A Schooling in Contempt:

Emotions and the *Pathos of Distance*

Mark Alfano, Associate Professor, Delft University of Technology

**Abstract**

Nietzsche scholars have developed an interest in his use of “thick” moral psychological concepts such as virtues and emotions. This development coincides with a renewed interest among both philosophers and social scientists in virtues, the emotions, and moral psychology more generally. Contemporary work in empirical moral psychology posits contempt and disgust as both *basic emotions* and *moral foundations* of normative codes. While virtues can be individuated in various ways, one attractive principle of individuation is to index them to characteristic emotions and the patterns of behavior those emotions motivate. Despite the surge in attention to Nietzsche’s use of emotions, the literature has tended to lump all emotional states together. In this paper, I argue that what Nietzsche calls the *pathos of distance* is best understood as the virtue associated with both contempt and disgust. I conclude with a discussion of the bleak prospects for a Nietzschean democratic ethos.

**Word count:** 10,705

**Keywords:** contempt, disgust, pathos of distance, digital humanities

**1 Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In the last couple of decades, scholars have developed an interest in Nietzsche’s use of “thick” moral psychological concepts, such as virtues and character (Alfano 2013a, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Daigle 2006; Hurka 2007; May 1999; Reginster 2006; Railton 2012; Robertson 2012; Thomas 2012; White 2001), as well as emotions (Alfano 2010, 2013b, 2016; Hunt 1991; Janaway 2009; Poellner 2007; Reginster 2011). This development coincides with a surge in interest among both philosophers and social scientists in virtues, the emotions, and moral psychology more generally. Contemporary work in empirical moral psychology posits contempt and disgust as both *basic emotions* (Ekman 2007; Ekman et al. 1987, 2003) and *moral foundations* of normative codes (Haidt & Joseph 2007; Rozin et al. 1999; Shweder et al. 1997). An emotion counts as basic, in the technical sense, if it is associated with a universally recognized facial expression (e.g., the wide eyes and open mouth of surprise). A basic emotion is also typically thought to cause a distinctive signature of physiological reactions (e.g., the nausea of disgust), have analogues in non-human animals (e.g., fear’s similarity to the fight-flight-freeze reaction in rats), and be the referent of a word or short phrase in all natural languages. Although there is some controversy about the exact catalogue, accepted lists of basic emotions typically include (perhaps among others) surprise, fear, anger, contempt, disgust, sadness, and joy. An emotional reaction grounds a moral foundation, in the technical sense, when it motivates behaviors and social signaling that tend to erect and enforce a set of norms. For instance, it’s been suggested that contempt grounds a hierarchical social structure of domination and subordination, disgust grounds an exclusionary system of purity and corruption, and anger grounds a horizontal system of care and non-maleficence.

A virtue is an excellence of character – a disposition of cognition, emotion, and behavior that makes its bearer admirable and that, within a range of conditions, tends to promote the flourishing of its bearer. While virtues can be individuated in various ways, one attractive principle of individuation is to index them to characteristic emotions and the patterns of behavior those emotions motivate. For example, we can characterize courage as the virtue related to fear and the behaviors it motivates, justice as the virtue related to anger and the behaviors it motivates, and curiosity as the virtue related to surprise and the behaviors it motivates.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nietzsche seems to employ this principle of individuation when he distinguishes “hot” and “cold” courage on the grounds that they are associated with different emotional signatures (D 277).[[3]](#footnote-3) An Aristotelian version of this principle is the well-known doctrine of the mean, but the principle itself is more general, allowing for virtues that involve always or never feeling particular emotions. For example, Martha Nussbaum (2015) argues that anger is “normatively irrational,” which suggests that it is never appropriate or fitting and that the related virtue involves never feeling it (or at least never reflectively endorsing it when one feels it). In a similar vein, Dan Kelly (2011) argues for moral disgust-skepticism, and Macalester Bell (2013) argues that contempt is only appropriate in a highly circumscribed range of situations (namely, as a meta-emotional response to someone else’s unjustified contempt – a phenomenon closely related to what I will later discuss under the heading of *spernere se sperni*). Furthermore, there is no reason in principle why a virtue must be indexed to exactly one emotion. In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle held that courage is associated with both fear and confidence, and it’s not implausible to suggest that virtuous nostalgia is associated in complex ways with both joy and sadness.

Despite the surge in attention to Nietzsche’s use of emotions, the literature has tended to lump all emotional states together. To date, there are no published papers primarily on the *pathos of distance*, one on contempt (Wilson 2007), and two on disgust (Faulkner 2013; von Tevenar forthcoming). In this paper, I argue that what Nietzsche calls the *pathos of distance* is best understood as the (alleged) virtue associated with disgust and contempt. This claim is purely a matter of textual interpretation: I will not argue that the *pathos of distance* is in fact a virtue, only that Nietzsche considered it one. That further issue will be addressed briefly and indirectly when I discuss the bleak prospects for a Nietzschean democratic ethos, for which several commentators (Hatab 1999; Katsfanas 2013; Owen 2002, 2008; Wilson 2007) have argued but about which I, like Brian Leiter (1997, 2010), have serious doubts.

Here, then, is the plan for this paper: in section 2, I explain the methodology underlying my argument, which employs digital humanities tools that have been under-utilized in Nietzsche scholarship. In sections 3 and 4, I apply this methodology to ‘contempt’ (*Verachtung, Hohn*) and ‘disgust’ (*Ekel, Widerlichkeit*), respectively. In section 5, I apply it to ‘*pathos of distance*’ (*Pathos der Distanz*) and reach back to the accounts of contempt and disgust in the previous sections to argue that the *pathos of distance* is the virtue associated with both emotions. Finally, in section 6, I cast doubt on the prospects for a Nietzschean democratic ethos.

**2 Methodology**

Philosophy has been slow to adopt the tools of digital humanities scholarship. In Nietzsche studies, we have the Nietzsche Source ([www.nietzschesource.org](http://www.nietzschesource.org)): a digital repository of all of Nietzsche’s texts, including published works (e.g., HH, D, GS, BGE), private publications (e.g., NCW), authorized manuscripts (e.g., A, EH), posthumous writings (e.g., PTAG), posthumous fragments, and letters.[[4]](#footnote-4) This repository is searchable, allowing for comprehensive documentation of his use (and mention) of words and phrases. Nietzsche scholarship is notorious for its cherry-picking of texts and evidence.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Nietzsche Source will help us to achieve a fairer, bird’s-eye perspective on his work, as I illustrate here.

In this study, I first searched the Nietzsche Source for every passage in his published and authorized writings in which ‘*pathos of distance*’, ‘disgust’ and its cognates, or ‘contempt’ and its cognates occurs at least once. Altogether, this yielded 301 passages. Details of the exact search terms are provided in Table 1.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **concept** | **search term****(not case-sensitive)** | **German terms** **(not case-sensitive)** | **English translation** | **passages** |
| *pathos of distance* | ‘pathos der distanz’ | ‘pathos der distanz’ | *pathos of distance* | 6 |
| contempt | selbstverachtung | selbstverachtung | self-contempt | 201 |
| verach\* | verachtung | contempt |
| verachten | contemn[[6]](#footnote-6) |
| verachtet | contemned |
| verachte | contemn |
| verachtete | contemned |
| verachteten | contemned |
| verachtenden | contemning |
| verachtend | contemn |
| verachtende | contemning |
| verachtetet | contemned |
| verächtlich | contemptuous |
| hohn\* | hohn | scorn |
| hohne | scorn |
| hohnlied | scorn-song |
| hohnlachen | scorn-laughter |
| hohnes | scorn |
| hohngelächter | scornfully |
| hohnlachend | scorn-laughter |
| hohngelächters | scorn |
| hohngeschrei | scorn-shouting |
| hohns | scorn |
| disgust | ekel\* | ekel | disgust | 132 |
| ekelhaft | disgusting |
| ekels | disgust |
| ekelhafte | disgusting |
| ekelt | disgusted |
| ekelhaften | disgusting |
| ekeln | nauseate |
| ekelhaftes | disgusting |
| ekelgedanken | disgust-thoughts |
| ekelhafteste | disgusting |
| widerlich\* | widerlich | disgusting |
| widerliche | loathsome |
| widerlichen | disgusting |
| widerlicher | disgusting |
| widerlichsten | disgusting |
| widerliches | disgusting |
| widerlichkeiten | disgusting |
| widerlichste | disgusting |
| widerlichem | disagreeable |
| widerlichere | loathsome |

 **Table 1:** Nietzsche’s use of *‘pathos of distance*’, ‘contempt’, and ‘disgust’

Next, I tabulated these passages and examined them for overlaps in which Nietzsche uses, for example, both ‘disgust’ and ‘contempt’. There is one passage in which he uses or mentions all three terms, along with thirty-six pairwise overlaps, as shown in Figure 1. This suggests that the concepts of contempt, disgust, and the *pathos of distance* are interlinked in Nietzsche’s philosophy.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Crucial SSD:Users:markalfano:Documents:Philosophy:History of Philosophy:Nietzsche:Alfano:contempt, disgust, and thepathos of distance:Venn of disgust, contempt, and pathos of distance.png | **Figure 1:** Venn diagram of Nietzsche’s uses of ‘disgust’ and cognates, ‘contempt’ and cognates, and ‘*pathos of distance*’ in his published and authorized writings. Counts represent the number of passages in which each term occurs at least once. For example, ‘*pathos of distance*’ occurs in six different passages – three times alone, twice in the same passage as ‘contempt’, and once in the same passage as both ‘disgust’ and ‘contempt’. |

Third, I close-read and analyzed all 301 relevant passages with an eye to the conceptual, psychological, and causal relations among contempt, disgust, and the *pathos of distance*. In the following sections, I discuss the conclusions I reached through this analysis.

Before proceeding, I should note some limitations of this methodology. First, I ended up filtering out any passages in which Nietzsche expresses or discusses contempt, disgust, or the *pathos of distance* without using any of my search terms. For example, he onomatopoetically exclaims ‘*Pfui!*’ in D 166, 203, and 206, but he doesn’t use any of the search terms in 206, which was therefore excluded. Likewise, in BGE 207 he quotes Leibniz saying, “*Je ne méprise presque rien*,” but uses none of the search terms. Second, this method cannot, on its own, tell us whether Nietzsche is discussing contempt, mentioning a German word for contempt, expressing contempt, praising someone’s contemptuous attitude, rejecting someone’s contempt, and so on. For that, one has to close-read the passages, which introduces subjectivity on the one hand but expertise on the other hand. Third, counting passages rather than, say, pages or books, is an arbitrary cutoff. Some passages are just one sentence long, whereas others – especially in the *Untimely Meditations* – go on for pages. Furthermore, in some passages, Nietzsche uses a relevant terms just once, whereas in others he uses them over and over again. For instance, in *Zarathustra*, we read “*Ekel! Ekel! Ekel!*” three times (Convalescent 1, Convalescent 2, Kings 1). Finally, I chose to exclude Nietzsche’s unauthorized writings (e.g., PTAG), fragments, and letters from this analysis. Follow-up work may examine these to complement or complicate my interpretation, but in the first instance it seemed appropriate to restrict the study in this way. Despite these limitations, the methodology employed here marks a significant advance in Nietzsche scholarship.

**3 Nietzsche on contempt**

For Nietzsche, contemptibility is essentially the opposite of nobility. To be noble is to be and feel oneself *above* someone or something on some normatively important dimension, whereas contemptibility is a matter of being and feeling oneself *beneath* someone or something – being *humble* or *humiliated* (etymologically, *on the ground* or *low*). In the first instance, contempt always targets whole persons (BGE 260; GM 1.2; see also Bell 2013, p. 41 for a contemporary perspective), though it can also be applied derivatively to institutions, cultures, values, and other things. A contemptuous person dismissively curls his lip in scorn. This is why silence and non-reactivity can be interpreted as a sign of contempt (HH 324, Wanderer 33, Wanderer 259; D 33, 43). It’s also why it can be difficult to understand and inquire into the object of one’s contempt. For instance, Nietzsche claims that “Christianity, with its contempt for the world, made a *virtue* of ignorance” (D 321; see also HH Wanderer 16; GM 1.10; A 62). It’s also why, if Nietzsche is right that pity is disguised contempt, pity can be insulting (HH Wanderer 50; D 135).

Expressing contempt is for Nietzsche a performative insistence on one’s own nobility (How could I contemn if I weren’t above?) and the contemptibility of one’s target (How could I contemn *this* if it weren’t beneath me?). Contempt is thus also essentially comparative. This contrast between nobility and contemptibility shows that we are in an ethical magisterium beyond the usual concern for suffering and pleasure. This is an ethos in which “It is not he who does us harm but he who is contemptible who counts as bad” (HH 45; see also BGE 260 and GM 1.10) – the ethos of ancient Greece and other cultures of nobility.

Moreover, for Nietzsche, the relation between hierarchy and the attitude of contempt is bi-directional. Sometimes, people who independently enjoy a superior position naturally feel contempt for whomever and whatever is beneath them (BGE 257; GM 1.2; A 57). Other times, contemning vaults the contemnor above the contemned. Contempt – at least in some cases – ennobles the contemnor. In SE 6, for example, Nietzsche claims that “a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view” is a necessary condition for looking “beyond” oneself and seeking a “higher self” that has hitherto been “concealed.” In this passage, the contemnor and the object of contempt are one and the same. Contempt for oneself or some aspect of oneself is a common theme in Nietzsche’s writings. Indeed, it seems that he set himself the task of repurposing Goethe’s appropriation of the medieval ascetic tradition derived from Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), according to which the four cardinal virtues are *spernere mundum, spernere neminem, spernere se ipsum,* and *spernere se sperni*.

*3.1 Spernere mundum*

Nietzsche frequently expresses his contempt for “the world.” This is most obvious in his disdain for capitalism, philistinism, and contemporary culture (especially German and English culture – his relation to Christianity is more complex, as I explain below). In DS 7, he laments the “pitiful, hopeless, and truly contemptible philistinism” of David Strauss’s writing, going so far as to say that he would “renounce all hope” for any reader who could endure *The Old and New Faith*. In SE 4, he spurns the “hugely contemptible money economy” of emergent European capitalism. In GS 373, he says that Herbert Spencer’s attempt to reconcile egoism and altruism through Darwinism almost “nauseates” with its contemptibility (note the overlap with disgust). As his estimation of Wagner deteriorated, he finally arrived at the point where he had nothing but “deep contempt from the bottom of my soul” for Wagnerian theatre (NCW Objections). These passages demonstrate Nietzsche’s disdain for the middlebrow culture of his time, which, on its own, may be philosophically shrugworthy. However, he frequently contemns other people, values, and things, which suggests that the same value-structure is in play with these more philosophically resonant phenomena.

Most prominently, Nietzsche’s disdain for “the world” gets translated into Zarathustra’s struggle to affirm the eternal recurrence despite the existence of “the most contemptible person”: “*the last man*”, whom the “crowd” begs to become (Z Prologue 5). What makes the last man so contemptible in Zarathustra’s eyes? He has no sense of wonder or curiosity to transfix him with rapt attention; instead, even his inquiries into love, creation, longing, and the universe are accompanied by “blinking.” The last man is overly familiar with people, things, and concepts that should only be approached with reverence and terror. In this same passage, Zarathustra compares the last man to vermin and heaps scorn on his claim to have invented happiness (note again the overlap with disgust). The goal of the last man is to smooth out all differences between people. Politically, this means “No shepherd and one herd!” Psychologically, it means that “Each wants the same, each is the same.”

Zarathustra opposes such political and psychological arrangements with contempt, an emotion that separates the contemnor and the contemned both vertically and horizontally. Throughout Nietzsche’s texts, contempt is metaphorically associated with both distance and height (e.g., the “beyond” and “higher self” of SE 6). Contempt (including self-contempt) induces a feeling of elevation, making it a vertical emotion. For instance, in HH P4, he describes the free spirit as feeling “bird-like freedom, bird-like exuberance, and a third thing in which curiosity is united with a tender contempt.” The free spirit goes “aloft” and sees “a tremendous number of things *beneath* him.” The distance and height implied by contempt psychologically remove the contemnor from the contemned, leading to the condition of solitude and loneliness that Nietzsche so often praises in scornful people, himself very much included (e.g., HH Wanderer 62; D 2, 249, 381, 443; BGE 284).[[7]](#footnote-7) In another passage (Rabble), Zarathustra says, “I once asked, and almost choked on the question: What? Does life also *require* the rabble?” When he finally confronts his “most abysmal thought,” it is not simply the idea of the eternal recurrence but the eternal recurrence of the “small man,” another moniker for the last man: “alas, man recurs eternally! The small men recur eternally!” (Convalescent 2). Convulsed with a cry of, “*Ach, Ekel! Ekel! Ekel!*” Zarathustra here laments the similarity of the “greatest” to the “smallest.” This is at once the moment of the “great contempt” (*grosse Verachtung* – Z Prologue 3, Criminal, Evils) and the “great disgust” (*grosse Ekel* – Z Tables 28, GM 3.14; see also A 38).

Zarathustra characterizes the great contempt as “the greatest thing that you can experience” (Prologue 3). This might seem puzzling. After all, he himself both experiences it (Convalescent 1) and recalls it (Convalescent 2) with revulsion. Moreover, it is “the hour in which even your happiness turns to nausea and likewise your reason and your virtue,” not to mention your justice and your pity (Prologue 3). On the face of it, that doesn’t sound so great. To understand why Zarathustra and Nietzsche consider the great contempt and the great disgust necessary though dangerous, we need to turn to the other kinds of *spernere*.

*3.2 Spernere neminem*

Nietzsche doesn’t advocate the great contempt for its own sake. Instead, he offers it as a challenge – the same challenge he first issued in GS 341: affirming the eternal recurrence despite the existence of so many small, petty, and contemptible people, institutions, and values. This brings us to the most difficult *spernere* from his point of view: *spernere neminem*. How could someone who brags that his writings are “a schooling” in contempt (HH P1) despise no one? How could someone whose own autobiography vaunts of his open contempt (EH Clever 10, Books-UM) spurn no one? My suggestion here is that, for Nietzsche, *spernere neminem* means affirming life and the eternal recurrence *despite* a clear-eyed recognition of the contemptible last man. One overcomes one’s revulsion and ultimately achieves a positive affective relationship to life.

On this view, what leads to the great contempt and the great disgust is what Bernard Reginster calls the problem or crisis of nihilism (2006, p. 4). The crisis arises when one struggles to distinguish what is noble from what is contemptible, when one sees with Zarathustra that the “smallest” and the “greatest” are all too similar. And the crisis is overcome – *if* it is overcome – not by reaching an all-encompassing judgment but by achieving a positive affective stance towards one’s life.[[8]](#footnote-8) This achievement takes contempt, including the great contempt (and disgust), as an input but nevertheless produces joy as an output. Zarathustra arrives at this point at the end of Convalescent 2 and in Great Longing, where he sings, “Oh my soul, I taught you contempt that does not come like a gnawing worm, the great, loving contempt that loves most where it has the most contempt.” This is followed by the Other Dance Song, in which Zarathustra sees life as “gleaming” and his heart skips a beat. Moreover, if Paul Loeb (2010) is right that books 1-3 of *Zarathustra* form a narrative circle, then the Zarathustra who descends the mountain in P2 without a trace of disgust in his visage is the same Zarathustra who was just rejoicing in the affirmation of life at the end of book 3.

We see the same process of deeply ambivalent emotions metamorphosing into a clear-eyed yet positive affective stance elsewhere in Nietzsche’s corpus. For example, in GS 333 he suggests that Spinoza’s famous motto, “*Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere*” is only the final outcome of a war among the affects in which “each of these impulses must first have presented its one-sided view of the thing or event; then comes the fight between these one-sided views, and occasionally out of it a mean, an appeasement, a concession to all three.” The result is *intelligere* or understanding. This same process of emotional civil war and understanding rapprochement is acted out in GM 3.12 where Nietzsche explains his notion of perspectivism: “the ability *to control* one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge.” This is also the same conception of knowledge and understanding he discusses in GS 333: the point of view of someone in whom contempt, disgust, and all the other emotions have had their say, and who nevertheless is in love with life – a condition Nietzsche sometimes calls *amor fati* (GS 276; EH Clever 10, Books Wagner; NCW Epilogue).

Because this process is meant to result in knowledge, it is important that one’s emotions fit, to the extent possible, the evaluative properties of their targets. As Nietzsche puts it in BGE 39, “it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure.” The great contempt, whatever else its function, is meant to contribute to such hard-won knowledge. Or, as Nietzsche puts it in BGE 65, “The attraction of knowledge would be small if one did not have to overcome so much shame on the way.” In Alfano (2013a), I argued that curiosity is a cardinal virtue for Nietzsche, and that he especially values curiosity that overcomes affective resistance to a clear-eyed recognition of the truth. “We have had to wring the truth out of ourselves every step of the way, we have had to give up almost everything that our heart, our love, our trust in life relied on” (A 50; see also HH P 6; GM 1.1, 2.6, 2.22). As I put it there, because “Nietzschean curiosity is a matter of […] overcoming great intellectual resistances […] one of its purest expressions is in the investigation precisely of the most nauseating facts about ourselves” (2013a, p. 16). It should come as no surprise, then, that there are 20 passages in which Nietzsche uses or mentions both ‘curiosity’ and either ‘contempt’ or ‘disgust’.[[9]](#footnote-9) Honesty about oneself, according to Nietzsche, induces contempt for one’s own hopes and values, which is a necessary step on the way to authentic life-affirmation (HH 34).

*3.3 Spernere se ipsum*

This brings us to the third *spernere*: *spernere se ipsum*. While Nietzsche’s schooling in contempt may appall many readers, it is essential to his project that one be capable of scorning *others* because a highly-tuned capacity of “refined contempt” (GS 379) makes one sensitive to the dross and dregs in *oneself*, which prompts what Nietzsche likes to call “self-overcoming.” This theme dates back at least to HL 2, where Nietzsche discusses the self-contempt of great men in their final hours, when they regard their own deaths as an opportunity to rid themselves of what was unworthy in them. Above, I quoted SE 6, where Nietzsche claims that self-contempt draws out what is noble in oneself.

This is a consistent refrain in his writings. In HH P3, he says that a “lightning-bolt of contempt” for what one had previously loved and considered one’s duty is a first step in becoming a free spirit. In D 56, he claims that the free spirit “reaches up even to the forbidden fruits of *spernere se sperni* and *spernere se ipsum*.” In GS 98, he argues that Shakespeare’s abusive representation of poets in *Julius Caesar* is a “cry of self-contempt” that in turn enables him to elevate the ideal of independence of soul in the character of Brutus. Zarathustra says, “In the mud of your contempt lay the statue [i.e., an ideal or value], but precisely this is its law, that out of contempt life and living beauty grow back to it!” (Z Events) Likewise, in Z Ugliest, Zarathustra says that self-contempt leads to elevation. And in GM 2.18, Nietzsche argues that the same attitude and impulse that manifests as social contempt and political domination can also be “directed backward, in the ‘labyrinth of the breast.’” I quote at length:

This secret self-ravishment, this artists’ cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant, suffering material and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny dreadfully joyous labor of the soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer – eventually this *active* “bad conscience” – you will have guessed it – as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself. – After all, what would be “beautiful” if the contradiction had not first become conscious of itself, if the ugly had not first said to itself: “I am ugly”?

The height and distance implied by contempt, when it is directed inward, open up a metaphorical space within one’s own soul, enabling one to contemn some aspects of oneself while simultaneously revering other aspects of oneself. Or, as Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, “Whoever despises himself still respects himself as one who despises” (BGE 78).[[10]](#footnote-10)

Before turning to *spernere se sperni*, a word about Nietzsche’s ambivalence towards Christianity and its power to induce self-contempt. As Lanier Anderson (2011) has persuasively argued, for Nietzsche, the priests who brought about the slave revolt in morals are consistently portrayed as noble, in large part because they embody the *pathos of distance*. This makes Christianity, which Nietzsche so vehemently opposed, the product of a noble mindset. It should come as no surprise, then, that he consistently says that Christianity induces self-contempt. For example, in HH 117, he argues that the doctrine of original sin leads to contempt for humanity (hence, both *spernere mundum* and *spernere se ipsum*). In D 60, he claims that Christianity breeds a “noble contempt for the fragility of the body.” In GS 150, he argues that Christian virtue inspires self-contempt in others. This makes it at once noble and “brutal.” And it is here that we can see why, despite Christianity’s nobility, Nietzsche nevertheless issues a negative verdict on it. Christian values are dangerous *because* they are noble and therefore tempting to people who embody the *pathos of distance*. Nietzsche is horrified not by contempt as such, by the targets of Christian contempt: the body and nature. Christianity inspires contempt for reality and reverence for a fiction. Thus, it is not Christianity’s contemptuousness that appalls Nietzsche. He endorses the attitude, but not the appropriateness of its object.

*3.4 Spernere se sperni*

I claimed above that Nietzsche set himself the task of repurposing Goethe’s appropriation of the medieval ascetic tradition according to which the cardinal virtues are *spernere mundum, spernere neminem, spernere se ipsum,* and *spernere se sperni*. This may have come as a surprise, but I hope that the previous three sub-sections have demonstrated what contempt for the world, for no one, and for oneself mean to Nietzsche. In the case of *spernere se ipsum*, we have direct textual evidence: he praises the free spirit for embodying such contempt in D 56. In the case of *spernere se sperni*, the textual evidence is even stronger. He uses the phrase three times in his published writings. We have already seen it in conjunction with *spernere se ipsum* in D 56. Nietzsche also discuses *spernere se sperni* in HH 137, where he characterizes it as at once sublime and dangerous (just like Christianity): some people “feel so great a need to exercise their strength and lust for power that, in default of other objects or because their efforts in other directions have always miscarried, they at last hit upon the idea of tyrannizing over certain parts of their own nature.” This is the same phenomenon as contempt “directed backwards” that we find in GM 2.18. Moreover, the process by which it takes place – immense will-to-power redirected to the self as a default intentional object because no other object is ready-to-hand – is exactly the phenomenon I’ve dubbed the “tenacity of the intentional”: “When an intentional state with a subpropositional object loses its object, the affective component of the state persists without a corresponding object, and that affect will generally be redeployed in a state with a distinct object” (Alfano 2010; see also 2013b). In this passage, Nietzsche goes on to say that people filled with *spernere se sperni* go out of their way to destroy their own reputations, to provoke the disrespect of others, and to prompt others to accuse them of inconsistency. In such paradoxical displays, “man worships a part of himself as God and for that he needs to diabolize the other part.” The prime exemplar Nietzsche names is none other than Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount. It might seem, then, that Nietzsche could not possibly be saying that *spernere se sperni* is noble. But that is exactly his claim: Christian contempt is dangerous *because* it is a temptation to people with a sense of nobility, with the *pathos of distance*.

The third passage in which Nietzsche discusses *spernere se sperni* is D 205. This is a delicate passage because it puts his troublesome conception of race and ethnicity on display. Nevertheless, the passage is hardly the stuff of anti-Semite dreams:

Every Jew possesses in the history of his fathers and grandfathers a great fund of examples of the coldest self-possession and endurance in fearful situations, of the subtlest outwitting and exploitation of chance and misfortune; their courage beneath the cloak of miserable submission, their heroism in *spernere se sperni*, surpasses the virtues of all the saints. For two millennia an attempt was made to render them contemptible by treating them with contempt, and by barring to them the way to all honors and all that was honorable, and in exchange thrusting them all the deeper into the dirtier trades – and it is true that they did not grow cleaner in the process. But contemptible? They themselves have never ceased to believe themselves called to the highest things.

We see here a struggle among social contempt (and disgust), self-contempt, and contempt for social contempt. Other Europeans, says Nietzsche, tried to render Jews contemptible by treating them with contempt. This is an invitation to self-contempt, shame, and humiliation. However, says Nietzsche, European Jews opposed this emotional attack with their own contempt: *spernere se sperni*. And this is what has made them so noble, in his eyes, that he looks forward to the day when he can “rejoice” to see Jews “as masters” of Europe. Leaving aside the monolithic and essentialist treatment of all Jews here, the structure of Nietzsche’s argument is clear: the contempt of others can sometimes be overcome by meta-contempt. One proves oneself noble by maintaining self-respect in the face of social contempt (and disgust).

Nietzsche makes a similar claim in HH 619, arguing that it is a “step towards independence when first we venture to express views regarded as disgraceful.” Even one’s “friends and acquaintances then begin to worry. The gifted nature must pass through this fire too; after it has done so it will belong much more to itself.” Scorn for the scorn of others is a way to emotionally vault oneself above a hierarchy in which one appears contemptible, and in so doing to performatively endorse an alternative hierarchy where one counts as noble. To put it in contemporary salty language, mastering *spernere se sperni* is the “subtle art of not giving a fuck” (Manson 2015), which is not only consistent with but indeed requires caring about something other than how one is perceived by one’s contemporaries in relation to ordinary normative standards.

*3.5 Nietzsche aims to induce what he considers fitting contempt in receptive readers*

Before turning to Nietzsche’s use of disgust, we must consider what it means for his writings to be “a schooling” in contempt (HH P1). Nietzsche does not provide a conceptual analysis of contempt. Nor does he simply report the people and things he happens to contemn. Rather, this schooling is his attempt to induce what he considers fitting contempt in receptive readers. He tells us as much in GM 2.24, when he asks who is strong enough to “wed the bad conscience to all the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal” and answers that it is “the redeeming man of great love and contempt,” namely, Zarathustra.

This is one reason why Nietzsche addresses his readership apostrophically, telling them what they must be like to be capable of understanding his writings. In the preface to A, he says, “my only readers, my true readers, my predestined readers” are “far above humanity in […] contempt.” In EH Books 2, he says that a “perfect reader” of his work would be a “monster of courage and curiosity.” In addressing his readers thus, he invites them to occupy the affective perspective from which his contempt (among other emotions) makes sense. This is at once a noble and a contemptuous stance to adopt. To the extent that Nietzsche succeeds in moving his readers to this position, he accomplishes what I’ve elsewhere called “Nietzschean summoning” (Alfano 2015b).

**4 Nietzsche on disgust**

Disgust is a nasty emotion. As Dan Kelly explains in his (2011; see also Strohminger 2014), it is associated with a characteristic “gape” face, the embodied affect of nausea, the impulse to withdraw, and a sense of the target’s impurity, corruption, and taboo infectiousness. Disgust seems to have a core set of universal elicitors that were evolutionarily selected for their association with poisons and pathogens, but people can easily acquire new elicitors. One prominent way to do so is to see someone else, especially a member of your in-group, express disgust. Disgust thus functions as an affective communication channel. Of course, Nietzsche did not have the benefit of acquaintance with 20th- and 21st-century moral psychology, but he seems to have been aware of many of these features of disgust, and to have turned them to his own purposes.

The catalogue of people, things, institutions, and values that nauseate Nietzsche is long: David Strauss’s writing (DS 4), David Strauss’s use of quotations (DS 6), the fact that nothing is truly new under the sun (HL 1), his own followers (HL 4), modern culture and mediocrity (HL 9; GS 86, 364; A 38), scholars and other cultured people who have no longing for genius (SE 3), the dishonesty of atheists who become religious believers (D 56), faith and dogmatism (GS 76), “moral chatter” and the mendacity of moralizers (GS 335; GM 3.19), patriotism and aestheticism (GS 347), Herbert Spencer’s attempt to reconcile egoism and altruism through Darwinism (GS 373), romanticism (GS 2nd P), anything “motley” (BGE 10), whatever is “clumsy and approximate” (BGE 227), Christian values (GM 2.24), and euphemizing what the “ascetic priest” does (GM 3.19). He often mixes a healthy dose of disgust at women into his lamentable remarks about gender. And that’s just a partial list.

*3.1 The use of disgust: detaching from an ideal*

Glancing at Figure 1 above, we can see that disgust and contempt frequently co-occur in Nietzsche’s writings, but that each also crops up independently. This suggests that he frequently puts disgust to the same uses as contempt, as we have already seen. For example, the “great disgust” is an input to affective civil war and rapprochement just as much as the “great contempt.” Furthermore, he thinks that Christianity is dangerous because it inspires both contempt for and disgust with humanity (SE 2; A 38).

Nietzsche also seems to think that, just as *spernere se sperni* enables one to performatively endorse an alternative to the value-structures available in one’s social world, so disgust enables one to divorce oneself from an ideal and perhaps in turn to become attached to a new ideal.[[11]](#footnote-11) In SE 5, he says that we “*begin* our association” with a new ideal “with a sudden contrast of light and darkness, intoxication and nausea – and that this is a repetition of an experience that is as old as ideals themselves.” There are thus twin affective aspects to revaluations of values: on the one hand, one is inspired, awed, or elevated by a new ideal; on the other hand, one is disgusted with or contemptuous of an old ideal. In HH Wanderer 7, Nietzsche claims that “the strongest argument against any proposition” is disgust at it.[[12]](#footnote-12) He seems to think that both emotional reactions are necessary. Awe without disgust merely grants “an intoxicating vision” that lasts only a few “moments at a time,” but disgust without awe leaves us “all the more painfully in the lurch and prey to an even deeper dissatisfaction” (SE 5). He worries that the great disgust unmixed with positive affect will ruin humanity (GM 3.14).

Nietzsche struggles throughout his writings to achieve and inspire in his readers this sort of deep ambivalence, this combination of disgust at currently-held values and admiration for new ones. It’s an essential element (along with curiosity) in what he calls *gay science*. The curious investigation of what is revolting and contemptible about ourselves is only tolerable when coupled with an almost-manic cheerfulness, a surfeit of positive affect that, in many cases, is derived from awe at a new ideal (GS 107). Nietzsche seems to think that, fortunately, disgust sometimes inspires more positive affects. For example, Zarathustra admits that there is “much filth in the world,” but counters this by saying, “nausea itself creates wings and water-divining powers” (Z Tables 14; see also BGE 203).

Why would an emotion as nasty as disgust be needed to detach oneself from an ideal? The explanation lies in Nietzsche’s drive psychology, which I do not have the space to explore in detail here.[[13]](#footnote-13) Suffice it to say that attachment to an ideal is, for Nietzsche, an affective relation, and that affects have a certain staying power or modal robustness. This is why he thinks that it’s pointless just to refute an idea that someone is attached to. Affects are only defeated by other affects (D 109; GM 3.7, 3.13). “Whoever wants to kill most thoroughly, *laughs*” (Z Festival 1) – presumably with contempt. If this is right, then Nietzsche employs contempt and, in extreme circumstances, disgust because he feels people are so attached to Christian ideals that only affects with great firepower will do the job.

*3.2 The danger of disgust*

I mentioned above that contemporary philosophers such as Kelly (2011) have argued that disgust should never be recruited and trusted as a moral emotion. His main reason is that disgust has so much firepower that it is dangerous. Nietzsche seems to have recognized this danger. His inquiries are a rollercoaster ride between the pure heights of contempt and the depths of disgust, as in the “subterranean” journeys of the *Genealogy*, each of which is interrupted by a disgusted cry of “Enough! Enough!” (*Genug! Genug!* GM 1.14, 2.25, 3.27). He realizes that he is playing with very dangerous affects, but his curiosity pushes him ever onward. “Every achievement, every step forward in knowledge, comes from *courage*, from harshness towards yourself, from cleanliness with respect to yourself… I do not refute ideals, I just put on gloves before them” (EH P3; see also EH Destiny 6; A 46).

Indeed, Nietzsche suggests that the capacity for fine-grained disgust is a mark of nobility. In BGE 26, he says that anyone “who, in intercourse with men, does not occasionally glisten in all the colors of distress, green and gray with disgust, satiety, sympathy, gloominess, and loneliness, is certainly not a man of elevated tastes,” but that knowledge can only be attained by someone who is willing to “take all this burden and disgust upon himself.” Later in the same book, he says that it “almost determines the order of rank *how* profoundly human beings can suffer” from nausea (BGE 270). In EH Wise 8, he boasts that the “sensitivity of my instinct for cleanliness is perfectly uncanny, and I can physiologically perceive the presence or – what am I saying? – the very center, the ‘intestines’, of every soul – I can *smell* it.” He goes on: “my humanity does *not* consist in sympathizing with people as they are, but instead in *putting up with* the fact that I sympathize with them” which requires frequent retreats into “*solitude*.”

**5 The *pathos of distance***

In Alfano (2015a), I argued that Nietzsche holds a modest person-type-relative unity-of-virtue thesis, according to which what’s intrinsically good for a particular type of person is to develop and act from character traits that “fit” her type, and that the virtues of a given type tend to support each other. In Alfano (2013a), I showed that we can tell what Nietzsche considers a virtue for *his* type by tracking his self-attributions, and that one of the cardinal virtues for his type is curiosity. Here, I argue that another virtue for Nietzsche’s type is the *pathos of distance*. In GS 379, Nietzsche claims that a sense of “refined contempt is our taste and privilege, our art, our virtue perhaps.” This, along with refined disgust, is what Nietzsche means by the *pathos of distance*. The phrase crops up in six passages in his published and authorized writings: BGE 257, GM 1.2, GM 3.14, A 43, A 57, and TI Skirmishes 37.

*5.1 BGE 257*

In this passage, Nietzsche characterizes the *pathos of distance* as the attitude that naturally develops among the ruling class in a highly stratified aristocracy, and claims that it is responsible for every “enhancement of the type ‘man’” that has ever occurred and ever will occur. This *pathos* involves constantly looking “afar” and “down upon subjects and instruments.” Nietzsche goes on to claim that, out of the *pathos of distance* grows “the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states – in brief, simply the enhancement of the type ‘man,’ the continual ‘self-overcoming of man.’” Although Nietzsche does not use ‘contempt’ or its cognates in this passage, it should be clear that he is referring to *spernere se ipsum*. Hierarchical social arrangements are here portrayed as conditions for the psychological possibility of the *pathos of distance* and the enhancement it enables. What Nietzsche values in all this is not the social arrangements themselves (he admits that the “truth is hard”) but the psychological possibilities they open or foreclose.

In what way are such social arrangements conditions for the psychological possibility of the *pathos of distance*?[[14]](#footnote-14) Are they necessary, sufficient, both? It’s not clear that Nietzsche has an answer to this question, though it seems most plausible to me that they are neither necessary nor sufficient but rather *most conducive to* the development of the pathos of distance. If this is on the right track, Nietzsche’s view is structurally similar to that of Lorraine Besser-Jones (2014, p. 5), who aims not to identify necessary and sufficient conditions for virtue but rather the “best path” to virtue.

*5.2 GM 1.2*

In this passage, Nietzsche claims, *contra* the “English psychologists,” that

it was ‘the good’ themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was out of this *pathos of distance* that they first seized the right to create values.

The *pathos of distance* presupposes a vertical contrast between what is noble, on the one hand, and what is plebeian and contemptible on the other hand. It assumes socially-sanctioned contempt. “The pathos of nobility and distance, as aforesaid, the protracted and domineering fundamental total feelings on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a lower order, to a ‘below’ – *that* is the origin of the antithesis ‘good’ and ‘bad.’” Once again, hierarchical social arrangements are here portrayed as conditions for the psychological possibility of the *pathos of distance*. This is because the *pathos of distance* involves not just any contempt, but *essentializing* contempt: contempt for others because of what they essentially are (which goes hand in hand with reverence for oneself in virtue of what one essentially is). By this I do not mean that those who embody the *pathos of distance* are *right* about essential properties (indeed, Nietzsche recognizes that they are *wrong*), but that the content of their attitudes is essentializing. This will be important in section 6 below. Before moving on to GM 3.14, it’s important to note that, in GM 1.6, Nietzsche introduces the priests, saying, “To this rule that a concept denoting political superiority always resolves itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul [i.e., the *pathos of distance*] it is not necessarily an exception […] when the highest caste is at the same time the *priestly* caste,” which emphasizes not just high and low (noble and contemptible) but “pure” and “impure” – i.e., the properties that disgust tracks. This contrast is then “dangerously deepened, sharpened, and internalized” – the disgust-equivalent of *spernere se ipsum*.

*5.3 GM 3.14*

This is the one passage in which Nietzsche uses ‘disgust’, ‘contempt’, and ‘*pathos of distance*’. He warns that the most fearsome calamity we face is the “great disgust” (*grosse Ekel*). He nauseates over “that most disgusting [*ekelhafteste*] species of the vain, the mendacious failures whose aim is to appear as ‘beautiful souls’ […] the species of moral masturbaters and ‘self-gratifiers.’” He recommends solitude so that “we may […] guard ourselves, my friends, against the two worst contagions that may be reserved just for us – against the *great disgust* [*grossen Ekel*] *at man!* against *great pity for man!*” Recall that, according to Nietzsche, pity is disguised contempt, and here you have the problem in a nutshell: overcoming the great disgust and the great contempt is at once Nietzsche’s highest aim and his greatest danger, which he can only hope to achieve with the aid of bouts of solitude. “It is in the swamp of self-contempt [*Selbstverachtung*] that every poisonous plant grows.” Hence, “the pathos of distance *ought*” to ensure that the healthy and noble have their solitude, their respite from the sick.

*5.4 A 43*

In this passage, Nietzsche says that one “cannot heap enough contempt” on the Christian idea that “as immortal souls, everyone is on the same level as everyone else,” which would make it impossible to distinguish the contemptible from the noble – precisely what causes the great contempt and the great disgust in Z Convalescent 2. Note that what Nietzsche objects to here is the idea that people are *essentially* the same, even if some may be higher and lower in non-essential ways. This notion contradicts what I above called the condition for the psychological possibility of the *pathos of distance*. And we see the same claim again here:

Christianity has waged a deadly war on every feeling of respect and distance between people, which is to say the *presupposition* of every elevation, […] it has used the *ressentiment* of the masses as its *main weapon* against *us*, against everything that is noble.

Because Christian values have triumphed, Nietzsche goes on to complain, “Nobody is courageous enough for special privileges these days, for the rights of the masters, for feelings of self-respect and respect among equals – for *a pathos of distance*.” Do the “masters” deserve these rights and privileges? Nietzsche doesn’t care. What matters is that they feel certain in them, which enables them to achieve things that only people possessed of immense self-confidence in their own essential properties can do.

*5.5 A 57*

In this passage, Nietzsche claims that the critic of Christianity, unlike the critic of Hinduism, “cannot but make Christianity look *contemptible*.” Unlike Christianity, which poses as a new religion, the book of Manu poses as ancient. In so doing, the book of Manu gives those who follow it a “right” to “aspire to the highest art of life. *To this end, it must be made unconscious*: this is the goal of every holy lie. – *Caste-order*, the most supreme, domineering law, is just the sanction of a *natural order*.” Note that Nietzsche here admits that the caste-order is a “lie.” Nevertheless, he praises this lie because it helps to establish the conditions for the psychological possibility of the *pathos of distance*. Unlike the “Chandala” (see also TI 3, 4, 45), those who, because they are socially dominant, feel spiritually dominant embody the affect that “*The world is perfect*.” Their instinctual thought is: “imperfection, every type of being that is *beneath* us, distance, the pathos of distance, even the Chandala belongs to this perfection.” This is the feeling of *amor fati* discussed above, the affirmation of life despite the existence of everything contemptible and disgusting. Nietzsche here ties the *pathos of distance* to the Law of Manu and the attitudes of the top caste towards the Chandala (formerly called “untouchables” in English, now “Dalit,” which means *oppressed*), who were traditionally considered disgusting because of their occupations (e.g., hide tanning, hunting, handling corpses). The upper caste feel that they “do not rule because they want to, but rather because they *exist*.” Once again, we see that the *pathos of distance* – fairly or not – essentializes both those who have it and those for whom they feel contempt and disgust.

*5.6 TI Skirmishes 37*

Finally, in this passage, Nietzsche claims that if his contemporary Germans “were to abstract from our sensitivity and maturity, our physiological aging process, then our ‘humanizing’ morality would immediately lose its value too” and would instead “inspire our contempt.” Contemporary morality, which emphasizes normative equality because descriptive equality continues to shrink, “essentially belongs to decline: the rift between people, between classes, the myriad number of types, the will to be yourself, to stand out, what I call the *pathos of distance*, is characteristic of every *strong* age.” Thus, Nietzsche’s key claims about the *pathos of distance* are:

1. Social and political hierarchy is the best path to the psychological capacity to embody the *pathos of distance*.
2. The *pathos of distance* is the only virtue that enables people to feel sufficient contempt and disgust for existing values to allow themselves to detach from these values and seek new ones.
3. The *pathos of distance* arises only to the extent that people feel essentializing contempt and disgust.

**6 Prospects for a Nietzschean democratic ethos**

For Nietzsche, the painful mental action of tearing oneself apart, of looking down scornfully into the dregs of one’s soul, is essentially intertwined with its opposite: staring in reverently up at what is most noble in oneself. As early as SE 1, he argued that the “true self” is the aspect of oneself that aspires and loves, the part that values.[[15]](#footnote-15) Here is the moving passage:

what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it? Set up these revered objects before you and perhaps their nature and their sequence will give you a law, the fundamental law of your own true self. Compare these objects one with another, see how one completes, expands, surpasses, transfigures another, how they constitute a stepladder upon which you have clambered up to yourself as you are now; for your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be. 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 educated or formed.

Nietzsche then contrasts the true self with “rubble and vermin,” with what is contemptible and disgusting. I contend that the process of eliminating, to the extent possible, what is contemptible in oneself while cultivating, to the extent possible, what is noble in oneself is what Nietzsche consistently named with the maxim, *become what you are*, a notion that he derived from Pindar’s second Pythian ode: “Become what you are, having learned what that is” (γένοι', οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών). As the classicist Glen Most (1985, pp. 102-3) has argued, this passage invites its addressee to manifest his true nature in conduct, having acquired knowledge of what that nature essentially is. If, as I have suggested, Nietzsche held that one’s true self is what looks contemptuously down at the rest of oneself (and on others), and at which the rest of oneself gazes reverently up, then becoming what one is is only possible through self-contempt.

I do not have the space to argue for it here, but in Alfano (2015a, 2015b, 2016a) I show that Nietzsche also held that beliefs about one’s essential self function as self-fulfilling prophecies. If that is right, it means that the part of oneself that one reveres as one’s true self, and which one has the opportunity to become, need not have an antecedent and independent existence. As I put it in Alfano (2015b, p. 266), Nietzsche held that noble people “are not already, but rather *become*, what they say they are. Their virtues are acquired through self-labeling.” Nevertheless, “*faith* *in* the Doctrine of the Hierarchy of Types (and faith that one’s own type is at or near the top of the hierarchy) is more important than actually *being* a person of a higher type” (Alfano 2015a, p. 434) because the self-fulfilling prophecy doesn’t work unless one has this faith. This is the crux of the problem for a Nietzschean democratic ethos.

The central argument made by Katsafanas, Hatab, and others who think that Nietzschean contempt and a democratic ethos are compatible appeals to Darwall’s (1977) distinction between recognition respect and appraisal respect. Recognition respect for other people, on this view, involves seeing them as equals in essential dignity, whereas appraisal respect involves positive evaluation of the object of respect for his or her merits. Katsafanas and others go on to point out that it is possible to contemn someone for their lack of merit while nevertheless according them recognition respect. Such ambivalent sentiments fit within a meritocratic democracy or democratic meritocracy.

While this is certainly a conceptual possibility, it is in deep tension with three aspects of Nietzschean contempt. First, as I argued above, Nietzsche thinks that social and political hierarchy is the best path to the psychological capacity to embody the *pathos of distance*. If this is right, then democratic meritocracy is not the best way to foster the *pathos of distance*, one of the most distinctive Nietzschean virtues. Still, one might think, there is only a tension here, not an outright contradiction. This leads to my second point. I also argued above that the *pathos of distance* arises only to the extent that people feel essentializing contempt and disgust. Appraisal respect and meritocracy, by contrast, only make sense in relation to non-essential properties. It’s a truism that one deserves no credit for one’s essential properties. I can’t be proud of my bipedalism. By the same token, it’s conceptually incoherence for appraisal respect (and contempt) to be essentializing, as Nietzschean contempt is. Moreover, a meritocracy based on unearned merit is a sham. Third, and perhaps most clearly, essentializing contempt is simply inconsistent with recognition respect. Recognition respect “is the acknowledgment in attitude and conduct of the dignity of persons as ends in themselves. Respect for such beings is not only appropriate but also morally and unconditionally required: the status and worth of persons is such that they must always be respected” (Dillon 2015). One simply cannot direct essentializing contempt and recognition respect towards the same person. Perhaps this makes Nietzschean contempt and the *pathos of distance* morally indefensible or unpalatable, but that should not blind us to what Nietzsche really means.

**References**

Alfano, M. (2016a). How one becomes what one is: The case for a Nietzschean conception of character development. In I. Fileva (ed.), *Perspectives on Character*. Oxford University Press.

Alfano, M. (2016b). *Moral Psychology: An Introduction*. Polity.

Alfano, M. (2016c). Swanton’s *The Virtue Ethics of Hume & Nietzsche*. *Ethics*.

Alfano, M. (2015a). An enchanting abundance of types: Nietzsche’s modest unity of virtue thesis. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 49(3): 417-35.

Alfano, M. (2015b). How one becomes what one is called: On the relation between traits and trait-terms in Nietzsche. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 46(1): 261-9.

Alfano, M. (2013a). The most agreeable of all vices: Nietzsche as virtue epistemologist. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 21(4): 767-90.

Alfano, M. (2013b). Nietzsche, naturalism, and the tenacity of the intentional. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 44(3): 457-64.

Alfano, M. (2010). The tenacity of the intentional prior to the *Genealogy*. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 40: 123-40.

Anderson, R. L. (2011). On the nobility of Nietzsche’s priests. In S. May (ed.), *Nietzsche’s* On the Genealogy of Morality, pp. 24-55. Cambridge University Press.

Bell, M. (2013). *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt*. Oxford University Press.

Besser-Jones, L. (2014). *Eudaimonic Ethics: The Philosophy and Psychology of Living Well*. Routledge.

Daigle, C. (2006). Nietzsche: Virtue ethics… virtue politics? *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 32: 1-21.

Darwall, S. (1977). Two kinds of respect*. Ethics*, 88(1): 36-49.

Dillon, R. (2015). Respect. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), E. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/respect/>.

D’Iorio, P. (2010). The digital critical edition of the works and letters of Nietzsche. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 40: 70-80.

Ekman, P. (2007). *Emotions Revealed, 2nd edition: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*. New York: Henry Holt.

Ekman, P., Campus, J., Davidson, R., & de Waal, F. (2003). *Emotions Inside Out: 130 Years After Darwin’s* The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals. New York Academy of Sciences, vol. 1000.

Ekman, P., Friesen, W., O’Sullivan, M., Diacoyanni-Tarlatzis, I., Krause, R., Pitcairn, T., Scherer, K., Chan, A., Heider, K., LeComplte, W., Ricci-Bitt, P., Tomita, M., & Tzavaras, A. (1987). Universals and cultural differences in the judgments of facial expressions of emotion. *Personality Processes and Individual Differences*, 53(4): 712-17.

Faulkner, J. (2013). Disgust, purity, and a longing for companionship: Dialectics of affect in Nietzsche’s imagined community. *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 44(1): 49-68.

Haidt, J. & Joseph, C. (2007). The moral mind: How 5 sets of innate moral intuitions guide the development of many culture-specific virtues, and perhaps even modules. In P. Carruthers, S. Laurence, & S. Stich (eds.), *The Innate Mind*, vol. 3, pp. 367-91. Oxford University Press.

Hatab, L. (1999). *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*. Chicago: Open Court.

Hunt, L. (1991). *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue*. London: Routledge

Hurka, T. (2007). Nietzsche: Perfectionist. In B. Leiter & N. Sinhababu (eds.), *Nietzsche and Morality*, pp. 9-31. Oxford University Press

Janaway, C. (2009). Autonomy, affect, and the self in Nietzsche’s project of genealogy. In K. Gemes & S. May (eds.), *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, pp. 51-68. Oxford University Press.

Katsafanas, P. (2013). *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism*. Oxford University Press.

Katsafanas, P. (2011). The relevance of history for moral philosophy: A study of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*. In S. May (ed.), *Nietzsche’s* On the Genealogy of Morality, pp. 170-92. Cambridge University Press.

Kelly, D. (2011). *Yuck! The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust*. MIT Press.

Leiter, B. (1997). Nietzsche and the morality critics. *Ethics*, 107(2): 250-285.

Leiter, B. (Winter 2015 Edition). Nietzsche’s moral and political philosophy. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, E. Zalta (ed.), url = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/>.

Loeb, P. (2010). *The Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*. Cambridge University Press.

Manson, M. (2015, January 8). The subtle art of not giving a fuck [blog post]. Retrieved 17 November 2015 from <http://markmanson.net/not-giving-a-fuck>.

May, S. (2011). Why Nietzsche is still in the morality game. In S. May (ed.), *Nietzsche’s* On the Genealogy of Morality, pp. 78-100. Cambridge University Press.

May, S. (1999). *Nietzsche’s Ethics and His War on ‘Morality’*. Oxford University Press.

Most, G. (1985). *The Measure of Praise: Structure and Function in Pindar’s Second Pythian and Seventh Nemean Odes*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Nussbaum, M. (2015). Transitional anger. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 1(1): 41-56.

Owen, D. (2002). Equality, democracy, and self-respect: Reflections on Nietzsche’s agonal perfectionism. *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 24: 113-31.

Owen, D. (2008). Nietzsche, ethical agency, and the problem of democracy. In H. Siemens & V. Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics*, pp. 143-68. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Poellner, P. (2007). Affect, value, and objectivity. In B. Leiter & N. Sinhababu (eds.), *Nietzsche and Morality*, pp. 227-61. Oxford University Press.

Railton, P. (2012). Nietzsche’s normative theory? The art and skill of living well. In C. Janaway & S. Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism, & Normativity*, pp. 20-51. Oxford University Press.

Reginster, B. (2013). Honesty and curiosity in Nietzsche’s free spirits. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 51(3): 441-63.

Reginster, B. (2011). The genealogy of guilt. In S. May (ed.), *Nietzsche’s* On the Genealogy of Morality, pp. 56-77. Cambridge University Press.

Reginster, B. (2006). *The Affirmation of Life*. Cambridge University Press.

Robertson, S. (2012). The scope problem – Nietzsche, the moral, ethical, and quasi-aesthetic. In C. Janaway & S. Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism, & Normativity*, pp. 81-110. Oxford University Press.

Rozin, P., Lowery, L., Imada, S., & Haidt, J. (1999). The CAD triad hypothesis: A mapping between three moral emotions (contempt, anger, disgust) and three moral codes (community, autonomy, divinity). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(4): 574-86.

Shweder, R., Much, N., Mahapatra, M., & Park, L. (1997). The “big three” of morality (autonomy, community, divinity), and the “big three” explanations of suffering. In A. M. Brandt & P. Rozin (eds.), *Morality and Health*, pp. 119-69. New York Routledge.

Strohminger, N. (2014). Disgust talked about. *Philosophy Compass*, 9(7): 478-93.

Strohminger, N. & Nichols, S. (2014). The essential moral self. *Cognition* 131: 159-71.

Swanton, C. (2015). *The Virtue Ethics of Hume & Nietzsche*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Thomas, A. (2012). Nietzsche and moral factionalism. In C. Janaway & S. Robertson (eds.), *Nietzsche, Naturalism, & Normativity*, pp. 133-59. Oxford University Press.

Von Tevenar, G. (forthcoming). Nietzsche on nausea. In K. Gemes & C. Janaway (eds.), *Nietzsche’s Values*. Oxford University Press.

White, A. (2001). The youngest virtue. In R. Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche’s Post-Moralism*, pp. 63-78. Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, J. (2007). Nietzsche and equality. In G. von Tevenar (ed.), *Nietzsche and Ethics*, pp. 221-40. Oxford: Peter Lang.

1. I carried out some of the research leading to this publication while I was affiliated as Visitor at the School of Philosophy, Australian National University. I also benefited from feedback from Sabine Roeser, Paul Katsafanas, Ken Gemes, Simon May, and Andrew Huddleston. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more on the Nietzschean virtue of curiosity, see Alfano (2013a) and Reginster (2013). For more on individuating virtues by indexing them to emotions, see Alfano (2016b, pp. 115-17). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I rely on the Cambridge translations throughout, though in some cases I modify them slightly for the sake of clarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a full introduction, see D’Iorio (2010). To my knowledge, the only paper to use the Nietzsche Source to comprehensively study Nietzsche’s use of a word is Alfano (2013a), which interprets his use of ‘curiosity’ (*Neugier*, *Wissbegier*) and cognates. The complete data-sets for that study as well as the present study are freely available at http://www.alfanophilosophy.com/dh-nietzsche/. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Alfano (2016c), which reviews Swanton’s (2015) jaw-droppingly inept misreadings of Nietzsche. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For the sake of continuity, I here use the somewhat old-fashioned ‘contemn’. Other translations of *verachten* include ‘despise’ and ‘scorn’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bell (2013) also points out that contempt typically leads the contemnor to shun or withdraw from the contemned. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See May (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Namely: BGE 224, 227, 269, 270; BT Self-criticism; D 469; GS P2, 346; HH P1, P3, P4, 629; HL 2, 5; NCW Object; RWB 6; TI Skirmishes; Z Evils, Small, Ugliest. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This point also sheds light on the otherwise-puzzling “two membranes” passage in GM 2.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Von Tevenar (forthcoming) makes a similar point. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Though, for a seemingly contrary view, see HH Wanderer 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For an excellent introduction, see Katsafanas (2013, pp. 161-82). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Thanks to Paul Katsafanas for raising this question. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Recent work in moral psychology suggests that this is also the folk conception of the true self (Strohminger & Nichols 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)