TRANSLATING MAN BACK INTO NATURE: NIETZSCHE’S METHOD

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche declares himself to be committed to the “extravagant task” that is “to translate man back into nature” (BGE 230). He does not think there is anything different in kind from the natural world and much of his writing contributes to the project of understanding man, culture and morality in natural as opposed to supernatural or theistic terms. He asks “When will we complete our de-deification of nature?” (GS 109) In this respect Nietzsche is far from untimely but rather a product of his age. He is in the company of forerunners such as Auguste Comte, his one time friend Paul Rée, and evolutionary thinkers like Herbert Spencer, in considering human preoccupations as of the same origins as the animal and natural world. Given the plenitude of 19th century thinkers employing the tools of natural science and the burgeoning human sciences in the effort to understand man in natural terms, why is it that Nietzsche considers the task of translating man back into nature to be an “extravagant” one that still remains to be achieved?

Whatever its continuities with 19th century naturalistic thinking, Nietzsche’s naturalism must also be understood to be distinct from other thinkers who share in a broadly naturalistic approach, yet whom he criticizes. I take naturalism to encompass a wide range of thinkers, including experimental scientists and social and moral philosophers, who attempt to explain the world entirely in natural as opposed to supernatural or otherworldly terms. Nietzsche,
however, believes neither the experimental scientists nor philosophers engaged in this common project have yet succeeded in seeing through the “gold-dust of unconscious human vanity” in order to discern the “terrible basic text [schreckliche Grundtext] homo natura” (BGE 230). Nietzsche recognizes that how to translate man back into nature is problematic. In this article, I explore how, in his late works, he would have us attempt this task. I will demonstrate how Nietzsche believed not only his results but his method set him, and a select few to come after him, apart from prior attempters at this challenge.4

Significant scholarship has been undertaken which traces the influence on Nietzsche’s thought of naturalistic thinkers.5 Keith Ansell-Pearson’s recent discussion of Nietzsche’s relationship with Jean-Marie Guyau extends this to offer an exploration of what distinguishes Nietzsche from a thinker with whom he at once shares so much.6 I am adding to this existing literature an interrogation of why Nietzsche understands his results to be superior, and those of forerunners and contemporaries, even of Guyau whom he seemingly admires,7 to be inherently limited. This emphasis on method is crucial to understanding what is distinct about Nietzsche’s thought. Nietzsche’s explicit criticisms and points of divergence from particular thinkers such as Comte, Rée, Spencer, and Guyau, cannot be reduced to a disagreement on the results of naturalistic investigation.8 Crucially he considers himself to be going about the task of understanding man in natural terms in a unique way. He offers a different method of translating man back into nature, which explains why he arrives at a different understanding of the text that underlies the self-interpretation of the civilized, moral man. Nietzsche talks about natural man in terms of a text, precisely because it presents a problem of translation. The constitution of the
moral subject has involved the sublimation of the multiple drives at work within us, which Nietzsche will come to elaborate in terms of the will to power.

Nietzsche takes all possible subjects of investigation to be natural. In the task of translating man back into nature he employs an empirical method of investigation that incorporates this assumption. Hence, he is in an important sense a methodological naturalist, as Brian Leiter designates him, but not in the sense which Leiter proposes. Leiter defines methodological naturalism as the requirement that enquiry is ‘continuous with empirical enquiry in the sciences’, it thus cannot proceed entirely a priori. Leiter suggests that this continuity can be understood in terms of results continuity, where a criterion for philosophical conclusions is that they are compatible with our best scientific conclusions, or in terms of method continuity. Method continuity, Leiter claims, involves taking on the supposition that phenomena have deterministic causes. He argues that Nietzsche is a methodological naturalistic because he offers causal explanations of phenomena. Leiter argues further that, given Nietzsche’s investigation into morality takes man to be of natural origins, his philosophy can be seen to some extent to demonstrate ‘results continuity’ with existing scientific thinking, fitting with developments in evolutionary theory.

Leiter’s characterization of Nietzsche’s naturalism, however, does not explain what distinguishes Nietzsche from the naturalists whom he criticizes. Nietzsche’s methodological naturalism cannot be reduced to continuity with any prior examples of scientific method. Rather we must explore what new method his philosophy offers us. In order to understand in what sense Nietzsche is a methodological naturalist we need to clarify both what Nietzsche praises in
scientific method and what practices and virtues he thinks have hitherto been lacking in our pursuit of knowledge.

I will proceed by discussing two naturalistic thinkers, Rée and Guyau, whose work Nietzsche was well acquainted with, and in what ways, from the Nietzschean perspective, they do not go far enough in revealing what lies beneath man’s “many vain and fanciful interpretations and secondary meanings” (BGE 22). My point is not to offer an exhaustive discussion of their relationship which has been documented elsewhere but to emphasize the aspect of method, which allows us to understand why Nietzsche thinks their projects remain unsatisfactory. Having sketched where, for Nietzsche, the right naturalistic method leads us, namely his understanding of man in terms of the will to power, I will focus on why these thinkers have failed in the task of translating man back into nature and outline the method that Nietzsche thinks is required for its successful completion. I will argue that Nietzsche’s methodological naturalism cannot be separated from what Lawrence Hatab designates as his existential naturalism.\(^{11}\) Nietzsche’s naturalistic method is not restricted to a theoretical level, or the criteria of investigation, as Leiter’s characterization of his naturalism would have it.\(^{12}\) Rather it requires us to live a certain way. Further, a complete understanding of man in natural terms, which can only be achieved through the adoption of a method, is a prerequisite to an existential naturalism or as Hatab puts it a “revaluation of meaning in different terms according to immediate life conditions”.\(^{13}\) Thus, the translation of man back into nature is at once a question of understanding man in naturalistic terms and a re-naturalization of man, which goes beyond existing methodological naturalism.
NIETZSCHE'S RELATIONSHIP TO RÉE AND GUYAU

I turn now to a consideration of naturalistic thinkers who Nietzsche would set himself apart from. Much recent Nietzsche scholarship emphasizes naturalistic strains in Nietzsche’s thought. One ground that is offered to support the importance of naturalism to his philosophy is the evidence that he read and was positively influenced by naturalistic thinkers. Two such thinkers whose work at one time struck a cord with Nietzsche are Rée and Guyau. It is worth exploring how Nietzsche stands apart from these naturalistic thinkers in particular precisely because of the positive influences and connections they have with him.

Rée's influence is widely recognized and Nietzsche's acquaintance with his work, which continued beyond their friendship, has been detailed by Thomas Brobjør. Rée was both a significant positive influence on Nietzsche and provides a source of opposition that shapes Nietzsche’s own presentation of the history of morality. Rée’s work explores the development of moral sentiments in the context of psychological and biological understandings of human behavior. Nietzsche wrote Human all too Human in the company of Rée, and even quotes from Rée's forthcoming The Origins of Moral Feeling (Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen) with approval in this work (HH I 37). This period marks for Nietzsche a decisive turn towards natural science as a source of inspiration in his explanations for human behavior and his engagement with natural science is associated with his friendship with Rée, the two being mutually reinforcing.
Nietzsche’s encounter with Guyau’s thinking came later. He first read Guyau’s *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* in 1885 and his *Non Religion of the Future* in 1887. Following Thomas Brobjer’s chronicling of Nietzsche’s reading of Guyau, Ansell-Pearson has recently considered their intellectual relationship. Perhaps even more than with the Nietzsche of *Human all too Human* and Réé, the points of similarity between Nietzsche’s later thinking and Guyau are striking. At the same time as exploring their differences Ansell-Pearson highlights the significant common ground that exists between them. He shows that both Nietzsche and Guyau are engaged in developing a notion of life that would allow us to understand existence in monistic terms. Further, both understand morality in terms of their conception of life. Guyau is by no means a defender of moral dogma. He warns against our allowing moral dogmatism to take the place of religious dogmatism and criticizes making duty into the new God. Guyau even expresses a concern lest the ideas of Mill and Comte take the form of cult worship. “Love of humanity is one thing, and idolatry of humanity, or sociolatry, according to Comte’s term, is another.”

So in what sense then, given they share with Nietzsche the aim of understanding moral man in natural terms, various points of agreement in their explanations, and an opposition to existing dogma, have Réé and Guyau failed to translate man back into nature? While they have attempted to understand man in natural terms they have not recognized the basic text that will challenge not only the myths of morality’s origins, but our faith in the desirability of its core values. Réé, while exposing the vanity and egoism that is often behind our actions continues to believe that we are also capable of genuinely disinterested pity. He believed that we had evolved to possess some selfless instincts. For
Guyau in turn, “To live fully and completely one must live for others”.25 Guyau, while providing much inspiration for Nietzsche, is sharply distinguishable from him because he remains committed to a belief in the importance of altruism, a central value of the Christian morality that Nietzsche would have us reject. As, Thomas Brobjer suggests, in 1887 Nietzsche “seems to have regarded Guyau as the sort of free thinker who rejects Christianity but holds on to Christian morality”.26 While no defender of the status quo, Guyau does not take his own naturalistic analysis of human morality to be undermining of the possibility of altruistic morality. He suggests that “associations for moral purposes” will survive the decline of religion and be “based on a consciousness of the solidarity and fraternity of mankind”.27 While Guyau, according to his fellow Frenchman Alfred Fouillée, “sees the genuinely intense life in the generous and fruitful life, which ‘lives for many others’ [... ] we have seen that Nietzsche, in the name of life, simply and entirely does away with morality”.28 Though Nietzsche may value aspects of morality, such as the degree of asceticism necessary to the pursuit of knowledge, he intends his analysis to challenge not simply theistic conceptions of morality, but the values of altruism and compassion that are embedded in our existing moral culture. He warns: “Where compassion [Mitleiden] and fellow-suffering is preached today – and, heard aright, no other religion is any longer preached now – the psychologist should prick up his ears: through all the vanity, all the noise characteristic of these preachers (as it is of all preachers) he will hear a hoarse, groaning, genuine note of self-contempt.” (BGE 222)29 For Nietzsche, it is not enough to recognize that morality has historical and biological roots. He hopes to lead a select audience to an understanding of how it has been damaging to life and to the emergence of higher types.
THE WILL TO POWER

The basic text of humanity, not recognized by others who have attempted to translate man back into nature, which will challenge this faith in altruism and the positive role of morality, is understood by Nietzsche in terms of the will to power. To understand how various instincts have come to be sublimated in the taming of man, the process in which various wills to power have competed and developed has to be unpacked or translated. Nietzsche comes to understand all motivations and instincts offered as explanations of human behavior in terms of the principle of will to power: “This world is the will to power- and nothing besides! And you yourselves too are this will to power – and nothing besides!” (KSA 11: 38[12]/ WP 1067).

Nietzsche’s understanding of life, and explanation of all there is, in terms of will to power is influenced both by his psychological observations and his readings from the natural sciences. Observations concerning the significance of our desire for power precede Nietzsche’s mature formulation of the will to power. In his discussion of asceticism in Human, all too Human Nietzsche connects it to a sublimated “defiance of oneself” in some men, which is explained by “a need to exercise their strength and lust for power that in default of other objects or because their efforts in other directions have always miscarried, they at last hit upon the idea of tyrannizing over certain parts of their own nature” (HH I 137). Nietzsche’s early recognition of the explanatory significance of our sublimated desire to feel power in action reaches fruition in his concept of a will to power. As he refines his understanding of what it is to will to power Nietzsche
postulates that the activity of all our drives and instincts are ultimately to be comprehended as the activity of will to power. He claims: “our drives can be reduced to the will to power” (KSA 11: 40[661]). At the same time as the will to power explains the development and activity of the drives, our experience of our own need to assert and express our drives, and to feel the sense of power that this allows, gives content to the will to power as an explanatory concept.

Neither, however, the sources for his understanding of what will to power is, nor its extension as a principle of explanation, are limited to human psychology. Both Wolfgang Müller-Lauter and Gregory Moore have drawn attention to the significant influence of biological and physiological theory on Nietzsche’s work pointing to an understanding of the will to power in this context. Michael Forster, whose 1877 Textbook in Physiology, Nietzsche possessed in the German translation, even uses the expression ‘will’ to describe an amoeba without attributing this will to any particular cell within it. Nietzsche was aware of developments in cell biology, which he would have encountered in his reading of Friedrich Lange, who discusses the multicellular structure of organisms, drawing on the likes of pathologist Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902). That Nietzsche takes on this language of physiological struggle and multiplicity in his development of the will to power is demonstrated in the unpublished notes. For example, we find: “The will to power can only express itself against resistance, it seeks what will resist it – this is the original tendency of protoplasm in sending out pseudopodia and feeling its way. Assimilation and incorporation is, above all, a willing to overwhelm” (KSA 12: 9[151]/ WP 656). The need to expand and assert, to feel and express power, explains what a need to preserve and simply continue cannot. For instance, “protoplasm takes into
itself an absurdly greater amount than it would need for preservation: and, above all, the point is that it does not thereby ‘preserve itself’, but *disintegrates* ([KSA 13: 11[121]/ WP 651]). Will to power explains why protoplasm incorporates more than is required for self-preservation. It explains how forms of life incorporate one another, changing in this incorporation, and how division or destruction of forms of life may occur, allowing the continued expression of will to power rather than the static perpetuation of fixed forms.

As an explanation of all there is, the will to power is a monistic theory in that everything is of the same character. This character, of needing to assert and incorporate, explains the development and continuity of different forms. This explanation presupposes a plurality rather than a unity. Will to power, can only be identified where resistance is felt: “Aversion is felt through resistance: but power can only become aware of itself through resistance, thus aversion is a necessary ingredient of all action (all action is justified against something, that must be overcome) The will to power *strives* against opposition, against aversion.” ([KSA 11: 26[275]]) As Müller-Lauter argues, given that “will to power is supposed to be the only reality, what can offer resistance to it can likewise be only will to power”. Hence, the expression of the will to power “presupposes a multitude of wills to power”.[34]

What we can learn by examining organic life in all forms is supported, and ultimately incorporated as a truth for us, by considering our own drives, and our experience of the feeling of power in their expression. Nietzsche's use of physiology comes together with his psychological insights to produce the hypothesis of the world as made up of multiple, active wills to power. His explanations of phenomena, including the establishment of our moral culture,
depend on there being dynamic, competing wills to power, such as the will to power of the weak, which creates the ascetic ideal in reaction to the will to power of the strong (GM I 10). Insofar as these are convincing explanations, Nietzsche justifies the claim that underlying our behavior are a multiplicity of wills to power. These plural wills are all of the same fundamental nature. Their explanatory capacity relies on the interaction and resistance between them and this assumes both their plurality and dynamic, expanding character. John Richardson describes how this expansion can be qualitative as well as quantitative, in incorporating other wills to power a will to power can incorporate a greater variety of patterns, occupying more perspectives or using different drives. Several wills to power can be synthesized into whole organisms or societies.

Nietzsche’s critique of morality in On the Genealogy of Morality employs, and at the same time develops and expresses, this concept of the will to power. Moral and cultural phenomena are continuous with “the organic world [which] consists of overpowering, dominating, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former ‘meaning’ [Sinn] and ‘purpose’ must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.” (GM II 12) The will to power shapes the meaning of things in an ongoing process: “every purpose and use is just a sign that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it is own idea [Sinn] of a use function; and the whole history of a ‘thing’, an organ, a tradition can to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations” (GM II 12).
This notion of multiple and dynamic wills to power as the explanatory force behind human culture and activities is again expressed in Beyond Good and Evil where Nietzsche speaks of the task of translating man back into nature. Though Nietzsche does not here use the phrase ‘will to power’ he describes “what the people calls ‘spirit’ [Geist]” in terms that resonate with his Nachlass discussions of the will to power discussed above. “Spirit’ [Geist]” he claims “wants to be master within itself and around itself and to feel itself master”. Nietzsche describes its “intention” in assimilating, simplifying, falsifying as “the incorporation of new ‘experiences’, the arrangement of new things within old divisions - growth; that is to say more precisely, the feeling of growth, the feeling of increased power.” (BGE 230)

This understanding of life as will to power, and all phenomena in terms of this conception of life, implies a critical appraisal of human morality. Where Guyau speaks of the desire to sacrifice, Nietzsche’s annotations on his personal copy counter: “life is above all concerned with power”.36 Thus, Nietzsche understands his concept of the will to power as in direct opposition to the belief in life’s inherent tendency to altruism that can be found in thinkers such as Guyau. For Nietzsche, a translation of man back into nature, conducted by the right method, finds only will to power, which explains the development of the values of pity and altruism in terms of the need of the sick, and the priestly caste, to feel power.

The weak required these evaluations against the dominance of the strong. This morality allows the sick to assert themselves against the healthy and thus express their weak will to power and to continue living. “The will of the sick to appear superior in any way, their instinct for secret paths, which lead to tyranny
over the healthy, - where can it not be found, this will to power of precisely the weakest!" *(GM III 14)* The need for the ascetic ideal, and its practices of altruism and compassion, springs from sickness: “the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life, which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence”. *(GM III 13)* Nietzsche considers these values, despite serving to allow the sick to cling to life, to express an evaluative opposition to life, understood as will to power. The example of the moral, pious man condemns the inherent character of life to express power “as though health, success, strength, pride and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities” *(GM III 14)*. Christianity, which has championed these values, “has made an ideal out of opposition to the preservative instincts of strong life” *(AC 5)*. Thus, given Nietzsche’s concern with the need to protect and cultivate the healthy and strong, morality, which is fundamentally sick and opposed to the character of life as will to power, must be overcome.37

**NIETZSCHE’S METHODOLOGICAL NATURALISM**

The question I wish to focus on for the remainder of this article is why Nietzsche believes that thinkers such as Rée and Guyau stop short in their analysis and are blind to the character of life which he sees as will to power, and thus to the need to overcome a morality that stifles this character. For Nietzsche, we do not have transparent knowledge of ourselves but rather face the challenge of translating the cultural and moral language in which our existing self-interpretations operate. Nietzsche claims that he has “an unconquerable distrust in the possibility of self-knowledge that has led me to the point where I sense a contradiction in adjecto in even the concept of ‘immediate knowledge’ that
theoreticians permit themselves” (BGE 281). Thus a methodology of translation is required to achieve self-knowledge and decipher the process in which our self-interpretation has been formed. Methodological naturalism in the sense of the method of empirical sciences, or continuity with the empirical sciences, is not adequate to this challenge. While it is the case that at times Nietzsche praises scientific method, his points of connection with the wider scientific approach do not sufficiently characterize his method. The virtues he at one time celebrates in science he comes to see as yet to be fully realized. I will now discuss how solitude, skepticism and attention to the body operate as mutually reinforcing habits that form Nietzsche’s methodological naturalism and allow the translation of man back into nature that Nietzsche diagnoses as lacking.

Essential to Nietzsche’s method is the practice of solitude. Solitude, and the desert in which it is experienced, are associated by Nietzsche with genuine truthfulness: “It is always in deserts that the truthful have dwelt” (Z II 8). He asks, “who today knows what solitude is?” (HH I Preface 3) While the likes of Rée and Guyau might attack existing dogma, they lack the capacity for solitude required to recognize what lies beneath modern man or to question the most cherished common values. Solitude is both a pre-condition and result of undertaking the task of translating man back into nature. It acts to facilitate further aspects of the method of re-naturalization and understanding man in natural terms, which I will discuss below. It is also made inevitable by the distance that emerges between those who take up this method and the moral human being.

A second aspect of Nietzsche’s naturalistic method is a capacity for uncertainty, or a species of skepticism, that he thinks has not yet been
demonstrated by his contemporaries. This element of Nietzsche’s method connects with the respect that he often shows for scientific method. At the time of writing Human all too Human, he believed scientists exemplified the capacity for uncertainty which was necessary to letting go of metaphysical and theistic prejudices that constrained enquiry. He declared with approval that “science [Wissenschaft] needs doubt and distrust for its closest allies” (HH I 22), and “the scientific spirit [wissenschaftlichen Geist] will bring to maturity that virtue of cautious reserve” (HH I 631). An awareness of the need to develop a capacity for doubt is not unique to Nietzsche. Rée also recognized the importance of a skeptical, or cautious, attitude towards belief and opinion and warned that the discomfort of doubt might lead us to hold fast to our opinions.\(^39\) Nietzsche, however, distinguishes between existing and required skepticism.\(^40\) He claims of the nature of existing skepticism that: “skepticism is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition called in ordinary language nervous debility and sickness” (BGE 208). This criticism, or diagnosis, of skeptics does not imply a rejection of all skepticism however.\(^41\) Nietzsche speaks of a “new and stronger species of skepticism” bred in solitude, “which does not believe yet retains itself” (BGE 209). The skepticism that Nietzsche advocates does not express indifference or an inability to commit to, or own, one’s drives. Rather, it represents the strength to live without certainties and without belief in unchanging truths and values. It requires one to embrace the change that the will to power constantly produces. Such skeptics have no need “of an external regulation to constrain and steady them” (AC 54). Given that the self has no impervious boundaries or fixed essence, the idea is not to replace external regulations with ‘internal’ ones found through introspection. Rather, re-
naturalized man, more aware both of the particular drives that contingently form their evolving self and of the creative process of change, takes responsibility for the creation of their own values. This alienates them from the herd, which rests on a system of universal, fixed values and beliefs. This new species of skepticism thus depends on a readiness to be solitary and apart from the herd.

Nietzsche finds this stronger species of skepticism lacking in his contemporaries. The “pale atheists, Antichrists, nihilists, these skeptics [...] still believe in Truth” (GM III 24). Hence, they neither go deep enough in their skepticism or investigation. At the same time as recognizing a value in its emphasis on doubt, Nietzsche criticizes science because it still assumes the value of truth. “Strictly speaking, there is no science ‘without presuppositions’. The idea of such a science is unimaginable, paralogical: a philosophy, a ‘belief’, must always be there first, so that with it science can have a direction, a sense, a border, a method, a right to exist” (GM III 24). In contrast, a skepticism born of strength and cultivated in conditions of solitude, need not assume the redemptive power of truth. In thinkers such as Comte, however, who hoped that science would pave the way to Utopia, and even with Guyau, who had faith in the power of altruism, naturalistic investigation is still associated with the redemption of man and the creation of a heaven on earth.\(^\text{42}\)

The goal of social and moral improvement is one that sets boundaries to naturalistic investigation. To undertake the task of translating man back into nature with genuine skepticism, which means to undertake it without the belief that truth will serve humanity, is a truly solitary undertaking. It is only without the need to believe that one’s labors will lead to mankind’s happiness or redemption, however, and in solitude from the opinions of others, that the
investigation into the text underlying moral man can be unconstrained. As long as the lone scholar is warmed by his belief that he is serving mankind, they are not truly alone, he does not have to endure a solitude which “encircles and embraces him, ever more threatening, suffocating, heart-tightening” (IH II Preface 3). As long as scholars presuppose the value of truth as that which will redeem man, their investigation cannot go beyond the limits set by the values of Christian morality. Nietzsche’s method requires a more extreme skepticism, one in which the task of translating man back into nature is not conducted on the basis of a project rooted in Christian morality.

A third crucial dimension of Nietzsche’s method is to pay attention to the body and its multiplicity of drives. Nietzsche’s method opposes a history of philosophy whose practitioners “saw the senses as trying to lure them away from their world, from the cold kingdom of ‘ideas’, to a dangerous Southern isle” (GS 372). He inverts Plato’s criticism of the sight and sound lovers who are too distracted to contemplate the pure forms. For Nietzsche it is the so-called pure perceivers who, in their denial of the body, are impure and must be confronted as “lechers”, “cowards”, and “habitual liars” (II On the Famous Wise Men). To overcome this history requires that we embrace the experience of the senses, and learn to listen to the various bodily drives and perspectives that form the self. This self-awareness concerning the operation and character of our drives is necessary if we are to grasp the concept of the will to power, which forms the basis of Nietzsche’s naturalistic explanations and critique of morality. This requires the cultivation of new habits. Becoming aware of and attending to our drives demands that we confront the ongoing process in which they have been
sublimated and re-interpreted. This will allow us to recognize their character as will to power.

Attention to the activity of our drives is facilitated by solitude. Alone we can hear the voices of the multiple, sometimes competing, drives within us. This experience is challenging and disturbing. Hence, “We are afraid that when we are alone and quiet something will be whispered into our ear, and so we hate quietness and deafen ourselves with sociability.” (UT Schopenhauer as Educator 5) Further, the capacity to endure solitude and skepticism concerning even the value of truth in serving humanity, is necessary to accept the implications of what we hear, which will challenge our morality and our self-understanding. Thus, the likes of Rée and Guyau, confined by their attachment to herd values, will remain deaf to much of what might be heard in solitary attention to the body.

Developing the habit, facilitated by solitude, of listening to the various drives within us is a step towards being able to occupy a wider variety of perspectives.45 We must learn “to look into the world through as many eyes as possible, to live in drives and activities so as to create eyes for ourselves” (KSA 9: 11[141] This allows a more ‘just’ hearing of the perspectives that are currently suppressed. Precisely because man has within him many perspectives and “feels many pros and cons” he has the possibility to raise “himself to justice” (KSA 11: 26[182]/ WP 259). Richard Schacht suggests that together our multiple perspectives “constitute the means of compensating for their particular ‘injustices’ sufficiently to bring the attainment of ‘justice’ and the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ so understood within the realm of possibility.”46 It is not possible to obtain a view from no perspective, and as Schacht argues, were it possible it
would not give us a deeper knowledge. There are no pure objects of knowledge obtainable for us, but rather perspectives, or wills to power, which condition each other. What is ‘unjust’ is to equate the interpretation of a particular perspective with an object as it is in itself. This arbitrarily excludes other interpretations and thus takes a narrow view of the subject of interpretations. We do greater ‘justice’ to something when we try to occupy as many perspectives as possible, and in doing so develop an understanding of the process of interpretation.47

OBJECTIVE MAN

It is precisely such ‘justice’ that existing scientific method does not allow. In his claim to be disinterested and objective the scientific man fails to capture the multitude of perspectives. In the passage Leiter quotes from as evidence that Nietzsche is committed in his late work to scientific method, Nietzsche’s tone is in fact rather mocking of the objective researcher.48 The “precious instrument” of the objective scientist Nietzsche describes thus: “only in his cheerful totalism can he remain ‘nature’ and ‘natural’. His mirroring soul, for ever polishing itself, no longer knows how to affirm or how to deny”. Such a man “has to first wait for some content so as ‘to form’ itself by it- as a rule a man without content, a ‘selfless’ man.” (BGE 207) Hence, the value of disinterest practiced in scientific method comes together with the value of self-sacrifice in the morality that 19th century naturalists justify; both involve an inability to own and assert the wills to power that form the self.

The ‘objective men’ are incapable of knowing themselves. This claim must be understood in the context of Nietzsche’s understanding of the self. Already in
his early notebooks, Nietzsche considers the idea of the unified enduring self as a fantasy; “We have a phantom of ‘I’ in mind [...] we want to create unity” (KSA 8: 32[8]). Our notion of ‘I’, as a unified subject who perceives and interprets, requires us to overlook our multiplicity. It is “an attempt, to see and conceive our endlessly complex being in simplification.” (KSA 9: 7[62]) The self is in fact made up of various wills to power, drives, habits, and patterns of behaviour. Their interaction is contingent and developing; there is no unchanging self. The attempt to isolate a limited part, or moment, of this interaction and fix it as the self is itself an interpretation that obscures the process of interpretation. The project of establishing a fixed nature, or self, runs contrary to Nietzsche’s method of naturalism; “for the enrichment of knowledge it may be of more value not to reduce oneself to uniformity in this way, but to listen instead to the gentle voice of each of life’s different situations” (HH I 618). To achieve this implies a different understanding of the self: “ceasing to treat oneself as a single rigid and unchanging individuum” (HH I 618). In order to know oneself one must accept that there is no unchanging self to know.

The objective man, however, is wedded to a notion of self that excludes an awareness of the multiplicity of drives within them. The history they have inherited, from Plato and Christianity, is one in which mind or spirit is posited as separate from the body. This separation is one that Nietzsche repudiates. He insists “‘Pure spirit’ [Geist] is pure stupidity: if we deduct the nervous system and the senses, the ‘mortal frame’, we miscalculate” (AC 14). Of course, other naturalistic thinkers also reject mind body dualism. For them mind or spirit is to be understood in terms of the body. They have, however, inherited the habit of denying their own sensuous nature. Unlike, “the rarest and best formed men”,

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such as Goethe, in whom “the spirit feels just as comfortable and at home in the senses as the senses feel at home and comfortable in the spirit” (KSA 11: 41[6]/WP 1051), the ‘objective’ men do not feel at home in their bodies, and are not comfortable acknowledging the multiplicity of their drives. Thus their monism still involves a suppression of the processes of the body. While their aim is to understand mind or spirit as continuous with the body they do this by excluding much of the activity of the body. Having suppressed the contradictions of their various drives the ‘objective’ men are out of touch with their bodily drives. They cannot create direction and value from the flux of drives within them because they either condemn or deny altogether the activity of these drives. Instead of asserting their own interpretations and affirming their own perspectives they simply mirror the interpretations of the herd. Committed to the value of truth, understanding the purpose of science in the context of herd values, they remain men of faith rather than true skeptics. “Belief of any kind is an expression of selflessness, of self-alienation” (AC 54). For Nietzsche, both disinterest and self-sacrifice imply a failure to affirm life. More specifically they imply a failure to affirm any of the particular interpretations of the particular drives within us. This lack of awareness and affirmation of any particular competing drives and their interpretations implies a lack of awareness and affirmation of our nature as made up of these competing drives. Further there is a lack of awareness and affirmation of the creative process of interpretation that life as will to power consists in.

The objective men, have no awareness of the complexity of competing wills to power which form them. They are unaware of the operation of their own drives in their very assertion of impartiality. They are not natural in themselves
and are not able to translate man back into nature on the level of understanding either. Hence, the translation of man into nature necessitates that we overcome the limitations of objective man.

THE RE-NATURALISATION OF MAN

To translate man back into nature a new objectivity is needed, one which involves the awareness of a multitude of perspectives as Nietzsche indicates in On the Genealogy of Morality: “to see differently and to want to see differently to that degree, is no small discipline and preparing of the intellect for its future ‘objectivity’ – the latter understood not as ‘contemplation’ [Anschauung] without interest (which is, as such, a non-concept and an absurdity), but as having in our power the ability to engage and disengage our ‘pros’ and ‘cons’” (GM III 12). A new self-awareness of the activity of our interests is needed. To complete the task of translation on the level of understanding we must overcome the limitations of objective man. We are faced with “the task of assimilating knowledge and making it instinctive” (GS 11).

This transformation, which is required in order to fulfill the project of translating man back into the nature, is brought about through attempting this task. Through employing Nietzsche’s method of naturalism we are changed such that we are able to more completely employ it, and will finally be able to incorporate the truth that man is will to power. In order to overcome the denial of the body that the objective men suffer from, we must train ourselves to be more aware of our body and break the habit of ignoring the senses. This new awareness of our body and drives produces a new awareness of our pros and cons. It requires more than observation. To become emancipated from the
ascetic ideal is a gradual process. To break the habit of ignoring the body we must live our pros and cons; we must be prepared to affirm and deny. Nietzsche’s method demands that we occupy different perspectives; something he does through his writing. In place of coolly observing them, we must learn to move, or rather dance, between them: “thinking needs to be learned just as dancing needs to be learned, as a form of dancing.... Who is there among the Germans who knows from experience that light shiver which spreads out to all the muscles from light feet in intellectual matters! [...] for dancing in any form cannot be divorced from a noble education, the ability to dance with the feet, with concepts with words” (TI What the Germans lack: 7). Escaping the fixed values of the herd and retaining a skepticism that prevents one petrifying within one position allows us to live in and explore the pros and cons of our sensuality.

This engagement with our own variety of perspectives in turn reinforces and deepens the new skepticism discussed above. The “spirit takes leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, practised as it is in maintaining itself on tight ropes and possibilities and dancing even beside abysses.” (GS 347) Rather than a skepticism which attempts to dissociate from the multiplicity that forms the self, by holding itself apart from any ‘pros’ and ‘cons’, we become capable of a skepticism born of an awareness of these ‘pros’ and ‘cons’, which has learnt to engage and disengage with their full variety. Addressing those who would follow him in his method Nietzsche declares: “You shall get control over your For and Against and learn how to display first one and then the other in accordance with your ‘higher goal’.” (HH I Preface: 6)

Having first, through Nietzsche’s method of naturalism, become aware of the flux of wills to power that contingently form the self, re-naturalized man is in
a position to cultivate the “great and rare art” which enables one “to ‘give style’ to one’s character” to “survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan” (GS 290). Thus, they form their values through their own activity rather than mirroring herd values.

Living for Nietzsche involves valuing. It is to prefer one form of life, one will to power, or combination of wills to power, over another. Nietzsche’s writings demonstrate such valuing. The new stronger skeptics, therefore, do not live without values. What they hold back from is constructing ideals out of these values. Instead they accept the status of their values as contingent, and transient, interpretations. Nietzsche understands himself as opposed to all fixed and transcendent ‘ideals’ or ‘idols’ (EH Foreword 3). To attempt to solidify our pros and cons into enduring values is to project them beyond the flux from which they emerge. Nietzsche is aware of this danger, but he hopes that the experiment of translating man back into nature will allow us to escape the need to construct new idols.

CONCLUSION

Nietzsche’s method involves a capacity for solitude that allows a new kind of skepticism and a new level of attention to the body than has yet been achieved. A new awareness of the nature of our underlying drives involves the incorporation of truths that radically challenge our existing self-understanding. It requires becoming “investigators to the point of cruelty, with rash fingers for the ungraspable, with teeth and stomach for the most indigestible, ready for every task that demands acuteness and sharp senses, ready for every venture” (BGE 44). Only those capable of this will recognize the world in terms of will to
power and be able to incorporate such painful insights. This incorporation will serve to distance them from the herd and induce further solitude.\(^{49}\)

How do we know that we have successfully avoided attachment to existing ideals and are suitably skeptical, solitary, and engaged with the senses, in embarking on our project of translation? We can only continue to examine ourselves and our motives, purifying ourselves from instances of denying the involvement of various drives, such as a drive to certainty, to fixity, to approval from others, by revealing their operation in our existing behavior and system of beliefs. To live non-ascetically, is not to deny the presence of a drive to asceticism. Rather it is to own it and employ it in exposing, and ultimately becoming at home in, the drives that have been sublimated and denied under the hegemony of the ascetic ideal.

The superiority of Nietzsche’s method of naturalism depends in part on its success in cultivating individuals who are able to overcome the ascetic ideal and affirm the interpretation of life that they reach, and in part on how convincing an interpretation it yields. We cannot establish competing interpretations as true by reference to a unchanging standard free from interpretation. We can, however, demonstrate the presence of interpretations where they are denied by exploring the operation of interpreting perspectives behind the denial. We can demonstrate the exclusion of perspectives by occupying a greater variety of perspectives. Finally, we can find the interpretation which we arrive at more or less convincing as an explanation of our experiences. The interpretation that Nietzsche believes best explains the phenomenon we encounter, including the immodest tendency to deny the presence of interpretation, is the view that everything is will to power.
The method which he believes will persuade us to this view of the world has to be lived and actively engaged in. It cannot be reduced to a theory to be applied to scholarly investigation. One should live by the principle “Life as a means to knowledge” (GS 324). As a lived method it affects the individuals who undertake it. By becoming more aware of their drives, and incorporating their new knowledge, those who undertake Nietzsche’s task undergo a re-naturalization. This re-naturalization is symbiotic with understanding man in natural terms; both aspects are required by Nietzsche’s naturalistic method and both are involved in translating man back into nature. Thus, Nietzsche’s naturalistic method can be viewed as existential in so far as it is must be actively engaged in, forming part of how a life is lived, and is transformative of those who undertake it.

Further, it creates the conditions that would be necessary for the kind of existential naturalism discussed by Hatab, in which we respond to the implications of relinquishing supernatural interpretations. By allowing one to be more in touch with ones drives and challenging the beliefs and methods that Nietzsche analyzes as ascetic and inimical to life, Nietzsche’s methodological naturalism enables its practitioners to find their “way back to ‘virtue’, ‘health’, happiness” (TI Expeditions of an Untimely Man 48), such that they might have the necessary strength, and awareness of their own pros and cons, to take on Nietzsche’s further challenges, however we construe them. Such challenges might include developing new virtues, breeding a higher type or, as emphasized by Hatab, thinking the eternal return. These practitioners of a new naturalism can hope to achieve “a ‘return to nature’, although it is not really a going-back but a going-up – up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness” (TI
Expeditions of an Untimely Man 48). Ultimately Nietzsche’s methodological naturalism is itself an experiment and celebration of “the thought that life could be an experiment for the knowledge-seeker” (GS 324).

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2 In talking of 19th century naturalistic thinkers I am not assuming membership of any one movement, or that these thinkers would have used the term ‘naturalism’ to define their own thought. Hence, I am not concerned with the historical provenance of the term itself.

3 Nietzsche does not discuss any group of thinkers in terms of their naturalism. He uses the term Naturalismus only three times in the published works, twice in relation to art and once in relation to morality (BT 7, HH I 221, TI Morality as Anti-Nature 4). What I am concerned with here is that despite the existence of many thinkers in the 19th century who we now consider naturalistic in their approach, and who in different ways might be seen to be engaged in a task of translating man back into nature, Nietzsche believes this translation is yet to be achieved. He thus finds all attempts lacking and understands himself to be taking a unique approach. Thus, if we consider Nietzsche to be a naturalistic philosopher we must at the same time respect that his approach cannot to be reduced to what he shares with other broadly naturalistic thinkers.

4 Nietzsche’s understanding of philosophical method, both as a means of inquiry and as a way of life, is not static but in gradual development. This article focuses on the later formulation of his method as it emerges in Beyond Good and Evil in relation to the task of translating man back into nature. I am thus primarily concerned with his writings from 1886 onwards.
For example Gregory Moore offers a detailed exploration of Nietzsche’s relationship to biological theory, exploring the biological metaphors in Nietzsche’s work in the context of 19th century biology, particularly evolutionary theory [Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002]].


Nietzsche describes him as “brave”. (KSA 11: 35[34])

For example, such criticism includes Nietzsche’s accusation that Comte wanted “to lead his Frenchmen to Rome via the détour of science” (TI Expeditions of an Untimely Man 4), and made the “misunderstanding” of seeing humanity’s perfection as a goal (KSA 11: 26[232]). He mentions Guyau with Comte in a critical context: “the mild and lily-livered concept ‘humanity’ à la Comte and after Stuart Mill […] Is once again the cult of Christian morality under a new name… the freethinkers, e.g. Guyau”. (KSA 12: 10[170]/ WP 340). Spencer is criticized at several points in Nietzsche’s oeuvre including GS 373 and TI Expeditions of an Untimely Man 37. Nietzsche accuses Spencer of misunderstanding the “essence of life, its will to power” because he sees life as “as an increasingly efficient inner adaptation to external circumstances (Herbert Spencer).” (GM II 12)


Ibid. 7.


For example see, Christoph Cox Nietzsche Naturalism and Interpretation (Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1999) and John Richardson, Nietzsche’s New Darwinism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Cox explores the theory of knowledge contained in Nietzsche’s work, exploring how Nietzsche is simultaneously a naturalist and asserts the irreducibility of interpretation. Richardson develops a reading of the will to power, which he maintains is present, if subordinate and not directly articulated, in which the character of drives as will to power is itself explained according to the principle of natural selection.

Thomas Brobjer, Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), esp. 40-2, 64, 103.


As documented by Brendan Donnellan, a shared interest in the French moralists was also a significant influence on the development of Nietzsche’s own distinct position at this point in his career (“Nietzsche and Paul Réé; Cooperation and Conflict”, Journal of the History of Ideas, 43 (1982): 595-612).

Brobjer, Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context, 248.

20 Ibid. 104. For Nietzsche this conception of life will be in terms of the will to power: “Where I found the living, there found I will to power” (Z II 12), “life as such is will to power” (BGE 13), and “I consider life itself instinct for growth for continuation, for accumulation of forces, for power” (AC 6).


23 Donnellan, “Nietzsche and Paul Réé; Cooperation and Conflict”, 601.


26 Brobjør, Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context, 102.


28 Alfred Fouillée, “The Ethics of Nietzsche and Guyau”, International Journal of Ethics 13 (1902): 13-27, 24. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche is not an ethical thinker. I would temper Fouillée’s comment to say that Nietzsche would have us do away with existing morality, both in terms of the particular values it espouses and in terms of its understanding of duty as a universal imperative and external regulation.

29 Translation modified.

30 “Homo natura: The will to power” (KSA 12: 2[131]/ WP 391).

31 Moore, Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor; Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy, trans. by David J Parent (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). Moore chronicles Nietzsche’s reading of contemporary physiologists such as Wilhelm Roux (1850-1924), and Michel Foster (1836-1907). Moore suggests that these scientific developments serve to challenge the idea of a unitary subject and thus inform Nietzsche’s concept of a self formed by multiple wills to power. Müller-Lauter, argues that for Nietzsche contradictions are constitutive of the world, as it is made up of inherently contradictory wills to power. His monograph ends with a detailed discussion of Roux’s influence on Nietzsche’s understanding of the individual organism as a struggle and competition between its parts (163).

32 Moore, Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor, 39.

33 Nietzsche first read Lange in 1866 and returned to him when preparing his later texts. For the full dates when Nietzsche read Lange’s work see Brobjør Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context, 249.

34 Müller-Lauter, Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy, 19.


36 This is noted by Ansell-Pearson, “Free Spirits and Free Thinkers: Nietzsche and Guyau on the Future of Morality,” 107. Nietzsche’s annotations are listed in the German translation (Leipzig, 1912) of Guyau’s A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction (Brobjer, Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context, 234).

37 It is beyond the scope of this article to assess whether Nietzsche is justified in the assessment that if life is will to power, the ascetic ideal, and the values of
altruism and pity, are inimical to healthy life, and whether Nietzsche’s notion of health then provides sufficient grounds to reject these values.

38 Horst Hutter offers a more general discussion of the possibilities of solitude as a technique of self-cultivation (Shaping the Future; Nietzsche’s Regime of the Soul and its Ascetic Practices [Lanham; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006]).

39 Réé, “Psychological Observations”, in Basic Writings, 9.

40 Nietzsche discusses different variants of skepticism. For my purposes what is significant is that in Beyond Good and Evil he considers prior forms of skepticism to be inadequate and demands the development of a new form of skepticism. For an overview of Nietzsche’s comments concerning different variants of skepticism and their representatives see Andreas Ur Sommer (‘Nihilism and Skepticism in Nietzsche’, in A Companion to Nietzsche, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson [Malden, MA; Oxford; Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2006] 250-270, esp. 259-260).

41 That Nietzsche continues to value skepticism at the same time as criticizing variants of skepticism and particular thinkers described as skeptics is clear in the Antichrist. Here we find both the claim that most skeptics are “ignorant of the first requirements of intellectual integrity” and that “The vigor of a mind [Geist], its freedom through strength and superior strength, is proved by skepticism [...] the capacity for an unconstrained view, pertains to strength . . . .” (AC 54)

42 Comte believed that social science could solve man’s social woes and that increasing humanity’s self-understanding would set us on a path towards a social utopia (Auguste Comte, Introduction to Positive Philosophy, trans. Frederick Ferré [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988], 28-30).

43 “Those who love looking and listening are delighted by beautiful sounds and colors and shapes, and the works of art that make use of them, but their minds are incapable of seeing and delighting in the essential nature of beauty itself.” (Plato, The Republic, trans. D. Lee [London: Penguin, 2003], 476b [Stephanus Pagination]).

44 Graham Parkes gives a detailed analysis of Nietzsche’s understanding of drives (Graham Parkes, Composing the Soul; Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology [Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994]). Hutter also speaks of a requirement on free spirits to “listen to their bodies” (Shaping the Future; Nietzsche’s Regime of the Soul and its Ascetic Practices, 29).

45 Richardson discusses Nietzsche’s Perspectivism in terms of occupying different viewpoints (Nietzsche’s System, 264).


47 Given justice is a central value of Christian morality, Nietzsche’s use of this term to refer to a virtue of the practice of knowledge seems to be in tension with his critique of the ascetic ideal. His understanding of the will to power, however, underscores a view in which the signification of a concept, value or virtue can change as it is incorporated and used by different forms of life. Thus justice as it has existed in the context of the dominance of the ascetic ideal can be overcome. The ‘justice’ of a new method of truth which stands in opposition to the ascetic ideal is thus contrasted to the meaning of ‘justice’ within an ascetic understanding of truth, which conceived justice in terms of the impersonal and impartial. Nietzsche’s chooses this term precisely because of its association with the ascetic ideal. He hopes to demonstrate the hypocrisy contained in the
existing idea of justice, which asserts the ideal of the impersonal and the objective from a partial position. Thus, he shows how what is understood as ‘just’ has been unjust and contrasts it to a new virtue of justice.

49 This might also apply to an alternative, but equally challenging, characterization of the *Grundtext of homo natura*, other than the particular analysis that Nietzsche offers in terms of the will to power.

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