

# Natural Goodness

PHILIPPA FOOT

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Immoralism ✓

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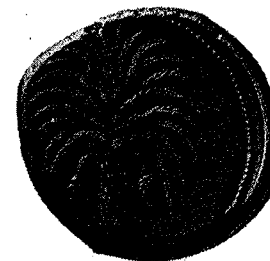
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To  
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*In Memoriam*



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## *Immoralism*

Immoralism is nowadays a somewhat neglected subject: one can search the indexes of dozens of contemporary works without finding a single entry under this heading. Many contemporary moral philosophers seem to agree with Prichard who, notoriously, scolded Plato for accepting the challenge of immoralists such as Thrasymachus and Callicles (in the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*) to show that the just man was happier than the unjust.<sup>1</sup> And while Nietzsche's work now interests many analytic philosophers, one finds few who actually try to confront him. This seems to me a mistake, if only because the whole idea of immoralism is hard to understand. Nietzsche said that he was attacking the premises of morality. Does it then have premises? What could these be? I want to consider the subject of immoralism in the light of the account of moral evaluation given in previous chapters of the present book.

In the *Republic* the immoralist case is put forward by the Sophist Thrasymachus and (as Devil's advocates) by the brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus who are not satisfied with Socrates' way of refuting Thrasymachus in Book I.<sup>2</sup> Thrasymachus had said that justice (that is, the just actions of just men) served the interests of the stronger, identifying the stronger first as the rulers who lay down laws to their own advantage, but later as strong, ruthless individuals who swindle honest men in such matters as contracts, 'plundering by fraud and force alike the goods of others, sacred and holy things, private and public possessions, and never pettily but always on a grand scale'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Prichard, 'Duty and Interest'.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Books I-II, 336B-367E.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 344A.

These strong men, powerful enough to escape retribution, profited from the self-inflicted injury of the just, whose obedience was not virtue but silly good nature. Therefore the life of the unjust was superior to that of the just. The strong who practised injustice followed good policy (*euboulia*) and were wise and good (*phronimoi* and *agathoi*). So it was wrong to prize justice over injustice.

Socrates tied Thrasymachus up in knots, but left Glaucon and Adeimantus dissatisfied: they thought that Socrates had failed to refute the strongest arguments in favour of injustice, and were ready to put them forward on the Sophist's behalf. They wanted to be confirmed in their view that the life of the just is better than that of the unjust. Glaucon therefore argues, in the role of an immoralist, that most people think injustice *in itself* better than justice, praising the latter only for the rewards that society attaches to it. It is true that justice is better for those who cannot get away with injustice, but the life of the strong unjust man is best of all. Those who praise and practise justice do so only because they fear injustice: unable to live the best of lives, they settle for the second best, which is neither to suffer nor to do injustice. They practise justice unwillingly and from inability to inflict injustice, as is proved by the fact that no one of them would act justly if, through a magic ring of invisibility, they could become invulnerable. If someone with such a power refrained from plunder he would not be admired but rather seen as the most foolish of men.

Glaucon asks Socrates to show that justice is better than injustice in itself as existing in the soul, quite apart from penalties and rewards, and suggests that in the argument they should strip these away, contrasting the life of a just man reputed unjust with one unjust but reputed just. Glaucon himself believes that justice is one of those good things desired for what they are in themselves as well as for their consequences. He wants Socrates to show that this is so, thus comparing justice to thought, sight, and health, rather than to gymnastic exercises or medical treatment which, though advantageous in their outcome, are troublesome in themselves. Adeimantus too presses this request, asking Socrates to show that injustice is the greatest of evils in the soul of him who has it, and justice the greatest good. Otherwise, he says, the best policy will be to be unjust and

not be found out. It will not be justice but the appearance of justice that men should seek.

These then are the elements in the immoralist position as represented in Books I and II of the *Republic*. Socrates assailed it by accepting the request of Glaucon and Adeimantus to show what justice is in the soul: that it is health rather than disorder there. He denied that happiness lies in the possession of wealth and power or any other of the advantages listed by Thrasymachus, insisting that it rather lay in harmony in the soul.

It is not relevant to the thesis of the present book that I should consider the arguments developed in the remainder of the *Republic*. It will be more to my present purpose to ask what reply we ourselves might want to make to immoralism as Plato saw it. We need, however, to think a little about what can even be understood as looking at justice *in itself as it is in the soul*. What is the inside and what the outside here?

analogy:  
friendship  
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It is very easy to put this last question in a way that produces nothing but puzzlement. But I suggest that a couple of analogies can help us. Suppose, for instance, that we think first about friendship among humans as this might appear to some not very intelligent visiting Martians who, without being able to talk to us or read our literature or philosophy, have been studying the phenomenon of friendship here on earth. They report that certain humans are linked with certain others in performing what seem to be services, unpaid except by reciprocity. The tacit arrangement seems to be that if humans A and B are friends each is able to call on the other when in difficulties, and there may be exchanges of gifts. Both the services and the gift-giving can be a considerable nuisance to the giver. He or she apparently performs them because everyone needs friends, except perhaps for a very few who are especially rich and powerful. The ordinary needy human would prefer to be like these few, but in fear of friendlessness settles for the next best thing, which is to be a friend and so to be able to call on friends. The institution serves him, and so he praises it.

These Martians would see friendship very much as Plato's immoralists see justice. In itself acting as a friend is, the Martians suppose, disagreeable, like gymnastic exercise or medical treatment.

For the run of humans it is, however, worthwhile for its rewards. Were it possible to get these rewards by gaining the reputation of being a friend without really accepting its duties, that is what any human would seek. The point of my analogy lies, of course, in the fact that these Martians would be failing to understand what friendship actually is in human life. And if, rather labouring the point, we described the way in which they have got things wrong, we should find that without any philosophical intention we had described what friendship *is* in the human mind and heart. What friendship requires a friend to do for a friend may indeed be onerous, involving even life itself. But what is done in friendship is done gladly, *con amore*: perhaps with regret but without resentment about the way the chips have fallen. We ourselves know perfectly well that it is not true that the best life would consist in successfully pretending to friendship: having friends to serve one but without being a real friend oneself. A Thrasymachean view of friendship would instantly be recognized as wrong.

Nor is this an isolated case. A similar analogy could be suggested if the subject were not friendship but rather the relation between parents and children. Here too, unintelligent Martians might think that parents saw looking after children as worthwhile only because children help with the harvest and support parents in old age. And with this example one can see, again, the existence of the concept of *one's own good* that was *on the scene* in the discussion of our Letter-Writers in the previous chapter.<sup>4</sup> A loving parent would often be puzzled if told 'You should just consider your own good' if the good of the children were at stake. Naturally, there can be consideration of advantages on one side or the other, having to do, for instance, with an interesting job for a parent in one country and better schooling for the children elsewhere. But there is a way in which a loving parent does not really separate *his or her good* from the good of the children. And I think it is wrong to suppose that this is only because one will affect the other. Joseph Conrad's story of the sea captain, who happily if ruefully sold his boat (which was day-to-day his whole life) for the sake of sending money to his far-away grown-

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 94-6.

up daughter, may be thought rather sentimental by the critics, but nevertheless rings true.<sup>5</sup> If he cared more deeply about his daughter than about his own future there is a sense in which he could not in his mind oppose his good to hers.

It may of course be questioned whether such analogies can really help us to understand what justice is 'in the soul'. After all, we can hardly think that people pay debts, keep promises, or refrain from taking the goods of others *out of love!* Of course not. Hume, who so much stressed the part played by sympathy in the moral life, had to admit the difficulty of cases like that of paying a debt to a profligate creditor. Nevertheless, it is one of the advantages of the recent interest in virtue theories of ethics that moral philosophers are thinking about virtues rather than bare acts. For Aristotle was surely right to distinguish doing what the just man does from doing it as the just man does it.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle's stress was mainly on the stability of the principle of true justice; but we might also think of it in terms of the underlying thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of one who recognizes the claim of any human being to a certain kind of respect. Here it is perhaps enough to point out that it makes sense to speak of those who are lovers of justice—as of those who love truth.

The plot thickens, however, if we leap across the centuries to confront the greatest of those who have been called immoralists; that is, to confront Nietzsche. Few contemporary moral philosophers, at least in the analytic tradition, have really joined battle with Nietzsche about morality. By and large we have just gone on taking moral judgements for granted as if nothing had happened. We, the philosopher watchdogs, have mostly failed to bark; which, given Nietzsche's genius and his great and continuing influence, is surely rather odd. For while J. P. Stern surely exaggerates the extent to which Hitler embodied Nietzsche's values,<sup>7</sup> and Nietzsche sometimes spoke out against anti-Semitism, nevertheless the Nazis were able to

<sup>5</sup> Conrad, *The End of the Tether*.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, chapter 4, 1105a26-b9.

<sup>7</sup> Writing of Nietzsche's belief in the unconditioned value of self-realization and self-becoming, he says, 'No man came closer to the full realization of self-created values than A. Hitler': Stern, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 86.

analogy  
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paternalism

call on him in defence of their genocidal policies. That alone should wake us up.

I want to challenge Nietzsche. But that is easier said than done, if only because it is hard even to locate the field of battle. Nietzsche called himself an immoralist and said that he was attacking morality itself, but he is not consistent in this and many interpreters have denied that he was really an immoralist. The word does not matter, but it is impossible, I believe, to confront him without separating out at least three distinct theses that might come under this description.

There is, first of all, Nietzsche's insistence that free will is simply an illusion. It has recently been strongly argued that these views on moral responsibility are central to Nietzsche's immoralism because they explain the reach of his attack on morality, beyond 'the morality of pity' to 'morality itself'.<sup>8</sup> I think that this is right, but nevertheless want to put his attack on free will aside. For here Nietzsche's attack was on the idea of a pure substance standing outside nature but nevertheless intervening to cause actions in the world. Perhaps he had in mind something like Kant's Noumenal Self; he was certainly wholly hostile to Kant and Schopenhauer even in their idea of a more real world behind the world of appearances. The denial of free will was indeed a pillar of Nietzsche's attack at least on a certain kind of morality, because he saw such a metaphysic of the self as necessary to the idea of moral responsibility and the morality of desert. To sweep them away would be to destroy the kind of judging, particularly the blaming, that seemed to him to be of the essence of morality and to show a detestable love of retribution. Nietzsche loathed the idea of punishment, saying (surely rightly) that we should mistrust anyone in whom an instinct to punish was strong.<sup>9</sup>

Why, then, do I want to leave his denial of free will aside? Because really to threaten morality itself Nietzsche would have had to show not only that free will as he understood it was an illusion,

<sup>8</sup> See Clark, 'Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality', in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 15-34.

<sup>9</sup> He also thought that many criminals were simply strong men destroyed by society's hatred: 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', in *Twilight of the Idols*, 45.

but also that no other distinction between voluntary and involuntary action (Aristotle's, for instance) would do instead. He seems to be wrong about this. And perhaps he is also wrong in thinking that moral evaluation of voluntary action and character requires the kind of attribution of responsibility that he thinks of as the moral way of judging, and speaks of as essentially unfair. Bernard Williams, discussing Nietzsche, says:

Reminded both that different pictures of action have been held in other cultures, and that the notion of action itself is less than transparent, we can be helped to see that the integrity of action, the agent's genuine presence in it, can be preserved without this picture of the will.<sup>10</sup>

If this is right, it is not Nietzsche's metaphysic of the soul that is most important to one who believes, as I do, that we should take the threat of his immoralism seriously, and wants to ask how it might be met.

2. For this reason I shall now turn to a different strand in Nietzsche's immoralism, to the attack on specifically Christian morality, which was especially prominent in his earlier writings—for instance, in *Human, All Too Human*. Here, when Nietzsche called himself an immoralist or attacked morality, his target was primarily what he called 'pity morality'. That is to say, it was the Christian teaching that he identified especially with 'herd morality', the morality of 'the weak and inferior' who, while secretly cruel and above all resentful, performed acts of 'kindness' with which they would demean the recipient and bolster up their own self-esteem.<sup>11</sup>

All this has to be taken seriously because Nietzsche can claim, almost equally with Freud, who admired him greatly, to be the founder of the theory of depth psychology. In this vein he makes observations impossible to dismiss. He recognized only Dostoevsky as his superior, claiming himself to be an innovating genius in the field. And indeed Nietzsche's psychological insights have rightly

<sup>10</sup> Williams, 'Nietzsche's Minimalist Moral Psychology', in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 246.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller description of Nietzsche's doctrines see Foot, 'Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values', in R. Solomon (ed.), *Nietzsche*, 156-68, and 'Nietzsche's Immoralism', in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 3-14.

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won him many admirers. He saw the frequent insincerity of professions of altruism, and the vanity and malice that lurks behind many of our kindly everyday actions. But of course he goes much further than this. He says that we do kindnesses to others so as to make them think well of us, then buy back this good opinion to soothe our self-hatred. We relieve our dullness with tales of others' misfortune. We torment others by displaying our virtues. Meanwhile, above all, we ourselves are resentful of our need to accept morality's control.

At this point Nietzsche's immoralism is like that of Thrasymachus, and that of Plato's other immoralist Callicles in the *Gorgias*, because supposedly good and admirable characters are depicted as weak and therefore as objects of scorn. And Nietzsche's attack, if sustainable, would be more deadly than the others, just because he is speaking in sophisticated ways of what acts of justice and charity are in the soul. He is thus trespassing on the very ground of Plato's own defence against Thrasymachus; he is representing a moral man as a wretched, fearful creature, tormented by a biting conscience and unable to seek his own good. The morality of pity, which is not even helpful to others, is above all harmful to the moral man himself. Like Callicles, Nietzsche sees human beings as tamed by morality and, like tamed animals, as thereby reduced.<sup>12</sup> He represents human good in terms of individuality, spontaneity, daring, and a kind of creativity that rejects the idea of a rule of life that would be valid for others as well. Members of 'the herd' are, by contrast, conforming, fawning, propitiating, 'dog-like' creatures. They settle for a banal kind of happiness; they 'have little pleasures for the day and little pleasures for the night; and they take good care of their health'.<sup>13</sup>

What are we to make of these charges against Christian morality? Anyone who is sympathetic to the representation of human goodness as 'natural goodness', as that has been described in the present

<sup>12</sup> Apparently Nietzsche was influenced by Plato's portrait of Callicles. But he would not at all have agreed with Callicles that the man who is to act rightly 'should let his appetites grow as large as possible . . . and to fill them with whatever he has appetite for at any time'. Plato, *Gorgias*, 491E5-492A3.

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Zarathustra's Prologue, section 5.

book, must take them very seriously indeed. For what Nietzsche is denying of the supposed virtue of charity is exactly the connection with human good that was earlier said to give a character trait that status. Taking pity (*Mitleid*) to be at the core of Christianity, he insisted that it was a kind of sickness, harmful to pitied and pitier alike. He claimed that this morality was 'slave morality' and said that it grew out of the resentment felt by the weak on account of their inferiority. Nietzsche described resentment (*Ressentiment*) as 'aggrieved conceit, repressed envy'.<sup>14</sup> As Robert Solomon has put it, 'frustration lies at the heart of *Ressentiment*, its description often embodies such metaphors . . . as "simmering," "seething," and "fuming".'<sup>15</sup>

This is strong stuff. For it goes without saying that one consumed by *Ressentiment* lives a wretched life—that Christian morality seen like this has a systematic connection not with happiness but rather with frustration, and of course with deprivation of the kind of creativity, freedom, and lightness of spirit that Nietzsche rightly sees as a great part of human good. But does one really have to see a morality that stresses the humanness of sympathy—Hume's, for instance—as mistaken? Are those whose compassion for the unfortunate may even go so far as to rule their lives really to be seen as thereby expressing a twisted sense of inferiority? Is charity really mostly a sham? Sometimes, of course, it may be a sham, and Nietzsche, with his devilish eye for hidden malice and self-aggrandizement and for acts of kindness motivated by the wish to still self-doubt, arouses a wry sense of familiarity in most of us. But this is not to say that there is not a great deal of genuine charity—of the genuine virtue—in people who do not at all fit the picture Nietzsche draws of those master types who hold themselves at a distance from the Christian 'herd'. Thinking of the ordinary unpretentious men and women who seem to find special happiness in working for the relief of suffering, one must surely find Nietzsche's dismissive views on compassion rather silly.

To say this is not, however, to reject the depth psychology that is

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Part II, 'On the Spirit of the Tarantulas'.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Solomon, 'One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*', in R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, 103.

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more or less taken for granted nowadays. Perhaps most of us can now come to terms with the thought that our motives are seldom without any trace of vanity or self-regard. Perhaps today we can recognize how much of malice, vanity, and even aggression is often present in what we do, without drawing an immoralist conclusion. A story is told of an old priest, who, asked if he had learned anything about human beings in his many years of hearing confessions, first said 'No', but then, 'Yes. There are no grown-ups.' Is it not possible to think that he spoke truly, acknowledging the greedy, jealous, small child that is ever with us, and yet insist that genuine kindness exists? If so, by the criteria of natural normativity charity is a prime candidate as a virtue, because love and other forms of kindness are needed by every one of us when misfortune strikes, and may be a sign of strength rather than weakness in those who are sorry for us. We may reasonably think, moreover, that charity makes for happiness in the one who has it, as hardness does not.

We are now, of course, in an area in which philosophy can claim no special voice: facts about human life are in question and so no philosopher has a special right to speak. But we can use Nietzsche's attack on 'the morality of pity' to unravel a tangle that may otherwise ensnare us when we try to confront him. For we often find in his writings a claim that he is engaged on 'the revaluation of values', and this is a confusing idea. What could it mean to revalue values? By what values are the values to be revalued? And can these values be revalued in their turn?

We shall not, I think, get anywhere by asking questions in which such abstractions appear out of context.<sup>16</sup> But if we look at what was going on in Nietzsche's attack on Christian morality as he conceived it, the puzzle disappears. He was saying that something thought good was not really good: 'Pity is thought good but is not really good.' Here we have the 'X is good' form that does not in general give a determinate thought.<sup>17</sup> But clearly what is in question is whether pity is a disposition that *should* be cultivated or rather

<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, section 116: 'What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.'

<sup>17</sup> Compare my objections to G. E. Moore in the Introduction to this book.

avoided in human life; that is, whether someone is to be seen as a good person in so far as he or she feels compassion for others, or rather the reverse as Nietzsche suggests. He is focusing on an evaluative assessment of attitudes and feelings that he finds in Christian morality. He is denying the proposition 'To pity others is to have a good disposition towards them', and so is challenging a judgement about what I have called natural goodness and defect in the human species.

How are we to understand such a challenge? To set it in the right conceptual framework one might usefully compare his challenge with an evaluation that has to do with a characteristic found in a species of animal, for instance, the dancing operation in honey bees. The dancing of a homecoming bee leads other bees to a source of nectar and so plays a beneficial role in the life of the hive. But at one time this supposition was queried. So suppose it were not true after all that other bees found nectar by reacting to the movements of an individual returning to the hive; in that case, unless the dance played a part in the life of the dancer itself, unless it was something that a homecomer needed to do for its own good, there would be no merit in a bee's dancing and no 'natural defect' in an individual bee just because it did not dance.

This outlines a procedure in which an evaluation might be revalued, and the procedure is in principle no different when an evaluation of a characteristic or an operation of human beings is in question. It might have been thought, for example, that it was good for human beings to be as fat as possible, before it was realized that corpulence went with ill-health. And in our own lifetime extant moral beliefs about various sexual practices have come to many of us to seem mistaken; we have re-evaluated old beliefs about the baneful influence of, for instance, masturbation or homosexuality, and so revised former evaluations. If we take this as an example of revaluing values, we can look at Nietzsche's attack on Christian values more or less on his own terms. He asked whether pity was good for the one pitying or the one pitied, and this was the right question to ask. To be sure, his treatment of the topic was all mixed up with gratuitous contempt for the kind of human beings he saw as inferiors and some pretty strange ideas about the resentment and



hidden malice of those who accept conventional moral restraints. I have suggested that he got his facts wrong; but if his facts had been right, his revaluation of pity would have been right as well. To some extent I suppose that Nietzsche was indeed right if we are thinking, strictly speaking, of what we call 'pity'. For we may think that no one really likes being pitied. It is rather what we call compassion that is respectful and good.<sup>18</sup>

So much, then, for Nietzsche's attack on what he had labelled 'pity morality'. The theme continued throughout his writings; but increasingly, as time went on, he moved to a different and more sinister point of view, in that he went so far as to deny 'intrinsic badness' in the doing of any kind of act. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, published in 1887, he wrote:

To talk of intrinsic right and wrong is absolutely nonsensical: intrinsically, an injury, an oppression, an exploitation, an annihilation can be nothing wrong, in as much as life is essentially . . . something which functions by injuring, oppressing, exploiting, and annihilating, and is absolutely incomprehensible without such a character.<sup>19</sup>

The reason given here as to why no action can be intrinsically wrong is not one that we can take very seriously, because it depends on an illicit identification of features of the plant and animal worlds with *human acts* of injury or oppression. We must look for a more interesting and original argument than this, and indeed that is to be found in a part of Nietzsche's theory of psychology that is more radical and more threatening than anything I have touched on so far. His most deeply rooted thought about the goodness and badness of human actions was based on something we might label 'psychological individualism', or perhaps 'personalism'. He thought profoundly mistaken a taxonomy that classified actions as the doing of this or that, insisting that the true nature of an action depended rather on the nature of the individual who did it. (I think he must have seen a classification under descriptions such as 'murder' or 'oppression'

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of *Mitleid* in Nietzsche, see Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 363-71. Also Salaquarda, 'Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, 90-118.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay, section 11

rather as Linnaeus must have seen previous taxonomies of plants, or as a scientist conversant with the classification of metals by their molecular structure might see the taxonomies of alchemy.)

A denial of the intrinsic badness of kinds of actions may, of course, look like nothing more than the common (though I myself believe mistaken) belief that there are no *kinds* of actions, however horrific, that could not in extreme circumstances be justified by a pressing end.<sup>20</sup> But it is more than this. Nietzsche was speaking about injury and oppression; using descriptions tending to imply that such arguably extenuating circumstances were not on the scene. In any case his own thought was different. It was that right and wrong in action could not be determined by what was done except in so far as that stood in a certain relation to the particular nature of the person who performed it. Thus, while he was ready to castigate certain types of individuals as cruel monsters or licentious beasts (having no time for either), he spoke indulgently of the nobles of earlier times, whom he saw as 'pranksome' (*spöttisch*) in performing acts of plunder, murder, and rape.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that he said such things might incline us to say that Nietzsche was undoubtedly an immoralist. But perhaps the sense of that word as applied to Nietzsche is not as clear as it once seemed to be. For he was, after all, ready to endorse what we may be inclined to see as moral judgements on *types* of human beings, as he notably did in speaking scornfully of the merely licentious, as contrasted with those who undertook the noble task of forming in themselves a body of strong but controlled and disciplined passions. Indeed we might give a list of Nietzschean virtues, putting courage and integrity at the head of that list and, on the other side, Nietzschean vices such as the malice and inauthenticity that he attributed to members of the herd. But even in this part of his work he attacked deeply rooted moral views, because he gave the 'affects' of cruelty and lust (the dark passions) an essential place in human life. He seemed to think them especially necessary for the transformation to a higher form of human being that he believed possible—if only

<sup>20</sup> See pp. 77-80, 114-15.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay, section 11.

people would listen to him. The image of the tree that had to grow with its roots in the mud worked powerfully in Nietzsche's mind, and it must surely have been this part of his philosophy that he was thinking of when he recognized the hatred that his writings would arouse, and the dangerousness of the seas of thought on which he had embarked.<sup>22</sup>

How, one may wonder, did Nietzsche come to this strange position, embraced with such passionate intellectual integrity and a surpassing courage that prevented him from shrinking from even the most dangerous of thoughts? His crucial idea was, I think, about what constituted a good life for a human being, that is, his idea of human good. The terms in which he was ready to describe such a thing were 'creativity', 'self-confidence', 'lightness of spirit', 'daring', and so forth. But beyond these very general descriptions he thought that nothing could be said. He spoke with special scorn of the belief that there could be a good that was not just my good or your good but 'good and evil the same for all'.<sup>23</sup> He would, perhaps, have agreed with the basic schema described in earlier chapters of the present book in so far as he would have thought that a genuine virtue would have to be such as to fit an individual for his own good. But where this good lay was, in any specific terms, something that an individual had to determine for himself, creating his own values rather than paying heed to anyone else.

Delving further into the origins of this moral taxonomy, we find that it depended on psychological theories that go far beyond the observations involved in Nietzsche's attack on 'pity morality' as described earlier in this chapter. In his theoretical psychology, of which he was very proud, he asserted the existence of a constellation of drives (*Triebe*) that he thought must underlie the relatively superficial elements that psychologists so far had had in their sights. But the truth is that as far as these drives were concerned he had nothing more to offer than the *concept* of a depth psychology and a promissory note filled out only with the highly dubious suggestion that they could all be reduced to a will to power. Freud was by com-

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Preface, section 6.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III, 'Of the Spirit of Gravity'.

parison an empirical scientist, ready after all to give up his overarching 'pleasure principle' when it conflicted with observed facts. Nietzsche, however, fell into the philosophers' trap of inventing a generalizing theory largely unsupported by observation. It is common to think of him as a wonderful psychologist, but at this point I think that he was not.

There was, I am arguing, no sound basis in psychology for the Nietzschean denial that descriptions of what was done, such as 'injury', 'oppression', or 'annihilation', mark out examples of acts contrary to the virtue of justice—unjust actions—that in themselves are morally wrong. This denial seems to me to be a totally mistaken and moreover poisonous doctrine. It is of course contrary to the principles of natural normativity as expounded in the present book, because there is nothing human beings need more than protection from those who would harm and oppress them. To be sure, it matters a great deal, especially in personal relationships, *how* someone is rather than simply what he or she does. Underlying attitudes and desires have already been recognized as an essential part of a virtue.<sup>24</sup> But given the horrors of the past century I think that today it would be especially strange not to see the 'what' of actions as even more important. We have seen such terrible things done in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, in Chile, Cambodia, Rwanda, that we cannot but have a sense of the awfulness of *this very fact*. It is no doubt of practical import to us to know what kind of a man can give the orders issued by Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, or Pinochet, and the personal evil of the legion of torturers now at their loathsome business in so many countries of the world—if only to know how we ourselves might come to act like that. But we do not need to know anything of that kind before branding the things that were and are still being done as utterly wicked. At this point Nietzsche's insistence on individualistic evaluation seems simply absurd, as if we should need to probe deep into the psychology of a Mengele or an Eichmann before we could evaluate their actions. Thomas Mann was surely right when he said, already in 1947,

<sup>24</sup> See p. 48.

resp:

ej:

Critica:  
i par pte?

How bound in time, how theoretical too, how inexperienced does Nietzsche's romanticizing about wickedness appear . . . today! We have learned to know it in all its miserableness.<sup>25</sup>

Many have, of course, found Nietzsche's individualism inspiring. It seems to preach, as he himself liked to put it, on the side of life, and needless to say there is some good in this. But those who take his attack on morality simply as a rather edifying call to authenticity and self-fulfilment are deluding themselves; the proof of this lying precisely in what he said about there being no right or wrong in actions considered in themselves. About whom, we may ask, was Nietzsche talking here? He was talking about human beings, not Martians or angels, and, as he used the present tense, about human beings as they are, not about Neanderthal man or man as he may be many millions of years hence. Moreover, the evaluations he is making are about human goodness and defect, so that if the main thesis of the present book is correct the schema of natural normativity will be in place.

It follows that we have to take actual human life into account, and so to think about what men and women would be tempted to do in the absence of moral teachings. Human life, unlike the life of animals, is lived according to norms that are known and taken as patterns by those whose norms they are. So we have to teach children what they may and may not do. Nor could these norms be taught simply by telling children that they are to be courageous and 'authentic', however important it is to encourage them to be daring and also to allow them to discover their true desires. The norms to be followed must largely be formulated in terms of the prohibition of actions such as murder or theft. In human life it is an Aristotelian necessity (something on which our way of life depends) that if, for instance, a stranger should come on us when we are sleeping he will not think it all right to kill us or appropriate the tools that we need for the next day's work. In human life as it is, this kind of action is not made good by authenticity or self-fulfilment in the one who does it. Some generally wrong actions are, it is true, justified by special circumstances, as promise-breaking sometimes is; or justified by

<sup>25</sup> Mann, *Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Recent Events*, 35.

a special role, such as that of a magistrate or parent. But in admitting this we are getting nowhere near to Nietzsche's denial of the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of kinds of actions, a denial that seems to me to be a totally false doctrine, tempting those who see themselves as exceptional to think that when *they* murder and torture they are doing nothing wrong.<sup>26</sup>

Of course we must take Nietzsche's attacks on morality seriously. He was engaged, as he insisted, on a revaluation of values. And this is not an incomprehensible enterprise. For, unlike the members of other species, humans, having the power of abstract thought, can *consider* their own ways of going on. We humans have ourselves developed and can criticize our own practices. We can ask whether human life might not be better conducted if Nietzsche's doctrines were taught. But then we must think about *how* human life could be carried on. Nietzsche believed that under his influence a higher type of man could develop on earth, and wrote as if he could imagine this new being: as if he saw the possibility of a new species or life form that could develop from our own. My point is that it is only for a different species that Nietzsche's most radical revaluation of values could be valid. It is not valid for us as we are, or are ever likely to be.

<sup>26</sup> For a description of how this came about in the case of the Nazis, see Jonathan Glover's very interesting book, *Humanity*, 316-64.

rules & education

≠ immoralism