

Empiricism, Determinism, and Naturalism

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Abstract:

Brian Leiter's naturalistic interpretation of Nietzsche's ethics reduces the cause and explanation of all facts about an individual to biological and psychological properties. He makes two central claims. First, that empiricism is the distinctive scientific way of looking at the world, providing access to objective, valueless truth. Second, that Nietzsche seeks to identify the causal determinants of human values, actions, thoughts, feeling etc in a fixed psycho-physical human nature. I argue that Nietzsche's endorsement of empiricism does not entail his endorsement of Leiter's strong naturalism. Leiter misconstrues Nietzsche's arguments concerning truth, failing to realize that his own thesis of truth is susceptible to Nietzsche's attack on metaphysics. In fact, Nietzsche subscribes to a "postmodern" falsification thesis, rejecting the scientific and/or empirical claim to access "valueless," objective reality. Nietzsche believes all of our "truths," "knowledge," judgments, and experiences are infused with subjective values. Instead of seeking "objectivity" through disinterested empiricism, we must seek objectivity by engaging with our values and affective interests. I go on to show that Leiter also misconstrues Nietzsche's arguments concerning causality. As a result, Leiter's thesis that Nietzsche seeks to identify deterministic causes of human facts is untenable. Finally, I show that, due to his naturalistic interpretation, Leiter misconstrues Nietzsche's dismissal of the Kantian problem of freedom (of the *causa sui*) as an endorsement of determinism.

I. Introduction

Brian Leiter's naturalistic interpretation of Nietzsche's ethics reduces the cause and explanation of all facts about an individual to biological and psychological properties. Such an interpretation is not altogether surprising given Nietzsche's penchant for speculating about nature, physiology, psychology, science, and necessity. Leiter cites the following passage, central to substantiating his naturalism:

"To Translate humanity back into nature; to gain control of the many vain and fanciful interpretations and incidental meanings that have been scribbled and drawn over that eternal basic text of *homo natura* so far; to make sure that, from now on, the human being will stand before the human being, just as he already stands before the *rest* of nature today, hardened by the discipline of science,—with courageous Oedipus eyes and sealed up Odysseus ears, deaf to the lures of the old metaphysical bird catchers who have been whistling to him for far too long: "You are more! You are higher! You have a different origin!"(BGE 230)

For Leiter, to translate man back into nature, to stand man before himself "hardened by the discipline of science" means to "construct philosophical theories that are continuous with the sciences either in virtue of their dependence upon the actual results of scientific method in different domains or in virtue of their employment and emulation of distinctively scientific ways of looking at and explaining things"(Leiter 5). He makes two central claims about the nature of this scientific method. First, according to Leiter, Nietzsche endorses empiricism as the "distinctively scientific way" of looking at the world. Second, Leiter argues that

Nietzsche seeks to identify the causal determinants of human values, actions, thoughts, feelings etc in a fixed psycho-physical human nature.

Leiter situates his naturalism in opposition to a “postmodern” interpretation. He is primarily at odds with the postmodern understanding of truth and perspectivism. This non-naturalistic reading proposes that the world has no objective features, no facts independent of interpretation. Rather, subject valuations pervade all knowledge and judgment. As a result, science provides only interpretations of natural phenomena that cannot be said to “truly” or “objectively” correspond to anything in the world.

Leiter responds by endorsing a view I call “perspectival objectivity.” He argues that Nietzsche does not reject truth as such, but rejects only the Kantian noumenal world—a world that exists outside the realm of human perception. According to his naturalistic interpretation, Nietzsche privileges the epistemic status of natural science as a source of unadulterated, objective truth. I will use Maudemarie Clark’s *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* to elaborate on Leiter’s arguments concerning truth, which he cites to support his position.

After explicating Leiter’s position, I argue that Nietzsche’s endorsement of empiricism does not entail his endorsement of Leiter’s strong naturalism. Leiter misconstrues Nietzsche’s arguments concerning truth, failing to realize that his own arguments are susceptible to Nietzsche’s attack on metaphysics. In fact, Nietzsche subscribes to the falsification thesis and thus rejects the claim that empirical methods access a “valueless,” objective reality. He believes all of our “truths,” “knowledge,” judgments, and experiences are infused with subjective values. Instead

of seeking “objectivity” through disinterested empiricism, we must seek objectivity by engaging with our values and affective interests. I go on to show that Leiter also misconstrues Nietzsche’s arguments concerning causality. As a result, Leiter’s thesis that Nietzsche seeks to identify deterministic causes of all human facts is untenable. Finally, I argue that, due to his naturalistic interpretation, Leiter misconstrues Nietzsche’s dismissal of the Kantian problem of freedom (of the *causa sui*) as an endorsement of determinism.

I conclude that translating man back into nature means translating him from the world of being—of a noumenal world—to the world of becoming—the world of a multiplicity of human perspectives. Leiter’s misunderstanding of Nietzsche’s views stems from his narrow interpretation of the German word translated as “science”: “the term *Wissenschaft* or science applies as much to historical studies of ancient philology as the natural sciences” (Babich 104). By understanding Nietzsche’s endorsement of empiricism negatively—as a rejection of metaphysics—we avoid reducing his philosophy to the scientific naturalism proposed by Leiter.

II. Brian Leiter’s Naturalism

A. Truth

The status of truth and knowledge in Nietzsche has been the subject of much debate. Nietzsche famously challenges the value of truth and thus knowledge. He rejects the notion of metaphysical truth (i.e. truth as distinct from a human perspective), and instead proposes perspectivism at the core of all human

understanding. Leiter argues that Nietzsche's rejection of truth does not entail the rejection of truth per se, but only the rejection of, in Kantian terms, an objective, "noumenal world," which "would be a world of objects seen from *no perspective at all*" (19). By rejecting a world that exists independently of humans, Nietzsche also rejects the "mere" appearance of the "phenomenal" world. According to Leiter, truth only exists in the world accessible through human experience.

The postmodern "Skeptical Reading," to which Leiter strongly objects, understands Nietzsche's criticism of truth as a rejection of objective truth as such. According to the postmodern "falsification thesis," there exists an irreducible interpretation and simplification in all "truth" or "knowledge," a necessary "falsification" or "distortion." Alexander Nehemas expresses this view, writing, "To recognize that illusion is inevitable is to recognize that the views and values we accept wholeheartedly and without which our life may not even be possible depend on simplifications, on needs and desires we may not at the moment be able to locate specifically" (Nehemas 61). In other words, our truths are filtered through a set of subjective views and values that escape awareness.

This postmodern reading poses a serious difficulty for Leiter's naturalistic interpretation because,

"[I]t seems to be precisely an effort to move away from the idea that the world possesses any features that are in principle prior to and independent of interpretation. In itself, the world has no features, and these can therefore be neither correctly nor wrongly represented" (Nehemas 45).

Recall, Leiter claims that Nietzsche privileges the epistemic status of science; but, according to the falsification thesis, "no particular point of view is privileged in the

sense that it affords those who occupy it a better picture of the world as it really is than all others”(Nehemas 49). This is because all “truth” involves an unjustified choice, selection, and simplification of the world.

In reply, Leiter cites Maudemarie Clark, who argues that notions of distortion or falsification entail the existence of a true, objective world of “things-in-themselves.” But according to her, Nietzsche rejects precisely this kind of objective world by discrediting Kant’s noumenal world. While Clark agrees that seeing and knowing the world are shaped by the physiology of the senses, she maintains we cannot remove ourselves from this human perspective to judge whether our “truths” simplify “reality.”

According to Clark and Leiter, the shaping of the world by our senses does not conflict with the fact that seeing and knowing can objectively correspond (or fail to correspond) to the world. Leiter endorses what I call a doctrine of perspectival objectivity. He maintains that perspectivism does not “require us to deny that some perspectives will *distort* the true nature of a viewed object, or that the viewed object has a determinate character that transcends any particular perspective we adopt upon it,” giving the following example to clarify his position (Leiter 20):

“[I]f we want to create a map to give us knowledge of a particular region, what our map represents will vary with our interests, i.e., whether we are interested in the topography of the region, or the major arteries, or the tourists attractions. Similarly, as we multiply *interests* we can expect to know more about the object of knowledge. But this perspectivism still allows for the possibility that certain perspectives can be simply *wrong* about the object, that they can “distort” its true nature”(Leiter 21).

In other words, if we want to navigate our way around a series of highways, a certain kind of map (e.g. a road map) conveys this information. Further, the map may misrepresent or distort the “true”, or actual pattern of roads. Obviously, the map fails to represent many characteristics of the area (e.g. buildings, topography, etc). But, perspectivism does not entail the absence of objectivity or a necessary distortion about matters known—only that “knowledge is always interested (and thus partial),” limited to particular *objective* perspectives. Note that the correct map corresponds to the way the world actually is, as according to our empirical observations.

B. Science and Objectivity

Leiter’s two central claims concerning science rely on the existence of objective truth. Leiter maintains that for Nietzsche, objective truth comes from the results of science and/or distinctively scientific methods and ways of looking at and explaining things. His first claim is that empiricism is the distinctive scientific way of looking at things .

Nietzsche does unequivocally endorse empiricism, expressing this view in the following passage: “All credibility, all good conscience, all evidence of truth come only from the senses (BGE: 134). While it seems that empiricism far from distinguishes natural science (to which Nietzsche ostensibly subscribes) from many other kinds of explanation (e.g. anthropological, historical, etc.), Leiter equates empiricism with science. He quotes from a source, which says, “during the 19th century ‘empiricism...came to be the defining characteristic of real science’”(44n).

Leiter quotes further, “ ‘true science is...nothing but a methodically and deliberately completed and purified experience’”(44n). This empirical grounding differentiates scientific judgments from moral ones: whereas empiricism gives us access to objective truth about the world, moral judgments are irreducibly subjective.

Clark and Dudrick agree “that Nietzsche takes the ‘constituents of the objective world’ to be only those objects and properties accessible through perception or the empirical methods of the sciences”(Clark and Dudrick 197-8). They draw a line between “the disenchanting empirical world revealed by science and the enchanted or value-laden world of our practical concerns”(201). According to these philosophers, the “real world” as disclosed by science is valueless, citing the following passage as evidence:

“Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less—but rather has been given, granted value at some time, and *we* were the givers and granters!”(GS 301).

According to Clark and Dudrick, Nietzsche distinguishes objectivity in science from objectivity in ethics. In science, “objectivity...*does* guarantee convergence in opinion, at least ideally,” whereas “objectivity” in ethics does not (Clark and Dudrick 223). Objectivity in ethics involves occupying a number of different evaluative standpoints with the goal of choosing the “best” one. Clark and Dudrick endorse Leiter’s position, according to which an individual’s subjective judgment of “good” is causally determined by psycho-physical facts.

C. Science and Causality

Leiter's second claim is that Nietzsche seeks to identify deterministic causes of natural phenomenon by analogy with science. According to Leiter, Nietzsche takes "over from science the idea that natural phenomenon have deterministic causes" (5). This means understanding and explaining "human beliefs, values, and actions by locating their causal determinants in various features of human nature" (5). Thus, Leiter claims that Nietzsche reduces all questions concerning human behavior, ideas, thoughts, and actions to causally deterministic biological or psychological explanations.

Before we go any further, Leiter must defend his naturalism against passages in which Nietzsche appears to explicitly denounce causality. Leiter counters by construing Nietzsche's rejection of causality as the rejection of cause and effect as "pure concepts"—i.e. as applying to an abstract, Kantian noumenal world. He contends that Nietzsche's criticism of causality "does *not* undermine the objectivity of claims about causes; it simply confines their objective truth to the world as it appears to us" (23). Again, we encounter Leiter's claim that objective truth does not exist distinct from human perspective, but does exist in the empirical world.

Leiter presents his position as "Causal Essentialism," distinguishing it from "Classic Determinism." According to Classic Determinism, "for any event p at a time t , p is necessary given the totality of facts prior to t , together with the actual laws of nature" (Leiter 82). According to Leiter's Causal Essentialism, "for any individual substance (e.g. a person or some other living organism) that substance has

“essential” properties that are causally primary with respect to the future history of that substance, i.e., they non trivially determine the space of possible trajectories for that substance”(Leiter 83). Unlike Classic Determinism, Causal Essentialism does not presuppose the existence of laws of nature and also does not fix a single outcome, but circumscribes a range of trajectories (Leiter 83).

Now that Leiter has (for the time being) defended his interpretation of causality, we can provisionally accept his strongly deterministic thesis concerning the self. Leiter calls this his “Doctrine of Types,” according to which “Each person has a fixed psycho-physical constitution, which defines him as a particular *type* of person”(8). These “type-facts” are both causally and explanatorily primary to “all other facts about a person (e.g. his beliefs, his actions, his life trajectory),” even his conscious mental states (91). Thus, according to Leiter, Nietzsche does not consider individuals to be morally responsible agents, which would require the causal efficacy of conscious mental states (which are determined by causally prior type facts). Rather Leiter presents Nietzsche’s position as follows:

“A ‘person’ is an arena in which the struggle of drives (type-facts) is played out; how they play out determines what he believes, what he values what he becomes, But, qua conscious self or ‘agent,’ the person takes no active part in the process”(Leiter 100).

Leiter does believe values play a causal role in the trajectory of a person’s life; but a person cannot choose or create values because type-facts causally determine an individual’s values.

In sum, Leiter suggests that Nietzsche endorses the scientific perspective “as the correct or true one”(Leiter 21). According to Leiter, Nietzsche only criticizes

science insofar as it seeks to render philosophy obsolete. Science “cannot entirely preempt ‘philosophy’” because philosophy is needed for the important task of creating new, subjective values (Leiter 22). In other words, science provides access to objective truth on which philosophy grounds its perspectival ethical theories. For Leiter, these objective features of the world are fixed psycho-physical type facts, which are both causally and explanatorily primary to all other relevant facts about a person.

III. Nietzsche on Truth

In the following pages on truth, I provide evidence from Nietzsche’s works in favor of the falsification thesis. (There exists an enormous literature concerning Nietzsche’s arguments and their extensions (See for example, Rorty *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and *Truth and Progress* for an introduction)).

Nietzsche quite clearly rejects two kinds of truth. The first, as already noted, is metaphysical truth, an objective truth independent of all human experience. This kind of truth rests on a hypothesis of being, which “is the source of all *slandering of the world*” (212). Nietzsche also rejects the scientific reduction of the world to something quantifiable, calculable, mathematical, and logical—the reduction of existence to physical facts (GS 373). Instead of stable, enduring *being*, Nietzsche proposes that the world is *becoming*. I argue that Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysical truth also applies to Clark and Leiter’s objective perspectivity.

In his typically elusive manner of philosophizing, Nietzsche appears to waver between Leiter and Clark’s thesis of perspectival objectivity—that certain

perspectives correspond to valueless facts about the world—and the falsification thesis. Such ambivalence is apparent in the following passage from his late notebooks:

“ ‘[I]llusoriness’ itself belongs to reality: it is a form of reality’s being, i.e. in a word where there is no being, a certain calculable world of *identical* cases must first be created by *illusion*: a tempo in which observation and comparison are possible, etc. ‘illusoriness’ is a trimmed and simplified world on which our *practical* instinct have worked. It suits *us* perfectly: we *live* in it....the world apart from our condition of living in it, the world we have not reduced to our being, our logic and psychological prejudices does *not* exist as a world ‘in-itself’ it is essentially a world of relationships: it could have a *different face* when looked at from each different point: its being is essentially different at every point...and these summations are in every case entirely *incongruent*” (LN p. 250).

It appears the falsification thesis characterizes the world of our practical concerns while Leiter and Clark’s perspectival objectivity characterizes the world apart from our condition of living in it. Leiter and Clark could plausibly argue that the latter refers to a world given through scientific empiricism. However, this passage does not clearly characterize this world of relationships—so let us turn elsewhere.

In a less ambiguous passage, Nietzsche juxtaposes the reality of the world as it appears to us, which “lies in the constant recurrence of the same, familiar, related things, in their *logicised character*, in the belief that here we can calculate,” to “the opposite of this phenomenal world [which] is *not* ‘the true world’ [i.e. Kantian noumenal world] but the formless, unformulatable world of the chaos of sensations—thus, *a different kind* of phenomenal world, one not ‘knowable’ by us” (LN p. 161). It is the intellect that “logicises” or “trims” the material of the senses,

reducing our chaotic sensory experience to “the broadest strokes.” Here as in other passages, Nietzsche identifies the falsification of reality with the simplification of the “chaos of the senses” into enduring and similar things.

Clark argues this account of sensory experience is internally inconsistent with Nietzsche’s endorsement of empiricism. According to her, “empirical accounts cannot provide a basis for equating reality with the chaos of sensations, since they must presuppose that sense organs and bodies are real”(Clark 123). Although Nietzsche denies the existence of stable enduring things, he must presuppose the existence of real, enduring sense organs to ground such a claim. Nietzsche himself remarks on the *reductio ad absurdum* if one insists that the external world is a product of our sense organs, writing, “But then our organs themselves would really be—the product of our organs”(BGE 15). In other words, “only an *a priori* account of the construction of the world from sensations could ground his equation of reality with sensations, and thereby his falsification thesis”(Clark 124). According to Clark, Nietzsche falls prey to hypothesizing the very thing he rejects—viz. a noumenal world, a world causally prior to, but outside the realm of our experience.

However, only those who subscribe to the notion of “appearances in the way idealist philosophy uses that term” are subject to this internal contradiction (BGE 15). According to idealism, knowledge of mind-independent reality is impossible because all sensations are mind-dependent. But, Nietzsche’s philosophy of “becoming” does not reduce sensory experience to mind-dependent “ideas” or experiences; rather it criticizes our sensory experience as infused with judgments that simplify the world (viz. into unified and enduring things).

Nietzsche grounds his falsification thesis in his experience and observation of how we come to know (cf. BGE 230). He observes, “the will to truth is a *making* fixed, a *making* true and lasting, a removing from sight of that *false* character, its reinterpretation into something that *is*” (LN p. 155). In the selection above (LN p. 161), Nietzsche puts “knowable” in quotations because he considers “knowledge as such impossible within becoming” (LN p. 138). With careful observation, we can become aware of the perpetual flux of our experience and the need to impose certain simplified forms and shapes, experiences and “knowledge,” so as to make sense of the world.

IV. Nietzsche On Empiricism

Recall according to Leiter, Nietzsche endorses careful empirical observation as a means of accessing a world of objective, valueless truth. However, I have shown that Nietzsche believes all “truth” simplifies and falsifies the perpetual flux of the world. Furthermore, Nietzsche attributes the simplification of the world to the unavoidable imposition of our subjective moral judgments. For example, he consistently identifies utility and “preservation of the species” as dominant judgments undergirding our “knowledge” and “truths.” He writes,

“We simply have no organ for *knowing*, for ‘truth’: we ‘know’ (or believe or imagine) exactly as much as is *useful* to the human herd, to the species: and even what is here called ‘usefulness’ is finally also just a belief, a fiction” (GS 354).

Nietzsche argues that consciousness only developed in humans as “social animals,” and thus “the world of which we can become conscious [i.e. gain ‘knowledge’ of] is

merely a surface- and sign-world, a world turned into generalities and thereby debased to its lowest common denominator”(GS 354). For Nietzsche, consciousness developed due to the need for intersubjective communication, which requires the erasure of fundamental differences into a generalized, understandable form.

Nietzsche’s criticism of consciousness as generalized and debased echoes his critique of language. He points to the “being” built into the way we talk, think and experience the world when he proposes that language functions metaphorically. According to Nietzsche, our linguistic concepts operate by equating two unequal things and thus simplifying and falsifying both. For example, we use the word “road” to refer to a variety of roads, and in doing so ignore differences and forget distinguishing aspects. Clark retorts that using the same word to describe two things “is to posit not an identity, but only a similarity”(Clark 77). To call x a road “means only that x is relevantly similar to other things we call [‘roads’]”(Clark 77). In reply, we may ask, what makes these things “relevantly similar”?

Clark and Leiter respond that an objective empiricism grounds what is relevantly similar. While Leiter and Clark believe we can disable the subjectivity of value judgments through disinterested observation, Nietzsche writes, “There are no experiences other than moral ones, not even in the realm of sense perception” (GS 114). He argues, “we put certain values into things, then these values have effects *back* on us after we’ve forgotten we were the ones who put them in”(LN 109). He gives the following example: “supposing I think someone is my father, then much follows from that concerning everything he says to me: it’s *interpreted*

differently”(LN 109). In short, we comprehend and construe reality through a set of values that escape awareness.

To understand why Nietzsche rejects the objectivity of empiricism, let us consider Leiter’s example of the road map. According to Leiter, a map can correspond to the world and thus accurately represent it, or fail to correspond and distort facts about the world. If the map corresponds to the world, it belongs to the realm of valueless truth. In reply we should ask, how do we establish “objectively” what counts as a road? Do we include dirt roads? Do we include small side streets? Do we include unmaintained roads? In other words, we must make subjective value judgments in deciding what counts as a road.

Leiter argues that there is no reason to think this kind of value judgment introduces falsification. Recall, in making a road map, we choose to exclude other features of the area such as buildings, restaurants, etc. This does not entail a lack of objectivity, but only that our knowledge is always interested. However, for Nietzsche, the problem is not only that we ignore or exclude information that bears on the “truth” or “objectivity” of our map; it is that we remain largely unaware of how our subjective moral judgments pervade our ideas of reality and truth.

Let us return to the example of the map. Now consider, do we include the number of lanes? The width of the road? Potholes and cracks? If we do not include these features, does our map correspond to reality? My point is that there do not exist objective features of the world that determine what counts as a road. Rather we decide what counts as a road based on a set of “moral” judgments—judgments that distinguish a “good” from a “bad” road. These morals are conditioned feelings

and associations, contingent on a particular historical, cultural, linguistic context (Janaway 346). This kind of judging, based on irreducibly subjective standards that falsify and simplify, pervades all “knowing.”

Thus, instead of approaching the world with a disinterested empiricism, we must engage with our interests and valuations to achieve “objectivity” because:

“There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be” (GM III, 12).

Note that Nietzsche equates knowing with the affects, with feeling. For example, when we judge what counts as a road we really judge based on a conditioned feeling. To begin to understand the values that underlie our experiences and judgments, we must ask why a particular judgment “that is true” is good or useful *for me* (e.g. as a product of a special upbringing, culture, history, physiology, etc). Say we decide the following features define a road: paved, longer than one mile, and open to vehicular traffic. Among other things, this judgment indicates the values of a particular country during a particular historical period (the measurement of distance in miles indicates a country; the existence of cars indicates a particular historical period). As we engage with these valuations, we can shift our judgments for and against, adding new affects to our worldview.

Clark and Leiter worry that this falsification thesis fails to capture the intuition that some views and interpretations can be radically false. To address this worry, let us consider Nietzsche’s endorsement of empiricism. He believes this empiricism provides a stronger method or standard for making judgments

concerning the “nature” of man in the wake of the “death” of God. His arguments against a metaphysical explanation of the world are two-fold. First, he provides a more justified explanation of natural phenomena (viz. of morality). Second, he criticizes the value of metaphysics by criticizing the type who endorses this kind of explanation (viz. the life-denying “herd animal man”). Are Nietzsche’s arguments more objective or true than his metaphysical predecessors? Only judged by the very standards he endorses (empiricism, natural explanation etc); they are certainly more *useful* for Nietzsche’s project of rejecting metaphysics and creating an ethics of higher types. In Nietzsche’s support of natural explanation, he endorses explaining worldly phenomenon by appeal to other worldly phenomenon (as opposed to metaphysical). But, there neither exists objective, “mind-independent” truths nor such standards to judge the truth of the explanation. There only exist truths based on metaethically unjustifiable and irreducibly subjective values that necessarily exclude relevant information. The important point to realize is that everything we see or do is value-laden.

If scientific “truths” are infused with subjective, “moral” judgments, Leiter can no longer neatly separate the “enchanted” world of values from the “objective” world of science. With the understanding that philosophical moral judgments pervade and shape all of our experience, we must reverse the priority given to science over moral judgment. We see that science does not provide objective, valueless truth, but is one interpretation among many. Science simplifies and falsifies the world, just as Leiter’s naturalism does to Nietzsche’s works.

V. Nietzsche on Scientific Determinism

The second central thesis of Leiter's naturalism concerns causality. To recapitulate, Leiter argues that Nietzsche confines the objectivity of causality to the world as it appears to us, while rejecting causality in the realm of "things in themselves." He uses this interpretation to support his doctrine of type-facts, according to which fixed physiological traits causally determine the trajectory of a person's life (Leiter 82).

Equipped with his misinterpretation of truth, Leiter misses the mark in reducing Nietzsche's project to the explanation of all human actions, thoughts, feelings etc through the identification of their causal determinants in human nature (viz. type facts). Nietzsche quite explicitly rejects this kind of deterministic picture in the following selection, titled "*On combating determinism*":

"From the fact that something happens regularly and predictably, it does not follow that it happens *necessarily*. That in every determinate case a quantum of force behaves and determines itself in a single way does not make it an 'unfree will'. 'Mechanical necessity' is not a fact: it is *we* who have interpreted it into what happens...But from the fact that I do a particular thing, it by no means follows that I do it under compulsion"(LN p, 154).

Following his arguments concerning truth, Nietzsche writes, "Causality is not a fact but an interpretation"(LN p. 154). Leiter appears to ignore a variety of passages from Nietzsche's published works to the same effect, citing only the following selection to substantiate his causal thesis:

“[O]ne should use ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ only as pure *concepts*, which is to say as conventional fictions, for the purpose of description and communication, *not* explanation. In the ‘in-itself’ there is nothing like ‘causal association,’ ‘necessity,’ or ‘psychological un-freedom’”(BGE 21)

Nietzsche’s point is not that causality does not exist in the noumenal world (which of course it does not, because no such world exists), but that we have made up the concept of causality for the purposes of understanding our empirical world. The following passage, ignored by Leiter, corroborates this interpretation:

“Cause and effect: there is probably never such a duality; in truth a continuum faces us, from which we isolate a few pieces, just as we always perceive a movement only as isolated points, i.e. do not really see, but infer...An intellect that saw cause and effect as a continuum, not, as we do, as arbitrary division and dismemberment—that saw the stream of the event—would reject the concept of cause and effect and deny all determinedness”(GS 112).

In short, our world does not “obey” any principle of causality. Like all “truth,” our ideas of cause and effect are necessary simplifications of the infinitely interpretable world.

Furthermore, I can point to numerous aphorisms that explain human facts without any sort of reference to a fixed nature, but the following will suffice:

“Almost all Europeans, at an advanced age, confuse themselves with their role; they become the victims of their ‘good performance’; they themselves have forgotten how much they were determined by accidents, moods, and arbitrariness at the time that their ‘profession’ was decided—and how many other roles they may have been *able* to play”(GS 356).

Unless Leiter wants to argue that accidents and arbitrariness fall into the category of “causally determined by psycho-physical facts”, he has fallen victim to an inevitable

misinterpretation and simplification. This passage unequivocally rejects the compulsory character type-facts.

Nietzsche also objects to the vocabulary of substance in Leiter's explanation of Causal Essentialism. Nietzsche's objection to the notion of substance is an objection to the belief in the fixed character of world, the "belief in things lasting and regularly recurring"—such as type-facts (LN p. 155). It is fitting that the vocabulary of substance emerges in this particular discussion, as Nietzsche argues that the belief in an enduring substance with essential properties stems from the belief in causality, the belief that there exists "*something that causes* and a *something upon which there is an effect*" (LN p. 154). Note that Leiter cannot solve the problem by appeal to a different vocabulary—the thesis of causal essentialism requires a notion of an enduring, unchanging thing with essential (causal) properties.

The following passage highlights the irony of Leiter's claim that humans are unfree:

"It is almost always a symptom of what is lacking in a thinker when he senses some compulsion, need, having-to-follow, pressure, un-freedom in every 'causal connection' and 'psychological necessity. It is very telling to feel this way—a person tells on himself" (BGE 21).

(Nietzsche divides those concerned with the problem of the "un-freedom of the will" into two groups—the vain who want credit for all of their actions and the weak who do not want to be responsible for anything. Which one is Leiter?). Nietzsche does not concern himself with the "reality" of the freedom of the will or the determinedness of the self because the notions of freedom and necessity, cause and

effect are anachronistic fictions—Nietzsche creates better ways of understanding ourselves.

VI. The Problem of the *Causa Sui*

Although the evidence above is sufficient to debunk Leiter's causal thesis, I want to explain Nietzsche's position with respect to the causal efficacy of conscious mental states. Leiter mistakes Nietzsche's rejection of the Kantian problem of free will or the *causa sui* for his endorsement of determinism. This is due to his understanding of the deterministic relationship between type-facts and conscious mental states. In rejecting the problem of the *causa sui*, Nietzsche wishes to underscore our misunderstanding of the problem of freedom and the kind of freedom we have—not endorse determinism. Our past misunderstanding of freedom stems from metaphysical ideas about the "essence" of humans (viz. unified, immortal soul).

According to Leiter, Nietzsche rejects the causal efficacy of conscious mental states and thus freedom. To support this position, Leiter quotes Nietzsche, who writes, "a thought comes when 'it' wishes, and not when 'I' wish" (BGE 17). He proposes that the fundamental causes of thoughts, and thus actions, are type-facts (assuming thoughts are causally prior to action). Without the autonomous causal power of mental states (which would entail the causal efficacy of conscious mental states in and of themselves), Leiter believes that there does not exist any kind of freedom.

To understand Nietzsche's position, we must set his interpretation of the relationship between consciousness and freedom directly against Kant's. Kant argues that consciously willing an action in a particular way (viz. in accordance with the categorical imperative) distinguishes an action as free—as the highest kind of action. Further, this willing must be totally free of external influences (viz. of worldly inclinations). Nietzsche's point in rejecting the causal efficacy of conscious mental states and thus downgrading the value of consciousness is that "free will" (or at least the feeling of free will) does not wholly or largely consist in a conscious willing. Rather, freedom and the feeling of freedom accompany the ability to accomplish a task, which is the effect of having the proper resources, drives, strength, innate talent etc.

This appeal to act free of all external influences (such as free of prior experience) is not only an absurdity; it is also a "slavish" appeal to a world other than this one (e.g. a world of pure reason). It is absurd to posit a "pure," or "uncaused" conscious mental state as the distinguishing feature of a free action, because conscious thought is impossible without previous experience. Nietzsche does not, as Leiter argues, commit himself to the view that all conscious mental states are therefore causally determined. He only points to the absurdity of this metaphysical notion of freedom based.

Nietzsche also denounces the slavishness of the typical formulation of freedom as the ability to act free of external influence, contrasting it to the aristocratic "artistry and enthusiasm in respect and devotion" (BGE 260). Those who believe in this formulation of freedom believe freedom is only attainable when

removed from the world. In the following passages on artists, Nietzsche underscores the externally influenced, “necessary” character of the highest, most “free” actions:

“Every artist knows how far removed this feeling of letting go is from his ‘most natural’ state, the free ordering, placing, disposing and shaping in the moment of ‘inspiration’—he knows how strictly and subtly he obeys thousands of laws at this very moment, laws that defy conceptual formulation precisely because of their hardness and determinateness”(BGE 78).

Nietzsche appeals to the belief that an artist embodies a high kind of freedom in his moment of inspiration. If artists obey hard and determinate laws in this creative moment, we should reconsider defining the “highest,” most “free” kinds of actions by their degree of freedom from external influence.

How then are we to understand Nietzsche when he writes about the necessity of “becoming who we are”? We should understand it as a fatalistic doctrine in which Nietzsche, “begins at the end, that is, the outcome, and considers the outcome in some sense necessary, given the nature of the person’s character, which in turn entails a protracted narrative which, all things considered, encompasses the whole of that person’s life, culture, and circumstances”(Solomon 423). We are much less “free” than we would like to suppose, but certainly we are not totally “unfree” or determined.

VII. Conclusion

In seeking to translate man back into nature, Nietzsche criticizes metaphysical and religious interpreters of humans because “they have a thirst for things that are *contrary to reason*”(GS 319). These sorts fail to ask questions such as: “What did I really experience? What was going on inside and around me? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will turned against all deceptions of the senses and stalwart in warding off the fantastic?” He opposes the “religious-founders” interpretation with “we reason-thirst ones, [who] want to face our experiences as sternly as we would a scientific experiment hour by hour, day by day! We want to be our own experiments and guinea pigs”(GS 319). In short, Nietzsche wants “to hear nothing more about all the things and questions that don’t admit of experiment”(GS 51).

In treating oneself as a scientific experiment, Nietzsche does not mean identifying underlying psycho-physiological causes. Leiter’s naturalistic theses stem from his misinterpretation of the German word translated as science, which “does not refer only, or primarily, to the natural sciences,” but to any empirical discipline (e.g. anthropology, philology, history, sociology, political science, etc.) (GM footnote p. 146). The word science refers equally well to “historical studies of ancient philology as to the natural sciences”(Babich 104). There is no evidence that Nietzsche privileges the findings or the epistemic status of natural science. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Nietzsche distinguishes his project from that of the natural sciences in the following passage (one of the few places he directly references “natural science”):

“The familiar is what we are used to, and what we are used to is the most difficult to ‘know’—that is, to view as a problem, to see as strange, as distant, as ‘outside us...The great certainty of the natural sciences in comparison with psychology and the critique of the elements of consciousness—with the *unnatural* sciences, one might almost say—rests precisely on the fact that they take the *strange* as their object, while it is nearly contradictory and absurd even to *want* to take the not-strange as one’s object....”(GS 355).

He quite clearly expresses the aim of his project, which is not concerned with the “certain” findings of natural science, but with the uncertainty of the psyche and of consciousness.

Also, there is no reason to assume that when Nietzsche writes about “nature,” he refers to some fixed biological or physiological fact. Nietzsche’s inquiry into the “natural” origins of our “universal” morals and truths is into the cultural, social, historical, physiological, and psychological among other things. We should understand natural in opposition to metaphysical, but not as purely or reductively physiological.

I do want to note that Leiter hits on a bit of truth in writing “natural facts about a person circumscribe what that person becomes,” but misconstrues the nature of these “natural facts” and overestimates the extent to which such facts determine our entire life’s trajectory (Leiter 81). Not everyone can become a world-class athlete—such athletes must be born with a certain “innate” talent and perhaps even a certain “competitive edge.” But, Nietzsche does not propose that there exist or that it would be possible to identify fixed natural or “psycho-physical” facts and define them as such.

To translate man back into nature does not mean to translate him into a “truth” produced by natural science, but to translate him from the world of being to the world of becoming. Nietzsche objects to the notions of truth and knowledge because they presuppose the stability of a world in perpetual flux (thus often putting “know” in quotations). Truth and knowledge are concerned with what *is*, with regularizing and universalizing—they suppose that there exists a truth for all. While Leiter argues that a set of universal, scientific truths must ground all philosophical value creation, Nietzsche’s objection to truth is precisely an objection to the validity of universal “truth” (such as provided by science) because of its herd-like character. The kind of truth that interests Nietzsche is directly related to his concern for the flourishing of higher types. These highest sorts of idiosyncratic individuals reinvent “truths,” tailoring their values and thus their judgments and “truths” according to their unique perspective.

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