

Nietzsche's Metaethics: Fictionalism for the Few, Error Theory for the Many

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Interpreters of Nietzsche face a well-documented puzzle. On the one hand, there is a raft of textual evidence that Nietzsche is a moral anti-realist. In his own words, “there are no moral facts,”¹ or more broadly, there is nothing valuable in itself.² On the other, Nietzsche's works are filled with a great variety of evaluations of people, actions, attitudes, states of affairs, etc.; there are higher and lower types, the free spirits and the slavish masses, decaying cultures and healthy individuals, and so on. How are we to reconcile these two features of Nietzsche's works? How can Nietzsche eschew the truth of (moral) evaluations while offering his own?

Various analyses of Nietzsche's metaethical view have been proposed,³ but I think they have missed the best clue we have as to what Nietzsche's metaethical views are. More specifically, I think to understand his views we need to understand precisely what the *process* of revaluing values consists in. The thought is that, if we can get a grip on what that task involves, we'll get a sense of what, on Nietzsche's view, values are and

¹ TI, ‘Improvers’, 1. This claim is repeated in GS 301, discussed below. See also the list of passages Hussain (2007) provides in footnote 7.

² See especially Hussain (2007), but also Danto (1965, 33) and (Leiter 2002).

³ See Leiter (2002), Hussain (2007), Clark and Dudrick (2007), Langsam (1997), Sinhababu (2015), Katsafanas (2011).

what he's doing when he makes his own evaluations. Indeed, vindicating that line of thought is part of the aim of this paper. The primary aim of the paper, however, is to demonstrate that Nietzsche is, in contemporary parlance, a metaethical fictionalist. He does not *believe* the contents of his evaluative utterances, but rather *pretends* or acts *as-if* he does believe them, and that is because, in part, he wants *others* to believe them.⁴

I proceed as follows. In Section I, I argue that Nietzsche thinks that he and others have/will/are engaging in a process of revaluing values, which entails, in his words, “creating” meaning, purpose, and value (MPV). In Section II, I argue that essential to creating MPV is, again in Nietzsche's words, “interpreting” lives, actions, and states of affairs, where ‘interpretation’ consists in offering *false causal and/or teleological explanations* of those phenomena in such a way that the explanations speak to various people's desires, drives, affects, and physiological constitutions.

If what I argue in these sections is true, then we should predict that Nietzsche is attempting to create MPV by offering his own interpretations, that is, offering his own false causal and/or teleological explanations, and indeed, in Section III, I provide textual evidence that he does. In fact, insofar as the predictive “theory” of Sections I and II is

⁴ I am thus in agreement with some of the basics of Hussain's understanding of Nietzsche's Metaethics. But Hussain's argument for this conclusion, while highly suggestive, is very far from conclusive. Hussain relies primarily on passages regarding what Nietzsche says about artists, and my argumentative strategy is very different. In fact, on my view, the passages Hussain discusses ought to be seen in light of what I say below about “interpretation” in conjunction with what I say about the “art of interpretation” in Blackman (2010). See also note, 24 below.

confirmed in Section III, Section III serves as further confirmation of the conclusions of Sections I and II (in the way that a scientific theory is confirmed by its predictions being realized). Lastly, given the success of my analysis of Nietzsche's creation of MPV in Section III, we are in a position to locate Nietzsche's metaethical view in the contemporary metaethical landscape, which I articulate in Section IV. I conclude that Nietzsche is, *regarding his own evaluations*, a metaethical fictionalist, but with regard to the evaluations of most other people, he is what we might call a *revolutionary error theorist*.

Before proceeding it will be useful to clarify some key terms.

Terms like 'meaningful', 'purposeful', and 'valuable', will be taken to be co-extensional. Thus, if some activity is meaningful there is a purpose and value in doing it. Arguably these terms, outside this paper, are neither synonymous nor co-extensional, but I do not think Nietzsche is particularly sensitive to these distinctions, and if he is, it does not affect the arguments to come.

I take a "revaluation of values" to be a complex set of events that may occur over an extended period of time (indeed, as we will see, even over millennia), and includes, for instance, a host of activities that encourage or promote people to internalize, and hence lead their lives by, new evaluations. A revaluation of values is, then, a psychological and sociological affair, not a metaphysical one. Further, I use the term 'revaluers' to refer to those who are roughly at the start of the process of revaluing values; they are, as it were, the "founders" of the new valuing. Born-again evangelical Christians in the 21st century, despite their interest in promoting Christianity and its values, are not revaluers. It is worth stressing that the terms 'revaluation of values' and

‘revaluers’ is *neutral* with regard to the metaethical status of the values that are promoted and internalized; for all that is meant by these terms, the claims of revaluers may be true, false, or neither.

I. Revaluing Values

The goal of this section is to demonstrate that Nietzsche a) thinks a variety of people have been revaluers, and indeed, that revaluers are often needed, b) sees the ascetic priest as a revaluer, c) hopes that he and others will achieve the same status, and d) thinks of revaluing as a matter of creating or inventing MPV. (I leave it to Section II to discuss what creating or inventing, in Nietzsche’s view, amounts to).

We begin with GS 1, which contains (a), (c), and (d), so I quote it at length.

[a] “What is the meaning of the ever-new appearance of these founders of moralities and religions, of these instigators of fights about moral valuations, these teachers of pangs of conscience and religious wars? What is the meaning of these heroes on this stage?...They, too, promote the life of the species *by promoting the faith in life*. ‘Life is worth living’, each of them shouts, ‘there is something to life, there is something behind life, beneath it; beware!’...Life *ought to be loved, because - ! Man ought to advance himself and his neighbor, because -!* What names all these Oughts and Because have been given and may yet be given in the future!

[d] The ethical teacher makes his appearances as the teacher of the purpose of existence in order that what happens necessarily and always, by

itself and without a purpose, shall henceforth seem to be done for a purpose and strike man as reason and an ultimate commandment; to this end he *invents* a second, different existence and takes by means of his new mechanics the old, ordinary existence off its old, ordinary hinges...[a, again] There is no denying that *in the long run* each of these great teachers of a purpose was vanquished by laughter, reason and nature...Despite all this corrective laughter, human nature on the whole has surely been altered by the recurring emergence of such teachers of the purpose of existence – *it has acquired one additional need*, the need for the repeated appearance of such teachers and such teachings of a ‘purpose’... [c] Oh, do you understand me, my brothers? Do you understand this new law of ebb and flood? We, too, have our time!⁵

Revaluers are needed because they articulate the MPV of actions, states of affairs, and life generally, and because their offerings eventually fall to “laughter, reason, and nature,” we are always in need of new revaluers. Nietzsche repeats this idea three sections later, in GS 4:

The strongest and most evil spirits have so far done the most to advance humanity: time and again they rekindled the dozing passions – every ordered society puts the passions to sleep-, time and again they reawakened the sense of comparison, of contradiction, of delight in what

⁵ My emphasis on ‘invent’.

is new, daring, unattempted; they forced men to pit opinion against opinion, ideal model against ideal model. Mostly by force of arms, by toppling boundary stones, by violating pieties – but also by means of new religions and moralities!

This brings us to (b): The priests of GM clearly fall into the category of “teachers of the purpose of existence” that provided MPV, and they did it by overthrowing and replacing the evaluations of the nobles. “What is certain, at least, is that...Israel, with its revenge and *revaluation of values*, has thus far again and again triumphed over all other ideals” (GM I:8, my emphasis), and in GM II:28, “he [humankind] *suffered* from the problem of what he meant...and *the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning!*”.

Turning to (c), Nietzsche clearly sees himself as one of these “strongest and most evil spirits” who is “forc[ing] men to pit...ideal model against ideal model,” since, in reply to a question concerning what he’s doing in GM – ““Is an ideal being set up or destroyed here?”” –, he echoes GS:4: “If a shrine is to be set up, a *shrine has to be destroyed*: that is the law – show me an example where this does not apply!” (GM II:24). But perhaps the most obvious place to look to verify this claim is when Nietzsche famously declares in GM P:6, “*for once the value of these values must itself be called into question*—and for this we need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted,” and then

proceeds, in the remainder of the book, to offer what he takes the conditions and circumstances to be.⁶

Let's return for a moment to claim (d) in GS 1. Revaluers revalue by taking something "without a purpose" and giving it a purpose; They "invent" a world of purposes, meaning, value, etc. The language here of "inventing," and the general picture we get here between something without value being given a value by revaluers is not unique to GS 1. In GS 301 Nietzsche says,

It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually *make* something that is not yet there: the whole perpetually growing world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. This poem that we have invented is constantly internalized, drilled, translated into flesh and reality, indeed, into the commonplace, by the so-called practical human beings (our actors). Whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less – but has rather been given, granted value, and *we* were the givers and granters! Only we have created the world *that concerns human beings!*

⁶ Nietzsche is also likely the madman in GS 125, who has "come too early" to tell people – indeed, those "who did not believe in God" – that god is dead and with it, the ascetic ideal.

The picture is one of revaluers – here, the “contemplatives” – who “make something that is not there,” specifically, values. And then the revaluers get followers, which is to say, others internalize those values; the values are “constantly internalized, drilled, translated into flesh and reality,” which is to say that people come to make the judgments the revaluers make and live their lives by them. The passage further confirms the picture we get from GS 1, and this language of creation is used throughout GM. The nobles of the first treatise of the Genealogy, for instance, “first took for themselves the right to create values” (I:2) and “The noble type of person feels that *he* determines value...he knows that he is the one who gives honor to things in the first place, he *creates values*” (BGE 260). And the priests, whose revaluation Nietzsche is so concerned with throughout GM, are filled with “ideal-creating, value-reshaping hate” (GM I:8); indeed, “[t]he slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values” (GM I:10), a constituent of which is reconceptualizing the nobles themselves: “imagine ‘the enemy’ [the noble] as the human being of *ressentiment* conceives of him- and precisely here is his deed, his creation: he has conceived of ‘the evil enemy,’ ‘the evil one,’” (GM I:10).

The priests are successful revaluers, and Nietzsche aims to be one, but what of his “brothers” in GS 1 – those whose time is to come? They are surely the “new philosophers” we hear so much about in BGE. In BGE 42, for instance, Nietzsche tells us that, “A new breed of philosophers is approaching...[T]hese philosophers of the future might have the right (and perhaps also the wrong) to be described as *those who attempt*.” What are they meant to attempt?⁷ We get an answer in BGE 61:

⁷ See also BGE 2.

The philosopher as *we* understand him, we free spirits –, as the man with the most comprehensive responsibility, whose conscience bears the weight of the overall development of humanity, this philosopher will make use of religion for his breeding and education work, just as he will make use of the prevailing political and economic situation.

The new philosopher “bears the weight of the overall development of humanity.” And what could this mean but that the new philosopher is meant to revalue values? But we don’t need to speculate, for in BGE 211 Nietzsche is explicit on this point. He begins by distinguishing the “philosophical laborers” from the new philosophers. The former are, well, very much like you and me. “It is up to these researchers to make everything that has happened or been valued so far look clear, obvious, comprehensible, and manageable, to abbreviate everything long, even “time” itself, and to *overwhelm* the entire past. This is an enormous and wonderful task, in whose service any subtle pride or tough will can certainly find satisfaction.” But as wonderful as our task is, we are mere laborers in the service of “true philosophers.”

[T]rue philosophers are commanders and legislators: they say “That is how it should be!” they are the ones who first determine the “where to?” and “what for?” of people, which puts at their disposal the preliminary labor of all philosophical laborers, all those who overwhelm the past. True philosophers reach for the future with a creative hand and everything that

is and was becomes a means, a tool, a hammer for them.

Or even more to the point, the true or new philosopher's "task itself has another will, – it calls for him to *create values*." And in BGE 203, the new philosophers must be "strong and original enough to give impetus to opposed valuations and initiate a revaluation and reversal of "eternal values"...a revaluation of values whose new pressure and hammer will steel a conscience and transform a heart into bronze to bear the weight of a responsibility like this." Lastly, in GM I:17 we are told scientists, too, can find their great satisfaction in doing the grunt work for the new philosophers, the revaluers: "All sciences are henceforth to do preparatory work for the philosopher's task of the future: understanding this task such that the philosopher is to solve the *problem of value*, that he is to determine the *order of rank among values*.—"

To summarize, there are revaluers, the most successful of whom have been the ascetic priests, and Nietzsche hopes to be a revaluer himself, with the help of his impending "philosophers of the future." And the task of revaluers is to take something that originally had no MVP, and to give it MVP.⁸ But "revaluation," "invention," "creation," "determining," "reshaping," "giving birth," "making," and "granting" of MVP - what does Nietzsche mean by these terms? *How* does one revalue, create, invent, etc.

⁸ When I say that those things "originally" had no MVP, I mean to say they had no MVP until someone created their MVP. When a revaluer revalues and creates a new MVP, she may either do this with something that either no one had given an MVP to previously, or with something that was given an MVP by someone but the revaluer wishes to give it a different MVP. More on this, below.

MPV?

II. Revaluing and Interpreting

We begin to get a picture in GS 353, *On the origin of religion*:

The true invention of the religion-founders is first to establish a certain way of life and everyday customs that work as a *disciplina voluntatis* [discipline of the will] while at the same time removing boredom; and then to give just this life an *interpretation* that makes it appear illuminated by the highest worth, so that henceforth it becomes a good for which one fights and under certain circumstances even gives one's life. Actually, the second invention is the more important: the first, the way of life, was usually already in place, though alongside other ways of life and without any consciousness of its special worth.

Here we have a passage that links “invention” with “interpretation.” The idea is that the revaluer takes a way of life that people are already living and then “*interprets*” that way of life in such a way that it seems of great value. The life that was being lived, however, was not *already* of great worth; it exists alongside other ways of life that are equally unremarkable. But the genius of the revaluer is to offer an interpretation of the practices that constitute that life so that “*henceforth* it becomes a good for which one fights,” where “henceforth” refers to the time *after* the interpretation is offered. This is a clear echo of the point made in GS 1 “that what happens necessarily and always, by itself

and without a purpose, shall henceforth seem to be done for a purpose and strike man as reason and an ultimate commandment.”

But what does Nietzsche mean by “interpretation”? What does interpreting a life (or action or state of affairs, etc.) amount to?

In this passage, we have a way of life that is understood by the revaluer in a way the liver of the life would not have offered as an explanation for why they live as they do. They live the way they do for one reason, but the revaluer tells them it is for another reason altogether, and what is more, the *real reason* (according to the revaluer) is that their way of life is meaningful, valuable, or purposeful in a way they had not yet realized.

My contention is that this notion of interpretation is absolutely essential to understanding how, on Nietzsche’s view, MPV is created, invented, made, granted, etc.; or rather, to create, invent, grant, etc. MPV to a life, action, state of affairs, etc. *is* to *interpret* those things in just the sense at issue here. More specifically, I contend that to interpret a set of phenomena is to offer false causal and/or teleological explanations for those phenomena, where those explanations speak to the drives, instincts, needs, etc. of the interpreters and/or the people to whom the interpretations are offered.⁹ There is a great deal of textual evidence for this claim, and I begin with BGE 22.

You must forgive an old philologist like me who cannot help maliciously putting his finger on bad tricks of interpretation: but this ‘conformity of nature to law,’ which you physicists are so proud of...exists only because of your interpretation and bad ‘philology.’ It is not a matter of fact, not a

⁹ More on this distinction, below.

‘text,’ but instead only a naïve humanitarian correction and a distortion of meaning that you use in order to comfortably accommodate the democratic instincts of the modern soul! ‘Everywhere, equality before the law, - in this respect, nature is no different and not better off than we are’...But, as I have said, this is interpretation, not text.

There are several important points to extract from this passage.

First, we have a contrast of “fact” or “text”, on the one hand, and “interpretation,” on the other; interpretations are *false*.¹⁰

Second, the interpretation Nietzsche accuses the physicists of offering is a false *explanation* of why various phenomena in nature occur. The physicists claim it is because objects “conform” to the laws of nature, but there is no “conformity of nature to law,” according to Nietzsche. Objects of differing masses fall at the same rate in a vacuum, but that is not because they are both following laws.¹¹ Importantly, this explanation is false because it posits a non-existent entity as a cause.

Third, the particular interpretation the physicists offer is offered because it speaks to the “democratic instincts” of the physicists. The point seems to be that the physicists believe in democracy so much, or need or desire equality so much, that they even see

¹⁰ See BGE 38, BGE 230, and GM III:16 for more explicit distinctions between text and interpretation. And for additional uses of ‘interpretation’ in this sense, see GM III:13, 17, 23, 24 and 28.

¹¹ Of course, Nietzsche is surely wrong that physicists think of the laws of nature as causes, as opposed to *descriptions* of how the world works.

equality in the workings of the universe, which “accommodates” or soothes the physicists.¹²

We turn now to GM II:16:

That ‘sinfulness’ in humans is not a factual state but rather only the interpretation of a factual state, namely of being physiologically out of sorts – the latter seen from a moral-religious perspective that is no longer binding on us . . . ‘[P]ain of the soul’ itself does not at all count as a factual state but rather only as an interpretation (causal interpretation) of factual states that could not yet be exactly formulated.

The use of “interpretation” here is identical to its use in BGE 22. First, we get the repeated contrast between factual states and interpretations of factual states. Second, the interpretation consists in a false explanation for why someone is suffering, viz. that they have sinned. As before, the explanation is false, in part, because it posits the existence of an entity that in fact does not exist, viz. sin, which is an act or state of being that stands in defiance of non-existent laws decreed by a non-existent deity. The real cause of suffering, the fact, is that they are simply “physiologically out of sorts.” And this exact claim, including the use of the term ‘interpretation’ to articulate it, also shows up in GM II:7, GM III:20, and GM III:28. Third, the interpretation speaks to the desires or needs of (at least) the alleged sinners, in just the way the physicists’ interpretations speaks to their

¹² See GS 373 for more on the physicists and their interpretation.

“democratic instincts.”¹³ As Nietzsche puts it in GM III:20,

Man, suffering from himself in some way or other, physiologically in any case...*desirous of reasons* [my emphasis]—reasons alleviate—desirous also of cures and narcotics, finally holds counsel with...the ascetic priest, [from whom] he receives the first hint concerning the ‘cause’ of his suffering: he is to see it in *himself*, in a *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he is to understand his suffering itself as a *state of punishment* [viz. in original sin].

Here, again, people are “physiologically out of sorts” or “suffering...physiologically,” and they want a reason for their suffering. And the ascetic priests’ explanation is ultimately accepted, viz. that the suffering is the cause of having sinned and so constitutes the sufferer’s punishment. Such an interpretation of his suffering caused even more suffering, this time from guilt over being a sinner, “[b]ut in spite of all that – man was *saved*, he had a *meaning*, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of ‘non-sense’” (GM III: 28). The ascetic priest’s explanation speaks to the desires of the common person because he is, as a matter of fact, suffering (from literal sickness, from the oppressive conditions imposed upon him by the nobles, etc.), and he seeks a meaning or justification for his suffering; it must *make sense* to him why he is suffering, and simply being at the whim of the nobles does not provide the sort

¹³ Whether it also speaks to the desires and needs of the priests is a separate question, addressed below.

of coherent, justificatory story he is looking for; it does not, after all, relieve his suffering nor provide him with grounds for emotionally accepting his condition. The interpretation of the priest, however, allows him to accept his suffering as his due, which is a better position to be in, emotionally, than experiencing senseless suffering.

We see this notion of interpretation yet again when Nietzsche discusses the saints' deeply ascetic existence:

[N]o loving; no hating; apathy; no avenging oneself; no making oneself rich; no working; begging...[They attain] “expressed physiologically: hypnotization—the attempt to achieve something for man that approximates what *hibernation* is for some species of animals....In countless cases they really go *free* of that deep physiological depression with the help of their system of hypnotics.

But the *physiological* dampening of desire, drive, affect, etc. results in something interesting. According to the saints it achieves “expressed in psychological-moral terms: ‘un-selfing,’ ‘hallowing’.” But what actually happens, Nietzsche says, is something very different.

“It is all the more certain that it [physiological dampening] forms, can form, the *path* to all kinds of mental disturbances, to ‘inner lights,’ for example...to [religious] hallucinations of sounds and figures...The interpretation given to conditions of this [physiological] kind by those who

are afflicted with them has always been as fanatically false as possible, this goes without saying: but do not fail to hear the tone of the most convinced gratitude that resounds already in the *will* to such a manner of interpretation. (GM III:17).

The saints are those who suffer and who seek to alleviate their suffering in extreme asceticism. And, in fact, they achieve that relief by way of achieving a dampened physiology, a hypnotic state, and in some cases, experiences as of¹⁴ losing their selves and/or religious experiences (that is, experiences as of God, Jesus, etc.). Their *interpretation* of the cause of these experiences is that they have lost their selves, or become one with god, etc., but really their ascetic lifestyle caused a change in their physiology, which gave rise to the experiences. So we have here a certain way of life and set of experiences that receive a false causal explanation that creates the MPV of that way of life and those experiences, which is just the way Nietzsche uses ‘interpretation’ in the previous passages.

I do not want to belabor the point, and I cannot here analyze the myriad places in which Nietzsche talks about interpretation to mean exactly what has been articulated here, but I invite the reader to consider BGE 108: “There are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena...”, BGE 17 (“[A] thought comes when “it” wants, and not when “I” want. It is, therefore, a *falsification* of the facts

¹⁴ The locution ‘as of’ is used here, as in the literature in the philosophy of mind, to indicate that the experience may not be veridical. Of course, Nietzsche does not think their religious experiences were veridical.

to say that the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think.”...even the “it” contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself), BGE 32 (“The origin of the action was interpreted in the most determinate sense possible, as origin out of an *intention*”), and GM I:13 (where positing a “doer” behind an action is a matter of interpretation).

I have so far articulated Nietzschean interpretations as false explanations that speak to the desires, needs, and emotional constitutions of the people interpreting and/or the person being offered the interpretation. And I’ve focused on explanations that are false by virtue of being false *causal* explanations. But there is another way of offering a false explanation that Nietzsche has in mind, which we may call “teleological explanation.” Generally, to offer a teleological explanation of an event or thing is to explain why that event happens, or why the thing does what it does, by appeal to its telos or end. We can, for instance, give teleological explanations for action, e.g. she did it so that she could go on vacation. In this sort of case, the agent has an end – going on vacation – that is *contingently* held. Some teleological explanations, though, appeal to an end that the thing has necessarily by virtue of the end being constitutive of the kind of thing it is.¹⁵ We are perhaps most familiar with teleological explanations of this variety from Aristotle or pre-Darwinian scientific explanations generally. On that view, biological organisms have an intrinsic telos, and it is their pursuit of that telos that explains their behavior.

¹⁵ I am playing fast and loose with terms like ‘intrinsic’, ‘necessary’, and ‘constitutive’ (e.g. a property can be intrinsic without being necessary) but greater precision is not needed for the point at hand.

Nietzsche learned from Darwin that these latter sorts of teleological explanations are false; nature and the organisms that are part of it have no intrinsic telos. In fact, Nietzsche thought the same thing about legal institutions, social customs, political institutions, etc.; the origin of some set of behaviors has nothing to do with what purpose we attribute to those behaviors now. That is, there are behaviors, practices, organizations, etc. that were “born” *without* purpose, people “interpret” those behaviors as having some purpose, and then proceed in error to think that those behaviors, etc. have an intrinsic telos or end. Furthermore, someone can come along and attribute a *different* intrinsic telos to something that has already been falsely attributed as having a telos; one false claim about a thing’s intrinsic telos can be replaced with another false claim about its intrinsic telos. Nietzsche discusses this at length, in GM II:12-13, in his discussion of a “major point of historical method”:

Now another word on the origin and purpose of punishment – two problems which are separate, or ought to be: unfortunately people usually throw them together. How have the moral genealogists reacted so far in this matter? Naively, as is their wont –: they highlight some ‘purpose’ in punishment, for example, revenge or deterrence, then innocently place the purpose at the start, as *causa fiendi* [*cause of becoming*] of punishment, and – have finished. But ‘purpose in law’ is the last thing we should apply to the history of the emergence of law: on the contrary, there is no more important proposition for every sort of history than that which we arrive at only with great effort but which we really *should* reach, – namely that the

origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* [by all heaven] separate; that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually *interpreted* [my emphasis] anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it...No matter how perfectly you have understood the *usefulness* of any physiological organ (or legal institution, social custom, political usage, art form or religious rite), you have not yet thereby grasped how it emerged: uncomfortable and unpleasant as this may sound to more elderly ears,— for people down the ages have believed that the obvious purpose of a thing, its utility, form and shape, are its reason for existence, the eye is made to see, the hand to grasp. So people think punishment has evolved for the purpose of punishing. But every purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function; and the whole history of a ‘thing’, an organ, a tradition can to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations, the causes of which need not be connected even amongst themselves, but rather sometimes just follow and replace one another at random.

And in GM II:13 Nietzsche repeats the connection between “inserting” a purpose or teleology into a thing and this being a matter of “interpreting.”

“[T]he procedure [of punishing] itself will be something older, pre-dating its use as punishment, that the latter was only *inserted* and interpreted into the procedure.”

Aside from false causal explanations being a way of “interpreting” MPV into the world, then, one can also give false intrinsic teleological explanations, viz. false explanations of an entities behavior as engaging in the behavior that it does because it has a telos that is necessary or constitutive of the sort of entity that it is. Various people – revaluers, in particular – offer intrinsic teleological explanations of various phenomena, but *all* of these teleological explanations are false, since nothing has an intrinsic telos.

It is worth highlighting that the interpretations of various phenomena change over time, but the interpretations do not change because we learn more and so offer *more accurate* interpretations; truth is not at issue here. Rather, when something, e.g. punishment, is said to have some particular intrinsic purpose or function, that is because some new interpretation has been given to replace the older one, and this is a function of the *power of the revaluer*, viz. the revaluer’s ability to get people to internalize the interpretation she’s selling.¹⁶

¹⁶ It might be objected – plausibly, I think – that while a practice may not have an intrinsic telos, it can nonetheless acquire one. Perhaps, for instance, while the set of behaviors that constituted what would eventually be called ‘punishment’ had no intrinsic end, an end was given to those practices so that we can now *truly* say that punishment has a purpose (or purposes). But I can find no textual evidence that Nietzsche is sympathetic to this line of thought. As far as I can see, Nietzsche thinks that to attribute an end to a

To summarize, Nietzsche has a use of the term ‘interpretation’ that he uses throughout his later works.¹⁷ And to interpret a phenomenon (state of affairs, way of life, action, experience, etc.) is to give a false causal and/or teleological explanation of those phenomena, where the explanation speaks to the desires, needs, and emotional thing is to attribute an intrinsic or necessary end to that thing – it is to specify an end that the thing has by virtue of being the thing that it is – and since all intrinsic teleological explanations are false, all claims that a thing has an intrinsic purpose is false. As GM II:12-13 indicate, attributions of purposes, according to Nietzsche, simply evidence that a new revaluer is on the scene and has the power to offer these interpretations, but these new interpretations do not represent “progress towards a goal” “but rather sometimes just follow and replace one another at random.” The problem, though, is that we need a reason for thinking that we cannot have a *true* teleological explanations of a phenomena, behavior, political organization, etc. where the telos is taken to be contingent while attributions of that contingent telos are true. To take an analogy, if it can truly be said that the purpose of a knife is to cut, where that function is determined, in part, by human intentions, why cannot a legal behavior have a function that is determined, in part, by human intention? The issue is a complicated one, but I see no textual evidence that Nietzsche considered this option, let alone had an answer to it.

¹⁷ It might be asked whether this is true of all interpretations or whether it is only one way in which, on *Nietzsche’s* usage, one can interpret something, and it is my contention that Nietzsche uses the term *exclusively* in this sense. I have so far provided many passages in which he uses the term in the specified way, and I do not know of passages in which he does not use it in this way.

constitutions of the people interpreting and/or the person being offered the interpretation. In fact, this is a crucial part of the story about *why* people internalize a given interpretation (and hence a set of MVPs).¹⁸

But it is worth pointing out another way in which revaluers cause people to internalize the interpretations revaluers want them to internalize: by controlling the language. This method is spelled out explicitly in GS 58.

Only as creators! – This has caused me the greatest trouble and still does always cause me the greatest trouble: to realize that *what things are called* is unspeakably more important than what they are. The reputation, name, and appearance, the worth, the usual measure and weight of a thing – originally almost always something mistaken and arbitrary, thrown over things like a dress and quite foreign to their nature and even to their skin – has, through the belief in it and its growth from generation to generation, slowly grown onto and into the thing and has become its very body...But

¹⁸ Wallace quite plausibly argues that another reason the commoners, or the sufferers of *ressentiment*, become followers of the ascetic priest is because it allows them to resolve a certain kind of psychic tension from which they suffer: “the powerless find themselves in a conceptual situation in which the negative affect that dominates their emotional lives [*ressentiment*] is directed at individuals whom they themselves seem compelled to regard as exemplars of value and worthy of admiration” (119). By adopting the ascetic ideal and thus seeing the nobles as evil, they are able to resolve this psychic tension.

let us not also forget that in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create new ‘things’.

One central message of the passage is that “what things are called” has a great impact on how people understand or see that thing; indeed, so much so that they are almost “new ‘things’”. An understanding of the world is created anew when we “create new names and valuations and appearances of truth.”¹⁹ The priests pull this off when, for instance, he makes “mechanical activity,” something to be grateful for; he calls it ‘the blessing of work’. People suffer from their work but “it required little more than a small art of name-changing and rebaptizing to make them henceforth see in hated things a boon, a relative bit of good fortune” (GM III:18). The priests pull this off even more obviously by “creating” the “evil enemy.”²⁰

III. Nietzsche’s Interpretations

If Nietzsche is engaging in a process of revaluing values and revaluing entails creating MPV (Section I), and creating MPV is a matter of interpreting actions, lives, and states of affairs (Section II), then we can make two significant predictions about

¹⁹ See BGE 20 for more on ways in which languages constrain or determine possible interpretations.

²⁰ Republican consultant Frank Luntz, author of “Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear,” knows this well; he is responsible for turning “estate tax” into “death tax,” and “healthcare reform” into “government takeover” of healthcare (to name just a couple of his inventions).

Nietzsche's texts. First, that Nietzsche offers interpretations in just the sense I have specified, that is, he offers false causal and/or teleological explanations of various phenomena that speak to his or his audience's drives, desires, affects, etc. And second, that he offers them in a way that speaks to his understanding of how people come to internalize interpretations. If these predictions are borne out, the conclusions of the previous sections are further confirmed, and indeed, that is just what we find.

We begin with BGE 22, the first half of which we have already seen. After Nietzsche tells us the physicists look at the "matter[s] of fact" or "text" of nature and that they interpret this text as laws of nature in order to accommodate their democratic instincts, Nietzsche continues,

...But, as I have said, this is interpretation, not text; and somebody with an opposite mode of interpretation could come along and be able to read from the same nature, and with reference to the same set of appearances, a tyrannically ruthless and pitiless execution of power claims . . . Granted, this is only an interpretation too – and you will be eager enough to make this objection? – well then, so much the better.

Nietzsche rejects the interpretation of the physicists, *but not because it is false*. He rejects it because he favors a *different interpretation*, viz. nature is "a tyrannically ruthless and pitiless execution of power claims," and he *explicitly tells us* this is interpretation: "Granted, this is only an interpretation too...well then, so much the better." Again, there are various phenomena in the natural world, which is part of the

text of nature, and we can explain those occurrences to accord with democratic instincts by appeals to laws of nature, or we can explain them by the execution of power claims those phenomena (or the entities involved in the phenomena) make. And seeing nature in terms of such power claims surely speaks to Nietzsche's desires and emotional constitution, or as he sometimes says, his "tastes."

We know this is interpretation because Nietzsche tells us it is. We also know it is interpretation because of what he says in GS 109: "Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities: there is no one who commands, no one who obeys, no one who transgresses." This not only denies the truth of the physicist's interpretation, but also points out that Nietzsche's talk of the "power claims" of nature is interpretation and that the interpretation is, just like every other interpretation, false.

Nietzsche also offers us a Nietzschean interpretation of the ascetic priests. In GM III: 11-13 he describes the priests as promoting the ascetic ideal and thereby gaining power over the masses. Nietzsche then says,

For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here a resentment without equal rules, that of an unsatiated instinct and power-will that would like to become lord not over something living but rather over life itself, over its deepest, strongest, most fundamental preconditions . . . here the gaze is directed greenly and maliciously *against physiological flourishing itself*...we stand here before a conflict that wants itself to be conflicted, that enjoys itself in this suffering and even becomes ever more self-assured and triumphant to the extent that its own presupposition,

physiological viability, decreases (my emphasis).

The “fact” or “text” here is that the priest promotes the ascetic ideal, and the explanation offered in this passage is that his promoting it is caused by his desire to undermine “physiological flourishing itself.” And he is further encouraged in his efforts to the extent that he succeeds in decreasing “physiological viability.” But this explanation is false; it’s just an interpretation. And how do we know this? Because, once again, Nietzsche *explicitly tells us* in the very next section, GM III:13:

In an accounting that is physiological and no longer psychological, a contradiction such as the ascetic seems to represent, ‘life against life’, is – this much is immediately clear as day – simply nonsense. It can only be apparent; it must be a kind of provisional expression, an interpretation, a formula, arrangement, a psychological misunderstanding of something whose actual nature could not be understood for a long time.

The priest promotes the ascetic ideal, that is, an ideal that denigrates the human drives and instincts as base, sinful, dirty, etc. And what explains this, Nietzsche initially tells us, is that the priest flourishes the more he decreases physiological viability. But then Nietzsche tells us this explanation is false because it would represent the priest as someone who seeks to undo the preconditions of his life, which is, Nietzsche says, simply nonsense.

Nietzsche’s interpretation of the priest consists in representing him as “life against

life.” But this simply is not the case. In fact, Nietzsche tells us, in section GM III:13, that the priest “belongs to the very great conserving and yes-creating forces of life,” which is commensurate with what he says about the creators of MPV generally, as in GS:1. But how does interpreting them as being an instance of “life against life” speak to Nietzsche’s desires, drives, tastes, etc.? Because life against life, or life overcoming life, is a metaphor for self-overcoming, which suits Nietzsche’s tastes just fine. In other words, the interpretation Nietzsche offers of the priest – *which he explicitly tells us is interpretation* – expresses Nietzsche’s deep admiration for self-overcoming. In fact, in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in a section entitled “On Self-Overcoming”, Nietzsche says: “And life itself confided this secret to me: ‘Behold’, it said, ‘I am that which must always overcome itself.’” The language of life overcoming itself, then, is present elsewhere as a metaphor for self-overcoming.

Again, I do not want to belabor the point that Nietzsche offers his own interpretations of various phenomena in just the way I’ve articulated.²¹ So let us turn to the two ways in which Nietzsche offers his interpretations in a way that they are likely to get internalized.

First, Nietzsche, being a revaluer, and being someone who believes that setting the language or the terms of the discourse influences how people see the world, would be interested in coining terms that would do just this. Recall the end of GS 58: “...in the

²¹ Though see Blackman (2010), where I argue there are additional Nietzschean interpretations on offer in GM, e.g. one concerning Schopenhauer and philosophers generally (found in GM III:8, where he explicitly says he’s offering an interpretation), and one concerning Nietzsche’s claims about the will to power.

long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create new ‘things’.” This contention is supported by the fact that Nietzsche *explicitly tells us* he is developing his own language. In BGE 4 he refers to “our new language.” In GM 1:2 he says, [O]nly when aristocratic value judgments begin to *decline* does this entire opposition ‘egoistic’ ‘unegoistic’ impose itself more and more on the human conscience – *to make use of my language* [my emphasis], it is *the herd instinct* that finally finds a voice (also *words*) in this opposition.” In other words, “the herd instinct” is a piece of Nietzsche’s language, that is, of his interpretation. Describing an event as being the result of a herd instinct manifesting itself in an oppositional party is an interpretation, not a mere text. But there is no herd instinct; appeal to it is a false causal explanation for the actions of the masses (that speaks to Nietzsche’s disgust with them).

Nietzsche makes an identical move in GM II:18: “Fundamentally, it is the same active force as the one that is at work on a grand scale in those artists of violence and organizers, and that builds states, which here, internally, and on a smaller, pettier scale, turned backwards, in the ‘labyrinth of the breast’, as Goethe would say, creates bad conscience for itself, and builds negative ideals, it is that very *instinct for freedom* (put into my language: the will to power).” Again, the “will to power” is Nietzschean language invented for the purpose of getting people to conceive of situations – in this case, what happens when man becomes “‘locked up’ in the state” – in the same way he does, viz. in accordance with his very undemocratic instincts.

Second, there is simply the way Nietzsche writes, which is surely meant to excite the passions and thus act as a rhetorical device for accepting what he says. The common person has his need for a meaning to his suffering and his *ressentiment* that the ascetic

priest taps into. Nietzsche wants to tap into our desire for cruelty, or power, or self-overcoming, and that is just what his writing is meant to do. Who doesn't feel disgust towards the lying, pathetic ascetic priest and the cowering masses and admiration for the heroic noble when reading GM?²²

Revaluing values is not merely a matter of getting people to think that different things are good or bad, and pursuing or avoiding accordingly. It involves getting people to see the world differently; indeed, it involves, for the people who internalize the new values, believing false causal and/or teleological explanations for various phenomena and speaking with a vocabulary that strongly encourages conceptualizing the world in a certain way. Values, when internalized, *permeate* one's understanding of the world and oneself. If one internalizes the values Nietzsche urges, one will see people pushed by their herd instinct, or their will to power, striving for self-overcoming, or degenerating. This is very different from one who sees others as suffering under the burden of sin, driven by devil-inspired desires, but nonetheless chosen and saved by god. And this shows us why interpretation is so important to Nietzsche: merely getting people to put different objects under their lists of 'good' and 'bad' is not to cause a revaluation of values; indeed, this is arguably only a *symptom* of the revaluation. But getting people to accept one's interpretations, one's understanding of how the world works in such a way that different objects must (therefore) be seen as good or bad – *that* is how one affects a revaluation of values.

²² The question is meant rhetorically, though one might plausibly answer: "Anyone who steps back from the emotions evoked by Nietzsche's rhetoric and empathizes with the oppressed masses"!

IV. Nietzsche's Metaethics

We can now turn to an analysis of what Nietzsche's metaethical view consists in. I begin with a brief overview of some terms and positions, and then offer that analysis.

Cognitivism in metaethics is the view that the attitude expressed in ethical utterances is cognitive, and more specifically, is *belief*. Its being cognitive entails that the belief is truth evaluable. Realism is the view that cognitivism is true and at least some of the beliefs are true. Anti-realism standardly consists in either denying cognitivism or affirming cognitivism while denying any of the beliefs are true.

I said at the outset that I am persuaded that Nietzsche is some kind of anti-realist. Some philosophers who think the same have interpreted Nietzsche as a non-cognitivist, thus denying that his moral utterances are truth evaluable. But if my interpretation of Nietzsche is accurate, he is not. Interpretations confer MPV on matters of fact that are otherwise MPV-less. And they consist, at least in part, in false explanations of those facts. 'You are suffering because you have sinned' is a false explanation of the fact that people are suffering for reasons having nothing to do with sin, and 'sin' is a term for a nonexistent state, insofar as it consists in being such that one (or one's ancestors) has breached the non-existent commandments of a non-existent deity. Of course, the desires, drives, and affects of a person have a causal influence on what interpretations are offered and/or accepted, but that is not the same as saying that the interpretations *just are* expressions of those affects.

This brings us to error theory. An error theory about a discourse claims, roughly, that the discourse is cognitive, and so the discourse consists in claims that are truth

evaluable, and systematically flawed, in that all of the utterances (and the beliefs those utterances express) are false. If, for instance, there is a community that thinks all people are either witches or warlocks, and so they go around claiming who is a witch and who a warlock, they are all uttering truth evaluable claims (expressing beliefs) and all of them are false. Similarly, if error theory about morality is true, all our moral utterances are false.

Some philosophers²³ have taken a view that is related to error theory in various ways (only some of which I can explore here). Cognitivists are philosophers who think that one has the attitude of belief towards moral propositions. If error theory is true, their attitudes are mistaken by virtue of being false. But one can have different attitudes towards a proposition; aside from believing that p, one can also, say, desire that p, or wonder whether p. *Fictionalists* highlight that one can also *pretend* that p, that is, one can act as-if p, and that is true whether or not one believes that p. Some fictionalists say that one can take the “fictive attitude” towards a proposition.²⁴

Fictionalists about morality can be divided into two camps. On the one hand, there are *hermeneutic fictionalists*. These philosophers are those who think that, as a

²³ E.g. Joyce (2001) and Kalderon (2005).

²⁴ Hussain (2007) casts fictionalism as a kind of “honest illusion,” and compares taking the fictive attitude towards something as akin to seeing an optical illusion, but this is not what fictionalists maintain. In taking the fictive attitude towards ‘the floor is lava’, and acting as if it is, I am not subject to any illusion. Thus, while I agree Nietzsche is a kind of fictionalist (as we will soon see), I do not think Nietzsche is calling for, as Hussain puts it, “evaluative illusions.”

matter of non-normative fact, the average person currently has the fictive attitude towards moral propositions. If this is true, there is a way in which this might be good news: if moral propositions are indeed false, then we would be in error if we believed them. But if they are false and we are only *pretending* they are true, then we are not (or not obviously) in error. So if, for instance, moral propositions require the existence of metaphysically unacceptable facts, that need not do anything to disrupt our practice of making moral utterances, since we were never supposing they were true anyway.

On the other hand are *revolutionary fictionalists*. These philosophers think that, as a matter of non-normative fact, the average person currently has the *cognitive attitude* of *belief* towards moral propositions. So revolutionary fictionalists think that error theory is true given our *current* way of relating to moral propositions, viz. cognitively. Now if you are worried that people having systematically false moral beliefs is problematic (because, say, it renders people's adherence to moral demands unstable because they may find out the horrible truth), you might suggest a *revolution*: "everyone change from a cognitive attitude to a fictive attitude towards moral propositions!". Once the revolution occurs, the thought goes, we have saved people from systematically committing errors.²⁵

Where does Nietzsche fall in this landscape? The answer is not simple, and that is because whether cognitivism or error theory or hermeneutic fictionalism or revolutionary fictionalism is true depends upon *whom one is describing*. For these distinctions depend not (only) on the truth or falsity of the moral propositions people believe or pretend to believe, but also on what attitudes people have towards those moral propositions. And it would be no surprise if Nietzsche thinks – indeed, if we all think – different people or

²⁵ For powerful critiques of both forms of fictionalism, see Cuneo and Christy (2011).

peoples have different attitudes towards the propositions in question. It might be, for instance, that ascetic priests and their flock all believe their moral utterances, in which case an error theory is true of all of them. But it may also be that the ascetic priests are disingenuously offering their interpretations in order to acquire power.²⁶ In such a case, while error theory would be true of the unsuspecting masses, the priests would be *hermeneutic fictionalists*, since they only act as-if their moral utterances are true when in fact they do not believe them.

Nietzsche is certainly an error theorist about anyone who sincerely espouses the ascetic ideal; if the priests and their flocks believe what they preach, they are systematically in error, since their values presupposes the existence of a non-existent deity. And of course hermeneutic fictionalism is not true of Nietzsche's attitudes towards the moral propositions the priests utter, since he does not act as-if they are true. He is, however, *a hermeneutic fictionalist about his own interpretations*, since he knows, after all, that he is interpreting and so offering false explanations of various occurrences; in fact, as I've pointed out, he is continually telling us when he is interpreting, and we surely cannot saddle him with the unintelligible view that he knows his interpretations are false but he believes them.

But Nietzsche is also a *revolutionary fictionalist* in that he wants others, specifically, the new philosophers, his "brothers," to adopt the same fictive attitudes towards the interpretations he offers, and he wants them to take part in this process of reevaluation by offering more interpretations and affecting the masses – through religion, political institutions etc., as he says in BGE 61– in such a way that the masses accept

²⁶ This interpretation of GM I is powerfully argued by Wallace (2007).

these interpretations and hence new MPVs for their lives.

But what is Nietzsche with regard to the people that are not his brothers? He is, to coin a phrase, a *revolutionary error theorist*. For Nietzsche wants the masses to abandon the ascetic ideal in favor of a new ideal – that is why he’s toppling shrines and calling for new philosophers – but he surely doesn’t think the masses are capable of knowing what’s going on; most people, after all, think very little about their values, or rather, what underlies those values. So Nietzsche wants them to go from being systematically in error about one moral discourse to being systematically in error about another discourse.

This means, of course, that the average person is to be told a lie – a great many lies. But Nietzsche surely has no problem with this, as indicated in GM III:19:

Our educated ones of today, our ‘good ones’ do not lie—this is true; but it is *not* to their credit! The true lie, the authentic resolute ‘honest’ life (concerning whose value one should listen to Plato) would be something far too rigorous, too strong for them; it would demand what one is not *permitted* to demand of them, that they open their eyes toward themselves, that they know how to distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘false’ in their own case.

Or as he put it earlier, in GS 2:

[T]he great majority lacks an intellectual conscience...Everyone looks at you with strange eyes and goes on handling their scales, calling this good

and that evil; nobody as much as blushed when you notice that their weights are underweight...I mean: *to the great majority* it is not contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly *without* first becoming aware of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterwards.

So to summarize, Nietzsche is a hermeneutic error theorist about people's current moral utterances (insofar as they sincerely espouse the values of the ascetic ideal) but also a revolutionary error theorist about them insofar as he wants them to have different false beliefs about what is of MPV, a hermeneutic fictionalist about his own interpretations, and a revolutionary fictionalist about the values of his brothers. Unsurprisingly, Nietzsche is not your average metaethicist.

Conclusion

Before closing there is a set of related questions that demand answers, though I can only partially provide those answers here. First, shouldn't we abandon interpretations? They are, after all, false. And, second, why is Nietzsche so cavalier, in BGE 22, about the fact that he is only offering equally false interpretations ("Granted, this is only an interpretation too...well then, so much the better)?

There are at least two replies, one fairly obvious and somewhat superficial, the other, I think, more profound.

The first is simply that thinking that the truth is of higher value than the false is to be beholden to the ascetic ideal. Insofar as we are meant to shed the ascetic ideal, we

should, presumably, question whether truth is, after all, so important, and perhaps we should accept “untruth as a condition of life” (BGE 4). This sort of point is right on the surface of the text. And one may very well reply, ‘Well, look, Nietzsche: maybe the ascetic ideal is false, but the truth is still important for independent reasons: we need it for reliable communication, for trusting each other and thus for friendship,’ and so on and on. Or perhaps one may reply, in a Kantian vein, that we are rational agents and rational agents as such aim for the truth. Nietzsche may tell us the value of truth is questionable, but we may plausibly reply that the question can be answered, and not in a way he might like.

The deeper point, I think, is that, if you accept what Nietzsche says about creating MPV through interpretations, to deny that we should interpret in this sense is to express the ascetic ideal. For the core of the ascetic ideal is to teach us that human-all-too-human desires, drives, affects, and physiology, is bad, evil, low, contemptible and, in short, to-be-condemned. But, Nietzsche says, “[f]or all too long man has regarded his natural inclinations with an ‘evil eye,’ so that in him they have finally become wedded to ‘bad conscience.’ A reverse attempt would *in itself* be possible...namely to wed to bad conscience the *unnatural* inclinations.” (GM II:24). So to rid ourselves of the ascetic ideal we must wed the bad conscience to all those claims to condemn human nature and to affirm what is human, that is, to affirm our drives, desire, affects, etc. But if giving MPV to our lives through interpretation is necessary given the kinds of creatures we are – if we are creatures with drives, desires, affects that *need* a meaning to live and create MPV in a way that speaks to our drives, desires, and affect – if “human nature...*has acquired one additional need*, the need for the repeated appearance of such teachers and

such teachings of a ‘purpose’ – then to deny that we should engage in interpretation is to deny that which makes us human, and thus would be to express the ascetic ideal all over again. Indeed, insofar as Nietzsche is right that all MPV comes into the world through interpretation, a call to cease all interpretations would be a call to “*not will*” (GM III:28). But then, to think that we should give up on interpreting MPV into life in the name of (the value of) truth is not to overcome the ascetic ideal of self-denial, but to sink deeper into it.

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