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### **Gratitude to Beautiful Objects: On Nietzsche's Claim that the Beautiful "Promises Happiness"**

Nietzsche suggests that aesthetic experience is fundamentally interested in nature. This is, Nietzsche claims, bound up with the fact that experiencing an object as beautiful involves experiencing it as beneficial – as Stendhal puts it, "the beautiful promises happiness"(GM III.6).<sup>i</sup>

Nietzsche defends this account of beauty by pointing to its explanatory power.<sup>ii</sup> In particular, Nietzsche claims that his account is well-positioned to explain the distinctive effect beautiful objects have on artists. In artists, beautiful objects excite feelings of *gratitude*, feelings which find expression in a desire to praise those objects, celebrating them by creating works of art that capture their worth.<sup>iii</sup> The object of gratitude is typically experienced as a source of benefit. As such, an account of aesthetic value which ties that value to the expectation of benefit easily makes sense of the gratitude *towards* beautiful objects that plays a role in motivating artists' activity.

In what follows, I will defend this reading of the positive side of Nietzsche's argument for the claim that beautiful objects are experienced as beneficial. I will not consider the negative side of this argument – Nietzsche's reasons for thinking that other views of beauty are unable to explain the effect he describes. My goal in this paper will be to work out why Nietzsche claims that his view of beauty can explain the creative activity of artists. Nietzsche's further assertion that his is the *only* view capable of doing this explanatory work will be left for another time.

#### **I. What Effect of the Beautiful Is Nietzsche's View Meant to Explain?**

In *Genealogy* III.6, Nietzsche argues that aesthetic experience should be understood as an interested state – part of what it is to experience an object as beautiful is to desire it.<sup>iv</sup> This effect of

beautiful objects can, Nietzsche claims, be inferred from the fact that they are experienced as beneficial. Thus, Nietzsche endorses Stendhal's view that "the beautiful *promises* happiness", and suggests that any object experienced as promising happiness also excites desire:

Stendhal, as noted, a no less sensual but more happily-formed nature than Schopenhauer, emphasizes a different effect of the beautiful: 'the beautiful *promises* happiness' – to him it is precisely the *excitement of the will* ('of interest') by the beautiful that seems to be the fact of the matter. (GM III.6)

I take it that, at least in this context, "the excitement of the will" is nothing more than the excitation of desire. Thus, in the surrounding text, it is the arousal of sexual desire that serves as the chief example of the will's excitation. Nietzsche's claim in this passage, then, is that Stendhal's view of beauty licenses an immediate move to the conclusion that beautiful objects excite desire. If beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness, then our experience of them will be an interested one.

It is not essential for present purposes to explain this particular inference – my concern is with Nietzsche's reasons for thinking that beautiful objects are experienced as beneficial, not his reasons for thinking that if beautiful objects are experienced as beneficial, then aesthetic experience must be interested in nature. Nonetheless, we may be able to quickly get a sense of what Nietzsche has in mind here. Thus, I take it that when Nietzsche suggests that beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness, he means to indicate that we are *attracted* to them in a particular way.<sup>v</sup> Nietzsche's point here is not, it seems to me, different from what he has in mind when (in a passage to be discussed in greater detail below) he notes that art is "bound up with the *desirability of life*" and functions as "the great stimulus to life"(TI "Skirmishes" 24). We feel that a life containing beautiful objects would be one worth living. We desire such objects, wishing to incorporate them within our lives because we feel that a life which contains them would itself be a wonderful thing to possess. This is, I take it, all that Nietzsche has in mind when he says that beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness – an object taken to promise happiness is one felt to play a role in rendering life desirable.<sup>vi</sup> That no object could be viewed in this way without being desired is, I take it, a straightforward point – to experience an object as

beneficial, as promising happiness, just is to experience a certain kind of desire for it and a life containing it. There is more to be said here about exactly what kinds of desire allow us to experience an object in this way – clearly not all forms of desire do, as Nietzsche takes some forms of desire to be generated by an *aversion* to life rather than attraction to it.<sup>vii</sup> For present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that *some* form of desire will always play an essential role in this experience. This is already enough to justify Nietzsche's move from the claim that beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness to the conclusion that desire has an essential role to play in aesthetic experience. What, however, justifies Nietzsche in claiming that beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness in the first place? Why does Nietzsche view the anticipation of benefit as essential to aesthetic experience?

It is here, I take it, that Nietzsche appeals to this claim's explanatory power, to its ability to make sense of effects of the beautiful that would otherwise remain incomprehensible. In particular, Nietzsche suggests that this claim explains the effect that beautiful objects have on artists. Thus, he suggests that Kant and other critics of Stendhal's view are only able to maintain their position by overlooking artists' experiences:

Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem starting from the experiences of the artist (the one who creates), thought about art and the beautiful from the viewpoint of the 'spectator' and thus, without it being noticed, got the 'spectator' himself into the concept 'beautiful'. If only this 'spectator' had at least been sufficiently familiar to the philosophers of the beautiful, however! – namely as a great *personal* fact and experience, as a wealth of most personal intense experiences, desires, surprises, and delights in the realm of the beautiful! But I fear the opposite was always the case: and thus we receive from them, right from the beginning, a definition in which, as in that famous definition Kant gives of the beautiful, the lack of a more refined self-experience sits in the form of a fat worm of basic error. 'The beautiful,' Kant said, 'is what pleases *without interest*.' Without interest! Compare this definition with one made by a real 'spectator' and artist – Stendhal, who in one place calls the beautiful *une promesse de bonheur*. (GM III.6)

What is notable about this passage is that Nietzsche never denies the importance of defining beauty in a way that also makes sense of the effect beautiful objects have on those who do not respond to them

artistically. A good account of beauty would explain effects beautiful objects have on both artists *and* spectators. This is why, in addition to its inability to make sense of artists' experiences, it is cited as a further defect of Kant's view that it is unable to make sense even of the experiences of genuinely engaged spectators. Stendhal's authority to speak about the beautiful is presented as deriving from his familiarity with the perspective of *both* artists and genuine spectators – we should trust what Stendhal says about beauty, Nietzsche suggests, because he has been affected by it in a wide variety of ways, and is thus unlikely to offer an account of it which fails to make sense of a significant portion of its effects. All of this makes it fairly clear what kind of argument Nietzsche is making here – the superiority of Stendhal's view is meant to consist in its explanatory power, in the fact that it allows us to explain effects of beautiful objects that Kant's view cannot. This conclusion receives further support from the pains Nietzsche takes over the next several sections of the *Genealogy* to establish that Stendhal's view is able to explain even the effect beautiful objects have on someone like Schopenhauer, who found that aesthetic experience was able to calm his most distressing desires. Although Nietzsche considers the calming effect of aesthetic experience to be somewhat marginal and insignificant – “Schopenhauer described *one* effect of the beautiful, the will-calming one – is it even a regularly occurring one?” (GM III.6) – he nonetheless still recognizes it as an effect such experience might have. As such, an inability to account for it would be a strike against any view of the beautiful defended on explanatory grounds. Nietzsche's efforts to show that this calming effect of beauty too can be explained by the fact that the beautiful is experienced as promising happiness makes a great deal of sense on this understanding of the argumentative strategy being employed.<sup>viii</sup>

Nietzsche, then, defends the claim that beautiful objects are experienced as beneficial as offering the best explanation of the effect beautiful objects have on both artists and genuine spectators. For our purposes, however, it will be sufficient to focus on the artists. Our question, then, will be why Nietzsche takes the effect of beautiful objects on artists to be well explained by the claim that such

objects are experienced as beneficial. As a first step towards answering this question, it will be necessary to identify the particular effect of beauty on artists that Nietzsche takes his view to explain.

Unfortunately, however, Nietzsche is not very clear on this point in GM III.6. He emphasizes that artists are creators, describing the artist as “the one who creates” on introducing them to the discussion. It seems likely, consequently, that the effect in question is bound up with artists’ creative activity. Little is said, however, about how this activity is to be thought of, or why the claim that beautiful objects are experienced as beneficial should be taken to provide the best explanation for it.

Previous scholarship has proposed two main ways to fill this gap, both of which seem to fall short for similar reasons. Thus, Bernard Reginster and Ivan Soll suggest that Nietzsche means to emphasize the joy artists find in creative activity itself, pointing out that such activity necessarily involves desire because the activity is itself desired.<sup>ix</sup> Christopher Janaway and Julian Young, meanwhile, suggest that Nietzsche intends to emphasize the importance of active interpretation in artistic creation.<sup>x</sup> As Nietzsche argues in GM III.12, such interpretation depends on an affectively constituted perspective for its possibility, and thus on the desires that generate those perspectives.

These views both seem to capture something important about Nietzsche’s understanding of creative activity, and would perhaps succeed as Nietzschean arguments for the impossibility of carrying such activity out in a disinterested manner. Nietzsche’s claim, however, was not that desire is inevitably involved in creative activity. Rather, it was that desire is inevitably generated by beautiful objects. These theses about the importance of desire to creative activity, consequently, are irrelevant to Nietzsche’s point. As Young notes, the Reginster-Soll thesis is one which even Schopenhauer is more than happy to grant.<sup>xi</sup> There is no tension between the claim that desire plays no role in our experience of beauty and the claim that it plays a significant role in the activity by which artists communicate that beauty to others, just as there is no tension between the claim that sound plays no role in the experience of silence and the claim that sound might play a significant role in describing that experience to someone

else. The irrelevance of Nietzsche's point on these interpretations of it becomes even more clear when we recall that Nietzsche's claim was not simply that beautiful objects necessarily provoke desire, but that that they necessarily provoke desire *because* they are necessarily experienced as beneficial. It is clear enough that this idea plays no role in either account. Benefit has no particular presence in the Janaway and Young view, and on the Reginster and Soll approach it attaches to creative activity rather than beautiful objects. If, then, Nietzsche is not to be understood as completely confused about the goal of his own argument, we will need to find another way of relating his views about the creative activity of artists to his claim that such activity is best explained by the idea that beautiful objects are experienced as beneficial.

A promising option is suggested by Aaron Ridley, who focuses on the role beautiful objects play in *motivating* artists' activity.<sup>xii</sup> As Ridley rightly notes, Nietzsche does not see beauty as entering into artistic activity solely as its endpoint, in the form of beautiful works of art. Rather, Nietzsche also takes the experience of beauty to play an important role in inspiring such activity – artists produce beautiful works at least in part as a reaction to beauty that they have already experienced.<sup>xiii</sup> Unfortunately, Ridley's ability to make sense of this sort of creation from beauty is hindered by his confusion about Nietzsche's attitude towards Stendhal, whose claim that the beautiful promises happiness Ridley takes Nietzsche to deny.<sup>xiv</sup> In what follows, I will attempt to see what can be made of Ridley's basic approach if this interpretive error is avoided. Thus, I will argue that – as Ridley suggested – it is precisely creation *from* beauty that Nietzsche takes his view of beauty to explain. More specifically, I will argue that Nietzsche takes his view to explain the variety of creation from beauty he takes to be especially characteristic of artists: creation from gratitude to a beautiful object.

## II. Art as Praise

Nietzsche claims that attention to the creative activity of artists will reveal the explanatory power of his claims about beauty. I have suggested that the feature of this creative activity which Nietzsche's view explains is its frequent motivation *by* beauty. Artists, Nietzsche thinks, sometimes craft their works in response to experiences of beauty. They express their sense that an object possesses aesthetic value by celebrating it, by creating a work of art that functions as a praise of its worth – the beautiful work of art is a way of giving thanks to a beautiful object external to that work. The motive for an artist's creating a work that celebrates beauty in this way is, Nietzsche thinks, that she feels gratitude towards it. It is this sense of gratitude towards aesthetic objects that Nietzsche's account aims to explain.

My main reason for reading Nietzsche's claim in this way is that it is precisely art's status as a form of praise which he focuses on when he actually puts the *Genealogy's* method for understanding beauty into practice in a later work. Thus, in "Skirmishes" 24 of *Twilight*, we find Nietzsche considering the question of art's purpose. Explaining how a psychologist would go about answering such a question, Nietzsche provides us with an explicit example of what would be involved in "envisaging the aesthetic problem starting from the experiences of the artist". In so doing, he shows us just what he takes these distinctive artists' experiences to be. The foremost of them is the impulse to praise:

A psychologist, on the other hand, will ask: what does art do? Doesn't it praise? Doesn't it glorify? Doesn't it select? Doesn't it have preferences? All of this *strengthens* or *weakens* certain value judgments . . . Is this just incidental? accidental? Completely unconnected to the artist's instinct? Or: isn't it the presupposition for an artist *to be able to* . . . ? Is the artist's most basic instinct bound up with art, or is it bound up much more intimately with *life*, which is the meaning of art? Isn't it bound up with the *desirability of life*? – Art is the great stimulus to life: how could art be understood as purposeless, pointless, *l'art pour l'art*? (TI "Skirmishes" 24)

Nietzsche here suggests that the impulse to praise is essential to artists' creative activity and the first feature a competent psychologist would notice when attempting to understand that activity. Other

features of that activity are presented as no less essential.<sup>xv</sup> Nonetheless, these other elements of artists' creative activity only help Nietzsche arrive at his conclusion if understood *as a consequence* of this activity's fundamental character as praise. Thus, the mere fact that artists are selective in the presentation of their subjects would tell us nothing about art's purpose. Selection tells us that there *is* a purpose in play, but not what that purpose is. Despite the language of the last sentence, Nietzsche's claim here is not *just* that art has a purpose. The idea of *l'art pour l'art* does not really deny this – it claims that art is its own purpose, not that art has no purpose at all. In rejecting the idea of *l'art pour l'art*, Nietzsche's claim is specifically that art has an *external* purpose, that it is created for the sake of something outside of itself. What is decisive for this point is not just that the artist selects, but that the principle of her selection is determined by the impulse to praise. She needs to focus on certain details rather than others because doing so allows her to strengthen certain value judgements and weaken others, but the goal of this strengthening and weakening is to produce a work that brings out the value of her subject, depicting it in a way that counts as praising or glorifying it. That artistic activity is structured by the impulse to praise in this way proves, Nietzsche suggests, that art is not created for its own sake – the thesis that art is created for the sake of art cannot explain why artists create art in the way that they do, namely in a manner suggestive of an active effort to celebrate something external to the work they are creating. What would explain this, Nietzsche suggests, is if art was created for the sake of something experienced as the source of life's value. For something experienced in this way, as beneficial in the highest degree, as sufficient to render life desirable – in other words, something experienced as *promising happiness* – would surely be more likely to generate the impulse to praise and celebrate essential to the artist's activity. The most detailed attempt to sketch an artist's aesthetic Nietzsche provides us with, then, suggests that it is precisely the role of praise in artistic creation that such an aesthetic is meant to highlight – it is this feature of artistic experience that the psychologist takes note of, and that she demands any aesthetic theory be able to explain.

Thus, again at the end of this section, we find Nietzsche critiquing pessimistic conceptions of tragedy for failing “to ask artists themselves” what tragedy aims at, suggesting that a proper understanding of tragedy will be developed only when the experiences of those who create it are taken into account. Nietzsche’s suggestion of what will be learned when we do so is telling:

The courage and freedom of affect in the face of a powerful enemy, in the face of a sublime hardship, in the face of a horrible problem, – this *victorious* state is what the tragic artist selects, what he glorifies. The martial aspects of our soul celebrate their saturnalia in the face of tragedy; anyone who is used to suffering, anyone who goes looking for suffering, the *heroic* man praises his existence through tragedy, – the tragedian raises the drink of sweetest cruelty to him alone. (TI “Skirmishes” 24)

Here again, what we learn when we “ask artists themselves”, is that praise, glorification, and celebration are the central impulse of even tragic art. It seems, then, that it is precisely these features of artistic creation that the device of asking artists themselves is designed to direct us towards. Nietzsche tells us to “ask artists themselves” before making any claims in the realm of aesthetics because he thinks that doing so will ensure that our aesthetic theories never overlook the central role played by the impulse to praise in artistic creation.

This emphasis on praise as the distinctive activity of the artist is, it should be noted, consistent with Nietzsche’s portrayal of artists throughout his work. For Nietzsche is often at pains to emphasize the fact that artistic creativity is, at bottom, motivated by a desire to celebrate rather than (pace the claims of Reginster and Soll discussed above) a desire to create. A particularly clear statement of this point is found in *Gay Science* 85:

Artists continually *glorify*— they do nothing else—all those states and things that are reputed to give man the opportunity to feel good for once, or great, or intoxicated, or cheerful, or well and wise. These select things and states, whose value for human happiness is considered safe and assured, are the artists’ objects. Artists always lie in wait to discover such objects and draw them into the realm of art. What I mean is that they are not themselves the appraisers of happiness; rather they try to get close to those who make the appraisals, with the utmost curiosity and the urge to utilize these appraisals immediately. Since they have, in addition to this impatience, also the big lungs of heralds and the feet of runners, they are also always among the first to glorify the new good; and they therefore appear to be the first to call it good, to appraise it as

good. But this is, as I have said, an error: they are merely quicker and louder than the real appraisers. —But who are the real appraisers?—The rich and the idle. (GS 85)

Nietzsche here identifies glorification as the artist's distinctive activity – he in fact gets quite close to identifying it as the artist's *only* activity (“they do nothing else”). As in the passages discussed above, Nietzsche suggests this impulse to glorify places a limit on the objects of art. Art, Nietzsche claims, is always about something that the artist takes to promise happiness – “things and states, whose value for human happiness is considered safe and assured, are the artists' objects.” Beautiful objects, on Nietzsche's view, always fall into this category – they are among the objects taken to promise happiness, and thus among the artists' proper objects.<sup>xvi</sup> I will have more to say below about why Nietzsche takes objects that promise happiness to be particularly capable of inspiring artistic creation. For the moment, however, the important point is just this: all that is distinctive of artists is a particular response to such objects, namely an urge to praise them coupled with a capacity to express this praise effectively (their “big lungs” as Nietzsche puts it here, or status as a “genius of a communication” as Nietzsche puts it in TI “Skirmishes” 24).<sup>xvii</sup>

The same point is made less directly, but still tellingly, in *Daybreak* 433, where Nietzsche claims that the extent of the modern identification of happiness with knowledge can be read off of the fact that it is precisely knowledge which modern artists are moved to glorify:

Supposing that beauty in art is always to be understood as the *imitation of happiness* – and this I hold to be the truth – in accordance with how an age, a people, a great, self-regulating individual imagines happiness: what does the so-called *realism* of contemporary artists give us to understand as the happiness of our own age? Its kind of beauty is undoubtedly the kind of beauty we can most easily grasp and enjoy. Is one not then obliged to believe that *our* happiness lies in realism, in possessing the sharpest possible sense and in the faithful interpretation of actuality – thus not in reality but in *knowledge of reality*? The influence of science has already acquired such depth and breadth that the artists of our century have, without intending to do so, already become the glorifiers of the ‘delights’ of science. (D 433).

Artists, Nietzsche again suggests, are fundamentally glorifiers – their product is always an “*imitation of happiness*”, a celebratory representation of the beneficial.

Given Nietzsche's consistent suggestion that artistic creation is fundamentally a form of praise and glorification, an effort aimed at celebrating a value external to the work of art itself, it should be unsurprising that this impulse to praise would be the feature he expects an artist's aesthetic to highlight. The impulse to praise through creative work is the artist's distinctive feature. Thus, an aesthetics that starts from the experience of artists will be one that takes this impulse to praise as its primary explanandum.

### III. Gratitude as Explanation for the Artist's Impulse

I have argued that Nietzsche sees the artist's impulse to praise as the primary explanandum of an artist-focused aesthetic theory. In claiming that his view of beauty is responsive to the experience of artists, then, Nietzsche suggests that it is well-suited to explaining the ability of beautiful objects to inspire this sort of artistic impulse to praise. His view of beauty, Nietzsche claims, makes sense of the fact that artists are sometimes moved to *praise* it.

To see why Nietzsche might think this, it will be helpful to consider a few passages where Nietzsche is quite explicit about what he takes to explain the artist's impulse. Underlying the artist's impulse to praise is, Nietzsche suggests, *gratitude*. Perhaps the strongest statement of this is found in Nietzsche's epilogue to *The Case of Wagner*, where he suggests that gratitude is the essence of *all* great art:

noble morality, master morality, is rooted in a triumphant *self*-directed yes, – it is self-affirmation, self-glorification of life, it needs sublime symbols and practices too, but only because 'its heart is too full'. All *beautiful*, all *great* art, belongs here: the essence of both is gratitude. (CW "Epilogue")

Art, Nietzsche suggests, is an attempt to express gratitude to something passionately valued. It is an effort to provide that which you value with "sublime symbols and practices", honoring it as an expression of your appreciation of what it has done for you.

The same point is made in *Gay Science* 370, where Nietzsche suggests that gratitude provides the best explanation for the artistic impulse to immortalize:

The will to immortalize also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first, by gratitude and love; art with this origin will always be an art of apotheoses, perhaps dithyrambic like Rubens, or blissfully mocking like Hafiz, or bright and gracious like Goethe, spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things. (GS 370)

The structure of this passage is governed by Nietzsche's effort to distinguish between two types of creators, both of whom produce works aimed at immortalizing their subjects: genuine artists, described in the passage above, who immortalize their subject as a means of celebrating them; and a variety of pseudo-artists who immortalize their subjects as a means of revenge, in an effort to keep others from developing different, perhaps more positive, views of them. This contrast is not, however, particularly important for our purposes. For us what matters is Nietzsche's account of the impulse towards celebratory immortalization. It is, Nietzsche suggests, prompted by gratitude. When genuine artists feel compelled to immortalize a subject, they do so out of an appreciation for everything it has given them. For the artist, crafting a celebratory work of art is a way of giving thanks, of acknowledging just how much value a valuable object has added to her life.

The celebratory work of art is thus produced with the same basic motive that Nietzsche takes to explain his own production of *Ecce Homo*:

On this perfect day, when everything is ripe and the grapes are not the only things that are turning brown, I have just seen my life bathed in sunshine: I looked backwards, I looked out, I have never seen so many things that were so good, all at the same time. It is not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today, I had *the right* to bury it, – all its living qualities have been rescued, they are immortal. The *Revaluation of all Values*, the *Dionysian Dithyrambs*, and, for recuperation, the *Twilight of the Idols* – all gifts of this year, of the last three months, in fact! *How could I not be grateful to my whole life?* And so I will tell myself the story of my life. (EH "Dedication")<sup>xviii</sup>

Nietzsche's understanding of his motive to produce *Ecce Homo* is that he feels gratitude to his life. His life has given him a great deal – looking back on it, he finds it filled with "so many things that were so good" and feels that the last three months alone were the source of many "gifts" of inestimable value.

As an expression of his appreciation for all that his life has given him, Nietzsche feels moved to create a work of art that celebrates that life – he tells himself the story of his life as a way of thanking it, of expressing his appreciation to it. He offers it the gift of immortality as thanks for all the many gifts it has given him. The thought that gratitude provides the ultimate explanation for the artist's impulse to praise, then, seems to be one that Nietzsche takes quite seriously. It is a thought that plays a central role both in his general discussion of art and artists and in his presentation of his own artistic activity.<sup>xix</sup>

#### **IV. How does Nietzsche's Account Explain Beauty's Ability to Inspire Gratitude?**

If the above is correct, Nietzsche takes the celebratory creation of artists to be motivated by gratitude towards their subjects. In claiming that his account of beauty explains the beauty-inspired creative activity of artists, then, Nietzsche is claiming that this account explains the tendency of artists to respond to beautiful objects with the kind of gratitude that underlies their creative impulse. Nietzsche's claim, in other words, is that his theory of beauty explains our feeling gratitude towards objects experienced as beautiful. Artists, as discussed earlier, at least sometimes create *from* beauty, producing works meant to celebrate and immortalize beautiful objects. On Nietzsche's account of artistic motivation, such creation from beauty will be motivated by gratitude *to* beautiful objects. Nietzsche's claim that beautiful objects are always experienced as beneficial is meant to explain this phenomenon.

How it does this is, I take it, immediately clear. In gratitude, we perceive an object as having done something for us, as having given us a gift. Gratitude is fundamentally a response to something seen as offering benefit, as making some contribution to our good. This, then, is already enough to motivate the claim about beauty that Nietzsche emphasizes in *Genealogy* III.6, namely that beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness. Objects which we take to be beneficial inspire feelings of gratitude. Thus, the feelings of gratitude *to* beautiful objects underlying beauty-inspired artistic

creation will make perfect sense if artists typically experience beautiful objects as beneficial. Attention to the effect of beauty on artists, then, provides straightforward support for Stendhal's view once Nietzsche's account of the nature of that effect is made clear.

It may seem that the above overlooks another feature of gratitude. Thus, on many accounts of gratitude, gratitude cannot be inspired by just *any* object that we take to be beneficial. Rather, gratitude is inspired only by *agents* that we take to be beneficial, perhaps even only by agents that we take to have benefitted us freely and intentionally.<sup>xx</sup> On this view of gratitude, Nietzsche's account of beauty looks insufficient to explain beautiful objects' capacity to inspire it. It is not enough for beautiful objects to be experienced as beneficial – if they are to inspire gratitude, they must also be understood as agents.

A thorough response to this point would require a more detailed account of Nietzsche's conception of gratitude than I am able to provide here. For the moment, however, it will suffice to note that Nietzsche does not share the view that gratitude can only be provoked by agential objects. Thus, in the *Ecce Homo* passage considered above, we saw Nietzsche declare himself to be "*grateful to my whole life*" (EH "Preface"). Although Nietzsche is an agent, Nietzsche's whole life certainly is not. Elsewhere, Nietzsche suggests that agential-objects are often invented after the fact to provide pre-existing feelings of gratitude with a target that is more easily thanked:

"A people that still believes in itself will still have its own god. In the figure of this god, a people will worship the conditions that have brought it to the fore, its virtues, – it projects the pleasure it takes in itself, its feeling of power, into a being that it can thank for all of this. Whoever has wealth will want to give; a proud people needs a god to *sacrifice* to . . . On this supposition, religion is a form of gratitude. People are grateful for themselves: and this is why they need a god." (A 16)

The feelings of gratitude exist before the god. The god is brought in because it is easier to thank a god than to thank one's own life and the conditions that led to it – anyone capable of sacrifice can provide a god with its due compensation, but you need to be an artist to celebrate a non-agent effectively. What is essential for our purposes, however, is just that non-agential objects – people's lives and the

conditions that lead to them – are sufficient to *generate* feelings of gratitude all on their own. An agential-object commonly plays a role in enabling that gratitude to be expressed. It is not, however, in any way a precondition of gratitude's existence. That the view Nietzsche expresses in this passage is no fluke is clear from the fact that he himself repeatedly identifies the same non-agential objects responsible for the gratitude of these ancient peoples as the primary targets of his own gratitude. Thus, we have already seen Nietzsche affirm the gratitude he feels towards his own life. Later on in *Ecce Homo*, he expresses gratitude to the month which allowed him to write *The Gay Science* and the location which enabled him to conceive of the *Anti-Christ*<sup>xxi</sup>: "One verse [] expresses gratitude for the most wonderful January I ever experienced – the whole book is its gift"(EH "GS"); "I did not leave Sils-Maria until 20 September, held back by floods; in the end I was the only guest left in this wonderful place: my gratitude wants to give it the gift of an immortal name"(EH "TI" 3). He likewise expresses gratitude for his enemies, not because of any intentional good they have done him, but because of what his battle against them has allowed him to accomplish – "The case of Wagner is a *lucky case* for the philosopher, – you can hear that this essay is inspired by gratitude"(CW "Epilogue"). All of this is summed up in a formula at the start of the *Case of Wagner*:

"Bizet makes me fertile. Everything good makes me fertile. I do not know any other gratitude, and I do not have any other *proof* for what is good"(CW 1).

Note the absence of any agential limitation here – "everything good" is a source of the only kind of gratitude Nietzsche claims to know. This gratitude takes as its object *whatever* provides the conditions for Nietzsche to live the sort of life to which he is attracted. Whether it be a month or a place, music or an enemy, *anything* that provides the conditions necessary for Nietzsche to live the kind of life he values will be a suitable inspiration for gratitude as he understands it.

On Nietzsche's view, then, that we are attracted to a life, or that we take an object to play a role in making a life to which are attracted available, is enough to inspire our gratitude to that life or object. Given this understanding of gratitude, a view of beauty on which the

beautiful promises happiness is one that makes beautiful objects' capacity to inspire gratitude exceptionally easy to explain.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> I draw on the following translations of Nietzsche's work: *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998); *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Case of Wagner* trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974); and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>ii</sup> For convenience, I will sometimes refer to Nietzsche's account of beauty, Nietzsche's view of beauty, or Nietzsche's theory of beauty. It should be noted, however, that the only parts of Nietzsche's conception of beauty I mean to refer to with these phrases are the ones mentioned in the opening paragraph of this essay: Nietzsche's claims that aesthetic experience is fundamentally interested and that beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness. Other aspects of Nietzsche's understanding of beauty will not be discussed here, and I do not mean to refer to them with any of the phrases I use to stand in for the relevant aspects of Nietzsche's aesthetic view.

<sup>iii</sup> I will treat the terms praise (*loben*), celebrate (*feiern*), and glorify (*verherrlichen*) as more or less interchangeable. Although the differences between these terms may be significant in some contexts, I take it that Nietzsche draws no real distinction between the three in connection with gratitude-driven artistic activity. In TI "Skirmishes" 24, for example, Nietzsche asks of art, "Doesn't it praise? Doesn't it glorify? [*lobt sie nicht? verherrlicht sie nicht?*]", seeming to treat the two questions as different formulations of the same point. In this context, I take it that all three terms refer to nothing more than presenting something in a way designed to bring out its value. This is particularly important to keep in mind where celebration is concerned, as the term could also be used to refer to holding a festival or other event to commemorate something significant (perhaps with the goal of putting oneself in contact with its value or otherwise maintaining one's connection to it). I take it that Nietzsche does take art to play a role in celebration of this kind as well (see, e.g., GS 89), but I will not be considering it here. I am grateful to Scott Jenkins for pushing me on the need for clarity on this point.

<sup>iv</sup> This claim will seem immediately implausible if heard the wrong way. The claim is not necessarily that in viewing a beautiful work of art we desire that artwork. Rather, we desire the object which the artwork represents as beautiful. A beautiful work of art is, for Nietzsche, typically one that beautifies something. Thus, he tends to speak of works of art as, e.g., "world-transfiguring" (EH "CW" 1) – great artworks turn other things into aesthetic objects, and the desire Nietzsche associates with the aesthetic state is often desire for those transfigured objects rather than the art itself. This is why Zarathustra describes beauty as prompting him to "will with all my will . . . that an image might not remain mere image" (Z:II "On Immaculate Perception"). Great works of art present us with images of distinct beautiful objects, prompting desire for the realities they depict.

<sup>v</sup> For a helpful discussion of the sort of attraction I have in mind, see Brian Leiter, "The Truth is Terrible," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 49 (2018): 151-173, 163.

<sup>vi</sup> Bernard Reginster has suggested that Nietzsche means to draw a distinction between experiencing something as *promising* happiness and experiencing it as beneficial ("Art and Affirmation," in *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, ed. Daniel Came [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 14-38, 35). To experience something as merely promising happiness is to experience it as merely *possibly* beneficial, as a potential source of happiness worthy of further investigation but not yet valued with any real confidence. This reading is undermined by the way Nietzsche puts related points elsewhere. Consider, for example, the following passage from GS 85 (to be discussed in greater detail below): "These select things and states, whose value for human happiness *is considered safe and assured*,

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are the artists' objects" (my emphasis). Here, the subjects of the artists' work – the things they consider beautiful – are precisely those they are fully confident contribute to happiness.

<sup>vii</sup> Thus, at the end of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche notes that "a will to nothingness, an aversion to life . . . is and remains a will!" (GM III. 28).

<sup>viii</sup> Nietzsche claims that those for whom happiness and contemplation are one will experience as beautiful only that which triggers their drive to contemplation. This has the indirect result of calming other desires by pushing them out of a consciousness that another, more powerful drive has fully occupied: "in him [Schopenhauer] the sight of the beautiful apparently acted as a triggering stimulus on the *principle force* of his nature (the force of contemplation and of the engrossed gaze); so that this then exploded and became all at once lord of his consciousness" (GM III.8).

<sup>ix</sup> Reginster, "Art and Affirmation," 24-25; Ivan Soll, "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Redemption of Life Through Art," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79–115, 107-111.

<sup>x</sup> Christopher Janaway, "Disinterestedness and Objectivity: Nietzsche on Schopenhauer and Kant," *Studia Kantiana* 4 (2002): 27-42, 33; Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 122-123.

<sup>xi</sup> Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, 121. See also Julian Young's contribution, "Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Disinterestedness," to the entry, "Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm" by Bernd Magnus, Gary Shapiro, David Wellbury, and Julian Young in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199747108.001.0001/acref-9780199747108>.

<sup>xii</sup> Aaron Ridley, "Une Promesse de Bonheur? Beauty in *The Genealogy*," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*, ed. Simon May (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 319–35.

<sup>xiii</sup> On Ridley's account, Nietzsche sees artistic creation fundamentally as the artist's reaction to his own overall beauty (both physical and otherwise) ("*Une Promesse de Bonheur?*," 331). As we will see below, Nietzsche also allows artists to be inspired by the beauty of other people and things. These things will, however, always be experienced as offering a value that is *available* to the artist herself. Beautiful objects are experienced as promising happiness, which is to say that they are viewed as a potential *source* of value rather than just of reserve of it. Thus, Ridley is right to read Nietzsche as claiming that there will always be an element of self-celebration in the artist's celebration of beauty. The artist figures herself as in some way permeable by the value she celebrates; its value is of a kind that can enter her life and make it better.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ridley suggests that Nietzsche does not fully endorse the view of beauty he attributes to Stendhal ("*Une Promesse de Bonheur?* Beauty in *The Genealogy*," 323-224). This conclusion rests on the description of Stendhal Nietzsche uses to introduce the passage quoted above: Stendhal is described as "a real 'spectator' and artist" (GM III.6). Insofar as Nietzsche takes aesthetic theories to go astray by focusing on the experience of spectators rather than artists, Ridley takes the description of Stendhal as "a real 'spectator'" to indicate that he cannot be a source of reliable aesthetic theory – as a "real 'spectator'", Stendhal is more insightful than a fake spectator like Kant who had little appreciation for art, but less insightful than someone who spoke from a purely artistic perspective. It is unclear, however, why Nietzsche would think that someone able to understand aesthetic experience from both the perspective of the spectator and the perspective of the artist would have a weaker grasp on it than someone who understood it from a purely artistic perspective. Nietzsche will, after all, claim just a few sections later in the *Genealogy* that the more perspectives we bring to bear on a subject, the better our understanding of it will be (GM III.12). In any case, given the more or less exact match between the view attributed to Stendhal in the *Genealogy* and the view explicitly affirmed as Nietzsche's own in *Daybreak* 433 (to be discussed below), Nietzsche's endorsement of Stendhal's aesthetics should not be in doubt.

<sup>xv</sup> E.g., the selective and preferential interpretive elements emphasized by Janaway in "Disinterestedness and Objectivity."

<sup>xvi</sup> Are beautiful objects the only members in this category? Nietzsche claims that beautiful objects promise happiness. Does he also hold that any object which promises happiness will be experienced as beautiful? I take no position on this here. For my purposes, all that matters is that Nietzsche takes the essential characteristic of artists to be an impulse to praise that which they experience as beneficial, and that he takes beautiful objects to at least rank among the objects able to inspire artistic creation in this way.

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<sup>xvii</sup> One feature of the passage discussed above may seem to cause trouble for my account. Nietzsche emphasizes that artists direct their praise at objects taken to promise happiness *by others* – they praise those things which “are reputed” to provide happiness. Are artists, then, really marked out by an impulse to praise things they themselves experience as beneficial, or just to shrewdly flatter the values their wealth patrons embrace? It seems to me that everything Nietzsche says in the passage is consistent with the first of these options. Nietzsche’s main point in this passage concerns the *sequence* in which values spread throughout society. This concern with the order of adoption is sufficient to explain Nietzsche’s emphasis on the fact that artists praise things already reputed to be beneficial by others. There is no need to assume an additional goal of suggesting that artists are insincere in their appreciation to make sense of Nietzsche’s emphasis on the derivative nature of their values. After all, Nietzsche takes the vast majority of people to receive their values from others, and does not generally seem to take this sort of unoriginality as a strike against the sincerity with which a value is embraced. I am grateful to Scott Jenkins for pressing me on this point.

<sup>xviii</sup> Nietzsche does not himself title this *Vorbemerkung*, which follows the preface and contents and precedes the first proper chapter of *EH*, but it has a dedicatory tone.

<sup>xix</sup> Is it a problem for Nietzsche’s account if he has radically overestimated the role of gratitude in motivating artistic activity? Yes and no. As long as gratitude really is *an* effect of beautiful objects, it is a point in favor of Nietzsche’s view that he is able to explain it. An account’s ability to explain any effect of beauty, minor or major, supports its claim to explanatory power. At the same time, however, the amount of support provided will vary with the significance of the effect. If an alternative view of beauty has greater success than Nietzsche’s at explaining effects of beauty that are more significant than the one he focuses on, then that will speak in its favor. No view of beauty that fails to explain any one of its effects will possess full explanatory adequacy, but of two accounts that fall short of this high standard, the one that explains the more significant effects will be preferable. It is no problem for Nietzsche’s view if the effect of beauty he explains is a minor one, but it is a problem if the effect of beauty he explains is minor *and* he is unable to explain major effects rendered comprehensible by other accounts. For helpful discussion of Nietzsche’s use of explanatory arguments and some suggestions about what might be involved in claiming that one explanatory argument is superior to another, see Brian Leiter, *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 23. Note also that Nietzsche is not entirely consistent in claiming that gratitude underlies *all* artistic activity. In *Gay Science* 170, Nietzsche identifies an impulse to immortalize out of gratitude as just one of two genuine artistic motives. The other, an impulse to destroy out of desire for change, is presented as no less legitimate. It is unclear whether Nietzsche has ceased to distinguish between these two motives by the time he writes *The Case of Wagner*, or if the totalizing way he puts the claim there amounts to an oversimplification for rhetorical purposes.

<sup>xx</sup> For perhaps the most famous statement of this view of gratitude, see Peter Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72-93, 76. I am grateful to Brian Leiter for pushing me for clarity on this point.

<sup>xxi</sup> When Nietzsche praises Sils-Maria in *EH* “Books: TI” 3, he does so on the grounds that it was where he conceived of and began work on what he refers to as the *Revaluation*. It is my understanding that this is a reference to *A*, which was originally viewed as part of a larger project called the *Revaluation of All Values*. The Cambridge edition of the text has a footnote in this passage directly equating the two, and I take it that doing so is appropriate in this context. Furthermore, Nietzsche says that he *finished* the *Revaluation* on September 30, 1888, which makes sense only if he’s using the term to refer directly to *A* here rather than to the larger project of which it was originally meant to be a part.