Educating Moral Theory: Nietzsche, Dewey, and Living Ethics

by

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Abbreviations

**Dewey**

AE: *Art as Experience*

CF: *A Common Faith*

DE: *Democracy and Education*

E: *Ethics*

EN: *Experience and Nature*

L: *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*

QC: *The Quest for Certainty*

“Self-Realization”: “Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal”

“Reflex Arc”: “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”

**Nietzsche**

BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*

EH: *Ecce Homo*

GM: *The Genealogy of Morals*

GS: *The Gay Science*

“History”: “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”


PTG: *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

“Schopenhauer”: “Schopenhauer as Educator”

TI: *Twilight of the Idols*

WP: *The Will to Power*
“Whether we immoralists are harming virtue? Just as little as anarchists harm princes. Only since the latter are shot at do they again sit securely on their thrones. Moral: *morality must be shot at*” (Nietzsche, TI, 471).

Philosophers have routinely ignored the conceptual significance of education and pedagogy in moral theory. While the reverse has not been true—philosophers of education generally hold themselves accountable to a system of ethics—moral theorists tend not to concentrate on the reception and delivery of values. How we learn values is not as important as what we learn, if we understand the process of establishing values as learning at all. Kant does not examine what it means to take up the categorical imperative, or how it is that the individual might reach this point in her reasoning. Mill does not find it necessary to include how we learn to value utility in his discussion of ethics. Not only is a descriptive and normative narrative missing, but the notion that this aspect of moral belief might be relevant to the value itself is entirely out of the picture.

Though they are not alone,¹ Friedrich Nietzsche and John Dewey stand apart from this crowd. Each has developed a moral theory that takes education as central to its purpose. The value of education is inspired for them by the importance they attach to locating the individual in the world. That is, both Nietzsche and Dewey take the individual’s actual existence and experience to be morally relevant. This move accentuates the importance of meaningful interaction, which is, at the very least, laden with potential educative material.

¹ Aristotle immediately comes to mind, and though he is not a part of this inquiry, his voice should not be silenced on the subject.
What does it mean for education to become relevant in moral theory? Our relationship to our values must change, as well as our relationship to others. We should suspect that traditional moral theory has fallen short by ignoring the role of education. I take it that this intuition should suggest that moral activity and valuing, commonly construed, might be lacking in significant ways. Moral theory no longer sits securely on its throne.

This project examines the ways in which Nietzsche and Dewey integrate education and pedagogy into their conceptions of moral theory. Although these seminal thinkers have rarely appeared in dialogue with each other, their writing addresses similar concerns. Both have developed moral theories that emphasize methodology as the legitimating force behind values. Rather than holding that methodology accountable to abstract or universalizable norms, it is held accountable to the individual as such. While Nietzsche has been embraced as making significant contributions to the discourse of moral theory, his philosophy of education has been widely disregarded, and although Dewey’s philosophy of education has been much discussed generally, rarely have philosophers considered its connection to his ethics, let alone to ethical or educational theories of other philosophers.

Nietzsche centers his moral theory on the significance of affirmation in value and action. The individual is not merely the legitimating structure for norms, but she also participates in the content of her values. Dewey makes a similar claim; that is, that the character of the individual’s relationship to a belief or action is what indicates moral value, rather than solely the belief or action itself.
This approach is able to construct a coherent account of how non-universal values can engage each other and the world. Often a rejection of universalism provokes a worry as to how moral interaction might take place. However, when education is taken as central to moral theory, this problem transforms from an objection into a statement of intent. Our moral activity is not solely directed towards an end, but is itself concerned with its own process and the continuation of that process.

Both Nietzsche and Dewey place a moral emphasis on how values are legitimated, rather than what values are justified or why. This prominence of methodology strongly unites their thought. That is, it is morally important for both philosophers to account for how we develop and learn values. Conversely, it is also crucial to examine how our values educate us. The interaction between the individual and her values is recognized by both Nietzsche and Dewey as the central moral question. This relationship, both writers suggest, should remain fluid and dynamic. The concept of education for both Nietzsche and Dewey does not center on an end result or achieved state. It is, for each of them, the process that is morally valuable. Both Nietzsche’s argument for living experimentally and Dewey’s stress of plasticity and immaturity in the educational process speak to this concern. We find ourselves, following a rejection of universalism, in a position to endorse a plurality of beliefs and actions. The struggle to come to terms with this notion is both the motivating force and final aim of the educative moral theory developed here.

This emphasis on methodology implies the non-conformity of values while centralizing education within its conceptual framework. If a moral theory gives
priority to a methodology that leads to potentially—if not, as is Nietzsche’s case, insistently—divergent values, it faces some tough questions concerning the relationship between values. How do we criticize others if we are unwilling to hold them accountable to our own norms? Dewey argues that moral inquiry is essentially public in nature (at the very least publicly accessible), and Nietzsche shows no signs of withholding criticism. In considering this problem, it becomes clear that the method of critique plays an essential part in this concern. Thus the project here will retain an interest in how values are presented in addition to their content.

This thesis is intended to work out the insides of a productive understanding of the role of education in moral theory, while grounding itself in two significant thinkers on the subject. Comparisons and contrasts between Nietzsche and Dewey are meant to further illuminate what is at stake in this inquiry. While a comparison between the two as philosophers in general would be worthwhile, it is not the focus here. It is important to note, however, that although we can read Nietzsche in some ways as a pragmatist, there are significant differences between “the great immoralist” and Dewey. The latter is inseparable from a democratic viewpoint, and it is through this perspective that he constructs both his moral and educational philosophy. Nietzsche, on the other hand, makes neither positive nor (positively) normative claims about equality. The tension here, while significant, is not insurmountable. It is valuable to concentrate on this “inside” tension in content rather than to focus on the “outside” shape of their work.

In Chapter 1 I outline Nietzsche’s critique of traditional moral theory. This serves as the basis for a suggestion that despite his rhetoric, Nietzsche should be read
as developing his own constructive theory of morals. With Nietzsche’s turn away from objective (or disinterested) truth, and towards interested or embodied truth, the individual—who also is neither detached nor disinterested (Nietzsche, GM, 178)—becomes much more relevant to the formulation of values and beliefs. To be concerned with morality involves a concern for the individual, and therefore a concern for the individual’s growth and education. It is important to note that Nietzsche is concerned with the education of the individual as individual. However, that individual is always viewed by Nietzsche against a background of history and experience. Understanding this relation is central to evaluating Nietzsche’s moral and educational project. It is productive to understand Nietzsche’s work as constructive moral theory because this introduces tension to the term. The concept of moral theory as such is threatened by Nietzsche’s work, and the reorientation required to maintain coherence despite this tension raises important challenges for both participants. In Chapter 2 I go on to spell out Nietzsche’s philosophy of education, locating it within the concerns of his moral theory.

Chapter 3 is an examination of Dewey’s moral theory and philosophy of education. Like Nietzsche, Dewey is given space in his own terms here, in order to work out a coherent account of his work. Priority is given here to the relationship between Dewey’s theory of inquiry, his unified structure of experience, and his moral experimentalism.

Chapter 4 centers on the explicit role of education in moral theory: criticism. Rather than understanding criticism as the method of moral judgment, both Nietzsche and Dewey understand it as a method of education, and we should take this notion
seriously. The impulse to judge is, in their respective views, diametrically opposed to the impulse to educate. One perspective is interested in taxonomy, in understanding and categorizing actions or beliefs in order for this categorization to do the work of affirming or negating the subject of criticism. The other impulse of criticism takes on the work of engaging the subject directly. This notion is taken up here, primarily concerning the difficulty of criticizing without established moral boundaries.

Chapter 5 takes up the less obvious (and historically neglected) role of education in moral decision-making and action. Deliberation, when understood as part of a reflective and self-constituting process, must be understood as educative in nature. The question of how decision-making can fit into a notion of embedded and continuous inquiry takes us to the focus of this chapter.

A lack of concern with the role of education in moral theory threatens to obscure the role values actually play in people’s lives. It also disarms the notion of moral skill or expertise. In order to make sense of our experience in the world, our values should be understood as worldly themselves, subject to growth and development. We repay our teacher badly if we remain merely a pupil (Nietzsche, EH, 676), and the present project looks to construct a vision of educative moral theory that builds from on and then stretches beyond that found in historical analyses of either ethical or educational works. Nietzsche and Dewey provide ample ground for this type of work. It is time to arm ourselves with their thought and thus to invigorate ethics. It is time to take a shot at morality.
Chapter 1  Nietzsche: The Great Immoralist?

“The last thing I should promise would be to “improve” mankind. No new idols are erected by me; let the old ones learn what feet of clay mean. Overthrowing idols (my word for “ideals”)—that comes closer to being part of my craft” (EH, 673).

Nietzsche’s moral and educational philosophy is conceptually founded on his critique of traditional—universalist—moral theory. By emphasizing the moral centrality of the interested individual, embedded in life, Nietzsche reshapes the structure of moral theory and action. His interest is in how values are developed and what it means for an individual to hold them. This notion of valuing as itself meaningful suggests serious failures in traditional moral theories. This chapter begins with an account of Nietzsche’s criticism of ethics.

While Nietzsche clearly rejects systematic moral theory, I argue that there remains in Nietzsche space for constructive moral work. However, this interpretation of Nietzsche as providing a moral theory might not be immediately discernible from his writings. To take him at his word would give us a critic, one who has—at least, in his own estimation—revealed the inherent problems of morality and presented plausible grounds for devaluing and deemphasizing constructive moral theory. We would do best then to interpret very differently what has typically been understood as moral phenomena. However, this interpretation fails to capture the full extent of Nietzsche’s moral thinking. Although Nietzsche would resist being categorized as a moral theorist, his critique of morality provides grounds and articulation for a revitalized moral theory. While Nietzsche’s ethical concepts should not be understood as systematic, they remain constructive—as opposed to simply critical—work. Nietzsche’s insistence that he is only “overthrowing idols” should be understood not
as a rejection of moral theory as such, but only that which is idolatrous. Nietzsche’s
response to the destruction of moral idols (ideals) suggests the conceptual centrality
of education to moral theory.

1.1 Philosophizing with a Hammer: What’s Wrong with Ethics?

Nietzsche criticizes moral theory on two levels: form and content. For the
first, he takes issue with theories that locate values outside—that is, as not responsible
for or to—the particularities of life. This abstraction results in methodologies that
encourage simplification and equalization of agents’ values and decisions. For
Nietzsche, this is the result of flawed philosophical understandings of the world and
life. Though this is not Nietzsche’s term, I will call this formal-methodological
problem “the problem of intercession.” The second direction of critique focuses on
demonstrating the weaknesses of the particular value judgments of traditional moral
theories. These valuations are problematic because they are anti-life. They succeed
in providing guidance by deemphasizing the actuality and individuality of their
practitioners.

Traditional moral theories attempt to understand and value experiential
phenomena and processes by holding them accountable to standards and methods that
operate independently of this experience. From the Platonic Forms to Kant’s
categorical imperative and also to Mill’s utilitarian principle, our actions and values
are legitimated through universal systems of valuation. The particularities of
experience are taken as incidental; the aim is to reach past them for something
universal. Nietzsche’s criticism here stems from his argument that life is the condition

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2 This is a fundamental notion for Nietzsche and will be returned to in detail on page 18 below. For
now we should take the notion to provisionally suggest healthy and realized being.
of valuing, and therefore to attempt to step outside these conditions to create values is inherently self-contradictory, if not incoherent. If “life itself values through us when we posit values” (TI, 490), we must then emphasize rather than obscure the relation of the individual and her values to actual life itself, rather than rely on a representation of experience that is, if not primarily a theoretical schema, at the very least devoid of particularities and color. That is, to value through abstraction is to deny the significance of life and its experience. We as individuals become then aberrations: increasingly problematic the more this individuality is emphasized.

Whether or not moral systems, as such, are inherently open to this criticism, it is easy to see how well Nietzsche’s description fits. Traditionally, the individual becomes instrumental within the realization of determined moral values. Whenever the individual acts individually—that is, in ways conflicting with culturally accepted morals—the individual is understood as problematic.

While certainly this is an issue of social conformity, the more philosophically interesting concern centers on the (sometimes implicit) assumption that “correct” moral reasoning will always result in near-identical moral judgments. Nietzsche’s response, that “‘My judgment is my judgment’: no one else is easily entitled to it” (BGE, 243), comes out of his relocation of the concern of values. That is, Nietzsche adjusts the emphasis of the reflective moral question from “what should I do?” to “what should I do?”. Nietzsche is thus interested in the moral primacy of the individual as individual. Thus the successful practitioner of Nietzsche’s values would not be understood as being “good,” but rather as actualizing a “great individual.” This notion pervades Nietzsche’s moral and social philosophy under different guises, and
should be understood as the foundation of his moral concerns.\(^3\) Thus Nietzsche rejects universal and abstract moral values insofar as they function as an imposition on—rather than an expression of—the individual and life.

Nietzsche’s moral critique can be interpreted methodologically as objecting to the ways in which morals intercede for and between individuals. To intercede is to engage in one of two activities (both of which are relevant here):

1. To act in behalf of someone who faces difficulty.
2. To reconcile differences between conflicting individuals (or values).

Nietzsche’s complaints about traditional moralists run as follows: “What they would like to strive for with all their powers is the universal green-pasture happiness of the herd, with security, lack of danger, comfort, and an easier life for everyone” (BGE, 244). What would normally represent a positive moral ideal becomes vitriol when coming from the pen of the self-proclaimed “great immoralist.” The problem for Nietzsche is that this type of value system prevents the development of moral individuals by emphasizing the commonness of individuals: that is, their un-individuality (BGE, 243). By using a model of intercession, we are able to map out the structure of how Nietzsche’s critique is carried out.

The first formulation of intercession shows how moral theory attempts to ease the difficulty in making judgments. Rather than engaging with situational thickness, moral choices are thinned out—and made instrumental—by emphasizing the systematic elements of the experience. We plug the problem into a moral function—e.g. by scrutinizing it with the Categorical Imperative—and wait to see what is right

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\(^3\) The concept shows up as “genius” in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and is often cited as “übermensch” or “overman.” This last formulation is so extensively fraught with historical over-exaggeration and misinterpretation that it becomes detrimental and distracting to employ the term in a productive account of Nietzsche’s moral thought. Thus it is avoided here.
as the answer is produced on the other side. The system of values does the work here, not the individual. Nietzsche argues that this method does not allow for the individual to act as such: “God is a gross answer…: you shall not think! (EH, 693). While traditional moral theory may successfully facilitate deliberation, Nietzsche may be right in pointing out how simultaneously these advantages incite deterioration within the individual (BGE, 244). In addition, if we take seriously Nietzsche’s argument that “every action that has been done was done in an altogether unique and irretrievable way” (GS, 265), this moral methodology is not only stagnating but also misleading.

To systematize or instrumentalize our approach to actions is to ignore the particularities of the action in favor of its “universal” qualities, the reality of which Nietzsche approaches with suspicion. What we can take from Nietzsche’s criticism here is that systematic moral methodology is at best unhelpful for the actualization of the individual; at worst it disconnects our values from the actions they are directed towards. If we choose to follow Nietzsche in rejecting universal commonalities between actions or events, we must start by taking seriously the question of whether or not our moral methodology retains its relevance.

The second formulation of intercession works on two levels. The first of these understands moral theory as instrumentally equalizing individuals. The second formulation understands traditional moral theory as working towards the convergence of values. This latter interpretation speaks directly to the problem of universality that Nietzsche finds so disturbing. When he states that nobody else has a right to one’s own judgment or taste (BGE, 243), Nietzsche means this both descriptively and

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4 Nietzsche uses religious metaphors (although they are not always so metaphoric) to indicate moral and metaphysical tendencies towards universality and abstraction (EH, 673). “God” means “that which is considered universal.”
normatively. Descriptively, in that we can see that individuals do make value judgments differently, even when following similar standards, and it is problematic to deemphasize this. This is a normative claim, in that Nietzsche understands the act of valuing itself to be valuable only when it affirms the self as individual. This higher priority is inconsistent with a commitment to convergence. The first aspect of the attempt to “reconcile difference” considers how traditional moral theory treats fully developed moral beings as essentially interchangeable. This is for Nietzsche quite simply anti-life. Again, both descriptively and normatively, Nietzsche’s argument is that we are not equal, nor should we attempt to be (GM, 173). Is valuation not a picking out, a raising up, an ordering of things? Why should our method contradict its content? Nietzsche has caught on to this paradoxical aspect of traditional valuing when he poses the problem of the “common good” as a contradiction in terms. Nietzsche uses this specific image to evoke discomfort in his readers, but there is a significant philosophical point beneath the polemical rhetoric. “Common” and “good” generally point in different directions. It is not necessarily plausible to take Nietzsche literally here, and agree that “‘good’ is no longer good when one’s neighbor mouths it” (BGE, 243). Rather, Nietzsche is directing our attention towards two distinct and contradicting perspectives involved in our accepted process of valuing. Against this approach, Nietzsche suggests the importance of “the pathos of distance, that is characteristic of every strong age” (TI, 540). The deterioration of the individual that accompanies an affirmation of interchangeability is a primary concern of Nietzsche’s work. This brings us to Nietzsche’s criticism of the content of traditional moral theory.
Nietzsche criticizes the tradition of moral reasoning as resulting from two distinct moral impulses. The first, characterized as “slave morality,” arises from those who find themselves in positions without power. They are dominated and set-upon by society and life. Their primary moral valuation is to categorize that which works against them as “evil.” In a move that Nietzsche must ironically appreciate, the “slaves” are then able to value themselves as “good”: this term meaning whatever is not evil. The problem, for Nietzsche, is not only that these values originate from ressentiment towards life, but that through their self-regulatory and confining content, they work to further articulate and enforce this ressentiment. “Slave ethics…begins by saying no to an “outside,” an “other,” a non-self, and that no is its creative act” (GM, 171). This presents Nietzsche with a conflict. On the one hand, he can quickly dismiss this version of morality as anti-life. On the other hand, this negative creative act succeeded in transvaluation; that is, it reshaped predominant values in order to resolve a need (against moral vulnerability) of the “slaves.”

This condition of moral vulnerability resulted from the other impulse in valuing: the “master morality,” which developed from the perspective of those with power, the “noble” individuals, and is thoroughly self-affirming. The main creative act of the master morality is a resounding “yes” to the individual who takes this perspective. “The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval… the noble human being honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself” (BGE, 395). The master morality is life-affirming, and it does not intercede with the individual.
However, Nietzsche implies here that the master perspective is now invariably caught up in its struggle with the slave morality. It is not the case that these moralities exist presently in separate areas of society. The account here is an allegory written to show the conflicting nature of our own moral system. Nietzsche’s criticism of traditional moral theory is worked out through this genealogical project, which develops in two ways. First, by providing a material and conceptual history of ethics, Nietzsche disarms morality of its privileged perspective, locating it rather in the world; moral values are understood as in dialogue with the plurality of perspectives and concerns that constitute our experience. Secondly, by relocating morality, Nietzsche is able to hold values (moral systems) accountable for their consequences. Thus arises the problem of content: the “slave morality” is harmful to those who participate in it. It is simply not healthy. Neither is the “master morality” universally praiseworthy. However, through this genealogical project, we can see in what ways a moral theory can be valuable. Values that are life-affirming and individualizing are still valuable for Nietzsche. The question of whether we should read Nietzsche as making positive contributions to moral theory—that is, moving beyond the ‘mere’ criticism and dismissal of traditional moral theory—turns on whether or not Nietzsche’s criticisms provide the grounds for new values and methods of valuation. Certainly he does provide this space, but is it involved enough with the type of problems that have historically been considered “moral”?

1.2 Nietzsche’s Moral Theory: A Critical Construction

Morals function as a representation of the individual’s interactions with her environment. To the extent that we admit that the natural and social worlds are
complex and perspectival in the experiential background they provide for individuals, we must also admit that morality should reflect this complexity and plurality: “What serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation must almost be poison for a very different and inferior type” (BGE, 232). This is not a rejection of moral theory as such, but of traditional moral theory in its systematic failings. The quotation that began this chapter illuminates the method of Nietzsche’s moral project. He is not interested in constructive moral systemization. What Nietzsche offers us in place of traditional moral theory is not a system but a perspective. The distinction here is that while a moral system involves a fixed methodology and often fixed moral values, a perspective primarily involves various concerns. In Nietzsche's case, this concern lies primarily with the individual. While it certainly struggles against most of Nietzsche's rhetoric, his moral perspective can be understood as moral theory because it aims to solve the same problems that face traditional moral theory: "What should I do?" "Who should I be?" Certainly the discourse has been distorted and re-colored, as Nietzsche explicitly calls into question most of all the obvious and un-criticized values—“the weights of all things must be determined anew” (GS, 219)—but this does not preclude the notion that he has engaged in what might productively be called a moral theory.

Nietzsche’s own theory of values must conceptually begin with the death of God:

“Do we hear nothing as yet of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him” (GS, 181).
This “event” signifies his rejection of universal claims as the measure and legitimation of values and individuals. This includes all claims about absolute morality and absolute reality. Conceptually, it is “God,” or a similar universal point of foundation (reason, for example), that allows for an understanding of concepts and objects as un-situated and disinterested. Nietzsche refers to this system as “the horrendum pudendum of the metaphysicians” (TI, 495). This positing of a true or absolute world beyond “mere” appearances and interests is problematic for Nietzsche because it resists the notion that meaning (both moral and otherwise) is embedded in actual lived experience. The individual is left reaching for what will be (by definition) always beyond his reach. We are unable to “become those we are” (GS, 266). “God” is the highest form of intercession (if we take my model seriously), and is thus both anti-individual and anti-life. Thus the death of God results, for Nietzsche, in the ascendance of the individual to primacy with respect to value theory.

This move away from universal claims entails an insistence on the perspectival nature of individuals and their experience. Nietzsche’s project is not to create new universal systems, but rather to reject that methodology entirely. The death of God does not result in the promotion of a new god, but rather the recognition of an essential plurality of ‘Gods’, absolute in a way very different from their predecessor (GS, 181). Once the world of the thing-in-itself is removed, objects and concepts come into focus only as related to—and interested in—each other, and it is this interrelationship (life) that becomes, for Nietzsche, the relevant measure and legitimator of values: “Life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us

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5 As well as the slowly growing social and cultural understanding and acceptance of this notion, at least in Nietzsche’s estimation.
when we posit values” (TI, 490). All intelligible meaning must function within the structure of our experience (life). Thus, if we allow Nietzsche’s criticism, any claims about meaning or value beyond experience become fundamentally problematic. It is the heated activity of life, as opposed to the cold, brute facts of existence, which, for Nietzsche contributes to the rise of and meaningfulness of values and norms.

There is a tension in Nietzsche’s constructive theory between the emphasis on the individual as creative being and life (or nature) “as the measure of all things.” Can we truly create our own values, or are they dictated from natural means not of our own making? Is the responsibility for values taken up by nature or the individual? The problem with this distinction is that we are still positing the individual as separate from the world. We are alleging a dichotomy between the “subjective” individual and the outside (and presumably independent) world—but the individual cannot be understood as distinct from the world. The healthy (that is, abstraction-free) actualization of life involves the realization of the moral individual. The actualization of the great moral individual is inseparable from the affirmation and success of life as such (“Schopenhauer,” 159).

However, an insistence on perspective is not an encouragement for acknowledging a system of free interpretation of the world—that is, any held belief is legitimate and constitutive of an individual’s perspective. The interconnectedness between the individual and life demands a more serious account of valuing. That is, Nietzsche rejects any conception of the individual as free, if freedom means the “foolish demand to change one’s essentia arbitrarily—like a garment” (PTG, 53). Rather, we are responsible for realizing ourselves in our own perspective; in light of
the understanding that the world as such is bound up in our actions, we must “see as beautiful what is necessary in things” (GS, 223).

It is only then, Nietzsche argues, that we can become creative valuers (fully individual). That is, this dedication to necessity—Amor Fati—should not be understood as a call for passive acceptance of life. A love of fate invokes an active engagement with life; Nietzsche’s claim here is that the recognition of necessity does not come easily or without effort. We must be free of our immediate influences and values if we are to be able to recognize necessity. The affirmation that we find Nietzsche valorizing in his discussion of the master morality is exactly this free choice to recognize and embrace necessity. There is no intercession between the individual and nature if the individual engages in this Nietzschean vision of affirmation:

“For what is freedom? That one has the will to assume responsibility for oneself. That one maintains the distance which separates us” (TI, 542).

The tension in Nietzsche's work between the individual and nature is resolved through the actualization of this process. The individual as individual must be understood as natural rather than mysterious.

It is necessary at this point to spell out the meaning of the term “life” for Nietzsche. In the context of The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche uses life as the condition against which the “slave revolt in morals” sins (GM, I71).

In Twilight of the Idols he elaborates on the point, arguing that life is the active engagement of values (TI, 490). By acting with ressentiment the “slaves” are refusing to participate in this engagement, thus they are “anti-life.” Thus life appears for
Nietzsche to be the active renewal of affirmative being. This is reinforced by Nietzsche’s use of the term “will to life” (TI, 490) as the impulse to self-affirmation.

Central to Nietzsche’s conception of life is the understanding that it is not merely frictionless flowering and self-affirmation. Life is full of tension and destruction. It involves “being cruel and inexorable against everything about us that is growing old and weak” (GS, 100). This is not to say that life is destructive, only that conflict is central to Nietzsche’s intent here. Life is not easy; rather, it is the difficult working out of activity. Yet, Nietzsche often employs life synonymously with nature. This raises a tension within the terminology, as life is given as the condition of valuing, as well as that activity itself. Throughout the Untimely Meditations Nietzsche utilizes life as the converse of disinterested knowledge. This tension in Nietzsche, that life is simultaneously self-affirmative activity and its condition, is not immediately resolvable. Yet the perpetuation of the tension serves to remind us of the extent to which Nietzsche is serious about the embeddedness of the individual in the world. The fully realized individual is understood by Nietzsche as the success of life. This explains how Amor Fati manages to be both affirmative of life and active in itself—heavy with responsibility.

It is essential to note that valuing in the world involves knowing it. A critical exploration of values must for Nietzsche involve a critical exploration of the world. The failure to value a necessary world results in individual, if not social, sickness. Nietzsche’s main criticism of the “slave morality” is that it posits values that work against life rather than affirm it (GM, 171). To the extent that the individual creates

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6 Though the use is definitely not limited to this work. See (for example) The Gay Science, page 169.
and affects life and the world, he or she is responsible for it. We are valuable individuals, for Nietzsche, when our values cohere with our responsibilities. It is here that we find the central aspect (affirmation) of what can be described as a Nietzschean moral theory. This conception of the moral individual, and of how this individual as such is actualized, is also (as we shall see) not only the basis for Nietzsche’s philosophy of education, but also dependent on it.

Nietzsche’s central criticisms of traditional moral theory can be represented as an objection to morals as intercession, to morals as anti-life. Nietzsche has certainly offered an alternative to intercession: “to live dangerously!” (GS, 228). Nietzsche favors any belief that allows for experimentation and frowns upon any belief that does not allow for it. “This is the limit of my ‘truthfulness’: for there courage has lost its right” (GS, 115). This commitment to precariousness with one’s own values exemplifies Nietzsche’s concern for engaging difficulty rather than circumventing it. The value of the tension and conflict that is in drawn out in non-intercessional morality is one of Nietzsche’s central moral and educational beliefs.

It is important to note that Nietzsche also argues against oppositional valuation: “For one may doubt, first, whether there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these popular valuation and opposite values on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives” (BGE, 200). He is following the thread of inquiry here from a question of how a value or conception can be constructively formulated as being produced by its opposite. When we step back from this perspective, Nietzsche is suggesting that we can begin to see valuing as functioning along a continuum, rather
than as idiomatic. This is how we move “beyond good and evil”—which is, however, not a move beyond morality. Nietzsche argues against “right” and “wrong” *per se* (GM, 208), but this does not prohibit the development of an alternative moral vocabulary:

“The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species cultivating” (BGE, 201).

While it certainly goes against much of Nietzsche’s rhetoric, this is still very much a normative theory of values. Affirmation is a striking (but still) moral concept! Nietzsche avoids and condemns the term “morality” because of the problematic conceptions that term has historically carried with it. I refer to Nietzsche’s theory of valuation as a moral theory because, in addition to the fact that he makes morally relevant value claims (about the significance of the development of the great individual, for example), involving his thoughts in the moral discourse emphasizes the relevance each has for the other. While this is not the only possible interpretation of Nietzsche’s work, it seems at least plausible, given the analysis here of his critique of moral theory. Nietzsche has defined the parameters of a non-systematic perspective on valuation in such a way as to allow us to make normative judgments about the world. While these judgments will take shape differently from those situated in traditional moral theory, they remain moral judgments.

In the following chapter, I discuss how the motivating factor of Nietzsche’s moral philosophy, and how that same concern also drives his philosophy of education. While it is always problematic to view spheres of philosophy as distinct, in this case it is fully an impossible position. Nietzsche’s work on morality and
education are conceptually similar, interrelated, and interdependent. It is easily 
apparent that any discussion of philosophy of education is intimately tied up in moral 
theory, but in this case we find a moral theory that is inseparable (arguably 
indistinguishable) from its educational aspects.
“Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you that the true, original meaning and basic stuff of your nature is something completely incapable of being formed, and is in any case something difficult of access. Bound and paralyzed; your educators can only be your liberators” (“Schopenhauer,” 129).

The topic of education, while not always explicit in Nietzsche’s writing, is central to his moral theory as well as generally to his philosophical work. While he touches on the subject in scattered sections throughout his writing, Nietzsche concentrates explicitly on the concept in his *Untimely Meditations*, in his essay, “Schopenhauer as Educator.” It is here that Nietzsche explains both how an individual develops to the point that he or she can become an educator, as well as how an individual can develop to the point where he or she can begin to truly learn. This dichotomous approach speaks to the role that form plays in learning, a point that I return to shortly. Education, for Nietzsche, cannot be the achievement of social and cultural functionality that we achieve through the ideology of the educational institution (as such) today. Nor, for that matter, can it consist of specialized technical instruction. Neither of these educational methods approaches Nietzsche’s concern for the education of the individual as individual. That is, education involves learning and working against the current time and culture. It is only through this independence that we can develop as individuals (“Schopenhauer,” 146). Furthermore, the educational experience cannot come easily. Were education to occur without struggle, the student would not develop in response to it. Education presents itself as a problem, and for Nietzsche its value is negated if the difficulty inherent in this problem is avoided.
2.1 Education as Liberation

Interpretive and constructive work must be actively engaged by the learner, not solely by the educator. Thus Nietzsche says: “I profit from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example” (“Schopenhauer,” 136). It is here we find Nietzsche conceiving of valuable education as opposed to pedagogical intervention. To teach through example forces the student to do the work of the learning. Knowledge and understanding is not given, it is taken, and the educator is simply a facilitator. Furthermore, although this is not explicitly stated by Nietzsche, the justification of the interpretation of an example is not the teacher as such, but life (the success or failure of the experimental execution of that interpretation). That is, the persistent openness of an example to reinterpretation forces this very process to require reaffirmation repeatedly. The force of an example hangs on its usefulness in employment—in life.

Furthermore, an example only becomes tenable as we relate it to our own experiences and life-activity. In describing his own education from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche begins with the impression he first received from the figure of the educator. This approach to education—one that gives priority to (or at least emphasizes) the personality of the educator—is central to Nietzsche’s re-conception of the meaning and method of education. We are learning, after all, to become better people. Is it not best then to study our teachers as people? This approach emerges from Nietzsche’s methodology in Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks. In this text, Nietzsche examines the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers by “emphasiz[ing] only that point of each of their systems which constitutes a slice of personality… to bring to light what we must ever love and honor…: great individual human beings” (PTG, 24). Nietzsche
employs this tenet to bring the Greeks to life: only by engaging them personally does he feel that their thought becomes meaningful to us. The philosopher as example serves to enact philosophical work with vitality and personality: we thus engage philosophy as involved necessarily in life, rather then outside or opposed to it.

The imperative here, as in Nietzsche’s moral theory, is to “become who you are.” This indicates the need for an active effort by the individual. It is precisely the lack of this effort that produces the space and need for education: “the man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily” (“Schopenhauer,” 127). To take oneself “difficultly” is to encounter the self as a problem. The impulse to become individual, in the sense of the personality of great individuals, provides Nietzsche with the grounds for his theory of education. The need of the individual to affirm life—to return to Nietzsche’s moral theory for a moment—is what prepares them for the impulse to education.

This directly touches on the central tenet of Nietzsche’s philosophy of education: that education should be for life rather than for knowledge or truth. This opposition does not indicate a lack of interest in factual learning or a rejection of the relevance of truth. Rather, it underscores the problems Nietzsche locates in the notion of activity solely for the sake of truth or knowledge (“History,” 118). Nietzsche treats history in the same way he treats examples (history is itself just a particular type of example). That is, history can be used either for its own sake or for the benefit of our activity and life. That is, history becomes meaningful, Nietzsche argues, when it becomes personally—rather than academically or scientifically salient. The task of history, Nietzsche argues, is the production of great need (“History,” 111). That is,
history is able, taken personally, to evoke a problem for the individual that demands resolution. Similarly then, examples as such must serve the same purpose. The educator, for Nietzsche, must seek out and respond to a need in the learner.

Nietzsche often employs rhetoric that implies an elitism towards his intended audience. However, his repeated insistence that he writes only for “the few” is misinterpreted if it is understood as mere arrogance or fatalism. Rather, this language is used to remind us that there are more and less valuable methods of reading and interpretation; “those whose ears are related to ours” (GS, 343) will find productive meaning in our work, while those who engage the work with a problematic attitude will completely miss the point (the few and the many, respectively). Nietzsche’s statement that “books for all the world are always foul-smelling books: the smell of small people clings to them” (BGE, 30; emphasis mine), is intended as an indictment of both the equalizing instinct in education and the lack of potential disruption created by any appeal to a wide audience. That is, speaking universally (to all) is impossible unless we rely on widely held notions—which significantly diminishes the possibility of subverting these notions.

Throughout his work, Nietzsche reiterates his point that education requires a certain attitude on the part of the person being educated (GS, 100). The central point here is that neither the position of educator nor student can be assumed as given. It is important to note that Nietzsche states that he encountered Schopenhauer at a time of need. Nietzsche seems to be indicating here that as in valuing, we must be in a particular state—readiness to affirm necessity—in order to take advantage of a potentially educational experience. Here we find nature again playing an important
role. Honesty responds to needs, not crafted desires. As it is with transvaluation or affirmation, education can only come in response to a deep need, created by the natural situation of the individual. This is why Nietzsche puts so much emphasis on the value of struggle in life. It is difficult situations, rather than comfortable ones, that produce needs over desires. Of course, in response, it requires a certain strength in the individual to respond creatively to struggle rather than to break under its weight. Nietzsche’s philosophy of education, in addition to his moral theory, is borne out through this tension between nature and the individual.

As with his moral theory, Nietzsche argues for a philosophy of education that understands education as plural and complex: “each will understand according to what and how much he is: and none of us will ever fully understand it” (“Schopenhauer,” 143). The goal of education is not to create unified and universal knowledge. Rather, the aim is, again, to encourage the realization of the individual as individual. This can only occur when the individual experiences the need to be individual, and can be carried out only when the teacher recognizes this. That is, neither the position of teacher or student should be assumed as given. As the student requires a unique positioning, so does the teacher: “whoever is a teacher through and through take all things seriously only in relation to his students—even himself” (BGE, 269). Whatever is being taught (which includes the self of the teacher as example) is only successfully communicated, Nietzsche argues, when it addresses the immediate (rather than theoretical) position of the student.

For Nietzsche, when we are forced to become the creators of new ideals and values (after the death of god), values become present to us as a problem. This
problem must be solved in a way that is affirmative of ourselves and nature. It is through resolving this problem that we become morally realized individuals.

In a similar manner, education must show up as a problem. Our convictions, Nietzsche writes, “are signposts to the problem we are” (BGE, 352): they are indications of a resistant self undergoing liberation. They are at once both suggestive of success on those grounds and demands for further exertion. As we begin to understand our engagement with life we become aware of the need to realize ourselves differently from how we are. This begins to explain Nietzsche’s insistence on education as liberation (“Schopenhauer,” 129), a conception of education consistent with Nietzsche’s account of the self and Amor Fati. That is, liberation should be understood as the self’s transformation into itself as individual.

Essentially, Nietzsche uses the concept of liberation to guard against the notion of a common education. The very idea of a generally shared education suggests to Nietzsche a distinct failure in educating the individual as individual. This is not to say that Nietzsche is against education involving common knowledge (how to speak, read, do math). He does not dismiss the importance of these skills, but rather argues that they need to be understood in a critical context. Thus Nietzsche argues that the aim of the philosopher as educator is to teach us to be honest and untimely (“Schopenhauer,” 133). The notion of honesty refers to a coherence of self only achieved through liberation.

Untimeliness is also central to Nietzsche’s conception of liberation, and is thus worth explicating here. Nietzsche defines untimeliness as “acting counter to our

_Though, we can infer from Nietzsche’s work that he does not think there is ever complete resolution, nor should there be (“Schopenhauer,” 144)._
time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come” (“History,” 60). That is to say, being untimely is the achievement of individuality: we stand out against the society and culture around us. This notion serves for Nietzsche as the product of successful education, and it is significant that this is very much a moral virtue. The timely individual is symptomatic of her culture; she acts with her “time,” rather than on or against it. We are untimely to the extent that we can interact with cultural and social norms as if we were external to them. It is a difficult and solitary existence, but Nietzsche finds these traits only to reinforce the value of untimeliness.

Nietzsche describes four problematic impulses behind education in “Schopenhauer” (164). Each involves the greed of some interest dominating and guiding the form and direction of education to serve its own commitments and desires. There is the greed of “money-makers,” (“Schopenhauer,” 164), of the state, and of science. The fourth unsatisfactory motivation for education is the interest of “those who are conscious of possessing an ugly or boring content and want to conceal the fact with so-called 'beautiful form’” (“Schopenhauer, 166).

In each case, the philosophically relevant point centers on the relation between the commitments of the teacher and student. Simply imposing commitments on the students fails to liberate them (obviously). Thus commitments, in order to be successfully transferred, must be elicited from the student in her own terms (sometimes quite literally). Therefore even in education it is possible, if not probable (according to Nietzsche), to produce untimeliness even in the transference of shared commitments. Problematic forms of education, Nietzsche argues, are such because
they involve a “hatred of any kind of education that makes one a solitary”
(“Schopenhauer,” 165).

Education, Nietzsche insists, is important as far as it is life-affirming. That is,
Nietzsche envisions an education directed at life, rather than for the sake of
knowledge. Activity then is central to a Nietzschean education. To act individually,
Nietzsche argues, requires liberation not only from our time and culture, but also
from our own personal history. We are raised as timely beings, and it is only by
disconnecting ourselves from this past that we are able to achieve untimeliness. Thus
Nietzsche argues that “it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live
happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to live at
all without forgetting” (“History,” 62).

Education is thus problematic for Nietzsche when it is directed at simply
linking us with theory or the past. While this kind of memory is necessary for a
sustained sense of self, it often also mires us in the subject of our studies. Nietzsche
spends a significant amount of time on the value of forgetfulness, and does this in
order to emphasize the centrality of an active (and untimely) life to a successful
education. Nietzsche explains the centrality of untimeliness to both his moral theory
and his philosophy of education in a letter to Rhode from 1870 about the state of the
German public university:

“A thoroughly radically truthful existence is impossible here. But what is specially
important is that nothing truly subversive can ever emerge from this quarter…. We
can only become genuine teachers by straining every nerve to raise ourselves out of
the atmosphere of these times and by being not only wiser but above all better men”
(Letter to Rhode, ed. Levy, 73).

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8 This is meant in light of the conceptual role Nietzsche gives to the notion of “life.” See page 18
above.
This passage not only reinforces Nietzsche’s commitment to education as liberation, but it also addresses the conceptual linkages between his moral and educational values.

One of Nietzsche’s most important arguments about education is that an ideal can educate only if it can be approached through practical activity (“Schopenhauer,” 156). Education, to be valuable, must be concerned with the world, in addition to the individual as student. Specifically, we must take a Nietzschean conception of education to be concerned with the world in relation to the student (BGE, 269). We can take this to indicate the value of an unmediated interaction between the two. Like moral valuation, education should, for Nietzsche, present the individual with a problem.

Nietzsche’s relocation of moral activity—that is, to life and experience—necessarily involves an emphasis on education as part of being moral. Affirmation is valuable as much (if not more) for the self-transformation that accompanies it as the “rightness” of its judgments. Any ethics that fails to concern itself with education turns out to be more concerned with values then with the method of their realization: the transformation of the individual. Education, conceived well—for Nietzsche—places the individual foremost. Nietzschean morality involves the same commitment, but it is dependent on education for the achievement and conceptual development of this commitment.
2.2 Education in Style: Irony, The Aphorism, and Interpretation

“Only thoughts reached by walking have value” (TI, 471).

Nietzsche argues throughout his work that reification causes concepts and values to stagnate and decay. The education of fixed concepts and norms is constraining rather than liberating. Motion, not only in the boundaries of concepts but in their transference as well, makes education lively. This notion is absolutely central to critical engagement for Nietzsche. However, he is quick to point out that the type of learning referred to is not easily realized. To learn in motion is difficult, and it is the very difficulty of this work that provides the basis of education value for Nietzsche. Self-realization, the becoming who we are, requires the tractability and thickness of acting and learning against our time. Thus Nietzsche insists above all that we do not sit.

Nietzsche is concerned, not with the learning of knowledge per se, but with education for the sake of life: “I demand that men should above all learn to live” (“History,” 116). Scholarly commitment as such is dangerous because our life’s work has turned away from itself. Thus there is another meaning to the notion that “only thoughts reached by walking have value”: quite literally walking is engaging life and the world, and our values and education must do this as well. Walking also carries the notion of movement; it is unsettled, quietly (or not) experimenting as it traverses new ground and circumstances. A settled education rests on its facts and propositions, a state that renders the process separate formally from the experimentation that is central to life (in all its vital activity). Moving thoughts then, in addition to thinking while moving, are necessary for Nietzsche’s depiction of worthwhile education. It is through “walking,” Nietzsche argues, that concepts and values gain any meaning.
whatsoever. A so-called disinterested or “objective” stance, Nietzsche argues, enforces the meaninglessness of the student and subject for each other: a cultivated and vital relationship here is essential to meaningful elaboration or use (“History,” 93). Education, then, must make us walk.

Nietzsche himself purports to educate in three ways. The first is through the personality he cultivates in his own writing. It is impossible to read Nietzsche without being enveloped by the personality of his writing. It is witty, infuriating, cynical, insightful, disdainful, joyous, exhilarating and above all bold. In this way he sets an example for those in need of a way to engage life. Secondly, he challenges accepted values, forcing his audience to actively reconsider or reaffirm their beliefs. Thirdly, Nietzsche educates through the method and form of his moral challenge. As Nietzsche is unable to make us literally walk, he must do so through his writing: by avoiding systematic formulations of his thought, Nietzsche constantly evades our grasp, thus keeping the mind’s feet in motion. This is done primarily through his use of irony and the aphoristic style.

The question, simply put: why does Nietzsche so often write in aphorisms? Aphoristic writing resists the learned passivity of the reader. By disrupting the tempo and tone of the flow of thought, the aphorism forces the reader to be active in constructing a meaningful interpretation of the text. Jill Marsden, in discussing Nietzsche’s approach to aphorisms, suggests that aphorisms should be understood not as summational points of thought requiring unpacking, but rather as defined moments that demand further explication (Marsden, 30). The distinction here is that the notion of unpacking suggests unfolding from within, while Marsden wants to suggest that
the required work is outside the aphorism, anticipated, but purposely left undefined by Nietzsche. Thus with the aphorism Nietzsche is able to direct our activity without setting up a problematically stable philosophical system.

Those who take the time to work through the guided inspiration of an aphorism, cautiously and with vigor, are the intended audience for Nietzsche’s writing. Nietzsche’s constant reiteration that these are “the few” is simultaneously both a challenge to his readers (to motivate a change in attitude towards one more valuable), and an acceptance that he cannot dictate his audience. Nietzsche is quite aware that he will be misinterpreted; it is the price he must pay for the potential of meaningful education: “Posthumous men—I, for example—are understood worse than timely ones, but heard better. More precisely: we are never understood—hence our authority” (TI, 468).

In discussing his own work, Nietzsche addresses this tension when he writes that “every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives” (BGE, 241). That this statement is so accurately prophetic suggests the thoroughness with which Nietzsche approached the form of his writing. His aphorisms stand as a powerful indictment of the neglect often given to pedagogy in moral theory as well as the greater philosophical discourse.

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9 This point becomes most obvious in Nietzsche’s own life as his work is used to justify fascism: a prejudice that Nietzsche explicitly and repeatedly argued against (Kaufman, 7). While there is an extensive explanation of this particular line of interpretation—much pertaining to his sister—it is not the focus of this work and must be examined elsewhere.
It is important to note that Nietzsche does not only write aphorisms. Many of his major works, including *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Untimely Meditations*, are systematic in style. Yet, even in these books, his writing often retains the disruptiveness and indirectness that characterize his aphorisms. While Nietzsche may occasionally abandon the form of the aphorism, he nearly never deserts its spirit.

That the aphoristic style is so pervasive in Nietzsche’s written work stresses the importance he places on his conception of education. Not only is his philosophy of education central to his moral theory, it is the comprehensive and unifying shape of his work as a whole. Simultaneous with this form of presentation is Nietzsche’s insistent employment of irony. He makes not only unexpected, but indefensible claims in order to provoke reflection on the legitimacy of both the explicit and inexplicit statements. That is, through irony’s form of stating simultaneously a claim and its opposite, Nietzsche is able to call into question he very ground this distinction stands on. Thus he attacks morality ironically; by doing so Nietzsche is able to interrogate the legitimation of a value rather than simply the value itself. Without engaging in alternative constructive philosophy, irony is able to subvert the very norms of moral theory (by turning them against themselves).

Through irony the reader sees opposites simultaneously. That is, we are aware of both the explicit statement, as well as the indirectly presented intention of the author. This juxtaposition forces the reader to realize and work out the tension between the two positions. The unsaid statement is thus made more meaningfully present than if it were explicitly stated (Lang, 68). It is thus a fundamentally *active* experience that disrupts the passive role all too often assumed by the reader. Irony
thus places the reader too in the authorial perspective; it invokes a responsibility to actively interrogate both the concept at hand and the greater structure of its discourse. Furthermore, irony is especially compelling in its invitation to the student to assume the author’s point of view. Yet, the constructive work is done in full by both the teacher and student, thus guarding against the worry of forced commitments. Irony is essential for transvaluation: Nietzsche’s term for liberating into untimeliness a previously timely value.

Nietzsche’s philosophy of education centers on his notion of interpretation. We interpret the example, we interpret the aphorism, the meaning of the ironic statement and what is left unsaid. The work of liberation (the self’s transformation into itself) is done through interpretation, and thus it is essential to produce a clear picture of Nietzsche’s understanding here. Interpretation can be passive in the sense of encountering a clear and direct stimulus or an unsurprising experience. Alternatively, in can be active, disrupting the rhythm of the individual and forcing her to engage freshly the present moment. Moreover, Nietzsche locates the process of active interpretation inside life, noting its role in transformation and liberation: “all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming and that, in turn, all outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement, in the course of which the earlier meaning and purpose are necessarily either obscured or lost” (GM, 209). It is through interpretation that Nietzsche finds education working. The meaningful engagement between the individual and life found here shapes the space of liberation.
It is interpretive struggle that plays the crucial moment for Nietzsche. He states that “the value of a thing sometimes does not lie in that which one attains by it, but in what one pays for it—what it costs us” (TI, 541). The more significant the struggle, the greater the potential is for education. The more difficult a concept or activity is to understand, the more work must be done to understand it. The extent of this work is reflected in the self-realization of the individual, thus enforcing the value of difficulty in interpretation. Of course, even Nietzsche is willing to admit that insurmountable odds are unlikely to produce great individuals. While responding to a challenge is rewarding, the familiar feeling of being overwhelmed during the learning process is not productive. It takes specific attendance to determine and enact the appropriate challenge as a teacher. Yet we are often able to take certain aspects of situations that relate to the current state of ourselves and grasp those as the basis for interpretation. This struggle then, not only to interpret, but to gain interpretive ground (a point not explicitly stated by Nietzsche himself), is the foundation of self-realization.

Nietzsche takes the notion of struggle quite seriously. Throughout his work Nietzsche refers to the great individual, student, and teacher with metaphors of combat: “the free man is a warrior” (TI, 542), he is “a fighter against his age” (“History,” 95), etc. This insistence on polemical terms reflects not only Nietzsche’s own educational style, but the content of his understanding of what it means to take oneself “difficultly.” That is, education as provoking liberating interpretation individualizes the individual by setting him against his time (he is now able to act on his time rather than with it). Meaningful life thus becomes possible. Through
challenging us to interpretation (with both content and form), Nietzsche assumes the role of teacher. Education for life centers, for Nietzsche, on a transformation and realization of the self: a process that can only be achieved through active interpretation. Nietzschean education might be better served by a metaphor of hiking rather than walking.

“How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples? According to the resistance which must be overcome.... The people who had some value, attained some value, never attained it under liberal institutions: it was great danger that made something of them that merits respect.” (TI, 542).

The next chapter will examine Dewey’s stance on education and moral theory. As I stated in the introduction, I engage him separately before I bring him into dialogue with Nietzsche (in Chapters 5 and 6). While Dewey often frames his questions differently, his concerns are similar to Nietzsche’s. Dewey too, is concerned with the relationship between precariousness (danger) and value.
Chapter 3      Everyday Morality: Dewey on Self-Realization

The intent of this chapter is to spell out and examine the relation between two definitional statements made by Dewey about morality and education.

1) “To find the self in the highest and fullest activity possible at the time, and to perform the act in the consciousness of its complete identification with self (which means, I take it, with complete interest) is morality, and is realization” (Dewey, “Self-Realization,” 51).

2) The essence of education is “vital energy seeking opportunity for effective exercise” (DE, 84).

These are clearly statements occurring in the summation of an argument, embedded in background work that must be unpacked in order to make sense of them. I attempt here to map out and explore Dewey’s thought surrounding these claims, and thus to elucidate out the significance of education in Dewey’s moral theory. The structure of my inquiry is intentionally modeled after Dewey’s own conception of moral methodology. The occurrence of a statement or act is not enough by itself; for Dewey, to answer the question of moral value. Rather, it is the production of the occurrence that holds the morally relevant information for Dewey. As far as it involves a commitment to the present experience, thought, intelligently bringing to bear knowledge from previous experience, has an operational function—morally—on a statement or act. That is, reflection can have a morally transformative effect on activity. An action, once so considered, and the meaning of that act fully grasped, only then becomes a candidate for moral designation. It is the process of intelligently working through the meaning of an action that allows us to make a moral choice about that action (“Self-Realization,” 52). Otherwise, morality is not a quality of that

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10 I would point out that this does not indicate either finality or completeness.
experience. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which morality is a quality of experience, using Dewey’s philosophy to draw out the ways in which educational concerns offer a potential solution to certain moral problems.

I want to follow Dewey's example by treating moral theory in the way he treats aesthetic theory. This latter theory suffers, Dewey argues, when it concentrates primarily on formal works of art, since it then fails to capture the role of art in experience and people’s lives. If the subject of a theory is understood as distinct from our experience, so too will the content and structure of that theory remain detached. As meaning, for Dewey, is constructed through the interdependence and interconnections of objects and concepts, art in this “museum conception of art” fails to become fully meaningful (AE, 4). Dewey argues instead for concentrating on the aesthetics ingredient in the experience of everyday life. This approach, he suggests, is able to grasp the full meaning of art and the aesthetic experience (AE, 9).

Moral theory, like aesthetic theory, also suffers from concentrating too often on certain rarified types of experiences: the extreme and the formal. In everyday life, the situation in which we are faced with a decision that is morally weighted is less common than moral theorists would have it appear. Whether this is the murderer at the door or the suffering man by the side of the road, these examples tend to obscure the moral qualities of our everyday experience. The majority of moral activity does not involve such formal and forced choices. Neither does it necessarily involve life or death issues. While moral discourse traditionally has not concentrated exclusively on

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11 This is a passing reference to the famous example Kant treats in “On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns.” In this short essay, Kant examines the moral issues involved in lying to a murderer who shows up at your door, looking to kill your friend who is hiding in the basement (Kant, 63).
issues of mass-murder or other equally extreme acts, it benefits us to concentrate on everyday experience here.\footnote{Though it is essential that we do moral theory about these occurrences, it is not my concern at this point. The line of argument here is that everyday morality should be established as basic, and must therefore be worked through first.}

In *A Common Faith* Dewey attempts to unhook “religious” as an adjective from “religion” as a noun. While certainly there are differences that should not be overlooked between “religion” and “morality,” the same unhooking process might be useful for a theory of morality as well. The notion presented by Dewey is that it is problematic to think that a person who does not identify with a religion is therefore unreligious. The first (the noun) signifies a system of beliefs and practices, institutional or otherwise. The adjectival form denotes an attitude, and as such does not imply a systematic structure (CF, 9). Following Dewey here, we should take seriously the notion of emphasizing the adjective “moral” over “morality.” While Dewey’s approach to moral systems will be engaged later, worth noting now is the perspective from which the adjectival form allows us to approach the issue of ethics. Moral values can be understood qualitatively rather than in terms of success or failure.

It is Dewey’s own project to break down certain false distinctions we make about experience. Experience is itself continuous and whole, rather than departmentalized and discrete. Thus any formal separation of types of experience is abstract and problematic (CF, 9). If “religious” is a quality that can belong to experience, the same goes for morality. Looking at everyday life, we should notice that a significant number of morally relevant experiences do not involve an obviously presented choice. That is, our values are more commonly expressed through the ways
in which we structure our daily lives, in the experiences that we seek out and reinforce, than through discrete choices. We have a certain job, speak a certain way, and we participate in sustained social relationships. Each of these activities involves valuing and the development of taste and self. Thus we cannot dismiss them as irrelevant to moral theory. Our everyday experience is value-laden. If we follow Dewey in relocating morals in the unified experience, these everyday activities then become central to an inquiry into morals. The murderer at the door is the exception rather than the rule.

An immediate implication of this observation, following Dewey, is that no experience is simply presented to us. We play an active role in both "stimulus" and "response." Dewey argues in “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” that what is generally considered the stimulus in a given situation is not simply an external force, but rather it emerges out of the interaction between self and environment. What we are engaged in directly affects the way the world shows up to us. We are active co-creators in the production of experience ("Reflex Arc,” 140). This is true all the way down to the activities of seeing and hearing, and is also relevant in the construction of complex and meaningful experience. Thus we must attempt to understand how our own activities and interests shape worldly events.

Conversely, it is just as important to take note of how experience shapes our selves. The process is thus a coordination, an active, participatory interaction. That is to say, Dewey argues that the relation between self and experience runs in both directions. Dewey’s philosophy of education and inquiry provides some insights into the mechanism of this influence. This will provide a basis for understanding a
Deweyan moral theory. In addition, it sheds light on how an action can be committed in “complete identification with self” (“Self-Realization,” 51).

3.1 (An) Inquiry into Education

In education, as well as morality, Dewey stresses the importance of method rather than the ends to be achieved. It is the growth of the learner, rather than what is learned, that is the purpose and legitimation of education. He is presenting here a rejection of principle and formalization, and through this critique Dewey offers a conception of morality and education that is centered on and concerned primarily with the specific experience of the agent. The indication of education, according to Dewey, is a shift in the impulse for action. That is, an agent can be understood to be educated when the motivation and interests behind an action has changed, as in, for example, when a person becomes motivated out of the concern for another’s well-being, rather than from seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. It is our specific interests—and their movement—that define the extent of our education. In shifting the impulse for action, we do more than simply move ourselves into another (even if it is a wider) area of experience. Rather, in shifting the impulse, we are making constitutive changes to the self (DE, 16).

The importance of interest is further illuminated by the distinction Dewey makes between education and training (DE, 35). Training occurs when learning happens solely for the sake of a concern other than for what’s being learned. When the child learns to tie her shoes solely in order to avoid the displeasure of her parents, she is being trained to tie her shoes. When “instincts remain attached to their original

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13 This notion is central, and will be returned to below, on page 47.
pain or pleasure” (DE, 16), a shift in activity indicates only that: a shift in activity, a change that is practically external to the acting agent. It is the difference between understanding why we do something and just doing it. The person who is taught to say a phrase in a foreign language without any understanding of that language is being trained. They do not mean what they say, nor are they interested in that statement (because they are unaware of its meaning). Activities such as this “possess us, rather than we them” (DE, 36).

However, when an individual is interested in some aspect of the activity in itself, not purely instrumentally and for some other reason, the process is no longer simply training. When the child becomes interested in the shape and feel of the shoelaces, the challenge of tying interesting knots, then the impulse for action has changed. When the individual begins to understand how a new language works, how the words she speaks are situated in this new linguistic community, then she is engaging in education. That action has become meaningful in being committed for itself.

We only gather meaning from experience through having an interest in it (DE, 38). Dewey intends his argument about the connection between meaning and interest to indicate literally the ways in which we gather meaning from experiences, such as facial expressions. Dewey argues that these (as an example, but indicative of all meaningful aspects of experience) are not meaningful in themselves—though it is important to note that they are often full of intention—but rather become meaningful through their use by interpreters to indicate something. Meaning is not given. Rather,
Dewey argues, meaning is taken, and it is the method of taking that determines whether learning qualifies as education or as training.

Inquiry, for Dewey, is the prerequisite for, and condition of, education. It is the mechanism through which we participate in an educational experience. In a certain sense, training is inquiry-free learning. As inquiry is directed at the transformation of experience, I must first briefly examine Dewey’s conception of the structure of experience.

According to Dewey, experience is constituted by a struggle between stable and unstable elements. Here Dewey is objecting to two forms of metaphysics. The first takes reality to be only what is unchanging and necessary. The rest is conceded to be illusion or “mere appearance.” The second form of metaphysics fetishizes change, not only by valuing transition for its own sake, but through over-emphasizing the occurrence of instability in the world. Dewey, alternatively, argues that the empirical world involves the uncertain and precarious as well as the stable and sure (EN, 32). Thus change is constituent of experience without defining it. There is certainly stability in the world, but it can give way to instability, which in turn gives rise to new firmness and further precariousness.

By rejecting both metaphysical priorities, Dewey is able to work out a productive relationship between these experiential qualities. Stability is the condition of completed action and knowledge, and is thus essential, practically, to life. Yet, stability threatens to freeze the very action and knowledge that it makes possible. Precariousness works against such stagnation, allowing for progress and growth. Yet

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14. The problems with these views are extensive, but they are not the central concern here and must be set aside.
the very quality of precariousness that provides this possibility also directs us towards stability. These qualities are not oppositional, Dewey suggests, but work together in tandem. Attending to this precludes the dangers presented by faulty metaphysics: stagnation and frictionless, meaningless change (EN, 51).

Inquiry, according to Dewey, forms the connective tissue between stability and instability in experience. It is the directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into a unified and distinct experience. Inquiry is provoked by precariousness, and is concerned with the settlement of this doubt. It is a stabilizing process, one that increases possible cultivated activity (L, 104). In other words, effective inquiry produces a reliable belief, which in turn initiates a new and thoughtfully considered activity. However, for inquiry to be fully productive, it must also provoke the destabilization of new areas of experience. The production of rigid habit, for Dewey, has a stagnating effect. To remain intelligent—that is, adaptive, learning, growing—beings, we must avoid acting in ways which resist growth. Of all things, mere habit most notably resists growth. Thus for Dewey, true inquiry must result in more than just a new and stable activity. This reflects Dewey’s notion that “experience involves, to put it baldly, a gamble” (EN, 41). Without preserving this essential uncertainty (in addition to the production of stability), inquiry would become “not, as it is in experience, a call to effort, a challenge to investigation, a potential doom of disaster and death” (EN, 51).

Dewey uses metaphors of diversification and complexity to describe the effects of inquiry. Like his conception of the reflex arc, inquiry is both response and stimulus. All experience, including experience-post-inquiry, includes both
“problematic and determinate characters.” (EN, 70). To quote Ralph Waldo Emerson on this view: “Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens” (Emerson, 189). Dewey is concerned with the adaptive ability to deal with ever-widening circles. His claim is that inquiry increases our intelligence: our ability to interact effectively with the world (an essentially social world). While of course inquiry is directed at transforming a precarious situation into a determinant one, this leads eventually to a more complex indeterminacy. The important operational aspect of inquiry, for Dewey, is learning to learn (DE, 53).

Similarly, learning to learn is the function of education. A meaningful, interested education results in an increased intelligence (an active, responsive adaptability). According to Dewey, education should be understood as the changing of the self by means of inquiry. We educate by motivating inquiry, and we are educated through our response to this motivation. An education is not a result but a process, continuous, directed at the increase of capacity (an activity), rather than the achievement of a particular solidified state. Education, for Dewey, is growth. Its foundation is immaturity (a positive potential) and plasticity—the ability to learn from experience, to retain from one experience something which helps in another (DE, 53). Education requires work from the learning agent, rather than work on the learning agent. Learning is a process that does not aim at the conclusion of that process.

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15. The respect that both Dewey and Nietzsche had for Emerson is well known.
16. It is important to remember that this is an active rather than passive exercise.
It is worth restating that for Dewey immaturity is a positive condition that enables education and growth. It is the broad state of our capacities. According to Dewey, a capacity is an action (“Self-Realization,” 46). What we traditionally term capacity is understood as passive because it is seen to stretch across various experiences, defining none. For example, we have a capacity for sight, but it is whatever is seen that defines a particular visual experience. Dewey argues that this explanation is problematic. Elsewhere he notes that “every existence is an event” (EN, 71). It is a happening, a process. As with the reflex arc, our “capacities” are difficult to distinguish from the interactivity they are engaged in. They are, Dewey would argue, specific actions in specific situations. Thus they are also specific to individual agents. While many of us happen to enact abilities of vision that are similar, they are still our own specific actions. As these define the ends of possibility, our ideals (or ends) must also relate back to a specific self. If education occurs only in relation to a specific self, then it is that self that defines, challenges, and limits the field of choice and educational growth. That is, education is not something done to an individual, but is an activity of that individual. It is the realization of—and concurrent challenge to—the individual’s inquisitive capacities.\(^\text{17}\)

A prominent complaint set against this notion of education centers on the significance of interest in education and against Dewey’s argument that education is not about preparing for the future, but is rather about fully understanding the meaning of the present. This complaint revolves around the premise that interests should involve definite goals, projects, and concrete gains and achievements. Education is

\(^\text{17}\) This is the full meaning of the definitional statement from the beginning of this chapter.
aimed at—and plays an essential role in—the reproduction of society, as well as individuals. Even Dewey notes that initially education was primarily experiential, but as societies advanced, the knowledge-gap between the child and the adult widened, and thus formal education became necessary. Dewey seems vulnerable to the objection that because of this necessity, formal instruction should remain the primary mode of education.

However, this form of education tends to be problematic, as it separates learning from experience and practice, and thus fails to achieve the goal of education. Dewey argues that even such interest as can be found in formal education is contained within the sphere of that education. While a child might be legitimately interested in her formal education, as long as this education is held formally apart from the rest of experience, the interest and growth will remain within that discrete sphere, further challenging (in a negative sense) the self’s aspiration towards holistic growth.

Learning which is not related to a specific interest of the student fails to rise beyond training. If the result of an education is only the achievement of a distinct goal, the student has not developed, but, Dewey argues, has obtained “an Ungrowth” (DE, 50). If the student understands herself to have reached a settling point in the achievement of her goal, the student has lost an ability (to learn) that was previously present. Dewey opposes this notion, “maturity,” to the positive conception of immaturity that was discussed earlier.

Furthermore, in response to the objection against experiential education—an objection that can only be grounded on the concern that unlike formal education, experiential education is an individualistic, unsocial process—we should keep in
mind Dewey’s understanding of the self as social. We only have the capability for
growth, Dewey argues, because of our constituent dependence on the world, and
specifically on other people. As children—the state in which we are literally
immature—we need others in order to survive. We learn to be interdependent because
of this residual immaturity. That we require social connection “denotes a power rather
than a weakness” (DE, 52). Thus the extent to which we are immature—the extent to
which we are social—is a positive measure of the degree of our growth. Dewey’s
educational model is directed precisely at expanding our social capabilities, not at
self-reliance. This last concept is for Dewey “an unnamed form of insanity which is
responsible for a large part of the remediable suffering of the world” (DE, 52).

A shift in impulse can thus aim in one of two directions. The first type of shift
is toward an interest that is self-contained. If the interest is not interrelated with other
meaningful interests, Dewey argues that it is no longer is relevant to the educational
process. Dewey is not claiming that growth for the sake of a growth is a positive
value in itself. The impulse must move toward a wider, expanding set of interests (the
second direction a shift can take). It is growth for the sake of growing that has
meaningful educative value for Dewey.

It is essential to point out that most activity will involve instrumental
concerns as well as meaningful interest in the activity in-itself. While it is not
necessary to sacrifice one in favor of the other, the formal method seems to do just
this: it produces functional but not educated agents. Education should instead be
understood, following Dewey, as a quality present in our broad, interconnected
experience. That is, if we admit an openness that allows for growth, this possibility is
potential in nearly all of experience. The more we experience growth, the more consistently we possess “vital energy seeking opportunity for effective exercise” (DE, 84). Now, in light of this explanation, we turn back to Dewey’s moral theory.

3.2 Moral Experience

The discussion earlier on everyday morality was included in order to emphasize the shift that is necessary if we take Dewey seriously in his moral critique. Dewey is concerned with morality as embedded in experience, and thus the agent’s relation to experience is morally relevant. Rather than contemplation and application of principle, Dewey’s morality centers on responsible and intelligent interaction with experience. As such, the method of education as growth previously discussed is a central moral issue. Inquiry is fundamental to moral activity, and the way in which the self responds to inquiry has ethical importance.

Morality is an everyday phenomenon because, for Dewey, it is embedded in our daily practices. Knowledge involves connections and consequences; it is concerned with the full arc of an existence (QC, 266). This network of meaning is maintained through interactions, both conceptual and physical. Moral knowledge, Dewey argues, is similarly embedded in activity, and thus should not be conceived as separate from it (DE, 412). As far as morality is involved in experience and activity, it should involve similar structural complexities. That is, like experience, morality is constructed of sure and unsure elements. That the world is both precarious and stable “renders every existence, as well as every idea and human act, an experiment in fact, even though not in design” (EN, 70).
One of the central moves in Dewey’s moral theory is the rejection of principle as the primary structure of moral thought. That is, Dewey is resistant to the notion that we should develop moral rules and consequently do our best to abide by these overarching rules. Acting on the “animating aim and spirit of an action without attending to circumstance,” which is the essence of acting on principle, not only furthers—and is dependent on—the false distinction made between motive and result, but is often indicative of a failure in education (DE, 410). Like his educational theory, Dewey’s theory of morals assigns priority to methods and means rather than to ends (QC, 279). Rather than reaching an agreement, Dewey is interested in keeping the conversation going.

How we come to value a particular action or belief is constitutive of the meaning of that action or belief, and thus it determines the moral quality. Dewey’s insistence on attention to experience leads his to a particularly scientific view of a valuable moral method. That is, for Dewey morality should not be held separately from science (QC, 256). This is meant both in the sense that empirical observations are morally relevant, and that scientific methodology is morally instructive.

Dewey, then, is critical of a moral theory centered on principles. Even when they are constructed by the individual (rather than received), principles supervene upon experience. “Conviction in the moral sense signifies being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end” (CF, 20). To avoid such moral conquest, we must allow experience to adjust our ideals. Morality fails to be educational otherwise—and we fail to grow. Loyalty to principle is thus an act of stubbornness for Dewey (QC, 278). Instead, Dewey is interested in a moral
experimentalism. That is, a moral methodology that is fundamentally based on continually participating in a process of inquiry. It is selfish, Dewey argues, to act in the interest of a past or fixed self, rather than intelligently holding oneself open for educational experience ("Self-Realization," 51). By emphasizing the moral qualities of methodology rather than results, Dewey is suggesting that rather than—to use a metaphor of dialogue—working to reach an agreement, we must be committed to keep the conversation going. While this commitment involves certain liabilities (an issue is never finally settled), the danger in failing to treat experience as educative overrides these issues for Dewey.

Furthermore, while previous or historical value judgments are instructive, they should make no demands upon our current endeavors (QC, 262). Rather than basing our value judgments solely on previous judgments, Dewey is encouraging the moral individual to use our current judgments to direct the construction of a future state of enjoyed objects and values. That is, rather than turning to principle, we should engage in forward-looking valuation. While we can (and should, and must) certainly hold on to moral beliefs, Dewey suggests that we treat these "principles" as hypotheses (QC, 278). Moral beliefs as such also need to be directed towards the specific activity to which they are being applied. That is, as far as we can hold "principles" as hypotheses, they must be situated, specific, and testable. Morality is difficult. The discovery of a stable "good" is not, in actuality, the application of "good" to an action or event. Rather, this "discovery" involves working to realize and maintain that value in an unstable world. Dewey criticizes philosophers for retreating from this work into idealization and abstraction (EN, 53). Any particular act, Dewey argues, done for the
sake of “goodness” in general, is not moral; Dewey goes so far as to call it “immoral” (“Self-Realization,” 52). Morality requires full realization of an action, and a concern for an external “goodness” provides a conflict of attention and interest. Not only is the impulse of action external to the action itself (thus preventing full concern and realization of meaning), but it invokes principle, which is decidedly un-experimental.

Dewey’s experimentalism is aimed at his interest in self-realization. The process of inquiry again remains central in making this connection. Dewey makes a point of distinguishing observation from judgment. To say something is enjoyed is a statement of fact, not a judgment. It only raises the question of desirability, it does not settle it (QC, 260). To simply find a thing desirable is to ignore the way in which we are active participants in the construction of any given experience. Dewey in concerned with making us attend to this role, aligning our part (our judgment) intelligently with our ideals. The result of this is that valuing becomes a matter of taste. It is cultivated and active: the result of intelligent inquiry (QC, 262). For Dewey, taste is a matter of experience brought to bear on judgment. It is educational, and therefore involved in the growth of the self. Dewey remarks almost as an aside that “there is nothing in which a person so completely reveals himself as in the things in which he judges enjoyable and desirable” (QC, 262). Dewey must go a step further and also argue that these judgments are also constitutive of the self. Furthermore, it must be noted here that taste is not subjective in the limiting sense of that term. It is intelligently developed in response to objective stimuli (desires). Taste, for Dewey, is scientific in nature. He argues that “the method of intelligence is open and public. The doctrinal method is limited and private” (CF, 39). As far as our taste is developed
through educational inquiry, it is intelligent, and therefore public (open to further inquiry).

However, it remains to be seen how Dewey’s experimentalism relates to the initial statement of this chapter about the relation of self-realization to morality. The relevance stems from the relation of interest to inquiry. As far as moral reasoning, judgment, and action are experimental, they are based in inquiry. They must be understood as an exercise of inquiry and education. They are developed meaningfully only through personal interest, and Dewey argues that the distinction between self and interest is faulty: what we are interested in is constitutive of ourselves (DE, 408). That is, the self, like meaning, is found in its social (worldly) relationships. Dewey regards the self “as always a concrete and specific activity” (“Self-Realization,” 43). Dewey’s move is to reject the notion of a discrete, somehow necessarily separated self. In so doing, the agent’s activities and interests become constitutive of a meaningful understanding of self.

If we reflect on the quoted statement on morality at the beginning of this chapter, we should now understand that intelligence brought to bear on value judgments is involved in a process of self-realization. If Dewey intends to break down the distinction between self and interest, he must take the development and refinement of our interests as in fact the growth of our selves. As such, self-realization cannot indicate an ideal self that must be realized. Rather, we must take this as pointing towards a working self constantly in the process of realizing itself (“Self-Realization,” 44).
Morality, then, is intimately tied up in self-realization. This realization comes through an educative process. The development of taste is the realization of both self and interest. An act or judgment becomes moral because of this process. Dewey briefly terms this process “operational thinking” (QC, 263), and I think it is worth taking this term seriously. The moral value of an action changes depending on the process of reflection it is involved in. The value shifts according to the extent to which the action is performed with the “consciousness of its complete identification with self” (“Self-Realization,” 51). Inquiry (as thought) plays a moral function and has distinct moral consequences. Operational thinking and moral taste is intelligence brought to bear on experience (and in turn experience brought to bear on the self). The term denotes the transformation of the self through intelligent reflection. An action is moral when it is fully and meaningfully intended, and this intention must be involved in the interest of the agent. It is an act of realizing the self through the realization of intentions—which in turn provides new problems for the realization of the self. The two are in fact inseparable and mutually constituent. This notion provides the conditions for Dewey’s definition of morality: a quality simultaneously dependent on and constitutive of growth.

Conceiving morals as adjectival, then, turns on the persistence of growth throughout the individual’s experience. An active approach to experience (which retains immaturity) allows for an engaged self-realization that, by increasingly widening the individual’s sphere of interest, reduces the need for provocative moral events. That is, we are able to better recognize, respond to, and emphasize the moral qualities of everyday life.
The next chapter will consider the ways in which criticism plays a role in moral life. The issue of how criticism might be moral and educational on the accounts of both Nietzsche and Dewey will center the dialogue between the two philosophers. While their shared rejection of universal moral claims provides a solid foundation for such a discussion, how far that agreement reaches remains to be seen.
“A life unexamined, uncriticized, is not worthy of man.” –Socrates (Dewey, E, 5).

The relevance of a philosophy of education to moral theory can most clearly be seen in the explicit activity of moral education: criticism. When we engage in addressing the moral beliefs and actions of others, we are (at the very least) implicitly attempting to educate them. That moral theory has often neglected this aspect of criticism—by emphasizing the content worthy of critique rather than the method of—is indicative of the failure on the part of ethics to take education into account. The latter concern will be a significant focus here, though it is central to Nietzsche’s moral theory that the two cannot be separated, and this notion too will be treated seriously. I will primarily be considering here not when criticism is appropriate, but rather how it can be appropriate. The former question addresses the problem of our responsibility towards each other, and as formulated normatively—that is, as when “should” we respond and intervene critically to others—is not a central question for the moral experimentalism I have been exploring. Rather, the question of how we are in a position to criticize, when we so wish, is an absolutely relevant challenge to both Nietzsche and Dewey. The problem of how one should engage in criticism is at the core of the relation between educational philosophy and moral theory.

4.1 Non-Judicial Responsiveness

A potentially major challenge facing a moral experimentalism such as those presented by Nietzsche and Dewey is how to respond to another who is crossing a

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18 “Moral experimentalism” refers to the insistence—shared by Nietzsche and Dewey—that we treat values as always unconcluded (that they never cease showing up to us as a problem).
particular moral boundary—that is, doing something that we find reprehensible—when we are methodologically adverse to setting up such boundaries. In the previous chapters, I discussed the reasons presented by both Nietzsche and Dewey for moving away from value dichotomies (e.g. “good and evil”) and general or abstract judgments. For Nietzsche, the problem with boundaries stems from its opposition to perspectival truth. Moral limits are not necessarily collectively recognized, nor (Nietzsche argues) should they be. This type of criticism seems to rely, for Nietzsche, on an appeal to shared moral values and principles. Nietzsche is thus faced with the problem of criticism across unshared boundaries.

Dewey levels a similarly formulated objection, judging that principle-based value systems represent an intellectual failure, as this type of reasoning precludes the full exercise of our ability to allow particular experience to bear on our judgments. For Dewey the problem goes even deeper. This is not only a question of moral responsiveness, but also of educational responsiveness. Is education as growth unbounded? If not, how are educational boundaries established? What kind of range of experiential education is acceptable, before such learning acquires a negative connotation? That is, there is a significant interdependence between morality and education for Dewey. Despite my earlier argument,\(^\text{19}\) I am going to use an example that although somewhat formalized, helps to draw out the ways in which common approaches to criticism are problematic. Dewey’s moral and educational theories face a parallel challenge: why should we not let a person only learn whatever she wants, and similarly, how can we critique another’s moral behavior? Both have a double-

\(^{19}\) See page 40 above.
layered response: one that concentrates on method, while the other struggles to deal with ends.

The example I would like to center on was introduced by Nel Noddings in her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, though it is by no means a strange or unique example (that the example is mundane makes it especially pertinent here). Noddings presents the situation of teaching mathematics to a young boy. The moral system presented by Noddings focuses on a commitment to the interests of the other, and thus in this situation she attempt to rouse a concern for mathematics in the child, rather than simply to force him to be able to work equations out properly. So far Nietzsche’s concern for authenticity and Dewey’s philosophy of education are in line with Noddings’ comments. Authentic interest is central to affirmational valuation and self-realization. Noddings goes on to indicate that these concerns outweigh the final result: “What matters to me, if I care, is that he find some reason, acceptable in his inner self, for learning the mathematics required of him or that he rejects it boldly and honestly” (Noddings, 15). The point here is not to examine Noddings’ “care” vocabulary, but rather to focus on the issue of honest rejection.

This is potentially a significant problem for both Nietzsche and Dewey. How can we refrain from critically responding to a child who will not engage math? Or, in a similar but more traditionally moral context: at what point could a murderer’s ‘bold and honest’ refusal to stop killing be an acceptable resting place? If we take Nietzsche’s urging us to “create our own values” seriously, we run the risk of

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20 While a dialogue between Nietzsche, Dewey and feminist (in this case feminine) moral theorists would be fruitful (and has been), it does not fit in the scope of this work.
encountering some very dangerous creativity. Giving priority to method in moral theory may provide the conditions for authentic self-realization, but even if we follow Nietzsche that far, we can coherently continue to be concerned with the problem of objectionable valuations. One the other hand, if someone has exercised the “proper” methodology, how can we begin to judge their ends negatively?

I read Dewey’s moral theory as suggesting that we should reformulate the structure of the problem, and that our traditional responses are generally off the mark. Criticism should be educative rather than directed towards judgment, and it is a process through which both participants should be engaged in moral and educational reflection. Critique opens up a space for potential growth for both the criticized and the individual engaged in criticism. The issue is not that we see something “wrong” and we are forced to respond to it. This begs the question of how we are valuing perspective or method. Rather, we encounter certain speech or activity, and we do not understand how a person could come to fully mean such an action. We are puzzled. It irritates our moral beliefs. If we immediately respond in condemnation, we are failing to preserve our own non-universal methodology and are conforming rather to moral habit. Thus we are acting morally irresponsible (we are being irresponsible). Rather, we have to respond to such incidents as opportunities or calls for inquiry. Why would a person do such a thing? We are called to examine the potentially “open and public” method through which the other has produced this action.

This point is consistent with my previously stated commitment, following Dewey’s aesthetic program, to endorse an everyday conception of morality. 21 Here

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21 See Chapter 3.
“everyday” indicates “in the world,” continuous and non-formalized. If we take this notion seriously, criticism should not show up solely as a response to points of conflict. Rather, it should play an essential part in our active and positive valuations. It is partially constitutive of moral inquiry, insofar as inquiry, which involves (at the very least is motivated by) a process of deliberation—a process that inherently moves dialectically (though not necessarily dualistically)—includes rejection as well as affirmation. While there may be some methodological distinctions between criticism of others and self-criticism, the self is sufficiently dynamic to ensure that there should not be a hard conceptual boundary between the two. Additionally, methodological critique can be understood as comparative; thus critiquing others is directly relevant to forming our own moral valuations.22

It is essential, however, to note that this responsive inquiry is not an end point. To participate in inquiry itself is not the goal of inquiry, though conclusions that do not open up new paths of inquiry are problematic for Dewey to both the process of inquiry and self-realization (Dewey, DE, 54). Yet, inquiry is first and foremost a stabilizing process (Dewey, L, 104). It is important to understand that inquiry has two distinct, though interrelated, functions. The first is the consummational experience of inquiry (stability), while the second is growth. While inquiry is directed towards stability, this stability is not consummational—that is, it is not satisfying—unless the inquiry also provokes growth (the individual has learned to learn). The coordination between these two functions is what gives inquiry such a prominent place in both Dewey’s moral and educational philosophy. Thus, like Nietzsche, Dewey is interested

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22 The comparative point is elaborated on page 10 of this chapter.
not in inquiry as only the settlement of doubt, but in inquiry with a future; inquiry, as
the mechanism of education, is a process “of continual reorganizing, reconstructing,
transforming” (Dewey, DE, 59). Thus we should not be interested in criticism as
judgment, but in criticism with a future.

It is especially relevant to utilize Dewey’s conception of aesthetic criticism
here, as he begins his treatise on morality (Ethics) by discussing the dualism
expressed in traditional moral theory (motivation/intent and consequence) as captured
by the language of form and content (motive and end respectively) (Dewey, E, 6). To
this end, Dewey laments that “criticism is thought of as if its business were not
explication of the content of an object as to substance and form, but a process of
acquittal or condemnation on the basis of merits and demerits” (Dewey, AE, 311).
The distinction between explication (or analysis) and the alternative (what I have
been referring to as judgment-directed) lies in the fact that the analysis is open and
public, and it is this quality that allows for the possibility of a positive notion of
critique in the moral systems set up by Dewey and Nietzsche.

Dewey points out that fundamental to the activity of criticism is an urge for
authority. This impulse, according to Dewey, is what mires even methodological
moralists in principle-structured criticism. Yet judgment as final or settling is
exceptionally problematic for either Nietzsche or Dewey’s conception of morality.
The latter makes a distinction between such settled judgment and ‘judgment that is a
development in thought of a deeply realized perception” (Dewey, AE, 312). This
second type of judgment is significant in two ways. The first is its connection to
perception, which for Dewey is an active and engaged exercise. This ensures that
judgment is tied to experience, which (because of Dewey’s rendition of experience as a dialectic between precariousness and stability) thus assures that the judgment remains in motion.

This concept of unsettled judgment is the second significant point in Dewey’s distinction, as the requirement that the judgment is a development also serves to move away from criticism as settling. Understanding the problem of settled criticism illuminates one of the most mutually beneficial exchanges between Nietzsche and Dewey. If we understand settled criticism—as far as it is primarily constituted as a negation—as “anti-life” (to use Nietzsche’s term), we see not only the connection between Nietzsche’s conception of “life” and Dewey’s understanding of intelligent inquiry, but we also see that effective (un-settled) criticism is necessary for both concepts. Dewey states the opposition of “life” and problematic criticism like this: “the failure of even the best of judicial criticism: its inability to cope with the emergence of new mode of life—of experience that demands new modes of expression” (Dewey, AE, 316). Nietzsche echoes this thought in the *Gay Science*: “Sitting in moral judgment should offend our taste” (Nietzsche, GS, 266).

For both Dewey and Nietzsche, criticism without self-reflection is a failure, as it is essentially judicial. This seems to be an unavoidable conclusion if we are to take non-principle-based morality seriously. For moral response (criticism) without concurrent inquiry involves leaning too heavily on (at the very least) past judgments, if not principles. This is problematic, as reliance on past judgments suggests worrisome moral stagnation for Dewey (and Nietzsche provides similar sentiments on the misuse of history). It is here then, that we begin to see how the relationship
between criticism and construction emerges. This interdependence is crucial to why we should take the rejection of judicial criticism seriously.

Yet, that criticism is involved in the morality of the self is not a new concept. Judicial criticism can also be understood as relating to the moral value of the agent engaged in critique. That is, criticism as judgment involves a notion, in some sense, of punishment and reward. Designation of positive or negative value in critique is often meant not only as an indicator of the truth of the matter, but also to encourage or discourage certain types of activity. Nietzsche spends a significant portion of The Genealogy of Morals on the concept of punishment, but he states it succinctly in an aphorism in The Gay Science: “The purpose of punishment is to improve those who punish; that is the last resort of the apologists for punishment.” (Nietzsche, GS, 210).

If we are interested in critique primarily as an educative process for the other, we must be concerned with the notion of punishment involved in judicial criticism.

I would like to turn for a moment to a particularly relevant statement from The Gay Science: “We destroy only as creators!” (Nietzsche, GS, 120). This claim brings out two significant points in Nietzsche’s thought on criticism. The first (embodied by the end of the quotation) is the relation between criticism and valuation. The suggestion here is that critique involves not only a negative response, but also inherently involves an active statement of value. Also from the same work:

“When we criticize something, this is no arbitrary and impersonal event; it is, at least very often, evidence of vital energies in us that are growing and shedding a skin. We negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm—something that we perhaps do not know or see as yet” (Nietzsche, GS, 246).

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23 The notion that criticism is educative is of course not novel. It is rather its methodology that has often been lost in the shuffle.
Thus, like Dewey, Nietzsche places a strong moral emphasis on the relationship between consummational experiences and the provocation of inquiry.

A more subtle point here is the notion that language transforms the content it is directed towards. Nietzsche argues that “what things are called is incomparably more important than what they are” (Nietzsche, GS, 121). The significance for my discussion here is that we must be sensitive to the language we employ when engaging in critique. While it can be advantageous to use problematic language polemically—that is, to provoke through the use of unstable vocabulary—we must be careful to ensure that this vocabulary does not become stable: “We really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words!” (Nietzsche, BGE, 213). We can utilize dichotomous value-laden terminology (such as “evil”) to jar the recipient into reconsidering a particular moral conception, but we must be careful to ensure that this language—problematic to the morality of both Nietzsche and Dewey—does not stick.

Nietzsche is very much aware of the conceptual structure lodged in language: “Every word immediately becomes a concept…. Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal” (Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie,” 46). Employing traditionally moral terms seduces us into relying on the systems of thought that have supported that language. Not only does the meaning of moral vocabulary outrun our intentions (if our intentions are similar to those suggested by either Nietzsche or Dewey), but it threatens to revise our intentions so that they reinforce this meaning. That is, if we are interested in rejecting a system of values, we should be guarded against its terms as well as its contents. Nietzsche’s reluctance to embrace moral
language (evidenced by referring to himself as “the great immoralist”\textsuperscript{24}) should be understood as an intentional rejection of the baggage carried by moralistic language. To take this commitment seriously necessitates a digression from judicial methods of critique.

There is another thread of argument in Nietzsche’s work, however, that suggests a potentially legitimate use of moralistic terminology. When discussing his genealogy of morality, Nietzsche compares the slave morality’s use of the dualism of “good and evil” as opposed to the master’s use of “good and bad.”\textsuperscript{25} The difference between “good and bad” and “good and evil” is that the latter offers an ability only for condemnation and rejection, while the first suggests measurable qualities. That is, “good and bad” are relations of strength (Nietzsche, BGE, 396), which are comparable. The notions of “good” and “evil” are not so easily measured. Thus Nietzsche’s understanding of “good and bad” not only involves a potential to change (to learn), but it provides grounds for dialogue. It is a descriptive comparison rather than a judgment.

To reach a judgment suggests a finality that would certainly bother both Nietzsche and Dewey. The temporal relation of the self to future and past selves suggests at the very least that if we allow experience to bear on our moral deliberation, we must reevaluate that deliberation as experience piles up, therefore suggesting that “creating our own values” must be a renewable [and renewing] process. This is then problematic in relation to the goal of “resting in judgment,” for surely it is a settlement, as opposed to an educative and powerful movement—on this

\textsuperscript{24} This label is applied generously throughout \textit{Twilight of the Idols}, for example, but is certainly not limited to this work.

\textsuperscript{25} Note that one of his major titles, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, is not \textit{Beyond Good and Bad}. 

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point: sitting in judgment rather than working on criticism is for Nietzsche a refusal to walk. Thus comparative criticism is a preferred notion for both thinkers here. Further support for this limited reclamation of moral language is found when we contemplate why Nietzsche utilizes moral language in some of his work, as it were despite himself. Retaining a certain vocabulary, but re-visioning it, is essential to Nietzsche’s concept of transvaluation.

It is important, before going further, to reexamine Nietzsche’s notion of perspectival truth, as this is absolutely central to his notion of criticism. For the same reasons that he rejects universal values, Nietzsche is forced to reject universal truths. He argues that this notion depends on a knower who is outside of life (thus not limited to a certain participation in it), and is therefore unthinkable. In response, Nietzsche states that “all seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing” (Nietzsche, GM, 255). Furthermore, this commitment can be seen in the way he understands the views of both the bird of prey (the master) and the lamb (the slave) to be justified. That neither objects nor truth are conceptually singular is also at the core of his moral theory: “What serves the higher type of men as nourishment or delectation must almost be poison for a very different and inferior type” (Nietzsche, BGE, 232).

If we take this perspectivalism seriously, it leaves us in a difficult position when it comes to criticism. The potential problem lies not with the fact that we judge another person’s actions or intentions as good or bad, but rather in relation to the method with which we attempt to criticize and evoke change. Certainly we do—and

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26 See Chapter 2.
27 One does not have to look far to find Nietzsche employing positively terms such as “virtue” or “noble.”
should—morally engage others and their actions. What is a “public method” if it is not open to the public? The issue here centers around two factors: the form of our critique, and its object. Appealing directly to “good” and “bad” does not provoke inquiry and thus inhibits the possibility for growth and true moral choice. While such moralistic statements certainly play a part in it, they should not do the work of criticism. Rather, the object of criticism should be the method behind moral decisions. A commitment to perspectivalism does not reduce to a radical relativism; we are still able to meaningfully communicate values and concepts to each other. This ability to communicate allows us to engage the other’s perspective. Dewey’s point that inquiry is social in nature is well taken here: self-realization, as it occurs through participation in experience, is public. Perspectivalism, then, allows for methodological critique: this is the answer as to when criticism is important.

Similarly, in Caring Noddings has suggested that moral statements that are purely declarative (“That is good/bad!”) are not particularly effective as instances of moral critique or judgment. Rather than appealing to—and imposing—external value structures, Noddings suggests a process of explanation and examination that attempts to provoke\(^{28}\) the offending agent into re-inquiring about the issue at hand (Noddings, 90). She maintains that dualistic moral language is useful towards this end, insofar as it provides indicators as to when and how inquiry might be necessary. However, the concerns presented on this front by both Nietzsche and Dewey deserve continued consideration. Moral terms may be useful as markers, but if we are resisting traditional moral frameworks, such words should not be doing the work of our critical

\(^{28}\) Although this is a more polemic term than those Noddings tends to use, it provides a nice connection with both Nietzsche and Dewey, and I think the tension inherent in the word is appropriate.
statements. As decoration they may provide direction and force, but if they are also supposed to provide justification, they draw criticism into settled judgment.

Nietzsche is not interested in criticism as chiding or rebuking: “To be annoyed or feel remorse because something goes wrong—that [the moral individual] leaves to those who act because they have received orders and who have to reckon with a beating when his lordship is not satisfied with the result” (Nietzsche, GS, 108). Rather, criticism can only be understood (for Nietzsche) as an inquiry into the truth and value of the matter. The irony of this (in light of Nietzsche’s commitment to perspectivalism) is the central issue here. To spell out the problem more fully: There seems to be a tension in this method of reading Nietzsche. On the one hand, he argues for a perspectivalist vision of truth, and he attempts to evoke this approach in others. On the other hand, I read him as holding a unified (though not necessarily systematic), coherent philosophy, and as intent on conveying his ideas. That is, Nietzsche is intent on being persuasive, yet he argues against assuming shared standpoints (the grounding for the justification of criticism).

This problem goes deeper for Dewey. While he does not hold as radical a conception of truth as Nietzsche (truth is more public and thus connected to a moderating force: society), he is, for the very same reason, not in as strong a position to encourage the forcing of one’s conception of truth on another. Dewey’s immediately apparent moralism is directly in conflict with his concern for a democratic and liberal dialogue (where criticism is concerned). A critical reading of Dewey could argue that he is unable to provide moral grounds for harsh criticism. It is important to note, however, that Dewey’s moral theory is not a descent into
relativism. We are able (in most situations) to search out the methods behind the actualization of a particular action or belief. If this action or belief has risen in response to a desire without the contemplation of its desirability, regardless of perspective we can argue that, according to Dewey at least, this action or belief is not moral. Any indication that serves to identify our own moral failings is also recognizable (and fully worthy of pointing out) in another.

However, a problem still persists when we encounter a person who has made the methodologically right choices still engages in problematic behavior. It is here that Dewey’s moral theory fails to satisfy. He is not able to provide an answer for the persistently problematic but moral individual. The public nature of self-realization prevents a solitude that would discourage criticism of other’s morals. In addition, there is never a cessation of inquiry, so we are always able to re-initiate criticism. But what if the other is consistent? We have to either face the continual challenge of inquiry, or accept the other’s ‘bold and honest’ rejection of our criticism. That is, in situations where the other resists critique, Dewey is hard-pressed to provide a method of educative interaction other than insistently re-raising inquiry.

My concern here is that we can become mired in unsuccessful inquiry. While Dewey is persuasive in arguing against value-inquiry as ever settled, if this process goes without a consummational experience at all it cannot be understood as productive. Thus we may be faced with the choice of either engaging in non-consummational inquiry or setting the problem aside entirely. Ultimately neither is

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29 I particularly encourage the use of the term “problematic” here, as the concept of a problem both carries a negative connotation and is embedded in the pragmatist discourse about inquiry as a positive notion.
satisfying. Nietzsche, however, manages to dodge this problem (though not, it seems, unproblematically), and his method will be the subject of the following section.

4.2 Critical Form: Interpretation as Growth

Neither of two potential readings of Nietzsche, though potentially antagonistic, are easy candidates for rejection. The first is a cynical reading, in which Nietzsche must be understood as inconsistent: despite his commitment to perspectivalism, Nietzsche privileges his own views in his work. That is, he does not consider his own statements as subject to perspectivalist critiques. On this reading, Nietzsche has invoked a viewpoint-neutral standpoint and universal values (if only to the extent that the statement “everything is perspectival” is not itself perspectival). It is important not to dismiss this critique (in order to see Nietzsche as fallible) and also because Nietzsche obviously is quite sure that he is right. His polemic writing is not only a stylistic choice; it stems from the self-assurance that his arguments will be relevant and persuasive for his readers. While this point may be embraced through Nietzsche’s particular notion of perspectivalism, this notion may not be able to explain the extent of his confidence in the expression (to others) of his own claims.

The second reading is cynical as well, though it is cynical with Nietzsche, rather than of him. Under this reading, Nietzsche is well aware of the perspectival nature of his views, and is consciously engaged in drafting others to that perspective. The objection to this type of move is animated by a universal valuation of truth. To simply impress one’s perspective on another has not enlightened the other, nor shown the falsity of his previous beliefs. It consists in simply convincing the other to agree with you; it has proved (as far as truth is concerned) nothing.
According to the second reading of Nietzsche, this is exactly his intention: proof is beside the point. To take a concern for perspectivalism seriously, we must see that a shift in truth for an individual involves a shift in loyalty from one perspective to another. This, of course, is not to say that all reconsiderations are like this, or that finding out that one was previously mistaken constitutes a changing truth. Rather, it involves a transformation of the self, a movement such that one’s perspective changes. Thus, in order to persuade others to his view, Nietzsche requires that they undergo a self-transformation, and he is happily willing to bring that about. This seems to me a more productive reading of Nietzsche, in that it gives us a handle on how to proceed on the question of critical persuasion.

Yet there is also significant evidence against the dominating impulse suggested by this second view. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche expresses distaste for the moral domination of others: “involuntarily, parents turn children into something similar to themselves—they call that ‘education’…. [They see] in every new human being an unproblematic opportunity for another possession” (Nietzsche, BGE, 297). This view fits well with Nietzsche’s individualist rhetoric and antipathy for the “herd” mentality. However, it is not an accurate reading of Nietzsche for the same reason that he has placed the term “education” in question in that passage. Nietzsche’s goal is not to simply convert his audience: he intends that we will accept his ideas boldly and authentically. He wants us to agree with him on our own terms.

Absolutely central to a Nietzschean conception of criticism is his use of irony and style in general. His often contradictory statements and tones are evidence of a disinclination to speak straightforwardly. In this chapter I have raised the problem of
moral vocabulary, and I have suggested that a move away from dualistic responsiveness is central for a commitment to educational (as well as moral) concerns. Yet, simply rejecting the terms “good,” “bad,” “right” and “wrong” outright can only be unsatisfactory. Neither Nietzsche nor Dewey (nor those of us who are committed to learning from them) are in a position to simply remove such deeply ingrained terminology from our moral exchanges. We are, after all, social and historical beings. There is a limit, even for Nietzsche, to forgetfulness.

The response to the tension raised by traditional moral vocabulary should be taken from the example set by Nietzsche. That is, through irony the moral dualism can be used to subvert itself. Nietzsche constantly employs moral valuations contrary to our expectations, valorizing acts generally understood to be dangerous, and condemning those that are seemingly beneficent. By setting the conventional value against itself we destabilize it, thereby evoking a precariousness of meaning: the judgment becomes unsettled. We are forced to call into question that particular value and the setting it is framed in: dualistic moral judgment. Irony, then, is indispensable to responsible, educative criticism.

Irony also speaks to Nietzsche’s notion of truth. A significant result of perspectival truth is that meaning has become pluralistic when addressing multiple audiences. If we understand ourselves as fundamentally speaking to different audiences, irony may be all we have. Irony speaks to a perspectivalist vision of truth, as it becomes the one potential mode available when one dismisses the possibility of a singular truth (which prevents the possibility of a singular representation). Thus
Nietzsche is able to speak to many truths, as well as to promote the formulation of perspective.

Non-judicial criticism functions, it seems, through provoking inquiry in the subject. I have discussed many methods that fail to do this, but what kind of criticism could actually succeed? One option, taken from the bulk of Nietzsche’s work, is to force the subject of criticism to do interpretive work as a response to the critical statement. Rather than explaining directly how a particular action is problematic, the critic can present an indirect challenge, forcing the subject to unpack or work out the problem herself. It is no accident that Nietzsche primarily employs aphorisms as his main vehicle for communication. Nietzsche is not interested in forcing another to accept his beliefs. Rather, he is interested in badgering, conniving, agitating and slyly convincing the reader to adopt his particular perspective. The distinction, though subtle, is significant. The first only results in the return of a slave or herd mentality to valuation, while the second potentially involves self-realization.

This is similar to the distinction Dewey makes between education and training: the former being transformative and thus more valuable. The weight that Dewey places on interest in education and growth corresponds nearly directly with the position Nietzsche gives to interpretive work. In both cases, education as growth is thereby differentiated from training. The common quality shared between them is the movement they induce. That is, in both interest and interpretive work, the consummational experience is coordinated with future activity. They are fundamentally unsettled concepts for Nietzsche and Dewey, serving as the center of criticism and education.
However, there is a tension between Nietzsche and Dewey over the place of persuasion in a critical context. Dewey encourages an involved, participatory approach to personal growth, but one that ultimately allows the individual to make her own decisions and commitment to decisions. Dewey is not interested in “badgering” the reader into agreement with him. He takes inquiry as fundamentally public and social; it is the shared participation in this educational experience that relates the interests of the involved individuals. Nietzsche, on the other hand, has no philosophical qualms about “perspective-adjustment”. His use of form transforms the content of his criticism from what could be a problematic valuation to one that is in line with methodological and perspectival moral theory. While criticism is founded on judgment, this should not be its end. If we take the move towards a methodological morality seriously, final judgment cannot be the goal of criticism. On this point Nietzsche and Dewey are not in opposition. However, the activity of critique illuminates the most distinct disagreement between the thinking of Dewey and Nietzsche, primarily in the difference in the range of responsiveness they encourage.

Part of rejecting principle involves the letting go of certain "moral" impulses or habits, such as the designations "right" or "wrong" in the work of moral statements, critical or otherwise. While such terms can be useful, we must be careful to employ them measurably and with an eye to irony. For both Nietzsche and Dewey, the overarching methodology of critique is to induce growth through either the direction of interest, or by inducing interpretive work. These routes, however, are by no means exclusive; they function well in coordination with each other. Both serve to avoid
settled or judicial criticism, and as such they guard against the worry that we are merely engaging in training. Through the notion of unsettled criticism evident in the work of Nietzsche and Dewey, we can morally motivate actual educative development in the other.
“Our actions shine alternately in different colors, they are rarely univocal—and there are cases enough in which we perform actions of many colors” (Nietzsche, BGE, 336).

It is not advisable to discuss a reconceptualization of moral theory without explicitly addressing the topic of reasoning or choice. The moment of moral deliberation has been the central point in most traditional theories of ethics. If we take seriously Dewey’s notion of the continuity of experience, this moment must be expanded, sewn together with the process of self-realization and the nature of the individual’s location in experience. Deliberation has commonly been construed as determining how possible actions fit into our notions of right and wrong. Our appeal to this moral dualism\(^30\) gives structure to an otherwise confusing and potentially intractable field of choice. “Right” and “wrong” are employed in order to provide justifications for actions or judgments, in addition to being these justifications themselves. That is, moral dualism results from the need to make a decision about action or belief. This is, however, not the only available response to this need. The moral territory spelled out in the previous chapters suggests that a dissolution of the moral dualism is possible, if arguably preferable or even necessary.

For both Nietzsche and Dewey, the moral dualism represents a problematically simplified and self-restricting notion of value. Both thinkers hope to map out a notion of choice and value that—at the very least—decentralizes this problematic either/or. Replacing the dualism is a topology of value in which actions and beliefs are interconnected and pluralistic. Nietzsche’s work has suggested a term

\(^30\)This term refers to the explicitly dichotomous framework of traditional values systems. We are stuck between two fundamental, overarching types of values: “good and evil,” “right and wrong,” etc. It is the forced either/or between this opposition that presents the problems I am addressing here.
(albeit my own) that effectively captures the flavor of this alternative: polychromaticism. In rejecting universal and principle-based notions of morality, both Nietzsche and Dewey produce concepts of action and valuation that emphasize the multidimensionality and interconnectedness of what have traditionally been understood as isolated moments. The legitimacy of polychromaticism depends not only on its articulation, but also on the claim that the needs served by the moral dualism are not universal. This chapter will concentrate on the shape of polychromaticism, as well as the lines of thought in the work of Nietzsche and Dewey that provide traction in a more complex field of choice. The formulation of polychromaticism provides grounds for the dissolution of the moral dualism, and this development is central to the conceptual significance of education in moral theory, and this will be the subject of the closing section of this chapter.

5.1 Polychromaticism and the Dissolution of Moral Duality

The term “polychromaticism” comes from the conclusion of an aphorism in Beyond Good and Evil: “Our actions shine alternately in different colors, they are rarely univocal—and there are cases enough in which we perform actions of many colors” (Nietzsche, BGE, 336). This statement appears in a discussion of perspectivalism, as Nietzsche reminds us that an action can have many different meanings, depending on the value perspective from which one views it; the visual metaphor here suggests an emphasis on external interpretation. However, the meaning shifts when Nietzsche suggests that this pluralism exists during the performance of an action as well. Not only can the value and meaning of an action be interpreted legitimately in many different ways, but the action does not depend on interpretation
for this pluralism. There are many reasons behind a single action: forming them into a single motivation is blinding ourselves to this fact. This notion is conceptually linked to the insistence on everyday morality that was developed above, in Chapter 3. If activity is not discontinuous from experience, but is embedded in a complex whole, the model of abstract reasoning—which arguably gives rise to the notion of singular motivation—no longer applies. We act in order to serve many concerns, especially so if we subscribe to the moral experimentalism of Nietzsche or Dewey. “Polychromaticism” refers to the nature of embedded activity in the complex terrain of value found in both writers.

Polychromaticism is needed, following both Nietzsche and Dewey, because of the limitations imposed by the failures of traditional moral theory. As was discussed in the previous chapter, resorting to dualistic moral language indicates a finality to thought, a notion potentially even more problematic for deliberation than for criticism. Employing universalistic moral terminology is an effective tool in formulating a judgment. Yet any such taxonomy indicates a refusal to involve the deliberation in further inquiry—a fatal problem for Dewey. Self-realization involves a commitment to open-ended inquiry that is precluded by a dependence on dualistic principles. Similarly, Nietzsche intends “beyond good and evil” as both a rejection of traditional moral values, and as a rejection of the structure of these values. This structure, according to Nietzsche, prevents creative or affirmationational valuation. It intercedes on behalf of the individual and thus reduces the space available to the individual for valuation. Nietzsche notes that historically, the impulse for individual valuation was justified by appealing to a pantheon of existing gods: polytheism
provided the structure for “a plurality of norms [in which] one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him” (Nietzsche, GS, 191). If this impulse is unhooked from the need for “divine” justification, it describes exactly the picture of polychromaticism that I am advocating.

Why, then, has the moral dualism been developed? Moralistic language is employed in order to allow words to do the moral work for the individual. Rather than engaging the situation as fully as is required, we invoke the history and complexity of the moral discourse to do the work for us in a given situation. It is an act of despair, or at the very least, of keeping our hands clean. It is morality as intercession, in the sense that it both precludes the difficulty of polychromatic choice and levels out the topography of individual character that is realized through more creative moral reasoning. We employ this dualism in order to locate the morally relevant aspects of a particular action or motivation. The structure of “right and wrong” allows us to portray a unified account of activity that not only singles out a particular reason for action, but also locates this on a moral framework. Thus the dualism provides the tools necessary for judgment along the traditional moral tendencies.

The “tool” analogy used here for dualistic reasoning is worth unpacking. Tools allow us to engage our environment more effectively. By altering the nature of our physical interaction with the world around us, they make our work easier. If we take the role of education in moral theory seriously, we should be suspicious of methodologies that avoid the difficulties of choice. In his characterization of the great individual, Nietzsche considers the point that those people who need pleasure in their work (artists, great individuals) strive for difficult and painful work (Nietzsche, GS,
This demand for difficult work, when translated to the moral individual as “the man of keenest taste” (Nietzsche, PTG, 43), represents an interest in the complexity of choice. Nietzsche is suspicious of techniques or methods that ease this demand or interest. Rather than engage directly with the muddy, thorny reality, the individual has elected an interlocutor to clean up for him. This interlocutor intercedes on behalf of the individual, regulating the nature of our choices, but providing no space for individual growth.

Principle, grounded in a dualistic setting, is the most common moral tool, but it is not the only available option. Historically, moral theory has frequently utilized the example as a means for elucidation, and this mode of moral communication is particularly suitable to a polychromatic approach to deliberation. In the beginning of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey remarks in what is essentially an aside that “example is notoriously more potent than precept” (Dewey, DE, 21). While he is referring to the educative potential of examples, there is a strong moral relevancy that we can locate here as well. While principles may provide guidance and justification, these are by nature univocal and at most two-dimensional. Examples, if properly articulated, can suggest the complexity and richness of life (it has emotional content, for example). Nietzsche states: “I profit from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example” (Nietzsche, SE, 136). An example can serve similarly to a teacher or role model; it provides source material for the individual to reference, but it is not dominating in the way that principle can be.

Yet, as Chapter 3 suggested, the example model can also be misleading. The opportunity to employ abstract situations in order to provoke moral tension or
ambiguity is often abused by moral theorists in such a way as to prevent a polychromatic response to the situation. To return to the example of Kant’s murderer at the door, philosophers can employ drama in order to make a strict (fixed) moral structure seem necessary. That is, the options seem in this case to be limited to whether or not a lie to this worrisome stranger is justified. Creative responses are never emphasized in these situations. Why can I not stall him and call the police? Kant would respond to this answer by arguing that I have begged the question. I would whole-heartedly agree with him on this point. I have opened up the field of morally relevant choices so that the either/or problem no longer defines the situation.

More central to the notion of polychromaticism is the way in which an action involves many axes of value. By stalling the murder (or beating him with a stick), I am engaging in an act that has (arguably) both positive and negative qualities. A central point to Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals is that our valuations and actions can easily display both master and slave tendencies. Nietzsche’s objection here is not against such rampant pluralism, but he finds fault rather in the incapacity of each moral perspective to accommodate this pluralism consciously. A significant part of the moral confusion we feel today, according to Nietzsche, is not only due to our inability to separate these conflicting tendencies, but also because our monochromatic evaluative system is unable to accept a non-reductionist view of moral motivation and intent.

That is to say, as moral agents we are complex creatures. As organisms we participate in a drawn out interaction with the world. Our actions are never separated from our larger arc of being in this sense, and neither are they considered
disinterestedly or in a void (this was discussed explicitly in Chapter 1). Thus to
ascribe to any action a single motivation or unified symbolic understanding is to
reduce our account of that action and to misrepresent it. Nietzsche’s comment that
often enough our actions have many colors is both descriptive and normative. Our
critical moral task is to bring these formal distinctions together.

Dewey provides another angle from which we can approach the need for
polychromaticism. In some situations we are unable to act morally to the best of our
abilities. There is no time for contemplation, we are unable to grasp the meaning of
the situation, or the options available to us are unlike the results of our intelligent
reflection. Traditionally, these situations have resulted in a judgment of action or
conduct as “immoral.” But morality, if we follow Dewey, does not consist of a
duality between “moral” and “immoral.” Rather, it is a measurement of degrees. We
are able to determine the extent to which an action either succeeds or fails according
to our methods of measurement (“extent” is the emphasized point here), and this
determination need not be limited to a monolithic judgment of “right” or “wrong”:
“Only dogmatism can suppose that serious moral conflict is between something
clearly bad and something known to be good…. Most conflicts of importance are
conflicts between things which are or have been satisfying, not between good and
evil” (Dewey, QC, 266).

However, rejecting the moral dualism in favor of “measurement by degree”
does not directly imply polychromaticism. A continuous measurement of value along
one axis involves a complex method of judgment, but there is no necessary
implication of plurality within this system. However, Dewey also argues that values
are methodologically produced. He appeals to no absolute scale of value; rather he suggests that values are realized through reflective interaction with experience (Dewey, QC, 278). There is no one way for an action to be either bad or good. More significantly, there is no single concept of “bad” or “good” for an action to live up or down to. While an action can arise from reflective inquiry — thus being valuable — it cannot be simply categorized as good: by nature the action must be understood as contextual, and therefore relevantly available for polychromatic interpretation.

It is important to note that Nietzsche’s concept of (what I am terming) polychromaticism does not indicate an unfettered concept of choice. As I noted earlier, Nietzsche abhors the notion that the individual is free, if this claim assumes “the foolish demand to be able to change one’s essentia arbitrarily — like a garment” (Nietzsche, PTG, 63). The dissolution of the moral dualism does not provide us with an infinitely wide field of choice. This would be an unsustainable reading of Nietzsche. Rather, a commitment to polychromaticism involves employing a complex vocabulary of values and relevant concepts; our choices become thicker, our freedom heavier, not the opposite. This understanding of embeddedness permeates the work of both Nietzsche and Dewey.

It is time to return to the problem presented in the introduction to this chapter. What if the need for structure in moral choice is in fact a legitimate need? That is, though Nietzsche stresses the desire for difficulty that the great individual experiences and the value of engaging that difficulty, it may turn out that these difficulties are insurmountable. Nietzsche himself notes that absolute freedom is

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31 This can be contrasted with — for example — Kant’s moral theory, wherein either you act in accordance with the categorical imperative (and are good) or you do not (and are bad). That there are multiple articulations of the categorical imperative does not imply a plurality of value here either.
problematic: “A living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon” (Nietzsche, “History,” 63). We might be unable to conceive of ourselves as acting morally if we do not have some kind of traction.\(^{32}\)

However, the dissolution of moral duality does not preclude the existence of some moral structure. Rather, instead of an imposed structure, we become responsible for the structure itself, not just of our navigation within it. This is not necessarily a novel concept: Kant’s moral theory also turns on the notion that the categorical imperative is self-imposed (Kant, 49). It is significant that for both Nietzsche and Dewey the reconceptualization of the structure of moral deliberation is intimately involved with an emphasis on the materiality, historiality, and embeddedness of the individual in the world. Not only are our decisions not made discretely from the remainder of our life and experience, but they are constitutive of, constituted by, this larger structure. Our responsibility for the topography of the field of moral choice is weighted in the same way that as our freedom of choice is within that structure. That our decisions and valuations are embedded in the world should ease our worries about lack of friction. While neither Dewey nor Nietzsche are naturalists, in the sense that they conceive of values as entirely caused by the world, they are both careful to recognize life and the world as the condition of values. Dewey writes: “But fear, whether an instinct or an acquisition, is a function of the environment. Man fears because he exists in a fearful, an awful world. The world is precarious and perilous” (Dewey, EN, 42). This necessary conditionality of values, embraced by both Nietzsche and Dewey, suggests the plausibility of a polychromatic account of action.

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\(^{32}\) There is a certain empirical aspect to this problem, but there is a legitimate conceptual response, and this is enough for my purposes here.
That the individual is embedded in the world precludes the possibility of an unshaped field of choice. In order to understand moral deliberation in this new sense, we must investigate the ways in which the individual experiences this embeddedness. Thus we must turn to a discussion of habit.

5.2 The Embedded Individual: On Habit and Taste

The pressing tension here is how the development of character—which comes through the process of intelligent inquiry, called self-realization by Dewey, and by Nietzsche “becoming what you are”—seems to oppose Dewey’s mistrust of habit and Nietzsche’s rejection of the neutral agent behind an action. This tension sets out the boundaries of what a morally valuable embeddedness might look like (for polychromatic action).

The tension referred to also highlights a potential point of difference between Nietzsche and Dewey. Dewey is distrustful of habit (and this sets him against virtue theory), as it is unreflective. This is not to say that we should not—or do not—develop habits, but that the moral qualities of behavior lie in its non-habitual elements. Dewey argues that habituation is “our adjustment to an environment which at the time we are not concerned with modifying” (Dewey, DE, 56). This lack of concern for active adjustment removes habit from the process of moral inquiry. Habitual activity is not immediately immoral for Dewey; it is simply amoral or unmoral. While habitual activity can be consistent with moral action—and in this sense, a significant amount of our activity is unproblematic, in that it is in line with our moral projects and self-realization—the fundamental point is that habit is not (by its nature as habit) involved in actively developing these moral processes. If a
situation is unproblematically stable (which is always temporary), then habitual activity is an appropriate response to the situation—though this does not make it moral. However, when precarious demands are introduced, retaining a hold on habit is morally culpable: it is a failure to bring experience to bear on thought (Dewey, QC, 262). This raises the question of what situations should be morally received. That is, if we are able to navigate certain situations habitually (as certainly we must), when are we obliged to engage the situation morally—or, to turn the question slightly, when is it reprehensible to act habitually? Dewey’s notion of precarious demands must be understood in light of his conception of experience. That is, experience is manifested through a participatory interaction between self and world (Dewey, “Reflex Arc,” 138). Dewey notes that a claim towards a stable good involves not a statement of fact or a application of a concept, but rather a commitment to work at the realization of this good (Dewey, EN, 53). Thus the demands of a precarious moral situation are typically a result of the work we are currently engaged in (or not). This obligation against habit is self-constructed. Like all other activity, habit, for Dewey, must be understood as “an experiment in fact, even though not in design” (Dewey, EN, 70). We have a responsibility to be reflective, and in this sense we must be careful about which situations we delegate to habitual activity. It is very easy for habit to overreach its bounds. We can easily act habitually in contexts that no longer resemble the situation wherein the habit was appropriate, and it is this tendency that we must resist.

Nietzsche has a peculiar relationship to habit. He recognizes this problematic sustainability by differentiating between “brief habits” and “enduring habits.” The
first are part of our actively constructed lives, while the second are essentially anti-
life (Nietzsche, GS, 237). Yet, Nietzsche is not entirely interested in rejecting non-
reflective action. Instinctual activity is central to the master morality, and is valorized
by Nietzsche as authentic. The bird of prey, Nietzsche’s metaphor for the pre-moral
master individual, is a creature of instinct. It is in this section of *The Genealogy of
Morals* that Nietzsche argues that there is no “neutral agent, free to manifest its
strength or contain it” (Nietzsche, GM, 178). This central tenet of Nietzsche’s moral
theory can be read as a radical virtue theory: that is, moral activity as impulsive rather
than reflective, although unlike Aristotelian virtue theory, values are not related to a
community. Nietzsche aims his argument here at the problematic (for him) rationalist
model of moral choice. The explicit distrust of non-reflective choice rampant there
spurs Nietzsche to vicious criticism.

As further textual evidence for Nietzsche’s thought about the lack of a “doer
behind the deed,” consider his treatment of the pre-Socratic Heraclitus. In his
reconstruction of Heraclitus’ work, Nietzsche states: “Every moment…exists only
insofar as it has just consumed the preceding one, its father, and then is immediately
consumed likewise” (Nietzsche, PTG, 53). Existence is tied up in action. This
quotation is about Heraclitus’ philosophy, yet it captures Nietzsche’s intentions
perfectly. In the same discussion, he champions Schopenhauer’s claim that *actuality*
is a better word than reality. The first term, unlike the second, denotes active
participation in experience or existence. It suggests that action is the measure of the
moment, and the moment, the measure of the action (Nietzsche, PTG, 54). The
relevance here to a theory of polychromaticism is that we are thus actively, rather
than passively, embedded in life. This distinction guards against the possibility that our non-dualistic moral structure of deliberation is imposed rather than developed. That is, while a polychromatic deliberation structure is grounded in experience, this condition itself is so only through a participatory interaction, leaving room for freedom and spontaneity in valuation. Yet disconnecting this spontaneity from the relevant action undermines Schopenhauer’s notion of “actuality.” There is a sense in which we are, according to Nietzsche, mistaking cause for effect (Nietzsche, GM, 179). To “become who we are” is an imperative to act and value in a way that seems to give priority to authenticity over spontaneity.

Yet Nietzsche’s command to “become who we are” suggests that our instincts, as we experience them, can be misleading. This tension within his work can be clarified by a passage from On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life in response to our condemnation of our instinctual and cultural/historical condition:

“The best we can do is confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away” (Nietzsche, “History,” 76).

Nietzsche’s notion of instinct is dichotomous. We have animal instincts: pre-moral, responsive and undeveloped. We are also capable of realizing individual instincts (through great effort). While this notion of second nature relieves the tension between the concepts of post and pre-reflective instinct in Nietzsche, it also seems to oppose the immediate reflection demanded by the eternal return—a concept judged

33 As has become clear, it might be more appropriate for Nietzsche to combine these concepts into a single notion: act-value—though the awkwardness of the term resists such unification
34 Nietzsche poses this notion as a thought experiment in which the individual is confronted with living through an infinite repetition of all of her actions (Nietzsche, GS, 273).
by Nietzsche to be “the most scientific of all possible hypotheses” (Nietzsche, WP, 36).

As I have argued in Chapter 1, Nietzsche does not intend his parable of the master and slave moralities as grounds for a return to master morality. The tangible historicity of value and the individual forces us to go beyond the bird of prey, to become self-conscious (yet self-creating) subjects. That we are embedded temporally in the world forces us to acknowledge the development of meaning, and although we are not trapped within the meaningful modern world, transvaluation requires its acknowledgement. Thus for Nietzsche the moral individual can also be understood as self-reflective. His concept of the eternal return serves to justify this reading and suggests a considerable likeness to Dewey. By employing the eternal return, Nietzsche asks us to reflect upon our actions, considering whether or not we fully mean the choices we make. We respond either positively or negatively to this concept, Nietzsche argues, depending on our relationship to (the confidence we have in) our actions (Nietzsche, GS, 274). The notion that our actions will eternally return gives weight to the authenticity of our choices. Thus there is a conceptual link for Nietzsche between reflection and authenticity.

Yet, reflection can imply a disinterested or detached agent. Nietzsche’s oscillation on this point (between instinct and reflection) results from a concern about detachment. The emphasis of his argument against the neutral agent behind the deed is on the issue of neutrality. A productive reading of Nietzsche must address this underlying concern and concentrate on the notion of an embedded (or perspectival) reflectiveness. Thus, while there is a significant tension in Nietzsche’s thought here,
we should derive from it a notion of perspectival reflection that is less vulnerable to
the danger of abstract moral deliberation.

Insistence on self-realization would seem to be at odds with a resistance to the
development of habit. One road out of this potential problem would be to re-iterate
how the self is realized as both precarious and stable for Dewey. That is, if the self is
understood as dynamic, self-realization should not be understood as an undoing of
this plasticity. Dewey directly states—and Nietzsche is in agreement—that the claim
to self-realization is not to set a goal, but to state a problem (Dewey, “Self-
Realization,” 43). The response to this problem involves growth, and thus maintains a
reflective self. Thus both philosophers put forward a notion of a realizing yet
simultaneously realizable self.

Certainly relevant to a discussion of habit are the thought of Dewey and
Nietzsche on the issue of taste. In discussing the pre-Socratic Greeks, Nietzsche notes
that their term for “sage” is etymologically related to taste and its development
(Nietzsche, PTG, 43).³⁵ A resounding similarity between the moral theories of
Nietzsche and Dewey is the centrality of the notion of taste for both thinkers. As I
have suggested earlier, moral progress for both can be expressed as a development of
taste.

There is a distinction that can be made between the development of taste and
the development of habit, one that is particularly germane to Dewey’s thought as well
as Nietzsche’s. Habit is, by its very nature, unreflective. To “get in the habit of doing
something” means to regularly engage in an activity until it no longer requires

³⁵ The accuracy of Nietzsche’s translation here is not at stake. Rather, the emphasis of his admiration
is enough to indicate the relation he sees between great individuals and the development of taste.
deliberation for its initiation. That it is not the product of deliberation involves the	ontion that habit no longer participates in the deliberation arc. That is, it no longer
functions as a means towards future critical activity. Taste, on the other hand, is
actively acquired. It is the product and means of reflective inquiry, and is morally
responsible—both in the backward and forward-looking senses of that word. Taste is,
of course, grounded in our experience similarly to habit, but unlike habit, taste is
fundamentally active and unsettled.

Habit, then, is morally problematic as a method of embeddedness. While it
suggests a continuity through temporal experience that is involved in a conception of
polychromatic action, this is a static and thus morally self-defeating method of
activity. It is passive, and thus is at best accidentally, rather than purposefully
polychromatic. Taste, on the other hand, is active and reflective. For Dewey, this can
be understood through his discussion of desirability. That we find something
enjoyable, according to Dewey, only raises the questions of desirability: it does not
provide an answer. The question is resolved through bringing experience to bear on a
judgment of that desirability. Only an affirmational outcome of this process can result
in the claim that something is desirable (Dewey, QC, 260). Nietzsche makes a similar
argument: “That they please—those who have them and those who enjoy their fruits,
and also the mere spectator—this does not yet constitute an argument in their favor
but rather invites cautions. So let us be cautious” (Nietzsche, BGE, 235).

The point here is that taste, unlike habit, involves an active judgment, and—if
we take Dewey’s concept of inquiry seriously—an open-ended judgment. Taste, like
education (it is in fact education) is growth. Our taste develops in order (among other purposes) to further refine our taste.\textsuperscript{36}

A particularly negative reading of traditional (principle-based) moral reasoning can understand its simplification of moral choice as habitualizing moral activity, although only virtue theory goes so far as to articulate this as its explicit goal. If we follow Nietzsche’s criticism that traditional moral theory strives to preclude the difficulties and complexities of moral reasoning, we can see moral development in this sense as the training of negotiated habits.\textsuperscript{37} Developing a taste for an action or value can thus be contrasted with habituating yourself into the employment—or even enjoyment—of that action or value. We should interpret Nietzsche as holding that our activity is always interested. As far as we realize and take responsibility for the content of that interest (and act accordingly), we can understand ourselves as acting morally.

Taste, as opposed to a habit which is formed value-free, is not morally blind (that is, it is not blind to the interests that drive the action). Habit, if it is undirected (in Dewey’s sense of the term) is potentially morally reprehensible. Reading Nietzsche’s notion of second nature as habitual is problematic in that this nature can never in itself be responsible or transvaluative. Thus we must take his notion of second nature as unsettled in its affect, equivalent in this respect to taste. Taste, then, can play a positive role in polychromatic activity. It is reflective and life-affirming, and is thus a participant in moral grounds (as opposed to an amoral space). It provides

\textsuperscript{36} Taste is taken here to function as a form of inquiry, and thus involves the same complex coordination between the consummational experience and precariousness.

\textsuperscript{37} The term “negotiated habits” refers to the extent that there are of course still choices to be made in dualistic moral theory, though they are limited. Even Nietzsche cannot deny this point.
a morally acceptable (on the methodological grounds laid out by both Nietzsche and Dewey) structure for moral deliberation.

5.3 Polychromaticism as Critical Action

The reader may have noticed that a major conceptual gap was left standing in the previous chapter. In a non-universal moral system, the self is treated differently from the other. While reasoning and methodology may be public, the value of authenticity prevents an easy parallel between treatment of the self and other. How does self-criticism function, and how does it differ from the criticism of others? The reason for placing this section in this chapter is that deliberation as self-realization is inherently self-critical. If we understand Nietzsche’s model of the eternal return as signifying an event that accompanies moral deliberation, we must see that active valuation involves self-criticism. We engage in active valuation in all moral deliberation, insofar as we have relinquished principle and a universal moral framework. This is not to say that we start from scratch during every moment of deliberation, quite the opposite: we develop a loose and self-critical structure of activity and choice, one that is explicitly polychromatic. Deliberation involves drawing from experience in order to make judgments and to formulate activity for the future; and more significantly, it occurs within experience. Thus a distinction between criticism and deliberation can at most only be tentative and pragmatic (rather than ontological or metaphysical). We criticize as we deliberate, and the process of criticism occurs only within the space of our active (thus potentially deliberative) experience.
Nietzsche underscores the link between active valuing and criticism in a momentous aphorism in *The Gay Science*, wherein he states that “we can destroy only as creators!” (Nietzsche, GS, 122). His point here is that purely negative criticism is not enough. Meaning is historical; our values and conceptions arise out of experienced (though not necessarily conscious) needs and impulses. Eventually the origin of meaning become cloudy and we begin to understand what was once an active response as a necessary (or at least natural) aspect of reality. Certainly simply to point out the failures of this meaning is not enough. If the conditions for its development and perpetuation have not also dissolved, our criticism will be unable to finish the job, so to speak. We must interrogate the condition of a concept or value as well. Nietzsche goes on, however, to point out “how foolish it would be to suppose that one only needs to point out this origin and this misty shroud of delusion in order to destroy [this ‘reality’]” (Nietzsche, GS, 122). If we take seriously the notion that thought and meaning must have real conditions, an argument made by both Nietzsche and Dewey, we must recognize that for a critique to carry weight, it must too have a condition (and if the criticism is serious enough, it must have a radically new condition).\(^{38}\)

The reverse is also true: deliberation is empty (habitual) without criticism. This is why Nietzsche considers himself justified in his unwillingness to accept the “honest rejection” of Noddings’ math student. Honesty (or authenticity) is not enough

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\(^{38}\) Dewey happily recognizes the dialectical nature of this shift of conditions, and while Nietzsche is often overly concerned with critiquing the idealist nature of Hegel’s dialectic, I think it is near-impossible to present a coherent picture of Nietzsche if we do not read him as insisting on the dialectical nature of meaning (though he would certainly be interested in changing the shape of the dialectic). However, as productive as a comparison would be, laying out the complicated relationship of each philosopher to Hegel is not within the scope of this work.
to account for moral success, according to Nietzsche. We must be creative in the sense of being original or negative.

This explains Nietzsche’s attachment to “fatalism.” That is, there is a sense in which we do not have control over whether or not acting authentically will be transvaluational (and whether or not we live in the right time and place to achieve this transformation of values, practically and morally). We can authentically affirm extant value structures (even if they are self-originating), but according to Nietzsche, in doing so we achieve no moral individuality. The extent to which this “greatness” can only be realized through challenge (as was discussed in Chapter 2) defines this point despite the individual’s capabilities. The notion here is that engaging in critical deliberation involves an affirmation of negativity—or untimeliness—that should encourage epistemological certainty as to the moral worth of our actions.

We are able to criticize ourselves as we would criticize another. The major conceptual claim that is worth holding onto at this point is that we have an obligation to criticize ourselves in every moral situation. The alternative to such a critical stance is habitual activity. The situations that are not pertinent to our moral project of self-realization are acceptable spaces for habitual activity. The moment in which I brush my teeth is not necessarily a point at which I am responsible for reflecting critically. However, contexts, like values, are never static (according to Dewey’s notion of an ever oscillating world of precariousness and stability). Thus as my self-realization begins to involve a commitment to environmental and ethical production methods, my teeth-brushing scenario may be destabilized, and I must critically deliberate (for example) on the choice among toothpaste companies. That situation may seem trivial,
but it illustrates both the point of critical awareness and the respect in which a methodological morality must allow for individualized moral contexts, even though the social nature of the individual invites speculation as to the extent that these contexts really are shared.

Dewey is much less concerned about negativity as a quality of moral valuing. The fundamentally social nature of the realized self through the socialization aspect inquiry and the cultural dimensions of education is not opposed to purely affirmational critical deliberation. We can accept Nietzsche’s point about individuality without giving up the morality involved in Dewey’s more social conception of deliberative action. However, this requires us to highlight a conceptual tension between Dewey’s conception of education and Nietzsche’s. The difference lies in the relationship between the individual and her world that develops through education. For Nietzsche, education is liberation (Nietzsche, SE, 129). That is, because of the irrefutable (for him) un-exchangeability of individuals, education serves only to realize the self as individual, thus strengthening individualization and setting the agent against her time and culture. Education leads to solitude (Nietzsche, BGE, 240). Dewey, however, suggests that rather than pointing towards isolation, education encourages the individual to go outward into more meaningful participation in the world and culture around her (Dewey, DE, 51). This tension, however, does not prevent these thinkers from affirming complementary grounds for the conception of polychromatic action and critical deliberation.

Criticism was understood in the last chapter to be a fundamentally active rather than passive response. Dewey’s argument that criticism must be ongoing was
taken seriously, and should be understood as participating in the sustained nature of
polychromatic deliberation. Critical deliberation must involve a commitment to
educative inquiry (as growth), and thus cannot be understood as a mere statement of
value. It is an ongoing experiment about the valuability of value, and is thus an
educative endeavor. Furthermore, without ongoing criticism, we are unable to
understand our actions as fundamentally polychromatic. That is, actions appear to us
in this way only through a process of engaged reflection. Conversely, we are able to
act morally (that is, in a fully self-realized and transvalued sense) only if we can
engage in polychromatic deliberation.

Creativity is exercised through polychromatic action, and it is also a condition
for the latter. Coherent polychromaticism is only conceivable as a product of creative
reflection. Otherwise its plurality becomes problematic. That is, we are unable to act
reflectively in a polychromatic nature unless we are engaged in a serious project of
education. Being fully moral thus depends on an engagement in education, as this
thick concept of education insists that we are responsibly embedded in the world, a
necessary condition for polychromaticism.

If we take at all seriously the notion that values are not absolute, then
education must become conceptually central to moral theory. Education invokes,
requires, and challenges an immaturity, an existence of flexibility and alternatives in
an agent. Being moral involves the same unsettledness. It is the preservation of
ambiguity, of precariousness, that animates the moral theories of both philosophers.
In avoiding instability we run the risk of habitualization and the end of growth (and
thus the reflexivity that is constitutively moral). Without idealizing change or flux, we
can understand this aspect of moral theory to center around a concern for education. It is only through education (in Dewey’s sense), that we are able to preserve attention for precariousness. We scramble to find our footing only in order to find a new, equally unstable path. This becomes simultaneously the force and target of moral theory.
through a comparative reading of nietzsche and dewey, i have begun to spell out what a moral theory that takes education as central might look like. this approach to ethics emphasizes how we come to claim a particular value, rather than what that value is or why we value it. this shift, from understanding the term “moral” as a formal claim to understanding it as a descriptive claim (as an adjectival quality), highlights the relationship between values and the individual. taking into account the rejection of universal justifications for value made by both nietzsche and dewey, this relationship is dependent on the development of both the individual and her values. following nietzsche and dewey, i have taken “education” to mean the learning process rather than knowledge earned. it is an activity rather than a state. this notion of education has played a central role in an experimentalist account of active moral valuing and practice.

one of the most fundamental conceptual distinctions made in the present work is dewey’s separation of education and training. education occurs when learning is done for to further itself, involving the individual’s interest in an unsettled and expanding process of inquiry. while nietzsche does not make the distinction between education and training explicit in these terms, he also values an educative process that leaves the individual needing and asking more, rather than stopping at the cessation of learning. education, for both nietzsche and dewey, is constituted by the continual development of our interactive capabilities with life (or experience).

it is important to make explicit the similarities and differences between the two primary authors here. nietzsche and dewey both take morality to be firmly

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located within the sphere of our activity (life for Nietzsche, experience for Dewey).\(^{39}\)

They both emphasize the placement of our values in their changing, evolving conditions. Thus both moral theorists argue that values should be fundamentally unsettled. Neither Nietzsche nor Dewey understand values as the final product of moral reasoning. Rather, our moral beliefs show up to us as problems in need of further elaboration and articulation.

There has been a major emphasis here on the significance of both moral action (criticism and deliberation) and values as being unsettled. Criticism, drawing from Dewey’s model of inquiry and Nietzsche’s intentionally indirect style of writing, was understood to succeed because it incited reflection, rather than ending it. Yet, I also suggested that action or criticism that is solely precarious is not a tenable program either. Dewey warns against “philosophies of flux” (Dewey, EN, 50), and Nietzsche argues that “the terrible par excellence would be for me… a life that would demand perpetual improvisation” (Nietzsche, GS, 237). Both thinkers recognize that a notion of exclusive unsettlement stands in tension with development or growth.

Thus it is necessary to reemphasize the relationship between the consummational experience (stability, habit), and precariousness (instability, precariousness, a growing future). While there has been a rhetorical lean towards the latter, this does not indicate a rejection of the conceptual significance of the former. That is, the valorization of unsettled criticism, values, and action is not intended to diminish the importance of stability, but rather only to make sense of the consummational experience within its often overlooked relationship with instability.

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\(^{39}\) Though the concepts are distinct, life and experience serve the same function for Nietzsche and Dewey, respectively.
This relationship defines moral value and activity as fundamentally developmental and ongoing projects. I have tried to bring out this quality by centering the discussion on non-juridical criticism and polychromatic deliberation. The approach to moral activity made by both Nietzsche and Dewey centers on growth as a defining characteristic of both moral and educational realization.

This understanding of morality and education as fundamentally ongoing also provides the connective tissue between criticism and deliberation. As I have suggested, if moral criticism is concerned with education rather than judgment, we must understand criticism as moral action. Conversely, then, polychromatic action should be understood as constitutively critical. Polychromaticism takes action to be natural in its plurality. It is a notion of unsettled choice, at once both complete and in tension with itself (combining growth and consummation). A commitment to this precarious experimentalism involves resisting overtly dualistic moral language, as this tends to suppress the polychromatic quality of our critical and deliberative statements.

While Nietzsche and Dewey are aligned on this point, they are not in complete agreement over the meaning of education in a moral context. The most significant tension, as I argued in Chapter 5, is over the relationship that education develops between the individual and the society or community. That their conception of the mechanics of education as growth is similar does not imply that Nietzsche and Dewey assume an equivalent stance towards the end result of that growth. Dewey understands education to invigorate the self as social, through public inquiry drawing the individual into the community both practically and as a communicative being.
While there are similarities between Dewey’s conception of education as growth and Nietzsche’s claim as to the significance of interpretive work in learning, the latter understands education as liberation from (or against) the socially directed self. Nietzsche’s conception of education understands effective teaching and learning to occur in separate, distinct spheres. The student of Nietzsche’s education must recreate and re-reach the teacher’s work on his own. That is, Nietzsche’s rejection of systematic thought as educationally responsive marks an opaque boundary between teacher and student. He is interested in truth as meaningful (for life) rather than truth as representational (of content), and thus in some ways we can understand the Nietzschean educator to always inciting the student to action rather than giving her knowledge.

Dewey, however, understands education to be a participatory process between teacher and student. Education involves for him developing communal capacities, as opposed to Nietzsche’s notion that education as liberation is directed towards untimeliness. As capacities are, for Dewey, active practices of the individual, we must understand his claim here as about actual projects rather than potential. Education is thus constituted by social activity.

The tension between Nietzsche and Dewey centers around their conceptions of social constraint on the individual. Dewey understands (healthy) society to be pluralistic, complex, and evolving. The multiplicity of interest in the community encourages the diversification and socialization of the self through educative growth.

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40 It is important to point out that neither Nietzsche nor Dewey demand that there are fixed roles of “teacher” and “student” in the educational process. Rather, there is educational material—which can be a teacher or an experience—and there is a subject engaging that material.
Nietzsche, while he does not reduce society to a monolithic sphere, takes society as such to be systematic; education, for Nietzsche, sets our thinking against this form of conceptual structures. While Dewey is compelling here, the concerns that motivate Nietzsche’s conception of education are legitimate as well. We need not choose definitively between Nietzsche and Dewey’s accounts, but rather we should keep in mind the tension between these alternatives when engaging in educative practice.

This line of thought brings out one of the most easily discernible—and often philosophically overlooked—differences between Nietzsche and Dewey. The latter’s writing, when read alongside Nietzsche, is somewhat monotonous and dry. While Dewey is not unpleasant to read, the vitality of his writing cannot compare to the life found on a single page of Nietzsche. That this would be true of nearly any philosopher only strengthens the significance of the comparison. One of Nietzsche’s greatest contributions to moral philosophy (as well as to the greater philosophical discourse) is demonstrating the significance that form, presentation and interpretation take in the meaning of our statements. That method informs content is not an unprecedented notion; however, Nietzsche is part of only a small group of philosophers explicitly concerned with the form of writing in philosophy.

We read Nietzsche actively and often joyously. His words dance, and when reading we must dance too if we are to keep up. Nietzsche’s educational success in this endeavor is entirely brought about by his ability to surgically provoke responses with his words: the demand for interpretive activity in his work is made possible by the excellence of his writing. We should take this claim seriously in light of the previous argument about form. How often have we found ourselves uninterested and
uninspired by even the most fascinating topic if it is systematically laid out for us? This is not to say that we can learn nothing from an experience that is passively encountered. Rather, this line of argument should suggest that meaning is not detachable from its mode of engagement (its motion). While facts might not very between presentations, what we take away from those presentations might, and if we take Nietzsche (or Dewey) seriously, the method of uptake—for example, with or without interest—is central in the educative process.

Thus it would seem that moral philosophy has historically failed to be educative. Any individual growth is *despite* the dominant literature. We do not need to make the claim this strongly, but it is suggestive of the essence of the problem. Moral philosophy’s direct and often less than dynamic presentation resists integration into active experience. Have we grown after reading (for example) *Ethics*, or is Dewey merely training us? Dewey’s own argument about the failure of traditional education is relevant here. Even if we take interest in what we are reading, that moral philosophy is read predominantly in formal academic settings should raise the concern that our interest is to some extent contained within that space.

Yet anyone who has read some of this supposedly uninspiring philosophical literature knows that, while it is lacking in many educational respects, we do in fact learn from it. We are forced, when reading (for example) Hegel to stop, time and time again, to interpret what exactly it is he has just argued. While this interpretive move is formally distinct from the method employed by Nietzsche, there are shared elements. Our reconstruction of Hegel, paragraph by paragraph if necessary, serves a similar function to the disruptiveness found in Nietzsche’s aphoristic writing.
It would not be out of place to claim, then, that although it is often removed from active life, moral philosophy has succeeded in being educative in some measure. However, it has not achieved this success on its own terms. We are not forced to do interpretive work when reading—again, for example—Hegel because that is his intention, but rather because his writing is unclear. The majority of the educational success of moral philosophy, then, has been accidental. With the exception of Nietzsche and a few others, educative moral theory has been maintained—unwittingly—by bad writers.

By no means do I intend here to gloss over the educational value of knowledge and content. Rather, I am trying to emphasize the often overlooked significance of communicative method in the educational uptake. This methodological point is especially relevant in moral theory. Philosophers need not always take themselves to be educators. They often write as scholarly researchers, rather than as teachers. Joy in reading might not be necessary for epistemology or modal metaphysics. But for moral theory, the connection that the experiential uptake makes between philosophical content and meaningful life is of significant value. Dewey himself is (now ironically) a strong example of an author who has taken the concerns of practical life as the center of much of his philosophical work. While his writing is somewhat dry, his concern for the practical meaning of ethics takes shape, I would gather, in the lives of many of his readers. Both Nietzsche and Dewey take the location of values in life or experience very seriously as morally relevant if not moral justification. Thus engaging in moral theory that is detached from life diminishes its worth.
For moral theory that is embedded in life we must be educative in our writing. We must write well. While we must not all become poetic—and it is unlikely that many of us could write like Nietzsche—we should keep this impulse in mind while writing, conversing, and living. Moral theory cannot rely on accidental success.

There is a danger, however, in taking this unsettled and indirect approach. Nietzsche, unlike Dewey, has a plethora of interpretations. Putting aside the unjustifiable readings, such as those that use Nietzsche to justify nationalism or even fascism, there are many compelling and conflicting understandings of Nietzsche’s thought. While this might suggest that Nietzsche has gone too far in avoiding consummation, it also offers a more programmatic interpretation. We will never settle on a final interpretation of Nietzsche, and if we take his thought to be morally relevant, we will continue engaging the process of inquiry about our own values and lives. Nietzsche forces us to keep our moral and educational projects unsettled and ongoing. Thus we can understand Nietzsche’s writing as itself polychromatic. While the content of Dewey’s thought is in complete agreement with Nietzsche on the mechanism of education, his form is incompliant.

To maintain values that are responsive to life and experience, we must preserve their precariousness. The role of—and necessity for—education in moral theory is to provide this instability through delineating the method of morality as self-realization, and through actualizing self-realization as growth. Our behavior is moral, then, only when it participates in unsettled inquiry. Like Nietzsche’s writing, polychromaticism is unable to detach the method and form of moral value from its content. By ignoring the role of education in ethics, moral philosophers have confined
value in rigid consummation. Moral theory must be educative if it, like critical inquiry, is to have a future.


———. *The Will to Power*. Ed. by Walter Kaufmann. Trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale.
