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# Authenticity: an ethic of capacity realisation

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick, Department of Philosophy

March 2007

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## Abstract

My interests lie in consideration of conceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity from the perspective of ethical theories which conceive of the good for man with reference to human nature and concomitant beliefs regarding the most appropriate realisation of human capacities. Here, I find particular interest in the philosophical styles embodied by the existentialist and *Lebensphilosophie* movements. Such approaches sit outside the traditional frames of reference provided by deontological and utilitarian approaches to ethical reasoning and yet do I shall argue, share significant similarities with ancient *aretaic* styles of ethics. Here, I take Aristotle to represent those aspects of ethical thought which are quintessentially of this period of intellectual history. I find not merely points of comparison but a fruitful way in which to re-examine the thought of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Scheler, Heidegger and Sartre with reference to styles of ethical enquiry which place primacy upon an objective conception of happiness which centres upon the appropriate realisation of human capacity understood with reference to Aristotle's Function Argument. I argue that phenomenological analysis shares a conception of self-perspicuity in which the agent reflects upon the full contents of their conscious experience. By this means, certain self-delusions which impede entry into the ethical life, may be removed. Additionally, whilst Aristotle's 'non-law' conception of ethics shares with existentialist thought an understanding of the human situation and its normative concerns in isolation from dualistic and theistic metaphysical speculation, such philosophy is still able to provide clear and objective ethical standards – standards often lacking within existentialism. For instance, whilst Nietzsche's pronouncement of the 'death of God' signals the death also of Christian morality, we find that such philosophy is not without normative implications and in fact can be derived to a large degree from assent towards a radical and more severe ethical self-discipline. Indeed, central certainly to the thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre is an understanding of the role of self-deception in the human condition. Here a useful distinction may be made between those types of self-deception which may be understood as structural – that is to say which are representative of an essential characteristic of human being at the abstract level – and those types of self-deception which may be described as 'motivated' or 'psychological' which relate to more specific types of self-deceptive engagement. I believe it is useful to examine both Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre through the lens of such interpretation, I find for instance that it is of use to examine the early Sartre as having a purely structural interpretation of bad faith (described by Jeanson as 'natural' bad-faith) whilst moving towards a psychological account in his later work, an account which has more specific moral implications with the possibility of 'willed conversion' to authenticity (Santoni). Additionally with Nietzsche, we also find a similar distinction between a self-deception which is in some sense preconditional and a motivational account of self-deception in which the agent infused with *ressentiment* falsifies reality in favour of subjective needs which are ultimately destructive of life-enhancement. In this sense the vicious individual can be said to have achieved merely a false optimum, and moreover, false from an objective standpoint.

## 1. Self-deception, Authenticity and Normative Ideals

Existentialist conceptions of authenticity first made their appearance, certainly in any explicit sense, in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Here the conception of *Eigentlichkeit* introduces a description of the human life-world at a special moment of self-gathering in which distractions are laid aside and the individual converts to a confrontation with their finitude. Heidegger describes a conversion in which the individual is no longer attached to worldly concerns but finds themselves freely given over to their fate, a fate determined by Being. Fear of death indeed leads to an obsession with control of the natural environment and accompanied by distractive engagement in gossip and mass culture; we find therefore that it is against the background of such concerns that Heidegger developed the concept of authentic resolution and the opposing tendency of 'falling' to which Dasein is uniquely prone. Heidegger therefore applies methods common throughout the phenomenological movement which involve an adaptation of Husserl's method of bracketing – also known as the phenomenological reduction or *epoche* – in which priority is given to descriptive accounts of the human life world in its primordial aspects. Much has been said regarding the inspiration for Heidegger's conception of authenticity, indeed it may be understood as a secular rendition of religious conversion. To the extent that it makes sense to place a divergent range of thought under the existentialist label, thinkers subsequent to Heidegger including Sartre have developed these themes into specific philosophies of their own. Sartre probably represents the closest example of a thinker who can be described as fully existentialist, since albeit with some reluctance, he is the only thinker which I consider who explicitly adopted this label for his own thought. Sartre too shares a similarity of method with the phenomenological movement which Nietzsche predates. Indeed in some sense Sartre can be understood to have articulated a philosophical

position in which authenticity is representative of a conversion from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude. In this sense he has given Husserl's notion of the gestalt shift of the *epoche* an ethical dimension. His conception of the 'spirit of seriousness' would here represent the natural attitude whilst his conception of authenticity the phenomenological attitude – a complex and protean concept but which for Sartre consists in embracing one's consciousness as something quite unlike the world of deterministic forces and in so doing coming to understand the existential structure of one's life. Additionally in Sartre we find a sophisticated analysis of self-deception which he terms bad faith. Here, as in Heidegger, we find a tension between structural and motivational accounts of inauthenticity. These will be examined with the intention of constructing some ethical conclusions with regard to an ethic of authenticity.

It is interesting however to consider the soil in which such philosophy grew in particular via Nietzsche and Scheler. Nietzsche in some sense stands between traditional systematic philosophy and the 'phenomenological turn', a turn which may be characterised not so much in terms of an abandonment of traditional metaphysical concerns but rather in terms of *indifference* towards such a project. Such a methodological shift can be seen as representative of an intensification of interest in description over logical deduction. In particular we find a rejection of the subject/object split found within Cartesian traditions with all the attendant problems which arise from such philosophical terminological stage setting such as the problem of the existence of other minds, the problem of the reality of the external world, and even the emergence of moral scepticism which reduces fundamental experience to 'sense data' from which value terms appear as an insecure addition possessing no objective status. Nietzsche can here be seen to initiate interest in a method in which

the project of working through the philosophical conundrums generated by such distinction is laid aside in favour of interest in the embedded subject and the detail of a predominantly descriptive psychology. Such themes are not however unique to Nietzsche, indeed we find a large section of *Being and Time* devoted to the development of a philosophical approach in which the conception of sense data is rejected in favour of an 'externalism' in which the significance of objects is grasped immediately and not inferred and projected after such data have been processed. Thus the sound of the 'creaking wagon' is for Heidegger grasped as such immediately within the 'context of significance' of the human life world and most importantly this mode of apprehension *preconditions* the special mode of the Scientific World View or indeed the philosophical notion of sense data. Indeed such method can be traced perhaps most convincingly to Scheler who identifies a major fault in Kantian style ethics for failing to attend to the genuine richness of human normative experience. He applies methods loosely inherited from Husserl in his analysis of affective experience in his *Formalism in Ethics*. Whilst we do not find a corresponding analysis of authenticity in Scheler's work, in earlier work he does give attention to a variety of self-deception coined by Nietzsche as *ressentiment*. In my analysis therefore I have to at times shift between positive descriptions of authentic states and corresponding negative states of self-deception. That is to say whilst I cannot argue that Scheler had a definite conception of authenticity in the existentialist sense I can argue that he had some conception of the way in which *ressentiment* could corrupt values such as love, justice etc. Likewise, it is not always clear how Nietzsche stands in relation to subsequent existentialist thought since he adopts a number of assumptions which do not fit with the general thrust of the existential project with his endorsement of determinism and a compartmentalised self, composed of drives and unconscious

forces. He shares however an endorsement of a variety of anti-essentialism, an aggressively defended atheism and a concern with excellence realised at the individual level.

Where definitions of authenticity are at times unclear, frequently we find corresponding interest in self-deception as the opposing vicious tendency. Upon this basis authenticity can be defined negatively as the absence of self-deception. Self-deception has however always presented itself as somewhat of a paradox since it appears to be a psychic phenomenon which defies the demands of logical consistency. This primarily stems from the observation that it is *prima facie* contradictory to speak of a knowledge of myself of which I am able to convince myself that I do not actually know. Solutions to this 'paradox' abound and in particular we find theories along Freudian lines which posit a divided self or a divided mind which accounts for the phenomenon of self-deception in terms of a compartmentalization within the subject in which some 'region' of the mind (i.e. the unconscious) remains inaccessible at the conscious level. Sartre famously reconstructs such arguments in *Being and Nothingness* where he criticises Freud's earliest model of the human mind in which Freud posits a 'censor' which inhabits the interface between conscious and unconscious regions of the psyche allowing only certain thoughts to cross over whilst others remain. These remaining thoughts or psychic states, dispositions or motivations, retain their ability to motivate action at the conscious level but without the agent being aware of this. In fact this model provides for Freud the very origin of neurotic behaviour. It is only through the process of analysis that the patient comes to understand via the interpretations provided by the analyst what exactly it is that really motivates them through, say, tracing such behaviour to its causal origin in a past but suppressed early childhood experience etc. However thinkers such as Sartre have



rejected this model – not always with a full understanding of the many modifications which Freud made to this early conception of the mind – and in fact we find in Sartre the quite radical assertion which denies the existence of the unconscious altogether. Whilst Sartre makes a distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness he will not allow any division of the unity of the self which would permit an unknowable region of unconscious mental contents and thus for Sartre one is one's consciousness and that is the end of the matter. So whilst initially the dual mind hypothesis offered some hope in the resolution of the paradox as to how an individual could be ignorant of something that they actually know, with Sartre we return to the very same problem since all mental contents are, if you like, available to the conscious subject. Nietzsche differs from Sartre in this regard in that he does endorse a conception of the human agent which is largely understood in terms of those unconscious drives which explain in a reductionistic manner the emergent properties available to phenomenal consciousness. Rational faculties are in this sense not given the priority in human life that they are for thinkers such as Aristotle and Kant. Nietzsche is in some respects largely indifferent to the mechanisms by which the agent comes to deceive himself and does not therefore supply the level of technical analysis that Sartre provides to explain how this human weakness is able to emerge. Broadly speaking, however, we do, I believe, find an endorsement of a reading of self-deceptive behaviour which is structured and largely inspired by the affective life of the individual at the expense of the executive faculties. Here links with Aristotle are of paramount importance since we find a position central to the ethics endorsed within the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which priority is given to the higher faculties over the lower. Self-deception upon this ethical model can be explained with reference to a conception of the human agent in terms of a hierarchy of faculties, each with their

own sphere of value-realisation to which specific excellences inculcated and sustained by specific virtues apply. We find an elaborate reworking of this theme in the principal exponent of *Lebensphilosophie*, Max Scheler, who also endorses and elaborates a theory of a hierarchy of value-realisation characteristic of the uniquely human milieu – albeit a hierarchy which does not give primacy to the intellectual faculties as we find with Aristotle.

Whilst existentialist and *Lebensphilosophie* thinkers embrace conceptions of self-deception and authenticity which possess a strong normative character, we frequently find a reluctance within such philosophy to provide a clear ethical project, since descriptive methods are given priority to prescriptive normative ideals. Heideggerian philosophy, for instance, suffers from the absence of any clearly defined ethic of authenticity, certainly within the early work of *Being and Time*. With Nietzsche we find a consistent and aggressive hostility to morality – certainly to Christian morality – throughout his published and unpublished writings. So whilst Heidegger is indifferent to ‘morality’, Nietzsche quite hostile and Sartre non-committal, such thinkers do share a descriptive account of the human subject with regard to its primary orientation towards Being in both its authentic and inauthentic modes. The attempt to amplify the ethical concerns found within Heideggerian philosophy is not, however, a project upon which I uniquely embark, since many commentators, including Hodge and Vogel, express similar dissatisfaction with the existentialist assertion that authenticity presents no normatively binding ethical project. Here I shall argue that authenticity understood as the ground of ethics is of use. In this sense, and I think Nietzsche and Sartre certainly also profit from this interpretation, authenticity emerges as the core of a meta-ethic which can be understood best in terms of its ability to organise the specifics of ethical concern. In

this sense it is a 'transcendental' normative ideal which stands as the precondition for genuine ethical engagement.

Elaborating this theme we find parallels of particular importance when comparing existentialist thought with *aretaic* ethics, since both are concerned not merely with the specific ethical dilemma of, say, abortion but with the 'Ethical Dilemma', if you like, of man's engagement with and appropriation of his entire life. Thinkers such as Heidegger and Nietzsche in particular do seem to strongly endorse a style of lucid interaction with Existence, Nietzsche through the existential imperative to affirm the eternal recurrence, and Heidegger through his implied imperative to achieve authentic resolution as 'impassioned being towards death'. Sartre, too, develops an existential psycho-analysis, based upon the unique peculiarities of freedom trapped within the recalcitrant determinacy of the in-itself with implicit and occasionally explicit suggestions with regard to normatively ideal modes of human engagement. To anticipate my argument, we could say that here such thinkers distance themselves from the decision procedures of consequentialism and the formalism of deontology from a dislike of petty prescriptions. In accepting one's death, existentialists have urged the individual to 'use themselves up' in creative and culturally elevating orientation against the essentially conservative and passive forces of the inauthentic. Additionally we find links with ancient thought in which the peculiar assertion 'proclaim no man happy until he is dead' is rendered intelligible from the perspective of a conception of a life considered as a whole, irreducible to a series of specific ethical choices. With regard to the issue of broadening the criteria for a normative ethic, Hodge too makes a similar criticism of Heidegger, in fact she cites his excessively narrow conception of ethics as the main reason why he sought to distance himself from a clear ethical project. Thus she writes: 'I shall read the themes

of guilt, the call of conscience, wanting to have self awareness, fallenness, death and care as elements of an ethical enquiry in *Being and Time*, which is acknowledged as such neither by Heidegger nor by his readers' (Hodge 1995,172). I agree broadly with such methodological approaches and extend such approaches to Nietzsche, Scheler and Sartre, observed through the lens of ancient and contemporary ethical functionalism.

### ***Phenomenological and Aristotelian methods***

Whilst I do endorse a conception of Aristotelian ethics which emphasises the realisation of human capacity I do not endorse any conception of moral condemnation which could not at least in principle be recognized as justified by the human agent. Flourishing in this sense – whilst of objective application – retains in principle the possibility that the 'immoral' agent could come to see the disvalue of their current attitudes, actions and practices. In fact it is here that phenomenological methods offer harmonization with Aristotelian thought, or at least a means by which we may appropriate the legacy of ancient ethics in a manner which will do full justice to such ethics. Such an ethic must possess the following:

#### Prem. 1

The results of the ethic endorsed by the Aristotelian style of enquiry must find their termination in a condition which is in principle observable by / evident as desirable to the self-conscious and self-perspicuous human agent.

But the question remains with regard to the extent to which it is justifiable to place ancient thinkers alongside those within the more contemporary phenomenological tradition. Any points of comparison with thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre must proceed with caution, since *prima facie* such thinkers reject any essentialist position. For Sartre, for instance, consciousness in principle transcends the causal flux of the in-itself, whilst Heidegger rejects any specific conception of human essence. As Barnes writes:

Consciousness [for the existentialist] is a process which transcends its origin and its base of support as it transcends its objects – whether they are external and material things or physiological stimuli or the mental constructs of consciousness itself. Since consciousness is not an entity, it cannot be identified with the body or viewed as a thing. Since it is a process which depends on a being i.e. both body and outside world – it is always localized as a point of view. Thus it is particularized and isolated.

(Barnes 1971, 243)

Whilst it is not clear that Sartre's analysis of consciousness is of universal applicability to existentialism as a whole, we find here a useful definition of consciousness as essentially transcendent of the material base studied within the special sciences. Thus no full description of the material base would give an observer any information of relevance in describing the characteristics of consciousness as if it were merely an emanation from the body representing with law-like regularity a causally determined expression of bodily change. But this is a view which Nietzsche

seems to precisely adopt in his endorsement of consciousness as mere epiphenomenon. Such a view treats consciousness as an almost unnecessary appendage to the functioning of the dynamical structure of the body. In this sense Nietzsche may be understood as a strict determinist, finding the human being fully continuous in all respects with the laws which universally pertain to the operation of matter. Furthermore any experience of free will upon such understanding can only be explained as mere illusion. We must, according to the Nietzschean view, operate in the world *as if* we were the determining force which makes decisions, changes its mind, brings new possibilities into play – but this for the determinist is merely how the world appears to us. Such a view depends upon the assumption that, given a full description of current physical states, and given full knowledge of all laws which relate to the operation of such states, perfect prediction of future outcomes could be ascertained regardless of the subjective appearance of free will within the human life-world.<sup>1</sup> For Sartre, however, the radical nature of human freedom is to be taken very seriously, certainly in his early work, and he presents a complex and subtle description of the nature of consciousness as pure spontaneity. Superficially Sartre may be criticised for promoting an absurd position in which the possession of radical freedom implies that one can at any time do exactly what one wants.<sup>2</sup> But this was never the case: freedom for Sartre always emerges against the background of restrictions. His view consists rather of the assertion that, despite such restrictions, there is always a level upon which we have the capacity to make a stand upon our situation, even if this involves no more than choosing the significance that an event

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<sup>1</sup> Wilcox points to a number of passages which suggest that Nietzsche in fact did have a role for consciousness as an effective power. However this power is small and easily overwhelmed by unconscious forces and the emotions. See Wilcox 1974, 173-174. A good example of Nietzsche's position would be as follows: 'Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic, and consequently also the most unfinished and *least powerful* of these developments' (*FW* I, 11).

<sup>2</sup> See C. Taylor 1982, pp. 111-127.

may have for ourselves. Thus the slave loses his 'real' freedom, but never loses his existential freedom. Sartre writes: 'Man can not be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all' (*EN* 441). Whether such freedom is illusory for Sartre is unclear, but I think (as is common to phenomenological methods in general) his interests do not lie in any speculation with regard to the world-in-itself, but rather lie with a description of those structural features of consciousness which are essential to the experience of any world. His rejection of the Cartesian conception of consciousness as substratum characterised essentially as thinking substance is, however, abandoned in favour of a view in which consciousness is conceived as 'nothingness', since all that is given to consciousness is external to consciousness (*EN* xxxii).<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche, too, seems to reject any stable conception of the self which would amount to an objectified human essence, but for different reasons, endorsing what might be described as a 'Heraclitian chaos' of forces both within and without, which by definition defy capture by any essentialist theory. However, I shall argue, Nietzsche, Sartre and Heidegger engage in a descriptive phenomenology of the human condition with clear descriptions of the kinds of weakness to which *Dasein* is prone: for instance the inability to face up to one's essential finitude, or the inability to recognize one's essential capacity as radical freedom. So whilst I do not wish to prove that Nietzsche, Scheler, Heidegger and Sartre assented to a form of naturalism, I do want to explore those aspects of their philosophies which amount to an ethics of flourishing within the parameters of the description of human nature and human

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<sup>3</sup> Sartre's adoption of the phenomenological premise that 'consciousness is always consciousness of something', therefore grants assent to the view that given no external world there could be no consciousness. Sartre asserts that consciousness is nothingness because everything is exterior to it. Likewise, unlike the in-itself, consciousness never coincides with itself and cannot therefore be objectified except as an act of bad-faith.

frailty that their philosophies will allow.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche has, however, been described by commentators such as Leiter and May as explicitly naturalistic, providing perhaps the closest similarity between existentialist thought and the ancients. Similarities between the strictly phenomenological styles of Scheler, Heidegger and Sartre are found in a common rejection of deductive and formalistic approaches in favour of an explication of the complexities of situated human reality. Likewise such approaches share, I think, the implicit assumption that considerable personal development can be secured by the human subject if they can achieve an inner clarity which restores self-possession and intensification of resolve in one's private and public projects. In fact, if we define naturalism in opposition to a 'supernaturalism' embodied within the thought of a variety of thinkers within the Western tradition, including Plato and extending even as far as Kant, we may see how Aristotle also diverges from such metaphysical speculation. Such approaches rest upon certain assumptions with regard to the health of the soul, or disembodied reason, regardless of what might be termed 'conscious physical flourishing', including flourishing within any particular community. We only need to think of the Socrates of the *Gorgias* to recall the radical assertion that 'the good man cannot be harmed'.<sup>5</sup> Socrates' allegory of the survival of the soul after death, in which the damage exacted upon oneself by one's misdeeds is at last clearly visible to observers in the underworld provides a metaphysical basis for the central

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<sup>4</sup> Annas notes that having a theory of human nature is not the same as endorsing naturalism. For this reason Aristotle himself need not be conceived as a strict ethical naturalist. Such theories, she argues, were more prevalent in subsequent ancient philosophy, such as found among the Stoics (Annas 1988, 169).

<sup>5</sup> Note that Aristotle does not link the attainment of happiness entirely to the proper inculcation and practice of the virtues, since he will permit an element of contingency via the role of good fortune in the material life of the individual. It is not clear, however, as to the extent that Aristotelian naturalism can accommodate the Socratic notion that 'the good man cannot be harmed.' As he writes: '[I]n order for a person to be happy, he also needs the goods relating to the body, and external goods, and those fortune brings, i.e. in order for him not to be impeded in these respects. (Those who claim that the man being broken on the wheel and engulfed by great misfortunes is happy, provided he is a good character, are talking nonsense whether they mean to or not. And because the happy person also needs the goods of fortune, some people think that being fortunate is the same thing as being happy, when it is not, for even good fortune is an impediment when it is excessive and perhaps one should no longer call it good fortune, since its limit is determined by reference to happiness)' (*NE* 1153b15-25).



doctrines of both Platonism and Christian theology. Kant's ethic of duty can also be understood to exclude all notions of happiness and flourishing from the sphere of ethical relevance. Additionally, Kant requires free-will, immortality and the existence of God in order to sustain his moral worldview (*KPV* 5:132-5:134). Without immortality, the soul is unable to achieve moral perfection, in addition the immortality of the self is required so that a subject surviving death may be held accountable for any misdeeds within this life, a task assigned to God in his role as divine judge (*KPV* 5:124-5:132). Thinkers such as Nietzsche clearly display an active and aggressive hostility to this style of metaphysical speculation, which posits both a dual world hypothesis and a divine entity which, for Nietzsche, in fact betrays a repressed hatred originating in a failure to obtain real power and standing in the empirical world as it is. Likewise Heidegger and Sartre emphasize purely descriptive methods of ontological enquiry which bypass metaphysical speculation of any kind, and thus, whilst endorsing man's radical freedom, both Sartre and Heidegger recognise the essential finitude of man. Whilst Heidegger cannot be described as an explicit atheist in his early period, Sartre most certainly can – in fact he sees the entire existentialist project as one which draws the full conclusions from an unconditional atheistic position.<sup>6</sup> Methods within the phenomenological movement clearly bracket any interest in metaphysical speculation. We find therefore both that the world as it is experienced, or the world as it is given, holds priority over any speculation with regard to the world in-itself, and additionally a rejection or indifference towards any account of the human good which proceeds from purely formal and deductive a priori methods of enquiry.

Accordingly, I adopt the following premise:

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<sup>6</sup> In *EN* we find an ontological *disproof* of the existence of God, with his demonstration that such an attempt posits the existence of a for-itself-in-itself, which for Sartre is a contradictory conception (*EN* 615).

Prem. 2

The existentialist tradition can be understood to harmonise with the Aristotelian to the extent that it can be seen to complete aspects of an ethical enquiry which begins with the good for man at the descriptive level, rather than being arrived at via strictly deductive methods or on the basis of metaphysical claims.

Consider the following passage suggesting precisely such methodological similarity, from the ‘father’ of 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology, Edmund Husserl:

...[phenomenological] analysis is an analysis of essences and an investigation of the general states of affairs which are to be built up in immediate intuition. Thus the whole investigation is an a priori one, though of course, it is not a priori in the sense of mathematical deductions. What distinguishes it from the ‘objectivising’ a priori sciences is its methods and its goal. Phenomenology proceeds by ‘seeing’, clarifying, and determining meaning, and by distinguishing meanings.

(Husserl 1964, 46)

We should consider here what exactly is to be understood by the term ‘essence’ in the sense in which Husserl wished the term to be understood. Nietzsche, for instance, presents a philosophical position which has been described as ‘anti-essentialist’. This sense of the term ‘essence’, however, relates to metaphysical speculation with regard

to those qualities in which an entity participates, which supposedly make it a thing of its kind. Plato's 'Theory of the Forms' can be understood to involve speculation with regard to the nature of essences in this sense. Entities are what they are, according to such theory, in relation to the extent to which they conform to those metaphysically self-subsistent essences which are definitive of the thing of its type in its ideal form. This style of essentialist theory is, I believe, the kind of theory that Nietzsche is rejecting when he asserts his anti-essentialist position. Aristotle, too, rejects the Platonist conception of essences, although his philosophy has been described as one which relies upon a 'metaphysical biology'; which is to say a theory of entities, specifically biological entities, with reference to their innate drive to reach certain predetermined ends (MacIntyre 1985, 196). This, as I shall elaborate, has been rejected by certain commentators as providing an interpretation which focuses too strongly upon such metaphysical speculation. Indeed, teleological explanation can, it seems, be understood rather as a means of understanding biological organisms in a manner which most closely suits the type of questioning that a biologist should wish to bring to such organisms. Such understanding has therefore been described as one in terms of 'backwards causation'. This is not a theory of time travel, i.e. a theory of how the future may causally interact with the present, but rather a mode of explanation which renders biological behaviour intelligible in terms of the aiming-towards-certain-future-states, i.e. reproduction, maturity, etc., which cannot be captured adequately with reference to previous states and their causal effects upon the present manifestation of behavioural characteristics. Such reference to essences in this sense refers, therefore, to a description of potentialities realized via those formal properties of the entity under consideration which motivate the organism towards those species-specific end states characteristic of the species in question.

We can discern a similarity of method between Aristotle and the phenomenology of Husserl to the extent to which each places emphasis upon the *phainomena* – that is, the world as it reveals itself to consciousness – irrespective of speculation with regard to any reference to the ‘real world’ and ‘thing-in-itself’. Kisiel notes that Heidegger found in Aristotle a ‘proto-phenomenologist’ (Kisiel 1995, 228). In particular, this view is sustained by similarity of method, in which philosophical enquiry is often expressed via visual metaphors: ‘Philosophical truth is truth which is “seen”’ (Kisiel 1995, 229). Such methods are therefore primarily descriptive or intuitive, rather than deductive. More precisely, whilst Aristotle does indeed engage in scientific and metaphysical speculation, this need not be considered to provide the essential basis of his ethics, which one could argue ‘brackets’ speculation on metaphysical entities such as the ‘form of the good’, the afterlife, etc., and merely concentrates upon an elucidation of concepts and description of self-evident, or at least generally agreed upon, components of human excellence in the here and now. With regard to method, Aristotle writes as follows:

As in other cases, we must set out what appears true about our subjects [*phainomena*], and, having first raised the problems, thus display, if we can, all the views people hold about these ways of being affected, and if not, the larger part of them, and the most authoritative; for if one can both resolve the difficult issues about a subject and leave people’s views on it undisturbed, it will have been clarified well enough.

(*NE* 1145b1-10)

What should be clear from the above quotation is that Aristotle is willing to accept differing degrees of exactitude within his examination of ethical issues. For Aristotle, description combined with philosophical clarification does not exist in isolation from the consensus of opinion – a source of understanding which philosophers such as Slote have described as ‘common-sense ethics’ (see Slote 1992). To this extent he does not accept that all moral issues are up for grabs: there are given parameters of ethical conduct which inform the resolution of the more intractable difficulties, those points of confusion where self-evidence fails.

### ***Existentialist ‘essentialism’***

The issue of essence is indeed of central importance within existentialism, arising, however, from a general hostility towards the attempt at any self-definition which exonerates oneself of one’s radical freedom. Authenticity is indeed largely constituted by the recognition that one is as an existentially free entity, free to choose one’s essence or at least transcend one’s essence via freely adopted commitments and projects. Existentialism has been defined largely as a movement which seeks a general rejection of any theory of the ‘essence of man’; i.e. as a theory which begins from the false premise that consciousness is reducible to a determined feature of the general furniture of the world of objects. Indeed an anti-essentialism of sorts has been endorsed by not only Nietzsche, but also by Heidegger and Sartre. In Sartre’s novel *Nausea*, for instance, it is clear that Roquentin lives largely with an attitude which will not allow the world to show up with normal abstract qualities. He describes a world quite alien from typical ‘ready-to-hand’ concern:

I murmur: 'It's a seat,' rather like an exorcism. But the word remains on my lips, it refuses to settle on the thing. It stays what it is, with its red plush, thousands of little red paws in the air, all stiff, little dead paws. This huge belly turns upwards, bleeding, puffed up – bloated with all its dead paws, this belly floating in this box, in this grey sky, is not a seat.

(N 188)

Roquentin describes a situation in which the distinction between essence and existence is such that the sheer existence of the seat is reduced to mere colours, patterns and shapes which are capable of bearing different names and different descriptive properties. In short he realises that he is the originator of essences and that there are therefore no objective 'givens' in this respect. In this sense therefore to appeal to phenomenological essences would preclude any ascription of descriptive content, both towards objects in the external world and to ourselves.

Whilst we need not apply such argumentation to Heidegger, Nietzsche or Scheler, we can find upon another level such thinkers endorsing certain essentialist theories of their own. In Nietzsche, for instance, we find a theory which finds life in general an expression of the 'will to power', in Sartre we find the assertion that man is inescapably 'radical freedom'; and in Heidegger we find the assertion that man's 'essence is his existence'. In some sense the two meanings of 'essence' with which we have been dealing in the above relate to the distinction between the *existentiell*, which, in the technical sense at least, pertains to those non-structural aspects of human life concerned with specific choices and self-interpretations, whilst the *existential* can be said to differ from such characteristics in that it aims to describe

those structural features of human consciousness which are a precondition of the *existentiell*. This is why we find, for instance, interest in general aspects of human consciousness – such as Heidegger’s and Sartre’s preoccupation with issues such as time consciousness. But, as I have said, such thinkers do retain some interesting theories of what it is to be human in its ideal and non-ideal modes, and whilst not naturalists in the physicalist sense of the term, both clearly endorse descriptive methods which bracket interest in metaphysical speculation. To repeat, when we adopt phenomenological methods of ‘bracketing’, any metaphysical assumptions with regard to the world independent of human observation, the ‘thing-in-itself’, or the nature of ultimate reality, are rendered superfluous to the enquiry. This, albeit rather broad form of ‘naturalism’ merely endorses atheism, or at least possesses no special interest in the role of Divinity in the justification and origination of the ethics. Additionally, such naturalism accepts that there is some sense in which we can refer to ‘human nature’, albeit at a certain level of abstraction.

Finally of interest is an examination of the extent to which existentialism embraces a *teleological* conception of human reality. Whilst Aristotelian teleology embraces a theory of final ends which explain the unfolding of the biological entity in question, existentialist teleology emerges when we consider the nature of the analysis of situated human consciousness and its fundamental relationship to a world exterior to itself which is quite unlike itself. This relationship generates a set of defences and strategies of evasion which are predictable upon the basis of the existential analytic. For Sartre, such teleology ultimately embraces an understanding of the human condition as the futile attempt to seek to ground itself as an ‘in-itself-for-itself’. At this stage, it is worth appreciating the extent to which such descriptions evince a teleological conception of human reality which ultimately finds its means of

‘salvation’ in authenticity. Here authenticity has the moral tone of an ‘enlightenment’ in which freedom is embraced as the fundamental value both recognised within oneself and crucially – with regard to ethical concerns – within others also. Whilst such an interpretation relates specifically to the philosophy of Sartre, we find also similar themes within Heidegger and Nietzsche. For Heidegger, the primary human frailty consists in absorption in the dictates of *das Man*, whilst ‘salvation’ could be said to exist in the attempt at self-recovery which generates releasement from such dictates and an enhanced state of self-possession as ‘impassioned being towards death’. With Nietzsche the analogy is less clear, but still we find the ‘proto-existentialist’ assertion that considerable enhancement of vitality and focus of engagement may be secured by the individual who embraces the thought of the eternal return. Again, evasive strategies which diminish the accomplishment of positive human excellencies can primarily be seen to stem from self-deceptive engagements, a defective condition potentially finding its ‘salvation’ in full self-perspicuity.

### ***Existentialist distance from the prevailing ethical theories of deontology and consequentialism***

Central to my concern throughout this essay is the assertion that *aretaic* ethical theory has much to offer as a means of clarification of the kind of ethic which existentialist thinkers have sought to espouse. I must therefore briefly consider the basis upon which existentialism rejected prevailing ethical theories. These include both methodological and substantive objections to deontology and consequentialism. Let us deal with each in turn. First, why might an existentialist take issue with the principles of a formalist style of ethics, as propounded by thinkers such as Kant.



Clearly Kant propounded a duty based system of ethics justified primarily in relation to the categorical imperative. Thus, moral maxims could in principle be tested for legitimacy against the universalisability principle. Scheler, amongst others, criticised this principle in the following manner:

[...] why should someone who elevates his self-hatred and misanthropy to a general principle, and who thereupon establishes a kind of “metaphysics” which holds that the non-being of persons is better than their being, not act out of his hate with awareness that everyone should do likewise.

(*FE* 317)

Such criticisms are indeed familiar and whilst this is not the place to examine such arguments further, we can at least appreciate the extent to which fault may be found with the Kantian formalistic approach. Such criticisms would not however amount to a unique existentialist critique of the Kantian position. However, both Scheler and Nietzsche also have rejected formalistic styles of ethics for its departure from any sound conception of the role of the affects in the ethical life. For them, the affects are as such the very source of value realised within the human life world. To deny their importance is to remove the very origin of a world in which anything matters at all. In some sense, therefore, they anticipate the contemporary revival of interest in *aretaic* ethics to the extent to which they recognise the primacy of the emotions, and furthermore recognise the primacy of linking ethical conduct with some conception of human flourishing. It is for this reason that Scheler remarks on Kant's: ‘impoverished conception of the emotive life and the nature of values as well as the relations among

values' (*FE* 239). Kant, of course, rejects the role of the affects because they represent aspects of man's empirical nature. That is to say they are within the flux of causal determinacy and not therefore subject to the autonomous radical freedom which man's essential nature is said to comprise.<sup>7</sup> For Scheler, in particular, Kant illegitimately identifies the a priori with the formal when in reality 'the opposition between a priori and a posteriori does not have the least to do with that between the formal and the material' (*FE* 72). Indeed for Scheler the value hierarchy which he posits as the fundamental ethical intuition of the self perspicuous agent is both material and a priori. That is to say values, which whilst intuited from actual concrete examples within sensual experience, point to values which do not require concrete instantiation to sustain their legitimacy, thus: 'the value of friendship is not impugned if my friend proves treacherous and betrays me' (*FE* 41).

Nietzsche provides what might be described as a 'consequentialist' objection to Kantian deontology which takes issue with the idea that there must be an ethic of universal application endorsed by all human beings. This largely stems from his elitism which requires the recognition of a strict hierarchy which allows certain privileges to an elite for the sake of the advancement of general human culture. Such issues will be dealt with subsequently and it is worth noting that such views are not consistently shared within the existentialist *oeuvre*. We do find that consistency does however occur in the general dismissal of theism and the immortality of the soul, both positions considered of central importance within Kantian ethics. Such views may be harder to ascribe to Scheler who demonstrated considerable fluctuation in his religious interests, but certainly both Nietzsche and Sartre were explicitly atheistic in philosophical orientation and took little interest in speculation regarding the afterlife.

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<sup>7</sup> Of course this is a point of similarity between Kant and Sartre who also embraces a conception of the human subject as free but constrained by its essentially rational nature.

In part this stems from the fundamental principles of the phenomenological method itself which has little interest in any reference to the noumenal beyond that which is given in ordinary experience. To the extent that Nietzsche may be described as a ‘proto-phenomenologist’ such methodological similarities preclude speculation with regard to any world beyond intelligible experience, indeed here, to the extent to which Heidegger may be said to share objection towards Kantian ethics, any priority given towards the human subject *qua* being-in-the-world, embraces the priority of ‘embodied doing’ as primordial to abstract modes of human engagement. In this sense the autonomous rational subject would emerge at worst as a philosophical fiction or at best as a mode of human life which is too peculiar to legitimise a universal human ethic.

Let me now consider Existentialist opposition to consequentialist approaches. Some criticisms can be classified as ‘methodological’, since they are primarily directed towards the *standards of reasoning* pursued within such philosophy. Nietzsche, for instance, derides even the *possibility* of knowing what the outcome of our actions will be; he describes the utilitarians as ‘naïve’ in this respect (*WzM* 291). Such criticisms stem from his belief that even the origins of our actions are essentially unknown to us, he writes: ‘[t]he value of an action must be judged by its consequences – say the Utilitarians – to judge it by its origins implies an impossibility, namely that of *knowing* its origins’ (*WzM* 291). There is, for Nietzsche, a self-deception implicit in any attempt to posit the will as a known cause of action within the individual. Additionally, such attempts are considered merely to be the moralist’s means of ascribing responsibility to the agent – an ascription which Nietzsche deems entirely illegitimate (*GM* I, 13). Perhaps of greater importance, philosophers such as Sartre (and to some extent in agreement with Kantian objections against

consequentialism) find the consequences of our actions an irrelevance when considered against the value of forging commitments and projects which are endorsed irrespective of outcomes. That is to say, whilst consequentialism may be criticized for a tendency to be essentially ends driven (teleological in this sense), philosophers such as Sartre share with Kant a commitment to the view that consequences are ethically irrelevant – that for example, one fights Fascism even when it is not clear whether it would be ‘better’ in terms of utility maximisation to collaborate and reach some position of compromise. Heidegger would also object to the essentially mechanical nature of the utility calculus which aims to manipulate in a quasi-technological manner the behaviour of human beings, ignoring the context dependent nature of human life as it unfolds in historically unique conditions.

Additionally, for the existentialist, placing one’s trust in a utility calculus undermines the responsibility that the agent must confront in the face of the groundlessness of ethical choice. With this in mind we find an interesting criticism of utilitarian ethics from Williams which clarifies and adds detail to existentialist criticism:

It is absurd to demand of [...] a man, when the sums come in from the utility network which the projects of others have in part determined, that he should just step aside from his own project and decision and acknowledge the decision which utilitarian calculation requires. *It is to alienate him in a real sense from his actions and the source of his actions in his own convictions* [my emphasis]. It is to make him into a channel between the input of everyone’s projects, including his own, and an output of optimific decision; but this is to neglect the extent to

which his actions and his decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity.

(Williams, in Smart and Williams (1973), 116)

We find here a criticism which essentially interprets submission to the utility calculus as a variety of bad faith due to an implicit denial of responsibility. 'Integrity' here refers to the ethical agent's self-directed input in their realisation of private and public commitments. The Utilitarian is described as held hostage to the dictates of others. He is in this sense radically alienated from his own ethical ground. Within Sartrean terminology, such attempts fail to appreciate the extent to which radical freedom must grasp itself as the ultimate ground of value. Submission to a utility calculus would largely represent an act of bad faith in itself. As with Aristotelian styles of ethical investigation, there is a sense in which the individual who can step aside from their own projects, commitments and affective inclinations has already missed the point of the ethically motivated life. They have attempted to alienate themselves from themselves.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps there are also affinities here with the philosophy of Heidegger in which the dictatorship of *das Man* is constitutive of an impediment to live

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<sup>8</sup> To be fair towards utilitarianism on this point I think there is room for an appraisal of the strengths of utilitarianism in certain publicly realised projects, such as welfare reform, the just distribution of healthcare, city planning etc. The mistake lies in any over extension of the project into areas of private relevance. The weakness, indeed, of Aristotelian-inspired ethical approaches lies in the vague nature of decision procedure which finds difficulty in expressing specific advice. Surely there are circumstances where it would be in the interest of the public at large were the integrity of certain individuals undermined in the wider public interest. Williams' famous analysis of the painter Gauguin is of interest in this regard. The painter abandons his family in favour of the furtherance of his artistic talent. His project coheres around his commitment to his personal genius. Moral condemnation from utilitarian perspectives (assuming we can agree what such condemnation would entail) finds an unacceptable degree of selfishness in such behaviour, yet from the perspective of Aristotelian ethics the pursuit of self-perfection and optimum personal capacity realisation forms the basis of ethical motivation and is perhaps intelligible within such ethical parameters. This is certainly the position endorsed by Nietzsche who finds a levelling tendency in the utilitarian ethos which may sacrifice higher values for the lower.

authentically. The authentic individual, as with Sartre, achieves a 'state' of existential liberation from 'the spirit of seriousness' when the nature of human reality as 'radical freedom' is obscured by an excessive identification by consciousness with the in-itself. In the 'spirit of seriousness' the 'subjectivity of objectivity' is denied or hidden, or rather the input of the subjective as ground and sustaining element of the objective perspective is occluded in their inauthentic dispersion. In this regard, authentic resolution can be regarded as the precondition of genuine ethical behaviour. Such conduct could include assenting to a moral system which adopted elements of the utility calculus, but the adoption of such calculus would lack its proper ethical dimension when assented to in the inauthentic mode. When Sartre writes 'by legislating for myself I legislate for all humanity', he endorses a position in which even in refusing to choose we still endorse a position for which we are responsible and in this sense to not choose is still to choose. This is why, I think, existentialists can indeed be largely understood to endorse a meta-ethical position which describes the *preconditions* for the genuinely ethical life, one which emphasises responsibility, self-transparency and radical integrity, justified in relation to objective standards of human life in its ideal and non-ideal modes.<sup>9</sup> Clearly such ethics endorses aspects of

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<sup>9</sup> We should avoid the tendency with some of the examples given by Williams in particular which conflate matters of minor ethical concern with matters of major ethical concern. I would assert that in reality many matters of major ethical concern are reflected in law. They lie outside the individual's realm of sanction-free self-determination. That is to say, murder rape and pillage are already deemed unacceptable regardless of whether I wish to pursue such practices. 'Immorality' is almost an irrelevance in the face of illegality and the powers of the state to prosecute and to punish. The reason why there is no legislation which tells me whether or not I should or should not pursue my career as a painter is simply that such a decision is largely an ethical triviality (it may not be a triviality for me of course). Indeed many contemporary ethical issues lie in areas where legislation is currently ineffective, for instance with regard to issues of global relevance such as international relations, justifications for war, response to climate change, and so forth. All such issues bear greatly upon human flourishing, but not always at the immediate and private level. Here ethical approaches which involve intrusion in privately realised projects can be of great relevance. Political complicity, i.e. doing nothing, can be revealed as a pernicious ethical position which causes great damage. It is here that the later Sartre, I think, realised the rather provincial and self-indulgent nature of bourgeoisie ethics (Nietzsche not excluded) which amounts to little more than a style of self-justification which never really challenges the parameters within which such commitments are engaged. For the late Sartre (as with Aristotle)

*aretaic* ethical concern via the centrality given to the *moral psychology* of ethical subjects, which is to say that dispositions, attitudes and meta-ethical or preconditional aspects of moral motivation have priority. Heidegger writes in this regard:

For the Greeks the consideration of human existence was orientated purely toward the meaning of being itself, i.e., toward the extent to which it is possible for human Dasein to be everlasting. The Greeks gathered this meaning of being, being as absolute presence, from the being of the world. Accordingly, one cannot force Greek ethics into the mode of questioning of modern ethics, i.e., into the alternative of an ethics of consequences or an ethics of intentions. Dasein was simply there with regard to its possibility of being as such, whereby neither intentions nor practical consequences play any role. Even the expression *ethos* corresponds to this conception of the being of man; *ethos* means comportment, the proper way of being.

(PS 178/122-23)

For the Greeks, therefore, to live ethically is to pursue a certain intense style of engagement which cannot be captured by an ethics of utility or duty. Such an ethic, is however, justified in relation to an understanding of those aspects of man's nature which are specific to him alone. I hope I have made it clear that there is indeed a *prima facie* case for the assertion that existentialism has more in common with Greek styles of *aretaic* thought, and that the extent to which deontological and

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ethics is not really even possible in a society which precludes the full realisation of human talent throughout society.

consequentialist styles of ethical speculation were rejected by the existentialists are misdirected in part by the formers' excessively narrow conception of ethics, which contemporary interest in virtues ethics has sought to address. Such interest is often distinguished by its emphasis upon the question of 'How should we be?' over questions of 'What should we do?' Additionally, such interest attempts to find some common aspect of human nature from which to extract qualities which are definitive of human excellence. Whilst the extent to which such analysis may apply to phenomenological styles of philosophical speculation is open to debate, central to any secure understanding of *aretaic* ethics will be a clear explication of Aristotelian ethics, which must indeed be considered both definitive of the intellectual epoch of Greek antiquity and fundamental to ethical thought within the Western tradition.



## 2. Ancient Functionalism

In my attempt to explore the means by which a descriptive ontology may provide compelling ethical norms I intend to appeal to functionalism in both its ancient and contemporary forms. I have a particular interest in the manner in which an essentially pagan philosophical enterprise is able to generate normative condemnation and appreciation of specific failings and excellencies within human subjects, in isolation from subsequent theistic sources of justification in a predominantly ‘law conception’ of ethics. Of course, Aristotle did engage in theological speculation, yet when we consider the *Nicomachean Ethics* in particular, the justification given for the types of human excellence that he describes are largely independent of any theistic speculation. To the extent that he does embrace a metaphysical justification for his ethic we find Aristotle making reference to his theory of natural kinds. However, as I shall argue, I do not believe that such justification was indeed central to his ethical project. Indeed we find that his methods were far less precise, and deliberately so, since he relies predominantly upon descriptive methods which highlight those areas of ethical agreement common to his society, with the attempt to clarify and extend such agreement to more intractable areas.

Whilst contemporary interest in Aristotelian ethics frequently focuses on it as a variety of Virtue Ethics, excessive interest in explication of the specific virtues can partially obscure the original centrality of the Aristotelian insistence that potentiality may be actualized in a more or less successful manner, with reference to the Function Argument. The primary rendition of the Function Argument may be found in *NE* 1098a5-1098a20. Here Aristotle presents a position which develops from the Platonic view that the function of a biological, or indeed a non-biological, entity is to be found

in the application of its best use. From such a viewpoint it is supposedly possible to establish those criteria by which the human being may be evaluated. Aristotle writes:

If the function of a human being is activity of soul in accordance with reason, or not apart from reason, and the function, we say, of a given sort of practitioner and a good practitioner of that sort is generically the same, as for example in the case of a cithara-player and a good cithara player, and this is so without qualification in all cases, when a difference in respect of excellence is added to the function (for what belongs to the citharist is to play the cithara, to the good citharist to play it well) – if all this is so, and a human being's function we posit as being a kind of life, and this life as being activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason, and it belongs to a good man to perform these well and finely, and each thing is completed well when it possesses its proper excellence: if all this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with excellence (and if there are more excellences than one, in accordance with the best and the most complete).

(*NE* 1098a5-1098a20)

For Aristotle, the virtuous individual emerges as the one who therefore takes direction from the intellectual faculty through both the practical application of *phronēsis* and the contemplative pursuit of *theōria*, and is successful in the habituation of the 'lower' faculties to be receptive to the dictates of the intellectual faculties. Additionally, the ethical life is intimately entwined with some conception of what is good for human

beings as physical entities continuous with the natural world. It is assumed that the fully virtuous person will emerge as the most fulfilled and blessed of its kind within the parameters of a finite lifespan. In particular, Aristotle embraces a position common within this period of intellectual history, in which immoral behaviour emerges as essentially irrational. In this sense, the immoral agent fails to ascertain the true goods of life either through sheer confusion or indeed through motivated distortion of those ends which they would assent to were they in possession of themselves to an adequate degree. The methods of Socrates, for instance, in many of the Platonic dialogues often focus upon the immoral agent who is led towards a position in which they may come to doubt the original impetus that led to their admiration of morally dubious individuals. Socrates attempts, not always successfully, to lead the immoral agent into a position of self-doubt, or indeed into a position in which they realise the extent to which their values and justifications for their behaviour somehow conflict (as found for instance in dialogues such as *Gorgias*).

Some argue, however, that Aristotle's attempt to ground his ethics in normatively binding and objective argumentation is deeply embedded within his entire conception of the natural world and links directly with his understanding of the fourfold nature of causation and his theory of natural kinds. For Aristotle, in the case of natural kinds, both final and formal causation are said to converge such that to know the formal properties of a natural object, say an acorn, is also to know something definite about the final end of a functionally adequate acorn, i.e. that it should grow into an oak tree. For Aristotle, therefore, facts and values or descriptions and evaluations are not to be sharply separated, since to know (in this case) what an acorn is, is to know something quite specific about the nature of an excellent species member. Whilst traditional objections to such commitments will be examined, I must

in particular examine the extent to which such examples are of relevance when evaluating human nature. Whilst the functional element of natural kinds consists of those essential capacities and / or formal potentialities which give rise to the actualisation of species-specific characteristics, Aristotelian appraisal of human excellence is intertwined with an appreciation of the primacy of education in the formation of the human individual. The human being does not, then, possess an innate capacity for self-perfection, but rather has capacities which require appropriate training to reach their optimum. For Aristotle, human beings are indeed unique amongst the animals for this requirement of extensive training and development, if they are to adequately flourish in a manner characteristic of their species. Such was certainly appreciated by Aristotle in the following passage:

[O]ne should say that every excellence, whatever it is an excellence of, both gives that thing the finish of a good condition and makes it perform its function well. Similarly the excellence of a horse both makes it an excellent horse and good at running, carrying its rider and facing the enemy. If, then, this is so in all cases, the excellence of a human being too will be the disposition whereby he becomes a good human being and from which he will perform his own function well.

*(NE 1106a15-25)*

Virtue is not, therefore, upon this characterization merely an imposition from an external source upon the recalcitrant affects. Rather, virtue is conceived in terms which are of direct benefit to the virtuous individual. Virtue therefore should, it seems,

be described almost entirely in terms of that which brings the human being towards maximal excellence. As Korsgaard writes:

[T]o be virtuous is to realize our true nature, to be the best version of what we are. So it is to let our own nature be a law to us. And the Greeks thought that since our own good would be realised in being the best version of what we are, we have every reason to be virtuous.

(Korsgaard 1996, 66)

I would assert, however, that the concept of function operating here relates directly not to any specific *metaphysical* doctrine, but rather to the less controversial analysis of the best application of faculties and capacities which require no further and no deeper justification than the self-evident observation that the biological unit strives for appropriate expression of its innate and essential qualities, and thereby finds satisfaction in the discharge of the unique, yet functionally determined, aspects of its empirical nature. In fact, when we look further into the *NE*, we find Aristotle asserting a position in which pleasure can actually be defined as the unimpeded expression of functional potentialities, since pain is here described as the impediment of such functioning (*NE* 1153b1). In the same way that the functionally adequate acorn grows into an oak tree, so for Aristotle the ideal species participant develops into the functionally adequate and fully rational human being. In this sense, therefore, his theory represents a conception of an empirical human essence against which the ideal may be judged. To be precise, the soul is for Aristotle best understood as in some sense a function of the material conditions that impinge upon it. In book II of *De*

*Anima*, Aristotle notes that whilst the soul is to be considered a substance it is not the same kind of substance as the body. He argues that:

It must be the case that soul is substance as the form of a natural body which potentially has life, and since this substance is actuality, soul will be the actuality of such a body.

(*De An.* 412a-412b)

Aristotle's conception of the soul, then, is one which emphasizes the form of material processes. This is why Aristotle embraces what at first appears to be a peculiar doctrine with regard to a stratification of the self which includes the nutritive capacities. We can see this most clearly when we consider the 'axe analogy'. It is the axe's ability to cut which provides the form or essence of an object which, viewed materially, would merely comprise of a purposeless lump (*De An.* 412a-413a). He observes:

[T]he soul is like sight or the potentiality of a tool. And the body is what is in this potentiality. So just as pupil and sight are the eye, so, in our case, soul and body are the animal.

(*De An.* 413a-413b)

Of interest, however, is the extent to which the rational faculty may be evaluated with reference to essentialist theories of this kind, since Aristotle aims to have provided functional criteria for a faculty where standards of evaluation are open to considerable discrepancy. Whilst an individual's club foot may be evaluated by reference to

species-specific characteristics and deemed worthy of operative procedures in order to correct the defect, the evaluation of rational capacities may not quite meet the same evaluative criteria, because the disvalue of irrationality is not directly analogous to being mad or having Alzheimer's, or being under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, etc. The judgement of irrationality is not an accusation of insanity, rather, in my opinion at least there is in this accusation the assumption of sanity and furthermore the assumption of the capacity – albeit unrealised – for rationality. So, in that sense it is perhaps a mistake to attempt to move from evaluative functional arguments which relate strictly to the nature of plants, animals or kitchen knives, etc., and to try to get from here to a similar or analogous account of the functional adequacy of human life according to the extent to which it may fail or succeed in fulfilling the species-specific capacity for rational behaviour. It is here that Aristotle has been criticised for committing what has come to be known as the 'naturalistic fallacy', the view that a value cannot be obtained from a fact (Moore 1959).

Contemporary readings of Aristotle, however, favour an interpretation in relation to this issue which fuses the evaluative and factual in such a way that certain factual observations are understood to commit the observer to certain evaluative conclusions (for instance see Foot 1995, 14). Greek aretaic styles of enquiry can therefore contribute towards an understanding of the role of 'potential' as an evaluative category from which certain specific ethical judgements may be extracted, with reference to those teleologically specific states of capacity realisation which are constitutive of the potential in its realised form. Such a 'happiness' or 'fulfilment' is precisely not one which the individual experiences as some kind of pleasant sensation, rather – and crucial to this essay – the happiness can only be evaluated with reference

to criteria which remain inaccessible to the non-virtuous agent's evaluative parameters. Aristotle pursues similar arguments when he writes:

If creatures are distinct in kind, then, their pleasures will be different in kind; and if they are of the same kind, one might reasonably expect their pleasures not to differ. But they diverge to no small degree at least in the case of human beings, since the same things delight some whilst giving pain to others, and are painful and objects of loathing for the one group while being pleasant and things to love for the other. This happens with sweet things too; the same things don't seem sweet to the person with a fever and the one in good health, nor warm to those who are frail and those who are physically fit. This happens with other things too in the same way. However, in all such cases it is thought to be what appears so to the good person that is so. And if this is the right thing to say, as it seems to be, and it is excellence and the good person, in so far as he is such, that is the measure for each sort of thing, then so too with pleasures: the ones that appear so to him will be pleasures, and the things he delights in will be pleasant.

*(NE 1176a5-20)*

Again the appraisal of the good is here seen as the application of a capacity (refined though training) to perceive the most appropriate course of action and to evaluate those aesthetic qualities of highest value. Clearly, for Aristotle, the bad man is simply not qualified to know the difference between good and bad. In terms of Socratic ethics the immoral agent thinks that they aim at the good for themselves by, for instance,



murdering their relatives in order to obtain the throne, but actually they cause harm to themselves. For Socrates such individuals fail to realise the good even in circumstances where they are sure that they are indeed realising the good through their gluttony and enjoyment of power. Socrates achieves this conclusion by applying an objective conception of happiness. He therefore discounts the immoral agent's subjective experience of happiness and finds them unhappy from that putatively objective standpoint. This feature of an ethics of flourishing, whilst perhaps *prima facie* appearing trivial, is in fact of central importance with regard to any normative guidance in dilemmas of ethical relevance. In particular, it does provide what has been described as the 'Archimedean point' from which the ethically confused can achieve conversion to ethical clarity. Williams writes, with such a view in mind, as follows:

[I]t might turn out that when we properly think about it, we shall find that we are committed to an ethical life, merely because we are ethical agents. Some philosophers believe that this is true. If they are right, then there is what I have called an Archimedean point: something to which even the amoralist or the skeptic is committed but which, properly thought through, will show us that he is irrational, or unreasonable, or at any rate mistaken.

(Williams 1985, 29)

That is to say, if it can be demonstrated that there is some benefit to the agent from the acquisition of those intellectual virtues which provide ethical clarity, then the practice of such an ethic will have a normative effect upon those who comprehend

such demonstration. Here similarities with MacIntyre may be seen, since we find in his reading of Aristotle which endorses a position in which higher value realization, whilst not necessarily of immediate appeal, can come to be understood and appreciated in time by the non-virtuous human subject as they acquire the necessary dexterity of intellect and strength of moral character of relevance to the practices within which they seek to excel. This observation cannot in fact be emphasised strongly enough, because the normativity of any ethic of flourishing will be entirely undermined if the evaluations of flourishing states are merely privately determined, independently of objective criteria. In particular, it is therefore necessary to prove that any ethic which appeals to the relative value of capacity realisation really can achieve binding normative force. By this I mean that it is of utmost importance that the enjoyment the incontinent may experience must – if any ethic of capacity realisation is to remain cogent – be capable of being overridden by arguments and persuasive means which enhance the appeal of abstinence from such behaviour, for the sake of *higher* stages of value-realisation as manifest in the life of the good man (the man who is uniquely qualified to know the difference between good and bad pleasures).

As we have seen, Aristotle appeals to some conception of human nature in order to define the good for man and to evaluate relative human excellence. However, whilst Aristotle is committed to embracing elements of material success in the life of the excellent person, it should be clear that whilst such success may complete the blessed life, such elements are relatively peripheral and relate solely to the realization of lower faculties. Aristotle gives the example of King Priam, a virtuous individual who suffers at the end of his life from the most unlucky of tragedies, the loss of his

sons.<sup>10</sup> Whilst it seems quite reasonable to suppose that Priam's life could not be judged as one which the excellent person would share, it would not follow, even upon an Aristotelian understanding, that Priam failed to realize those virtues which properly characterise a man of *nobility*. It is possible to argue, however, that Priam strictly speaking 'fails', but fails at a lower sphere of value-realization, with regard to the loss of his sons. Thus any excellence accruing to Priam in his role as social administrator, or perhaps contemplative philosopher, would not be tarnished or reduced by his bad luck in losing his sons in such a manner. The loss of his sons, whilst a source of private grief, cannot be understood as diminishing his personal excellence, when viewed from any perspective which endorses a hierarchy of value-realization. There are, upon Aristotle's own understanding, clear differences to be made between those aspects of human excellence which lack moral content. Whilst such characteristics may indeed be indicative of human flourishing, they are not unique to *human* beings, and are to a large extent not characteristics which we can be held responsible for possessing. Such features subsist as independent and separate forces outside of the control of the subject. However, whilst it is possible to be unfortunate in relation to 'lower' types of value realisation, there is room in Aristotle's philosophy for recognition of the greater importance of success in the exercise of higher faculties. He explicitly appeals to arguments which we find in Plato with regard to the exercise of proper function in relation to the specific faculty of concern (See the *Republic* 345a). Virtue does not therefore manifest itself in this ancient conception in the rather twee

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<sup>10</sup> Kantian criticism of Aristotle on this point is, I think, quite valid since it is not clear why any contingent factors, i.e. whether or not I am born ugly or beautiful or whether or not I win the lottery etc, should have any bearing upon the moral content of my life. Whilst a certain degree of health and material prosperity may be preferable, such contingent factors of one's life cannot be *solely* constitutive of the life lived well. Aristotle himself acknowledges this when he describes the lives of the philosophers who in their search for theoretical understanding and a contemplative existence fail to attend to the practicalities of everyday life.

framework of Victorian ethical concern, such as chastity, modesty and industriousness. Rather, we find a central interest with essence and its most perfect realization.

Additionally, Aristotle's apparent commitment to an ethic of material success seems to commit him to an interesting relativism in which virtue may be considered relative to the specific individual concerned. He describes, for instance, the case of Milo the wrestler who required a larger quantity of food than most in order that he might function adequately as an athlete, a quantity of food that might count as gluttony in a smaller and less active person (*NE* 1106b1). Aristotle seems to suggest therefore that to some extent *eudaimonia* may be achieved in different ways by different types, as if each individual possessed a different *ergon* relative to their best qualities. Whilst this observation indicates some sympathy for a relativism – certainly amongst the non-moral virtues – for Aristotle, there are capacities which are constitutive of all human life which in essence provide for objective standards by which one may evaluate specifically *human* flourishing. Thus, the example of differing food requirements is of interest, but does not provide an example of a uniquely *human* capacity since – as we have seen – the nutritive functions are possessed by plants and animals alike. Aristotle, whilst rejecting the Platonic metaphysical basis of such formal properties, maintained some adherence to an essentialism which provided normative guidance in the evaluation of species-specific types of behaviour and value-realisation. Superficial readings of Aristotle have found that he fails to provide a normatively binding definition of the human essence. For instance, it is argued that the mere fact that humans are uniquely capable of prostitution or internet fraud is not a reason to endorse the practice of such activities (Hobbs 1988, 210). There is, here, I believe, a clear misunderstanding of the very notion of essence as something which can be taken away or discounted from a thing

whilst it still remains a thing of its type. The mere fact that all men are capable of speaking Greek does not, for instance, mean that all men should speak Greek if they are to realise their essence as excellent species members.<sup>11</sup> However – in the abstract – the capacity for language does amount to a species-specific skill which the normal human agent should possess (including of course sign language / Braille). Certain exceptional talents, such as the capacity to engage in an understanding of higher mathematics, need not be considered as *essentially* human, since one could lose such talents but retain one's humanity.<sup>12</sup> For this reason I would wish to interpret Aristotle in a way which excludes reference to those capacities and dispositions which may vary between cultures or historical time periods. Upon this reading, Aristotle may be understood to assent to a conception of a universal human condition.

The issue of relativism with regard to ethical issues is of greater interest, and here we must be careful that such philosophy does not endorse a relativism which would allow differing *moral* standards to apply to differing individuals. We cannot endorse a position in which the psychopath's need to pursue acts of indiscriminate violence are considered appropriate expressions of his *ergon*, whilst an individual's desire to provide for their children and care for the sick and elderly is somehow merely on a par with the actions of the psychopath in that both actions express their particular nature. I would argue, therefore, that with regard to the moral virtues there is less scope in Aristotelian ethics for relativism. Rather, he endorses a position in which certain *species-specific* excellencies of both practical and theoretical deliberation are broadly applicable to the uniquely human *ergon*. Ancient conceptions of *eudaimonia* therefore stress the essentially objective nature of species-specific

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<sup>11</sup> So whilst the capacity to engage in computer fraud may be *unique* to human beings, such activity is not *essential* to being human in the way that recognising the value of friendship is.

<sup>12</sup> When Heidegger chose the term Dasein we know that he did so to emphasise some essential feature of the human subject which transcended any historical or cultural epoch.

types of happiness or flourishing. For this reason, we find in fact that translations of *eudaimonia* as ‘happiness’ are inadequate, since in the contemporary understanding of the term, it implies a happiness which could in principle be entirely *subjectively* determined, a state therefore which no external party would be qualified to pass comment upon. Whiting, for instance, argues that Aristotle aimed specifically to defeat relativistic ethics in which the good for one individual may not be considered good by another, by the appeal to human function (Whiting 1988, 38-39). On this view, it is possible to argue that an individual’s opinions with regard to what is or is not good for themselves may be mistaken. Traditional objections to such a position have, according to Whiting, clustered around the criticism that Aristotle illegitimately moves from a notion of what is involved in being a good man towards conclusions with regard to what is *good for a man* (Whiting 1988, 34). Whilst a good knife may possess certain specific excellencies such as sharpness, etc., it does not follow, according to such criticisms, that the possession of sharpness is *good for the knife* itself. Aristotle, it seems, moves from a description of those instrumental virtues which describe those capacities possessing use value with regard to the pursuit of specific ends and purposes, towards normative conclusions regarding the *sort of life* a man should lead. But, as Whiting argues:

Aristotle does not suppose that men have instrumental functions or virtues. Nor does he attempt to move from a purely descriptive and non-evaluative account of the human function to normative conclusions [...] Aristotle’s account is normative ‘all the way down’.

(Whiting 1988, 35)

Whiting argues that Aristotle makes a distinction between the inanimate, to which benefit cannot accrue, and the animate to which it can accrue. Any appeal to that which is 'good for the knife' would clearly be nonsensical. Of greater importance, however, is the fact that natural kinds delineate for Aristotle only certain essential spheres of excellence. Thus, whilst I may be an excellent flute player, excellence at flute playing need not be considered of relevance when evaluating human excellence.

Whiting further remarks:

[...] Aristotle's account of friendship suggests that he regards these categorical goods as intrinsic and non-instrumental in a way in which conditional goods are not. He claims that only virtuous persons wish well to one another for the other's own sake because they wish one another well for the sake of what each is essentially, and not [...] for the sake of what each is accidentally.

(Whiting 1988, 37)

Aristotle recognises, therefore, that what is essential to human life excludes many types of activity or excellence. To recognise the intrinsic value of friendship is, for instance, not a capacity which some human beings may possess to a greater degree than others – there is no competitive element which allows one to exceed over others in this regard, and most importantly, it does not stand out as a special accomplishment, but rather is representative of normal human sociability. So, returning to the apparent relativism with regard to Milo the wrestler, we find that relativism of diet in response to certain relativisms of conduct or livelihood represent an irrelevance with regard to those central or essential matters pertaining to normal human fulfilment (such dietary

needs would, using Whiting's terminology, have to be described as 'conditional'). The psychopath or paedophile do not – upon such an account of human excellence – figure as examples of alternative pathways to *eudaimonia*, but fail in any appreciation of the value of social harmony and perhaps the value of a certain reaching-out-to-others which is constitutive of friendship and the sustenance of genuine self-worth.

### ***Functional adequacy and accuracy of moral perception***

Aristotle provides an account of moral perception in relation to the exercise of practical reason. As Aristotle observes:

[W]hereas getting angry, or giving money away, or spending it are things anyone can do, and easy, doing them to the person one should, to the extent one should, when one should, for the reason one should, and in the manner one should – this is no longer for anyone [...]

(*NE* 1109a25-30)

Aristotle implies that moral perception cannot merely be acquired by undergoing the correct training, since he also introduces the possibility that one may in fact additionally require a talent for moral discrimination. A talent which should be respected by those of lesser talent, particularly in the case of obedience to a wise statesman or household manager. In this case, executive virtues such as *phronēsis* are of a kind that those who fail to possess them, or fail to possess them to the appropriate degree, are better off if they relinquish some of their executive powers to others. This is partly how Aristotle is able to justify the notion of the 'natural slave', although I think that he would argue that when compared with a fine statesman such as Pericles



we all fall short in our capacity for accurate moral perception. It is clear that Aristotle's observation that the mean is perceived rather than arrived at via a process of exact calculation indicates the importance of practical experience in the exercise of the virtues. For instance, learning to ride a bike presents a task which cannot be accomplished via theoretical training in mechanics and physics, but is rather only acquired and perfected by practice and immersion. Such an understanding of the nature and acquisition of the moral virtues allows Aristotle to hold the view that defective moral training may be remedied by the individual being encouraged to reach for the opposing extreme in their moral behaviour as a means of correcting moral inadequacy:

[W]e should consider the things that we ourselves, too, are more readily drawn towards, for different people have different natural inclinations; and this is something we shall be able to recognize from the pleasure and the pain that things bring about in us. We should drag ourselves way in the contrary direction; for by pulling far away from error we shall arrive at the intermediate point, in the way people do when they are straightening out warped pieces of wood.

*(NE 1109b1-10)*

In essence Aristotle here encapsulates the central concern of the virtue ethicist that our attention in moral philosophy should predominantly cohere around the issues of educational priority. That is to say whilst consequences are entirely relevant, they only represent the outcome of a causal series which initiates with a certain educational success or failure in the inculcation of virtuous dispositions. Indeed, whilst Aristotle

adopts functional methods of evaluation, he does so, as the above passage makes clear, in order to define the sorts of training and ‘moulding’ one should be subject to, both from society when of a certain age, but ultimately from oneself in later life. The Function Argument does not commit us to a passive separation of the intrinsically good from the intrinsically bad but to a commitment to an active, practical understanding of our nature – in particular in its higher aspects – in order that that which is best within us may be brought to the fore in educational, political and personal projects.

Whilst for Aristotle it seems that the vices are tempting because they represent a course of action that requires no exercise of self-discipline, they are in a sense where we end up when we ‘let ourselves go’. However, for Aristotle our perfection and most perfect happiness lies in a self-disciplined life in which our passions are educated to achieve proportion, harmony and appropriate expression.

[I]t is not easy to determine not only how, but with whom, in what sorts of circumstances, and for how long one should be angry, since we ourselves sometimes praise those deficient in anger and call them ‘mild’, while at other times we praise those who get angry and call them ‘manly’.

(*NE* 1109b15-20)

Correct conduct is in some sense reduced to a matter of appropriate choice, as determined by the man of practical wisdom. In this sense such an individual is distinguished by a ‘feel’ for appropriate conduct, and thus by making his choice with a similar sort of justification as an artist or a craftsman would make theirs.

Whilst Aristotle has been criticised for a conception of the virtues merely in terms of ‘mindless habituations’ (Sorabji 1980, 216), in reply to such objections it is possible to demonstrate that there is room in Aristotelian ethics for the framing of moral principles which act as a rationalizing guide to action and not merely as causal motivation for, or instrumental facilitator of action. This widespread lack of emphasis upon this aspect of his philosophy is in part due to the attempt to integrate Aristotelian thought with emotivists such as Hume who reduce the human being to a network of desires, with the intellect playing a secondary role which merely instrumentally facilitates the fulfilment of desire. Upon this reading practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) is conceived in terms of the ability to deliberate, holding *eudaimonia* as its goal. Sorabji writes upon this matter:

It [*phronēsis*] enables a man, in the light of his conception of the good life in general, to perceive [...] what virtue and *to kalon* require of him, in the particular case, and it instructs him to act accordingly.

(Sorabji 1980, 206)

In the case of courage, for instance, it is not merely enough to possess the virtue of a courageous disposition, but also to know *when* to be courageous and to what degree in order that one ‘hits the mean’. He continues:

[V]irtue of character is regarded as a disposition to desire the mean that is found and dictated by deliberative skill, while practical wisdom is a disposition to use one’s deliberative skill in order to find the mean and dictate it.

(Sorabji 1980, 211)

Thus, whilst submission under the authority of our educators may be the initial stage of acquiring the virtues, this is not ultimately sufficient. Thus, the often made criticism of Aristotle that one could be virtuous without knowing why (merely through the thorough application of a certain training), is only partially correct.

Aristotle himself describes the vacuity of the recommendation to aim for ‘the mean’ in the exercise of the virtuous life since, as he describes, this does not in itself tell us what we should do. He writes:

[W]hile it is true to say that one shouldn’t apply oneself, or slacken one’s effort either too much or too little, but just to an intermediate degree and as the correct prescription lays down, if this were the only thing a person knew he would be no further on – e.g. he would not know what sorts of remedies should be applied to the body, if someone just said ‘those that medical science dictates, and in the way the medical expert would do it’. Hence in relation to the dispositions of the soul too what we need is not merely to have said this and said something true; we need also to have determined what ‘the correct prescription’ is, and what the determining mark of this is.

(*NE* 1138b25-35)

Aristotle can be seen therefore to have largely anticipated such criticism and aims to explore the problem that the non-executive virtues do not tell us what to do in specific

circumstances by uniting his understanding of such virtues with the intellectual or executive virtues.

He proceeds to outline a taxonomy of the soul which places action and truth under the control of 'sensation, reason and desire'.

What affirmation and denial are in the case of thought, pursuit and avoidance are with desire; so that, since excellence of character is a disposition issuing in decisions, and decision is a desire informed by deliberation, in consequence both what issues from reason must be true and the desire must be correct for the decision to be a good one, and reason must assert and desire pursue the same things.

(*NE* 1139a20-30)

Aristotle clearly asserts the necessity for a certain harmony between reason and the affects. The non-moral virtues should be in harmony with the executive virtues in the ideal human agent. Additionally, we see Aristotle proposing a ranking of the intellect above the affects, but he considers that the ideal circumstance is one in which the affects act in accordance with the dictates of the intellect (*NE* book VII). Aristotle concludes that truth and moral choice are only properly attained when both parts of the intellect, that is, the scientific or theoretical and the calculative or the practical, are in operation: 'It holds, then, of both intelligent parts that their function is truth; so the excellencies of both will be the dispositions in accordance with which each of them will grasp truth to the highest degree' (*NE* 1139b10-11).

We have seen, therefore, that Aristotle places special emphasis upon the role of the rational faculties in the apprehension of the good for man, defined both

abstractly and in relation to specific elements of practical deliberation. But the application of the rational faculty with regard to the specifics of life and the practical difficulties which it presents do not exhaust the application of the rational faculties. Indeed, it is primarily in relation to higher levels of theoretical comprehension that the life of the excellent person may be identified.

### ***Controversies regarding the centrality of theōria to the human essence***

Given the importance of *theōria* within Aristotle's ethical project, it would clearly be of value to briefly consider the complexities which surround the interpretation of this central concept. Within the *Eudemian Ethics*, for instance, *theōria* primarily consists of the exercise of intellectual virtues, such as understanding or *sophia*, most clearly in relation to the contemplation of the Divine, in which the *sophos* achieves a clear vision of the relationship of the first mover to all aspects of motion within the natural world (*EE* 1249b13-21). We know additionally from *NE* that, according to Aristotle, it is the philosophical way of life which most closely approximates the realization of this divine capacity. Thus it is only philosophers who most fully possess the virtues associated with *theōria*. As Aristotle writes:

From what has been said, then, it is clear that intellectual accomplishment is a combination of systematic knowledge and intelligence, with the things that are highest by nature as its objects.

This is why people call Anaxagoras and Thales and people of that sort 'accomplished', but not 'wise', when they see them lacking a grasp of what is to their own advantage; and they say that people like that know things that are exceptional, wonderful, difficult, even superhuman –

but useless, because what they inquire into are not the goods that are human.

(*NE* 1141b1-15)

Whilst suggesting that the possession of virtues associated with the attainment of theoretical wisdom may to some extent come at the expense of certain practical competencies, Aristotle clearly emphasizes the fact that such wisdom represents the highest form of value realization attainable to the human being. In some sense such goods could be described as ‘existential goods’ or indeed ‘ontological goods’, since they require some grasp of those *structural features of reality* which precondition or explain specific ontical concerns.

This interpretation is rejected by commentators such as Broadie, who argues that it is not clear that such activity consists of a state which is in some sense completed – as it were a state of mystical union or profound inner peace. Rather it should be seen as a dynamic process which involves some appreciation of process and change. Broadie rejects the static interpretation, since, she argues:

[to take pleasure in an acquired truth] is absurd since pleasure attaches not to states but activities. In fact he [Aristotle] is comparing one activity with another: the activity within which we are at one with the developing object, and the less fulfilling activity in which we cast about trying to locate it.

(Broadie 1991, 401)

She argues, therefore, that it is not so much contemplative knowledge which constitutes the satisfaction of the wise man, but rather the ability to place knowledge acquired within a 'systematic context'. This conception of *theōria* is closer, therefore, to that which we mean by 'scientific theory'. Theory in this sense is that branch of knowledge which *organises* particular data and provides cohesion and *explanation* of such data. Broadie argues, therefore, that there seems to be a tension within Aristotle's writing between a *theōria* which consists in a mystical experience of God or the absolute, and of a *theōria* which consists in an organisation of scientific knowledge within a systematic whole. There are conflicting passages within the *Nicomachean Ethics* which illustrate this tension. Consider:

[W]hat was said before will fit with the present case too: what belongs to each kind of creature by nature is best and most pleasant for each; for man, then, the life in accordance with intelligence is so too, given that man is this most of all. This life, then, will also be happiest.

(*NE* 1178a1-10)

Here Aristotle implies that those activities best befitting a human being (including contemplative activities) lead to the most perfect happiness simply because they are an expression of that which is most human within us. Whilst earlier the contemplative life appears as an unusual achievement, requiring a high degree of self-sufficiency (*NE*, 1177a26), pure contemplative activity is ultimately interpreted as superhuman:

[I]f, then, living has practical doing taken away from it, and (still more) producing, what is left except reflection? So then the activity of



a god, superior as it is in blessedness, will be one of refection; and so too the human activity that has the greatest affinity to his one will be the most productive of happiness.

(*NE* 1178b20-25)

The capacity for contemplative activity stands as that aspect of the human being which is shared with the divine. Such contemplation is, therefore, non-calculative and for this reason in a certain sense non-rational. I would argue that this conception of *theōria* bears more similarity to an affective state such as contemplative bliss, and remains thus distant from conceptions of theory which relate to scientific conceptions which ‘organise’ particular data.

What should be clear is that the very fact that *theōria*, considered as an activity in which human beings can only partially involve themselves, often only exceptional human beings at that, and given that the gods take little interest in matters concerning the exercise of practical reason, whilst exhibiting a perfect realisation of the capacity for theoretical contemplation – however conceived – leads to the conclusion that *theōria* cannot be understood to be constitutive of specifically *human* function by the criteria that Aristotle himself provides. The capacity for *phronēsis* may in fact emerge as the unique human capacity. It is argued, therefore, that Aristotle himself wished to understand the capacity for practical deliberation as uniquely expressive of the human *ergon* (*NE* 1098a5-1098a20). As we have seen from *NE* 1097b30-1098a25, Aristotle specifically isolates those functional capacities which are unique to the entity in question and those excellencies which are ‘in accordance with the best and the most complete’ characteristics of the entity. The capacity for *theōria* would not, upon this understanding, represent the most complete

capacity of human life, although it would remain the highest. Upon this understanding, the contemplative philosopher would have to be considered in a similar manner to the exceptional musician or the exceptional mathematician. Whilst in possession of specific excellencies, such individuals do not possess qualities which are representative of human nature in its essential form and are not therefore of relevance in any ethical enquiry. *Phronēsis* may, however, qualify as the primary executive virtue which must be possessed for typical human flourishing. Kraut, however, argues that whilst *theōria* is indeed shared with the divine, Aristotle accepts that the type of *theōria* in which human beings engage is of a different quality to the divine (Kraut 1979, 473). This may provide a resolution to the tension between Aristotle's insistence that *theōria* provides the most perfect human happiness, and the insistence within the Function Argument that man's function consists in the exercise of his *unique* capacity. If human *theōria* is different in kind to the divine, then human *theōria* could still be upheld as the highest level of human capacity realisation. Additionally, Kraut argues that higher life forms are principally defined by Aristotle in relation to the lower – i.e. animal life is defined in relation to its differences with plant life – and not in relation to that which is above them. Indeed, it is possible that divine entities in this context are really only introduced as idealisations – rather like Kant's appeal to angels as representative of natures whose will always accords with the demands of the moral law. We don't have to take Aristotle or Kant literally in this regard.

### **Summary**

To summarise, central to Aristotelian ethical theory are the following principles:

(a) Man possesses an essence / nature, however abstractly defined.

- (b) Such a nature contributes to an objectively determined ethical evaluation appropriate to such a nature.
- (c) Ethics therefore has the role of specifying the fulfilment of the human essence.
- (d) The virtues are beneficial to the possessor in their role in actualizing potential.
- (e) Any clear-thinking rational subject can come to see the beneficial value of the possession of the virtues.
- (f) Philosophy has a central role in the achievement of such clarification.
- (g) There is a hierarchy of capacity which places the executive virtues above the non-executive.
- (h) The lower faculties have an enabling function, but should be subordinate in humans to a cognitive element.
- (i) Contingent factors are of relevance (i.e. material luck).
- (j) There is room for the possibility of particularized *ergon*, i.e. it is possible at some level for differing practices to be endorsed for differing human types. There is not necessarily 'the good for man' which is completely universalizable.
- (k) There is room for some conception of the moral genius, that is to say, an individual who manages to access some level of moral understanding which we can only emulate and perhaps never fully access ourselves. For Aristotle, this allows a ranking amongst human types which also has certain political implications.
- (l) The correct use of the rational faculties is central to the good life. Failure to live rationally represents a failure to live a fully human life.

### 3. Contemporary Functionalism

Whilst Aristotle is able to offer an ethic of a putative objectively binding nature, he does so largely in isolation from metaphysical speculation, certainly in isolation from any dual world hypothesis or creator/legislator hypothesis as found within Judeo-Christian traditions. It is partly for this reason that Elizabeth Anscombe sought to revive *aretaic* styles of ethical enquiry, originally in her now famous paper ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ of 1958. In this work she expresses dissatisfaction with ethical enquiry that is based on non-theistic assumptions, but is not pursued within the parameters of ethical reasoning which emerged during a period of near universal consent to theism:

To have a *law* conception of ethics is to hold that what is needed for conformity with the virtues, failure in which is the mark of being bad *qua* man (and not merely, say, *qua* craftsman or logician) – that what is needed for *this*, is required by divine law. Naturally it is not possible to have such a conception unless you believe in God as a law-giver; like Jews, Stoics, and Christians. But if such a conception is dominant for many centuries, and then is given up, it is a natural result that the concepts of ‘obligation’, of being bound or required by law, should remain though they had lost their root; and if the word ‘ought’ has become invested in certain contexts with the sense of ‘obligation’ it too will remain to be spoken with a special emphasis and a special feeling in these contexts.

(Anscombe 1958, 6)

Given that the conception of God as law-giver has been largely abandoned, Anscombe feels therefore that there is a need for a new departure in ethics which abandons morality conceived in terms of law. Additionally, she recommends a heightened sensitivity towards human psychology, in particular as this relates to moral psychology, since:

[...] it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; ... it should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking.

(Anscombe 1958, 1)

Moral psychology in this sense relates to an understanding of ethics which links the inculcation and possession of human ethical dispositions to some conception of human flourishing. Such psychology has provided the mainstay of the contemporary revival of *aretaic* ethics, an ethics placing its normative justification of its conception of the 'good for man' on a conception of the human essence.

It might remain to look for "norms" in human virtues: just as *man* has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species *man*, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life [...] "has" such-and-such virtues: and this "man" with the complete set of virtues is the "norm," as "man" with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm.

(Anscombe 1958, 14)

We find here a precise description of Aristotelian normative ideals, not merely in relation to biology but extending to the proper application of the rational capacities. Such approaches have in the mean time been developed by philosophers such as Hursthouse, Foot, Nussbaum, Annas, Fulford, Megone and MacIntyre. I make reference to such thinkers with the intention of clarifying the contemporary state of virtue ethics, conceived principally as a contemporary functionalism, that is to say, a theory of human capacity realisation in its ideal and non-ideal modes.

Hursthouse endorses an approach to functionalist ethics which looks towards the realization of certain species-specific capacities when searching for the good for human beings. In particular, Hursthouse characterizes the normative content of *aretaic* ethics in distinction from deontological and teleological ethical theory by its reluctance to be concerned with providing ‘a decision procedure’ (Hursthouse 2001, 68). In the case of the tragic dilemma it is conceivable that two agents each provide a different response to the same ethical problem whilst both actions could reasonably be described as virtuous (Hursthouse 2001, 69). According to Hursthouse the virtuous individual ties their conception of the good action closely to the realization of human happiness, *eudaimonia* or the good life. That is to say, for the virtue ethicist an action is virtuous in so far as it makes a contribution to the realization of enhanced human well-being. In such ‘tragic’ cases, no matter which choices are made, the agent will commit him or herself to some diminishment of human well being (in the case of euthanasia for instance or the application of triage on the battle field). Here, there is strictly speaking no ‘right’ course of action in the sense that deontological and teleological approaches to ethics understand the term (Hursthouse 2001, 74). This

approach rests upon an appeal to the moral psychology of the ethical agent, that is to say, such ethics involve an acute appreciation of those *dispositions* which motivate the agent to choose the action that they engage upon.<sup>13</sup> The inability to reach definite conclusions with regard to intractable dilemmas does not, according to Hursthouse, represent an objection to the ethical project. Thus, for Hursthouse, it is a strength of VE that, when presented with the problem of what is the right course of action in difficult circumstances, it can accept that neither course of action is in fact in the strict sense of the word morally 'right' and yet still say something about what would constitute an exercise of the virtues in such moral dilemmas. VE can, for instance, describe the attitude that we should take toward any actions in such circumstances to include feelings of remorse. The very feeling of indecision over the correct course of action one should take is itself an example of a virtuous disposition. Thus, VE provides a more full account of those factors which shape the ethical life of the human agent, including the emotions, dispositions and other-regarding sensitivities.

In defense of the attempt to define adequate human functioning in strictly naturalistic terms, Hursthouse itemizes two aspects to the evaluation of functional capacity, beginning with non-human animals. Evaluative distinction is made, first, according to 'parts, operations/reactions, actions, and emotions/desires' (Hursthouse 2001, 200). Furthermore, such evaluation also involves proper regard for 'individual survival through the characteristic life span of such a member of such a species' and 'with respect to the 'continuance of the species' (Hursthouse 2001, 200). Every animal species, falling under the above evaluative criteria, also can be evaluated upon the basis of their actions aiming for the ends of individual and species survival.

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<sup>13</sup> Sartre too, as we shall see, endorses a conception of the irresolvable ethical dilemma in the famous example given in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Upon such an understanding, the ethical dilemma largely only comes into being for the ethical agent who possesses the necessary other-regarding sensitivities (EH 35-38).

Hursthouse examines Foot's example of the free-rider wolf who fails to conform to normal wolf-like behaviour by avoiding hunting with the pack. With reference to the life-world of wolves, this, according to both Hursthouse and Foot, would constitute an example of functional failure. The group will fail to develop their characteristic potentialities if certain dysfunctional character traits were to become widespread. Finally, animal life can be evaluated according to the experience, or absence, of that which Hursthouse labels 'characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic pleasure or enjoyment' (Hursthouse 2001, 200).

Clearly, any application of Hursthouse's analysis to existentialist conceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity must proceed with caution. She seems, in particular, to endorse a consequentialist reading of Aristotle in which the end by which human action may be evaluated is characterised strictly in terms of socially or biologically realized outcomes. Indeed it is not clear how her table of evaluative criteria fundamentally differentiates her style of ethical theory from consequentialism, since the act is judged good or bad in relation to the consequences it brings to personal and social flourishing and survival. Aside from this observation, her priority remains to establish those criteria which isolate the good from the bad within any species under consideration with reference to certain facts about the operation of the individual and group as a whole. In earlier work, Hursthouse however emphasizes the 'agent centered' rather than 'act centered' nature of VE in distinction to the most prominent forms of deontology and consequentialism. To the extent that VE is concerned with 'being' rather than 'doing', and is concerned fundamentally with questions such as 'What sort of person should I be?' rather than 'What should I do?'. Hursthouse agrees with the opponents of VE that it lacks normative content. This, however, only stands as a valid objection if we operate within the very narrow conception of normativity



which is concerned solely or primarily with decision procedures. However, as we have seen, evaluations of appropriate function clearly have normative implications (see Whiting 1988). To restate that position briefly, we cannot separate the descriptive statement 'I have athlete's foot' from the obvious implication that I would be better off if I did not have a foot in this condition. Of course, my example is somewhat outside the parameters of ethical inquiry, and clearly ethical evaluation is a subset within the set of evaluative activity which additionally includes (amongst others) aesthetic and medical evaluation.

In criticism of functionalist accounts of moral evaluation, Annas observes that reference to capacity in itself is not particularly helpful in aiding the individual to make an appropriate ethical judgement (Annas 1993, 124). We only have to think of the term 'intelligence' to make this point clear. 'Intelligence' is obviously meant to refer to a capacity or ability, yet it can only really be inferred backwards from its *manifestation* in intelligent action. There is no means of discovering the capacity without reference to those actions that such a capacity may give rise to (even the results of an IQ test refer to 'actions', i.e. to actually choosing the correct or incorrect answer). But if this is the case, how can we really distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate capacity realisation?<sup>14</sup> As Annas points out, the distinction between agent centered and act centered ethics seems to be unclear, since the good person is simply defined as either the person who does good deeds, or as the person who has the propensity to engage in good deeds (Annas 1993, 124). In this sense, therefore, the appeal to the primacy of the disposition of the agent over the actions that the agent pursues is a distinction not worth making, since the criteria of evaluation are identical, merely expressed with reference to actuality or potentiality. Yet, in defense of *aretaic*

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<sup>14</sup> Sartre makes a similar point when he writes: 'The duality of potency and act falls by the same stroke. The act is everything (*EN* xxii).

ethics we can at least appreciate how it may still be possible to prefer the agent who willingly does the good over the agent who does the good, but against contrary inclinations.

Nussbaum argues that the principal strengths of the functionalist position are that it avoids a ‘collapse into subjectivism’, again a position which has gained popularity (Nussbaum 1992, 209-212). Subjectivism in this context can be described as any position which places the origin of morality in the feeling states of the ethical subject, a position classically endorsed by emotivists. Functionalism is said to avoid the relativism threatened here via reference to objective criteria of human flourishing by means of which judgements such as ‘infanticide seems OK to me’ or ‘I like slavery’ could *in principle* be rendered as false ethical judgements, when seen from the perspective of an adequate definition of the good for man. Additionally, it could be argued that any metaphysical realism is in fact unnecessary in order to sustain an essentialist position. This is most evident when we consider Nussbaum’s position, which endorses an essentialism of basic human functions which is yet entirely non-metaphysical. Nussbaum offers the following list of basic human needs:

1. Being able to live to the end of a complete human life, as far as is possible; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Being able to have good health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction; being able to move from place to place.
3. Being able to avoid unnecessary and non-beneficial pain and to have pleasurable experiences.

4. Being able to use the five senses; being able to imagine, to think, and to reason.
5. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence, in general, to love, grieve, to feel longing and gratitude.
6. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life.
7. Being able to live for and with others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of familial and social interaction.
8. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. Being able to laugh. To play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. Being able to live one's own life and nobody else's; being able to live one's own life in one's very surroundings and context.

(Nussbaum 1992, 222).

Nussbaum provides a manifesto, if you like, of human nature in its essential aspects, aspects which, as she elaborates, have certain consequences for how we are to organize our societies and, in addition, provide normative ethical guidance, if only at a structural level of facilitation. Nussbaum endorses a cogent methodology in which the Aristotelian teleological understanding is not rejected in its entirety, but rather is reinterpreted in isolation from his speculative 'metaphysical biology'. As we have seen, such a position is reliant upon a certain theory of the teleological nature of all living organisms, in particular through understanding such organisms in terms of their

potentialities and essential qualities, which are realized or actualized throughout the natural development of the organism in question. Thus an acorn can be understood as a potential oak tree, any failure to realise this potentiality in a certain species-characteristic manner, can upon this teleological understanding, provide the criteria by which the relative excellence of the plant may be established, an evaluation which, by appeal to nature, yields an objectivity of evaluation unavailable to non-teleological methods of evaluation. Nussbaum's analysis does, however, seem to bypass such metaphysical baggage and rely instead upon a method which, as we have seen – in harmony with Prem. 2 – is indeed shared by Aristotle, in which the priority of observation / intuition is favoured over deductive method and metaphysical speculation.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in his article 'Sōphrosunē: How a Virtue Can Become Socially Disruptive', draws attention to an interesting criticism of functionalist evaluation. In particular, he aims his criticisms towards a particular conception of functionalism propounded by Pincoffs for whom the virtues are defined in relation to that which promotes a particular form of 'common life' (Pincoffs 1986, pp. 6-7 and pp. 97-99). However, for MacIntyre the problem is whether: '...no one can truly judge a particular quality to be a virtue, in the light of the best account of the virtues available within his or her culture, and also judge truly that that quality is dysfunctional in respect of the type of common life which he or she inhabits' (MacIntyre 1988, 2). MacIntyre criticizes this view and finds that genuine *sōphrosunē* consists of a certain soundness of mind which allows room for revolutionary practice against the prevailing social order. He concludes:

[O]n Pincoffs' view it does seem that the practice of the virtues in any order will always be fundamentally conservative, preservative of the functioning of that order. That his functionalist generalization is false opens up the possibility that being virtuous may require one to be at odds with the established modes of the common life in radical ways.

The virtue of *sōphrosunē*, like other virtues, can be a virtue of revolutionaries.

(MacIntyre 1988b, 11)

In some sense, the defect of methods which stress description over form is here exposed, since the normatively binding nature of any ethic so produced is liable to relativistic interpretation. MacIntyre in fact argues that there are certain virtues which may indeed be dysfunctional to the community, given that the community may be judged to be of an ethically dubious kind. It is of interest, however, to consider the extent to which the socially located nature of the virtues is of relevance. Indeed, when considering the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the socially located nature of the virtues is not stressed as strongly as MacIntyre would have us believe. The nature of the virtues is generally defined in relation to the flourishing of the individual. This is important since, if we cannot distinguish that which is of importance to the flourishing of the group from that which is of importance to the flourishing of the individual, we have not, it seems, provided an adequate account of the good for the individual man.

Additionally, we will be unable to condemn the practices of one community against another, if we only consider the relevance of the flourishing of the community concerned. To explain, a society may flourish as a result of slavery, that is to say, as a

result of the diminishment of flourishing of individuals within a disadvantaged social group, but this could not in any way justify the practice of slavery.

In some sense MacIntyre does, however, endorse the style of functionalist ethics which we find in Nussbaum. Appeal to characteristic flourishing need not commit us to a cultural relativism with regard to certain basic human needs. In this sense, being held by the majority within a community is not sufficient for endorsing principles which supposedly promote human flourishing – it is entirely possible that a community's higher nature or higher standards of capacity realisation may be suppressed, even in circumstances in which survival is guaranteed and the average level of human flourishing – albeit subjectively determined – is considered adequate.

### ***Normativity of the rational faculties***

Whilst functionalism has been criticized for the view that a 'value cannot be obtained from a fact', I argue that when applied to evaluation of the rational faculties, the position endorsed by Prem. 1 provides a means by which the naturalistic fallacy may be bypassed.<sup>15</sup> We have seen that the Function Argument is particularly susceptible to this criticism, since it is committed to the view that methods which are principally descriptive can provide certain normative 'oughts' with regard to the human ideal. Hume's famous rendition of this criticism is as follows:

Take any action allow'd to be vicious: willful murder, for instance.

Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or

real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you

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<sup>15</sup> 'The results of the ethic so endorsed by the Aristotelian style of enquiry must find their termination in a condition which is in principle observable by / self-evident to the self-conscious and self-perspicuous human agent' p.11.

find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself not in the object.

(Hume 1978, 468-469)

Whilst Hume finds it uncontroversial that we are able to 'find' certain 'passions, motives, volitions and thoughts' in the 'object' under consideration, he will not allow us to find evaluative properties, such as the vicious or the virtuous. For Hume, therefore, 'passions, motives, volitions and thoughts' are objective categories, whilst evaluative categories are entirely subjective. The naturalistic fallacy arises, therefore, in attempting to ascribe objective status to these subjective evaluations, as if they were as much 'in the object' as the passions, motives, volitions and thoughts so described. Contemporary virtue ethicists dissent from this view, because they reject the very notion of a 'valueless fact', and thus they argue that some facts indeed *contain* values, and therefore require certain evaluative descriptions from the very start. As we have seen, the descriptivist upholds the view that, for example, to know the definition of a car commits one to some understanding of what comprises excellence in a car. Functionalist ethicists propose a definition of man or the human essence, from which evaluative conclusions with regard to the nature of human excellence may be drawn. We find, therefore, that the naturalistic fallacy only applies in circumstances where no publicly endorsed criteria apply; it does not mean that we

cannot speak of sharp knives as good knives, since we can in such circumstances point to criteria which are applicable to any knife of adequate functional capacity. The fallacy can only apply in circumstances in which such criteria cannot be found, such as when we may attempt to move from a descriptive statement to a 'prescriptive' condemnation, where there are *no agreed evaluative criteria* which can be met. Foot writes in this regard as follows:

In my view ... a moral evaluation does not stand over against the statement of a matter of fact, but rather has to do with facts about a particular subject matter, as do evaluations of such things as sight and hearing in animals, and other aspects of their behaviour. Nobody would, I think, take it as other than a plain matter of fact that there is something wrong with the hearing of a gull that cannot distinguish the cry of its own chick, as with the sight of an owl that cannot see in the dark. *Similarly, it is obvious that there are objective, factual evaluations of such things as human sight, hearing, memory, and concentration, based on the life-form of our own species* [my emphasis]. Why, then, does it seem so monstrous a suggestion that the evaluation of the human will should be determined by facts about the nature of human beings and the life of our own species? Undoubtedly the resistance has something to do with that thought that the goodness of good action has a special relation to choice. But, as I have tried to show, this special relation is not what noncognitivists think it, but rather lies in the fact that moral action is rational action, and in the fact



that human beings are creatures with the power to recognize reasons for action and to act on them.

(Foot 1995, 14)

Here Foot subscribes to a broadly functionalist or essentialist position which aims to discern those species-characteristic qualities which define human life, which for Foot requires paying special attention to those aspects of human nature which involve practical deliberation. She must assert, therefore, that granted human beings are rational, then to be a rational human being must ‘close off’ certain forms of irrationality including immoral forms of behaviour. Those who do not embrace such forms of deliberation must be considered defective and lacking in those species-specific characteristics which are constitutive of normal human functioning. Foot therefore appeals to an explicit functionalist argument which, as I have previously touched upon, can subsist independently of any theistic context which appeals to design. Foot finds an analogy with the evaluation of sight and hearing and finds ‘objective, and factual evaluations’ of an uncontroversial nature recognizable within medicine and biology. She moves from such examples to an analogy with the proper moral exercise of the rational faculties and thus finds a means by which the immoral agent may be objectively evaluated via reference to species-specific characteristics. The difficulty here lies in the fact that – whilst there may be general agreement on the notion that to be rational is a species-specific characteristic of human life – actual examples of supposed ethical rationality may be open to subjectively or culturally relative evaluation. For instance, the practice of human sacrifice may appear rational to the agent infused with the assumptions of his community, i.e. he believes that the soul is immortal and that certain gods require appeasement etc. But from a

contemporary Western cultural viewpoint, such behaviour does not appear rational since we do not share these background assumptions. Rationality can therefore, it seems, only be defined relative to the historical and cultural milieu within which rationality finds expression. Thus, if I sincerely believe that my wearing an amulet will ensure that I will win the lottery, and given that I want to win the lottery and I have purchased a ticket and so forth, I would, it seems, behave irrationally according to the parameters within which I operate if I do *not* wear the amulet. Of course such background beliefs are generally considered to be irrational by contemporary standards. Indeed, we find analogous conflicts between the beliefs of contemporary society and those of the culture within which Aristotle lived, in particular with regard to slavery. Aristotle justifies slavery by his ‘natural slave’ argument according to which certain individuals lack the appropriate rational capacities which would enable them to flourish without external guidance from their natural superiors (*NE* 1134b5-1134b15). One wonders whether such argumentation in itself can be understood as mere rationalisation, that is to say, as an example of an argument which merely seeks to justify an existing institution from which (in this case) Aristotle and his fellow Athenians benefited. In which case such argumentation would itself be representative of irrationality. Be this as it may, the general problem here is that the rational appears against a cultural background which itself remains unexamined and yet it is largely this very background which provides the primary source of moral behaviour.<sup>16</sup> Whilst Foot introduces a compelling argument for considering the faculty of *reason* to be an objective category of human excellence, there remain considerable problems in

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<sup>16</sup> In *After Virtue* MacIntyre makes a similar point. He argues that standards of rationality and justice are historically contingent and thus argues that the Enlightenment Project which sought to ground such conceptions in a universal and non-historical manner was quite futile and led to the ethical impoverishment which emotivist theories generate, and to the *reductio absurdum* of Nietzschean amorality (see MacIntyre 1985, chapter 18 ‘After Virtue: Nietzsche or Aristotle, Trotsky and St. Benedict’).

determining *exactly how* the excellent state of such a faculty may be determined.

Relating such observations to Hume, we can appreciate how, for Hume, Foot's description of the hearing of the gull, for instance, would constitute an objective category, a fact determined simply by the *intension* of the terminology employed. In the same way that bachelors are unmarried men, so for Foot gulls with impaired hearing (fact) are bad examples of their species (value). It is not clear how Hume would react to the idea that the faculty of *rationality* within human beings is open to objective evaluation. Although rationality is an attribute to be found within human life, Hume could still consider our positive *evaluation* of such an attribute of a subjective nature.

We can, I hope, at least in principle, conceive of situations in which the 'naturalistic fallacy' may be avoided with reference to the rational faculty, in situations in which the agent may be held accountable to *his own evaluative criteria*. Such a position coheres with Williams' observation that there may be 'something to which even the amoralist or the skeptic is committed but which, properly thought through, will show us that he is irrational, or unreasonable, or at any rate mistaken' (Williams 1985, 29). In such circumstances the agent in some sense knows where he wants to be, but subverts his own evaluative criteria due to confusion or self-deception. If I aim for certain satisfactions but fail to achieve them, I can in principle come to accept that there is a distance between where I intended to be and where I actually am. Such a position is described in Aristotle's analysis of weakness of the will or *akrasia*, in which the agent knowingly subverts their own conception of the good and thereby acts irrationally, but by standards imposed by themselves. An example would be the failed attempt to give up smoking tobacco or drinking alcohol for reasons of health. I wish, however, to develop this notion and extend it to

circumstances in which the vicious agent engages in self-delusion or at least exploits an ambiguity to a significant degree such that, whilst the agent cannot be described as self-perspicuous with regard to motivation, their action remains potentially perspicuous. Here, the agent is already committed to certain internal evaluative criteria, and thus the naturalistic fallacy is bypassed.<sup>17</sup> The delusion is largely willed by the agent but in ‘bad faith’, that is, the agent fails to recognize the volitional element of the self-induced delusion. He hides both the delusion and the volition to delude from himself. Here links between ancient Greek ethics and existentialism are possible, since *akrasia* and bad faith emerge as specific intellectual failings in which a self divided against itself subverts its own ends – failings which find their cure in self-perspicuity.

Whilst such ethical approaches consider the ethical project in terms of the good for man, conceived in relation to a theory and description of human nature, it seems that ethics of this kind can therefore be articulated in terms of a series of judgments about the ‘health’ of an individual and the extent to which they conform to the ideal functional attributions of their kind. However, as Watson comments, the danger here is that the concept of ‘the bad’ is merely reduced to the concept of a defect:

Many of our modern suspicions can be put in the form of a dilemma.

Either the theory’s pivotal account of human nature (or characteristic human life) will be morally indeterminate, or it will not be objectively

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<sup>17</sup> I am not necessarily asserting anything that Hume or Moore could disagree with here. Foot wants to refute the naturalistic fallacy and whilst I explore this position I also want to examine the role of Ancient condemnation of the individuals who are themselves are committed to the evaluation drawn upon in the condemnation. They are vicious or virtuous by their own standards. The issue is complicated in circumstances where they are vicious or virtuous by standards that they either espouse, but fail to apply to themselves, or where they retain the capacity to appreciate such standards.

well-founded. At best, an objectively well-founded theory of human nature would support evaluations of the kind that we can make about tigers – that this one is a good or bad specimen, that that behaviour is abnormal. These judgments might be part of a theory of *health*, but our conception of morality resists the analogy with health, the reduction of evil to defect. (This resistance is something to do, I suspect with a conception of free will that resists all forms of naturalism.) An objective account of human nature would imply, perhaps, that a good human life must be social in character. This implication will disqualify the sociopath but not the Hell's Angel. The contrast is revealing, for we tend to regard the sociopath not as evil but beyond the pale of morality. On the other hand, if we enrich our conception of sociality to exclude Hell's Angels, the worry is that this conception will no longer ground moral judgment but rather express it.

(Watson 1990, 462-3)

Whilst Watson's comments deserve greater attention than I am able to give here, we can see how the appeal to characteristic flourishing can be criticized for reducing evil to defect – in the same way in which, for Foot, the gull who cannot hear the cry of its chicks is defective – yet even when broadened to include Hursthouse's criteria of characteristic flourishing within social communities, we cannot, according to Watson, provide an adequate ground for our ethical theory – indeed he accuses virtue theory for 'begging the question' in this regard by assuming the morality we aim to ground in the manner in which we characterize a genuine community. This is of interest, since can we not argue that there is such a group of people as the 'paedophile

community' or the 'community of racists' and thereby find such practices immune from external condemnation? Looking more closely at the criteria provided by Hursthouse in regard to characteristic species flourishing, the 'dubious' communities which Watson and I have itemized may simply not count as genuine 'communities', simply because they do not recognise the value of community in the normal sense of the term. They function rather as loose associations of mutual interest and may be distinguished from the genuine community perhaps precisely for the rejection of any stable environment within which children may be raised and communities thereby sustained. According to the analysis provided by Hursthouse, the four aspects of species-characteristic flourishing which relate to operations and reactions, actions, emotions and desires must be evaluated in relation to both the 'continuance of the species' and 'the good functioning of the social group', criteria not met by Hell's Angels or paedophile 'communities'.

### ***Human flourishing and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic disvalue***

As I have examined, contemporary readings of Aristotelian conceptions of the nature of virtue stress the importance of certain excellencies of character, defined in relation to the good for man or human flourishing.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary philosophers, such as

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<sup>18</sup> For Aristotle the exercise of the virtues is constitutive of the good life conceived as *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* consists of the attainment of a fully realised essence, a condition of intrinsic value and not therefore justified in terms of some further good, however conceived. Aristotle writes with regard to this matter as follows: 'Now we say that what is worth pursuing for itself is more complete than what is worth pursuing because of something else, and what is never desirable because of something else is more complete than those things that are desirable both for themselves and because of it; while what is complete without qualification is what is always desirable in itself and never because of something else. Happiness seems most of all to be like this; for this we do always choose because of itself and never because of something else, while as for honour, and pleasure, and intelligence, and every excellence, we do choose them because of themselves (since if nothing resulted from them, we would still choose each of them), but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, supposing that we shall be happy through them. But happiness no one chooses for the sake of these things, nor in general because of

MacIntyre in particular, indicate the centrality of disposition and training within a communal setting, and crucially in terms of narrative which provides the individual with a sense of who they are and the nature of their appropriate life trajectory (MacIntyre 1988, 389-403). Upon my understanding the Aristotelian reference to non-instrumental versus instrumental goods corresponds to MacIntyre's distinction between goods external and goods internal to practices. Happiness, is for Aristotle, never justified in relation to a further end but rather is an end in-itself, indeed *the* end in-itself. With this in mind, MacIntyre defines virtue, and in particular the *core* virtues, in relation to the extent to which they facilitate participation in any genuine human practice embodying internal goods. He examines five approaches to moral thinking, each of which has differing conceptions of the virtues; for instance, Homeric society valued different qualities in a person than the morality so described in the New Testament. The prized qualities of courage and physical strength gave way to virtues such as humility and compassion. Likewise, the New Testament encourages virtues such as faith, hope and love, (virtues not mentioned by Aristotle) and the value of humility, a quality considered a vice in Aristotelian philosophy. In addition, the New Testament has little conception of practical reason (*phronēsis*), a concept so central to the achievement of human excellence in the Aristotelian schema (MacIntyre 1985, 182). He asks, therefore, given the variety of accounts of what counts as a virtue, what core conception of the virtues should we adopt? He answers this question by reference to that which he describes as 'a practice'. MacIntyre writes:

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something else' (NE 1097a30-1097b5). Whilst virtues are of intrinsic value and of instrumental value, the final end of happiness is solely of intrinsic value. To elaborate, happiness is an end state, a complete state in which no further addition is required, a state in which one is fully realized. For Aristotle, as we shall see, it is primarily in the exercise of the rational faculties that the human being flourishes in its most unique manner, for this reason those executive virtues attendant with the rational faculties have central importance to the life of the excellent person.

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of achieving those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and the human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.

(MacIntyre 1985, 187)

For MacIntyre, therefore, the virtues are defined in relation to the extent to which a certain desirable characteristic contributes to the achievement of goods internal to practices. By this means MacIntyre attempts to undermine relativistic arguments and establish a common set of qualities that can be shown to transcend different historical periods and different moral systems. MacIntyre proposes the following definition of virtue:

A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.

(MacIntyre 1985, 191)

From this position he reaches a conception of the core virtues which must include 'justice, courage and honesty' (MacIntyre 1985, 191). MacIntyre believes that he has thereby provided an adequate explanation as to why different virtues have been



stressed at different periods in history. They simply are the different virtues required for historically changing practices, but nevertheless the core virtues, he argues, remain the same. For MacIntyre it seems, therefore, that the common 'goal' of the exercise of virtue is the achievement of internal goods. He illustrates this point with his chess player example. A child who is encouraged to play chess for sweets or money does so for goods external to the practice – such goods could, for instance, be achieved by other means, i.e. window cleaning. However, by continuous exposure to the game of chess the child may come to appreciate those internal goods, unique to the game of chess, for instance, an appreciation of chess-specific strategy, a certain kind of mental dexterity, etc. Such goods can, however, only be achieved via the acquisition of certain virtues such as honesty, perseverance and a sense of sportsmanship. Thus MacIntyre writes: '[I]f the child cheats, he or she will not be defeating me, but himself or herself' (MacIntyre 1985, 188). Goods external to practices include such things as fame, money and status. Such external goods may be achieved in the absence of the virtues, since the ruthless and dishonest may have the advantage when it comes to the acquisition of material wealth. It should be clear, therefore, that MacIntyre embraces an implied conception of the stratification of evaluative consciousness with regard to the relative value of internal over external goods. MacIntyre's philosophy does appear to be committed to the normative ideal that, when faced with the choice between internal or external goods, one should – provided sufficient external goods can be accessed in their vital role of facilitation – prefer internal over external goods. He does not condemn the acquisition of external goods, but rather seeks to set them in their proper place relative to the realization of higher human capacities as found within genuine human practices. It is clear that MacIntyre regards external goods of lesser worth, although they may be achieved as an

inevitable result of engagement with a practice and to some extent facilitate the operation and continuance of practices. Internal goods are, however, the most satisfying of goods. Here we find some points of similarity with Aristotle, Nietzsche and Scheler, who all endorse some conception of a hierarchy of value realization which allows for a distinction between 'higher' types of value realisation and 'lower' ones.

Whilst MacIntyre's approach differs from the approach of Hursthouse and Foot who, as we have seen, endorse strictly naturalistic readings of Aristotle, MacIntyre shares the common project of attempting to ground the ethical life in some conception of the good for man. Indeed, his appeal to goods internal to practices opens once more the notion of an objectively definable happiness which trumps any merely subjectively avowed happiness. Returning to the example of the paedophile, we could argue that, since certain aspects of family life embody goods internal to practices, any activities which essentially undermine such goods may be condemned as 'perverse' or 'vicious' simply because they fail to open the way to any appreciation of the 'higher' goods of life. The point may be made that certain individuals are motivated to pursue destructive perversions because they 'enjoy' doing so. MacIntyre has provided a means by which to counter this point without going outside the perspective available to the agent himself. Let us say the experience of power and domination that the rapist 'enjoys' are indeed enjoyable to that agent – we can, via MacIntyre's analysis, provide evidence of the extent to which such vicious behaviour entails closure with regard to higher satisfactions. Linking this with phenomenological analysis, we can appreciate how we do not merely describe a human ideal which is externally imposed, but rather extrapolate a potentially normatively compelling ideal with reference to functional adequacy which could *in*

*principle be embraced by the fully self-perspicuous human agent.* The rapist and the paedophile simply lack this self-perspicuity. In this sense the basis of the criticism is slightly different to the one adopted by Foot, who attributes functional inadequacy to the rational faculties of the non-virtuous human agent. Phenomenological analysis begins one stage earlier than the calculative processes, engaging rather with the extent to which the agent is able to reflect upon the full contents of their conscious experience. It is to this extent, therefore, that removal of certain self-delusions is essentially constitutive of entry into the ethical life.

### ***A functionalist phenomenology***

With the above in mind it is necessary to examine the extent to which this argumentation can be transposed to phenomenological methods of investigation, since existentialist interest focuses on the human subject *qua* consciousness, as opposed to biology. Jeanson draws attention to the dangers implicit in any psychology which aims to ground our understanding of the human being in terms of third-personal prior causes since '[...] man is not nature, though he may tend indefinitely to naturalize himself' (Jeanson 1980, 134). Jeanson is, however, prepared to assert that bad-faith (Sartrean self-deception) is a '*disease of consciousness*' (Jeanson 1980, 135). This terminology suggests that something like a functional normativity of consciousness, justified entirely with recourse to methods of phenomenological intuition, may harmonise existentialist philosophy with purely naturalistic readings of the Function Argument. It is to this end that I wish briefly to introduce the work of Keith Fulford and Christopher Megone, who both deal explicitly with psychiatric terms which generate perplexing philosophical problems of direct relevance to cases of delusion and those afflictions which affect 'the personality as a whole'. Whilst I am not

arguing that self-deception is indicative of mental illness, I do think that the philosophy of psychiatry here outlined has some interesting parallels with existentialist critiques of self deception, and in the case of Megone, with an explicitly functionalist critique.

Fulford offers a definition of non-biological functional objects involving the idea that a functionally adequate non-biological object engages in types of 'functional doing' which are in accordance with the purposes for which the object was created (Fulford 1989, 92). Non-biological functional objects may be evaluated upon the basis of the extent to which they fulfil the criteria for which they were designed. Thus Fulford observes, with reference to a descriptivist view that: 'to know what a car is, is also to know what it is for a car to be functioning properly' (Fulford 1989, 102). However, complexities arise when similar standards of evaluation are applied to biological functional objects (i.e. livers, hearts, legs etc.), since: 'though designed to serve particular purposes in particular ways, they are evolved not invented, grown not made' (Fulford 1989, 105). Fulford does seem to accept that when dealing with biological parts of an organism such as the kidneys, a functional definition is possible even though the design analogy does not hold at the level of the whole as in the case of non-biological functional objects. Such functional definitions include an evaluation of that which constitutes adequate functional realisation within biological functional objects. Further complications arise when we consider the extent to which such theoretical structures can be extended to embrace mental functioning, and particularly in relation to the evaluation of mental illness. Here Fulford relies upon an interesting distinction between function and action. Fulford argues that disease in biological functional objects represents a failure of *function*, whilst illness represents a failure of *action*. Fulford writes with regard to delusion:

Function-based theories generate an account of delusions as disturbances of cognitive functioning. Cognitive functioning, as the term is used in psychology and psychiatry, is broadly coextensive with Aristotelian theoretical reasoning. Hence a function-based account of delusion could be consistent with Aristotle's psychology [...] But psychology and psychiatry have yet to identify a failure of cognitive functioning that is characteristic of delusion [...] there is a prima facie mismatch between function-based accounts, which are at their most persuasive in relation to disturbances of bodily and mental parts and systems, and the phenomenology of the (non-organic) psychotic disorders, which involve a disturbance of the person as a whole.

(Fulford 1998, 218)

Action-based theories, when applied to illnesses such as delusion, according to Fulford provide a more satisfying account of the pertinent issues since they consider delusion not as disturbances of cognitive dysfunction, but from the perspective of disturbances of 'reasons for action' (Fulford 1998). Action-based accounts have the advantage over function-based accounts since they incorporate an appreciation of intentionality in mental illnesses such as delusion. Whilst I need to be functionally adequate to wave my arm, such functions (movement, perception, memory) are, according to Fulford, merely 'executive' and tell us nothing about the reason for which my arm is being used. He writes:

Reasons [...] are constitutive; they define actions [...] If reasons are in this sense central to action, a failure of reasons will be a central kind of action failure, exactly as we should expect if delusions are (or involve) a failure of practical reasoning.

(Fulford 1998, 219)

What I understand Fulford to mean here is that functional adequacy, whilst applicable at the level of disease evaluation, fails to capture those intentional aspects of human cognition which must be present if any sense may be made of human action. In some sense, therefore, he proposes the adoption of a different perspective in understanding the dysfunctional agent. He is not arguing that there is no physiologically or sociologically determined basis for a failure of action, merely that to evaluate the intentional aspects of human action requires reference to reasons and/or beliefs, and the extent to which they succeed or fail in the achievement of intended outcomes.

Now remembering that Aristotle tells us that: ‘the function of a human being is activity of soul in accordance with reason’ (*NE* 1098a5-10), one could argue that Fulford illegitimately excludes failure of action from functional evaluation. Clearly, Aristotle does have a strong conception of the ideal and the defective human agent, nowhere more pronounced than in his theory of the ‘natural slave’. Such characterization of an individual in terms of inherited intellectual capacities clearly can be regarded as a functional theory, which finds certain species members lacking in certain species-specific characteristics, such as the ability to reason accurately. Such diagnosis presupposes an internal inadequacy of some kind, demonstrated in behavioural failures such as being unable to cope without external direction. Indeed Megone draws attention to similar criticisms of Fulford upon this very point:

[P]hysical illnesses involving an incapacitating failure of the heart to function properly, or a mental illness where the agent is incapable of rational choice, is bad for the agent insofar as it constitutes a condition that incapacitates the agent from developing, or changing, in ways that contribute to a good human life. Such diseases or illnesses are bad [...] because they prevent the agent exhibiting a fully rational life, which constitutes the human good on the Aristotelian picture. The Aristotelian account thus meets the requirement to explain the sense in which a failure of function, and those failures of action which constitute failure of function, are bad for the agent.

(Megone 1998, 197)

When attempting to link such issues to self-deception, we must appreciate that both Fulford and Megone are primarily interested in psychiatric problems. Jeanson's assertion that bad faith is a 'disease of consciousness' need not be understood in any psychiatric sense. Indeed, to the extent that non-virtuous behaviour, such as armed robbery, is immoral, such behaviour is not generally conceived as an example of psychopathology. Criminal insanity is generally a quite separate issue.

In the light of the above we can therefore see how categories which may be of use when conducting certain kinds of psychiatric evaluation extend to those kinds of human dysfunction identified by Aristotelian ethical enquiry. In particular, we are thereby equipped with a means of distinguishing those aspects of inner life which can be evaluated from a moral perspective, and those which can be evaluated from a purely causal perspective. Any feature of mental life best understood in terms of

action or intention must occupy that area of analysis for which one may be held responsible, if only because, by definition, to act is to pursue an intention. The position may perhaps appear somewhat trivial, since if I kick someone from mere reflex or spasm, I am obviously not culpable in the same way as if I kick them deliberately. However, it appears in a more complicated form when we consider a circumstance in which I aim for the good but miss purely from some irregularity in my reasoning process. The intention to aim for the good remains present, but due to certain confusions the outcome fails to achieve the good. There is, in this case, some failure of mental dexterity which renders my choice of an inappropriate kind. Here one could object that what counts as the appropriate outcome is the very issue that we are trying to resolve. But here I would argue that the appropriate is what can be recognized as such by any cognitively well-functioning species member as constitutive of the good. For Megone, failure in action can be understood to encapsulate a failure of function, since the variety of incapacitation that the failure of action gives rise to in itself undermines the aims of the rational agent, that is, to live a good life. Thus, whilst immoral behaviour may be irrational, it is not psychopathological. Ascriptions of rationality in these ethical examples relate clearly to aspects of human endeavor which fail or succeed in the attainment of the good. Of interest, however, is the case of the individual who attains a subjectively avowed happiness which may appear to outsiders as purely delusional – the non-virtuous individual who claims to be happy. Such avowals have also been documented in psycho-analysis, in which the patient may attempt to manipulate the analytic situation by claiming to have been suddenly ‘cured’. The delusionally ‘happy’ subject aims to achieve the termination of the analysis, but in no way is his state indicative of genuine happiness. What I hope is clear in such circumstances is that, whilst the delusion aims



at some good and achieves it, the nature of the good which is aimed at is of a dubious quality. The failure of reason is primarily a failure to ascertain the real goods of life, instead giving preference to the illusory goods associated with the delusional consciousness.

My interest in contemporary functionalism has largely concentrated on areas of research which have stressed the 'medical' nature of delusion and self-deception, if only to fully explore the implications of Jeanson's comment that bad faith may be understood as a 'disease of consciousness'. Fulford, as we have seen, attempts to distinguish between those afflictions which affect the 'personality as a whole' and those which affect a specific part of the body; legs or liver, etc. This distinction does, I think, employ aspects of phenomenological method which appeal to the world as it is experienced, irrespective of the material base which gives rise to such conscious experiences. We have seen how Fulford, whilst not attempting to deny the role of the material ground, finds that reasons are constitutive of any understanding of action *qua* volition, irrespective of 'mechanics'. That is to say, whilst self-deception is of a kind that is only observable in human actions, some of which may inevitably be 'unconscious' or 'unknown' to the deceiver, it remains a disease at the level of consciousness or of the 'personality as a whole' and inexplicable in terms of the material base. The deception emerges, for example, when a third party is able to observe or at least infer a discrepancy of some sort between the explicit justifications for behavior given by the deceived agent and a behavioural betrayal of such justifications. Self-deception must be of a kind that is observable or at least inferable to any sensitive external observer. So called 'flights into happiness' are presumably observable because there is an incongruity between the facts of a person's recent life history and this sudden 'happiness' which therefore bears all the hallmarks of an

attempt at self-delusion. The patient, whilst under the delusion, gives an account of his behavior which does not actually fit with the reality of his intentions. His real intention, observable by the analyst, is that he is merely attempting, albeit sub-consciously or pre-reflectively, to avoid a full confrontation with his ‘pathological’ state.

In the case of self-deception, such intent is, if at all, only apparent to the subject at some future date, perhaps during an intensive psychoanalysis in which suddenly it becomes clear to the individual what it was that they were *really* doing. This kind of intention may therefore appear to be more elusive than, say, the clear case of feeling thirsty and going to get a glass of water. In the case of delusion the agent *acquiesces* in the delusional state because it alleviates the short-term pathological symptom. We might have to argue, therefore, that reference to intention in such cases is somewhat metaphorical, or at least that the intention is of a kind which whilst obscured to the agent at the time of the delusion, is capable of being clearly recognized by the agent at some future moment of lucidity.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to draw together those central aspects of contemporary functionalist ethics which seek to ground a conception of the ideal human subject upon some conception of the best application of those talents which are unique to human life. Clearly, ancient and contemporary approaches share a commitment to the notion of human essence in some form or another, which can provide standards by which human excellence may be evaluated. In particular, we find common to contemporary and ancient approaches an appreciation of the value of the capacity for rational deliberation, in its practical aspects but also in areas of

theoretical contemplation. Of particular interest is the extent to which the ‘naturalistic fallacy’ may be avoided if we unite the Function Argument with some appreciation of the rational capacities in their most functionally adequate mode of realisation. Either such realisation consists in acts of accurate moral perception with regard to matters of practical deliberation, or such realisation consists (more controversially) in the appreciation of structural and theoretical matters. We shall see how this dichotomy loosely follows the distinction made earlier between intrinsic public and practically realized value, since private commitment to a certain ontological clarity diverges from the publicly realised commitment to actions which enhance recognition of other-regarding concerns. Of particular interest, therefore, when attempting to relate this methodological and theoretical structure to existentialism and *Lebensphilosophie*, is the extent to which such thinkers endorse or reject any conception of a human essence. Whilst such conceptions are often rejected by them, I shall attempt to examine the extent to which nevertheless a certain core essence or meta-essence is embraced by these thinkers. Indeed, use may be made here of the distinction between ontological and ontic concern. Ontologically, existentialist thinkers have endorsed – however obliquely – a conception of the human essence which does indeed provide certain normatively ideal modes of capacity realisation of potentially objective application. It is my intention to develop this line of enquiry throughout the remainder of the essay, paying particular regard to the extent to which *authenticity* is representative of the normative ideal in the existentialist sense, and the extent to which self-deception and bad faith interferes with or obstructs the attainment of this privileged mode of existential orientation.

#### 4. Nietzsche and the Teleology of the Will to Power

In the light of the above analysis of contemporary and ancient functionalism I now wish to examine existentialist thought, seeking to explore the extent to which Aristotelian ethical theory may or may not aid in a clarification of an existentialist ethics. As I have noted, the term ‘authenticity’ – a central concept within existentialism – only emerges in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, so we must look to thinkers such as Nietzsche and Scheler with caution in ascribing to them espousal of this concept. However, clearly *Being and Time* arose from the existentialist milieu of the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Scheler, et al., and it is therefore profitable to examine these thinkers for those proto-conceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity which find their fullest expression in the work of Heidegger and Sartre. Whilst Nietzsche does not explicitly deal with issues of authenticity in the existentialist sense, we do find throughout his published writings an intense concern with self-deception. To give Nietzschean self-deception an existentialist reading, we could describe this condition as one of inauthenticity. Liberation from such a state would, therefore, be a condition of authenticity in the Nietzschean sense, a state characterised by radical self-perspicuity. Such self-perspicuity can, I shall argue, be best represented by the ‘conversion’ described in his accounts of a confrontation with the thought of the eternal return. For Nietzsche, one’s attitude towards the eternal return is indicative of the extent to which one is rid of a specific type of self-deception, a condition described as *ressentiment*. Whilst I do not think that Nietzsche provides only one conception of self-deception, *ressentiment* is certainly the most important, particularly in his later writings, such as the *Genealogy of Morality*. Unlike Sartre, Nietzsche provides little technical analysis of the means by which this variety of self-deception arises. For instance, he takes little interest in the coherence of the concept of a

‘knowledge’ which one keeps from oneself. For Nietzsche, it is evident that such deception is a very real aspect of human engagement and indeed an all too human frailty which must be overcome. In what follows, I aim to draw on a number of scholarly sources in order to reconstruct a picture of the type of self-deception that predominates within Nietzsche’s thought as a means of determining the extent to which such self-deception may or may not be considered detrimental to human flourishing within a broadly Aristotelian ethical framework.

Nietzsche’s position with regard to ethical matters is an area of controversy, partly due to confusions relating to interpretations popular in the 1960’s, in which thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida proposed ‘postmodernist’ interpretations of Nietzsche’s philosophy, understating in my opinion the clear link between his thought and the ancients, in particular in relation to Greek notions relating to the life-lived-well, rooted in a broadly naturalistic ethical framework. Brian Leiter makes this very point when he argues that Nietzsche has in fact been mischaracterized by the philosopher’s of the 1960’s postmodernist movement as a ‘genealogist’ and that Nietzsche should in fact properly be placed within a tradition of naturalistic thinkers which include, in modern philosophy, thinkers such as Hume and Freud (Leiter 2002, 2). Differences in interpretation are nowhere clearer than when we compare the approaches of Freud and Foucault. Whilst they can both be described as ‘Nietzschean disciples’ of sorts, they differ in their understanding of the central purpose of Nietzsche’s philosophical project. Freud understood Nietzsche as a precursor of the psychoanalytic movement by providing a preliminary study of the ‘nature and role of unconscious forces’ (Leiter 2002, 2). Foucault, however, understood Nietzsche to be asserting that behind appearances there is ‘not a timeless secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from

alien forms' (Foucault 1971, 78). Foucault claimed, therefore, that the genealogical method represented a new 'historico-philosophical' method which rejects the quest 'for the exact essence of things ... the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession' (Foucault 1971, 78). Genealogy, upon this view, reduces the meaning of moral pronouncements to a series of interpretations which lack objective reference and truth value. However, Leiter argues that Freud took the more appropriate interpretative line, since:

Nietzsche is the philosopher who anticipates psychoanalysis by trying to discover the deep, hidden facts about human nature which explain who we are and what we are to believe.

(Leiter 2002, 2)

According to such naturalistic readings, Nietzsche is not merely a philosopher who attempts to reduce conceptual history to an inescapable series of interpretations, but rather attempts to achieve a theory of human nature which assumes that there are deep facts about this nature which are available for discovery, thus generating a reading of Nietzsche that is entirely contrary to Foucault's interpretation. Leiter in fact argues that the *Genealogy* is Nietzsche's 'most systematic attempt to give a naturalized account of the phenomena of morality' (Leiter 2002, 3). He writes:

[C]entral to genealogical practice ... is a commitment to naturalism.

The genealogy is not only a history of morality that rejects the evidential value of morality's present meaning for discovering its

origin, but it is also a distinctively naturalistic history, an account of the origins of morality without appeal to supernatural causes.

(Leiter 2002, 172)

Thus, rather than seeing this as proof that there can be no facts with regard to the nature of human beings, we should interpret Nietzsche as a philosopher who attempted to characterize the nature of human beings and their beliefs and practices in terms of natural and causally determined influences. The analysis provides a certain psychological theory of the nature of human beings as manifest at different points in the evolutionary history of human psychology. This, according to Leiter, demonstrates a similarity of method with Darwin who pursued this line of argument with regard to natural history. Leiter draws attention to the fact that Nietzsche described the *Genealogy* itself as '[a] psychologist's three crucial preparatory works for a revaluation of all values' (*EHm* 136). This adds weight to his contention that in this work Nietzsche attempted an explanation of morality in terms of 'naturally occurring psychological mechanisms'; those of 'ressentiment, internalised cruelty and the will to power', explanations which require no reference to supernatural agencies or metaphysical entities (Leiter 2002, 173).

By way of additional illustration of Nietzsche's psychological method we can clearly see in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche's emphasis upon the centrality of psychology in any evaluation of a philosophical, theological or moral system. He anticipates that 'psychology shall again be recognised as the queen of the sciences ... For psychology is now once again the road to the fundamental problems' (*JGB* 54). Nietzsche applies a quasi-scientific, reductive method in his application of psychological analysis to philosophical and theological topics. He asks: 'How could

something originate in its antithesis? Truth in error, for example? Or will to truth in will to deception? Or the unselfish act in self interest?' (*JGB* 33). And he answers with reference to his theory of unconscious drives: 'most of a philosopher's thinking is secretly directed and compelled into definite channels by his instincts' (*JGB* 35). This explains his belief that what generally passes for rational argument is in fact motivated by irrational sources.<sup>19</sup> Thus Nietzsche recommends that we look upon the work of the philosopher and theologian with a degree of scepticism and do not take them at their word. The central issue is, however, whether Nietzsche solely attempts to establish a theory of meaning via this approach or, as Leiter argues, a theory of human nature. On this reading Nietzsche was in fact aiming to demonstrate the cogency of a particular theory of man via an examination of moral history. Writings such as the *Genealogy*, contrary to the claims of interpreters such as Foucault and Derrida, attempt to analyse a particular psychological case history which aims to yield conclusions about certain fundamental features of human nature. Thus Nietzsche's observation of the human capacity for self-deceit and of the interests embodied in value systems, whether accurate or not, must fall within the boundaries of speculative psychology. Indeed, Nietzschean psychology could be entirely wrong as a system of psychology, but from this it would not follow that a characterization of Nietzsche as 'genealogist' in the postmodernist sense is valid.

On the assumption that Nietzsche does then indeed endorse a variety of naturalism, we can legitimately move towards an analysis of the extent to which he is prepared to accept some conception of human nature. As we have seen in our previous analysis of Aristotle, once we can grant that there is such a thing as human

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<sup>19</sup> Understood from the Humean perspective, as 'passion's slave' reason is reduced to a calculative procedure motivated by the irrational affective life of the agent. Whether Nietzsche endorses such deployment of the intellectual faculties is unclear. He might be using such analysis to undermine his philosophical opponents, or he could be making the broader claim that all rational endeavour is fundamentally motivated by irrational sources.



nature – however abstractly defined – it is possible to generate evaluative criteria for the positive or negative appraisal of human life by appeal to the Function Argument. Whilst this would permit the extraction of a positive Nietzschean ethic, it would not commit Nietzsche to any endorsement of morality as conceived within the Christian or indeed any other tradition. Indeed, morality in this sense represents an *impediment* to human flourishing according to Nietzsche. In terms which recall Aristotelian conceptions of potentiality and its fulfilment in human flourishing the following passage from the *Genealogy* asks:

What if a regressive trait lurked in ‘the good man’, likewise a danger, an enticement, a poison, a narcotic, so that the present lived at the expense of the future? [...] So that morality itself were to blame if man, as species, never reached his highest potential power and splendour?

(*GM preface*, 6)

The Nietzschean condemnation of Christian ‘slave morality’ is based upon an appeal to the role such morality plays in the diminishment of human potential. Nietzsche would therefore seem to be committed to an understanding of man who in essence manifests a teleology characterised by an increasing tendency towards greater power and splendour, a teleology thwarted by *ressentiment* intellectual traditions and – in Aristotelian terms – a teleology thwarted by those vices which obstruct genuine human fulfilment. Relating such observations to the Function Argument, we find a conception of human potentiality which includes a description of human essence in which formal and final ends coincide. To be a human being is to share in the universal

will to power, a will which can be expressed in oblique and unacknowledged ways or in open and uninhibited ways. Nietzsche writes:

And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by “nothingness” as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving towards the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms towards the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simpler out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this is my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels

good towards itself – do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? – *This world is the will to power – and nothing else besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!<sup>20</sup>

(*WzM*, 549-550)

We can see from this that, for Nietzsche, not only is the human essence conceived in terms of will to power but indeed the entirety of the natural world. Human life conceived naturalistically is fully continuous with the natural world and therefore shares in the universal will to power. Thus, for Nietzsche, ethical systems which claim to subvert the end of power only do so as a disguised means to the same end.

Christian morality, for example, may be understood as an expression of the will to power, and indeed in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche attempts to demonstrate that *morality is immoral by its own standards*. Paradoxically, this observation can only be made from the perspective of a more severe ethical discipline, one characterised by intense standards of honesty towards oneself and radical self-perspicuity. As I have noted, Aristotelian ethics is capable of extending the parameters of human excellence beyond the boundaries of moral goodness, finding instead a conception of human excellence rooted in some conception of those natural potentialities or essential characteristics which make a human being a thing of its type and delineate its species-specific manner of flourishing. Nietzsche, too, in isolating his abstract conception of

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that Nietzsche describes the will to power as ‘without goal’, which suggests that it is without *telos* also. Clearly he means that it often lacks any deliberative or even conscious element, yet it remains a blind force which accounts for the development of phenomena and the final ends to which they direct themselves. Freud’s notion of Thanatos would also come under the category of a drive without goal in the deliberative sense, which still accounts for behaviour such as aggression, suicide and self-sacrifice which are inexplicable if life is understood merely as will to survive (see Freud 2003).

will to power, commits the species member to an evaluative framework which, when recognized, undermines the inhibited ethos of the self-deceived agent. For Nietzsche, the Christian is driven by a rage against those who have real power invents an *all powerful ally* (God) who will eventually crush and defeat those who possess earthly powers, giving supremacy to the meek and oppressed (GM I, 14). Additionally, virtue is monopolised by the Christian who denigrates the values of the masters as an evil for which they will be punished. Moreover the self-deceit goes so far as to consider meekness and lack of power in this life as a *choice* made freely (GM I, 13).

We can see, therefore, that Nietzsche's condemnation of Christian morality is made within the parameters of his own rather severe ethical system. It is for this reason that certain commentators have preferred to interpret Nietzsche's rejection of morality as a rejection of a *particular* morality which does not, therefore, represent an abandonment of a more broadly conceived ethical project. For instance, Leiter elaborates a conception of Nietzsche's understanding of what he describes as 'Morality in the Pejorative Sense' (MPS) (Leiter 2002, 74). According to Leiter, Nietzsche is able to condemn Christian morality (MPS) from the perspective of his own ethical standards. MPS, according to this view, is condemned because it has a detrimental effect upon the flourishing of a particular category of individual. Whilst *ressentiment* may in fact be an understandable position for 'the weak' and represent the optimum for such types, Nietzsche's fear is that the ideology generated by states of *ressentiment* will infect the superior man with a sense of indifference towards, or even contempt for the expression of his own unique capacities. Leiter thus maintains a theoretical space for an appraisal of Nietzsche's positive ethic, an ethic characterized by his conception of 'higher men'. MPS emerges as a species of immoral behaviour when judged against the standards of the Nietzschean ethic. MPS praises virtues such

as ‘goodness of heart’ which are claimed to express political and economic *impotence*, but reinterpreted into a positive and normative category of universal applicability. The virtue of humility is said to conceal what is in fact an ‘anxious lowliness’ of entirely passive origin whilst ‘inoffensiveness’ and ‘lingering at the door’ is interpreted as Christian patience. Inability to take revenge for wrongs suffered is interpreted as a conscious decision not to take revenge, again an essentially passive psychological phenomenon which is baptized as an active virtue of character, whilst justice in fact conceals a secret longing for revenge against one’s political masters (*GM I*, 13).

Additionally Leiter observes: ‘[...] Nietzsche makes plain his fundamental objection to MPS: simply put, that MPS thwarts the development of human excellence’ (Leiter 2002, 114). To the extent that one can speak of the Nietzschean virtues they must therefore be of a kind that *promote* human excellence. For Nietzsche, therefore, virtue in the pejorative sense – Christian virtues such as poverty, chastity and humility – are to be condemned because they denigrate and undermine certain kinds of excellence. Additionally in positing entities such as the immortal soul and God they are dishonest towards both themselves and towards those that they seek to convert. Relating these observations to Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power, we can see therefore how the attempt to achieve power through what amounts to a fantasy life is condemnable for at least two reasons. First, the agent inhabits a false world. In this sense, then, his ‘happiness’ – as judged by himself – is a false one, indicative of a delusional state of mind. Secondly, the agent creates a system of evaluation which undermines the virtues of the man who lives in open engagement with reality. The long term detriment of MPS is, then, a cultural degeneration which places the ‘strong’ in a state of subordination and neutralizes his appropriative but life-enhancing instincts. It should be noted, however, that objections to the notion of a ‘strength’ which

succumbs to the 'weak' is explicable in terms of medical metaphors. Strength, in the Nietzschean sense, refers to an abundant health whilst weakness refers to sickness. The strong are, if you like, 'infected' by the weak, but this does not in itself speak against their positive attributes.

### ***Self-deception and resentment intellectual traditions***

In the *Genealogy*, but also in earlier works such as *Beyond Good and Evil*, we find that Nietzsche's primary concern is to establish that morality, and in particular Christian morality, can be understood as having its origin in what he describes as the 'slave revolt in morality' – a revolt which he characterizes as an inversion of 'noble' virtues. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is more or less synonymous with his entire understanding of self-deceptive practice and must therefore be explicated. Consider the following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* which as far as I am aware is the first entry which deals with issues of this kind:

There is master morality and slave morality – ... when it is the rulers who determine the concept of 'good', ... the antithesis 'good' and 'bad' means the same thing as 'noble' and 'despicable' – the antithesis 'good' and 'evil' originates elsewhere .... The noble type of man feels himself to be the determiner of values, he does not need to be approved of, he judges 'what harms me is harmful in itself' .... The slave is suspicious of the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and mistrustful, keenly mistrustful, of everything 'good' that is honoured among them – he would like to convince himself that happiness itself is not genuine among them. On the other hand, those qualities which serve to make

easier the existence of the suffering will be brought into prominence and flooded with light: here it is that pity, the kind and helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, friendliness come into honour – for here these are the most useful qualities and virtually the only means of enduring the burden of existence. Slave morality is essentially the morality of utility.<sup>21</sup>

(JGB 260)

We find here Nietzsche's attempt to trace the history of the slave revolt in morality via a speculative analysis of the development of the original meaning of the term 'good', which he argues at its inception was applied by the 'masters' or nobles of antiquity to themselves and had the non-moral connotation of 'fortunate', 'excellent' and 'well-turned-out'. The masters in turn judged their slaves to be 'bad' in the non-moral sense of unfortunate, wretched and deprived. Nietzsche argues that the inversion of values occurred when the slaves moralized this non-moral terminology by inverting the content of the evaluative term 'good', applying it to themselves, whilst describing their oppressors as 'evil'. Further textual development of this point may be found in the *Genealogy*:

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to understand the nature of Nietzsche's style that we find in passages such as these. For instance, it is not at all clear that Nietzsche is speaking of any particular social group within any particular historical epoch, although the Romans are probably to be considered the originators of master morality, whilst the Jews are to be considered to be the originators of slave morality. In fact, when we consider that Nietzsche blamed the Jews for the origins of Christianity and exposed Christianity as a *ressentiment* movement, then such a reading would seem plausible. There is of course an irony here which is harder for readers today to appreciate: whilst sounding superficially at least anti-Semitic in tone by reducing Christian morality to its origins in an essentially Semitic movement, Nietzsche practices a form of anti-anti-Semitism upon the Christian anti-Semites. Aside from this, his lack of concern with exact historical detail must be set alongside similar methods, for instance in thinkers such as Freud and even Hobbes. Freud speculates about the patricide of the primal father, from which speculation he then develops his extensive theories of psycho-analysis. Likewise, Hobbes speculates on the 'state of nature' and the 'war of all against all'. Such images are in part historical speculation, but function largely in a diagrammatic fashion, which is to say they lay out and order a theoretical structure without requiring exact historical justification.

[The slaves] who, rejecting the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = happy = blessed) ventured, with awe inspiring consistency, to bring about a reversal and held it in the teeth of their unfathomable hatred (the hatred of the powerless), saying, 'Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!...

(*GMI*, 7)

Such inversion is for Nietzsche *ressentiment* par excellence, and forms his central objection to morality of the Christian tradition: its lack of internal perspicuity regarding its motivation. What should be clear, however, is that this explanation at this stage implies little positive appraisal of master morality. He is not recommending master morality as a desirable ethos by which to organise one's life. At this stage, it is enough for Nietzsche's polemical purposes to find in the origins of Christian morality the very emotions from which Christianity has sought to distance itself. We find that, whilst purporting to be providing a purely descriptive account of ethical standards and metaphysical destiny, the slave worldview is in fact distorted by subjective needs which do not recognize themselves as such. *Ressentiment* emerges as a form of self-deception which subverts the values that it purports to endorse. For instance, the demand for equality between souls in the eyes of God is for Nietzsche really an act of revenge against one's natural superiors. For Nietzsche, the self-deceiver in this case



can be understood as one who submits to a delusional psychological state which abandons an open, honest engagement with reality in favour of a fantasy life.

Consider the following passage from *The Will to Power*:

Toward a psychology of Paul. The given fact is the death of Jesus. This had to be explained – That an explanation may be true or false has never entered the minds of such people as these: one day a sublime possibility comes into their heads: “this death could mean such and such” – and at once it does mean such and such! A hypothesis is proved true by the sublime impetus it imparts to its originator.

(*WzM* 103)

The circumstance that Nietzsche describes is profoundly relevant. We find here the origin of a religious movement upon the basis of an improbable event such as a resurrection, and yet this event is believed with a high intensity of passion all the same. We can understand the origin of these beliefs from the very clear fact that the believers want them to be true. The human being wants to overcome sickness and death and to believe that suffering is not without meaning. However, the forms of belief are such that verification or falsification is in practice impossible, we are left only with the religious experience or ‘conviction’ which Nietzsche here describes. That is to say, ‘proof’ of the truth of the resurrection in this case is the effect that such a sublime thought has upon Paul and his followers.

Self-deception, conceived as a ‘disease of consciousness’ or, in Fulford’s terminology, as an affliction of ‘the personality as a whole’, allows us to interpret the example provided by Nietzsche as indicative of a pathology rendered intelligible by

reference to consciousness and consciousness alone. We find Nietzsche describing symptoms which bear similarity to neurosis in Freud's sense. As Poellner writes:

[...] [T]he subject of *ressentiment* does not simply find herself, by the operation of some to her inscrutable mental mechanism, with 'moral values' which happen to be resources answering to her desires. Rather, the re-interpretation of her hatred of the object of *ressentiment* as a righteous disapproval of wickedness is the result of intentional action: hatred is 'masked' and 'counterfeited' [...] as virtue.

(Poellner 2004, 47)

The motivated distortion here described extends therefore to the origins of the value system endorsed by *ressentiment* inspired intellectual traditions, of which Christian morality is upheld as the prime exemplar. It is for this reason that, if we have good grounds to reject the metaphysical foundations of our ethical system (for instance, the Creation myth), we should re-evaluate our morality to reflect such modifications. To do otherwise would offend against those strict intellectual ethical standards which the Nietzschean ethic insists on. It is of interest to note however that in the case of *ressentiment*, the concealed hatred precedes the metaphysical constructs which attempt to secure the intellectual foundations of a purely negative *affective* condition.

We can see from this how Nietzsche embraces a moral psychology which shares similarities with ethicists within the virtue-ethics tradition, because he has a conception of human being at its optimum and divergent from the optimum. For Aristotle as we have seen, to be a human being is to be rational in essence. This essence may, however, in certain non-excellent species members remain a mere

potentiality which never becomes fully actualized. The style of self-deception described by Nietzsche is such that the agent subverts their own best qualities in a dishonest engagement with reality. The falsifications which *ressentiment* intellectual traditions give rise to are, in this sense, intrinsically wrong because they violate certain standards of intellectual ethical excellence and represent motivated distortion within the non-virtuous agent's mind. They are also of *extrinsic* disvalue also for the attitudes which they create in others (e.g. through education), and for the disabling effect such traditions may have upon 'superior types'. It is therefore only in the light of the Nietzschean analysis that its addressees are able to see such traditions for what they are: a *rationalisation* of emotively defective engagement, one of hatred and ill will towards the genuinely *eudaimon*.

Such distortions can be found not only within ethical judgments, but find their expression in the entire metaphysics of immortality, divine retribution, equality of souls, and freedom of the will. Consider the following passage:

This type of man needs to believe in an unbiased 'subject' with freedom of choice, because he has an instinct of self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified. The reason the subject (or, as we more colloquially say, the soul) has been, until now, the best doctrine on earth, is perhaps because it facilitated that sublime self-deception whereby the majority of the dying, the weak and the oppressed of every kind could construe weakness itself as freedom, and their particular mode of existence as an accomplishment.

(*GMI*, 13)

It should be clear that for Nietzsche the extent of the deception here is broader than the merely ethical and in fact extends even into the very heart of speculation regarding the nature of ultimate reality, that is to say, it leads to the construction of an elaborate metaphysic which encapsulates an interpretation of nature that 'writes in' to nature certain metaphysical assumptions which are necessary to sustain an ethical projection. We find here an inversion within the individual in which 'needs' overcome rational standards and provide a motivated distortion of reality, and a radical departure from honest appraisal (*GM* III, 28). For Nietzsche, the will to perceive order and unchanging states behind ever-changing appearances arises from a *need* for stability which is essentially indicative of a lack of strength in the face of a perpetually changing and uncertain world within which suffering is without meaning. For Nietzsche, morality (MPS) can both be understood as an attempt to render suffering meaningful and as an act of revenge inspired by hatred upon those who do not suffer. *Ressentiment* therefore gives rise to the inversion of values and thereby seeks to denigrate the virtues of a dominant class or group with the unacknowledged intention of destroying such a class / group via the inculcation of an ideology subverting the *ethos* which sustains or constitutes it.

Self-deceptive practices could therefore be said to represent a *perversion* of correct human function and may be condemned for failing to contribute to the fullest realisation of human excellence. Such a perspective clearly draws legitimation from different sources than the Christian moral world order, which tends rather to conceive ethical standards negatively in terms of *restrictions* upon social conduct, ignoring the enhancement of aspects of human flourishing. As Solomon writes:

The nonmoral virtues are as important and, in some contexts (love, war, art and business, perhaps) they readily eclipse the moral virtues as the proper focus of attention. In this sense, at least, Nietzsche defends Aristotle's aristocratic "master" morality against Kant's universalizable slave morality.

(Solomon 1996, 205)

I would agree with Solomon that in some sense the Aristotelian position includes aspects of Nietzschean master morality in particular since attributions of 'good' and 'bad' in the Aristotelian sense lack what one might call moral intensity. Thus whilst Aristotle describes the moral virtues of courage, justice and temperance, his taxonomy of human excellence is broadened to include non-moral virtues such as excellence in science, art, practical wisdom and philosophic wisdom (Solomon 1996, 205). Whilst not specifically dealing with intellectual conscience, I think it is clear that the Aristotelian ethical framework is one which could accommodate the Nietzschean critique of Christian morality. First, to be exactly clear about Nietzsche's conception of intellectual virtue, consider the following passage:

I do not want to believe it although it is palpable: the great majority of people lacks an intellectual conscience. Indeed, it has often seemed to me as if anyone calling for an intellectual conscience were as lonely in the most densely populated cities as if he were in a desert. Everybody looks at you with strange eyes and goes right on handling his scales, calling this good and that evil. [...] the great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live

accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without troubling themselves about such reasons afterward [...]

*(FW 76)*

The objection to judgments of good and evil in this context primarily relates to issues of standards of assessment. The intellectual failure consists in failing to submit such judgment to the fullest critical rigour. Clearly my comparison with Aristotelianism can only work at a certain level of generality; granted this, it is acceptable to assert that Nietzsche did have a conception of non-moral virtues which provide a positive account of human excellence which extends beyond the restrictive and predominantly negative and reactive system of values to be found in Christian morality. It is, therefore, reasonable to consider Nietzsche to be effecting a non-moral critique of self-deception on the basis that such practices constitute a perversion of ideal human function, due to misuse of the rational principle. As Solomon writes:

Resentment is an emotion that does not promote personal excellence but rather dwells on competitive strategy and thwarting others. It does not do what a virtue or a proper motive ought to do – for Nietzsche as for Aristotle – and that is to inspire excellence and self-confidence in both oneself and others.

*(Solomon 1996, 210)*

Morality (MPS) is therefore misguided, since, rather than contributing towards the clarification of the means by which human excellence may be achieved within this

life, it is instead placed in the service of discrediting rivals and reinterpreting one's social, economic or physical impotence as desirable. Burnyeat draws attention to this issue in his article 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good', where he argues that, in addition to learning to enjoy something, there is also the issue of learning to enjoy something *properly*; he gives the following examples of not enjoying something properly:

[...] enjoying philosophy for the sense of power it can give, [...] enjoying a party because you are meeting important people [or] letting a symphony trigger a release of sentimental emotion.

(Burnyeat 1980, 76)

Thus, self-deception as described by Nietzsche is something much worse than just looking on the bright side or thinking positively, it is an active engagement in a 'cover up', which provides pleasures, but of an inappropriate kind. The self-deceiver simply fails to enjoy life properly, rather like the alcoholic or the drug addict. Whilst classical utilitarianism would perhaps have difficulty in coping with an argument which recommended the taking of drugs or the artificial stimulation of the brain for eudaimonistic purposes, were it to be proven that this would maximize such 'happiness' in human life, Aristotelian ethics is able to sustain the objection that such a life would be destructive of a self-sufficient and meaningful appropriation of what MacIntyre has called 'goods internal to practices', an essential constituent of flourishing in the Aristotelian sense (MacIntyre 1985, 188).

Problems with this analysis emerge when we consider that ancient thought tends to favour the doctrine of the unity of the virtues. Aristotle would assert that the

full possession of rationality would necessitate the avoidance of the misuse of rationality since (for the ancients) knowing what is good implies that one will, if rational, therefore pursue what is good. Self-deception is not a topic that Aristotle explicitly deals with, but on the assumption that self-deception is detrimental to human flourishing, as clearly Nietzsche believes it is, it is not unreasonable to conclude that it represents a dysfunctional human trait that is to be condemned from an Aristotelian perspective. Central, therefore, to the Nietzschean conception of virtue must be those virtues that relate to the intellect, and in particular virtues relating to intellectual conscience and intellectual standards. For Nietzsche, the Christian Church is an institution which claims to have superior moral insight, whilst in fact representing, in the Nietzschean schema, the most insidious form of intellectual corruption imaginable, in particular by losing the freedom of thinking that allows for an explicit examination of the problem of living well, whilst relying on dubious and unnecessary metaphysical assumptions, bizarre beliefs, the testimonies of the insane and the pathologically superstitious.

Additionally, and in keeping with his attempt to unearth the causal origins of moral practice, Nietzsche examines the origins of the conscience. For Nietzsche, conscience is not an irreducible given, but the culmination of a particular social process, more specifically a consequence of the creditor / debtor relationship. Thus, in the second essay of the *Genealogy* he asks:

To breed an animal *which is able to make promises* – is that not precisely the paradoxical task which nature has set herself with regard to humankind?

(GM II, 1)



He argues that in order that the practice of contract making could emerge at some unspecified stage in man's primeval past, the debtor must have been capable of being held accountable for a socially binding promise upon the threat of retributive punishment from the creditor. This, according to Nietzsche, explains the genesis of the conscience, since by a process of 'internalization' human beings thus came to see themselves as 'in debt' to those against whom they transgressed, and to live in anticipation of retribution. Nietzsche argues that human beings have thus been standardized and forced into a certain character mould by a process of social conditioning which has facilitated social control and predictability (*GM II*, 1). In Nietzschean psychology the Christian concept of original sin, merged with the internalised bad conscience (Ansell-Pearson 1994a, 134). Whilst originally 'guilt' obtained between two contracting parties when one party was indebted to the other, this became transformed in Christian culture into an internalised and unpayable debt simply for being born. Nietzsche argues that this process is explicable in terms of the aggressive drives which, unable to express themselves outwards, are instead expressed *internally* as the result of external social pressures (Ansell-Pearson 1994a, 136-137). As Nietzsche writes:

All instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards – this is what I call the internalization of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his 'soul'.

(*GM II*, 16)

Nietzsche also offers a 'genealogy' of the historically contingent nature of moral concepts such as freedom of the will, responsibility and conscience, and aims to persuade his readers that such moral phenomena are merely transitory, to be superseded by further historical developments. He notes:

[...] 'the criminal deserved to be punished because he could have acted otherwise' is actually an extremely late and refined form of judgement and inference, whoever thinks it dates back to the beginning is laying his coarse hands on the psychology of primitive man in the wrong way.

(*GM II, 4*)

The judicial system of punishment is therefore originally based upon the notion that the debt to society can be paid off by a curtailment of rights, a fine, or even physical maiming. The treatment of a crime in terms of debt that can be repaid through punishment is according to Nietzsche a legal development that leads to an 'isolation' of the individual from the deed. This in turn made possible the evolution of the notion of freedom of the will, where the criminal was considered fully and exclusively responsible for their crime. The notion of responsibility and freedom of the will is, according to Nietzsche, a relatively novel conceptual phenomenon, especially when we consider the expanse of human prehistory such a concept did not exist. Nietzsche argues that in human prehistory, punishment was not exercised because the individual was considered *responsible*, but rather from a sense of anger, in the same way that parents often punish their children (*GM II, 4*). For Nietzsche, justice is in fact a wholly alien concept within the natural world because: 'life functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner' (*GM II, 11*). We find here

echoes of thoughts expressed in *The Will to Power* in which life is understood as the striving towards an ever increasing optimum level of control and domination. He considers the moralist as merely one further example of this all-encompassing tendency; albeit one which will not recognise itself as such. Freedom of the will is therefore a deceit which serves the interests of those who wish to blame and hold morally accountable those who 'transgress'. The deceiver fails to acknowledge, however, that the means by which morality has come into existence are immoral by morality's own standards. It should be clear, therefore, that, since for Nietzsche the 'inner life' is a product of a particular historical process, he offers what could be described as an evolutionary account of the self. On this reading, the genealogical method aims at an account of the origin of moral concepts and often finds the origin of moral concepts in non-moral processes and phenomena.

It is clear, moreover, that Nietzsche foresees certain benefits of a future condition in which the bad conscience instilled by two millennia of Christianity will no longer be a cause of psychic discomfort. He writes:

[...] [F]rom the unstoppable decline in the Christian God there is, even now, a considerable decline in the consciousness of human guilt; indeed, the possibility cannot be rejected ... that atheism might release humanity from this whole feeling of being indebted towards its beginnings ... Atheism and a sort of second innocence belong together.

(*GM II*, 20)

Nietzsche therefore seems to be making what could be described as a therapeutic prediction regarding the psychological benefits of atheism.<sup>22</sup> Whilst I shall subsequently argue that Nietzsche's central conception of existential liberation consists in the affirmation of the eternal return, we can see also here how atheism in itself is constitutive of liberation from guilt. Such liberation is only achieved, as we have seen, when the individual gives up those distorting practices which involve belief in a judging God. For Nietzsche, atheism is synonymous with radical self-perspicuity and honesty towards oneself. In opposition to existentialist conceptions of authenticity, which often characterise atheism in terms of abandonment and anguish, Nietzsche presents an alternative picture in which the authentic man is freed from certain fears and can live uninhibitedly and free of guilt. In some sense, therefore, such liberation mirrors the outcome of a successful psychoanalysis in which, cured of neurosis and in full or at least fuller self-perspicuity, the analysand achieves autonomy from those internalisations which have impeded his mental vitality.

In addition to an examination of the origins of conscience, Nietzsche provides an analysis of the origin of 'ascetic ideals' with the similar objective of exposing such ideals as expressions of non-moral manifestations of the will to power. For Nietzsche, whilst the holy man and priest exemplify the practice of ascetic ideals in the most extreme form, Christian morality quite generally adheres to a broadly similar spirit. In the third essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche introduces the concept of the 'ascetic ideal' for this spirit; a set of practices and commitments which involve the

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<sup>22</sup> It is clear that Nietzsche can be located within the movement of naturalistic thinkers, including Hume and Freud, on account of his application of a reductive method to achieve understanding of human psychology and the development of the mind in terms of evolutionary determinants. This method, I would argue, does place Nietzsche within the tradition extending from the Enlightenment period. Nietzsche can be understood as a thinker who attempts to complete the Enlightenment ideals of achieving scientifically verifiable knowledge of man independently of the dogmas of tradition-based inquiry.

devaluation of earthly existence and the desire for escape from essential features of reality, which are: ‘perpetual change, destruction, illusion, becoming and death’ (Ansell-Pearson 1994b, xviii). Nietzsche explains ascetic ideals in terms of a psychological method of self-preservation in the face of physiologically determined sickness. Christian morality is, he argues, a type of morality which involves the infliction of ascetic practices upon the self with the unacknowledged purpose of preserving psychological equilibrium in unfavourable circumstances, but at the expense of genuine self-perspicuity. The ascetic ideal is described as a revolt against the very basis and precondition of life itself, but one which gives meaning to human suffering and thereby at least makes such suffering tolerable (Ansell-Pearson 1994b, xix). The ascetic ideal therefore represents a ‘contradiction’ of the will to power within the human subject since it both undermines the preconditions of life (e.g. celibacy) and finds ‘meaning’ in such self-denial (Ansell-Pearson 1994b xix):

Every animal including the *bête philosophe* instinctively strives for an optimum of favourable conditions in which fully to release his power and achieve his maximum of power-sensation; every animal abhors equally instinctively, with an acute sense of smell which is ‘higher than all reason’ any kind of disturbance and hindrance which blocks or could block his path to the optimum.

(*GM III, 7*)

In this sense, ‘motivated’ self-deception involves distortions which are as a result of a coping mechanism which is employed by the subject in circumstances where the ‘path to the optimum’ is blocked. The individual will satisfy himself with a ‘feeling’ of

power based on illusory beliefs in circumstances where real power or growth cannot be attained. Seeking power is entirely natural and a trait we share with the animals, but the distortion here is representative of dysfunctional engagement.

It is of interest to consider Scheler's criticisms of Nietzsche in this regard since, whilst he argues that Nietzsche was correct to characterize the ascetic ideal in terms of *ressentiment*-inspired motives, he in fact failed to appreciate the full extent to which asceticism can also be pursued without *ressentiment* motivations:

One can speak of "*true*" sacrifice only when it serves an intention toward a value that is *given as higher*, i.e., one that is a higher value and is *given* as such independent of a will to sacrifice. In addition, the sacrificed good must be given as a good of a *positive* value. In my treatise on *ressentiment* I pointed out that it is precisely this aspect of true sacrifice which distinguishes *true* asceticism from the illusory asceticism of *ressentiment*. The latter is characterized by the fact that either before or at the moment of denial we *devalue* what we deny ourselves and then regard it as something of *no importance*. For a Christian, for instance, a *free* renunciation of possessions, marriage, and selfwill for the sake of higher goods represents a morally valuable act only when such goods are positive.

(*FE* 231)

For Scheler, therefore, genuine asceticism is not motivated by a failure to obtain possessions which is then distorted into the view that such possessions are evil, but rather by a positive appraisal of such possessions which are nevertheless renounced

for the sake of the realisation of higher values. For Scheler, whilst Nietzsche was correct to recognise *ressentiment* in certain styles of love, asceticism and morality, he was incorrect in suspecting *ressentiment*-inspiration in all such cases. For Scheler, *ressentiment* arises as a corruption of values which are indeed values in their own right. Thus, whilst love can be a concealed form of hatred, it can also subsist as a genuine value when purified of such corruption.

### ***Nietzschean 'authenticity'***

Whilst Nietzsche describes a number of human failings, particularly of the tendency to engage in motivated distortion and dishonesty towards oneself, it is interesting to consider the extent to which he is willing to put forward a normative ideal, or, in other words, a description of man at his most authentic, rid of life-denying false consciousness and self-deception. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche first presents a conception of what might be described as 'Nietzschean enlightenment', characterized in terms of the agent's ability to affirm the rather peculiar assertion that one will live the same life over and over again (and that one has already done so). This stands as the test of the superior individual but will impede the inferior. Nietzsche writes:

The greatest weight. – What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this

moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? ... Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

(*FW* 341)

In relation to the above passage May observes:

[I]f to affirm 'eternal return' is to hold that nothing can be either ultimately transcended or, by contrast, lost in the past [...] and, indeed, that everything is linked together in continuous causal chains (so that to affirm one moment is to affirm every moment), then this doctrine confers inescapable significance and presence on everything in life, down to the smallest detail. It manoeuvres us into an encounter with all that exists [...] so restores, in principle, that relatedness with all being from which a metaphysics of transcendence purportedly removed or protected us.

(May 1999, 124-125)

The linearity of Christian time presents a situation in which suffering is rendered meaningful in relation to an understanding of this life as preparation for the next. In this sense, this metaphysical conception could be understood as conferring



inescapable *insignificance* upon the here and now. Affirmation of the return in contrast represents, for Nietzsche, the affirmation of earthly existence and conveys ultimate significance and reality to this life alone. Whilst metaphysical traditions have taken the corruptibility of the body as an objection to the value of earthly existence ('conception in filth, loathsome method of feeding in the womb, sinfulness of the raw material of man, terrible stench, secretion of saliva, urine and excrement', Nietzsche quoting Pope Innocent the Third (*GM II, 7*)) Nietzsche presents an opposing extreme in which the life described by Pope Innocent the Third is indeed the only type of life that we will ever have, whilst the notion of a self-subsisting immortal soul is rendered fantasy. For Nietzsche, such metaphysical speculation arises from a need to render suffering meaningful, whilst it is itself considered by him as evidence of a certain psychopathology and ill will towards an essentially innocent and meaningless play of natural forces. He conceives of the affirmation of the return as a proposition which 'weaker types' drawn to such teleological conceptions would find unendurable. It is only the 'strong', those able to affirm life despite its suffering, loss and unpredictability, who would welcome the return, the thought of it even leading to an intensification of engagement with earthly existence in the full recognition of the infinitude of finitude and the being of becoming.

Whilst I have characterized existentialism as 'metaphysically indifferent', Nietzsche has been accused of merely offering an alternative metaphysical doctrine with his conception of eternal return. May, however, explains that affirmation of the return is dissimilar in relation to certain essential features of metaphysical systems, in particular by denying both dualism and the 'atomistic need' (May 1999, 125). Nietzsche would therefore remain, as I have previously discussed, 'metaphysically indifferent' despite his assent to the eternal recurrence of the same. Furthermore,

according to May, Nietzschean ontology avoids the distinction between essential and incidental properties and denies the dichotomy of separate metaphysical realms for the changing and the permanent (May 1999, 125). Other commentators have, however, argued that the notion of eternal return need not be given any kind of literal interpretation and that its value rather lies in its ability to test the individual and act as a stimulus to self-overcoming. Maudemarie Clark writes:

[M]y interpretation places the theoretical backing for the practical doctrine of recurrence completely outside the sphere of a priori theorizing [...] I find Nietzsche's prime concern to be the transformative effects of accepting the ideal of affirming eternal recurrence rather than the cosmology [...]

(Clark 1990, 253-54)

On this reading, there is no metaphysical or cosmological speculation implied by Nietzsche's assertion, but merely a thought experiment which seeks to intensify self-possession and create some sense of urgency and importance in everyday concerns. I would tend to agree with such an interpretation. Certainly it is clear that the thought of the return carries with it the central motivation for an existential imperative to live as if this life were to be repeated endlessly.<sup>23</sup> The ethic generated from this does, I suppose, tend towards a certain degree of egoism to the extent that the heroic engagement of the individual becomes the central concern. But such an ethic also

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<sup>23</sup> Whilst it is possible to argue that continued 'instantiations' of oneself would not be aware of the fact that they had lived the same life before (or at least until the moment of consideration of the eternal return) this need no in itself count as an objection to the issue that Nietzsche wishes to impress upon his readers. Subsequent instantiations 'would not be me' only in the same way that my life at the age of three was not 'really me'. And yet we do, I think owe some special sense of care towards ourselves in spite of the radical changes which we undergo during our lives – akin to familial love or the love one may have for an identical twin.

implies a heightened need for action with no appeal to any supernatural agency that may intervene as a result of prayer or provide justice in an afterlife. To the extent, therefore, that Nietzsche can be said to possess a conception of authenticity, the affirmation of the return is the nearest point of comparison with existentialist thought. Indeed, when considering the early Heideggerian conception of *Eigentlichkeit* the parallels are perhaps closest. Common to existential thought is an intense interest in subjectivity – however reconfigured – an interest which overrides traditional concern with the impersonal and objective. The status of the ordinary as manifest in the life-world of the subject becomes the centre of philosophical concern, with normative implications for styles of engagement with one's life as a whole. As the author of my life in the imagined eternal return I bear a responsibility to myself to achieve heights of excellence and aesthetic grandeur. It is worth examining, however, the extent to which such conversion can really be accommodated in a strictly naturalistic ethic. The conversion to the realisation that one will live the same life eternally is not for instance one which admits of degrees. Additionally, it bears no essential relationship to any aspect of one's physical condition or material prosperity. In this sense, if it can be compared in any way to the Aristotelian conception of human flourishing, it must be considered closest to Aristotelian conceptions of *theōria*. This is because it is representative of an insight into the nature of reality which does not arise from any particular practical concerns, or presuppose them, and yet can provide a source of radical self re-evaluation and orientation.

Such a reading contrasts with views such as those expressed by Simon May, for whom Nietzsche's positive ethic is said to consist primarily in his concept of 'life enhancement', a condition characterized by 'power', 'sublimation' and 'form-creation' (May 1999, 26). As we have seen, 'power' is a condition most notably

possessed by Nietzsche's 'nobles', the mythical 'beasts of prey' who possessed a naïve estimation of their self-worth and engaged in acts of control and domination in complete innocence of moral conceptions of 'good' and 'evil'. 'Sublimation', however, consists of a positive reorientation of aggressive drives into higher manifestations of creative energy, for example, expressing a lust for power through intelligence, or expressing the sexual drive through creative artistic works.

Sublimation, then, offers the means by which Nietzsche's ethic may be rendered less barbaric than the ethic he occasionally seems to admire in the nobles of antiquity.

These forces of aggression are, in their sublimated form, powers which offer an immense potential resource for contemporary cultural rejuvenation, they are not merely to be 'squandered' in acts of rape, pillage and slave-trading. Nietzsche seems committed, therefore, to a view of the psyche developed further by Freud, in which certain kinds of primitive psychic energy may be trapped and channelled either into negative manifestations such as neurotic symptoms, or positively channelled into acts of sublimation expressed in artistic and cultural creativity. In this sense Nietzsche may be said to have some conception of self-realisation which is constituted by a more active, intense and vigorous engagement with life, with the full resources of primitive vigour placed in the service of rational objectives. It is for this reason that he is willing to describe philosophy itself as: 'the most spiritual will to power' (*BGE* 9).

Nietzschean self-realisation can, however, be distinguished from Aristotelian conceptions in certain respects, for two reasons. First, it is argued that Aristotelian 'potentiality' is universally applicable to all human beings, whilst Nietzschean self-realisation is of a particular kind applicable only at the individual level. Secondly, for Nietzsche, unlike Aristotle, 'the perfect and final actualization of a clear and fixed

potential is neither possible, nor knowable, nor should be sought' (May 1999, 109).

May itemizes three aspects of the Nietzschean *telos* in support of this claim:

- (a) it consists of a number of possible *tele* consistent with an individual's nature, nurture, and life circumstances, or, to put the matter another way, a range of possible values that will 'preserve and enhance' the particular person he or she is;
- (b) it is fluid in so far as the nature and life circumstances that shape it are themselves constantly evolving, and in so far as it can, at any point in time be actualized in several different possible ways; hence
- (c) it has not even a theoretical single terminus of perfect fulfilment or maximum good.

(May 1999, 109)

Developing these observations, May considers that Nietzsche, in harmony with his Heraclitian sympathies, *cannot* be compared with Aristotelian functionalist styles of ethical evaluation, since the nature of man is too particularized and unstable to cohere with such a theory. And yet, as I have previously observed, Nietzsche is committed to some conception of the essence of man as will to power. This will is shared by all living phenomena and does, when conscious, seek its termination in an anticipated state of maximal power realization. I accept May's observation that such drives may express themselves in different individuals in different ways, and I also accept that they may be unknown to the individual who is merely carried by inclinations unknown to himself. However, Nietzsche does have a conception of essence, and whilst the parameters within which this essence may express itself are wider and

harder to discern than within the Aristotelian schema, we see at a certain level of generality a position in which Nietzsche is committed to the belief that the realisation of a maximum of power is man's *telos*, and whilst there may more specific and underlying *tele* which contribute to the enhancement of power in a vast variety of ways, the central *telos* remains the same, this maximum of power sensation attainable by a given individual, which in the Nietzschean scheme corresponds to *eudaimonia*. Additionally Nietzsche's own commitment to the relative higher value of psychic energy expressed in a sublimated form shows us the degree to which he embraces a more concrete ethic, one which sets parameters upon human behaviour in the pursuit of cultural elevation. This is often implicit in Nietzsche's work but it forms the basis of the style of normativity to which he assents. Power is of universal value, but there remain 'higher' and 'lower' means by which power can be expressed, and Nietzsche remains committed to their 'higher' manifestation, thus: '[a]lmost everything we call "higher culture" is based on the spiritualization of *cruelty*, on its becoming more profound' (*BGE* 229). The affirmation of the return, for instance, presupposes a certain indifference to the hedonistic values / disvalues of pleasure and pain, and rather recognises an incommensurability between hedonic values and existential states which relate to one's life conceived as a whole, and apply to the personality as a whole, and not to some isolated or atomic state or sets of states.

We have seen that Nietzsche has a conception of a self-delusional consciousness which falsifies reality via a specific set of intellectual vices which subvert honest appraisal. This may be justified by reference to a conception of human nature from which certain evaluative condemnation of dysfunctional engagement, such as self-deceptive practices, may be made. Nietzschean authenticity – or at least a Nietzschean conception of the human subject in its full power and splendour – would,

according to this reading, commit Nietzsche to a view of human psychic health analogous to the conclusion of a successful psycho-analysis. In Freudian terminology, by accepting ‘the reality principle’, the patient would be enabled to overcome the false pleasures of self-deceit for a more mature and ultimately more satisfying engagement with reality. It is therefore strange that commentators such as May hold the view that Nietzsche had no sense of the optimum in human life enhancement. In a sense, the disagreement here can be resolved with reference to the distinction between the *existentiell* and the existential, since ontically human life does indeed present many different routes to fulfilment – different career paths for instance – and yet ontologically man is primarily ‘fulfilled’ in terms of his orientation towards Being irrespective of these specific concerns. Conversion to the affirmation of the eternal return does not then represent an optimum because it is not a state which admits of degrees. As with Heidegger and Sartre, one cannot be more authentic today than one was yesterday (assuming one was authentic yesterday), a point the implications of which May has failed to appreciate. To the extent that comparison with Aristotle is fruitful, we can see how Nietzsche does indeed share a common conception of the value of the non-moral virtues in the life of the excellent person, particularly those which relate to the correct application of intellectual capacities. Whilst such concerns merely involve ‘ontic’ issues regarding practical reason, Nietzsche too can be seen to embrace a conception of man in the mode of the appreciation of primordial existential structures of consciousness. Whilst it is debatable as to the extent to which this mirrors Aristotelian conceptions of *theōria*, we clearly find consensus on the general notion that human beings have certain capabilities which are unique and which must be active if the life in question is to be considered complete. Nietzsche and Aristotle do, then, share some conception of an ethic which centres upon the realisation one’s

higher nature, a nature which need not indeed be determined by or compete with the common standards within any particular community, but which is constituted by those aspects of human character which are most essential to humans. The thought of the eternal return forces the individual to make sense of their life as a whole and to redeem pain, displeasure and disappointment via an intensification of engagement in acts of self-creation and life-enhancement. I have demonstrated, therefore, the extent to which Nietzsche does indeed share a conception of a normative ethic rooted in a conception of the functional adequacy of a higher faculty. Here the capacity finds its appropriate good in directing itself towards those existential goods which are only obtainable through the radical gestalt shift attendant with the affirmation of the return. Thereby the individual attains the style of authentic resolution endorsed by Nietzsche.



## 5. Scheler's Evaluative Hierarchy

As indicated in Chapter One, common to existentialist thought is an 'externalism' which subverts the subject/object split found within Cartesianism. This split, I have indicated, is partly responsible for the philosophical conception of inner 'sense data'; a conception which allows objectivity to 'primary' qualities such as size, shape and number, etc. in contrast to 'secondary' qualities which include colours, and also value properties. Whilst Nietzsche places emphasis upon the subjective experience of the individual, he is unwilling to generate any convincing ethic allowing for objective validation. Indeed, it is a central dictum of the Nietzschean position that moral objectivity is largely illusory.<sup>24</sup> Scheler, whilst influenced by Nietzsche, particularly by his notion of *ressentiment* and the extent to which this negative state can corrupt values, does attempt to give values an objective grounding. Scheler's methods, loosely inspired by Husserlian style phenomenology, rest upon the primacy of 'phenomenological intuition', in which certain truths of consciousness may be ascertained by the self-perspicuous individual who attends to the detail and structure of conscious experience. For Scheler, all value is essentially dependent on the affective states of sensible, vital, psychic and spiritual 'feelings' which form the 'normative background' of the human life-world. In common with existentialist thought, and as a development of Husserl's conception of the life-world, Scheler endorses an enriched conception of human reality which embraces its normative structure revealed with the descriptive methods of phenomenology. This structure, once 'seen', commits the self-perspicuous agent to the realisation of higher values in

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<sup>24</sup> For example: 'Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present – and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it' (GS 242).

preference to the lower. Among the truths which are phenomenologically self-evident Scheler lists the following:

- I.
  1. The existence of a positive value is itself a positive value.
  2. The non-existence of a positive value is itself a negative value.
  3. The existence of a negative value is itself a negative value.
  4. The non-existence of a negative value is itself a positive value.
  
- II.
  1. Good is that value in the sphere of the will which adheres to the realisation of a positive value.
  2. Evil is that value in the sphere of the will which adheres to the realisation of negative value.
  3. Good is that value in the sphere of the will which adheres to the realisation of a higher (or highest) value.
  4. Evil is that value, which in the sphere of the will, adheres to the realisation of a lower (or lowest) value.

*(FE 48)*

The ability to apprehend the phenomenological structure of normative experience corresponds to the kind of proto-conception of authenticity which Scheler endorses. Failure to achieve clarity with regard to the relative position of values within a hierarchical affective structure will lead to confusion in matters of ethical deliberation. In Nietzsche we have seen how the privileging of a 'lower' sphere of value realisation over a 'higher' one by engaging in self-deception forms a central target of ethical criticism. Scheler rejects any notion of the ethical life which neglects or

misunderstands the emotive ground of conscious experience. In particular, Scheler insists on the essentially incommensurable nature of higher and lower states within a fourfold stratification of affective consciousness. Scheler writes:

[W]henever man is discontent in the more central and deeper strata of his being, his striving acquires a certain disposition to replace, as it were, this unpleasant state with a more conative intention toward pleasure, i.e., the pleasure of the more peripheral stratum at hand, which is the stratum of feelings which are more easily produced. A conative intention towards pleasure is therefore a sign of inner wretchedness (despair) [...]

(*FE* 345)

Here we find the basis of Scheler's objection to a hedonistic form of eudaimonism in his rejection of the assumption that all feeling states are reducible to a common currency of pleasure and displeasure (sensible feelings). Such hedonism is, according to Scheler, a sign of 'declining life', that is to say, when the higher feelings are thwarted and degenerate into their negative instantiations i.e. bliss into despair, 'spiritual' happiness into unhappiness, and 'vital' health into feelings of fatigue, there is a symptomatic tendency of the individual to seek subjective sensations of pleasure which is manipulable, often requiring complex means for its attainment, making the individual vulnerable all the while to having such pleasures denied them. Scheler argues that the moral system as embodied within the Christian tradition is in fact close to an understanding of the value hierarchy manifest within the stratification of emotive life. In particular, Scheler emphasizes aspects of Christianity which recognize

the value of suffering, not as a *means* towards the achievement of states of bliss, but as a means of self-development and self-understanding (an ‘authenticity’ of sorts). He writes:

This particular function of suffering, which guides us to the deeper levels of our being, is acknowledged in our assigning to it the power of “purification.” Purification does not imply moral “improvement” – still less, “training.” Rather, it means a continuous falling away (in our value-estimations and spiritual observation) from all that does not belong to our personal essence. It is an ever increasing clarification of the centre of our existence for our consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

(*FE* 348)

Clearly any eudaimonism such as Benthamite utilitarianism which only values the diminishment of suffering and the enhancement of positive sensible feelings cannot provide an adequate structure for the realisation of those aspects of human flourishing which are most fundamental, most essential, most authentic and as a consequence of this, most fully human. For Scheler, hedonistic eudaimonism cannot, by definition, recognise any conception of a positive value of suffering that may be necessary for the realisation of higher states of consciousness, nor can it differentiate between such states, since it attempts to reduce all levels of affective consciousness to the lowest form of human emotive life. We find here an endorsement of a view common to existentialist thought which rejects classical utilitarianism for its inability to

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<sup>25</sup> It is not clear that *all* suffering can be of such value, much suffering is pure impediment to value realisation of any kind. In fact the reduction of suffering is one of the central concerns of the Jesus that we encounter in the New Testament. Jesus did not teach us to learn how to be indifferent to suffering, but to alleviate it in a spirit of generosity.

differentiate qualitatively between the relative value of different types of emotive states. 'Pleasure' is given priority over higher affective states or holistic aspects of subjective life such as personal integrity and strength in the face of external coercion. Additionally, such hedonistically-based philosophies suffer from the weakness that it may collapse into an unattractive relativism in which pleasure subjectively determined becomes the final ground for ethical judgement irrespective of objective considerations. Scheler and Aristotle do therefore share a conception of hierarchies within the self which must be acknowledged if the person is to be considered to live a *eudaimon* life. Aristotle, whilst recognizing the value of the rational faculty, does not furnish formal criteria for the foundations of his moral philosophy; instead, each faculty realizes its own particular good when operating with the respective virtues which belong to that faculty.

For Scheler, higher and lower values are defined primarily in relation to their 'endurance' and their participation in 'extension' and 'divisibility' (*FE 90*). With regard to endurance, Scheler notes, that say, the higher value of beauty, as instantiated within a particular painting is not itself subject to any depreciation merely because the painting may be vulnerable to destruction. Beauty itself possesses higher value despite this vulnerability (*FE 90*). He writes:

A value is *enduring* through its quality of having the phenomenon of being "able" to exist through time, no matter how long its thing-bearer may exist.

(*FE 91*)

Thus a declaration of love, may for instance be short-lived if the declarer subsequently dies, but the sentiment itself, to remain an authentic declaration of love, must at the time it was spoken have possessed an endurance unrelated to the lifespan of the individuals concerned (*FE* 91). Additionally, in relation to the issue of disability and extension, Scheler observes that material values, such as the value of a piece of cloth, is proportionate to the quantity of the cloth that I possess. If I have half of the cloth then I possess half of its value (*FE* 93). Vital feelings and spiritual feelings, such as happiness and bliss, differ since they are not limited to a short term experience localised within the body, such as the tongue. Likewise the beauty of a painting or the profundity of a poem, is not exhausted by repeated 'consumption' since: 'It lies in the essence of values of this kind to be *communicable without limit* and without any division and diminution' (*FE* 94).

### ***Historical relativism explained with reference to the affective hierarchy***

Whilst in principle we here find a means by which higher and lower value may be identified, Scheler's final position fails to accommodate normative disapproval of the most extreme act of human sacrifice. The value hierarchy, whilst in principle accessible to contemporary and historical humanity, in practice does not allow for a common ethic, partly because the belief systems of cultural antipodes such as European and Aztec culture are so widely and, he seems to imply, legitimately divergent. Paradoxically, Scheler makes this point in the context of demonstrating the absolute nature of the value hierarchy, whilst undermining its normative conclusions with this relativistic understanding of the practice of human sacrifice. As Scheler writes, when 'we enucleate only essences' the *prima facie* variance amongst definitions of murder achieve a conceptual unity within which the universal evil of

such acts to all cultures and epochs comes to the fore with clear objectivity. Any assertion of genuine ethical relativism implies what he describes as ‘a grave assault on the honor of historical mankind’ (*FE*, 310). Scheler illustrates this point by rejecting the definitions provided by ‘present positive law’ in which, amongst other examples, ancient sacrifice to deities would have to be defined as murder. But, Scheler argues, in essence, the act of sacrifice is very different to murder, since such sacrifice took place in the context of various beliefs which clearly distinguish it from the latter. As Scheler writes:

The killing of a man is not murder; it is only its presupposition. In cases of murder the value of the person in a being “man” must be given in intention, and a possible intention of action must aim at its annihilation.

(*FE* 312)

With regard to the example of human sacrifice, Scheler argues that when we truly ‘enucleate only essences’ the common value estimations between cultures engaging in such practices and contemporary culture, emerge quite clearly. First, it was never the intention of the act of sacrifice to annihilate the being of the individual, rather the best were chosen, i.e. the youngest, strongest and purest, in order to honour the gods:

Frequently the killings in question were nothing but “removals” to a higher sphere of being and value, to heavenly dwelling-places; they were presents to the gods in the form of the very lived body of the sacrificed.

(FE 313)

Capital punishment would therefore, upon this understanding, represent murder, since, regardless of belief in the afterlife, the intention is not one of potentially salutary punishment (an act which is conducted in order that the miscreant might improve) but the act is performed with the clear intention of the annihilation of the person. On the other hand, the act of killing on the battlefield is unlike the act of common murder, since here, according to Scheler: 'A certain measure of the positive valuation of the enemy is connected with the very agreement to duel' (FE 314). Again, in essence, the apparent similarities between the crude acts of killing separate into clearly demarcated spheres of non-murderous human activity, and the evil of the intended annihilation of the person, an act which normally has been and will continue to be perceived as a crime of a heinous nature. As Scheler concludes:

Murder [...] presupposes the givenness of a human being as a person and as a bearer of possible values of the person. The value-complex that underlies murder is essentially connected with the intention to annihilate the person.

(FE 314)

Thus in cases where the notion of person-hood does not apply (as in the attitude of a Roman to his children and slaves) the value-estimation making murder possible is no longer present. Thus: '[t]he thesis of relativism can be held only by one who clings to the changing clothes of these types; who does not see their core because of the covering' (FE 316).



Scheler can be seen to endorse an absolutism of moral evaluation which paradoxically embraces a strong relativity of specific ethical concern. This primarily stems, I think, from his lack of attention to the intellectual content of moral evaluation. Whilst *affectively* human beings may share the same value hierarchy, it is precisely in relation to those intellectual faculties and their correct or incorrect function that the resultant actions motivated by such an affective hierarchy may be evaluated. By this I mean when we remove certain bizarre beliefs, such as appeasement of gods etc., as a result of a more full and self-perspicuous application of the rational faculties – it is then possible to complement the value hierarchy provided by Scheler with an appreciation of the role of reason in genuine practical deliberation. In this sense Scheler's *Lebensphilosophie* benefits from a *rapprochement* with Aristotelian normative appraisal of the rational faculties. This criticism of Scheler is analogous to MacIntyre's criticism of Pincoffs' functionalism, since the genuine *sōphrosunē* need not be judged by standards which are specific to a particular community or indeed a particular historical epoch. In this respect, Scheler's evaluative hierarchy wedded to some conception of normativity of the rational faculties would indeed find the practice of human sacrifice unacceptable. Whilst Scheler could argue that, given the limits of man's intellectual development within such societies, bizarre systems of beliefs are understandable, the value hierarchy in itself proves to be an unreliable guide to action if our beliefs regarding the nature of the non-evaluative properties of reality are significantly skewed.

### ***Authentic man 'acts his essence'***

I have so far examined the extent to which Scheler attempts to provide a solution to an ethical relativism which may largely be understood to result from the subject/object

split found within the Cartesian tradition of philosophy. By attending to those aspects of the human *milieu* which precondition the experience of a uniquely human world, Scheler provides evidence of a structured, normative experience common to both contemporary and historical humanity. Additionally, I have briefly indicated the extent to which a purely emotive, yet objective, grounding of the ethical life may be incomplete. Scheler's contribution to subsequent existentialist philosophy may be found in his understanding of those existential states of flourishing which overarch specific *existentiell* manifestations of pleasure/pain, depression/exhilaration, etc. Indeed Scheler provides what are I believe some useful parallels between an Aristotelian understanding of higher cognitive function and existential understandings of authenticity, with his examination of the fourth affective type of 'value-ception' which he terms 'spiritual feelings'. Such feelings include and are indeed largely exhausted by despair and bliss, although they are not strictly speaking 'states' since, according to Scheler, they involve a dissolution or at least recession of the ego and 'bathe everything given in the inner world and the outer world in these [spiritual] acts' (*FE* 343). Sensible pleasure for Scheler is distinguished by the fact that it has a very definite location within the body, for instance the taste of the wine upon my tongue. Vital feelings are diffused throughout the body and would include overall feelings such as vigour or exhaustion. Psychic feelings would include exhilaration ('happiness') or sadness, but are distinguishable from spiritual feelings in that they are intentionally directed at specific ontic states of affairs, individuals, or events. Spiritual feelings are, by contrast, described as 'absolute feelings', since they are entirely diffuse and not 'relative to [specific or particular] extrapersonal value-complexes or their motivating powers' (*FE* 343). Additionally, such states are, strictly speaking, not ones which we 'feel' so much as 'are'. They are therefore deep aspects of our very

being and are, therefore, those least capable of external or internal manipulation and least vulnerable to the vagaries of misfortune. Scheler elaborates:

Just as in despair there lies at the core of our personal existence and world an emotional “No!” without our “person” becoming a mere object of reflection, so also in “bliss,” at the deepest level of the feeling of happiness, there lies an emotional “Yes!” Bliss and despair appear to be the correlates of the moral value of our personal being. And for this reason they are the metaphysical and religious self-feelings par excellence.

(FE 343)

Scheler does, I believe, here embrace a theme shared by philosophers such as Spinoza in which that which we may describe as ‘affirmation of the Whole’ (intellectual love of God) provides the highest attainment within human consciousness. Likewise, parallels emerge when we consider Aristotle’s conception of *theōria*. Here an entirely non-practical sphere of human engagement is taken to represent the highest conscious state and the final ‘achievement’ of the excellent person. Whilst, as we have seen, Aristotelian conceptions of *theōria* are open to controversy, the comparison is most compelling in relation to *theōria* considered as a state of contemplation. Such engagement places the individual above the concerns of the detail of everyday existence, including failure at lower levels of the value hierarchy. *Theōria* conceived as rational scientific theory clearly has no relevance whatsoever to the state that Scheler here describes, which is rather one characterised as a component of the affective life. With Scheler as with Aristotle there is a clear notion of the human being

which is all it can be (which ‘acts its essence’) in its full dignity and self-realisation, contrasted with conceptions of human being in which all faculties or sources of value-realisation are ultimately merely partial. In Schelerian or Spinosist terms, to fail to affirm the Whole is both to express a failure of an ideally possible value-realisation and to fail to instantiate those states of existential ‘bliss’ that are attendant with such realisation. Here, potential parallels with Nietzsche may be discerned whose idea of an affirmation of the eternal return some commentators have understood as an affirmation of ‘ultimate reality’ as both positive and perfect and therefore infinitely desirable.<sup>26</sup> Such an ethics is clearly antagonistic and different in kind to any ethics of utility which attempts to reduce all value to a single ‘currency’, such as classical utilitarianism (Bentham), in which all value is in effect reduced to states of sensible feeling. It is important to realise, therefore, that when Scheler rejects eudaimonistic ethics for this very assumption, he cannot be criticising of Aristotelian ethics, even though Aristotle conceives of the fully flourishing life as one of *eudaimonia*. This is because, as we have seen, Aristotle does have a clear understanding of qualitatively irreducible aspects and levels of value realisation within human flourishing. That is not to say that Aristotle fails to recognise the value of sensible feelings, as Scheler most certainly does not fail to do either, rather both recognise a certain ranking among states that are essentially incommensurable. The goods attendant upon ‘theoretical’ contemplation cannot be expressed via a calculus which would measure the value of *theōria* relative to the value of an evening of wine, women, song, gambling and debauchery. In later work Scheler develops such ideas in relation a conception of ‘total man’ which clarify the extent to which his ethic embraces assent to Aristotelian capacity realisation:

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<sup>26</sup> See Clark 1990, Chapter 8.

Total man, in the absolute sense, is hardly close to us. It is the idea of a man who contains and has realized *all* his essential capacities. Indeed, he is as far from us as God who, in so far as we grasp his essence in spirit and life, is nothing but the *essential* (essence) of man, only in infinite form and fullness. However, every age of human history knows *a relatively total man, a maximum* of total humanity which is accessible to it, a relative maximum of participation in the highest forms of human existence.

(PP 102)

Upon this understanding, capacity maximisation is unobtainable in the fullest sense to the average human being. As with Aristotle, Scheler embraces some conception of the moral genius who we may emulate but never fully coincide with in all respects.

In common with existentialist ethical approaches, Scheler's may be criticised for having failed to have provided an ethic of clear normative relevance, since, we find a description of how a world would appear for the normatively ideal human agent irrespective of any specific cases of ethical deliberation. Whilst Scheler puts forward a philosophy which is characterised by hostility towards Kantian formalism, and in particular towards the tendency within formalism to deny the importance of the affects in the ethical life, this comes at the expense of any clearly defined role for the non-affective rational faculties in the ethical life. For Scheler the affects are sources of the disclosure of value and therefore the precondition of normative experience of any kind. Without their disclosive potential there would be no meaningful sense in which we could even speak of value-realisation in any form, merely of a distinctly inhuman

engagement with the world.<sup>27</sup> However, for Scheler, it is only the lower feelings, and in particular sensible feelings, that could in principle require the exercise of the rational faculty for their instantiation, whilst ‘psychic’ feelings and ‘spiritual’ feelings seem to come to the individual either by chance (e.g. I am miserable because my relative has died), or by something analogous to Divine Grace, as in the example of spiritual feelings.

In the light of such criticism it has been suggested by Perrin that the relative value of those positive states described within the value hierarchy must be considered as affectively self-evident (Perrin 1991, 72). That is to say, the relative value of the happiness which is the noetic correlate of beauty or justice over localised sensible pleasures, is not one which really requires extensive rational demonstration but rather is self-evident to the normal human agent. Provided that we perceive the relative importance of the higher over the lower, then we are, it seems, already committed to certain normative deliberative conclusions; i.e. we should privilege the higher over the lower. Leaving aside the case of straightforward rational incapacity or irrationality, this could only fail to occur if an agent simply failed to recognise the relevant ‘feelings’ altogether. In this case, we would have either an agent beyond the pale of normal human concern, or one in need of educative reform. A reform which, as I have outlined in my introduction, would be a self-perspicuity which would enable the agent to reach the appropriate normative conclusions. Perrin provides the following observation from Hartmann to illustrate such circumstances:

There are situations which befall a man the inescapable alternative  
either of sinning against truthfulness or against some other equally

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche makes a similar observation in this regard: ‘[T]o eliminate the will completely and turn off all the emotions without exception, assuming that we could: well? Would that not mean to *castrate* the intellect?’ (*GM* III, 12).

high, or even some higher, value. A physician violates his professional duty if he tells a patient who is dangerously ill the critical state of his health; the imprisoned soldier who, when questioned by the enemy, allows the truth about his country's tactics to be extorted from him, is guilty of high treason; a friend, who does not try to conceal information given to him in strictest personal confidence, is guilty of breach of confidence. In all such cases the mere virtue of silence is not adequate. If the physician, the prisoner, the possessor of confidential information will do their duty of warding off a calamity that threatens, they must resort to a lie. But if they do so, they make themselves guilty on the side of truthfulness.

(Hartmann 1932, 284)

Here we find a vivid description of circumstances in which the value hierarchy is at variance with itself such that we must sacrifice one set of values for another if action is to be possible. Perrin suggests, however, that the relative position of values within the hierarchy itself provides grounds for choice (Perrin 1991, 72). Which is to say, in this example, the value hierarchy could provide normative guidance expressible in action in favour of preserving human life over the value of honesty. To my knowledge Scheler does not himself make this point, but it does I believe provide a feasible way out of this kind of dilemma.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Of course, more serious problems would occur if the values occupied an equal position within the value hierarchy, although no examples spring to mind in this regard.

## Conclusion

For Scheler, despite the apparent differences between human cultures and historical epochs there does remain a core thread of objective values realised via superficially divergent acts. Scheler shares with Heidegger the view that certain aspects of being manifest themselves essentially via human being.<sup>29</sup> The content of the feelings constitutive of such states of affirmation (or denial) are for Scheler impervious to chance and manipulation, because they do not involve focus upon one part of the world at the exclusion of other parts. When we affirm the Whole, there is nothing left external to the Whole (by definition) which could upset, interfere or otherwise causally interact in a harmful or beneficial manner, and therefore the content of states of consciousness, although not their occurrence, is immune to worldly contingency. In this example, the non-formal ethicist operates with an understanding of the nature of human flourishing to be found in the operation and proper function of the stratified self, each part of which finds its own good in the value-realisation appropriate to its sphere, whilst each remains irreducible to the functioning of the lower parts. Aristotle, too, endorses a conception of the incommensurability of the rational, the emotive and the sensible, which aim at different goods and are therefore in principle incapable of being reduced to each other.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the joy attendant on the possession of a

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<sup>29</sup> For Heidegger, truth itself is dependent upon the existence of Dasein; likewise, for Scheler, value objectivity is possible because the World as it manifests itself via human being is and never could be given without value consciousness. I do not experience the World as present-to-hand in my ordinary everyday existence. Rather, objects show up for me within a 'context of significance' or background which includes their relative value or disvalue, i.e. the hammer shows itself as broken and therefore no good, or of a kind which possesses the correct weight for a certain task and therefore in possession of positive instrumental value qualities. But to take the analogy further; Scheler, Heidegger and Aristotle recognise the reality of states of consciousness which in essence radically extend beyond our 'average everyday' experience of value-realisation.

<sup>30</sup> I am aware that the Aristotelian understanding of the nature of the self does not translate exactly into the terms of the Schelerian understanding. However, clearly parallels do exist between at least Heideggerian interpretations of Aristotle and this notion of affirmation in Scheler's philosophy. The difference, is that the Greek conception of affirmation is characterised as a function of the *rational* part of the self, whereas Scheler plays down the significance of Reason. His conception of a deep "Yes" to existence is indicative of an emotive rather than an intellectual capacity.



fine intellect or a brave heart is incommensurable with, say, the pleasures of eating and drinking. We can conclude, therefore, that any non-formal ethics of value recognizes the relative importance of incommensurable values which rank those faculties of value-realization pertaining to the nature of human flourishing.

Furthermore, such a hierarchy recognizes that to become fully human, and therefore fully 'authentic', one must operate with all capacities. We are clearly presented with what can be described as a 'normative ideal' of the full realization of human capacities. For Scheler, as with Aristotle, to be human and yet to fail to realize all those capacities which are constitutive of being truly human is to have failed, in the relevant respect, as a human being. And yet, such conceptions do not seem to offer much aid when it comes to the kinds of actions we should engage in, at least with regard to those choices that are so commonly put forward in the dilemmas of applied ethics. Similarly, we are not here presented with any formal test of our moral maxims along the lines of the categorical imperative.

I have argued the 'naturalism' endorsed by Aristotle need not be understood in strictly materialistic terms, but rather as merely an indifference towards metaphysical speculation regarding the world as it really is in-itself. Such a point of departure shares similarity with the methods of classical phenomenology which seek descriptive accounts of essences and the relations between essences in isolation from metaphysical theories (e.g. concerning self-subsistent universals or the like). We have seen, however that there are certain drawbacks with descriptive approaches of this kind. In particular, the normative aspect of an ethic so generated seems to be at best limited and at worst entirely non-existent. Whilst a phenomenologist such as Scheler can describe those aspects of emotive life so central to any rich conception of the origin of value-realisation within the world as it typically shows up in human life, he

has difficulty in providing any prescriptive guidance that would actually be of use in any concrete case of ethical concern. We even find, as I have described, a disturbing picture which, whilst on one level limiting the scope of relativism by arguing for a core conception of the value of the person throughout various historical epochs, cannot find any means of evaluating practices such as human sacrifice. At another level Scheler does indeed endorse an historical relativism which seems to excuse such practices from the perspective of the milieu within which they arise. As I have argued, the best that can be made of accommodating such philosophy into a normatively binding ethical structure involves the argument that there must be some characteristic manner in which a life-world shows itself to the self-perspicuous human subject which provides closure with regard to certain acts generally considered to involve an immoral outcome.<sup>31</sup> Here Scheler can, it seems, offer some guidance in relation to the resolution of ethical dilemmas, if we consider the value hierarchy explicated in his *Formalism in Ethics* as one which gives normative preference to the higher over the lower affective states of value-realisation. As we have seen, the famous problem – which Kantian ethics never seemed to satisfactorily resolve – of the axe murderer who comes to the house asking the whereabouts of his next victim, in which the twee Kantian moralist can do nothing but tell the truth or at best remain silent, can be resolved by appeal to the relative higher value of the preservation of life over the value of honesty in cases such as these. Of course, such a philosophy may fail when it comes across dilemmas which involve conflict between two affective states of equal worth.

Relating the above analysis to those areas of existentialist concern which were subsequent to Scheler, we find little direct application to issues of self-deception and

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<sup>31</sup> A task which, as should be clear, is the central preoccupation within my essay. If I am right this is of central importance if the ethical legacy which we inherit from the phenomenologists, including Nietzsche, may be rendered of use in ethical deliberation.

authenticity. Indeed, I think this partly arises from Scheler's reluctance, certainly in the *Formalism in Ethics*, to provide an account of rationality in the ethically motivated life. We can, I think, see how there is in Scheler a proto-conception of full self-perspicuity which does relate directly to the ethical problematic. Indeed he describes a hierarchy of values which places primacy on an existential affirmation which bears similarity to certain aspects of the Heideggerian conception of *Eigentlichkeit*. However, for both Sartre and Heidegger, authenticity is bound up with a certain sense of the uncanny and is not to be characterised as a state of ecstasy or beatitude. Both thinkers do however share with Scheler some conception of the incommensurable nature of the goods attached to such states over and above lower or 'average everyday' forms of self-realisation. Finally, whilst Scheler is willing to accept the reality of self-deceptive engagement such as *ressentiment*, and would agree with Nietzsche that such engagement is detrimental to the fullest human flourishing, such engagement need not be typical within Christian practice. One may therefore upon Scheler's analysis renounce certain worldly pleasures whilst simultaneously accepting that these pleasures are of value. For Nietzsche, such asceticism is typically pursued because such goods cannot be attained – the deception consists in convincing oneself that, since they cannot be attained, they must therefore be unworthy.

## 6. Heideggerian Authenticity

Whilst we have seen that Scheler provides a description of those normative aspects of the life-world which arise in relation to its affective potentialities, the Heideggerian normative ideal, centres upon a reorientation of the ‘ethical subject’ towards a lucidity and self transparency which fits well with those interpretations of Aristotelian *theōria* concerned with the achievement of clarity with regard to the ontological structure of any given world. I *cannot* argue that Heidegger shares a conception of ethics which centres upon those norms associated with a Schelerian material ethics of value, since Heidegger explicitly rejects such a position (SZ 293/340).<sup>32</sup> It remains, however, of importance to examine the Heideggerian project in the light of comments made by Kisiel, since clearly Aristotelian influence upon Heidegger was of particular importance during the genesis of *Being and Time*.<sup>33</sup> Heideggerian understanding of essence is of particular interest in this regard, since, as outlined briefly in Chapter One, there are interpretations of Aristotle which marginalize the extent to which his understanding of potentiality and actuality really do constitute a speculative ‘metaphysical biology’. As described, Heidegger primarily finds a *methodological* similarity between Aristotle and phenomenology in a common *indifference* to metaphysical speculation – for both, the truths of philosophy are those which are ‘seen’ (Kisiel 1995, 229). This however leads Heidegger to an alternative reading of Aristotelian essence:

In defining *οὐσία*, Aristotle [...] narrows his options [...] to four fundamental concepts transmitted to him by the *λέγειν* of his tradition

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<sup>32</sup> He also here rejects Kantian formalism (SZ 293/340).

<sup>33</sup> See Kisiel 1995, chapter five ‘What Did Heidegger Find in Aristotle?’

and [...] eliminates the genus and the universal from serious contention [...]. This leaves *τό τί ἦν εἶναι* (no “essence” but “is-sense” for Heidegger) and *ὑποκείμενον* (subject or substrate). Substance as matter yields the indeterminacy of being, but for Aristotle it must be given form to stand by itself. Only when it is understood as relationship-to-form, potency, can matter be a serious contender for the status of “being.” Accordingly, the “is-sense” enfolded in the copula of the assertion becomes the primary locus for the one-in-many senses of *οὐσία*.

(Kisiel 1995, 231-232)

Whilst this is not the place to provide detailed analysis of Heidegger’s thinking in this regard, we can see from the above that his interpretation of Aristotle in relation to the concept of essence is such that it modifies traditional Scholastic interpretations, preserving the shared phenomenological method of description over metaphysical speculation.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Heideggerian insistence that human reality is not to be understood in terms of objectifiable substance, further illustrates those problematic issues which Heidegger perceived in relation to philosophically standard conceptions of essence. Consider the following passage:

But if the Self is conceived ‘only’ as a way of Being of this entity, this seems tantamount to volatilizing the real ‘core’ of Dasein. Any apprehensiveness however which one may have about this gets its nourishment from the perverse assumption that the entity in question

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<sup>34</sup> It is a familiar method within Heideggerian thought to seek to look to more primordial understandings which the metaphysical traditions have corrupted from the time of Plato onwards.

has at bottom the kind of Being which belongs to something present-at-hand, even if one is far from attributing to it the solidity of an occurrent corporeal Thing. Yet man's '*substance*' is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather *existence*.

(SZ 117/153)

In the above sense therefore, Heidegger provides a suggestion that the 'core' of Dasein, or indeed its 'is-sense', is its very 'Being-in-the world'. It is for this reason, and in common with existentialist thought more broadly conceived, that Heidegger embraces a variant of the Hegelian dictum that 'essence is what has been'. Essence, upon this understanding, can only be determined 'backwards' from the commitments that the existentially free entity has made. In this sense, therefore, the existentialist slogan that 'existence precedes essence' commits the individual to a position in which Dasein 'exists' *prior* to self definition. 'Dasein's 'essence' is therefore *to exist first*, since Being-in-the world takes priority to any 'potentiality' or 'nature' understood in the physicalist or present-at-hand sense. The 'is-sense' is therefore to be found in the description of the fundamental ontological categories which comprise Dasein's unique mode of life. It is for this reason that we find Heidegger commenting in later work upon *Being and Time* as follows:

In *Being and Time*, on the basis of the question of the truth of Being, no longer the question of the truth of beings, an attempt is made to determine the essence of man solely in terms of his relationship to Being. That essence was described in a firmly delineated sense as Dasein.

(N IV 141)

From the above we can appreciate how, again, a problem emerges in which existentialist anti-essentialism may be understood adequately in the light of comments which hint strongly towards an *endorsement* of essentialism. We must consider, therefore, the extent to which there is justification to consider the structure of consciousness and human subjectivity in its normative aspects in relation to Aristotelian Functionalism and the Function Argument of *NE* 1098a5-1098a20. By this I mean, we can legitimately question the extent to which the ‘is-sense’ or ‘essence’ of Dasein provides a ‘potentiality’ which may be ‘actualised’ in a normatively ideal manner. Such arguments have been briefly commented upon in Chapter Three where I argue that Jeanson’s reference to bad faith as a ‘disease of consciousness’, in the light of comments made by Fulford and Megone, provide evaluative criteria for a normativity of consciousness. To the extent therefore that *Being and Time* provides an attempt to ‘determine the essence of man solely in terms of his relationship to Being’, we must consider the extent to which Aristotelian conceptions of contemplation indicate that it is man’s orientation towards Being which stands as the primary test of his functional adequacy. Self-deception would therefore stand as the sole impediment to flourishing in the Heideggerian sense whilst conversion to authenticity, to the extent that it can be willed, may be considered as the most perfectly realised *eudaimonia* from an objective standpoint.<sup>35</sup> Polt writes in this regard:

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<sup>35</sup> Although I do not wish to push this terminological distinction too strongly, there is some case I believe for understanding the existentialist conception of essence as referring to ‘meta-essence’. By this I mean that Heidegger may indeed be committed to a strict conception of Dasein which – in the abstract – is essentially self-determining of specific essence. Sartre too endorses such a conception, thus whilst for Sartre man is radically free he is by this very fact essentially incapable of not choosing to be free – such an attempt would itself be an act of spontaneous freedom. This is not to say that those

One point to consider is that ethics need not be based primarily either on rules or on values; it can also be based on the concept of virtue, which in fact has experienced a philosophical revival since Heidegger wrote the “Letter on Humanism”. In some ways, one can even argue that Heidegger himself is close to Aristotle, the great philosopher of virtue. For both, our highest purpose is to become what we essentially are by placing our highest activity: the activity of openness to what is, and to Being itself.

(Polt 1999, 170)

Polt here expresses my central concern within this essay, which is to find some point of contact with ancient conceptions Dasein at its most functionally adequate. Clearly, upon the view here expressed, Polt recognises the role of *higher capacities* in the functionally adequate human life. Such a view bears similarity therefore to that expressed within Scheler’s philosophy, since we find recognition of the centrality of spiritual feelings in the ethically ‘superior’ who affirm the fundamental ‘Yes’ to all existence. Again, such *aretaic* ethical parameters need not embrace any description of specific virtues such as courage or benevolence etc., they do however provide for inclusion of a normative ideal of radical existential self-transparency, a mode of Dasein’s existence described by Heidegger as authentic resolution, in which, as noted earlier: ‘[e]ven the expression *ethos* corresponds to this conception of the being of man; *ethos* means comportment, the proper way of being’ (PS 178/122-23).



### ***The 'eclipse of the self'***

For Heidegger, with some similarity to Nietzsche, authenticity can be grasped most clearly when defined in relation to the self-occlusion against which it is defined.

However, whilst Nietzsche characterised such impediment in relation to historically specific individuals, for Heidegger, such non-ideal existential modes are ubiquitous and indeed, of *structural* relevance within the human condition.<sup>36</sup> For this reason it is not in principle impossible for the Nietzschean position to accept that *ressentiment* may eventually be eradicated at some future point in history when human beings have attained a more thorough self-understanding. However, for Heidegger, certainly from the perspective of so called 'structural readings', such an occurrence would be an impossibility since everyday 'falling' is characteristic of Dasein's default existential mode, For Heidegger, our ordinary self is *necessarily* the self of the indefinite 'anybody' and we emerge, without choice, in a world which has been pre-interpreted for us at the public level. Heidegger thus writes:

This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the "they" is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as they shrink back; we find 'shocking' what they find shocking. The "they",

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<sup>36</sup> The later Heidegger seems to move towards the view that inauthenticity may be more prevalent within the mass consumerist and predominantly *atheistic* contemporary culture with all its deleterious environmental effects and destructive appropriation of the natural environment.

which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum,  
prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.

(SZ 127-6/164)

Even non-conformist behaviour does not in itself provide evidence of a more authentic way of being, since even the paths by which an individual may attempt to go their separate way from 'the herd' (Nietzsche) may at some fundamental level still be found to be a pre-rehearsed and unoriginal situational response. For Heidegger the Other takes on the role of the means by which self-definition is achieved, therefore, definition as a rebel or eccentric, still emerges from a social sphere of interconnected and publicly interpreted relationships. In this sense therefore the individual is objectified by the presence of the Other and only becomes what he is socially by external influence or via the fantasy of 'being watched' in some respect (which largely amounts to the same existential outcome). This state of closure is characterised in terms of 'fleeing' from one's sober recognition of the primordial fate of the human subject – principally the essential finitude of one's existence. In the conclusion to *Division One*, this state of 'fallenness' is characterized by three attributes: idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. When we engage in idle talk we are in some sense alienated from the objects of communication relying instead upon a second hand and cliché ridden form of discourse which ingratiates ourselves with the group at the expense of genuine and original engagement. The dictatorship of *das Man* here emerges as a source of closing off between ourselves and the world since discourse loses its disclosive potential. Curiosity is a related attribute of the inauthentic and comprises a prurient obsession with the exotic and the far away. Such engagement is said to occur as merely a means of stimulation or buzz which comes

from these interests in the alien – not from a genuine desire to appropriate such objects in a disclosive manner, but rather as a source of distraction and dislocation. Ambiguity, again, shares similarities with curiosity and idle talk and consists of an inability to grasp a clear and deep understanding of the sheer mystery of existence. As a consequence of this preoccupation with shallow engagement, genuine thinking is replaced by assumptions regarding that which is appropriate to think (SZ §35-37). *Das Man* does not however represent an independently conceived plot against the individual, rather, as noted, the existential analytic reveals dispersion as an essential structural feature of Dasein's primary engagement, a dispersion in which individuality is *sacrificed* to the banalizing tendencies of *das Man*:

Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force. The care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the "levelling down" of all possibilities of Being.

(SZ 127/165)

It is, however, a peculiar feature of Heidegger's philosophy that he is uncomfortable with providing *moral* disapproval of these levelling tendencies, since, for Heidegger, falling is not essentially a negative category, he writes: 'We would misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves' (SZ 176/220). It is for this very reason that,

for Heidegger, the existential reorientation of authenticity can only be understood against the background of absorption in the 'they-world' and the particularities of everyday coping.

### ***Authentic resolution***

Authenticity, however, consists in a modification of the everyday self in which the given background of public choosing is freely affirmed:

When Dasein [...] brings itself back from the "they", the they-self is modified in an existentiell manner so that it becomes authentic Being-one's-self. This must be accomplished by making up for not choosing. But "making up" for not choosing signifies choosing to make this choice – deciding for a potentiality-for-Being, and making this decision from one's own Self. In choosing to make this choice, Dasein makes possible, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality-for-Being.  
(SZ 268/313)

Thus, 'structurally', Dasein is defined in terms of its *inauthenticity*, whilst authenticity is conceived as the mode of 'choosing to choose', as opposed to any specific denial of publicly sanctioned commitments. It is for this reason that authenticity is not a mere *non-conformity* but rather describes an internal attitude towards behaviour which may or may not conform. 'Choosing to choose' therefore describes the ability of authentic Dasein to accept that it is neither the cause of itself, since its life was not of its own choosing, but additionally, that in its freedom, *it has the power to exclude possibilities.*

Against the background of this groundlessness for which it is still responsible, Dasein must therefore embrace its temporal finitude and termination in death:

Only by the anticipation of death is every accidental and 'provisional' possibility driven out. Only Being-free-for-death, gives Dasein its goal outright and pushes existence into its finitude. Once one has grasped the finitude of one's existence, it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one – those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly – and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its fate. This is how we designate Dasein's primordial historicizing, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.

(SZ 384/435)

Dasein's 'nullity', freedom and temporal finitude therefore provide existential parameters which may be grasped in the authentic mode or evaded in the inauthentic mode. Heidegger describes an *intensification* within the life of Dasein in the authentic mode in the light of this confrontation with the inevitability of death that reduces the importance of the trivial and the everyday. The advantage of this reorientation of Dasein must be that of a certain increased strenuousness with regard to the task of living with disdain for time wasting and activities that merely provide temporary distraction – a condition not dissimilar from the affirmation of the Eternal Return within Nietzsche's philosophy. The inauthentic on the other hand successfully conceal

their finitude treating their time as an inexhaustible resource and therefore failing to involve themselves in a project which provides satisfying situational responses.

***'Inwardly' versus 'outwardly' realised authenticity***

It is important to appreciate however the extent to which a tension exists between interpretations of authenticity which stress its 'inwardly' realised aspects which contradict interpretations which emphasize 'outwardly' realised situational responses.

Regarding the latter description, the authentic individual emerges as someone who possesses a heightened sensitivity to those aspects of current practice that require modification and reinvigoration. This conflicts with readings which, as described, emphasize an essentially private and therefore 'internally' realized authenticity.

Textual evidence for such interpretation can be found in passages such as the following:

The 'world' which is ready-to-hand does not become another one 'in its content', nor does the circle of Others get exchanged for a new one; but both one's Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one's solicitous Being with Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves.

(SZ 297-8/344)

This can be interpreted to imply that authenticity describes an 'inward' reorientation which cannot make any difference to externally observable behavioural characteristics.

The content of the life of authentic Dasein remains unaltered, as does the nexus of

social relations. Likewise the achievement of authenticity cannot be captured by any appeal to a radical dislocation from *das Man*:

If the Being of everyday Being-with-one-another is already different in principle from pure presence-at-hand – in spite of the fact that it is seemingly close to it ontologically – still less can the Being of the authentic Self be conceived as presence-at-hand. Authentic Being-one's-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition which has been detached from the "they", it is rather an existentiell modification of the "they" – of the "they" as an essential existentielle.

(SZ 130/168)

There does therefore seem to be substantial textual evidence in favour of a reading of Heidegger that supports an authenticity which is known only to the individual and which cannot be observed in outward bearing and styles of situational response since there is no radical transformation of the they-self in the authentic mode. However Heidegger does seem to be presenting a conception of authentic resolution which rests upon the necessary priority of inauthentic dispersion over authentic resolution, that is to say, one can become authentic after formative dispersion but never before. There is therefore no sense in which authenticity represents a return to a pure state of being or merely a condition in which you are true to yourself (i.e. by pursuing what you are really interested in). Upon the 'inwardly realised' interpretation of authenticity therefore, we could not find any possible appeal to consequentiality justification for an ethic of authenticity, since, in principle there need not be any observable

behavioural change within the authentic mode. This interpretation certainly coheres with my earlier assertions that Heidegger may best be understood as a thinker whose ethic centres upon the existential and ontological orientation of the normatively ideal human subject. The occlusion which inauthenticity generates may be condemned from the perspective of an ethic which judges the individual against the appropriate or inappropriate realisation of functionally unique ‘capacities’. Since Dasein, is, by Heidegger’s own admission, principally defined in terms of its capacity for existential and ontological clarity, Dasein must find its normative ideal, justified with reference to the Function Argument, in the authentic mode.

Problems occur, however, for any commentator who attempts to interpret authenticity in terms of its ethical implications. Since ‘structural’ falling is by definition *constitutive* of the human condition, normative condemnation would be entirely unjustifiable and responsibility for such a condition would, by definition be incoherent. It is partly for this reason that commentators such as Dreyfus and Rubin have made an appeal to what they term ‘psychological falling’ – a condition which is described as ‘motivational’ and for which normative condemnation might be applicable (Dreyfus and Rubin 1991, 334). Such falling consists essentially of fleeing from one’s own individuality, specifically, fear of the radical individualisation which death implies since no one else can share my death. Heidegger writes:

In the face of its thrownness Dasein flees to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self. This fleeing has been described as a fleeing in the face of the uncanniness which is basically determinate for individualized Being-in-the-world.

(SZ 276/321)



In criticism of Heidegger, Dreyfus and Rubin argue that this motivational characterisation of inauthenticity suffers from a certain internal incoherence.<sup>37</sup> Heidegger either provides a definition of falling *additional* to the structural, or at worst directly *contradicts* the structural account given by the existential analytic provided in *Division One*. The authors are critical of the motivational account because they argue that it leads Heidegger towards a ‘double contradiction’ since either Dasein is essentially inauthentic in order that the ‘nullity’ of its existence be covered up by fleeing, or alternatively if the benefits of authenticity are so estimable, then this does not explain why is it that Dasein still possesses the inescapable tendency to return to the inauthentic state. That is to say, it seems that Heidegger cannot provide a satisfying account as to why when Dasein is no longer prey to the disappointments of inauthentic attempts to impose standards of unconditional meaning it retains a disposition to return towards the inauthentic mode. As Heidegger writes: ‘Along with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized ability-to-be, there goes an unshakable joy’ (SZ 310/358). This clearly leaves the problem as to why Dasein would give up this ‘unshakable joy’ and return to inauthenticity. According to Dreyfus and Rubin, Heidegger provides no reliable explanation as to why inauthenticity remains desirable when Dasein is motivated to give up its self-distorting tendencies.<sup>38</sup> Laying this aside, we can at least appreciate the extent to

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<sup>37</sup> Upon the motivational interpretation the authors argue that Heidegger follows Kierkegaard in an account of the nature of falling as a form of self-deception or cover up (Dreyfus and Rubin 1991, 334).

<sup>38</sup> It is possible to argue however that rather than being guilty of conflating *fleeing* and *falling* Heidegger can be understood to embrace a position in which the essential condition of Dasein as ‘thrown projection’ requires fascination with the world not as a pollution of the original and authentic self but rather as a constitutive requirement of the development of the self. Without formative dispersal under the dictatorship of *das Man* authentic Dasein would simply be a logical and practical impossibility. Upon this reading, structural falling emerges as both the necessary structural formative stage of Dasein’s appearance *and* necessary as long as Dasein exists – since in coping with equipment I am necessarily ‘absorbed’ by the world. However, in addition to the formative and necessarily structural forming we find that psychological falling may emerge as a mode of self-deceptive

which any ethic of authenticity would have to rely upon some conception of ‘willed conversion’ for ascription of ethical content. If the achievement of authenticity is merely an accident, or some kind of ‘talent’, then, whilst an admirable condition, it would have no more moral relevance than musical ability. Whilst musical ability is indeed an excellence, it cannot have the same imperative attached to it as honesty, since such achievements are not within the scope of every person.

### ***Ethical conclusions***

As we have seen, for some interpreters, authenticity emerges as almost a eudaimonistic ethic in which certain existential satisfactions are to be preferred because they lead to a better quality of life to be enjoyed for as long as they can be sustained. This however, leaves the unresolved issue as to why an individual would return to the inauthentic state. What I hope is clear, is that regardless of its externally realised aspects, authenticity should more properly be conceived as of value in itself, arising as the fullest exercise of human capacity. This is a reading which places Heidegger within the Aristotelian ethical framework, which, whilst not placing authenticity among the catalogue of virtues, instead describes a privately realised branch of human flourishing in its normatively ideal ontological orientation. If we cannot agree therefore that authenticity represents a morally desirable state, we can at least appreciate that it is indeed one of the primary human excellences. Furthermore,

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behaviour that is motivated by the desire to evade existential anxiety at that stage in the development of Dasein when such evasion is attainable. Thus the strongest argument for a structural interpretation of falling is that it most comfortably fits with an account of how the individual emerges within the world and thereby attains the autonomy and range of skills which constitute Dasein in its average everydayness. The motivational account is however needed to explain the emergence of authentic resolution since structural inauthenticity considered in isolation points towards the inauthentic mode as an essential and therefore unchangeable feature of Dasein. I would suggest that contrary to Dreyfus and Rubin that structural and psychological falling are in fact compatible.

we can appreciate the extent to which the tension between alternative readings of Aristotle with regard to the concept of *theōria* are also played out within Heideggerian philosophy. Clearly, theory conceived as scientific theory would be representative of the special mode of engagement which Heidegger explicitly rejects as the primary mode of human reality, an engagement characterized by ‘absorbed coping’. Alternative readings of Aristotle find that theory may also be conceived in terms of contemplation, or indeed apprehension of those structures of reality which comprise an existential ontology. I have argued that both Nietzsche and Scheler, although in different ways, both assent to the importance of existential lucidity in the normatively ideal human subject. As explored in Chapters Two and Three, descriptive accounts of essences or species-specific characteristics can be viewed as ‘normative all the way down’, which is to say, to understand an ‘entity’ with regard to its specific nature and most unique capacities is to understand certain prescriptive ‘oughts’ which apply to an entity of such type. For Heidegger, the human condition is characterised in terms of a ‘potentiality’ for reflective engagement upon a fundamental ontology which emphasises human finitude, the groundlessness of the human condition and the radical nature of human freedom. I assert therefore, that it is Dasein’s capacity for contemplation of, and confrontation with, *these* aspects of fundamental ontology which are definitive of the Heideggerian normative ideal, an ideal which can be lost in the inauthentic mode but regained in the authentic. The ‘banalizing tendencies’ therefore stand as an impediment to this more authentic engagement with reality, and represent a occlusion of that lucid self awareness which is indicative of Dasein’s higher ‘capacities’. It is, therefore, only in later work where authenticity is understood in terms of certain externally realised situational responses. This is made possible principally by a certain ‘releasement’ from controlling behaviour, particularly in

relation to the manipulation and domination of the natural environment. Heidegger's mature conception of authenticity therefore moves towards a specific attitude towards nature, and a non-manipulative yet contemplative engagement with the natural world.

With regard to the early Heidegger, we have seen from previous analysis that his conception of functional adequacy coheres quite closely with Aristotelian conceptions of which emphasise the exercise of higher capacities towards existential and ontological 'goods'. In particular such analysis finds that the human subject is in possession of certain latent talents which may realise themselves in a more or less adequate form. Thus whilst Heidegger places impediments to any *moral* evaluation of the authentic state – certainly in relation to any ethic founded upon decision procedure or duty – this state does indeed stand as the achievement of the genuinely *eudaimon*, and is, I believe, best understood as a fundamental human excellence.

## 7. Sartre: Facticity, Transcendence and Authenticity

In accordance with my intention to demonstrate the extent to which *aretaic* ethics may enable clarification of any existentialist ethic I now wish to examine Sartrean conceptions of authenticity and self-deception. From preceding chapters we have seen that the extent to which the Aristotelian Function Argument could apply to an existentialist ethic relies entirely upon there being some conception of human nature. However, superficially, existentialists reject the concept of human nature in its entirety. I have however aimed to justify an appeal to some conception of human essence – or at least a normatively ideal consciousness – justified in relation to a ‘potentiality’ towards ontological clarity. In the case of Heidegger, such ideal orientation primarily consists in embracing human finitude and achieving genuine individuation. For Sartre the issue is more complicated, however, as I hope to explain, there is some evidence that Sartre’s appeal to a ‘universal ‘human condition’ replaces the traditional notion of human nature. In my analysis, I rely upon interpreters such as Jeanson and Santoni, who have both attempted to develop an ethic of authenticity from Sartre’s complex and sometimes contradictory philosophy. Santoni in particular, makes extensive use of Sartre’s notebooks in order to reconstruct a coherent ethical position. Whilst there may be potential shortcomings associated with what essentially amounts to a reconstruction of Sartre’s thought from a collection of unpublished notes, we can at least appreciate the direction in which Sartre may have wished to pursue his existentialist ethic. Any attempt to demonstrate that self-deceptive practices are indicative of some failure with regard to the realisation of certain ‘capacities’ specific to human life or that authenticity may be understood as an exercise of ‘higher’ capacity in fact only appears cogent when we consider some of the writings from the *Notebooks*. Consider the following passages:

Alienation and mediocrity are the major vices. Therefore authentic man never loses sight of the absolute goals of the human condition. He is the pure choice of his absolute goals. These goals are: to save the world (in making being be), to make freedom the ground of the world, to take up creation for his own use and to make the origin of the world absolute through freedom taking hold of itself.

(*CM* 448)

Whilst the characteristics constitutive of the authentic man are different to those found within the Aristotelian conception of the *eudaimon*, we find useful similarities with regard to the role of vice in the closure of human capacity realisation. Sartre places particular emphasis upon the Hegelian notion of historical consciousness terminating in a state in which human history is no longer a mere play of blind forces, but rather in which human consciousness seizes control of the unfolding of history for its own purposes. Here a certain ‘teleology of consciousness’ can be discerned which commits Sartre to a theory of the nature of consciousness in its ideal and non-ideal modes of realisation in which ‘freedom tak[es] hold of itself’.<sup>39</sup> As I aim to explain, self-deception must – if I am right – represent a diminishment of capacity realisation, a position I have enunciated in relation to both Nietzsche and Heidegger. To the extent therefore that it makes sense to speak of human essence or human nature in the existentialist sense, we must return to Prem. 1 in which I outline a position in which phenomenology commits to a methodology justified with reference to the self-transparency of human reality. For this reason, the self-deceived individual, by

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<sup>39</sup> Hegel too promoted a conception of the teleology of consciousness towards a final synthesis of fully realised freedom. His phenomenology of the absolute describes the teleology of consciousness with fully realised freedom as its end state.

definition, retains the capacity for self-transparency. I argue that it is primarily this capacity which is indicative of the normative ideal embraced by Sartre. Such self-perspicuity can additionally have influence upon specific forms of behaviour, such as racism, which I will additionally examine.

### ***Descriptive ontology and the nihilating function of the for-itself***

As a preliminary to my discussion, I wish first to explicate the ontological commitments which lead Sartre to describe human reality in terms of a propensity towards self-deception. We find that it is Sartre's fundamental assertion that consciousness belongs to a different ontological category from that of the physical world. It is from this assumption that he is able to develop a clear account of the conditions for free action and the autonomy of the will as displayed in the consciousness of the authentic individual. This ontological distinction is founded on the conception of self-consciousness that Sartre brings to bear via his application of descriptive phenomenological methods. He demonstrates that any conscious mental state that does not include this element of self-consciousness is incoherent because it would generate what can be described as the absurdity of an unconscious conscious state (*EN* xxviii). Additionally, Sartre is able to grant consciousness a special status as both 'pure spontaneity' and radical freedom. From this position Sartre generates his descriptive dual ontology of the 'for-itself' and the 'in-itself'. Here, however, we must be careful not to attribute any 'dual world' hypothesis to Sartre, since he rejects the Cartesian conception of consciousness (the for-itself) as substance. For Sartre, the duality can be understood in terms of types of descriptive fact. Whilst physical entities 'are what they are', consciousness 'is what it is not and is not what it is'.

Consciousness, however, stands as an ontological category distinct from the plenum

of Being which Sartre describes as the 'in-itself'. He writes of the in-itself: 'It is *itself*. It is an immanence which can not realize itself, an affirmation which cannot affirm itself, an activity which can not act, because it is glued to itself' (*EN* xli). Therefore it is not accurate to describe the in-itself as 'matter' or even 'pure extension' in the Cartesian sense, since to speak of matter is already to have thematized the in-itself with specifically human interests – that is to say the interests found within the Scientific World View. For Sartre the in-itself presents itself as an undifferentiated mass. Here Sartre draws upon aspects of Cartesian ontology in which consciousness shares some similarities with Descartes' conception of 'thinking substance' (for Sartre consciousness is not a substance) in contradistinction to the extended and undifferentiated plenum. The perception of differentiation within the plenum is thus only manifest to the conscious subject since it is only via consciousness that distinctions between objects – rooted in the interests and nexus of signification within which human life – comes into being:

Consciousness has nothing substantial, it can not be conceived as a substance, it is pure "appearance" in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which it appears. But it is precisely because consciousness is pure appearance, because it is total emptiness (since the entire world is outside it) – it is because of this identity of appearance and existence within it that it can be considered as the absolute.

(*EN*.xxxii)

The for-itself is not therefore an independent substance as conceived within the Cartesian tradition and yet it is said to be utterly transcendent from the in-itself as the



source of nihilation and the origin of value. Consciousness, therefore, never experiences itself as co-extensive with Being since there always remains an implied separation between consciousness and objects perceived. Whilst Sartre endorses a view which asserts that without the presence of consciousness the in-itself is without significance, it does not follow therefore that he embraces a philosophical idealism which denies the 'reality of the external world'. Instead he presents a position in which the 'violence' perpetuated by consciousness, in imposing unity, differentiation and significance upon the in-itself, comes about when a thoroughly real and objective 'plenum' of being is held subject to a multiplicity of interpretations in which the conscious subject makes choices from the available data and organises such data into a signification which does not in itself possess independent existence. Analogously, if we stare at cloud formations, we may be able to find intelligible shapes in the clouds, but, we do not in this circumstance, have to assert, that since the shapes are in some sense mind-dependent, that the cloud formations themselves have no independent existence. The shapes have an existence dependent upon consciousness whilst the clouds 'in-themselves' have existence *independent* of consciousness. The shapes perceived have a reality to the human subject sustained by the nihilating function of the for-itself. It is here, as I shall subsequently explain, that concepts such as 'destruction' come into being. Such concepts cannot arise without both negation and temporality, two functions within the structure of consciousness as understood within the existentialist tradition.

The capacity to negate is however considered to be responsible for the unique capacity to both imagine and to create value. Value in this sense is rather like the concept of nothingness. It has no positive being yet arises from the subjectivity of the

human agent who bestows such qualities arising from the entanglement of the for-itself with the undifferentiated plenum of the in-itself. Sartre writes:

No emotional apprehension of an object as frightening, irritating, saddening, etc. can arise against the background of a complete alteration of the world. For an object to appear formidable, indeed, it must be realized as an immediate and magical presence confronting the consciousness. For example, this face that I see ten yards away behind the window must be lived as an immediate, present threat to myself.... The window is no longer grasped as 'that which would first have to be opened', it is grasped simply as the frame of the frightful visage. And in a general way, areas form themselves around me out of which the horrible makes itself felt. For the horrible is not possible in the deterministic world of the usable.

*(ETE 88)*

Common to Heidegger, therefore, Sartre explores a description of human subjectivity which places interest in the human life-world whilst marginalising the Scientific World View. Upon this reading, the Scientific World View of the deterministic and the usable emerges as a special mode of apprehension, and not one which includes phenomenally intrinsic values. In this sense, common experience, as mentioned throughout my essay, emerges as essentially normative and structured by and through value apprehension. Thus, the violence perpetrated by the for-itself upon the in-itself via its nihilating function provides, not only distinction between objects, for instance; in the apprehension of the table as distinct from the chair, but also typically, with

some apprehension of value apparently pertaining to this world. Such value is however ultimately dependent on consciousness in its projective character. Sartre's axiology consists therefore of recognition of the value creating function of nihilation:

Value is everywhere and nowhere ... it is simply lived as the concrete meaning of that lack which makes my present being. Thus reflective consciousness can properly be called moral consciousness, since it cannot arise without at the same time disclosing values.

(EN 95)

Sartre therefore posits a peculiar thesis in which value comes into 'being' via the negating influence of consciousness. Again, Sartre demonstrates influences from the Gestalt psychologists, in particular, by his appeal to the 'synthetic unity' of consciousness and its objects. For instance, in the case of the contemplation of a painting such as the Mona Lisa, any technical analysis of the colour patches upon the canvas would never reach that aspect of the object which is more than the sum of its parts – that is the painting conceived as a whole. Taken further, my expectation of meeting a certain individual at a certain location can be satisfied, in which case the person is there; or frustrated, the person is not there, however this experience of absence – an entirely negative condition – does, according to Sartre, *belong to reality*.

He writes:

When I enter this café to search for Pierre, there is formed a synthetic organization of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear. This organization of the café as the

ground is an original nihilation. [...] This nihilation is given to my intuition; I am witness to the successive disappearance of all the objects which I look at – in particular the faces, which detain me for an instant (Could this be Pierre?) and which as quickly decompose precisely because they “are not” the face of Pierre.

(EN 9-10)

We are able to assert on Sartre’s account of the experience of presence and absence that both are conditionally dependent upon consciousness forming the ‘synthetic unity’ as described. Non-being is not, however, for Sartre merely a conceptual projection of consciousness upon the raw data provided by the in-itself, and yet it does arise from human expectation. Whilst external existence of a man-made artefact may not be in doubt – the meaning of the artefact and the uses to which it is put are, according to Sartre, *dependent upon human consciousness*. Such an artefact is not therefore merely subjective. Consciousness is therefore a ‘witness’ to those negativities that without consciousness would not be apprehended. Sartre gives the example of the destruction of the mountain due to an earthquake. Here the destruction wreaked upon the mountain is not strictly speaking a fundamental feature of the in-itself:

“Destruction” presents the same structure as “the question”. In a sense, certainly, man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished. A geological plication, a storm do not destroy – or at least they do not destroy directly; they merely modify the distribution of masses of beings. There is no less after the storm than before. There

is something else. Even this expression is improper, for to posit otherness there must be a witness who can retain the past in some manner and compare it to the present in the form of no longer. In the absence of this witness, there is being before as after the storm – that is all.

(*EN 8*)

In Nature there is a release of tension and redistribution of particles. It is only to the conscious subject that the issue of fragility and destructibility come into being via the interests and expectations of an entity which is quite literally ‘for-itself’ (e.g. interested in its self-preservation). Such consciousness is however prior to conceptualised self-awareness, that is to say, the witness of non-being is not aware of itself *as* a witness, and thus non-being cannot be reduced merely to the awareness of non-being. Such nothingness can be described as concrete rather than abstract. That is to say, the expectation of meeting with a friend at a certain location when frustrated by their not turning up, is entirely different to the abstract non-being of a square circle. In the former case the expectation is entirely real and the actual experience of absence is thus entirely diffused within the experience of the meeting place. Each face I encounter arises as ‘not my friend’ and so forth. The abstract non-being in the latter example is merely a nonsensical object and not therefore one we expect to encounter.<sup>40</sup> We can describe the former description of absence as a form of non-being which therefore ‘haunts being’, without wishing to sound excessively pretentious it may be useful (although Sartre does not describe them as such) to speak of absences as ‘nothings which are positively realized’. They are in effect

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<sup>40</sup> Although it is still capable of bearing descriptive properties such as ‘impossible object’.

experientially 'real' as opposed to abstract. Sartre's notion of value is a feature of the life-world that shares a similar epistemological status as 'real non-beings'. We find here a methodology common within the phenomenological movement in which scientific reductionism is rejected in favour of a descriptive and non-reductive methodology. Reality is not sought in the mathematical description of the motion of elementary particles, but in the structure of any given life-world.

For Sartre, we cannot ignore the role of negation nor can we ignore the reality within which nothingness arises, since this is the very background of the primary relationship to reality from which the for-itself emerges in its primordial aspect. Indeed the very need to escape primordial anxiety forms the background upon which denial of radical freedom and therefore denial of responsibility in the ethical sense can first be seen to emerge. Here Sartre endorses the existentialist distinction between anguish and fear. Fear is aimed at an external object such as a vicious dog for instance, whilst anguish involves an existential orientation towards the sheer gratuitousness and absurdity of human existence. Anxiety arises in moments of genuine self-transparency when one sees clearly that one is responsible entirely for the projects, values and commitments one has engaged upon. That is to say, the individual in anguish comprehends in a quite visceral manner the essentially contingent nature of life commitments and therefore grasps the fragility of the commitments in a free and open future which could become radically modified:

[A]nguish is distinguished from fear in that fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself. Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over. A situation provokes fear if there is a possibility

of my life being changed from without; my being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation.

(EN 29)

In relation to the issue of value in particular, it is a feature, certainly of the philosophy of early Sartre, to deny entirely any philosophical appeal to metaphysical value objectivity. Value objectivity would have to be rejected upon the basis of the account already given of the for-itself in its most primordial aspect. We have established from our previous analysis of Sartrean philosophy, that human reality is characterized in its most essential aspects as one which is outside of any causal process. Metaphysical value objectivity would therefore demand an unacceptable denial of the freedom of consciousness to adopt and endorse values by its own volition.<sup>41</sup> Sartre writes:

I emerge alone and in anguish confronting the unique and original project which constitutes my being; all the barriers, all the guard rails collapse, nihilated by the consciousness of my freedom. I do not have nor can I have recourse to any value against the fact that it is I who sustain values in being. Nothing can ensure me against myself, cut off from the world and from my essence by this nothingness which I am. I have to realise the meaning of my world and of my essence; I make my decision concerning them – without justification and without excuse.

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<sup>41</sup> I suppose values could be objective but freely endorsed or rejected. There must be some room within Sartre's philosophy for a world which offers resistance to the interpretations that I place upon it. For instance there are objective standards for evaluating the artistic value of the *Mona Lisa* which would be ridiculous to ignore. However presumably one could accept that the painting were a fine example of its genre but still fail to find personal value in it. Here the issue of the non-historical and non-communitarian conception of the self come to the fore which some commentators including Gill and Taylor have criticized for being excessively disjointed from its society and historical processes.

(EN 39)

It is here that the central issues relating to consciousness in its authentic and inauthentic modes arise. When consciousness confuses itself / deceives itself with the causally determined flux of the in-itself, that is to say when consciousness takes flight in a self-interpretation which transforms the for-itself into a mere mode of the in-itself, then this is where inauthentic resolution is said to arise. It is the realization that a 'nothingness' separates me from my actions that leads to the state of anguish which indicates consciousness in its authentically realized mode. Inauthenticity is precisely the opposite of this state. Rather than confronting one's anguish, the inauthentic subject successfully 'lies' to themselves by concealing their freedom via a process of allowing themselves to become persuaded by non-persuasive evidence.

It is here that Sartre's belief that 'existence precedes essence' is of particular importance; a position made most clearly within *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Here, we find that *Dasein* is subject to a number of existential temptations which undermine the achievement of a fully human life (EH 45). However, as he writes:

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and the he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.

(EH 28)



Here, I must make appeal to the distinction between ontological and ontic conceptions of essence. I believe that Sartre's rejection of essence in this sense refers to the ontic conception – a conception of essence justified in relation to the 'natural attitude – which may be distinguished from essence revealed in the phenomenological attitude from which the lucid self awareness achieves existential clarity and therefore authenticity in the existentialist sense. Consider the later passage in relation to this:

[A]lthough it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence that can be called human nature, there is nevertheless a human universality of *condition*. It is not by chance that the thinkers of to-day are so much more ready to speak of the condition than of the nature of man. By his condition they understand, with more or less clarity, all the limitations which a priori define man's fundamental situation in the universe. His historical situations are variable: man may be born a slave in a pagan society, or may be a feudal baron, or a proletarian. But what never vary are the necessities of being in the world, of having to labour and to die there.

(EH 39)

Indeed; the ambiguities surrounding Sartre's conception of a universal human condition led to the following questioning from M. Naville in the subsequent discussion:

Man presents himself as a choice to be made. Very well. He is, first and foremost, his existence at the present instant, and he stands outside of natural determinism [...] I ask myself whether “existence” taken in this sense is not another form of the concept of human nature which, for historical reasons, is appearing in a novel disguise [...] Your conception of the human condition is a substitute for human nature, just as you substitute lived experience for common experience or scientific experiment.

*(EH 49)*

Referring back to Sartre’s lecture in which he notes ‘what never vary are the necessities of being in the world, of having to labour and to die there’, we can appreciate the extent to which these necessities which apply to human beings – which could be expanded to include the fact that our life is not of our choosing and that we are the origin of value within the world – provides the parameters from which excellence in the existentialist sense may be ascertained. It is for this reason that Sartre is able to comment:

One can judge a man by saying that he deceives himself. Since we have defined the situation of man as one of free choice, without excuse and without help, any man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a self-deceiver. One may object: “But why should he not choose to deceive himself?” I reply that it is not for me to judge him morally, but I define his self-deception as an error. The self-deception is evidently a

falsehood, because it is a dissimulation of man's complete liberty of commitment.

*(EH 42)*

We find Sartre in a position in which, whilst he denies any moral judgement, the self-deceiver is found wanting in relation to evaluative parameters, if only because the deception is representative of a contradiction within the unity of consciousness. Sartre expands upon this theme:

[...] I say that it is also a self-deception if I choose to declare that certain values are incumbent upon me; I am in contradiction with myself if I will these values and at the same time say that they impose themselves upon me.

*(EH 42)*

As we have seen from previous analysis, for Sartre, it is a fact of the human condition that values are sustained and arise through human subjectivity. Any attempt to attribute values as given features of the world arises thorough the spirit of seriousness, which as I shall explain, is one of the primary forms of bad faith in Sartrean philosophy. To live in such a manner is for Sartre to live in fear of the human condition. He adds:

[...] I can pronounce a moral judgement. For I declare that freedom, in respect of concrete circumstances, can have no other end and aim but itself; and when once a man has seen that values depend upon himself,

in that state of forsakenness he can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values.

(EH 43)

He presents therefore an ethic founded upon freedom. The individual must both embrace their own essential freedom and the freedom of others in order to achieve the kind of normatively ideal consciousness which any ethic of authenticity demands. As Sartre concludes:

[W]e remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or some peculiar realisation, that man can realise himself as truly human.

(EH 45)

Similar themes are developed in the notebooks. We find an ethic, justified in relation to a conception of the human condition which binds the individual to some conception of human excellence, principally, the achievement of self perspicuity and indeed, to recognise rather than evade the human condition as an alternative to engaging in self-occluding strategies.

### ***'Structural' bad faith***

From the above, Sartre develops particular interest in a human reality which is characterised as essentially disconcerted. The Sartrean axiology is for instance one in

which human reality is burdened by awareness that value comes in to the world only through itself and for which it is uniquely responsible. However, as with Heidegger, Sartre's position regarding the extent to which authenticity and self-deception possess ethical consequences is unclear. Indeed, within *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre presents bad faith as a *structural* aspect of the human condition, which, as I have argued, tends to marginalise any ethical dimension. According to Santoni, later conceptions move towards the *motivational* model of *willed conversion* from bad faith into authenticity, clearly a position generating ethical implications (Santoni 1995, 154-160). Furthermore, Sartre's notebooks point towards a conception of authenticity which finds its *terminus* in good actions.

Structural readings of bad faith originate with the famous example of the woman who, whilst in a situation with a man which requires confrontation with the implicit sexual content of their meeting, instead prefers to maintain herself in denial (*EN* 55-56). Her hand sits in his hand like an object as she retreats into herself and views the hand as a mere object within the external world. Such evasion is according to Sartre taken in denial of the man's sexual advance. Bad faith here arises as what might be described as an exploitation of the ambiguity set before her. It is a state characterized by not wanting to know that which one really does know, in this circumstance therefore the 'lie' here instantiated, is at the non-thematic stage of consciousness, a stage which indeed demonstrates how to some extent Sartre's conception of pre-reflective consciousness replaces the Freudian conception of the unconscious, at least with regard to the nature and intelligibility of self-deception. For this reason, this type of self-deception is characterised by the following principles:

- a) The awareness that the deceiver keeps from themselves is non-propositional

- b) Such awareness has therefore yet to be thematized by self-reflection.

Poellner explains the importance of this distinction as follows:

Pre-reflective consciousness is the most basic mode of awareness of our own conscious mental states. [...] In reflective self-consciousness we *attend* to our own mental state; this attending or thematizing an experience is a necessary condition of the possibility of the experience being presented to us as an *object*. [...] We are, and must be, able to be aware of them prior to reflection [...] which is to say that they are then phenomenally conscious, but *not* as intentional objects.

(Poellner 2004, 57-58)

Bad faith is possible according to the phenomenological theory here described because the individual is able to keep a certain 'knowledge' concealed from themselves by maintaining this peripheral and non-thematic mode and thus failing to reflect upon some feature of phenomenal experience. Poellner continues:

*Any conceptual* mental content is, necessarily, a representation of an intentional object in Husserl's sense. This entails that in pre-reflective consciousness experiences are presented nonconceptually and thus cannot be objects of propositional attitudes such as belief, and thus *a fortiori* cannot be known

(Poellner 2004, 58)

The subject engaging in bad faith exploits, in effect, an ambiguity which is of their own making, since failing to attend to some feature of the non-thematic background opens up the possibility that two conflicting thoughts may be sustained within the unity of the conscious subject. Such engagement emerges as a strategy employed to achieve certain satisfactions, in particular, to suppress the anxiety which may be generated from the realisation that the human condition is essentially *non-self-coincidence*, burdened with the responsibility of generating and sustaining values. For Sartre, the for-itself tends to crave the same kind of existence as a material object – e.g. an entity which fully coincides with itself – due to an experienced ‘lack’ or nullity which must be ‘filled’ with being. Bad faith is therefore largely the outcome of *fear of the human condition*. It is for this reason that the distinction between facticity and transcendence is of relevance. For Sartre, our facticity includes all inherited and concrete features of our social and bodily life as these are taken up by consciousness (i.e. in terms of their significance), whilst our transcendence consists of our consciousness, and, as explained above, in particular the separation that exists ‘between’ consciousness and pure contingency. Bad faith is therefore said to arise from an attempt to make our transcendence into a facticity. Sartre writes:

[T]hanks to transcendence, I am not subject to all that I am. I do not even have to discuss the justice of the reproach. As Suzanne says to Figaro, “To prove that I am right would be to recognize that I can be wrong.” I am on a plane where no reproach can touch me since what I really am is my transcendence. I flee from myself, I escape myself, I leave my tattered garment in the hands of the fault-finder. But the

ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I am my transcendence in the mode of being a thing.

*(EN 57)*

Freedom is, in effect, treated as facticity by the self-deceived agent.

In bad faith human reality is constituted as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is [.] Let us take an example. A homosexual [...] has an obscure but strong feeling that a homosexual is not a homosexual as this table is a table or as this red haired man is red haired.... He would be right actually if he understood the phrase 'I am not a pederast' in the sense of 'I am not what I am.' [...] But instead he slides surreptitiously towards a different connotation of the word 'being'. He understands 'not being' in the sense of 'not-being-in-itself'. He lays claim to 'not being a pederast' in the sense in which this table is not an inkwell. He is in bad faith.

But the champion of sincerity [...] demands of the guilty one that he constitute himself as a thing ['a homosexual'], precisely in order no longer to treat him as a thing. And this contradiction is constitutive of the demand of sincerity.

[...] This explains the truth recognized by all that one can fall into bad faith through being sincere [...]

In the final analysis the goal of sincerity and the goal of bad faith are not so different.

*(EN 63)*



It is here in relation to such issues that commentators such as Santoni have indicated that in the early Sartre good faith or sincerity *do not* in fact represent his conception of authenticity since good faith emerges here as a *variety* of bad faith. The demand to convince the homosexual to admit to himself what he really is, remains a demand to objectify himself in such a way that, rather like the example of the woman in the café, a ‘gestalt shift’ is achieved in which rather than finding self-definition through one’s actions, one’s actions are defined in relation to some projected feature of the in-itself (Santoni 1995, 8). For Santoni both good faith and bad faith are understood as representative of pre-reflective engagement, whilst authenticity, in contradistinction to good faith, is representative of a *willed conversion* and entry into ethical consciousness. To embrace oneself as radical freedom is inseparable from embracing oneself as fully responsible for the reality one creates and the values one endorses.

Santoni writes:

What Sartre is suggesting, essentially, is that the project of sincerity sets for itself an ideal or task that is impossible to fulfil. The meaning of this ideal “contradicts” the very structure of consciousness. For to aim “to be what one is” is to violate one’s consciousness as “being what one is not and not being what one is.” As a continued attempt to adhere to oneself, “total, constant sincerity” is by nature “a constant effort to dissociate oneself from oneself.” An individual frees himself from his “essential” being (freedom) by that act through which he constitutes himself an object for himself.

(Santoni 1995, 8)

For Santoni good faith and sincerity are not to be equated with authenticity. I am broadly in agreement with such interpretation. Generally, two aspects of the nature of bad faith have been itemized: first as denial of radical freedom and second: failure to accept responsibility. Clearly, the homosexual demonstrates both of these. However, in the light of Santoni's analysis, we find that the project of sincerity itself provides an additional category of bad faith in that it is indicative of a misapprehension of the existential structure of consciousness. The attempt to coincide with oneself is a futile act, since, as noted, consciousness is *essentially* non-coincidence with itself.

Commentators such as Santoni argue that Sartre in fact presents an interpretation of the Husserlian distinction between the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude, but with ethical implications. For Sartre, the natural attitude would here be representative of the 'spirit of seriousness', a term which as far as I can determine, occurs throughout his period of creative philosophical output extending throughout *Being and Nothingness* and also arising as a theme within the posthumously published *War Diaries*:

One is serious when one doesn't even envisage the possibility of leaving the world. When the world – with its Alps and its rocks, its crusts and its oozes, its peatbogs and its deserts: all those obstinate immensities – holds one fast on every side. When one gives oneself the same type of existence as the rock: solidity, inertia, poacity. A serious man is a coagulated consciousness. One is serious when one denies mind. Those unbelievers Plato speaks of in the Sophist who believe only in what they touch – they're the ancestors of the spirit of

seriousness. It goes without saying that the serious man, being of the world, doesn't have the least consciousness of his freedom, or rather, if he does have consciousness of it, in terror he buries it deep within him, like some filth. Like the rock or the atom or like the star he's determined. And if the spirit of seriousness is characterised by the application with which it considers the consequences of its acts, that's because, for it, all is consequence.

(*CDG* 326)

Clearly Sartre here describes a particular form of bad faith, however the extent to which Sartre's examples in *Being and Nothingness* demonstrate the spirit of seriousness is unclear. Whilst the term 'seriousness' refers to a form of bad faith, it is a form which can be distinguished from the attempts described above, in that it is specifically concerned with a failure to appreciate the extent to which one is the ground and sustaining element of the very possibility of values. Passages from *Being and Nothingness* illuminate this issue:

The serious attitude involves starting from the world and attributing more reality to the world than to oneself, at the very least the serious man confers reality upon himself to the degree to which he belongs to the world.

(*EN* 580)

'Seriousness' understood as a technical term in this context arises as a very specific mode of consciousness in which consciousness rests within the natural attitude and thus believes itself to be fully continuous with the law-like relationships which exist in the natural world. A moral code or moral law would, in the spirit of seriousness, be adopted as a refuge from an essential aspect of the human condition. Earlier in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre observes:

Anguish is opposed to the mind of the serious man who apprehends values in terms of the world and who resides in the reassuring, materialistic substantiation of values. In the serious mood I define myself in terms of the object by pushing aside a priori as impossible all enterprises in which I am not engaged at the moment. The meaning which my freedom has given to the world, I apprehend as coming from the world and constituting my obligations.

(EN 39-40)

So finding pre-existing values in the world is, for Sartre, a symptom of this 'diseased' state of consciousness, one defined as 'serious' in contradistinction from an authentic consciousness. The serious man wants to coincide with his natural essence and to perceive the essence of others as a fixed feature of the world in the same way that atoms are attributed with essential qualities and law-like motion. The serious man in effect fails to experience his own consciousness as a free consciousness, he confuses the output of his own consciousness with the input of the external world. Furthermore, he fails to attribute the same dignity to the Other also. As Sartre observes:

The serious man himself is merely a consequence – an unbearable consequence – never a principle. He’s caught for all time in a series of consequences, and sees only consequences without end. That’s why money – sign of all things in the world, consequence and of consequence – is the object par excellence of seriousness. In short, Marx posited the first dogma of seriousness when he asserted the priority of the object over the subject. And man is serious when he forgets himself, when he makes the subject into an object, when he takes himself for a radiation derived from the world: engineers, doctors, physicists, biologists are serious.

*(CDG 326)*

Sartre seems therefore to attribute any science which assumes a strict determinism of consciousness to be in itself a victim of the serious spirit. Seriousness arises therefore as the consideration of the consciousness of the subject as mere epiphenomenon – a reductionistic doctrine which seeks to explain all aspects of conscious life in terms of the law-like relations of elemental and mechanistic properties. Clearly the variety of naturalism described in Chapters Two and Three of my essay would it seems constitute an example of this very tendency. Aristotelian philosophy finds the entity in question open to evaluative appraisal upon the basis of the extent to which it realises its species-specific capacities, and yet Sartre’s philosophy is here riddled with implicit evaluative judgment with regard to the extent to which consciousness either heroically confronts the human condition or lives in flight from the human condition.

### ***'Conversion' to the phenomenological attitude***

I have so far predominantly dealt with those conditions which, according to Sartre, *impede* the achievement of lucid self-awareness in the authentic mode. Whilst authenticity, defined negatively, consists primarily in the cessation of self-deceptive behaviour, Sartre does indeed endorse a positively defined conception of authenticity with similarity to the Heideggerian conception:

When I am in the inauthentic mode of the 'they' the world offers me a sort of impersonal reflection of my possibilities, in the form of instruments which belong to 'everybody', and which belong to me in so far as I am everybody: ready-made clothes, public transport, parks, gardens, common land, shelters made for *anyone* who needs them, and so on ... The inauthentic state, which is my ordinary state in so far as I have not realised my conversion to authenticity, reveals to me my 'being with', not as the relation of one unique personality with another, not as the mutual connection of 'irreplaceable beings', but as a total interchangeability of the terms of the relation. I am not opposed to the other, for I am not 'me'; instead, we have the social unity of the 'they' .... Authenticity and individuality have to be earned: I shall be my own authenticity only if, under the influence of the call of conscience, I launch out towards death, with resolution and decision, as towards my own particular possibility. At this moment I reveal myself to myself in authenticity, and I raise others along with myself towards the authentic.

(EN 246)

We find themes which in particular relate to the achievement of genuine individuation. In the inauthentic mode of the 'they', human reality avoids confrontation with its essential finitude and engages in distraction. Such evasion amounts to an evasion of the human condition. Clearly, it is only to the extent that authenticity may be willed that it represents an ethic of normative relevance. It is for this reason that Santoni has interpreted Sartre as developing Husserl's distinction of the natural and the phenomenological attitude, conceiving the movement from the former to the latter in terms of an ethical conversion (Santoni 1995, 108). Authenticity considered as a willed conversion is an idea primarily developed by Jeanson but which Santoni also tends to favour.<sup>42</sup> As discussed, human reality is characterised in terms of its flight from its own intrinsic nature – that of ambiguity and lack of self-coincidence. Bad faith thus primarily comprises the attempt for consciousness to achieve the same kind of being as the in-itself. For Jeanson, the relinquishment from this 'natural attitude' occurs in the adoption of the 'phenomenological attitude' – a gestalt switch in which freedom and lack of self-coincidence are embraced rather than evaded and entry to the moral plane is achieved. Thus Jeanson writes: 'The human condition may be either ignored in *bad faith* or understood and lived in such an effort at *authenticity*' (Jeanson 1980, 219). Such choosing, it is emphasised, is not a permanent achievement, it is rather best understood as 'a point of departure' (Jeanson 1980, 218). Authenticity is therefore a state which can never be completed and which according to Santoni 'marks the movement by which human reality reflectively reclaims its freedom and

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<sup>42</sup> Sartre's reference to an authenticity which is 'earned' suggests (according to the terminological distinctions made within Chapter Six) that his conception of authenticity is 'motivated', comprising therefore what has been described as a 'willed conversion' to authenticity. Indeed, there are revolutionary implications also which embrace an externally realised authenticity which terminates in radical action in 'rais[ing] others along with myself towards the authentic' (EN 246). Themes of radical responsibility are echoed here, in which 'we remind man that there is no legislator but himself' (EH, 45).

responsibility and takes on the humanizing project of authenticity' (Santoni 1995, 108). It is for this reason that in *Anti-Semite and Jew* Sartre is able to represent the anti-Semite as quintessentially inauthentic:

The existence of the Jew merely permits the anti-Semite to stifle his anxieties at their inception by persuading himself that his place in the world has been marked out in advance, that it awaits him, and that tradition gives him the right to occupy it. Anti-Semitism, in short, is fear of the human condition. The anti-Semite is a man who wishes to be a pitiless stone, a furious torrent, a devastating thunderbolt – anything except a man.

(*RQJ* 54)

Consciousness may not be a substance and essences may not inhere within it, yet consciousness – according to Jeanson's 'approved reading' – is open to ascription of preferable and non-preferable modes of realisation. Thus, the type of bad faith engaged in by the anti-Semite would come under the description as 'a disease of consciousness'. Of course disease in this sense is partially metaphorical, but it clearly captures the dysfunctional ascription which Sartre wishes to make. As Santoni writes:

[I]t is clear that human consciousness, because of its non-coincidence with itself – its ontological "dis-ease" – exists "naturally" in bad faith and, [...] may either decide *reflectively* to consolidate its bad faith or convert to authenticity.

(Santoni 1995, 108)



We find, therefore, that the Husserlian category of the 'natural attitude' adopts a normative aspect. For Sartre, unlike Husserl, such an attitude is the origin of a *pathology* of consciousness. Moreover, such ideologies are parasitic upon the serious world view which proceeds from a certain blindness to the nature of radical freedom both within ourselves and others. Sartre does therefore present a normative ideal, albeit endorsed via a form of idealism, in which consciousness possesses priority over those forces which act upon it – and yet consciousness is an efficacious force all the same. In what might be termed as 'the spirit of playfulness' man recognises that element of the world – or at least of his life world – which he himself has brought to it.

Thus:

It's not possible to grasp oneself as consciousness, without thinking that life is a game. For what is a game after all, but an activity of which man is the first origin: whose principles man himself ordains and which can have consequences only according to the principles ordained. But as soon as man grasps himself as free, and wishes to use his freedom, all his activity is a game: he's its first principle; he escapes the world by his nature; he himself ordains the value and rules of his acts, and agrees to pay up only according to the rules he has himself ordained and defined. Whence the diminished reality of the world and the disappearance of seriousness.

(*CDG* 326)

In the light of the Sartrean axiology, which I have briefly examined, we can see how Sartre criticises the serious attitude primarily in terms of the orientation one has towards one's values. Such consciousness is inauthentic therefore to the extent that it fails to represent any adequate grasp of the existential structure of the subject's life-world. The serious man is mistaken in his orientation towards reality which loosely parallels previous assent to the Aristotelian concept of *theōria* as seen in my examination of Nietzsche, Scheler and Heidegger. Consciousness retains the capacity to understand itself as the negation which provides the subjective ground of evaluative phenomena such as the concept of 'destruction', yet such capacity remains *unrealised* in the inauthentic mode. Relating these observations to previous examination of the distinction between a privately and a publicly realised ethic, we find that at this stage at least, Sartre provides merely a condemnation of failure at the level of privately realised disvalue. It is interesting to consider therefore the extent to which he envisioned bad faith to have wider public effects.

### ***Dilemmas of practical deliberation and public concern***

Whilst I have examined aspects of those internally realised features of authentic conversion, clearly the style of authenticity here endorsed has little, if any, outward effects expressed in publicly realised ethical pursuits. It is for this reason that commentators such as Frondizi point to a weakness in the ethics of the early Sartre for producing an ethical position that is almost entirely incapable of discriminating between correct and incorrect conduct (Frondizi 1981, 375). In particular, he is referring to the famous passage within *Existentialism is a Humanism*, in which Sartre advises a young man:

As an example by which you may the better understand this state of abandonment, I will refer to the case of a pupil of mine, who sought me out in the following circumstances. His father was quarrelling with his mother and was also inclined to be a “collaborator”; his elder brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940 and this young man, with a sentiment somewhat primitive but generous, burned to avenge him. His mother was living alone with him, deeply afflicted by the semi-treason of his father and by the death of her eldest son, and her one consolation was in this young man. But he, at this moment, had the choice between going to England to join the Free French Forces or of staying near his mother and helping her to live. He fully realised that this woman lived only for him and that his disappearance – or perhaps his death – would plunge her into despair. He also realised that, concretely and in fact, every action he performed on his mother’s behalf would be sure of effect in the sense of aiding her to live, where as anything he did in order to go and fight would be an ambiguous action which might vanish like water into sand and serve no purpose. For instance, to set out for England he would have to wait indefinitely in a Spanish camp on the way through Spain; or, on arriving in England or in Algiers he might be put into an office to fill up forms. Consequently, he found himself confronted by two very different modes of action; the one concrete, immediate, but directed towards only one individual; and the other an action addressed to an end infinitely greater, a national collectivity, but for that very reason ambiguous – and it might be frustrated on the way. At the same time

he was hesitating between two kinds of morality; on the one side the morality of sympathy, of personal devotion and, on the other side, a morality of wider scope but of more debatable validity. He had to choose between those two. What could help him choose? Could the Christian doctrine? No. Christian doctrine says: Act with Charity, love your neighbour, deny yourself for others, choose the way which is hardest, and so forth. But which is the harder road? To whom does one owe the more brotherly love, the patriot or the mother? Which is the more useful aim, the general one of fighting in and for the whole community, or the precise aim of helping one particular person to live? Who can give the answer to that a priori? No one. Nor is it given in any ethical scripture. The Kantian ethic says, Never regard another as a means, but always as an end. Very well; if I remain with my mother, I shall be regarding her as the end and not as a means: but by the same token I am in danger of treating as means those who are fighting on my behalf; and the converse is also true, that if I go to the aid of the combatants I shall be treating them as the end at the risk of treating my mother as a means [...] If you are a Christian, you will say, Consult a priest; but there are collaborationists, priests who are resisters and priests who wait for the tide to turn: which will you choose? Had this young man chosen a priest of the resistance, or one of the collaboration, he would have decided beforehand the kind of advice he was to receive. Similarly, in coming to me, he knew what advice I should give him, and I had but one reply to make. You are free therefore choose – that is

to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world.

(EH 35-38)

It seems that the only value that is asserted in this philosophy is the value of asserting one's capacity for radical freedom. However, this ethical position in effect is one in which the agent is no longer capable of making an error, since, Sartre emphasises the style in which the choice is made rather than the particularities of the choice. In circumstances where it makes no difference what I choose, the currency of the distinction between right and wrong is destroyed, and I can therefore be neither right nor wrong in such circumstances. In reply to Sartre's assertion 'You are free therefore choose' Frondizi writes: 'But this is exactly the problem: I do not know what to do, and that is why I come to him for advice. If I knew how to decide or how to "invent" a solution, I would not need any advice, since I would have no problem' (Frondizi 1981, 376). Frondizi thinks that this issue in part arises from Sartre's doctrine of radical freedom, a position which he considers to be quite unique within the philosophical tradition. Radical Sartrean freedom appears to exclude any possibility of imposition from one's concrete situation, in which at any moment I may invent and reinvent my ethical commitments. However, if we consider the *War Diaries* it is not clear that Sartre's position is quite so simplistic. Consider the following passage:

Value really only bids human freedom to do what it is doing.

Consciousness self-motivates itself: it is free, except to acquire the freedom to be free no longer. We have seen that it renounces its possibles only by acquiring others. It can freely make itself akin to

things, but it cannot be a thing. All that is, it makes itself be. All that happens to it must happen to it by its own doing: that is the law of its freedom. Thus the first assumption that human reality can and must make, when looking back on itself, is the assumption of its freedom. Which can be expressed by the following formula: one never has any excuse. For it will be recalled that buffeted consciousness was a consciousness that pleaded the excuse of its facticity. But we should be clear that facticity has no relevance here. Granted, it is thanks to facticity that I'm thrown into war. But what war will it be for me, what face will it reveal to me, what I shall myself be in war and for war – all this I shall be freely and am responsible for.

(*CDG* 113)

Clearly Sartre is here endorsing a position in which he only grants freedom to the agent within the context of considerable limitations. When we relate this to the issues explored within *Existentialism is a Humanism*, ethical decision procedure emerges as yet another example of the background facticity, procedures which compete to present a course of action of self-evident moral worth. For Sartre, the desire to find a final decision procedure which either takes the form of a calculus (i.e. the hedonistic calculus) or the form of an authority figure such as a priest (or a philosopher) is in effect the attempt to make a facticity of one's transcendence – a project which is entirely misconceived. Sartre does therefore give the young man advice, but, in so far as he is able to give good moral advice, he can only advise him of the conditions under which moral action may be made. One may conclude, as Frondizi seems to, that Sartre would therefore endorse any action, but that simply is not the case here since

both actions are formed by sound motivations. Sartre's example presents a case in which a large amount of ethical commitment has already been assumed, since, the young man is not without values and these, in effect, represent his facticity in this situation. He did not ask for the war to occur but it has and his mother's sickness is beyond his control. He has in some sense inherited a set of conflicting values. Sartre's conception of radical freedom is not then merely one of a freedom which could decide instantly whether or not one should love one's mother or whether or not one should care about one's comrades and country, however, as we have seen from the passage above, what one makes of such given commitments does remain within the realm of a radically free consciousness. If the young man had come to Sartre with the proposition 'Should I indiscriminately murder the innocent or work for Oxfam?' I am sure even Frondizi would have to admit that it is unlikely that Sartre would have replied: 'You are free therefore choose – that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world'. So whilst Sartre does not tell us what to do he does not imply that we can do what we like, or that we would even want to engage in some bizarre course of action given free rein.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Bad faith considered as of extrinsic disvalue***

The dissatisfaction which Frondizi finds in Sartre's ethic occurs, as we have seen, because he does not seem to point towards any clear ethical conclusions. However, we find in later work further analysis of the role bad faith may have in sustaining indifference towards publicly realised disvalue, in particular in relation to black

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<sup>43</sup> Note Anscombe: '[I]f someone really thinks, *in advance*, that it is open to question whether such an action as procuring the judicial execution of the innocent should be quite excluded from consideration – I do not want to argue with him; he shows a corrupt mind' (Anscombe. *Philosophy* 1958, p. 17).

slavery. The example can be extended however to circumstances of political complicity in which a certain disadvantaged group fails to be recognised amongst the politically powerful due to *motivated inattention* which sustains certain political and economic advantages for the dominant group.

In the second appendix of the *Notebooks for an Ethics* Sartre deals specifically with ethical issues relating to black slavery. Sartre does not however present the kinds of argument that are common within standard ethical literature. He does not for instance attempt to place such ethical issues within the context of the maximisation of certain desirable end states (consequentialism) or again even in terms of the formal structure of moral maxims (formalism). His suspicion of such approaches does I imagine largely stem from his Marxist influence which tends towards both an implicit and often explicit hostility to the traditional frames of reference provided by bourgeois moral and legal theory. There is some evidence that he endorses a form of *aretaic* ethics, since it seems we can condemn practices such as slavery because they are necessarily sustained by bad faith – an existential vice of character to be condemned for its intrinsic disvalue but also for its wider and therefore publicly realised detrimental effects upon human flourishing. We can appreciate the extent to which a category which relates solely to ontological reorientation provides certain closure with regard to certain ontic concerns such as the practice of slavery.

Sartre argues that since law attempts to embody the prevailing morality so the original impetus behind the law which institutionalised slavery must have been made with a good conscience. He writes: '[T]he primary characteristic of morality is the bad conscience. So the structure of the original spirit of the oppressor – is the spirit of seriousness and of a good conscience. Except we need to know whether this good conscience belongs to good or bad faith' (CM 562). Thus the structure of oppression



did indeed attain the status of legitimacy given that such laws were made with a good conscience. Sartre argues however that such laws, whilst made in good conscience, fail as instantiations of just law, in part because they were made in bad faith. Sartre therefore attempts to explore the role of bad faith in relation to the maintenance of immoral practices. Sartre for instance describes how the law managed to make an exception for black people by looking towards their origins. Such appeals to origin sustained the view that the blacks were in some way subhuman either because they were not Christian (and had been rejected by Noah as the sons of Ham and so forth) or simply through the fact that slave status was actually in some cases originally conferred upon them by their own people (many black slaves were purchased from black slave traders). Sartre writes:

Plunged into a world they were unaware of, they originally count less than they did in Africa. They are submen. Here again there is an original bad faith since at the same time the laws prevented their being taught anything – Here again we have the schematism transcendence / facticity. In fact “they do not know how to read” is equivalent to “they are creatures whose absolute character is to be unable to read”.

(CM 563)

The bad faith here ‘perpetrated’ occurs in circumstances in which the plain knowledge of the necessity to learn to read over an extensive period of time requiring special socialisation is isolated and ignored in favour of the judgement that since they are unable to read they must merely be the kind of creatures which cannot and will not ever learn to read. The subhuman status is therefore sustained by a *motivated*

*inactivity* of the masters so that in effect their use value as mere slave may be lawfully maintained in good conscience.

It is clear with regard to Sartre's observations that the attempt to view a transcendence as a facticity (or to objectify the subject by denying their capacity as radical freedom) allows for the objectification of the slave in such a way that their human quality as a subjectivity for whom existence precedes essence is usurped in favour of the view that the slave in fact possesses a fixed nature. It must therefore be central to Sartre's ethic that any attempt to deny the normal attribution of existential freedom to the human subject is already to have dehumanised them to such a degree that acts of inhumanity may be legitimised. The bad conscience can only arise against the practice of slavery once the slave is accepted as an existentially free entity, *however it is bad faith which prevents such realisation by dehumanising and subsequently pronouncing judgement upon the product of its own negligence.* My question here is simply whether Sartre believes that such practices could be engaged upon in the authentic mode. If, as I shall argue, such practices *cannot* be engaged upon by the authentic person, then there is clearly room to argue that bad faith sustains a method of casuistry in which behaviour of self-evident moral worth is bypassed.<sup>44</sup> When Sartre writes that: 'there is an initial attitude of the for-itself that freezes the other into an object' (CM 563), it is clear that much of the perpetration of inhuman action stems from the deception which denies the possession of 'human

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<sup>44</sup> Again, Williams' remarks are of interest: '[I]t might turn out that when we properly think about it, we shall find that we are committed to an ethical life, merely because we are ethical agents. Some philosophers believe that this is true. If they are right, then there is what I have called an Archimedean point: something to which even the amoralist or the skeptic is committed but which, properly thought through, will show us that he is irrational, or unreasonable, or at any rate mistaken.' (Williams 1985, 29). Any wilful failure to attend to our own ethical commitments would count as a form of self-deception which sustains the practice of actions which would be seen to incompatible with such commitments given adequate self-perspicuity.

subjectivity' to oppressed groups enabling them to treat individuals as a means rather than an end.

It is interesting to consider further similarities with *aretaic* ethics in relation to passages which occur earlier in the *Notebooks* with regard to the nature of freedom. For instance with regard to the issue of finitude and human freedom Sartre observes:

If we make the hypothesis of a finite humanity, even one close to its end, where men, knowing that the society that they want to bring about will not perpetuate itself and will even disappear at the end of a relatively short time, still want to sacrifice themselves to its realisation simply so that, if only for an instant, humanity will have attained its highest degree of freedom or of perfection, *in short it will have realised its essence* [my emphasis].

(CM 425)

Whilst such a passage seems to contradict earlier insistence that man's 'existence precedes essence', Sartre here appears to assert that freedom is, in a sense, the 'essence' of human reality. That is to say, the essence of human reality is paradoxically to be one of a freely determined essence, the extent to which consciousness is therefore in possession of a function is therefore unclear, but, I believe that it is reasonable to make some appeal to a functional theory of human nature in the existentialist sense, provided we distinguish adequately between what has been described as function in the biological sense and function in the sense relating to the personality as a whole including the rational, volitional and emotional capacities. Sartre clearly rejects any conception of function which would objectively

determine the excellence of an individual by reference to biology. However he does, as the above passage seems to indicate, have some conception of a perfect realisation of human capacity. Plato too endorsed a notion of function which relates clearly to the essence of the best capacity that an object or an organism possesses. There is a tension therefore between Sartrean conceptions of bad faith which emerge as largely 'structural' with little ethical consequence and conceptions which may be described as 'motivational' which do indeed possess ethical consequences. According to the latter interpretation we can I think successfully argue that whilst I may get by in life in bad faith I am not exercising my best and most human qualities which comprise embracing the implications of freedom in the existential sense. The authentic man could, I shall argue, stand as the human ideal in the Sartrean sense. Additionally, provided we do not place too stringent normative demands upon the philosophy, we can, derive an ethics of flourishing in the existential sense from Sartre's philosophy. We have seen how Sartre endorses a teleology comprised of the following: 'to save the world (in making being be), to make freedom the ground of the world, to take up creation for his own use and to make the origin of the world absolute through freedom taking hold of itself' (*CM* 448). Here we have further evidence of a normative ethic which recognises the disvalue of vice in the existentialist sense, here described as alienation and mediocrity. Such vices stand in opposition to the existentialist 'virtue' of authenticity.

To return to issues relating to black slavery, we can see that Sartre does endorse an ethic which embraces the value of personal liberation from alienation, a state which can I think quite convincingly be described in terms of a failure to realise one's personal freedom and in some sense even to fail to appropriate oneself in one's commitments and creative endeavours. For instance the inauthentic or alienated man

is quite clearly the man who lives in an alienated state from the Other (it is worth pointing out that the Other is not just any other but an alien and wholly negative external threat which, in the terminology of contemporary psycho-analysis, would probably be described as the result of paranoid-schizoid projections). However, the authentic man incorporates respect for the freedom of the Other into his fundamental project and does not therefore experience the Other in terms of an authoritarian and critical presence. The master can therefore be condemned, existentially, for his failure to endorse the value of both real and existential freedom. One's alienation and mediocrity consist in the failure to realise the freedom which forms the existential 'essence' of human reality, submitting instead to those 'diseases' of consciousness which cohere around bad faith and alienation. Sartre elaborates upon this theme when he writes upon the nature of wickedness:

A wicked person has no rest. He is totally the victim of otherness. In other people, he only sees the other. Never a For-itself that is the same for oneself. Or rather he is quite aware that others are for-itself, but he sees the For-itself of others as the pure Otherness of the reflecting from others to himself and grasps himself through these others. It is a question therefore of by any and all means destroying other people in themselves and outside of oneself.

(CM 428)

Wickedness itself is understood therefore in terms provided by existential psychoanalysis. The Other is here not so much a structural feature of human existence, but rather arises in a form that could be described as *pathological*. The wicked man

does, therefore, in basing his fundamental attitude towards the Other as one of hatred, fail to realise an aspect of existential flourishing which consists of the functionally sound project of releasement from alienation whilst embracing the Other as the Same.

As Sartre writes:

The wicked person is characterised in terms of hate. But what he hates is neither him nor me, it is the Other in him and in me. He hates it like a person. If I show him that I am the Same, there is an awakening: he no longer finds what he wanted to kill and to hate.

(*CM* 428)

In the realisation of Sameness Sartre describes a situation in which the hatred can no longer be sustained. Clearly similar issues occurred between the black slaves and their masters, to the extent that they gradually achieved indoctrination within the institutions of the Christian Church they experienced the beginning of the end of their treatment as subhuman (*CM* 572). The law which institutionalised slavery could therefore no longer be sustained upon the basis that the slaves represented a different category of life.

### ***Sartre's later conceptions of historical teleology***

Finally, it is necessary to make some albeit brief reference to Sartre's final philosophical achievements both within the *The Idiot in the Family* and also the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Here Sartre presents a *rapprochement* between existentialism and Marxism with his 'totalizing' conception of human historical development. Whilst rejecting Marxist historical materialism, Sartre develops a

phenomenology of social development with reference to a regulative principle or myth which humanity is said to share. In particular, Sartre characterises human history in terms of myths relating to primeval unity of a lost totality. This is how he defines human life in the rather obscure terminology of ‘detotalized totality’. He writes: ‘In human reality ... the multiple is always haunted by a dream or a memory of synthetic unity; hence it is the detotalization itself which demands to be retotalized’ (*IF* 653). Human life is therefore characterised in terms of a movement towards the regaining of the lost totality in some future state of social perfection. Fell writes most clearly in relation to such philosophy:

The ideal terminus of a history that begins with scarcity is the point at which no individual would any longer have to quest to transform a future environment by mastering it, labouring over it, humanizing it, making its conflicting “parts” cohere or co-exist peacefully and even playfully with each other as an integrated cosmos composed of individuals of integrity.

(Fell 1979, 349-50)

Of interest however is the extent to which individuals, and even epochs, attempt to totalize prematurely. Movement towards totality is the essential nature of the human condition as understood by the later Sartre. Fear of the human condition, the state described in earlier work as that of ‘alienation and mediocrity’ leads to inauthentic attempts to totalise. Man engages in a peculiar variety of self-deception – quite unlike the ‘natural’ bad-faith described within *Being and Nothingness* – in which he allows

himself to be ‘convinced by unconvincing evidence’ and in so doing, embraces a ‘false totality’. As Fell succinctly writes:

What every *individual* ultimately has in common is the need for and quest for *totality*. But, confronted by individual and class dispersion or atomization and a brief lifetime in which to totalize it, he totalizes too quickly. He thus arrives at allegedly finished and final truths that are, according to Sartre, ‘dead’ or ‘false’ totalities. Examples abound – the truths of religion [...] the “truths” of existentialism as “philosophy,” the “truths” of Stalinist Marxism, the “truths” of American sociology, the “truths” of psychoanalysis – and so on.

(Fell 1979, 355)

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this essay to examine such ideas in depth, we can at least appreciate the extent to which Sartre presents a teleological conception of human history which embraces Aristotelian themes of potential and finding its realisation in some normatively ideal terminus of actualization. Sartre differs from Aristotle to the extent that such realisation extends over historical epochs and is not therefore restricted to the life span of a single human being. However, there is clearly an implicit normative ideal exemplified in the individual who courageously embraces the human condition as ‘detotalized totality’ in contrast to the self-deceiver who fails to confront the ambiguous nature of the human condition seeking comfort in ‘false totalities’. Sartre presents an ethic of capacity realisation in which the human essence is realised historically.



## Conclusion

I hope I have demonstrated that a normative ethic rooted in the structures and terminology provided by existential psycho-analysis can be found within Sartre's philosophy. The types of psycho-pathology that Sartre describes can go some way towards a normative condemnation of behaviour which arises from dysfunction in the existentialist sense. As with Nietzsche, Sartre endorses the value of the 'conscience behind the conscience' which emerges from those privately realised virtues of self-transparency and authenticity. Authenticity shares those aspects of Aristotelian thought which recognise the primacy of those unique features of the human life world which must be active if such a life world is to be representative of the normative ideal. Inauthentic man does, for Sartre, represent a closure of capacity realisation. Whilst care must be taken in describing Sartre's position in such terms, we must again, as I have previously argued, make reference to the ontic and the ontological distinction also expressed as the distinction between the *existentiell* and the existential.

*Existentially* man transcends his *existentiell* / ontic essence conceived strictly in terms of the Function Argument – e.g. relating to the functional adequacy of cithara players etc. but this leaves Sartre committed to a certain conception of human flourishing realised in isolation from *existentiell* concerns. Grasping one's finitude, embracing one's radical freedom and engaging in the gestalt shift which finds oneself as the origin of value are indeed all representative of an objective conception of human flourishing in the existentialist sense. As noted by M. Naville in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, it is possible to read the Sartrean conception of a universal human condition in such a way that this in fact replaces traditional conceptions of human essence. Sartre will not accept the notion of a human nature principally because this would marginalise the projective nature of human reality, placing the human being

entirely within a causally determined sequence. However, human reality understood as pure spontaneity and indeed *freedom itself*, can be understood ontologically as possessing certain universal attributes from which normative appraisal may be extracted. As we have seen, Sartre rejects self-deception because it sustains an internal incoherence. Additionally, he condemns the individual who denies their freedom within both themselves and others. This, as I have described, terminates in both bad faith and the related condition of the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of seriousness is of particular importance because it describes a state in which values are ascribed to the object over the subject. Sartre describes such a condition as one sustained by self-deception – we could add however that such a state is sustained by willed self-occlusion. There is, in such circumstances, an ontological occlusion in which values are projected into the object. This, as we have seen originates from fear of the human condition, a fear described as anguish. The existential hero for Sartre is essentially the individual who understands that they are the origin of value and accepts their radical freedom. Whilst such philosophy has difficulty expressing specific advice in matters of ethical deliberation, the style of engagement under the influence of a willed conversion to authenticity is clearly evident as the normative ideal which Sartre is prepared to endorse. Finally, with regard to the slavery example, the master assents to an unjust law with a good conscience, but in bad faith, whilst the non-virtuous agent succumbs to an alienation which consists in failing to embrace the essential sameness of the Other. Whilst it is not clear that the master's relationship with the slave is based upon hatred, we can at least appreciate that his desire for their labour is concealed behind an occlusion of the self within which the master is himself complicit. It is clear, however, that equality (that is to say recognition of equal dignity as existentially free subjects) must arise as a central feature of the Sartrean ethic as

here described, a feature of his ethic with clear normative implications, particularly in relation to oppressive practices. We can appreciate therefore how Sartre's conception of bad faith develops from the rather trivial pre-reflective concept of mere self-objectification into the immorality of the slave master. It is important to realise that the master evades self-perspicacity in order that he may pursue a rather dubious ontic success which is only sustainable at the expense of genuine existential and ontological clarity.

## 8. Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted to draw together from a variety of sources an argument for viewing those ethical issues which cohere around the concerns of existentialist thinkers, with particular regard to the positive appraisal of authenticity and corresponding condemnation of self-deception. It should be clear that I am primarily interested in an examination of existentialism from the perspective of Aristotelian *aretaic* ethical interpretation. I have briefly examined those objections to deontology and consequentialism which existentialist thought might endorse. I am, therefore, in such enquiry, attempting to define human excellence and as a consequence trying to interpret self-deception in terms which will find the non-virtuous agent to be an ‘exemplar’ of a species-specific failure in the realisation of such excellence from a normatively objective standpoint. We find important parallels when comparing existentialist thought with *aretaic* ethics, since both are concerned not merely with specific ethical dilemmas, but with the ‘Ethical Dilemma’ of the individual’s engagement with and appropriation of his entire life. We have seen that Heidegger and Nietzsche in particular strongly endorse a style of lucid interaction with Existence, Nietzsche through the existential imperative to affirm the eternal recurrence, and Heidegger through his implied imperative to achieve authentic resolution as ‘impassioned being towards death’. Sartre, too, develops an existential psycho-analysis, based upon the unique peculiarities of freedom trapped within the recalcitrant determinacy of the in-itself with implicit and occasionally explicit suggestions with regard to normatively ideal modes of human engagement. Authenticity can, however, be understood from two perspectives; first as a positively defined state of personal conversion and secondly as the absence of self-deception. Indeed, as should be clear, the thinkers discussed have differing conceptions of self-

deception and authenticity – conceptions which occasionally differ *within* their own work. Broadly speaking, however, we do, find an endorsement of a reading of self-deceptive behaviour which is structured and largely inspired by the affective life of the individual at the expense of the executive faculties. Here links with Aristotle are of paramount importance since we find a position central to the ethics endorsed within the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which priority is given to the higher faculties over the lower. Self-deception upon this ethical model can be explained with reference to a conception of the human agent in terms of a hierarchy of faculties, each with their own sphere of value-realisation to which specific excellences inculcated and sustained by specific virtues apply. Authenticity, upon this reading, consists primarily in the reflective attempt to convert from this pre-reflective temptation and to engage in a lucid self-awareness without fear of the human condition.

As I have examined, for Aristotle, we find that he attempts to ground any notion of the life-lived-well in terms of some conception of characteristic flourishing in human life. As I have examined, this need not commit us to any strict endorsement of Aristotelian essentialism, rather – and as developed by Hursthouse, Foot and Nussbaum – we find that a strict metaphysical biology is unnecessary in sustaining some defining features of the good for man at a certain level of abstraction. Such reference to essences in this sense refers, therefore, to a description of potentialities realized via those formal properties of the entity under consideration which motivate the organism towards those species-specific end states characteristic of the species in question. I have argued that a useful distinction can be made between what may be described as ‘existential goods’ or ‘ontological goods’ and specific ontical concerns. Ontological clarity of this kind requires some grasp of those *structural features of reality* which precondition relative cultural and historical differences.

The extent to which such observations are of interest in relation to existentialist conceptions of self-deception and authenticity are however of primary importance. I have remarked that the existentialists suffer generally from the absence of a clearly expressed ethical project. Authenticity and inauthenticity must be subject to ethical interpretation, yet often existentialist thinkers distance themselves from such understanding. My principal concern has been to argue that whilst it is understandable that such thinkers distance themselves from deontology and consequentialism – there remains a point of contact with ancient *aretaic* ethical philosophy which has largely remained unexamined. The revival in virtue ethics has been a predominant feature of contemporary analytic philosophy since Anscombe's paper *Modern Moral Philosophy* and it is in the light of this revival that I have sought to look at the existentialists through this relatively fresh interpretative approach. Aristotelian ethics, does, in particular, possess the power to extend our conception of that which is constitutive of human excellence, extending into those 'non-moral' virtues which are largely ignored by Christian ethical traditions: the value of intelligence for instance, skill in matters of practical deliberation and the capacity to question those fundamental aspects of reality which are constitutive of the life of contemplation. Central to the Aristotelian view, therefore, is the notion of the necessity to consider the means by which human potential may most appropriately be realised. Whilst his descriptions of functional adequacy in relation to knives and eyes etc. may seem indicative of a mechanistic and implausible theory of human nature, we see that Aristotle recognizes the unique centrality of training and education in the realisation of those capacities which are constitutive of human excellence. In this sense, the 'potentiality' is only one half of the ingredients which make up human life since the extent to which such potentiality may be actualized in appropriate or

inappropriate manifestations is open to human control. I have argued that in some sense the two meanings of 'essence' with which we have been dealing relate to the distinction between the *existentiell*, which, in the technical sense at least, pertains to those non-structural aspects of human life concerned with specific choices and self-interpretations, whilst the *existential* can be said to differ from such characteristics in that it aims to describe those structural features of human consciousness which are a precondition of the *existentiell*. Additionally, we can appreciate how Aristotle has a conception of self-creation and a notion of individuality as a real achievement which does not develop adequately without educational attention. Human nature is not therefore appealed to as a means of circumventing responsibility or denying ones capacity to choose, but rather, is appealed to in order that the goals of appropriate development may be adequately defined and the outcome of successful inculcation of the virtues may be recognized as appropriate to a distinctly human life. Aristotle's concern seems to be one which recognizes that a great many of us do not develop as we should and that only by applying ourselves to philosophical analysis and ultimately practical action (both individually and politically) can the ideals of human perfection be attained. More precisely, whilst Aristotle does indeed engage in scientific and metaphysical speculation, this need not be considered to provide the essential basis of his ethics, which 'brackets' speculation on metaphysical entities such as the 'form of the good', the afterlife, etc., and merely concentrates upon an elucidation of concepts and description of self-evident, or at least generally agreed upon, components of human excellence in the here and now. We have seen that Sartre is willing to admit that bad faith may turn out to be the typical condition of a very large part of mankind – in this sense he is not using species characteristic behaviour as a measure of normativity – rather he is able, as with Aristotle, to determine from an

endemic 'dis-ease', aspects of a real nature or higher nature which must form the basis of any existentialist ethic.

Whilst I have paid specific attention to the extent to which Aristotelian and phenomenological methods can be understood to coincide, it is not clear as to the extent to which such divergent sources of intellectual inquiry may be compared. But, as we have seen, Heidegger found in Aristotle a proto-phenomenologist in particular due to the attention Aristotle was prepared to give to the human life world and the realm of lived experience, from which a predominantly descriptive method attempts to obtain ethical clarity. It is a central assumption within this essay therefore that Aristotelian 'metaphysical biology' is largely an irrelevance in any evaluation of his ethical contribution. I have indeed argued that this is partly, although not entirely, due to the fact that the self-perspicuous agent is by definition capable of perceiving for themselves the extent to which their life coincides with an objective definition of the good. Such 'phenomenological intuitions' are in principle available to all human subjects yet may be realised in a more or less confused manner. Self-deception therefore arises as the principle means by which the agent may become separated from an objective conception of the good placing the removal of self-deceptive practice at the heart of any conversion to true self-perspicuity and ethical clarity. In this sense, existentialist concern with self-deception relates very well with ancient ethical conceptions and, upon this understanding, the conversion to authenticity would represent the master virtue or even a meta-virtue which preconditions participation in the specific virtues justified largely in relation to the realisation of higher human capacities. We have seen how elements of psychiatric philosophy may be of use here in establishing the extent to which self-deception, in the existentialist sense, may be open to functionalist evaluation. Whilst Fulford does not endorse a functionalist



conception of illnesses which applies to the personality as a whole, we have seen that Megone links such failures of action into an Aristotelian functionalist framework. Here, failure of action is understood as an incapacity which interferes with the project of living a fully rational life. Since, for Aristotle, the good for man consists primarily in the exercise of his rational capacities, such understanding of failure of action is representative for Megone of a functional failure. Whilst such analysis relates primarily to psychiatric evaluation we can at least appreciate the extent to which self-deception may be considered irrational, then, so too, it must be representative of a failure open to functionalist criticism. Conversion to authenticity would, upon this understanding, represent a return to the fullest 'existential health' attainable to the human subject. Functionalist evaluation of this kind applies less convincingly when we consider the analysis provided by Hursthouse and Foot, for whom a certain reproductive success and social continuity form the focus of ethical concern. From this perspective, animal life and human life may be evaluated in relation to the characteristic flourishing of the species. Such evaluation is predominantly from the perspective of the natural attitude and in the spirit of seriousness. For this reason such analysis relates less convincingly to existentialism. It is of interest to examine the extent to which those goods internal to existentialist conversion may or may not have influence upon areas of publicly realised action and other-regarding concern. Thus, whilst we have seen how an appeal to natural kinds can provide evaluative criteria which find species participants wanting in relation to certain species-specific traits, functionalism *need not* appeal to an average within a community since it is not inconceivable that a particular dysfunction be endemic – this could be true of certain neurotic symptoms including self-deceptive strategies. Aristotelian ethics therefore aims to delineate some conception of the good for man with reference to man's

essential nature. The virtues therefore arise against such theoretical background and are defined in relation to the extent to which they actualize human potential. So whilst I do not wish to prove that Nietzsche, Scheler, Heidegger and Sartre assented to a form of naturalism, I do want to explore those aspects of their philosophies which amount to an ethic of flourishing within the parameters of the description of human nature and human frailty that their philosophies will allow.

We have seen how MacIntyre for instance can be understood to explore a normatively binding ethic which in principle could provide the vicious agent with reasons to prefer those goods internal to practices over those goods external to practices. This would be possible if such goods are considered – even only in principle – as of self-evident higher worth given adequate self-perspicuity. Here, as I have argued in relation to the late Sartre, we find the possibility that self-deception again emerges as the sustaining force which prevents the vicious agent from apprehending the real goods of life leading to the perpetuation of the acquisition of external goods with no appreciation of higher satisfactions. Whilst I have argued that the issues here may indeed be more complex than MacIntyre suggests, we can I think distinguish between the vicious agent who has no appreciation of internal goods and in this sense fails even to appreciate the instrumental value of external goods in their enabling role towards the acquisition of internal goods. This position can, however, be distinguished from the virtuous agent who is able to recognise the value of external goods in so far as they are of use in the acquisition of higher satisfactions. Examples could be given here of business people who were only ever partially interested in the acquisition of wealth and indeed required certain virtues such as courage, self-discipline, self-belief and accuracy of judgement in order to realise their success. Mugging old ladies or selling drugs may not present themselves as just another means

of achieving the external goods of fame and wealth for such people. In fact nor would merely winning a lottery, since there is no personal challenge or personal input in such activity. Whilst MacIntyre may have failed to have convincingly shown how this more complicated blend of intrinsic and extrinsic value may arise in the life lived well, he does share an interesting point of similarity with thinkers such as Scheler in his attempt to show that despite apparent variety in ethical systems amongst historical humanity, we can rescue from these a core ethic which finds the core virtues to be of universal applicability in any distinctively human life-world. As with Scheler, we find MacIntyre presenting a defence which in some sense can largely be justified according to the criteria given by both Aristotle and his contemporary advocates such as Hursthouse, Nussbaum and Foot, since we find here an implicit appeal to a justification of ethical normativity provided in terms which appeal to those characteristics which are species-specific. However, the distinction between being and doing, or disposition and action, appear only as aspects of the same unity. Thus, whilst it is species-specifically uncharacteristic for human beings to devour members of their own family (action), it is also species-specifically uncharacteristic for a human life world to be devoid of normal categories of value-realisation such as familial affection (disposition). More importantly for MacIntyre, it is species-specifically uncharacteristic for a human life world to be devoid of any appreciation of goods internal to practices.

With regard to Scheler I have argued that it is harder to extract a normative ethic which terminates in action, however, we do see how he attempts to endorse a common set of values which are sustained throughout different historical epochs. Additionally, his value hierarchy has been shown to suggest a means by which when presented with two contradictory courses of action one should choose the higher over

the lower. Scheler's primary importance lies however in the attempt to replace the notion of sense-data – probably originating with Hume and certainly adopted by Kant – in which phenomenal experience is stripped of affective content. Such method clearly influenced Heidegger who appealed to such analysis in his criticism of Descartes – a thinker criticised for privileging the Scientific World View. It is criticism of this world view which largely forms the basis of the phenomenological project which is one which aims to restore the primacy of the world 'as it is given'. Clearly problems occur here however when we consider the possibility that life worlds are capable of differing to such an extreme degree. Indeed it is all very well attempting to argue that there is a way in which a normal life world should manifest itself in human life, but this does not in itself prove the disvalue of acts of a self-evident immoral nature. The case of the individual who is merely mistaken, will not, it seems, suffice as an example of the kind of confusion involved in acts of simple immorality. To draw the full logical conclusions from this, a mistake of which I am currently unaware is clearly a mistake of which I may *become* aware, since my inaccuracy lies waiting for my discovery at some future date. The immoral agent, if he is to be understood in the Socratic sense as one who does harm to himself whilst not realising it, is not of the same kind. An ordinary mistake involves an intention which is subverted by an error which could be compared with the explicit intention and subsequently rectified. In the case of the immoral agent's intention to murder his family to obtain the throne, we can appreciate that whilst such intentions may be achieved and even subsequently 'enjoyed', there remains the Socratic objection, that, through the failure to ascertain the good, the vicious individual has still failed to realise their intention which in the abstract was the achievement of the good even if only conceived within strictly individualistic and therefore selfish parameters. As I

have argued, Scheler has to be careful that he does not allow a relativism which is applicable not only *between* the life worlds of various historical epochs, but also between various contemporary cultures or classes and even individuals. By this I mean it is not inconceivable that such moral philosophy could not find moral condemnation possible, say, towards certain voodoo cults who have been responsible for acts of human sacrifice. To allow in such extreme cultural relativism seems quite useless moral philosophy, since the argument always remains that within a certain community such practices may be intelligible and thereby rendered acceptable. Likewise, the paedophile could argue that his practices represented a level of normality by the standards and lifestyle commitments of his paedophile 'community'. We have seen however the suggestion that some conversion to clarity with regard to the apprehension of the value hierarchy would place the agent under certain normative constraints such as being committed to placing the higher goods over the lower. Ethical clarity with regard to the relative goods of the affective value hierarchy could represent a style of ontological clarity which is representative of a proto-conception of authenticity in the Schelerian sense.

Whilst self-deception largely occurs in existentialist writing as a structural feature of the human condition, it never in fact occurs as a precondition of uniquely human experience. Rather, the tendency is introduced in order to characterise those temptations in human life which are constitutive of a uniquely human failing, whilst characterising self-deception as a diminishment of capacity but of specific relevance to the human condition. Appeals to intrinsic value are of importance in the same way that appeals to an objective conception of happiness are also of importance in such ethical inquiry since the disvalue of self-deceptive practice must in principle be open to normative condemnation if it is to be of any moral relevance whatsoever. Watson's

criticism of functionalist ethics, which amounts to the observation that evil is reducible to mere defect of some kind, is only truly cogent when we exclude reference to the essentially *intentional* nature of the disvalue under consideration. Whilst I cannot be held accountable for developing Alzheimer's disease, self-deception (upon any reading which would make sense with regard to ethical concerns) appears against the background of an agent who whilst not fully self-perspicuous with regard to intent, exploits an internal ambiguity which remains open to self-discovery. Self deceivers are complicit in a self-induced confusion and prevent themselves thereby from obtaining those internal satisfactions constitutive of the good life. I have argued that this can possibly be understood as an example of the agent treating themselves as a means and in the process treating others similarly. The failure to attend to the radical nature of one's own freedom in such a context is therefore often found together with the failure to respect and recognise the freedom of others. In this sense each of the core virtues – justice, courage and honesty – have been violated in the self-deceptive agent.

We have found Nietzsche to be endorsing a position which condemns the self-deceiver for engaging in a form of reasoning based on passion. Here he shares with Aristotle the view that for the excellent person 'there is a hierarchy of capacity which places the executive virtues above the non-executive'. The absence of self-perspicuity in such cases is representative of those confusions and deceptions which occur within the vicious individual upon such a reading. Central to such a position, as I have noted, is the description of the individual in their ideal and non-ideal modes of capacity realisation. To reach the optimum requires, upon the Nietzschean account, a reversal of those violations of species-specific excellence which *ressentiment* engenders. We have seen that May modifies Leiter's characterisation of Nietzsche providing a very

specific description of human nature by enlarging our understanding of the path towards life-enhancement. Such a process consists in an experimental approach to a very personalised ethics in which the individual chooses from a number of possible *tele* or life trajectories and thus affirms a style of self-creation from this prior analysis of possibilities. Again, Aristotle is of relevance, since we find room for the possibility of a 'particularized *ergon*' in which the individual chooses from a number of possible fundamental projects which lead to life-enhancement, but not in a fashion which may be universalised and found normatively binding upon others. Here, it may be of use to return to MacIntyre's analysis, which, as we have seen, isolates certain 'meta-virtues' which provide the parameters within which any meaningful account of human flourishing may be said to emerge. We find that both 'ethics has a role in enabling the fulfilment of the human essence' whilst 'the virtues are beneficial to the possessor in their role in actualizing potential'. Such core virtues (justice, honesty and courage) do not upon such a reading preclude the possibility that there may be variance in the style of peripheral virtues that an individual chooses to adopt. Corrupt engagement of this kind fails to give rise to those types of human flourishing which require open engagement and honest self-appraisal of motivations. Thus we find that when engaging in *ressentiment* inspired value creation, the agent conceals from himself his true intent – 'dwelling upon competitive strategy and thwarting others' – which most importantly signifies closure of higher capacity realisation. I find that such interpretation coheres with Prem. 1 in which such ethical judgement 'finds termination in a condition which is in principle self-evident to the self-perspicuous human agent'. Of course Nietzsche extends the scope of such evaluation to embrace condemnation along broadly functionalist lines of argumentation which stress the ubiquitous nature of such states, in particular within religious movements, but also

political movements such as Socialism. Such condemnation can, as we have seen, be understood from the elitist perspective as provided by Leiter for whom Nietzsche's philosophical project is primarily to be understood as directed towards the so called 'higher men' acting as the means by which they may rid themselves of the baggage inherited by *ressentiment* intellectual traditions and realise their unique talents in an uninhibited and intellectually vital manner. According to such understanding, the self-deceivers stand as essentially irredeemable, the best that can be done in such circumstances is merely not to allow oneself to be a victim by absorbing their false consciousness. May offers an alternative interpretation, which is more attractive, in which the Nietzschean ethic attempts to persuade the non-virtuous into a state of authenticity. Here we find the eternal return providing a focal point for the attempt at Nietzschean conversion. The best interpretation by far of the return is, as I have argued, one which endorses the existential imperative of living one's life *as if* it were to be repeated endlessly in forthcoming cosmic cycles irrespective of the mechanics and feasibility of such an occurrence. Here, as I have discussed, points of clear similarity emerge when we consider the work of Heidegger for whom attending to one's finitude represents to a large degree the primary criterion for the authentic state. These moments of intense self-possession at the entirely subjective level are indeed a theme common to those writers belonging loosely to the existentialist tradition. Anxiety represents a similar moment of self-intensification for Sartre, a state which places emphasis upon the role of the realisation of one's radical freedom as the foundation and condition from which ethical action may be said to authentically emerge. In some sense, therefore, the common point between such thinkers is not to be found in the specifics (i.e. decision procedure) which emerge from their ethics but rather from the meta-level assent to those characteristics and qualities which must be



possessed if ethics is even to be possible. Blind obedience to a moral code would not for instance represent a route to ethical decision in the sense in which the existentialists wish to understand normatively ideal ethical deliberation. It is here, as I have argued, that self-deception emerges as an activity which is of much wider concern than a mere singular vice such as cowardice, but rather is to be understood in terms of the enabling function for the sustenance of a whole subset of vicious behaviours which require self-deception for their continuance. This is why thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre have placed such specific emphasis upon the importance of self-deception in human life. In this sense, self-deception emerges as almost a meta-vice, a vice which organises and inspires the specific vices. By way of illustration, the practice of slave morality is understood to involve a temporary pleasure in the containment of repressed envy, but the agent fails to see in such circumstances the long term dis-value of such practices which ultimately limit the capacity for human beings to obtain optimum life enhancement. As we have seen, Nietzsche's preoccupation with slave morality, a morality he attributes to the Jews of antiquity, is paradoxically to be found also in the Jew hater (the anti-Semite) who subverts rational appraisal via a form of reasoning which is corrupted by hatred. Nietzsche himself recognised this element of *ressentiment* in the anti-Semitism of his day, a theme which he preoccupied himself with consistently throughout his published writings. Clearly the attempt to diagnose the self-deceptive agent via methods of descriptive existential analysis is also developed by Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Here the man in bad faith is characterised as an individual in flight from the human condition – a man unable to embrace both his own and others' radical freedom. In this sense the flight is understandable in that it attempts to resolve existential anguish, and yet, in so doing, he engages in a perversion of his 'higher nature'. The satisfactions

obtained by such methods give rise only to a false sense of security. The existentialist hero is however characterised as the individual who bravely confronts their existential anguish. Paradoxically, it is the need to perceive fixed essences within both oneself and others, which gives rise to the perversion of what could be described as man's 'meta-essence' – that of radical freedom and pure spontaneity. We have seen that Sartre was himself unclear as to the extent to which his philosophy embraced some conception of human nature, since, in the *Notebooks* written shortly after *Being and Nothingness*, he is prepared to endorse some conception of man 'realising his essence' – clearly a very Aristotelian position to adopt.

I have argued that we find a tension between 'motivated inauthenticity' and what has been termed 'structural inauthenticity'. I think we must conclude with regard to structural interpretations that the scope for moral evaluation is limited, since, in the case of Sartre and Heidegger in particular, we find structural types of self-deception to be unavoidable aspects of the human condition – they are if you like one facet of what it is to be human. Whilst for Heidegger, the primary human frailty consists in absorption in the dictates of *das Man*, 'salvation' could be said to exist in the attempt at self-recovery which generates releasement from such dictates and an enhanced state of self-possession as 'impassioned being towards death'. Again, evasive strategies which diminish the accomplishment of positive human excellencies can primarily be seen to stem from self-deceptive engagements, a defective condition finding its 'salvation' in full self-perspicuity. Additionally, for Heidegger, such structural readings are justified merely as a descriptive account of those features of human consciousness which give rise to the 'being who questions Being'. We drift into the unthinking realm of the 'they world' and wish to deny our own finitude taking comfort in the group, but as I have argued, the dictatorship of *das Man* must largely

be seen as a precondition of authentic resolution since such essentially social activities such as learning one's native language would I think be incomprehensible without reference to social dispersal. The self must, upon this reading, be considered as a social construction, albeit not a construction in any intended and mechanical sense, rather the manner in which the world is understood and illuminated depends largely upon the socialisation to which the individual has no choice but to conform. When the later Heidegger writes 'language speaks man' he has this very view in mind. The manner in which a world shows up for the subject and the teleology of the community into which he is socialised is not a matter of self-creation, since the individual is a partial summary and partial mouthpiece of the 'social' under such interpretation. Such structure is a necessary precondition of *any* human life and indeed originality itself can only be understood against this background of inherited 'context of significance'. However, the Heideggerian account of the human condition made with appeal to phenomenological methods produces a description which benefits in a similar manner from the appeal made by ethical functionalists in their passage from the descriptive 'is' to the prescriptive 'ought'. Thus we find a description of human reality which cannot be separated from some conception of human life in its preferable and non-preferable modes of realisation. For Heidegger 'falling' is a frailty and authenticity represents salvation from such frailty in the existentialist sense. This is a reading which places Heidegger within the Aristotelian ethical framework, which, whilst not placing authenticity among the catalogue of virtues, instead describes a privately realised branch of human flourishing in its normatively ideal ontological orientation.

In relation to Sartre, we can I think conclude that he does posit an ethic of authenticity which provides closure of specific actions which result from failure to recognise both oneself and others as radically free. Additionally, we find convincing

evidence that Sartre's ethic really can be said to represent a 'meta-ethic' and even a 'meta-ethic of virtue' which can be understood in functionalist terms. It is a meta-ethic justified functionally in terms of the meta-essence of radical freedom. For Sartre this feature of human life, disclosed by descriptive methods (in harmony with Prem. 2) and open to the realisation of the self-perspicuous human agent (in harmony with Prem. 1) that is constitutive of the starting point for the ethical life. The examples given of agents engaging in bad faith provided in *Being and Nothingness* in some sense whilst illustrating the nature of bad faith in vivid and compelling ways fail to capture the ethical nature of the dishonesty towards oneself that is constitutive of this fundamental human flaw. Here as I have argued, Nietzsche's example of the self-deception of St. Paul is more illuminating ethically. We have seen also how Sartre is able to condemn the anti-Semite for his engagement in a type of reasoning which is somehow enflamed by passion. The examples which are described by Sartre share this style of faulty engagement in which an ambiguity is freely sustained in order that the demands of an ethic of self-perspicuity are evaded. Self-deception of this kind is therefore pursued because it presents a method of coping with the demands of life, in this sense the subject really does feel better at the subjective level when pursuing such strategy. As I have argued such strategy can only be convincingly condemned from the moral perspective when viewed from a position which attempts to impose objective criteria for human flourishing justified in terms of capacity realisation. Aristotelian functionalism contributes to an understanding of happiness in the objective sense which can contradict the apparent happiness to which the vicious agent attests. Again, adopting Prem. 2 – which isolates Aristotle from any strict reliance upon his so called metaphysical biology – we find the human essence need not be determined with reference to specific metaphysical theories. Rather, we find

room for essences which are disclosed by strictly descriptive and phenomenological methods. Furthermore, and in accordance with Prem. 1, the results of such method are in principle, available to the self-perspicuous human agent. Sartre, for instance, can make his speculations with regard to the structure of consciousness and the man of bad faith from the perspective of his own consciousness which offers him all the evidence he requires for his descriptive analysis of the human condition. Such methods certainly do not take the vicious agent at his word. The epistemic status of any descriptive account of such diseases of consciousness can only be properly ascertained with reference to phenomenological methods since the accounts of non-self-perspicuous agents are largely of irrelevance. It is confused human life and may legitimately be described as dysfunctional, albeit in a common form. Whilst the waiter in the café is not typically engaging in an immoral activity, there are elements here of human dysfunction which are of greater ethical concern. Sartre for instance has particular interest in political complicity.

For the early Sartre we have seen an endorsement of a position in which values are merely projected or invented by human consciousness and in which within the serious mood are apprehended 'in terms of the world'. This, as we have seen, is a further development of his conception of bad faith in which consciousness retreats into an objectified self-interpretation evading anxiety via self-deception. The determinism implicit within the Scientific World View is therefore somehow illegitimately fused with value consciousness. This should strike us as strange since generally the Scientific World View precludes admittance of evaluative categories. Consciousness transforms the world but not merely in some random manner. We find for instance within his description of the 'frightful visage' framed by the window, that consciousness subverts the normal deterministic relationship between phenomena and

reveals the world in an aspect disclosed by emotion. It is not clear therefore as to the extent to which consciousness in the playful mode represents a state of genuine radical choice. It is not clear for instance as to the extent to which the spirit of playfulness is analogous to Sartre's conception of authenticity. In his later work we find a modification of this conception of radical freedom in which value is not understood as a projection but an aspect of the world given through the mediating influence of the negating function of consciousness analogous to the world given under the aspect of 'destruction'. The early Sartre seems therefore to conflate the nihilating function of consciousness with an active projection which could be quite different given adequate will power, in opposition to a more attractive position in which consciousness cannot control the manner in which a human world must show itself whilst retaining some conception of the world in-itself which is isolated from such aspects.

Sartre too can be understood from the dual perspective of the structural versus motivational dichotomy. We find in *Being and Nothingness* readings which support a structural interpretation where bad faith appears as an inevitable tendency of the human subject in the face of existential anguish. Later work, as suggested by both Jeanson and Santoni, points towards a motivational interpretation of bad faith in which willed conversion to authenticity provides the departure point for entrance into the ethical life. Although in Sartre's later work we find him endorsing a semi-Hegelian notion of the essential incompleteness of human life. Upon this reading, whilst attempting to totalise, the human condition is characterised as essentially movement-towards-totality, whilst such totality is never realised at the individual level. This is important, because we find Sartre endorsing a view of human life in which man's essence can only be realised communally and historically at some

unspecified point of future development in which the 'final synthesis' terminates in the maximum of human freedom (freedom in the 'real' or non-existential sense). As we have seen – even upon the assumption of a finite humanity – Sartre writes of the essence of man lying in the attempt to 'sacrifice themselves' to the realisation of the society that they wish to bring about 'if only for an instant, humanity will have attained its highest degree of freedom or of perfection, in short it will have realised its essence'. This extraordinary passage clearly points towards a teleology of human life in its ideal realisation, in fact, even the attempt towards social perfection can be seen as the best that can be attained – to fail in the pursuit would still succeed as an affirmation of human freedom. In this sense therefore Sartre recognises authentic consciousness in terms of revolutionary struggle towards justice, human reality can upon this model remain essentially incomplete, but the attempt to engage in such a struggle – even if any victory were to 'disappear at the end of a relatively short time' – remains a form of realisation in its own right. In this sense he has no concern whatsoever with regard to outcomes, one fights on regardless of outcomes and the ideals one strives for remain binding even in circumstances where complicity and compromise may offer temporary comforts. In this sense, therefore, we find similarity between Sartre and the Schelerian notion of value hierarchy. Happiness, upon the model I have examined, is not to be confused with some kind of pleasant sensation subjectively determined, rather, happiness – in the sense of the fullest realisation of human capacity – *overrides* value-realisation in its lower forms. Such a view of human flourishing remains both objective and universal. This is contrary to the Kantian criticism of any ethics of success, since, it does not root its conception of the good for man merely in terms of comfortable outcomes. Authentic resolution can be understood as the *precondition* of genuine ethical behaviour. Such conduct could

include assenting to a moral system which adopted elements of the utility calculus, but the adoption of such calculus would lack its proper ethical dimension when assented to in the inauthentic mode. Sartre's understanding that for man 'there is no legislator but himself', endorses a position in which even in refusing to choose we still endorse a position for which we are responsible and in this sense to not choose is still to choose. This is why existentialists can be largely understood to endorse a meta-ethical position which describes the preconditions for the genuinely ethical life, one which emphasises responsibility, self-transparency and radical integrity, justified in relation to objective standards of human life in its ideal and non-ideal modes.

When considering Nietzsche in relation to such models we also find good examples of coherence with such interpretation. In particular when we consider his analysis of the motivations of St. Paul, we find clear condemnation of motivated self-deception. This, in particular, is open to clarification via Aristotelian styles of moral enquiry. We can for instance find fault here for the transgression of a set of intellectual virtues pertaining to the unique function of practical reason within the human subject. To violate such functional dispositions can be condemned from the perspective of a philosophy which views ethics in terms of species-specific traits which promote flourishing within such species. As I have argued, such appeal to function in cases such as these can avoid traditional criticism with regard to the observation that a fact cannot be derived from a value because such value does remain (even if only potentially) open to realisation from the self-perspicuous agent under consideration. If the subject could never discover some aspect of their motivation and never 'come to see' what they were really doing, then such a subject would not be a human one. Self-transparency whilst not achieved by everyone at all times remains a capacity which may be activated at a certain point in the future of the individual



concerned. In this sense, the kind of self-perspicuity that Nietzsche prizes, mirrors the outcome of a successful psycho-analytical treatment. As Freud writes: 'Where id was there ego shall be. It is a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee' (Freud 1973, 79).

It is possible to make comparison here between the kind of liberation from the dictatorship of *das Man* described by Heidegger within *Being and Time* and the kind of liberation aimed for by Nietzsche and Freud. The liberation is of a different kind in that the nature of the 'imprisonment' is not so general as an indefinite Other but could for instance comprise the 'imprisonment' imposed by dominant family members, unfavourable social standing, physical disability, phobia and many other kinds. Common to such complaints is the fact they seem to lie largely outside the parameters of normal scientific or medical description since they require reference to those phenomenal qualities of lived experience in order to be adequately characterised and understood. Of interest is the extent to which philosophy, in its therapeutic role, is to be considered an end in itself. It is possible to argue, that so conceived, philosophy is rather of *instrumental* value in the achievement of those life enhancements which are attendant to existential liberation of the kind described. If this is so, the excellent person upon such interpretation is left with no specific guidance from the philosophical liberation which he has undergone and in fact his happiness lies ahead in a less introspective engagement which involves turning outward towards the content and detail of the world but in the light of a liberation which facilitates uninhibited self-expression. This leads to a life characterised by an enhancement of both self-confidence, self-respect, self-possession and positivity – the state of consciousness idealised by Nietzsche as belonging to the 'nobles' of antiquity. Here, I have argued, that Nietzsche may indeed present two distinct conceptions of the human

optimum, one ontically determined by this sense of power maximisation realised in specific projects of practical concern, and secondly, an ontological optimum which does not admit of degrees. The second, I have argued, represents most closely the extent to which Nietzsche endorsed a proto-conception of authenticity. Such conversion, indicated by affirmation of the eternal return, is to be understood as a gestalt shift in which the agent converts to a radical reappraisal of their life as a whole. Nietzsche envisages only certain exceptional individuals capable of this affirmation, those who are able to affirm life even in its darkest and most objectionable aspects. Here, I have argued, Nietzsche both shares some conception of the ancient esteem for the passage toward ontological clarity. The individual is 'immortalised' in the eternal return and therefore converts to the realisation that they are responsible for all aspects of their life conceived as a whole and must exert themselves to make something of their lives. In this sense, Nietzsche profits from an interpretation of authenticity which emerges as the core of a meta-ethic which can be most appropriately understood in terms of the ability to organise the specifics of ethical concern. In this sense it is a 'transcendental' normative ideal which stands as the precondition for genuine ethical engagement.

Linking the thought which I have examined in this essay, we could state that such 'happiness', in the existentialist sense, would comprise both the positive states described by Scheler such as experience of pleasure, vigour, intellectual dexterity and affirmation, structured however, within ethical parameters which enable the acquisition of those goods internal to practices, practices which represent not a single path to the optimum of life-enhancement but require the core-virtues for their realisation. Such happiness must therefore be of self-evident value to the agent concerned and thus find no further justification for its possession. Such an agent will

additionally be rid of those negative emotional states which give rise to false values which are ultimately destructive of life-enhancement both for themselves and others. Death and misfortune within an essentially uncertain world will not therefore, in themselves, represent an objection to life but rather be embraced as features of an essentially meaningless play of forces. Inhibition or repression must, according to such philosophy, be viewed as an essentially non-virtuous activity which leads to the diminishment of individual capacity realisation. With this in mind, it should be noted that the style of sublimated aggression required to overcome inhibition need not be judged by the standards of *ressentiment* intellectual traditions which have been internalised at the ultimate expense of the individual concerned. Self-realisation upon such a view is seen in terms of the realisation of innate capacities i.e. 'becoming what one is', but first in isolation from metaphysical speculation, and secondly of a kind which does not require the recognition of any one path to the optimum. The optimum in this sense is understood as the teleology of the individual who engages in existential liberation of this kind. Finally, I must add reference to the primacy of self-deception. Self-deception – drawing upon the resources gathered in the above essay – is the prime impediment to existential liberation. Self-perspicuity emerges when the individual is no longer victim of those self imposed impediments to the optimum which occur as a result of internal confusion, cowardice and lack of self-care. Non-virtuous consciousness is almost a twilight consciousness in which there is a discord of affective influence upon the higher faculties which are characterised by self-autonomy, the ability to reason accurately without external aid and a sense of radical responsibility. Such achievement may be understood in relation to a conception of human function which is comprised of the proper allocation of the highest function of human life, namely that of practical deliberation informed by but not entirely

constituted by appreciation of theoretical concern. Such endeavour, whilst not typically considered of ethical relevance from the perspective of deontology and utilitarian ethical approaches, can be understood to be of clear moral relevance from the perspective of Aristotelian functionalism. Examples provided within psychoanalysis evaluate neurotic symptoms in terms of the parameters of pathology. But here as we have seen with regard to Megone and Fulford's analysis, evaluative criteria are in fact the mainstay of medical method which aims to understand human life in strictly normative terms. We find it is possible, in the case of delusion – in line with Aristotle and contemporary ethicists such as Foot, Hursthouse and Nussbaum – to evaluate the rational faculty with reference to the functional realisation of species-specific characteristics in so far as they contribute to the characteristic flourishing of the species concerned. From this point of view self-deceptive practices, certainly of the motivational kind, represent an *immaturity* of the subject in question. Such disvalue, whilst pleasant to the individual concerned, can be condemned from an ethical standpoint for the reason that the individual can be seen to subvert their own ends whilst in temporarily self-induced ignorance of such ends. Here the relevance of Scheler to the analysis is, I believe, most clear since he is able to give a description of a stratification within the human subject which isolates a certain ranking between affective states. To prefer self-deception from cowardice may alleviate existential discomfort, but in so doing, one closes off certain higher stages of value-realisation. Again, from an Aristotelian perspective, the good for man consists in his becoming the best version of what he is and thus to deny oneself higher states of value realisation is to fail to live a fully human life. When the philosophies of Scheler, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre are placed within the parameters of the Aristotelian

project, we do find a way in which a fundamentally descriptive account of human life can be evaluated with clear normative implications.

## Abbreviations

Note: page numbers are given for the translated editions only.

- CDG* *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* [Sartre]  
Sartre J.P. (1984) *The War Diaries*, tr. Q. Hare. New York: Pantheon
- CM* *Cahiers pour une morale* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P (1992) *Notebooks for an Ethics*, tr. David Pellauer. Chicago: UCP
- CRD* *Critique de la raison dialectique* [Sartre]  
Sartre J.P. (1976) *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, tr. Alan Sheridan-Smith. London: New Left Books
- De An. De Anima* [Aristotle]  
Aristotle (1984) *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathon Barnes. Princeton University Press
- EE* *Eudemian Ethics* [Aristotle]  
Aristotle (1992) *Eudemian Ethics*, tr. Michael Woods. OUP
- EH* *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P. (1957) *Existentialism and Humanism*, tr. Philip Mairet. London: Methuen
- EHm* *Ecce Homo* [Nietzsche]  
Nietzsche (2005) *Ecce Homo: How to Become What you Are*, tr. Aaron Ridley in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce-Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. CUP
- EN* *L'Être et le néant* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P. (2001) *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes. Routledge
- ETE* *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P. (2002) *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, tr. Philip Mairet. Routledge
- FE* *Der Formalismus in der Ethic und die materiale Wertethik* [Scheler]  
Scheler, M. (1973) *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, tr. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk. Evanston: NUP
- FW* *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* [Nietzsche]  
Nietzsche, F.W. (1974) *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vantage
- GM* *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [Nietzsche]  
Nietzsche, F.W. (1994) *On the Genealogy of Morality*, tr. Carol Diethe. Cambridge: CUP

- IF* *L'Idiot de la famille* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P. (1981) *The Idiot of the Family*, tr. Carol Cosman. Chicago: UCP
- JGB* *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [Nietzsche]  
Nietzsche F.W. (1966) *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Walter Kaufmann. Random House
- KPV* *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [Kant]  
Kant, I. (1997) *Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Mary Gregor. CUP
- N* *Nausea* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P. (1965) *Nausea*, tr. Robert Baldick. Middlesex: Penguin Books
- NI* *Nietzsche Vol. IV* [Heidegger]  
Heidegger M. (1982) *Nietzsche Volume IV: Nihilism*, tr. David Farrell Krell. Harper and Row
- NE* *Nicomachean Ethics* [Aristotle]  
Aristotle (2002) *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Christopher Rowe. OUP
- PP* *Philosophical Perspectives* [Scheler]  
Scheler, M. (1958) *Philosophical Perspectives*, tr. Oscar A. Haac. Boston: Beacon Press
- PS* *Platon: Sophistes* [Heidegger]  
Heidegger, M. (1997) *Plato's Sophist*, tr. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: IUP
- RQJ* *Réflexions sur la Question Juive* [Sartre]  
Sartre, J.P. (1995) *Anti-Semite and Jew*, tr. George J. Becker. New York
- SZ* *Sein und Zeit* [Heidegger]  
Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row
- WM* *Was ist Metaphysik?* [Heidegger]  
Heidegger, M. (1993) 'What is Metaphysics?' in *Basic Writings*, 2nd edn, ed. D. F. Krell. San Francisco, California: Harper-San Francisco
- WzM* *Der Wille zur Macht* [Nietzsche]  
Nietzsche, F.W. (1967) *The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House

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