

Generosity as a central virtue in Nietzsche's ethics¹

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Abstract

Nietzsche's ethics is basically an ethics of virtue. In his own unique way, and in accordance with his extra-moral view of life, Nietzsche recovers and re-appropriates certain virtues – notably pagan, aristocratic virtues – as part of his project to reconceptualise ('rehabilitate') the virtues in terms of *virtù* (virtuosity and vitality), to which he also refers as his 'moraline-free' conception of the virtues. The virtue of generosity (in the sense of magnanimity) plays a central role in Nietzschean ethics. According to Nietzsche, the truly noble or virtuous person is one who lives beyond resentment and feelings of remorse and guilt. He lives his life from the fullness and plenitude of his own being and what he is able to bestow on others. Nietzsche seeks to rekindle and rehabilitate the aristocratic 'pathos of distance' as the true origin of ethical life. This pathos of distance basically emanates from self-respect: 'The noble soul has reverence for itself' (1974b: §287). For Nietzsche, this means that one should realize the greatest multiplicity of drives and form-giving forces in oneself, in the most tension-fraught but 'controlled' manner. This control, this imposing a form on oneself without neglecting the multiplicity in oneself, is a creative, artistic activity. Nietzsche also refers to this as a process of transforming the self into a work of art, of giving style to one's own existence. Thus we free ourselves from guilt, resentment and the rage against contingency. It is of the utmost importance for Nietzsche that one should attain satisfaction with oneself, for 'only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight.' (1974a: §290). To attain satisfaction with oneself ultimately means to affirm life in its totality. This implies a life beyond resentment, i.e. a life that is characterised by generosity or magnanimity (*megalopsychia*, *magnanimitas*), which is for Nietzsche the 'crown' of all the virtues.

1. Nietzsche's extramoral (außermoralische) view of life: Rehabilitating the virtues

Only after we have recognized everything as lies and appearance do we regain the right to this fairest of falsehoods, virtue ... only by exhibiting virtue as a form of immorality do we again justify it (Nietzsche, 1968: §328).

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The aim of this article is to highlight the important role played by the virtue of generosity in Nietzsche's extra-moral, 'aristocratic' ethics. Nietzsche's ethics is basically an ethics of virtue. In his own unique way, and in accordance with his extra-moral view of life, Nietzsche recovers and re-appropriates certain virtues – notably pagan, aristocratic virtues – as part of his project to reconceptualise ('rehabilitate') the virtues in terms of *virtù* (virtuosity and vitality), to which he also refers as his 'moraline-free' conception of the virtues.

It is important to understand Nietzsche's views on virtue against the background of his genealogy of morals and his project of a 'transvaluation' (*Umwertung*) of all values. According to him, values (and by implication virtues) had their origin in the aristocratic ethos, which was characterised by a pathos of distance and an uncompromising distinction between good (*vornehm*) and bad, noble and common. Particularly important is the following statement:

Now it is plain to me ...: the judgment 'good' did *not originate* with those to whom 'goodness' was shown! Rather 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 and to coin names for values ... The pathos of nobility and distance, as aforesaid, the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a 'below' – *that* is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad' ... It follows from this origin that the word 'good' was definitely *not* linked from the first and by necessity to 'unegoistic' actions, as the superstition of these genealogists of morality would have it. Rather it was only when aristocratic value judgments *declined* that the whole antithesis 'egoistic' 'unegoistic' obtruded itself more and more on the human conscience – it is, to speak in my own language, the *herd instinct* that through this antithesis at last gets its word (and its *words*) in. And even then it was a long time before that instinct attained such dominion that moral evaluation was actually stuck and halted at this antithesis (as, for example, is the case in contemporary Europe: the prejudice that takes 'moral', 'unegoistic', '*désintéressé*' as concepts of equivalent value already rules today with the force of a 'fixed idea' and brain-sickness). (1969b: I, §2)²

It is clear from this passage that Nietzsche's revaluation or rehabilitation of virtue must be understood as an attempt to revive something of the lost aristocratic ethos in the present. Elsewhere he says that his aim is 'to defend virtue against the preachers of virtue [for] they are its worst enemies.' Moralists preach 'virtue as an ideal *for everyone*', thus depriving virtue of 'the charm of rareness, exceptionalness and unaverage-ness – its aristocratic magic.' Nietzschean virtue, by contrast, does not unite people, nor does it relate in any way to that which is common to all people. 'It is unprofitable, imprudent, it isolates... it arouses enmity toward order, toward the lies that are concealed in every order, institution, actuality' (1968: §317). Here Nietzsche is probably referring to those lies that justify the herd's ordering of selves into its institutional arrangements. They posit commonalities where there is difference, conformity where there is resistance, community where there is individuality. In opposition, Nietzsche

² See also Nietzsche (1997: §45) 'Twofold history of good and evil'.

wants to animate and cultivate resistance against the established order and its systems of operation³ by inventing alternative constructions of the self, which attest to personal creativity, ingenuity and artistic sensibility. Dismissing Kant's notion of the categorical imperative he writes:

A virtue has to be *our* invention, *our* most personal defense and necessity: – in any other sense it is merely a condition of *danger*. What does not condition our life *harms* it: a virtue merely from a feeling of respect for the concept ‘virtue’ as Kant desired it is harmful... The profoundest laws of preservation and growth demand the reverse of this: That each one of us should devise *his own* virtue, *his own* categorical imperative (1985: §11).

Nietzsche frequently refers to himself as an advocate of ‘moraline-free’ *virtù*⁴ (in the pre-Socratic Greek, Roman and Renaissance sense of the word), thereby rejecting the common and perverted view of virtue as promoted by the herd mentality – by Christianity, Kantianism and other kinds of moralism. If virtue (in the sense of *virtù*) accidentally also works to the advantage of the herd, then it is an unintentional consequence, which leaves Nietzsche completely cold. Extremely important are the following two passages, where Nietzsche emphatically distances himself from the moralising approach to virtue, and where he relates virtue to the aristocratic notions of ‘virtuosity’ and excellence:

What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, power itself in man. What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome. *Not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue, but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtù*, virtue free of moralic acid)... (1985: §2)

I recognize virtue in that (1) it does not desire to be recognized; (2) it does not presuppose virtue everywhere, but precisely something else; (3) it does not suffer from the absence of virtue, but on the contrary regards this as the distancing relationship on the basis of which there is something to honor in virtue; it does not communicate itself; (4) it does not propagandise – (5) it permits no one to judge it, because it is always virtue for itself; (6) it does all that is generally forbidden: virtue, as I understand it, is the real *vetitum* within all herd legislation; (7) in short, it is virtue in the style of the Renaissance, *virtù*, moraline-free virtue. (1968: §317)

From the last quote, it is clear that for Nietzsche *virtù* is the real *vetitum* (the fundamental forbidden) of herd legislation, because it refuses the herd's claim on one's self; it is uncommunicative, it stands apart from the herd's morality game insofar as standing apart is possible. And as Bonnie Honig (1993: 67) says, ‘this “apartness” problematizes the herd's form of life since the fundamental claim and aspiration of herd morality is its universality: the values of the herd address and apply to everyone; that is the lesson the little lambs sought to teach the birds who preyed on them....’⁵ Nietzschean *virtù* refuses the herd's will to system and celebrates the necessary failure

3 For Nietzsche, ‘the will to system is a lack of integrity.’ (1968: §95)

4 *Virtù* is a term which he took over from Machiavelli. Originally it comes from the Roman *virtus* which signified something like manliness or courageousness, extolled as a virtue especially by Cicero.

5 Here, Honig is referring to Nietzsche's famous parable of the birds of prey and the little lambs, GM I,13.

of its attempts to mould the world in its image, according to its imaginings, because it is precisely those failures that make art and wisdom possible.

Although Nietzsche strongly insists upon the pathos of distance and solitude on the part of the truly noble and virtuous person, this is, arguably, for Nietzsche not an end in itself. It forms part of an overall strategy towards self-creation and self-formation, which basically emanates from self-respect: 'The noble soul has reverence for itself' (1974b: §287). For Nietzsche, this means that one should realise the greatest multiplicity of drives and form-giving forces in oneself, in the most tension-fraught but 'controlled' manner.⁶ This control, this imposing a form on oneself without neglecting the multiplicity in oneself, is an extremely difficult task – one that is impossible to accomplish once and for all and, in this sense, *übermenschlich*.⁷ A truly virtuous life is characterised by constant tension between the different 'identities' and 'instincts' that one harbours in oneself:

... the highest man, if such a concept be allowed, would be the man who represented the antithetical character of existence most strongly, as its glory and sole justification – Commonplace men can represent only a tiny nook and corner of this natural character: they perish when the multiplicity of elements and the tension of opposites, i.e. the precondition for greatness in man, increases. (1968: §881)

The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, where the plant 'man' shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully ..., but are controlled. (1968: §966)

Exercising control in such a way that it does not negate multiplicity is a great art. It requires a tremendous amount of ingenuity, creative imagination, subtlety – in short, all those qualities that we normally associate with the world of art and artistry. Indeed, Nietzsche refers to this as a process of transforming the self into a work of art, of giving style to one's own existence:

One thing is needful. – To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as an art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed –

6 See the extensive commentary of Van Tongeren (2000: 240-41), which clearly shows that, for Nietzsche, true self-respect means to remain standing between the two dangers of dogmatism ('overestimation of the nook in which [one] sits' – 1974a: §366) on the one hand, and dispersion and falling to pieces ('[to] be seduced into dilettantism, into becoming an insect with thousand feet and thousand antennae ... a pied piper of the spirit, in short a mis-leader' – 1974b: §205) on the other hand. Of central importance is the following: 'Not to remain stuck to a person – not even the most loved – every person is a prison, also a nook. Not to remain stuck to a fatherland ... Not to remain stuck to some pity – not even for higher men into whose rare torture and helplessness some accident allowed us to look. Not to remain stuck to a science – even if it should lure us with the most precious finds that seem to have been saved up precisely for us. Not to remain stuck to one's own detachment, to that voluptuous remoteness and strangeness of the bird who flees ever higher to see ever more below him – the danger of the flier. Not to remain stuck to our own virtues and become as a whole the victim of some detail in us ... One must know how to *conserve oneself*: the hardest test of independence.' (1974b: §41)

7 Nietzsche's overman (*Übermensch*) is primarily a name for an ideal that is and remains at a distance from human life. It might be approached, but it is never completely realized: 'Never yet has there been an overman' ('On Priests', 1978: II). See also ('Books', 1, 1969b).

both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime ... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste! (1974a: §290)

Nietzsche is quick to add that this aesthetic self-creation requires discipline. Thus it is only meant for those with 'strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own.' He contrasts these strong individuals with the weaker types, 'without power over themselves that *hate* the constraint of style'.

To give style to one's own existence means, in the words of Bonnie Honig (1993: 62), 'to develop a signature, an individuality, by working with, reshaping, and exploring the possibilities contained in and presented by raw materials that we did not choose.' And, as Honig quite rightly says, by doing this, 'we free ourselves of the rage against contingency by beautifying, deifying, sometimes concealing, and thereby unifying until we are satisfied with ourselves, until we have recovered ourselves by, in effect, re-covering ourselves... By giving up the demand that we, in our particularity, fit the requirements of the general category of subjectivity, we free ourselves from the "will of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for".⁸ Nietzsche's re-covered self-discipline liberates us from the rage against contingency *because* it operates according to a principle of selectivity, because it is governed by a single taste, and because its object is particular.' (ibid.)

Honig reminds us that it was Kant who indicated, in his *Critique of Judgment*, that the problem of contingency emerges only as a problem when we commit ourselves to 'objective' knowledge about reality: 'The process of objective knowing subsumes particulars under general categories – concepts – that relegate the particular to the realm of the unknowable or contingent: they suppress difference. The problem of the particular, of the contingent or different, disappears if we give up on this project or explanation via subsumption. And we can do this through art' (1993: 62). However, whereas Kant saw an analogy between the realm of art (the realm of beauty, of the particular) and the realm of morality, and tried to reconcile these two realms with each other, Nietzsche perceives the realm of art and the 'beautiful' (or the 'sublime' as Kant also called it) as an *alternative* for the impositional constructions of morality, just as he sees in his re-covered self-discipline an alternative for the self-discipline of the moralists (1993: 63). Honig then adds the following salient remark: 'Nietzsche's re-covered self-discipline valorizes the particularity and multiplicity that make the self resistant to the formation of moral, responsible subjectivity. His disciplined artist sees his unruly, multiple, and particular self as the source of a singular vitality and richness he distinctively shapes. He does not seek total self-mastery (and he does not experience the vengefulness that comes with that quest) because he understands Zarathustra's observation that "one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star."⁹ Neither does he expect total submission. He knows that his canvas is not passive and that artistry is interactive. He is responsive to the self as he shapes it' (1993: 63).

In contrast, the self-discipline of the moralists is characterized by resentful self-ab-

⁸ Honig is referring to Nietzsche (1969b: II, §2).

⁹ See Nietzsche ('Zarathustra's Prologue', §5, 1978).

negation, which is symptomatic of pervasive feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent with oneself. This is then why Nietzsche makes the following statement:

For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight. For the sight of what is ugly makes one bad and *gloomy*. (1974a: §290)

Unlike the moralist, the artist does not sink into a state of gloominess and resentment, because he does not measure himself against some unattainable (transcendent) and universal standard. He realises the wisdom of Zarathustra's admonition:

Do not be virtuous beyond your powers! And do not ask anything improbable of yourselves! Follow in the footsteps of your father's virtue! How would you climb high if the will of your fathers did not climb with you? ... And you should not pretend to be saints in those matters in which your fathers were vicious! ('Of the Higher Man', 1978: IV.)

To this Zarathustra adds the following words of encouragement:

And if great things you attempted have turned out failures, does that mean you yourselves are – failures? And if you yourselves have turned out failures, does that mean – man is a failure? If man has turned out a failure, however: very well! come on! ('Of the Higher Man', 1978: IV.)

The higher its type, the less often does a thing succeed. You Higher Men here, are you not all – failures? Be of good courage, what does it matter! How much is still possible! Learn to laugh at yourselves as a man ought to laugh! ... And truly, how much has already succeeded! How rich this earth is in good little perfect things, in well-constituted things! Set good little perfect things around you, you Higher Men! Things whose golden ripeness heals the heart. Perfect things teach hope. ('On Science', 1978: IV.)

For Nietzsche the truly virtuous, noble human beings are those solitary individuals who have attained a state of self-satisfaction or contentedness. This does not mean, however, that one becomes uncritical towards oneself, nor does it imply an attitude of passivity and indifference¹⁰ (this would simply be symptomatic of nihilism). Rather, it means that one no longer plays the morality game, i.e. one is no longer driven by feelings of resentment and self-loathing. Hence, one no longer hankers after some transcendent power that can somehow give meaning to one's supposedly 'corrupt' and miserable existence. To be virtuous, in the Nietzschean sense, does not allow any feelings of aversion to life and its vicissitudes. On the contrary, it means a total affirmation of life. It points to a kind of existence beyond *ressentiment*, i.e. an existence characterised by generosity and magnanimity.

2. Generosity as the crowning virtue

If one is to choose a single word or concept that would best capture Nietzsche's under-

¹⁰ Nietzsche (1968: §951) points out that 'self-satisfaction' in the ordinary sense of the word does not pertain to the character of the noble person: 'Even "self-satisfaction" is *not* part of it; one should be adventurous, experimental, destructive also toward oneself – no beautiful-soul twaddle – . I want to make room for a more robust ideal.'

standing of virtue, then the concept of ‘generosity’ (in the sense of ‘magnanimity’) immediately comes to mind. This concept is of course not at all foreign to the long-standing tradition of virtue ethics. Generosity (*megalopsychia*, *magnanimitas*) is often mentioned among the traditional virtues, particularly the so-called pagan (pre-Christian), ‘aristocratic’ virtues. Aristotle gives an extensive portrayal of the generous or magnanimous person:

Well, a person is considered to be magnanimous if he thinks that he is worthy of great things, provided that he *is* worthy of them ... magnanimous people are concerned with honour, because it is honour above all that they claim as their due, and deservedly ... It would seem that the magnanimous man is characterized by greatness in every virtue ... magnanimity seems to be a sort of crown of the virtues, because it enhances them and is never found apart from them. This makes it hard to be truly magnanimous, because it is impossible without all-round excellence ... At great honours bestowed by responsible persons he will feel pleasure, but only a moderate one, because he will feel that he is getting no more than his due, or rather less, since no honour can be enough for perfect excellence. Nevertheless he will accept such honours, on the ground that there is nothing greater they can give him. But honour conferred by ordinary people for trivial reasons he will utterly despise, because that sort of thing is beneath his dignity. And similarly with dishonour, because it cannot rightfully attach to him ... but he will also be moderately disposed to wealth, power, and every kind of good and bad fortune, however it befalls him ... He is disposed to confer benefits, but is ashamed to accept them, because the one is the act of a superior and the other that of an inferior. When he repays a service he does so with interest, because in this way the original benefactor will become his debtor and beneficiary ... Another mark of the magnanimous man is that he never, or only reluctantly, makes a request, whereas he is eager to help others. He is haughty towards those who are influential and successful, but moderate towards those who have an intermediate position in society, because in the former case to be superior is difficult and impressive, but in the latter it is easy; and to create an impression at the expense of the former is not ill-bred, but to do so among the humble is vulgar – like using one's strength against the weak ... He does not nurse resentment, because it is beneath magnanimous man to remember things against people, especially wrongs; it is more like him to overlook them ... (1976: IV, iii, 1123b-1125a)¹¹

This portrayal of the magnanimous man corresponds with Aristotle's aristocratic conception of excellence, and it was still vividly alive in the ethical thinking of Renaissance writers like Montaigne.¹² In Descartes' treatment of the good life, as developed in the *Passions of the Soul*, the traditional catalogue of cardinal virtues is boiled down

11 Compare the following remark by Aristotle: ‘So it is right for the good man to be self-loving, because then he will both be benefited himself by performing fine actions, and also help others. But it is not right for the bad man, because he will injure both himself and his neighbours by giving way to base feelings’ (1976 : IX, viii, 1169a).

12 See for instance the following statement by Montaigne (quoted in Schneewind 1990, vol. 1: 39): ‘Man in his highest estate is one of that small number of excellent and select men who, having been endowed with fine and particular natural ability, have further strengthened and sharpened it by care, study and art, and raised it to the highest pitch of wisdom. They have fashioned their soul to all directions and angles, supported it with all the outside assistance that was fit for it, and enriched and adorned it with all they

to just one, which he calls *la générosité* and which seems to have quite a lot in common with the Aristotelian notion of noble-mindedness or magnanimity.¹³ He too extols it as the crowning virtue, or as he puts it, as the 'key to all the other virtues and a general remedy for every disorder of the passions' (Descartes, 1991: art. 161).

David Hume also assigns a central role to generosity or magnanimity in his ethics, particularly where he refers to the virtues or 'qualities immediately agreeable to ourselves' (1966: 250 passim.). According to him, magnanimity is closely associated with qualities such as 'cheerfulness' and the 'sublime' and it means to have 'a proper sense of what is due to one's self', as well as 'a dignity and right of empire', exemplified for instance in the figure of Alexander the Great.¹⁴ He contrasts this with the vice of 'meanness' (small-mindedness) and comes to the following conclusion:

A certain degree of generous pride or self-value is so requisite, that the absence of it in the mind displeases, after the same manner as the want of a nose, eye, or any of the most material feature of the face or member of the body... Where a man has no sense of value in himself, we are not likely to have any higher esteem of him. (1966: 253, 254 n4)

Nietzsche, in turn, in countless passages throughout his work uses concepts such as *Seelengrösse*, *Grösse der Seele* and *geistiger Grösse* ('greatness of soul' and 'greatness of spirit'), as well as *Grossmut* ('magnanimity') when referring to his 'ideal' or noble human being.¹⁵ Kaufmann points to the strong resemblances between Nietzsche's conception of the noble person and Aristotle's portrayal of the 'magnanimous man' in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, referred to above.¹⁶ In fact, he is of the opinion that the latter serves as a leitmotiv in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*. One might even go further and state that for Nietzsche, like Aristotle, generosity is the 'crowning virtue'. To me this seems quite obvious, as generosity is clearly the exact opposite of *ressentiment*, which according to Nietzsche, lies at the root of slave morality and the decay and perversion of what is best in human nature. Hence one may safely assume that generosity and all those qualities normally associated with it would play a central role in the ex-

could borrow, for its advantage, from the inside and outside of the world; it is in them that the utmost height of human nature is to be found.'

13 Thus, like Aristotle, Descartes connects the virtue of generosity with a certain dignity and legitimate self-esteem: it 'causes a person's self-esteem to be as high as it legitimately may be' (1991: art. 153). However, as John Cottingham (1998: 100-103) points out, with Descartes there is a decisive shift away from the traditional, aristocratic view of excellence with its emphasis on outward achievement and its reliance on good fortune. In Descartes' Christianised understanding of ethics, generosity (and hence virtue in general) must at all costs remain immune to the vicissitudes of fortune, and (in a striking anticipation of Kant) will depend on inner rectitude alone. True generosity, Descartes proclaims, is a matter not of outward achievements matching one's natural endowments and civic status, but of the inner exercise of will. True generosity still involves justified self-esteem (like its pagan original), but, quite unlike the pagan model, it is self-esteem for the resolute and well-directed use of free will, which is supposedly within the power of all.

14 Compare the following remark by Hume (1966: 269-70) on the generous person: 'Cheerfulness ... runs through the whole tenor of his life, and preserves a perpetual serenity on his countenance, and tranquillity in his soul. He has met with severe trials, misfortunes as well as dangers; and by his greatness of mind, was still superior to all of them.' For Hume these character traits have nothing in common with practices of self-chastisement or the so-called 'monkish virtues'.

15 See for instance Nietzsche (1996: I, §521, §588); (1997: §315, §393, §459, §464, §556); (1974a: §3, §49); (1974b: §212); ('Zarathustra', 6, 1969b); (1968: §928, §935, §981, §984, §1040).

16 See Kaufmann (1974: Chapter 12, section vi), as well as his introduction to Nietzsche (1969b).

tra-moral ethics that Nietzsche develops as an antidote to slave morality in all its manifestations.

So what does Nietzsche say about generosity? I cannot go into too much detail here. I shall restrict myself to a few brief remarks about what I deem to be important. First of all, it is interesting to note that, when Nietzsche speaks specifically about generosity, he often relates it to self-sacrifice and a lack of self-interest. In the eyes of common people, the noble and generous person appears to be foolish and awkward, because he does not act from considerations of expediency and self-interest:

Common natures consider all noble, magnanimous feelings inexpedient and therefore first of all incredible ... they see the noble person as a kind of fool; they despise him in his joy and laugh at his shining eyes ... What distinguishes the common type is that it never loses sight of its advantage, and that this thought of purpose and advantage is even stronger than the strongest instincts; not to allow these instincts to lead one astray to perform inexpedient acts – that is their wisdom and pride. Compared to them, the higher type is more *unreasonable*, for those who are noble, magnanimous, and self-sacrificial do succumb to their instincts, and when they are at their best, their reason *pauses* ... The taste of the higher type is for exceptions, for things that leave most people cold ... This is the eternal injustice of those who are noble. (1974a: §3)¹⁷

The amazing intensity of passion and lack of calculated self-interest on the part of the noble and generous person typically manifests itself, according to Nietzsche, in the transience of his fury – and in his renunciation of revenge – against those who have harmed him:

Magnanimity and related matters – ... The magnanimous person ... appears to me as an extremely vengeful person who beholds satisfaction so close at hand and who drains it so fully and thoroughly to the last drop, in *anticipation*, that a tremendous and quick nausea follows this quick orgy, and he now rises 'above himself', as they say, and forgives his enemy, and even blesses and honors him. With this violence against himself, with this scorn for his lust for revenge that a moment ago was still so powerful, he merely yields to a new impulse that has now attained power over him ... Magnanimity contains the same degree of egoism as does revenge, but egoism of a different quality. (1974a: §49)¹⁸

In the work of Nietzsche, generosity is also related to experiences of pride and suffi-

17 Compare Nietzsche (1968: §317): 'Virtue has all the instincts of the average man against it ...' and (1997: §459), especially the concluding sentence: 'The fairest virtue of the great thinker is the magnanimity with which, as a man of knowledge, he intrepidly, often with embarrassment, often with sublime mockery and smiling – offers himself and his life as a sacrifice.'

18 Cf. (1969a: I, §10): 'While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself (*gennaios* 'of noble descent' underlines the nuance 'upright' and probably also 'naïve'), the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul *squints*; his spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as *his* world, *his* security, *his* refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble. A race of such men of *ressentiment* is bound to become eventually *cleverer* than any noble race; it will also honor cleverness to a far greater degree... *Ressentiment* itself, if it should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not *poison*: on the other hand, it fails to appear at all on countless occasions on which it inevitably appears in the weak and impotent.'

cient power, which are, according to him, the seat of those 'virtues that incur costs'. In this regard, he says the following:

As members of society we believe we ought not to practise certain virtues from which as private persons we acquire the highest honour and a certain satisfaction, for example mercy and consideration for transgressors of all kinds – in general any action by which the interests of society would suffer through our virtue. No bench of judges may conscientiously practise mercy: this privilege is reserved to the king *as an individual*; one rejoices when he makes use of it, as proof that one would like to be merciful, even though as a society one absolutely cannot be. Society thus recognizes only those virtues that are advantageous, or at least not harmful to it (those that can be practised without loss, for example justice). Those virtues that incur loss cannot, consequently, have come into existence *within society* ... They are thus the virtues belonging among non-equals, devised by the superior, the individual; they are the virtues of *rulers* bearing the sense: 'I am sufficiently powerful to put up with palpable loss, this is a proof of my power' – and are thus virtues related to *pride* (1996: II, §34).¹⁹

Nietzsche never tires of showing his contempt for moralism and its perversion of virtue in general, and generosity in particular. He briefly formulates his own conception of generosity as follows:

It is richness in personality, abundance in oneself, overflowing and bestowing,²⁰ instinctive good health and affirmation of oneself, that produce great sacrifice and great love: it is strong and godlike selfhood from which these affects grow, just as surely as do the desire to become master, encroachment, the inner certainty of having a right to everything. What according to common ideas are opposite dispositions are rather *one* disposition; and if one is not firm and brave with oneself, one has nothing to bestow and cannot stretch out one's hand to protect and support – (1968: §386)²¹

True generosity is only possible when one lives in total self-affirmation, in a state of self-sufficiency and contentment. This implies an existence that transcends the moralistic distinction between good and evil and the concomitant feelings of guilt and self-chastisement. The truly generous person never succumbs to feelings of guilt, remorse and self-reproach. To remain stuck in such feelings is for him a sign of coward-

19 Compare, however, the following remark by Nietzsche: 'It is not unthinkable that a society might attain such *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it – letting those who harm it go *unpunished*. 'What are my parasites to me?' it might say. 'May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!' The justice which began with 'everything is dischargeable, everything must be discharged', ends by winking and letting those incapable of discharging their debt go free: it ends, as does every good thing on earth, by *overcoming itself*. This self-overcoming of justice: one knows the beautiful name it has given to itself – *mercy*; it goes without saying that mercy remains the privilege of the most powerful man, or better, his – beyond the law' (1969a: II, §10).

20 See Nietzsche ('Of the Bestowing Virtue', 1978: I). I find this extremely important for an adequate understanding of Nietzsche's views on virtue. See also Schoeman (2004: 59-63).

21 Cf. WP 932: 'Well-meaning, helpful, good-natured attitudes of mind have not come to be honored on account of their usefulness, but because they are states of richer souls that are capable of bestowing and have their value in the feeling of the plenitude of life. Observe the eyes of benefactors: what one sees is the antithesis of self-denial, of hatred for the *moi*, of 'Pascalism'.'

ice and hypocrisy. One should rather choose to live proudly and candidly – which does not mean the same as shamelessness and unscrupulousness:

Against remorse. – I do not like this kind of cowardice toward one's own deeds; one should not leave oneself in the lurch at the onset of unanticipated shame and embarrassment. An extreme pride, rather, is in order. After all, what is the good of it! No deed can be undone by being regretted; no more than by being 'forgiven' or 'atoned for'. One would have to be a theologian to believe in 'guilt': we immoralists prefer not to believe in 'guilt'. We hold instead that every action is of identical value at root – and that actions that turn *against* us may, economically considered, be nonetheless useful, generally desirable actions ... (1968: §235)

It should be noted that Nietzsche denounces the notion of forgiveness in this passage. According to him, forgiveness is too closely associated with guilt and remorse, hence also with the moralism that he despises so much. Far from being an antidote to *ressentiment* and revengefulness, it in fact strengthens these vices and helps to keep them intact. As I tried to explain elsewhere (Schoeman, 2004: 199-205), the truly generous and noble person lives in terms of a radically 'other' conscience and sense of justice compared to its moralistic version, which is basically driven by *ressentiment*. Such a person lives not only beyond revenge and retaliation, but even beyond acts of forgiveness or confession. Such a person is simply inclined to *forget* about the wrongs that have been done to him or that he may have done to others. At the very least, he does not take those wrongs seriously for too long. Nietzsche puts it as follows:

To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long – that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget (a good example of this in modern times is Mirabeau, who had no memory for insults and vile actions done to him and was unable to forgive simply because he – forgot). Such a man shakes off with a *single* shrug much vermin that eats deep into others ... (1969a: I, §10)

Immediately upon this, Nietzsche makes the interesting remark that only such a noble and generous person is capable of true love and respect for his enemies (insofar as that is possible at all):

here alone genuine 'love of one's enemies' is possible – supposing it to be possible at all on earth. How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies! – and such reverence is a bridge to love.– For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and *very much* to honor! (1969a: I, §10)²²

22 Cf. (1969b: I, 7): 'I am warlike by nature. Attacking is one of my instincts. Being *able* to be an enemy, *being* an enemy – perhaps that presupposes a strong nature; in any case, it belongs to every strong nature... the *aggressive* pathos belongs just as necessarily to strength as vengefulness and rancor belong to weakness... The strength of those who attack can be measured in a way by the opposition that they require: every growth is indicated by the search for a mighty opponent – or problem ... The task is *not* simply to master what happens to resist, but what requires us to stake all our strength, suppleness, and fighting skill – opponents that are our *equals*. Equality before the enemy: the first presupposition of an *honest* duel. Where one feels contempt, one *cannot* wage war; where one commands, where one sees something beneath oneself, one has no business waging war. My practice of war can be summed up in

Furthermore, it is characteristic of the generous person that he never draws attention to himself; he would never boast about his good deeds, but would rather act 'anonymously':

It is so ungrateful always to play the bestower and giver and to show one's face when doing so! But to give and bestow and to conceal one's name and awareness one is bestowing a favour! (1997: §464)

In a certain sense, generosity goes hand in hand with modesty, provided that it is not understood in a false, hypocritical and moralistic way:

There is true modesty (that is, the recognition that we are not the work of ourselves); and it well becomes the great mind because it is precisely he who can grasp the idea of his complete unaccountability (also for the good he creates). One hates the immodesty of the great man, not to the extent that it comes from a sensation of his own strength, but through it he evidences a desire to experience this strength by wounding others, treating them in a domineering way and seeing how they will put up with it. As a rule this behaviour is even a sign that he lacks a calm certainty of his strength and thus leads men to doubt his greatness. To this extent immodesty is from a prudential point of view very inadvisable (1996: I, §588).²³

Finally, the noble and generous person is characterised by his gratitude towards those from whom he has received something. Nietzsche explains this as follows:

The reason the man of power is grateful is this. His benefactor has, through the help he has given him, as it were laid hands on the sphere of the man of power and intruded into it: now, by way of requital, the man of power in turn lays hands on the sphere of his benefactor through the act of gratitude. It is a milder form of revenge. If he did not have the compensation of gratitude, the man of power would have appeared unpowerful and thenceforth counted as such. That is why every community of the good, that is to say originally the powerful, places gratitude among its first duties (1996: I, §44).²⁴

In conclusion, and by way of summary, one can state the following about Nietzsche's aristocratic, generous person: He is passionate, egoistic, self-complacent and self-assertive, but at the same time he is also characterised by self-discipline, self-respect, politeness, gratitude, willingness to sacrifice himself and his own interests and, above all, lack of resentment and vengeance. He lives in total affirmation of himself, of the will to power, of life itself. Thus he is necessarily an 'immoralist' in the sense that he considers himself to be above the moralist distinction between good and evil, as well as the concomitant feelings of guilt and self-mortification. This does not mean that he is

four propositions. First: I only attack causes that are victorious; I may even wait until they become victorious. Second: I only attack causes against which I would not find allies, so that I stand alone – so that I compromise myself alone... Third: I never attack persons ... Fourth: I only attack things when every personal quarrel is excluded, when any background of bad experiences is lacking. On the contrary, attack is in my case a proof of good will, sometimes even of gratitude...'

23 Cf. Nietzsche (1968: §948): 'Essential: that one does not think one's life important; that one insists unconditionally on good manners on the part of everyone with whom one comes into contact (at least, when they do not belong to 'us'); that one is neither familiar, nor genial, nor merry, nor modest, except *inter pares*; that one *always maintains poise*.'

24 Compare the salient remark by Dewey (1957: 23): 'It is of grace not of ourselves that we lead civilized lives. There is sound sense in the old pagan notion that gratitude is the root of all virtue.'

unethical or that he advocates ethical relativism, scepticism or indifference. He most certainly maintains a distinction between good and bad. By disciplining and cultivating his passions, and by constantly reassessing and contesting traditional values, he ‘creates’ his own values and ‘stylises’ himself into a person of virtue, i.e. someone who excels or appears to be a virtuoso. Thus he inevitably finds himself in conflict and in a constant struggle (*agon*) with the ‘other’ – other people but also the ‘other’ in himself. He resists the foundationalist claim that values and virtues have a timeless essence, legislated once and for all by some supra-historical, transcendent power. Instead he firmly believes that values and virtues are inherent to life and its form-giving forces. They are engendered time and again by exceptional individuals, acting within specific contexts and in a way that is exemplary, yet uniquely their own.

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