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Beyond Selfishness: Epicurean Ethics in Nietzsche and Guyau[1]

> It is so ungenerous to always play the giver and the presenter and to show one's face in the process. But to give and to present and to conceal one's name and favour! Or to have no name, like nature in which what refreshes most of all is precisely that, finally and for once, we no longer encounter there a giver or a presenter, no longer a 'gracious countenance'! – To be sure, you foolishly forfeit this refreshment as well, for you have stuck a God into nature – and now everything is once more unfree and uneasy!...
> (Nietzsche, *Dawn* 464)[2]

One of the earliest references to Epicureanism in Nietzsche's corpus is an incidental remark in *Schopenhauer as Educator* where he says that to write today in favour of an education that sets goals beyond money and acquisition, that takes a great deal of time, and also encourages solitude, is likely to de disparaged as 'refined egoism' and 'immoral cultural Epicureanism' (UM IV 6). Epicurus does not become an important component in Nietzsche's published philosophy until around 1878-9 when he draws on him again and becomes inspired by certain Epicurean notions and ideals. In the texts of the free spirit period Nietzsche is ploughing his own field and he knows well the charge that will be levelled against him: indulging precisely in immoral Epicureanism. Indeed, at this time he was inspired by Epicurus's conception of friendship and the ideal of withdrawing from society and cultivating one's own garden. He liked to refer to his philosophy as "my Epicurean garden" (KSB 5, 460). If philosophical therapeutics is centred on a concern with the healing of our own lives so as to return us to the joy of existing,[3] then in the texts of his middle period Nietzsche can be seen to be an heir to this ancient Epicurean tradition.

The difference is that he is developing a therapy for the sicknesses of the soul under modern conditions of social control and discipline. In a note from 1881 he states that he considers the various moral schools of antiquity to be ‘experimental laboratories’ containing a number of recipes for the art of living and holds that these experiments now belong to us as our legitimate property: “we shall not hesitate to adopt a Stoic recipe just because we have profited in the past from Epicurean recipes” (KSA 9, 15 [59]). Indeed, it is the case that in D Nietzsche draws on both Epicurus and Epictetus as a way of attacking the morality of living for others and promoting an ethics centred on self-cultivation.[4]

In this paper I want to examine the character of this ethics as it centres on an Epicurean legacy and consider in particular critical concerns one might have about such an ethics. To illuminate some of the problems at hand I shall begin by referring to the work of Jean-Marie Guyau, a neglected philosopher from the second half of the 19th century with whose writings Nietzsche was familiar, and whose work I find especially fruitful for getting a critical handle on the legacy of an Epicurean ethics. The aim of the essay is to illuminate the character of the free-minded ethics Nietzsche is espousing in his middle period texts.[5]

Guyau on Epicurus

Guyau (1854-88) is an impressive philosopher of the second half of the nineteenth century and the author of path-breaking books on ethics and the philosophy of life. Known at the time as ‘the Spinoza of France’, he was read by as an inspiring ‘immoralist’ in America by the likes of Josiah Royce and William James.[6] Nietzsche tremendously admired his work even though he ultimately regarded him as a free thinker and not a genuine free spirit. Guyau’s major work on ethics was published in 1885 (Nietzsche read it at this time) and is entitled in English *Sketch of Morality*

Independent of Obligation or Sanction [*Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation, ni sanction*].[7] Prior to this work Guyau had published studies of ancient and modern ethics (especially English utilitarianism), being especially concerned with Epictetus and Epicurus with regards to the ancients and with Darwin and Spencer with regards to the moderns. He also published an essay on 'problems in contemporary aesthetics' in 1884, and in 1887, a fascinating tome entitled *The Non Religion (or Irreligion) of the Future,* which Nietzsche also read and admired.[8]

Guyau's text on Epicurus was published in 1878 and is entitled *The Morality of Epicurus and its Relation to Contemporary Doctrines.* We know Nietzsche read and was familiar with Guyau's major texts on morality and religion, but it is not known if he read this text. For Guyau, no other doctrine has been the object of more attacks and criticism than ancient and modern Epicureanism, and this is largely because it goes so strongly against received opinion on those things that are most dear to the human heart, notably morality and religion – the two topics we may note that become the centre of Nietzsche's critical inquiries from 1878 onwards. Guyau praises Friedrich Albert Lange for showing the important role Epicurus's ideas have played in the development of modern ideas and for placing Epicurus among the most seminal materialist thinkers. Moreover, "the moment seems to have arrived when we can more fairly appreciate the Epicurean doctrine and seek the portion of truth it contains."[9]

Guyau sees Epicureanism as representing several innovations in the critique of religion. He notes that the system of Hobbes is essentially irreligious: miracles are attacked, and the 'natural seed' of religion is held to be in fear, ignorance, and man's innate penchant for hasty conclusions. The Epicureans of the eighteenth century, such as La Mettrie, Helvetius, and d'Holbach, openly attack religion. Guyau cautions us to exercise philosophical restraint on this matter, however, since these thinkers failed to see "that the religious sentiment, existing in fact,

had to be taken into account; that it represented a tendency, legitimate or not, of human nature, and that philosophy had to seek to satisfy it to a certain extent."[10] Finally, Guyau notes the successes of Epicureanism in his own time, with the cosmological systems of Democritus and Epicurus triumphing again in the natural sciences, and in the moral and social sciences the doctrines that derive from Epicureanism have received a vital renewal in the English school and this represents for him an advance over the Stoicism restored by Kant: "How many old ideas and rooted customs Epicureanism has contributed to ridding the moral domain of!"[11] In the religious sphere Epicurus's labours to liberate human thought from belief in the marvellous, the miraculous, and the providential will continue to live on and have an influence. Nietzsche, we can note, shares this preference for Epicureanism in relation to making advances in the scientific study of morality (see HH II WS 216).

For Guyau the chief idea of the Epicurean doctrine is the ethical one: pleasure and pain are the sole forces that set being in motion and the sole levers by whose aid action is produced. Once this principle is posed it is held that the most appropriate morality for each individual is the act of securing for oneself the greatest amount of personal pleasure, or what a certain utilitarianism might call "the regularization of egoism."[12] As Guyau notes, "before Spinoza Hobbes attempted to construct a geometry of morals, Helvetius constructed a physic of morals, and d'Holbach a physiology of morals."[13] Guyau regards Epicurean morality as resting on a confusion of fact and duty, and sees the contemporary English school – Bentham, Stuart Mill and Spencer – as providing the necessary corrective, so that instead of personal pleasure being the sole legitimate end of our moral being, it is also the pleasure of others that needs to concern us. This was to become a key component in Guyau's subsequent efforts to construe the future of morality. Here he expresses his position as follows, which is worth citing at length:

When in thought we descend the scale of beings, we see that the sphere in which each of them moves is narrow and virtually closed. When on the contrary, we climb towards superior beings we see their sphere of action open up, expand, and increasingly mix with the sphere of action of other beings. The *self* is less and less distinguished from other *selves*; or rather, it has greater need of them in order to constitute itself and to survive. This scale that thought has just travelled, humankind has already travelled in part in its evolution. Its departure point was egoism, but egoism by virtue of the very fecundity of each life was led to grow, to create outside itself new centres for its own action. At the same time, sentiments correlative to this centrifugal tendency were slowly born and covered over the egoist principles that served as their principle. We are moving towards an era where egoism will retreat further and further within us, will be less and less recognizable. When that ideal era arrives, beings will no longer, so to speak, be able to enjoy in solitude: their pleasure will be like a concert where the pleasure of others will enter in as a necessary element…The predominant part played by sociable sentiments must be taken note of by every doctrine and in whatever we may conceive the principles of morality. No doctrine can close the human heart. We cannot mutilate ourselves, and pure egoism would be meaningless, an impossibility. In the same way that the ego is considered an illusion by contemporary psychology, that there is no personality, that we are composed of an infinite number of beings and tiny consciousnesses, in the same way we might say that egoist pleasure is an illusion: my pleasure does not exist without the pleasure of others…My pleasure, in order to lose nothing of its intensity, must maintain all of its extension.[14]

Guyau regards ‘evolutionist morality’ as both a development of Epicureanism and also its best criticism. What is demonstrated by it is the insufficiency of the principle of pure egoism. It is this ‘egoism’, of course, and the appeal to the necessity of solitude, that Nietzsche will endeavour to revitalise in the texts of his free spirit period. He notes in *Ecce Homo* with respect to *Dawn*, simplifying in fact what he has actually done in the text, that it is with this work that his campaign against morality begins and that it centres on the claim that the morality of modern decadence, altruistic morality, takes itself to be morality itself, and he adds that he is the enemy of the “morality of unselfing.” (EH Destiny 3)

The problem of pure egoism that Guyau is identifying is to be located for him in Epicurus’s original teaching. Although not lacking in ‘grandeur’ the teaching amounts to locking the self in upon itself. Given the definition of pleasure as a state of repose for both body and soul, a state of physical equilibrium and intellectual ataraxia, Epicurus deduces from it the ideal that for every human being the highest pleasure consists in retreating into the self and seeking everything within oneself without any external aid or repose. Guyau prefers Hobbes’s correction on this point, in which he maintains that pleasure “is in its essence movement, action, energy, consequently, progress” or forward movement: “To enjoy means to act, and acting means advancing.”[15] Guyau insists that although pleasure is accompanied by an internal equilibrium and harmony of all our faculties, this is only a condition of pleasure that in fact allows for a more expansive action in all directions. Moreover, pleasure is not anything immobile but subject to the laws of universal evolution. Let me now look in some detail at how Guyau wishes to move beyond so-called Epicurean hedonism. I say so-called since it is a moot point to associate Epicurus’s teaching with hedonism. One commentator has incisively argued, for example, that Epicurus is mostly concerned with securing inner tranquillity or ataraxia and his philosophy of

pleasure has to be seen as part of this overarching and overriding goal.[16] Having noted this, let me stick with Epicureanism as a philosophy of pleasure and follow for now Guyau's arguments against it.

Life and Pleasure: Beyond Hedonism

For Guyau, the cause operating within us before any attraction of pleasure is life.[17] Pleasure is but the consequence of an instinctive effort to maintain and enlarge life, and nature is to be regarded as self-moving and self-governing. Guyau writes:

> One does not always act with the view of seeking a *particular pleasure* – limited and exterior to the act itself. Sometimes we act for the pleasure of acting…There is in us an accumulated force which demands to be used. If its expenditure is impeded, this force becomes desire or aversion; if the desire is satisfied, there is pleasure; if it is opposed, there is pain. But it does not follow from this that the stored-up activity unfolds itself solely *for the sake* of pleasure – with pleasure as motive. Life unfolds and expresses itself in activity because it is life. In all creatures pleasure accompanies, much more than it provokes, the search after life.[18]

For Guyau, Epicurus, along with his faulty thinking about evolution, in which pleasure is said to create an organ's function, needs correcting on this point. In addition, he argues contra Bentham that "to live is not to calculate, it is to act."[19] An essentially Spinozist position – the tendency to persist in life is the necessary law of life – is deduced: "The tendency of the creature to continue in existence is at the root of all desire, without forming in itself a determinate desire."[20] Guyau takes this tendency to be one that goes beyond and envelops conscious life, so it is "both the most radical of realities and the inevitable ideal."[21] Therefore, Guyau reaches the conclusion that the part of morality that can be founded on positive facts can be defined as, "the science which

has for object all the means of *preserving* and *enlarging* material and intellectual life."[22] His ethics centre, then, on a desire to increase 'the intensity of life' which consists in enlarging the range of activity under all its forms and that is compatible with the renewal of force.[23] A superior being is one that practices a variety of action; thought itself is nothing other than condensed action and life at its maximum development. He defines this superior being as one which "unites the most delicate sensibility with the strongest will."[24]

Although the evolved human being possesses a source of varied enjoyment in its own activity, this does not mean that such a human being will decide to shut itself up in itself, establishing an autarchic realm of self-sufficiency, like some Stoic sage. For Guyau, intellectual pleasures are both the most inward pleasures and also the most communicative, being both individual and social. The bonds that the sharing of the higher pleasures can generate create a particular kind of obligation: "an emotional bond –a union produced by the complete, or partial, harmony of sentiments or thoughts."[25] Guyau does not, of course, deny that there is often conflict and disagreement over values and ideals, but at the same he insists new bonds between individuals arise from the sharing of the higher pleasures. Indeed, he maintains that the higher we rise in the scale of evolution, the more we see the highly social and sociable character of the pleasures of humankind.

We moderns are becoming more intellectual in our enjoyments and tastes, and with this arises a 'universal consciousness,' in which consciousness becomes easier of penetration.[26] It is on this point that Guyau thinks we are going beyond the life of pleasures envisaged by Epicurean philosophy. In modern conditions of human social evolution we find that the self distinguishes itself less and less from other selves and, in fact, has more in need of them so as to form itself and flourish. Here Guyau locates an important principle of human evolution: although the point

of departure is selfishness, it is such "by virtue of the very fecundity of all life," and it is "obliged to enlarge itself, to create outside of itself new centres of its own action."[27] For Guyau, then, human evolution is on the way to an epoch in which primitive selfishness will more and more recede. Compared to the selfish component of our existence, the sphere of altruism is becoming considerably larger and even the so-called purely physical pleasures, such as eating and drinking, only acquire their full charm when one shares them with others. The social sentiments are, then, of crucial importance for understanding the character of our enjoyments *and* pains: "Neither my sufferings nor my pleasures are absolutely my own."[28]

There is for Guyau an abundance of life that motivates us to care and work not only for ourselves but for others. This is, in large part, what he means when he seeks to locate "morality" – the sphere of the social expansion of the human animal and of other-regarding actions – within life itself. Life has two main aspects: nutrition and assimilation, on the one hand, and, production and fecundity on the other. The more a life form takes in, the more it needs to give out. Even in the life of the cell we can locate a principle of expansion and one that prevents any individual being sufficient unto itself. Moreover, the 'richest life' is to be found in the life that lavishly spends itself, sacrificing itself within certain limits, and sharing itself with others. The most perfect organism will also be the most sociable being: not simply because this carries with it certain evolutionary advantages but also because it is part of the higher moral development of life itself. It is on this point that Guyau sharply distinguishes himself from the likes of Bentham and the school of utilitarianism. It is within the very depths of our being that the instincts of sympathy and sociability emerge and that the English school has shown us to be more or less artificially acquired in the course of human evolution, so being little more than adventitious in consequence.

For Guyau the higher life is that which expands beyond the narrow horizon of the individual self. We have, he thinks, a need to go out of ourselves to others: "we want to multiply ourselves by communion of thoughts and sentiments."[29] We enjoy others knowing that we exist, feel, suffer, and love. In this respect, then, "we tear the veil of individuality," and this is not simple vanity but a fecund desire to "burst the narrow shell of the self."[30] Guyau, however, is not naïve in his appreciation of 'life': he draws our attention to the phenomenon of "affective debauchery" in which ones lives too much for others and neglects a healthy care of self.[31] So, although he is keen to attack what he sees as the dogmatism of egoism,[32] he also appreciates the need for a healthy form of egoism consisting in the cultivation of a care of self.

Middle Period Nietzsche

In turning to Nietzsche I want to focus largely on his middle period, especially the text *Dawn*. At this point in his intellectual development Nietzsche has no philosophy of life, such as might be encapsulated in the doctrine of the will to power, and he does not express the concerns about Epicurus that characterise his late writings, such as the criticism of decadence (see AC 30, 58). So, we find Nietzsche at a definite point in his development, the point as he puts it in D of a "moral interregnum" (D 453), and he is happy to cultivate his Epicurean garden. For Nietzsche, Epicurus experiences a oneness with nature and attains serenity in the face of the tumultuous character of existence. Moreover, although Epicurus suffers from existence it is the suffering that gives his achievement of happiness a profound meaning (GS 45). Nietzsche appears to be inspired by Epicurus's cultivation of a voluptuous but modest appreciation of existence, as well as by the attainment of serenity through a practice of psychic tranquillity: Nietzsche has a

special take on Epicurean *ataraxia*. Nietzsche's Epicurean-inspired doctrine at this time is clearly stated in aphorism 338 of *The Gay Science*, and I quote from it:

> Live in seclusion so that you *can* live for yourself. Live in *ignorance* about what seems most important to your age…the clamor of today, the noise of wars and revolutions should be a mere murmur for you. You will also wish to help – but only those whose distress you *understand* entirely because they share with you one suffering and one hope – your friends – and only in the manner in which you help yourself (GS 338).

We need to be careful in thinking how best to interpret such a doctrine, and in my view it would be too hasty to level criticisms at Nietzsche for neglecting the critical observations on Epicurean teaching we find, for example, in Guyau. This is because Nietzsche at this time is undertaking a specific project of ethical reformation and has specific reasons for wanting to promote an ethics of self-cultivation. Of course, we can question whether these reasons are well founded or not and whether they belie even a misanthropic or sociopathic set of sentiments on his part. My view is that this is going too far, though it is clear that his free-thinking project does at times give the appearance of bordering on these tendencies, but this we might say is part of the risks undertaken by a free-spirited project of ethical reformation, if decidedly not one of revolution: Nietzsche's project is one of what he calls "small doses" (D 534) and "slow cures" (D 462). Unlike Guyau, Nietzsche does not and cannot appeal to the interests of a broadened humanity as a whole, though he clearly favours an Enlightenment project, and hence his suspicions about love and the philanthropic sentiment that he regards as informing a great deal of the modern moral sensibility and that he has little time for. Let me now explore this set of issues in a little more detail.

What are the concerns we might have over Nietzsche's project and how might a close reading of the texts yield a subtler Nietzsche on ethical matters? It is widely thought that

Nietzsche invokes a notion of subjectivity as self-absorbed, as something whole to itself fully represented and self-contained.[33] In his consideration of the "self and other in Nietzsche," Elliot Jurist notes that Nietzsche's concern is with self-gratification – with such things as narcissism, instinctual satisfaction, and the will to power – and argues that this concern "interferes with the way he characterizes the relationship between self and others," and, moreover, that he leaves the issue of our relation to others unresolved: "Nietzsche himself acknowledges the social constitution of agency; yet he opts not to pursue this and not to concentrate fully on coming to terms with the experience of being-for-another."[34] Jurist notes the complexity and intricacy, if not the delicacy, of Nietzsche's actual position or set of positions when he comments on the fact that "competing tendencies" characterize Nietzsche's attitude towards others. So, on the one hand, Jurist contends, we encounter him seemingly countenancing cruelty and exploitation, and repeatedly stressing the need for solitude. And yet, on the other hand, we see him approaching the study of human relationships "with a subtlety and a psychological astuteness that should not be overlooked."[35]

As Ruth Abbey notes, Nietzsche's purpose in attacking the presumptions and prejudices of morality, for example, through conducting a genealogy of morality, is practical. He wants to discredit and demote values that promote the common interest and so as to clear the ground for the creation and resurgence of those that foster and ethics of individual self-care and self-fashioning. This extends to his re-appraisal of the value of self-love, in which, as Nietzsche writes, we are to forgive ourselves for our own ego and love ourselves as an act of clemency.[36] Only individuals who experience this love of self are capable of generous and beautiful actions. It becomes necessary, then, for Nietzsche to strip egoism and self-love of their usual adverse connotations, as when he states "egoism is not evil" (HH I 101)[37] This does not mean for him, of

course, that all is vanity or that while all action might derive from egoism all egoism is the same.[38] We need to distinguish between types of egoism and distinguish between crude and immature egoism and egoism that is mature and refined.

I think it prudent to bear in mind a point astutely made by Abbey, namely, that Nietzsche's supposedly scientific analyses of morality have a therapeutic intent, so that when he praises egoism, rather just describing it, he is "deliberately compensating for the calumny it has suffered and continues to suffer in moral frameworks."[39] Still, it is important that Nietzsche provide his readers with models of the relation between the self and its others. As we shall see, it is far-fetched to claim, as Jurist does, that Nietzsche is more concerned with narcissism than he is with relatedness.[40] Again, the context of Nietzsche's "campaign" against morality, as he calls it, is of crucial importance: he is advancing an ethics of self-cultivation as an ethics of resistance and in the context of his worries over the moral tendencies of commercial society. Let me turn to this.

Dawn's Campaign Against Morality

The 'campaign' centres largely on a critique of what Nietzsche sees as the modern tendency, the tendency of his own century, to identify morality with the sympathetic affects and compassion [Mitleid], so as to give us a 'definition' of morality. Throughout D, Nietzsche operates with several critical conceptions of morality. He is keen to attack the view that everything that exists has a connection with morality and thus a moral significance can be projected onto the world (D 3, 90, 100, 197, 563). He voices an opposition to both "picturesque morality" (D 141) and "petty bourgeois morality" (D 146), and speaks of his own "audacious morality" [verwegenen Moralität] (D 432). With regards to the modern prejudice, which is one of the main foci of his polemic in the book, here there is the presumption that we know "what actually constitutes

morality": "It seems *to do* every single person *good* these days to hear that society is on the road to *adapting* the individual to fit the needs of the throng and that the *individual's happiness as well as his sacrifice* consist in feeling himself to be a useful member of the whole…" (D 132) As Nietzsche sees it, then, the modern emphasis is on defining the moral in terms of the sympathetic affects and compassion [Mitleid]. We can, he thinks, explain the modern in terms of a movement towards managing more cheaply, safely, and uniformly individuals in terms of "*large bodies and their limbs*." This, he says, is "*the basic moral current of our age*": "Everything that in some way supports both this drive to form bodies and limbs and its abetting drives is felt to be *good*..." (D 132)

For Nietzsche, then, the principal presumption that holds sway in the Europe of his day is that the sympathetic affects define the essence of the moral, such as actions deemed to be congenial, disinterested, of general utility, and so on. He also thinks we are busy building a society of "security" in which the chief goal is to protect individuals from various hazards of life and so reduce human suffering and conflict. In *Dawn* Nietzsche's focus is not, as is widely supposed, on Christianity as the religion of pity or compassion – he maintains that until the eighteenth century such a virtue was a subsidiary and nonessential aspect of this religion. The view that morality means nothing other than disinterested, useful, and congenial actions is the residuum of Christian sentiments once the strictly egotistical, foundational belief in the importance of eternal personal salvation, and the dogmas on which this belief rested, receded and there then came into the foreground ancillary beliefs in love and love thy neighbour which harmonized with ecclesiastical charity. There emerges in modernity a cult of love for humanity and the idea of surpassing the Christian ideal became, "a secret spur of all French freethinkers

from Voltaire through to August Comte," for example, the latter's moral formula of "*vivre pour autrui* [live for others]" (D 132).

Nietzsche's main target in the book, then, is what he sees as the fundamental tendency of modern commercial society and its attempt at a "collectivity-building project that aims at disciplining bodies and selves and integrating them into a uniform whole."[41] Here 'morality' denotes the means of adapting the individual to the needs of the whole, making him a useful member of society. This requires that every individual is made to feel, as its primary emotion, a connectedness or bondedness with the whole, with society, in which anything truly 'individual' is regarded as prodigal, costly, inimical, extravagant, and so on. Nietzsche's great worry is that genuine individuality and a healthy concern with self-fashioning will be sacrificed and this, in large part, informs his critique of what he sees as the cult of sympathetic affects within modernity.

In the book Nietzsche devotes a significant number of sections to the topic of the affect of compassion [Mitleid], largely concentrated in book two of the text. His aim is to outline some of the perspectives by which we can gain some genuinely reflective insight into the affect of compassion and to encourage us to pursue critical lines of inquiry, so compassion [Mitleid] will be shown to be not a pure other-regarding affection, to be an injurious affect, to have value for specific cultures, and so on (D 132-138).[42] His criticism rests on a number of concerns. Let me mention two.

(a) A concern that in extolling compassion as the panacea to our moral anxieties we are in danger of existing as fantasists. Nietzsche wonders whether people speak with such idolatry about love – the "food of the gods" - simply because they have had so little of it. But would not a utopia of universal love be something ludicrous? – "each person flocked around, pestered, longed for not

by one love…but by thousands, indeed by each and everyone.” (D 147) Instead, Nietzsche wants us to favour a future of solitude, quietude, and even being unpopular. The imperatives of philosophies of universal love and compassion will serve only to destroy us. If they tempt us we should put them to the test and stop all our fantasizing. (D 137)

(b) A concern that in its cult of the sympathetic affects modern society is in danger of providing the image of a single moral-making morality that amounts to a tyrannical encroachment on the requirements of individual self-cultivation. In an essay on pity and mercy in Nietzsche, Martha Nussbaum argues that Nietzsche’s project is one that aims to bring about a revival of Stoic values – self-command and self-formation – within a post-Christian and post-Romantic context (she criticizes him for this Stoicism).[43] The picture frequently presented is one of Nietzsche advocating, in place of an ethics of sympathy or compassion, one of idiosyncratic self-assertion or the value of unbridled egoism. This is, clearly, a caricature, and fails to capture what we might call the Stoic demands Nietzsche places on the self and its cultivation: harshness toward oneself, self-discipline, self-control, honesty, and a profound love of fate.[44] An important aphorism in this regard is 139, which runs:

> You say that the morality of being compassionate is a higher morality [Moral] than that of Stoicism? Prove it! But remember that what is ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ in morality is not, in turn to be measured by a moral yardstick: for there is no absolute morality [Moral]. So take your rule from somewhere else – and now beware! (D 139)

Here we see Nietzsche contesting the idea that there is a *single* moral-making morality – he never contests the idea that morality is necessary, only that there is a single, absolute conception of it. However, other models of the self and its relation to others are offered in D, as we shall see,

and these serve to complicate the sage model of complete self-sufficiency and isolated aloofness that we might attribute to Nietzsche.

It is clear that Nietzsche is not in D advocating the overcoming of all possible forms of morality. Where morality centres on "continual self-command and self-overcoming…in great things and in the smallest," he champions it (HH II WS 45). His concern is that "morality" in the forms it has assumed in the greater part of human history, right up to Kant's moral law, has opened up an abundance of sources of displeasure and to the point that one can say that with every "refinement in morality" [Sittlichkeit] human beings have grown "*more and more dissatisfied* with themselves, their neighbour, and their lot…" (D 106) The individual in search of happiness, and who wishes to become its own lawgiver, cannot be treated with prescriptions to the path to happiness simply because individual happiness springs from one's own unknown laws and external prescriptions only serve to obstruct and hinder it: "The so-called 'moral' precepts are, in truth, directed against individuals and are in no way aimed at promoting their happiness." (D 108) Indeed, Nietzsche himself does not intend to lay down precepts for everyone. As he writes, "One should seek out limited circles and seek and promote the morality appropriate to them." (D 194) Up to now, Nietzsche notes, the moral law has been supposed to stand above our personal likes and dislikes; we did not want to impose this law upon ourselves but preferred to take it from somewhere or have it commanded to us. If we examine what is often taken to be the summit of the moral in philosophy - the mastery of the affects – we find that there is pleasure to be taken in this mastery. I can impress myself by what I can deny, defer, resist, and so on. It is through this mastery that I grow and develop. And yet morality, as we moderns have come to understand it, would have to give this ethical self-mastery a bad conscience. If we take as our criterion of the moral to be self-sacrificing resolution and self-denial, we would have to

say, if being honest, that such acts are not performed strictly for the sake of others; my own fulfilment and pride are at work and the other provides the self with an opportunity to relieve itself through self-denial.

The morality that humanity has cultivated and dedicated itself to is one of "enthusiastic devotion" and "living for others" in which it looks down from certain exalted heights on the more sober morality of self-control (which is regarded as egotistical). Nietzsche suggests the reason why morality has been developed in this way is owing to the enjoyment of the state of intoxication which has stemmed from the thought that the person is at one with the powerful being to whom it consecrates itself; in this way "the feeling of power" is enjoyed and is confirmed by a sacrifice of the self. For Nietzsche such an overcoming of the self is impossible: "In truth you only *seem* to sacrifice yourselves; instead, in your thoughts you transform yourselves into gods and take pleasure in yourselves as such." (D 215) In examining the inflated character of moral thinking and language Nietzsche is dealing with a problem that preoccupies him in his middle period: the problem of fanaticism. As he notes at one point in the text, such "enthusiasts" will seek to implant the faith in intoxication "as *the* life within life: a terrible faith!" (D 50) Such is the extent of Nietzsche's anxiety that he wonders whether humanity as a whole will one day perish by its spiritual fire-waters and by those who keep alive the desire for them. The "strange madness of moral judgements" is bound up with states of exaltation and "the most exalted language." (D 189)

Nietzsche appeals to the Stoic Epictetus for an example of a non-fanatical mode of living and as a counterweight to modern idealists who are greedy for expansion. Epictetus's ideal human being, lacking all fear of God and believing strictly in reason, "is not a preacher of penitence." (D 546) Although this ancient thinker was a slave, the exemplar he invokes is

without class and is possible in every class. Nietzsche also admires Epictetus on account of his dedication to his own ego and for resisting the glorification of thinking and living for others. (D 131) Of course, this is a partial and selective appropriation of Epictetus on Nietzsche's part. Although his chief concerns are with integrity and self-command, Epictetus is also known for his Stoic cosmopolitanism in which individuals have an obligation to care for their fellow human beings, and Nietzsche is silent about this aspect of Stoic teaching.[45] Nevertheless, it is true that the ethical outlook of Epictetus does invite people "to value their individual selves over everything else,"[46] and for Nietzsche he serves as a useful contrast to Christian thinkers such as Pascal, who considered the ego to be something hateful:

> If, as Pascal and Christianity claim, our ego [Ich] is always *hateful*, how might we possibly ever allow or assume that someone else could love it – be it God or a human being! It would go against all decency to let oneself be loved knowing full well that one only *deserves* hate – not to mention other feelings of repulsion. - 'But this is precisely the kingdom of mercy'. – So is your love-thy-neighbour mercy? Your compassion mercy? Well, if these things are possible for you, go still one step further: love yourselves out of mercy – then you won't need your God any more at all, and the whole drama of original sin and redemption will play itself out to the end in you yourselves. (D 79)

We are to look askance at impatient political invalids who seek change through the bloody quackery of revolution and instead carry out small, personal experiments, establishing ourselves as our own *reges* (D 453). In the future, Nietzsche hopes, the inventive and fructifying person shall no longer be sacrificed and "numerous novel experiments shall be made in ways of life and modes of society" (D 164). When this takes place we will find that an enormous load of guilty conscience has been purged from the world. Humanity has suffered for too long from

teachers of morality who wanted too much all at once and sought to lay down precepts for everyone (D 194). In the future, care will need to be given to the most personal questions and create time for them (D 196). Small individual questions and experiments are no longer to be viewed with contempt and impatience (D 547). Contra the presumptions of morality, then, he holds that we ourselves are experiments and our task should be to want to be such (D 543). In place of the ruling ethic of sympathy and self-sacrifice, which can assume the form of a "tyrannical encroachment," Nietzsche invites individuals to engage in self-fashioning, cultivating a self that others can behold with pleasure, a "lovely, peaceful, self-enclosed garden…with high walls to protect against the dangers and dust of the roadway, but with a hospitable gate as well" (D 174).[47]

Nietzsche acknowledges, then, that there is a need for the self to express, albeit in a subtle manner, its altruistic drive. However, the question remains: in all of this concern with finding and inventing one's self, through modes of self-cultivation, what of the relation of the self to others? To negotiate this question I now want to turn in the final part of the essay to a reading of one particular aphorism in D, an especially intriguing one.

A Reading of *Dawn* 449

> Ah! How it nauseates me to *impose* my thoughts on another! How I take pleasure in every mood and secret conversion within myself by which the thoughts *of others* prevail over my own! From time to time there occurs an even higher celebration, when for a change one is *allowed to give away* one's spiritual house and possessions like the father confessor who sits in the corner, eager for *one in need* to come and recount the travail of his thoughts in order that he, the father confessor, might once again fill his hand and heart

> and *lighten* his burdened soul. Not only does he eschew all praise for what he does: he would also like to avoid any gratitude, for gratitude is invasive and has no respect for solitude and silence. He seeks to live nameless or lightly ridiculed, too humble to awaken envy or enmity, armed with a head free of fever, a handful of knowledge and a bag full of experiences, to be, as it were, a doctor of the spirit to the indigent and to aid people here and there whose head is *disturbed by opinions* without their really noticing who has helped him! Not to be right vis-à-vis this person and to celebrate a victory, but to speak with him in such a way that, after a tiny unobserved hint or objections, he himself says what is right and, proud of the fact, walks away! Like a modest hostel that turns away no one in need, that is, however, forgotten about afterward or laughed at! To have no advantage, neither better food, nor purer air, nor a more joyful spirit – but to share, to give back, to communicate, to grow poorer! To be able to be humble so as to be accessible to many and humiliating to none! To have experienced much injustice and have crawled through the worm-tunnels of every kind of error in order to be able to reach many hidden souls along their secret paths! Always in a type of love and a type of self-interest and self-enjoyment! To be in possession of a dominion and at the same time inconspicuous and renouncing! To lie constantly in the sun and the kindness of grace and yet to know that the paths rising to the sublime [zum Erhabenen] are right at hand! – That would be a life! That would be a reason to live, to live a long time. (D 449)

This aphorism poses a number of interpretive challenges, and it is clearly central to any interpretation of Nietzsche on the relation between the self and others. The way Nietzsche envisages this relation is extraordinarily complicated. In this aphorism Nietzsche is envisaging a modest existence for the self, moving from matters of the body (not indulging oneself with better

food) to matters of the soul (not even having a more joyful spirit), and entailing a mode of existence that shares, returns, and communicates, freely making oneself poor in this manner of being and dwelling. Indeed, he refers to it as a 'humble' mode of living, one that is accessible to many and does not entail humiliating anyone. One suffers from existence, such is the vulnerability of the self, and yet still profits from one's experiences of life and to the point where one can aid and instruct others. One can love and one can attend to the needs and cares of the self. One constructs one's dominion but in a way that is not self-centred but, in fact, 'self-renouncing'. Living in this manner one can wish to live well and live a long time: one is ascending paths to the sublime, that is, peaks of elevated existence in which from the vantage point of the heights one has climbed one can look down upon the experiences of life that have been conquered and overcome. The portrait depicted seems to be that of some new sage, a person who has tempered emotional and mental excess, so is "armed with a head free of fever, a handful of knowledge and a bag full of experiences," and can be a "doctor of the spirit to the indigent," aiding people whose heads are subject to the reign of doxa. One lives without praise or gratitude, silently and even namelessly. The aid offered to the other is, therefore, of a delicate kind: one seeks to preserve one's own space in the process and to ensure that the integrity of the other person is respected. "Love" is perhaps a strong word for Nietzsche to use in this example, but he is clearly hinting at a special mode of care of others, and one that is not at all free of self-interest and self-enjoyment.

Such an aphorism clearly shows that Nietzsche's campaign against morality, by which he means the "morality of unselfing," possesses a complicated character, at least as it is articulated in *Dawn*. Nietzsche's focus on the self and on egoism is of a highly ethical character and in two senses: (a) it has a concern with self-cultivation; (b) this cultivation is not without care for others,

including the duties and responsibilities that come with such care. Here we can agree with Foucault's insight into the paradox of a precept of care of self that signifies for us today either egoism or withdrawal, but which for centuries was a positive principle, serving as the matrix for dedicated moralities. Christianity and the modern world have based the codes of moral strictness on a morality of non-egoism to the point where we forget that such codes originated in an environment marked by the obligation to take care of oneself.[48] Martha Nussbaum claims that in his cult of Stoic strength Nietzsche depicts "a fearful person, a person who is determined to seal himself off from risk, even at the cost of loss of love and value".[49] Like the otherworldliness he abhors, the Stoicism he endorses is a form of self-protection, expressing "a fear of this world and its contingencies" (ibid.). However, *Dawn* 449 clearly shows that Nietzsche is open to a doctrine of love, albeit of an unconventional kind, and that he is not advocating an ethic of a retreat into the self, one that would be independent of specifically human relations of care and openness to the other.

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[1] My thanks to Rebecca Bamford for helpful feedback on the essay that has helped me to finesse my reading of Nietzsche.

[2] I have referred to the following translations of Nietzsche: *Unfashionable Observations,* trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995); *Human, all too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality,* trans. Brittain Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974); *Ecce Homo,* trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[3] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), 87.

[4] Epicurus is a significant and inspiring figure for Nietzsche at the time of his free spirit texts (1878-82); by the time of the late writings (1886-8) he is a more ambivalent figure for Nietzsche, still the ‘soul-soother’ of later antiquity but also a said to be a typical decadent. With the return of the Dionysian in his thinking, which disappears in his middle period writings, we get the fundamental contrast between ‘Epicurean delight’ [Vergnügen] and ‘Dionysian joy’ [Lust]: ‘I have presented such terrible images to knowledge that any “Epicurean delight” is out of the question, Only Dionysian joy is sufficient: *I have been the first to discover the tragic*’ (KSA 11, 25 [95]; WP 1029).

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[5] See also Paul Bishop's discussion of translating *"der Freigeist* or *der freie Geist*" as "free mind" in this volume.

[6] See William James, "The Moral Philosophy and the Moral Life," in *The Will to Believe* (New York, Dover, 1956), 184-216; Josiah Royce, *Studies of Good and Evil: A Series of Essays upon problems of Philosophy and of Life* (New York, Appleton & Co., 1899), chapter 12, 349-84. On the reception of Guyau as an immoralist see Geoffrey C. Fidler, "On Jean-Marie Guyau, Immoraliste," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55 (1994): 75-98.

[7] Thomas Brobjer notes that Nietzsche's reading of the text 'is likely to have been of major importance for his views on ethics' (*Nietzsche's Philosophical Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008, 91). For the purposes of this essay I have been able to consult the fourth edition of the French from 1896 and the English translation of 1898 based on the second edition. The differences between the different editions are slight.

[8] For some details see Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context*, 102 and 235, note 32.

[9] J. M. Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure* et les rapports avec les doctrines contemporaines (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1878), 280.

[10] Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*, 288.

[11] Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*, 288.

[12] Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*, 281.

[13] Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*, 281.

[14] Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*, 282-3.

[15] Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*, 284.

[16] See Malte Hossenfelder, "Epicurus – hedonist malgré lui," in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 245-65.

[17] J. M. Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or* Sanction, trans. Gertrude Kapteyn (London: Watts & Co., 1898), 210.

[18] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 77.

[19] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 211.

[20] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 79.

[21] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 75.

[22] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 75.

[23] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 76.

[24] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 35.

[25] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 94-5.

[26] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 95.

[27] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 95.

[28] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 96.

[29] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 84.

[30] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 84.

[31] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 85.

[32] Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, 65.

[33] Alison Ainley, "'Ideal Selfishness': Nietzsche's Metaphor of Maternity," in *Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche-Interpretation*, ed. David Farrell Krell and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 116-131, 124.

[34] Elliot L. Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche. Philosophy, Culture, and Agency* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 258.

[35] Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche*, 246.

[36] Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 35.

[37] Cited in Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period,* 36.

[38] Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period*, 36.

[39] Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period,* 38.

[40] Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche*, 261.

[41] Michael Ure, "The Irony of Pity: Nietzsche contra Schopenhauer and Rousseau," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 32 (2006): 68-92, 88 note 45.

[42] It is perhaps important to bear in mind that in taking to task *Mitleid* in the ways that he does in these sections of D Nietzsche is working with Schopenhauer's conception of it where it involves the complete identification with the suffering of another. See A. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), 144.

[43] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism," in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 139-167. (1994, p. 140). The figure Nussbaum esteems over Nietzsche is Rousseau, who is prized for his "eloquent writings on pity" ("Pity and Mercy," 140) and whose thinking lies at the basis of "democratic-socialist thinking" (1994, p. 159). For an intelligent response to some of Nussbaum's concerns over Nietzsche on *Mitleid*, see Gudrun von Tevenar, 'Nietzsche's Objections to Pity and Compassion', in von Tevenar (ed.), *Nietzsche and Ethics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 263-81; for a critique of Rousseau on pity see Ure (2006).

[44] See R. M. Elveton, "Nietzsche's Stoicism: The Depths are Inside," in Paul Bishop (ed.), *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition* (New York: Camden House, 2004), 192-203, 193.

[45] Thomas Brobjer suggests that Nietzsche did not read the extended 'Discourses' and was only familiar with Epictetus's short 'Manual' or *Enchiridion*, and this might account for the somewhat one-sided portrait of him we get from Nietzsche's appraisal. See Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Reading of Epictetus," *Nietzsche-Studien* 32 (2003): 429-35, 430. For a full picture of Epictetus see A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[46] See Long, *Epictetus*, 3. Long also notes that Epictetus devotes more thought to the care of the self than he does to what is incumbent on human beings as members of society (30).

[47] See also my discussion in "Care of Self in Dawn: On Nietzsche's Resistance to Bio-Political Modernity," in *Nietzsche As Political Philosopher*, ed. Barry Stocker and Manuel Knoll (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2014), 269-286.

[48] For Foucault's insights see "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin et al. (London: Tavistock, 1988), 16-50; and *The Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at the College de France 1981-2*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[49] Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism," 140.