

Nietzsche: Artist, Creator, Educator

As a young man writing one of his earliest philosophical works, Nietzsche set forth the ‘fundamental law of his own true self.’ Much of *Schopenhauer as Educator*¹ is a perspicacious outline for not only the method with which Nietzsche would continue to write philosophy, but also for the socio-political and moral edifices that he would ultimately critique, attack, and reinterpret. The dominant theme of the essay, and the vehicle through which Nietzsche set the tone for his future projects, is an idiosyncratic value theory whose closest contemporary relative is *Exemplarism*. However, as I will argue later on, Exemplarism does not fully capture the spirit of Nietzsche’s prescriptive argument in *SE*, nor does it capture the development of *SE*’s philosophical influence on the later corpus of works.

Building an adequate account of Nietzsche’s value theory is a challenging task. He called himself an ‘immoralist,’ which might imply that he had no value theory, or perhaps instead that his value theory simply valued the negation of other value theories. However, at the same time, Nietzsche lauds the creation of value as an ideal task for free spirits and philosophers. Moreover, in *SE* Nietzsche not only discusses the many virtues of his educator, Schopenhauer, but he also constructs a framework for a value theory whose elements appear throughout the later corpus of

¹ Throughout this paper I refer to Nietzsche’s works in acronym form. *SE, BGE, GS, Z, GM, TI, EH*: Respectively, Schopenhauer as Educator, Beyond Good and Evil, The Gay Science, Thus Spake Zarathustra, Genealogy of Morals, Twilight of the Idols, and Ecce Homo. These books and quotes from them appear in: Nietzsche, Friedrich. ed. and trans. Walter Kauffman. *The Gay Science, with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. New York: Viking, 1960.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. ed. and trans. Walter Kauffman. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking, 1960.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. ed. and trans. Walter Kauffman. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche: Birth of Tragedy: Beyond Good and Evil: On the Genealogy of Morals: Ecce Homo*. New York: Modern Library, 1968.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, and R.J. Hollingdale. *Untimely Meditations. Schopenhauer as Educator*. 127-194. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997

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Nietzsche's mature philosophy. In light of this, many contemporary philosophers have argued that Nietzsche is a virtue theorist, or an exemplarist, or even a perfection-consequentialist.

In this paper, I reject all of these theses. I take as my primary target the idea that Nietzsche was a virtue theorist, and more precisely, an exemplarist. I argue why both of these interpretations of Nietzsche's value theory are misguided. I suggest, instead, a new way for characterizing Nietzsche's value theory that rests upon artistic interpretation, transfiguration, and perspectivism. Given these three themes of a Nietzschean value theory, I conclude that Nietzsche was not an exemplarist, but rather what I call a '*Hollow Exemplarist*.' In other words, I argue that Nietzsche is like an exemplarist, but his exemplars (educators) do not categorically or antecedently possess virtues. Rather, educators possess *the capacity to be interpreted as having* the most valuable sort of virtues (eternally life affirming ones). Hence, I argue that Nietzsche is a *Hollow Exemplarist*.

I. Evaluating Nietzschean Value Theory

Philosophers have interpreted Nietzsche as a virtue theorist (Macintyre, Swanton, Foot), and even as an exemplarist (Conant). There is evidence to support these views. Nietzsche clearly and consistently focuses on certain values and 'virtues' that appear throughout his works.²

Notwithstanding these apparent similarities in Nietzsche's works to the views of virtue theorists, Nietzsche vehemently attacks and denies certain positions that would be fundamental to any virtue theory.

Any virtue theory must accept that there is a state of 'human flourishing' in order to derive value from the particular character traits that accord with that flourishing. Likewise, virtue

² *Health* in *The Gay Science*, *Strength/Free Spirithood* in *Beyond Good and Evil*, and the myriad of qualities said to be possessed by Schopenhauer in *SE* come to mind.

theories require that one be able to discern valuable instantiations of a character trait from dis-valuable ones.³ Yet, Nietzsche denies ultimate flourishing in a state of *Eudaimonia* and the categorical imperatives of moral duties⁴, as well as the ability to judge actions on the basis of their perceived value⁵. Nietzsche's view, therefore, lacks both an antecedently reasoned state of flourishing to justify valuable character traits and an epistemic capacity for discerning the good from the bad in postulated virtuous actions (or instantiations of those character traits). Without these qualities a Nietzschean 'virtue theory' would be far too impoverished (or abnormal) to even call it by that name.

However, within the contemporary field of Virtue Ethics, there is a new and burgeoning perspective that has been called "Exemplarism." The Exemplarist moral theory claims that the derivation of virtues – the learning of what sort of activity is conducive to flourishing – is not an esoteric task (that *a priori* examination of human happiness often attributed to Aristotle's own method), but rather a practical and real selection of *exemplars* within our world so that we may become virtuous by emulating their behavior. Virtuous activity, then, is not an absolute morality like a consequentialism, or duty-based ethics. Similarly, it is not an *a priori* and complete set of

³ This is Aristotle's 'Doctrine of the Mean.' In effect, one must be able to tell excellences (virtues) from excesses and deficiencies of the character traits in question. The excellence (virtue) occurs in the mean between the character trait's over and under expression. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a25-1106b6)

⁴ "Whether it is **hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaimonism** – all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with *pleasure* and *pain*, which are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary, are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground and naïvetés on which everyone conscious of *creative* powers and an artistic conscience will look down not without derision, nor without pity." *BGE* 255 [**Emphasis: mine**] – Here we see a direct denial of the attribution of eudaimonism to Nietzsche's value theory: it is looked at with derision and pity by the artistic and creative ones.

⁵ "For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength... The popular mind, in fact, *doubles* the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a deed: it posits the same event first as a cause and then a second time as its effect." According to Nietzsche, popular morality – consequentialism, deontology, and (notably) *eudaimonism* – are all guilty of this redoubling, an epistemic mistaking of one deed for two, of cause for effect. Insofar as acts are taken to be valuable for some other reason than the mere doing of the act itself, that act is doubled – like a flash from lightning. The epistemic separation of an action from its source of value is, for Nietzsche, a misguided mistake of common morality.

behaviors that inevitably leads to a happy spirit (like a pure virtue ethics). Rather, virtue is simply what an exemplar would do. This is to be contrasted with a *pure*⁶ form of virtue ethics wherein the virtues, as per Aristotle, can be divined through reason alone. Therefore, even if Nietzsche cannot be a virtue theorist given his rejection of key elements of virtue theory, then he may well still be an exemplarist.

Exemplarism does not require the postulation of an antecedently reasoned for understanding of human flourishing; one need only find people who are currently doing well by any standard. Similarly, exemplarism requires only a thin epistemic capacity to pick out virtuous traits, a capacity that may not run into the same problems as the more robust capacity required by virtue theory simpliciter.⁷ Moreover, Nietzsche uses the language (and perhaps even methodology) of exemplarism in *SE*.⁸ Yet, despite the foregoing evidence that is consistent with the idea of Nietzsche-as-exemplarist, there is one significant difference in Nietzsche and exemplarism-as-normally-constructed. Nietzsche would not want us to pick out exemplars in order to appropriate their particular virtues, but rather in order that that we may learn to create our own virtues.

The foregoing idiosyncrasy would not, however, preclude Nietzsche from being characterized as having an exemplarist value theory; it would simply place him slightly askew

⁶ See Swanton p.29/31 for a discussion of *pure* virtue ethics.

⁷ In *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, Linda Zagzebski marks out this epistemic capacity as “*Admiration*.” Admiration, on Zagzebski’s account, is an emotional disposition that aims at exemplary features in virtuous people. When we admire people, and we can trust our admiration, then by its mark, we can know who exemplars are. (p.43)

⁸ Conant’s interpretation (to be discussed shortly) of the German word ‘*Exemplare*’ is translated as the English ‘Exemplar.’ This translation is specious. In German, the word translates to ‘Copy’ or ‘Type,’ and would not have carried the same value-laden meaning as does its English cognate (Thanks to Elijah Millgram, Zoe Perry, and Robert Pippin for pointing this out). In spite of this, the attribution of exemplarism need not be totally thrown out. Nietzsche’s exemplar-*type* is the ‘*educator*’ which still may very well carry with it the important value-laden connotations. I eventually argue that Nietzsche’s educator-types satisfy a formal condition that enables them to be interpreted as exemplary. Thus, the exemplar just is an educator and for this reason, I will use the words interchangeably.

from exemplarism-as-usually-understood. Just so long as Nietzsche is successfully interpreted as arguing that particular people have valuable character traits that make them exemplary and that the exemplariness of the people who possess those traits inspire virtuous activity in others, then an interpretation of Nietzsche as exemplarist would at least hold water. James Conant in *Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator* interprets Nietzsche in this way. As I argue in the following section, Conant's interpretation, though largely helpful, misses one key factor – For Nietzsche, there are no materially constitutive features of exemplary people. Conant's interpretation, although wrong about Nietzsche-as-exemplarist, still serves as a fruitful jumping off point both to explain the parallels between Exemplarism and Nietzsche's value theory as well as where they diverge. Following this discussion, I offer my own interpretation of Nietzsche's value theory – as a '*Hollow Exemplarism*.'

II. Conant's Exemplarist Reading of SE

Conant's interpretation of Nietzsche's exemplarism posits two features that constitute the nature of an exemplar. There is first a (1) *practical condition* that defines what an exemplar is in terms of what they do. And second, there is a (2) *constitutive condition* that defines exemplars in virtue of some feature(s) they possess which allow them to perform the act set out by (1). The practical condition relies upon the following quote:

To hang on to life madly and blindly, with no higher aim than to hang on to it; not to know that or why one is being so heavily punished, but with the stupidity of a fearful desire – that is what it means to be an animal... Yet let us reflect: where does the animal cease and the man begin?... We usually fail to emerge out of animality, we ourselves are the animals whose suffering seems to be senseless. *But there are moments when we realize this: then the clouds are rent asunder, and we see that, in common with all nature, we are pressing towards man as towards something that stands high above us.* (SE 157-8, my emphasis)

In this passage Nietzsche contrasts two features of the human condition and describes a subsequently realized inspiration whereby humans can overcome what is 'fearful' and 'animal'

in them; namely, that man is a being who can be inspired by a realization that ‘something stands high above us.’ Furthermore, it is only once we have experienced this inspiration that man can rise above his animal-like suffering and become something more.

The content of the realization of ‘a something that stands high above us’ is twofold. First, the realization makes us aware of our shameful and animal-like condition. Humans are beings whose condition is suffering and the desire to be rid of suffering, yet humans also feel the need to cling to life by any means – paradoxically, even if those means prolong suffering. However, the second feature of the realization is that we likewise become aware that, in addition to what is shameful in us, humans also have a single, powerful and redeeming quality: the understanding of a ‘something’ that ‘stands high above us.’ The *practical* feature (1) of educators, therefore, is that they are people who can inspire this dual realization, or ‘*twofold-feeling*,’ in us. As Conant says: “The role of the exemplar is to occasion the experience of this distinctive sort of shame.” (205), and later, “The role of the [exemplar] is in her capacity to reveal to you your own repressed knowledge of your ‘higher self’” (207).

In addition to defining educators (1) in terms of what they do, Conant’s interpretation requires that educators have (2) certain constitutive features that give them the ability to inspire the twofold-feeling.

The exemplariness of an exemplar consists in its perspicuous realization of some possibility that, in its perfect form is clearly recognizable as an excellence – an excellence to which other members of the genus can contain. (Conant 195)

Conant constitutively defines the educator, per the quote above, as a person who has an excellence(s) in their ‘perfectly realized form(s)’ so that they can be examples to those lacking such excellences – if they have it, we can too – and thereby they are able to inspire the twofold-feeling.

There is, however, a worrying existential implication couched within much of Conant's discourse on (2). That is, the way in which Conant construes the functional role of an educator - to inspire the twofold-feeling in people who take them up as exemplary - indicates that there already latently exists within those people, some primordial form of their ideal selves. According to Conant, that primordial form is what the educator imparts knowledge of to their students. He states that, "The lineaments of [an ideal self] are not specifiable in advance of such [a realization]" (Conant 203). In other words, the characteristics (or lineaments) of our ideal selves are not available to us before we experience the realization, *but they are afterwards*. Once we have realized the 'something that stands high above,' we *know* exactly who we would become in a future state of excellence - our ideal self high above. Hence, "The role of the [exemplar] is in her capacity to reveal to you your own repressed knowledge of your 'higher self'" (207).

This again implies that there is a '*you*' that stands high above you; the revelation of a final state in which the 'I' that is currently contemptible has become ideal. Moreover, the educator's role is not only to invoke the realization that there *could be* such a thing, but also to "signal that you possess such knowledge" of it (Conant 207). The existential implication, therefore, is that the precondition for having knowledge of a future ideal self is that there already exists some form of an ideal self that *can be known*. Insofar as Conant's interpretation has educators inspire in virtue of this knowledge, then his account is committed to the existence of some form of ideal self prior to our becoming it.

It is from this existential implication couched in Conant's development of (2) that I will depart in the following section of the paper. I interpret Nietzsche not only as not needing this element for his idiosyncratic 'exemplarism' to hold water, but also argue that the implication of a personal "I" 'standing high above us' is a concept to which Nietzsche would be hostile.

III. On the Contrary, Conant

Although I agree with Conant's treatment of the foundations of Nietzsche's position in *SE*, I contend that Conant misinterprets the relation between the 'something high above us' and what exactly it is that an educator inspires in the not-yet-exemplary self. In short, I do not believe that Nietzsche thought that the self that stands high above us has any *content* related to what we are in a pre-exemplary state. That is, rather than the 'I' high above being an ideal form of one's self – a person's perfect nature crystalized, though as yet unrealized – the "I" high above is instead the mere instantiated *realization* that there is⁹ such a thing, which as of yet remains hollow. Hence, the role of the educator is not to educate us about the personal features of our future ideal self, but rather to inspire us to seek it out, whatever it may be. In what follows, I present evidence to substantiate this interpretation.

If the foregoing interpretation is to hold any water at all, then the following passage in *SE* must be considered and explained:

Let the youthful soul *look back on life* with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it? Set these revered objects before you and perhaps *their nature and their sequence will give you law, the fundamental law of your own true self.* (*SE* 129, *my emphasis*)

This passage explains the way in which, post-educator-induced-realization, a person can better themselves. Insofar as Nietzsche recommends that we 'look back' into ourselves to find 'the fundamental principle of our true self,' the passage appears to support Conant's interpretation that there exists an already-present ideal-self that takes the form of that law. For Conant, it is the ideal self that we look back upon to find our 'fundamental law.' However, it is not necessary for

⁹ If this existential claim – that we feel that there *is* an ideal form of ourselves – is too strong, it would also do to characterize the inspirational feeling as one indicating merely that *there could be* such a self.

Nietzsche's construal of exemplarism that there exist an ideal self to look back on in order to determine a 'fundamental law.'

In order to be inspired to become exemplary, we do not need to know what we would be like if we were so, but merely that it is possible that we can be. For example, if I wished to become a world-renowned painter, I do not need to know what great works of art that I would create (or that I would create them at all); rather, I must simply realize that I have a creative power that enables me to be artistic. Similarly, the whole of my future exemplary self need not be laid out before me in order to strive to become it; I need only *realize* that it is within my power to strive for it.

Furthermore, in addition to the fact that the mere *possibility* of becoming exemplary is the only necessary feature of the twofold-feeling, Nietzsche also characterizes the realization of this possibility as wholly uninvolved with the self or ego. Shortly after introducing the realization that 'something hangs high above us' (*SE* 157-8), Nietzsche describes what that realized 'something' is like in the following way: "And so nature at last needs the saint [exemplar] in whom *the ego is completely melted away* and whose life of suffering is no longer felt as his own life... there are moments and as it were bright sparks of the fire of love in whose light *we cease to understand the word 'I'*, there lies *something beyond our being* which at these moments moves across into it..." (*SE* 160-1, *my emphasis*). Here, Nietzsche is describing the portion of the twofold-feeling involved with the realization of a 'something that stands high above' (the 'bright sparks of love's fire that comes from beyond our being and moves into us'). That 'something' is not characterized as Conant would have it – as an ideal *me/you* – but instead as so completely distinct from *me/you* as to render the very notion of 'self' incomprehensible; to cause us 'to cease to understand the word 'I'.

There is a worrying question that presents itself when we refuse to think of the ‘something that stands high above us’ as lacking personal existential features. Namely, what sort of person is a Nietzschean educator, if not someone who has become their higher self; if not the ideal-I? The foregoing formulation of the ‘lofty ideal’ portion of the twofold-feeling is therefore a problem for Conant’s (2) constitutive feature of the Nietzschean educator. If the educator cannot be defined by their achievement of an exemplary state of their self, then Conant’s constitutive feature (or the lack thereof) loses its ability to distinguish educators from non-educators. Moreover, without a constitutive feature to constrain who counts as exemplary, then conceivably *anyone* could fill the role of educator via (1), the practical condition.¹⁰ In other words, there is no reason, without feature (2), that scholars and priests of *ressentiment* could be said to be educators insofar as they are able to inspire the twofold-feeling. Even if these sorts of people might be said to be strong in an idealistically Nietzschean fashion, Nietzsche would *not* want them to be our educators insofar as their strength lends to the sickness of the world rather than to its culture and health.¹¹

The foregoing question that we are left with thus takes the following form – what sort of constitutive feature can constrain the class of educators to those people who meet the practical condition (1) and are not promulgators of sickness, but rather of culture and health? I suggest the following answer: No human being can at the same time be both an ideal and a person (we are, after all, all too human). However, through artistic-interpretation it is possible to *transfigure* people into educators. In this manner of speaking, Nietzsche’s educator is not Schopenhauer *the*

¹⁰ Conant may even be subject to this objection if we accept his condition for (2).

¹¹ Lanier Anderson in *On the nobility of Nietzsche’s priests* argues that Nietzsche treats these types of people, notably the priests, as having the strength characteristic of Nietzsche’s otherwise ideal free spirits and value creators. This does not, however, make them good people according to Nietzsche. Strength can be misused, and its misuse in education only serves to proliferate and prolong the deep sickness that Nietzsche sees as present in and negatively affecting the world.

man, but rather Schopenhauer *interpreted as* something that stands high above man – Schopenhauer transfigured as ideal. Through transfiguring artistic-interpretation, those features that make human beings exemplary are separated from the despicable nature of their humanity. Educators, therefore, become an instantiation of what it would be like for a human to be an ideal – something no human can ever actually be – yet the example is enough to inspire in us that ineluctable feeling of something greater. In summation, our educators set the ideal standards to which we may strive, and perhaps one day, permit us to inspire others in the same pursuit.

In the following section I offer a new defining constitutive feature (2) of the Nietzschean educator in the spirit of artistic transfiguration. This condition differs from Conant’s insofar as it is formal rather than material. Whereas Conant defines the educator as someone who has achieved a certain material (or existential) state of ideal selfhood, my definition is formal insofar as it requires only that an educator is a person who is *able to be* interpreted as such. Furthermore, I argue that priests of *ressentiment* and scholars (and similarly nasty Nietzschean characters) can be artistically interpreted, but their interpretations resist the kind of transfiguration that marks the difference between them and true educators.

IV. Artistic Interpretation, Transfiguration, Education

Conant’s constitutive definition of educators failed because it required that educators *really have* some ideal state of self that permits them to teach others how to achieve a similar condition. Nietzsche’s ideal state of selfhood (a not-self who ‘has forgotten the meaning of the word ‘I’), as described in the above passages from *SE*, precludes a person from being able to be in the ideal state of ‘self’hood while still being themselves. Educators, therefore, cannot be in an ideal state of selfhood lest they should cease to be themselves. The title of the Meditation might, in this case, have been “*No One as Educator,*” yet, however, the title is and remains “*Schopenhauer as*

Educator.’ Furthermore, Nietzsche explicitly admits that Schopenhauer was not, in truth, an instantiation of the “I that stands high above,” because “...even the greatest of men cannot attain to his own ideal” (*SE* 143). What then makes Schopenhauer an educator if he was not his own ideal?

I suggest that the Nietzschean educator can be defined in the following way: A person is a Nietzschean educator if and only if (1) their life is able to be valued through an artistic interpretation under which (2) the educator’s life is not only transfigured as wholly affirmable, but also under which (3) the transfigured-educator’s life-affirming value has interpretive power for the life of the educated person as well. When a person’s life is interpreted under the scope of a virtue so valuable as to be able to transfigure and affirm (1) not only the educator’s whole life (2), but also their own life as well (3), that person will experience the twofold-feeling and thereby be enabled to set out on their own value-creating endeavor.

In order to substantiate this formal constitutive definition of an educator, I will discuss each of its parts in turn before putting the pieces back together. I eventually conclude with a discussion of the fitness of my interpretation for the wider application to Nietzsche’s value theory in other works.

IV.2 Artistic Interpretation

The clearest accounts of artistic interpretation come from the *Gay Science*.¹² In *GS* Nietzsche proposes a characteristic feature of the artist’s activity that amounts to a beautification of otherwise unbeautiful features of the world. In short, “Artists continually *glorify* all those states and things that are reputed to give man the opportunity to feel good for once, or great, or

¹² Most notably, *GS* 34, 78, 85, 107, 299, 301.

intoxicated, or cheerful, or well and wise” (*GS* II.85). Moreover, take note that when describing the form of artistic activity, Nietzsche employs many of the same metaphors that he uses in *SE* when noting the features of the twofold-feeling. The following passage is the last section of the second book of *GS* and gives insight into Nietzsche’s perspective on the artistic-eye. Moreover, it is written as if spoken in the same language as the author used in *SE*.

Our ultimate gratitude to art – As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience **to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon**. At times we need a rest from ourselves by looking upon, by **looking down upon**, ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *over* ourselves or weeping *over* ourselves. We must discover the *hero* no less than the *fool* in our passion for knowledge... We should be *able* also **to stand above morality** – and not only to *stand* with the anxious stiffness of a man who is afraid of slipping and falling at any moment, but also to *float* above it and *play*. *GS* 107

Besides the consistency in metaphor between this passage and the twofold-feeling in *SE* (‘looking down from a place that stands above’), there are two key features of artistic interpretation therein to hone in on. First, through artistic interpretation, a person’s life is seen as an ‘aesthetic phenomenon.’ Second, artistic interpretation, through the scope of the ‘aesthetic phenomenon’ gives us insight into what is both foolish and heroic in us.

To interpret a life with the artist’s eye, a person’s life is glorified (or made to seem heroic) under the scope of a particular value – this is the role of the ‘aesthetic phenomenon.’ When we interpret ourselves in this way, we see that there are features of our lives that are heroic in virtue of that value, and many more features that are foolish. It is important to note, however, that even the features that are interpreted as foolish are still seen as glorified and as valuable within the artistic interpretation. In other words, an artistic interpretation has the power to make

an otherwise foolish and valueless feature of the world seem valuable.¹³ Furthermore, the foolish features of a life have a role to play in an artistic interpretation insofar as they contour and accent the heroic/glorifiable ones – just as the shadows in a photograph often provide as much character to its composition as does the light. In a manner of speaking, then, we are both able to see our lives as valuable, but also not as so absolutely valuable as to be unable to ‘play’ or to recognize the further growth we have to undergo in order to reach even higher existential heights.

The Nietzschean educator, as construed in *SE*, is the kind of person who is able to inspire in us the twofold-feeling. Similarly, from *GS*, we see that artistic interpretation is a method of cultivating a feeling that is remarkably similar to that of the twofold-feeling described in *SE*; both the heroic and the foolish play a significant role in further glorification. Moreover, in *SE*, Nietzsche notes that the ability to interpret Schopenhauer’s work artistically (as understood by the foregoing definition from *GS*) is an important feature of that work.

Though this is a foolish and immodest way of putting it, I understand him [Schopenhauer] as though it were for me that he had written. Thus it is that I had never discovered any paradoxes in him, though here and there a little error; for what are paradoxes but assertions which carry no conviction because their author himself is not really convinced of them and makes them only so as to glitter and seduce and in general cut a figure. Schopenhauer never wants to cut a figure: for he writes for himself and no one wants to be deceived, least of all the philosopher. (*SE* 134)

We see in this passage the beginning of the application of Nietzsche’s artistic interpretation to Schopenhauer. Nietzsche interprets Schopenhauer as containing some flaws, though never any paradoxes that would make his otherwise great philosophy valueless (or less valuable on the whole). Rather, Schopenhauer, under the valuation of Nietzsche’s artistic interpretation and with

¹³ *GS* 301 “*The Fancy of the Contemplatives* – Whatever has *value* in our world does not have value in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present – and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it.”

all flaws included, is a philosopher who cannot have gone wrong and who is so valuable to Nietzsche that it seems as if Schopenhauer's writing and philosophy were for Nietzsche alone.

It is also significant that the foregoing artistic interpretation is Nietzsche's first introduction of Schopenhauer in *SE* and it is only after this point that Nietzsche extols Schopenhauer's many virtues¹⁴ and, eventually, describes his ability to educate. Hence, Nietzsche values Schopenhauer under an artistic interpretation that performs the requisite task set out in *GS*; to glorify his life as well as all that's foolish in it under the scope of that glorifying value. The educator, therefore, must at least be someone who can be artistically interpreted under the scope of a value that makes out their life to be glorified and their foolish features necessary to that glorification.

However, it is not enough that an educator, or Schopenhauer in our case, can educate and inspire the twofold-feeling through artistic interpretation alone. Any person, including ascetics and priests of *ressentiment* could plausibly be artistically interpreted in this way. What distinguishes a Nietzschean exemplar/educator from any other person under an artistic interpretation is a further criterion. Not only must a life be artistically interpreted, but it must also be able to be *transfigured* by that artistic interpretation. In the following section I sketch out what transfiguration means for Nietzsche and argue why this criterion disambiguates merely artistically interpreted people (including ascetics, scholars, and priests of *ressentiment*) from true Nietzschean educators.

¹⁴ Honesty, cheerfulness, steadfastness, and solitude; respectively *SE* 135, 135, 136, and 139.

IV.3 Transfiguration

Transfiguration is a common theme throughout Nietzsche's works. It appears most often in the *Gay Science*, but also in *Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols*. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume Lanier Anderson's account of Nietzschean transfiguration. Anderson argues that Nietzsche's conception of transfiguration is a coupling of the injunction for life-affirmation in addition to an artistic interpretation that redeems the negative or 'foolish' features of that life. "For Nietzsche, redemption operates crucially through transfiguration: it effects a metamorphosis of particular features and events of a life, giving them a new form, in the sense of a new significance and evaluative salience" (Anderson 255). In this way, through artistic interpretation the negative features of a person's life become *redeemable*. However, when an interpretation not only redeems but also *transfigures*, it makes that life wholly affirmable with respect to Nietzsche's *eternal return*.

The eternal return is a thought experiment first explicitly introduced in *GS* 341 (and again, notably, in *Z*) that invokes a certain criterion of valuing one's life such that they would be able to *will* its existence eternally, including all that was both beautiful and terrible within it. We are able to will that our lives recur eternally when we are likewise able to affirm every aspect of that life. This criterion, the ability to *will* one's life eternally is of crucial importance to understanding the constitutive feature of an educator. It is this feature that distinguishes a merely *redeeming* artistic interpretation from a *transfiguring* one; and similarly, distinguishes educators from anyone else.

If I could tell my life story in such a way that I *will* the whole, then I could likewise affirm each event within it, in virtue of its essential contribution to the meaning of the whole story. Thus, events that were, considered by themselves, regrettable may be affirmed nonetheless. The new story of my life affords me a new attitude toward such fragments, which itself *changes their import*, and so redeems [and transfigures] them. I thereby bring my life into greater harmony with my values, and thus improve it in the dimension of Nietzsche's concern. (Anderson 239)

The *educator's* life is one that can be willed eternally by means of finding a *transfiguring* value through artistic interpretation. In short, the value prescribed to an educator's life is one that ought to be able to explain their ability to will that life eternally.

The concept of transfiguration also differentiates Nietzsche's venerated educators from his despised 'priests of *ressentiment* (and scholars, and ascetics, etc). Even though we may artistically interpret and thereby redeem priests of *ressentiment* and scholars and ascetics, the value under which those sorts of lives would be redeemed would not also make those lives eternally willable. Each of those types of lives resist transfiguration because such lives are predicated upon a kind of sickness, or lack of health. Priests of *ressentiment* suffer from their *ressentiment*, and likewise scholars appear as 'inverse cripples'¹⁵ who have lost their ability to be fit human beings in virtue of an over-powerful will for truth. The idea is that even though these lives may be beautified through artistic interpretation, those lives are not transfigured insofar as the beautification would not also make those lives eternally desirable and eternally willable. This idea is explained in a dialogue on *transfiguration* that appears in *Z* between Zarathustra and his 'inverse cripples.' As Zarathustra 'spakes':

Willing liberates; what means does the will devise for himself to get rid of his melancholy and to mock his dungeon? Alas, every prisoner becomes a fool; and the imprisoned will redeems himself foolishly... Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards. This indeed is what *revenge* is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was.' *Z* II.20

This passage describes the sort of will that redeems itself through interpretation, but which is not likewise transfigured by its interpretive redemption. The goal of the "foolish and imprisoned will's" redemption is not to eternally affirm all of life, to will the 'it was,' but instead to seek revenge for the sickness it has suffered. Thus, for artistic interpretation, there are two

¹⁵ 'Inverse Cripple' is a derogatory name given to scholars by Zarathustra in *On Redemption*.

classes of value under which a life can be glorified and beautified (i.e. redeemed). First, there are values that can redeem through revenge,¹⁶ and, second, there are values that transfigure by making it possible to will that life eternally. The ability to artistically interpret a life such that all of its features are valued under the scope of the latter kind of value is the mark of an educator. In other words, *Nietzschean educators are those sorts of people who can be transfigured through artistic interpretation such that the eternal affirmation of their whole life is explainable in virtue of that interpretation's redeeming value.*¹⁷

Recall that there are two important features that any Nietzschean exemplar must have; (2) a constitutive feature (defined above), and (1) a practical feature whereby they are able to inspire in students the twofold-feeling (they must educate). Given my new definition of a Nietzschean educator, we are left with the following question: how does this type of educator educate? In other words, how does the sort of person who is able to be *transfigured* under an artistic interpretation have any effect on others such that the educator can satisfy condition (1)?

IV.4 Education

The foregoing constitutive definition of an educator differs from Conant's insofar as it does not posit that an educator must antecedently have a particular excellence. Rather, what makes this

¹⁶Although there is not room to develop the thought in this paper, I suggest that these former sorts of values are those of the *decadent*. Hence, the *decadent* and the *artist/philosopher/saint (educator)* look very much the same insofar as both lives are redeemed under an artistic interpretation. What separates them, however, is that the latter sort of person uses that value to affirm and eternally will their 'it was' by *redeeming* their sickness. The *decadent* does not, but rather merely *justifies* their sickness.

¹⁷ Nietzsche interpreted Schopenhauer in just this way – so as to transfigure him in virtue of eternal life affirmation: “No, genius itself is now summoned, so that one may hear whether genius, the highest fruit of life, can perhaps justify life as such; the glorious, creative human being is now to answer the question: ‘Do you affirm the existence in the depths of your heart? Is it sufficient for you? Would you be its advocate, its redeemer? For you have only to pronounce a single heartfelt Yes! – and life, though it faces such heavy accusations, shall go free.’ – What answer will he [Schopenhauer] give? – the answer of Empedocles” (*SE* 146). I believe that Empedocles' answer would have been to love the whole of life, as the cosmological 'end' of the universe, he believed, was a state of complete love. In spite of its thematic consistency with both Empedocles and Nietzsche, this interpretation may be specious. More research is needed to determine what Nietzsche would have thought Empedocles' answer would have been.

definition powerful for interpreting Nietzsche's value theory is that it avoids the application of categorical excellences to *exemplars*, or more precisely, to educators. Rather, what is excellent about an educator is that they are excellent under an interpretation, or within a particular perspective. Furthermore the perspectives under which an educator's life are transfigured are, in a manner of speaking, in the eye of the beholder. The perspectives under which educators' lives are artistically transfigured are our own. And insofar as transfiguring perspectives are our own, educators are able to inspire in us the twofold-feeling and thereby satisfy the practical condition (1).

A person is (2) an educator if they can be transfigured by an artistic interpretation. The transfiguring value that is given by an artistic interpretation must be something that the interpreter can see as valuable (otherwise it wouldn't coherently explain why that educator's life is eternally affirmable within that person's perspective). Moreover, that transfiguring value is one that makes the educator's whole life eternally affirmable. Hence, the application of an artistic interpretation that transfigures an educator's life likewise gives the interpreter insight into a value that she sees as valuable for her own life; it is one that makes possible an eternal affirmation in both the educator's life as well as her own.

Thus only he who has attached his heart to some great man receives thereby *the first consecration of culture*; the sign of that consecration is that one is ashamed of oneself without any accompanying distress... that one has a feeling of sympathy for the genius who again and again drags himself up out of our dryness and apathy... with the profoundest conviction that... everywhere [nature is] succeeding in producing the most marvelous beginnings, individual traits and forms: so that the men we live among resemble a field over which is scattered the most precious fragments of sculpture where everything calls to us: come, assist, complete, bring together what belongs together¹⁸, we have an immeasurable longing to become whole. (SE 163)

¹⁸ This may be another reference to Empedocles and his 'answer' to the question of affirming everything. According to Empedocles, like elements attract one another and repel dissimilar ones. This process, cosmologically construed, resolves itself in a totality which is entirely of a single likeness in love.

When an interpreter interprets an educator she will experience the twofold feeling as redepicted in the foregoing passage. At once, she will see as possible the valuation of a life that can be eternally affirmable – and she will recognize that transfiguration is possible for her given her connection to the value in question. Because of the twofold-feeling, she will see that if a genius' affirmable value can bring their whole life together through transfiguration, then all of her life can be brought together too. In addition to this, she will recognize that she is not yet in a state that can be transfigured; that the value that makes her twofold-feeling possible is the educator's and not her own. And for these reasons, an educator who satisfies my new condition (2) will also satisfy condition (1) insofar as they educate in the way just described.

V. Recapitulation and Hollow Exemplarism

We now have all of the pieces to construct a complete and coherent interpretation of the puzzle that is Nietzsche's value theory. The touchstone of Nietzsche's value theory is the creation of our own value. In order to complete this task, we must first be inspired by an educator with the twofold-feeling. Educators do not have any already existentially realized virtuous features, but they have the capacity to be artistically interpreted in such a way that transfigures them as such. If Nietzsche were an exemplarist, as Conant would have it, then educators would need to have already existentially realized perfections; however, Nietzsche would be hostile to attributing 'perfections' or 'virtues' of the requisite sort to anyone. Not only would this commit Nietzsche to an unpalatable form of virtue ethics, but it would also make educators great people across perspectives. Insofar as educators have a requisite excellence/virtue categorically, then they ought to be an educator for anyone. However, it ought only to be the case that people are educators *from within a perspective*. In later works, Nietzsche unloads ink to denigrate and

challenge Schopenhauer's life and philosophy.¹⁹ I do not believe that we should think Nietzsche changed course on Schopenhauer's value as his career developed; rather, we should think that when Nietzsche was roasting Schopenhauer, he was doing so from an alternative interpretation (from within a different perspective) than the one under which it was possible to transfigure Schopenhauer as an educator.

Nietzsche, then, would be hostile to the exemplarist value theory attributed to him by Conant. However, in order for value creation to begin, we must have educators. This feature alone inexorably likens Nietzsche's value theory to contemporary Exemplarism. I posit, therefore, that we ought to think of Nietzsche not as an exemplarist, but rather as a *Hollow Exemplarist*. Nietzsche is an exemplarist insofar as it is exemplars, or educators, who make the acquisition/creation of value possible. However, the exemplarism is *hollow* insofar as educators need not be antecedently virtuous in any excellent way. Rather, educators must simply have the *capacity* to 'be able to be transfigured through artistic interpretation such that the eternal affirmation of their whole life is explainable in virtue of that interpretation's redeeming value.'

There is one final question to answer with regard to Nietzsche's Hollow Exemplarism. Namely, what is the effect of the twofold-feeling on the student of an educator? Conant defined this effect as the educator's looking within students to find a nascent, but pre-existing excellence in order to inspire them with it. However, for the same reasons that Nietzsche would be hostile to the injunction that educators have existentially realized excellences, he would likewise be hostile to any attribution of excellences (no matter how nascent) to students. After all, we must *create* our own values. Furthermore, recall that the creation of one's own value requires a reflection

¹⁹ Just to name a few: *BGE* 204, *GM* III.5-8, *TI* V.6, and *TI* X.21-24.

upon ‘all that we have loved till now and to allow those things to be the fundamental law of our true self.’ Thus, what is it, if not a nascent, ‘ideal-I,’ that we look back on to find the ‘fundamental law of our true self;’ to be able to begin creating value?

First, it is important to note that when we seek out our ‘fundamental law,’ we look inwards – to the same self for which we feel shame and desire to overcome. We do not look high above where there is no self (the lofty goal), but rather within to the ‘I’ that already is. And so when we look within our post-realization self, what Nietzsche says we must look for is “whatever is inimical to it [the lofty goal] and remove it – in short, we must unwearingly combat that which would deprive *us* of the supreme fulfillment of our existence by preventing us from becoming Schopenhauerian men [educators] ourselves” (*SE* 161). We must become the artists of our own lives. Hence, when we look within to find ‘what we have truly loved and has drawn our souls aloft,’ we do so in order to excise and *transfigure* everything else, everything foolish that holds us back. When we look within, the fundamental and ordering law of our true selves is not, therefore, an affirmation of some antecedently valuable excellence within us, but rather a transfiguration of everything inimical to the ability to will our lives eternally. And thus, we *affirm* the highest exemplary form of life by *transfiguring everything contrary to it*. Furthermore, this is only possible in the wake of the twofold inspiring education of our exemplary educators.

Nietzsche’s value theory, which I describe as Hollow Exemplarism, therefore recommends a lifelong journey of growth. We must grow out of what is unhealthy and disreputable in us. Like our educators who helped us begin the journey in the first place, we must grow until we are able to be transfigured through an artistic interpretation whereby our whole life is eternally affirmable. When we find that there is a value under which we are able to will the recurrence of

our lives eternally, we may be transfigured by that artistic interpretation; transfigured by our self-created value. And thus, we will be able to play the role of educator for others. Importantly, this feature – to be able ourselves to eventually play the role of educator – is an essential feature of Nietzsche’s value theory as developed in *SE*.

“One thing above all is certain: these new duties are not the duties of a solitary; on the contrary, they set one in the midst of a mighty community held together, not by external forms and regulations, but by a fundamental idea. It is the fundamental idea of culture, insofar as it sets for each one of us but one task: to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist, and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfection of nature” (*SE* 160).

Hollow exemplarism, therefore, not only avoids the problems that plague Conant’s straight attribution of contemporary exemplarism, but it also explains the importance of culture creation. It is a value theory whereby education and educators play an integral role in the perfection of nature - in the production of artists, of philosophers, and of saints. Moreover, there is reason to believe that Nietzsche saw himself as an educator; indeed, that he artistically interpreted and thereby transfigured himself as such. In the final section, I conclude by developing this interpretation of *Ecce Homo* and the fitness Hollow Exemplarism presents for reading Nietzsche’s final, autobiographical work.

VI. Conclusion and Further Interpretation

The interpretive fitness of my *Hollow Exemplarism* view of Nietzschean value theory is most salient in light of Nietzsche’s final book – *Ecce Homo*. In *EH*, while battling with an illness that would soon take his life,²⁰ Nietzsche wrote an autobiographical work in which, as I argue below, he *transfigured* himself as an educator. Nietzsche transfigured himself so as to “*not be mistaken for someone else*” (*EH* P.1). In other words, Nietzsche’s self-transfiguration in *EH* was a final valuation of the whole of his life so as to be able to eternally affirm that life; an attempt that,

²⁰ He became vegetative shortly after finishing the book – a fate, for a mind such as Nietzsche’s, equivalent to if not worse than death itself.

should it be successful, would preclude him from being misinterpreted as unable to will his ‘it was.’

That Nietzsche was, in *EH*, attempting to will the ‘it was’ of his whole life becomes immediately clear given the book’s autobiographical nature. Nietzsche reinterprets both his personal life (briefly), and more importantly, all of his past books such that the entirety of his philosophical life could be redeemed under a single, eternally affirmable, and self-created value – the ‘reevaluation of all values.’ He says as much in the final passage of the very first section of the book:

“Looking from the perspective of the sick toward the fullness and self-assurance of a *rich* life down into the secret work of the instinct of decadence – in this I have had the longest training, my truest experience; if in anything, I became master in *this*. Now I know how, have the know-how, *to reverse perspectives*: the first reason why a “reevaluation of values”²¹ is perhaps possible for me alone. (*EH* 1.1)

There are three key elements in this passage (besides the proclamation of his self-created reevaluation of all values). First, Nietzsche states that he is looking back on the richness of his wonderful life from a sick perspective. Second, Nietzsche notes that the decadent (or sick) features of his life are those that are to be interpreted. However, the third and final important feature of this passage is Nietzsche’s claim that he will reverse these foregoing perspectives. Whereas, from the outset, Nietzsche is a sick man looking in to an otherwise rich and fulfilling life, his goal in *EH* is to reverse those perspectives; to evaluate his life such that the whole of it becomes rich and fulfilling – even the decadent and sick ‘instincts’ that drive him. In other words, through the reversal of perspectives, Nietzsche will, by the end of his autobiography, have redeemed his decadence in virtue of the rich and fulfilling value that defines his life’s works: the reevaluation of all values.

²¹ In German: *Umwertung*.

The rest of *EH* is full of short quips and passages that often begin with deeply philosophical and poetic expressions but soon derail themselves into semi-coherent rants. The passages and chapters read as if they were an external expression of an internal battle between a man's genius and the terrible sickness pulling him apart at the seams. For example, Nietzsche *rants*, "The Germans ultimately have no feet at all, they only have legs. – The Germans have no idea how vulgar they are; but that is the superlative of vulgarity – they are not even *ashamed* of being merely Germans." And in the very next paragraph, "It is part of my nature to be gentle and benevolent toward everybody..." (*EH* XIII.4). Passages of the foregoing nature are present throughout *EH*. The battle is between Nietzsche's sickness and his redemption – a threatening decadence and an indomitable will that will stop at nothing to transfigure itself.

Whether or not Nietzsche succeeded in his final task – to transfigure himself – is an open question. That transfiguration is his purpose in *EH* is clearest in his recollection of the *Untimely Meditations*, and in particular, of *SE*. "This essay gives inestimable information about that, although at bottom *it is admittedly not "Schopenhauer as Educator" that speaks here, but his opposite, "Nietzsche as Educator"* (*EH* V.3, *emphasis - mine*). In short, Nietzsche is writing *EH* from within the perspective of himself as an educator. He interprets himself as a transfigured individual who is redeeming the whole of his life through his art – the written and affirmative reinterpretation of the past. Nietzsche, therefore, takes himself to be a *Hollow Exemplar* who needs only an artistic interpretation to become an *Educator*. *EH* is Nietzsche's self-serving epitaph of transfiguration; an ascendance from the nadir of instinctual decadence to the highest alpine heights imaginable.

The lasting effect of Nietzsche's personal transfiguration, from *Decadent* to *Educator*, depends upon us – his readers. Do we hear and feel the depth of his inspiration (?); that twofold-

feeling (?), the very same feeling that inspires Nietzsche at the proclamation of his reevaluation of all values? Do we feel that “rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears – ...a depth of happiness in which even what is most painful and gloomy does not seem something opposite but rather conditioned, provoked, a necessary color in such a superabundance of light” (*EH IX.3*)? From the perspective of such a feeling, we might find that there is nothing at all about Nietzsche that appears *Hollow* so much as it does *Exemplary*. Under the superabundance of light shed by his eternal transfiguration, do we find ourselves (?) amongst the class of philosophers, of artists, and of saints? To discover oneself in the illuminating light of redemption is to be educated; is the soul of education; is the greatest Yes! saying to life.

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