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Subjectivity and the Politics of Self-Cultivation: A Comparative Study of Fichte and Nietzsche

Abstract: At first glance, Fichte and Nietzsche might strike us as intellectual contraries. This impression is reinforced by Nietzsche's disparaging remarks about Fichte. The dearth of critical literature comparing the two thinkers also could easily lead us to believe that they are, for all intents and purposes, irrelevant to one another. In this paper, however, I argue that their theories of subjectivity are in many respects remarkably similar and worthy of comparison. But I further explain how, despite this convergence, their normative philosophies end up so conspicuously at odds with one another. After examining the resemblance between their denials of the substantial self, I respectively analyse Fichte's and Nietzsche's positive accounts of subjectivity, self-cultivation, and the political preconditions of self-cultivation. I locate the conceptual juncture at which their practical outlooks begin to part ways in their divergent drive psychologies and in their distinct conceptions of *conscience*. These apparently minor theoretical differences generate a large-scale disagreement regarding the political systems they believe best enable self-cultivation, with Fichte favouring a democratic regime, while Nietzsche opts for a markedly more aristocratic one. I close by sketching a possible way out of this dilemma.

Keywords: Fichte, Psychology, Politics, Subjectivity, Democracy, Conscience

At first glance, Fichte and Nietzsche might strike us as intellectual contraries.[1] For example, Fichte's belief in historical progress and universal moral law appears to be diametrically opposed to Nietzsche's searching critique of Enlightenment optimism. The apparent incompatibility of the two thinkers is borne out by Nietzsche's writings themselves. Fichte's name, much like that of Hegel's, is markedly absent from the corpus, and not a single work of Fichte is listed in the catalogue of Nietzsche's personal library.[2] On the rare occasions where Nietzsche does explicitly refer to Fichte, he more often than not has something disparaging to say. For example, in a *Nachlass* note from 1884, he complains that Fichte "stinks [*stinkt*]" like a theologian or church father (Nachlass

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2 See Giuliano Campioni / Paolo D'Iorio / Maria Cristina Fornari / Francesco Fronterotta / Andrea Orsucci (eds.), *Nietzsches persönliche Bibliothek*, Berlin 2003.

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1884, 26[412], KSA 11.262; see also 26[8], KSA 11.152). And in BGE 244, Nietzsche censures Fichte for his "patriotic flattery" of the German people, most probably with Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808) in mind.[3] This animus can be traced back to Schopenhauer, who had a formative influence on Nietzsche's thought and was vitriolically critical of Fichte. In the opening chapter of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* (1844), for example, Schopenhauer goes so far as to brand Fichte the "father of pseudophilosophy [*Scheinphilosophie*]."[4]

In addition to Nietzsche's dismissive attitude towards Fichte, the general dearth of comparative critical literature further implies that the two philosophers are broadly irrelevant to one another.[5] This paper, however, aims to dispel this misconception. Behind the façade of deep disagreement, Fichte and Nietzsche share a great deal in common. And there is good reason to suspect that there exists an unexcavated line of intellectual influence running between the two philosophers. The most likely connection is via Schopenhauer. Despite Schopenhauer's severe criticism of Fichte, he nevertheless incorporates some defining features of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, or *Science of Knowledge* (1794/95), into the conceptual framework of *The World as Will and Representation*.[6] This is perhaps unsurprising given that Schopenhauer is known to have attended Fichte's lectures in Berlin. Another potential source of influence runs through Afrikan Spir, whose philosophy engages extensively with Fichte's writings (he even edited a volume of Fichte's letters), and whom Nietzsche is known to have read in some

3 I have used the following translations of Nietzsche's writings: *The Antichrist*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2005; *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2002; *Daybreak*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1997; *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge 2001; and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Cambridge 2007.

4 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. II, trans. Eric F. J. Payne, New York 1958, 13. This view is reprised in Nietzsche's characterization of Fichte as a "thought-monger [*Denkwirt*]" as opposed to a genuine philosopher (such as Schopenhauer or Eduard von Hartmann) (Nachlass 1873/74, 30[20], KSA 7.739–40; see also 30[16], KSA 7.738, and 30[18], KSA 7.739).

5 To the best of my knowledge, the only sustained comparison of Nietzsche and Fichte is Thomas Kisser, "The Reality of the Will: On the Problem of Individuality in Nietzsche and Fichte," in Katia Hay / Leonel R. dos Santos (eds.), *Nietzsche, German Idealism and its Critics*, Berlin 2015, 115–53. Sebastian Gardner, "Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason," in Ken Gemes / Simon May (eds.), *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, Oxford 2009, 1–31, brings the two thinkers into brief dialogue, though only in order to highlight their divergence. *En passant*, Jeffrey Church, *Nietzsche's Culture of Humanity: Beyond Aristocracy and Democracy in the Early Period*, Cambridge 2015, 178–9, underscores several analogies between the normative theories of education respectively advanced by Nietzsche and Fichte. Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology*, Chicago 1994, 256–67, draws some illuminating parallels between their drive psychologies. And Allen Wood's "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," *Philosophical Topics* 19/2 (1991), 1–28, and *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, Oxford 2016, helpfully point up a series of important overlaps between Fichte and Nietzsche, though these are always cursory and cannot be said to amount to an extensive critical comparison.

6 See David Cartwright, *Historical Dictionary of Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, Lanham, MD 2016, 94–5, and Matteo D'Alfonso, "Schopenhauer als Schüler Fichtes," *Fichte-Studien* 30 (2016), 201–11.

depth.[7] Another possible vector is Hölderlin, one of Nietzsche's favourite poets, and a great admirer of Fichte's philosophy.[8] We might therefore expect significant elements of Fichte's philosophy to have surreptitiously permeated Nietzsche's writings by way of these intellectual influences.

The project of mapping the history of ideas therefore calls for a focused study of the relation between these two canonical figures. In this paper, I perform a conceptual comparison, my chief objective being to illuminate the key points of convergence between Nietzsche's and Fichte's respective theories of subjectivity. Most importantly, we will see that both similarly repudiate the notion of a substantial self, that is, the claim that there exists an unchanging substrate – akin to what is often referred to as a person's "soul" – lying beneath an individual's protean empirical self. What is more, both reconceive subjectivity as something consisting in activity and activity alone, and they comparably view the self as a conglomeration of *drives* caught in a struggle to coordinate themselves into a unity capable of authentic agency. Lastly, Fichte and Nietzsche both conceive the cultivation of our *conscience* as a necessary condition of our achieving internal unity, even if their conceptions of conscience are at bottom radically distinct.

But despite this descriptive convergence, they end up sharply diverging when it comes to outlining the political conditions required to generate psychological unity. The secondary objective of this paper is therefore to ascertain why, notwithstanding their agreement on a range of fundamental theoretical questions, they arrive at such antagonistic political outlooks. Fichte calls for a quasi-Kantian cosmopolitan world-order, a kingdom of ends in which individuals commune rationally and refrain from mutual exploitation. By stark contrast, Nietzsche vociferously scorns such an ideal, maintaining, instead, that exploitation and ruthless social conditioning are necessary for human flourishing. My claim is that this disparity is rooted in their distinct drive psychologies. Fichte holds that once an individual has sufficiently cultivated their rational conscience, they can straightforwardly order their drives. Democracy enables this process by promoting free rational intercourse, which educates each individual's conscience. Because Nietzsche construes drives as far more embodied and embedded, however, he maintains that a transgenerational breeding program is required, and that this demands the stability and long-termism peculiar to aristocratic regimes. This confrontation presents us with a philosophically significant dilemma: What political system is best equipped to propagate psychological holism? Both Fichte and Nietzsche give convincing reasons in favour of their contrary standpoints. In the final section, I contend that it may not be necessary for us to choose between these standpoints, and that we find the germ of a solution to this dilemma in their writings themselves. If we take a more expansive look at their socio-political philosophies, we find Fichte

7 For more on this intellectual link, see Michael Steven Green, *Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition*, Urbana, IL 2002, and Church, *Nietzsche's Culture of Humanity*, 88.

8 As noted by Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 267.

and Nietzsche each countenancing the advantages of both aristocratic and democratic practices in a manner that suggests that these might be combined. I argue that taken together, Fichte and Nietzsche therefore gesture towards a hybrid solution, one that combines and leverages the strengths of various different types of regime vis-à-vis the task of promoting psychological coordination.

I begin by comparing their similar denials of the substantial self (Section 1). In Sections 2 and 3, I analyse Fichte's and Nietzsche's positive accounts of subjectivity, self-cultivation, and the political preconditions of such cultivation. In these latter two sections, I focus on pinpointing the conceptual juncture at which their practical outlooks begin to part ways. I argue this juncture can be located in their drive psychologies and their distinct conceptions of individual conscience (*Gewissen*). It is these theoretical differences that then generate their large-scale disagreement regarding the political systems that best enable self-cultivation. I conclude Section 3, however, by sketching a possible solution to this disagreement.

Given that this paper is intended to be exploratory, and Fichte's and Nietzsche's philosophies undergo significant transformation over the course of their intellectual development, I will for the most part confine myself to Nietzsche's later writings (i. e. from 1880 onwards) and Fichte's Jena *Science of Knowledge* (1794–1799). These phases of the two thinkers' intellectual trajectories each exhibit a substantial degree of internal coherence, and limiting ourselves to them will prevent us from getting mired in the array of tensions and contradictions that exist between the different periods of their thought. The only exception to this rule will be made in Section 3, where I briefly consider aspects of their wider political theories.

1 Two Refutations of the Substantial Self

Fichte wholly rejects the idea of a substantial self, that is, a Cartesian *res cognitans* or "thinking thing" in which an individual's thought is grounded. Such an idea is, Fichte contends, symptomatic of what he pejoratively calls "dogmatism." In this context, dogmatism signifies the set of philosophical doctrines that construe perception as the result of things-in-themselves mechanically pressing upon the soul (EE 437–9).[9] On this mech-

9 I use the following editions and translations by Fichte: BM = *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800), SW 2; EE = *Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), SW 1 (*First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge, The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs, Cambridge 1970; cited by page number in SW); GGZ = *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1804), SW 7; GNR = *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (1796), SW 3; GWL = *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), SW 1; RDN = *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808), SW 7; SL = *Systeme der Sittenlehre* (1798) SW 4 (*System of Ethics*, trans. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller, Cambridge 2006; cited by page number in SW); SW = *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Berlin 1971 (cited by volume and page number); VBG = *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (1794), SW 6; VDW =

anistic worldview, like can only affect like, and so it assumes that "a soul is one of [these] things-in-themselves." Fichte's principal gripe with dogmatism is practical in kind: the dogmatic conception of the self – i. e. as just another thing yoked "within a closed chain of phenomena" – alienates individuals from their sense of freedom (BM 174). He further criticises this view on account of its lack of explanatory force. The theory, he argues, is unable to account for how representations emerge from the merely mechanical interaction of things-in-themselves (EE 438–9), what today we would call the hard problem of consciousness.[10]

According to Fichte, the self is a product of its own self-positing activity, and we will take a closer look at what this means exactly in the following section. It is in no way necessary, he maintains, to postulate the existence of a substantial self in which this activity inheres. In *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796), he declines to conceive the self as anything more than this pure self-positing form of *activity*: "The 'I' is nothing other than an acting toward itself [*eines Handeln*]," and he continues in a footnote, "I don't want to say: 'an active being' [*ein Handelndes*], because I don't want to introduce the representation of a substratum in which a power would be involved" (GNR 1). In *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* (1794), he then describes the "I" as "at the same time the acting thing [*das Thätige*] and that which is produced through the activity: action and deed are one and the same" (GWL 96).

Allen Wood has in passing remarked how Fichte's repudiation of the substantial self unmistakeably foreshadows Nietzsche's comparison of subjectivity to a bolt of lightning.[11] To expand upon Wood's cursory observation, it behoves us to revisit the relevant passage from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887):

> A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, will, action, in fact it is nothing but this driving, willing and acting, and only the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified within it), which construes and misconstrues all actions as conditional upon an agency, a "subject," can make it appear otherwise. And just as the common people separates lightning from its flash and takes the latter to be a deed, something performed by a subject, which is called lightning, popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the freedom to manifest strength or not. But there is no such substratum; there is no "being" behind the *deed*, its effect and what becomes of it; "the doer" is invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything. Basically, the common people double a deed; when they see lightning, they make a doing-a-deed out of it: they posit the same event, first as cause and then as its effect (GM I 13).

Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre (1797/98), SW 1; and ZE = *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), SW 1.

10 Note that Fichte indicts the dogmatic view for being theoretically weak on several further fronts. See Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 37–40, and Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence*, Cambridge 2002, 18.

11 Wood, "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," 9.

Nietzsche depicts the self, like Fichte, as nothing more and nothing less than its activity. But whereas Fichte is more focussed on first-personal ascriptions of substantial selfhood (i. e. where we describe *ourselves* as possessing a substantial soul), in this text Nietzsche's target is third-personal ascriptions. More specifically, Nietzsche is describing how the primitive slaves of *On the Genealogy of Morality* attribute an essential, fixed self to their oppressors, the nobles. This reified substratum furnishes the slaves with a fixed entity to which they can then slanderously impute freedom, responsibility, and, above all, guilt.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), however, Nietzsche opts for a more first-personal or phenomenological critique of the substantial self. He abjures the Cartesian thesis that our internal experience of our own subjectivity reveals an underlying metaphysical substrate:

> [A] thought comes when "it" wants, and not when "I" want. It is, therefore, a *falsification* of the facts to say that the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate "think." It thinks: but to say the "it" is just that famous old "I" – well that is just an assumption or opinion, to put it mildly, and by no means an "immediate certainty." In fact, there is already too much packed into the "it thinks": even the "it" contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself. People are following grammatical habits here in drawing conclusions, reasoning that "thinking is an activity, behind every activity something is active, therefore –." Following the same basic scheme, the older atomism looked behind every "force" that produces effects for that little lump of matter in which the force resides, and out of which the effects are produced, which is to say: the atom (BGE 17).[12]

By Nietzsche's lights, the "I" is an illusory construction – an illicit extrapolation from the facts of experience. In a sense, Nietzsche is, like Fichte, reprising Hume's criticism of Descartes.[13] Yet there remain important differences; for one, Hume views the self as an illegitimate construct of the imagination, where the metaphysically "real" components of this illusion are atomistic impressions. Fichte, on the other hand, rejects the idea that the active self revealed by introspection is in any sense fraudulent; then, as we can see from the quote above, since Nietzsche rejects all atomism, he *a fortiori* rejects atomistic perceptions.

Fichte and Nietzsche have different motivations for attacking the notion of a soul substratum. According to Fichte, this myth buttresses a Spinozistic type of determinism that he finds intolerably depressing, principally insofar as it precludes any genuine (i. e. libertarian) freedom of the self. If there is a substrate, particularly a material substrate, in which subjectivity is grounded, it must, he thinks, be determined by exogeneous forces – a thought that robs us of our autonomy, and with that, our responsibility, since it would mean that we can take neither joyful merit nor accept corrective blame for our

12 See also BGE 54 and Nachlass 1886/87, 7[60], KSA 12.315. For an overview of Nietzsche's denial of the self, see James S. Pearson, *Nietzsche on Conflict, Struggle and War*, Cambridge 2022, 174–80, and Gardner, "Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason."

13 See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London 1739, Book 1, Part 4, Section 6.

actions. Fichte goes so far as to say that a dogmatist of this sort is "in danger of losing himself" (EE 434). As such, Fichte wishes to ensure the ungrounded and self-sufficient status of the conscious, acting self.[14]

Nietzsche has quite contrary motivations for deflating the notion of the substantial self.[15] His critique forms part of his endeavour to naturalise morality. In GM I 13, Nietzsche seeks to unburden humans of crippling guilt by deconstructing the idea that there exists anything metaphysically stable to which moral responsibility and sin could legitimately be predicated. Moreover, by de-essentialising the self, he also opens up an ontological space for self-cultivation, since this move reframes the self as a constellation of forces susceptible to active formation.[16] So, despite their at times uncannily similar theoretical views, we can already see that Fichte's and Nietzsche's philosophical outlooks are informed by strikingly distinct practical projects.

2 Egalitarianism and the Foundations of the Fichtean Self

We should now consider the constructive aspect of Fichte's and Nietzsche's philosophies of the self. As we have seen, both conceive the self as activity and nothing besides or beneath. But this raises the question as to what *kind* of activity they have in mind exactly. Let us begin by inquiring into Fichte's view before turning to that of Nietzsche in the following section.

Fichte posits the principle of self-identity as a novel foundation for philosophy. In *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge*, he states that the most fundamental, or absolute form taken by the I is that of self-positing, or self-assertion, which can be represented by the tautology "I am I" (GWL 93–5). This free act of self-positing (free on account of its being determined by nothing but itself) underlies all objective experience according to Fichte. Echoing the B version of Kant's transcendental deduction – where Kant claims that the representation "'I think' must be able to accompany all my perceptions" – Fichte states that "[n]o object comes to consciousness except under the condition that I am conscious of myself, the conscious subject" (VDW 526–7).[17]

14 This point comes out most strongly in Part 1 of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. For more on Fichte's critique of dogmatism, see also EE 433–9; Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 37–43; and Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*, 18–9.

15 This said, Nietzsche shares Fichte's disdain for the lifeless character of the mechanistic worldview. See, e. g., BGE 21.

16 See D 560.

17 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge 1998, 246, B131.

He is careful to add, though, that there is no deductive proof for this conviction – it must be directly intuited by the reader themself. In Fichte's words (which directly appropriate, and subvert, those of Kant), it is an "intellectual intuition" (ZE 463) and represents a pre-reflective truth. He refers to this as the "immediate self-consciousness [...] that occurs in a free action of the mind," though one's attention must be correctly directed in order to intuit this self-positing activity (EE 429).[18] It is important to note that this is not a deductive or objective truth for Fichte; rather, it is an intuition based on feeling:

> Here lies the ground of all reality. Only through that relation of feeling to the self [...] is the reality of the self, or the not-self, possible for the self. Anything which is possible solely through *the relation of a feeling*, without the self being conscious, or able to be conscious, *of its intuition thereof*, and *which therefore appears to be felt*, is *believed* [*geglaubt*]. As to reality in general, whether that of the self or the not-self, there is only *a belief* [*Glaube*] (GWL 301).

So, although self-positing is ontologically fundamental and constitutes the absolute foundation of all experience, knowledge of the self is founded upon feeling and a faith-like form of conviction, not objective cognition. Any attempt to reductively explain this intuition of our foundational selves in terms of something else more primary – matter, say – fails because it can only be posited by means of this consciousness, as an abstraction therefrom. This feeling of the ungrounded, auto-positing self constitutes phenomenological bedrock. Any attempt at reduction or deflation relies upon and reinstantiates the primacy of this absolute self-consciousness and is therefore self-defeating.

Another essential feature of the self, according to Fichte, is its relation to alterity, to the "not-I." This foreignness is essential to the I of the Jena *Science of Knowledge* because it functions as a source of determination. There is, Fichte tells us, an outwardly pressing drive within the self, "a drive for determination [*Trieb zum Bestimmen*]." This compels the self-contained, absolute I to relate to otherness, to the world of the not-I (GWL 307). However, alongside this drive to encounter otherness, the I retains a countervailing drive for absolute independence; the I, according to Fichte, is always striving to exist in relation to itself and itself *alone*, and so when it confronts the not-I, it negates alterity by making the foreign thing conform to the I's internal laws of cognition. In Kantian terms, we might say that in forcing the noumenal realm of the not-I to conform to the schematised categories, the I annuls the otherness of the not-I, transforming the world into an extension of itself. As such, the Fichtean self is characterised by an *infinite* longing (*Sehnen*) to meet and negate otherness. This is what Fichte calls *desire* when it relates to specific objects.[19] While in *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* this

18 For more on how Fichte subversively appropriates Kant's conception of "intellectual intuition," see Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*, 76–7, and Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 55–9.

19 This clearly prefigures Hegel's desire-based account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). See Scott Jenkins, "Hegel's Concept of Desire," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47/1 (2009), 103–30.

formative impulse is primarily said to express itself in the act of cognition, elsewhere Fichte frames it as the impulse that drives us to physically pacify and exploit the natural world (BM 266–7); and as we will presently see, he also maintains that our impulse for independence issues in a desire to forge an *internal* coherence amongst our drives and impulses, which initially present themselves to our consciousness as exogenous forces.

Drive (*Trieb*) is a fundamental concept within Fichte's moral psychology. Every human individual is, he claims, composed of a system of drives. He refers to a person's given system of drives as that person's "natural drive [*Naturtrieb*]" (GNR 355). Fichte, it should be noted, stresses that this should not be equated with a simple drive for survival:

> There is no drive for existence in all of nature. A rational being never wants to be simply in order to be, but rather, in order to be this or that. […] There is in me a drive, one that has arisen through nature and that relates itself to natural objects in order to unite them with my own being: not to absorb them into my being outright, as food and drink are absorbed through digestion, but to relate them as such to my natural needs, to bring them into a certain relationship with me (GNR 118).

Michelle Kosch has glossed this as "the drive, in any organised product of nature, to keep its parts together in something like the order in which it finds them, to organise its relation to the external world in a way that facilitates its own maintenance, repair, and reproduction, and to do so just for the sake of doing so."[20] Yet Fichte is dissatisfied with the natural drive on two accounts. For one, it is intrinsically motivated by the shallow hedonic end of enjoyment (*Genuss*); further, though perhaps more importantly, this composite drive is naturally determined in a way that Fichte finds unacceptable, since it counteracts what he considers to be the superior human project of attaining independence.

For the rational agent to become autonomous, then, the natural drive needs to be married to, and curbed by, other psychological drives. First there is what he calls the "pure drive [*der reine Trieb*]" – that is, a drive for independence for its own sake. This drive does not divorce us from the natural drive, but rather removes its compulsive aspect, giving us the ability to critically reflect on the ends of the natural drive – to assess whether and to what extent those ends facilitate mastery of alterity (SL 140–2). By pausing and critically reflecting on the impetus of the natural drive, we neutralize its compulsive quality. And in selectively acknowledging the ends of the natural drive, we thereby negate its status as a quasi-exogenous bundle of forces. In this way, heteronomy yields to autonomy. Yet Fichte does not believe the pure drive to be sufficient for free action, since it has a merely negative function, checking the compulsive force of our natural drive, but without providing us with a positive criterion for selecting among the various (often conflicting) ends given to us by the natural drive (SL 147). There must be a third drive, thinks Fichte, one that knits these two drives together and generates posi-

20 Michelle Kosch, *Fichte's Ethics,* Oxford 2018, 25.

tive motivation. This third psychological component is the "ethical drive" – a drive that, as Wood has put it, impels us "to form a categorical imperative," and positively spurs us to comply with the call of conscience.[21] This process generates psychological harmony, or wholeness – that is, among the triumvirate of drives – and it is this internal holism that represents the guiding ideal of Fichte's ethics.

It is vital to observe that for Fichte, harkening the call of conscience does not mean simply complying with convention. He is explicitly critical of such an "unconscionable" ethical policy (SL 175), which in his view takes its lead from an external authority instead of inner conviction (the true source of conscience). According to Fichte, conscience ought to be conceived as our "immediate consciousness of our determinate duty" (SL 173). And while in retrospect we may discover that we were mistaken regarding our duty, our conviction is ultimately all we have to go on when it comes to concretely acting. We must therefore accept it as the incontrovertible touchstone of ethically warranted action. In Fichte's own words, conscience "has final jurisdiction and is subject to no appeal" (SL 174).

We should take care not to misread Fichte as advocating that we act on feeling alone. To act on such thin grounds is to engage in what he calls moral "fanaticism" (SL 174). Conscience, by contrast, is a feeling that arises out of earnest moral reflection (SL 174–6). What is more, Fichte believes that in order to act in accordance with duty, we first need to be embedded within a community. As Wood has emphasised, there is a strong intersubjective dimension to Fichte's ethics, chiefly insofar as others give us occasion to act dutifully.[22] We should recall that immediate awareness of our duty is a precondition of harmonising our drives, and of initiating free action. In Fichtean terms, others provide us with a summons (*Aufforderung*) to moral agency (SL 220). Moreover, conscience depends upon our having received a moral education from others. We do not, thinks Fichte, limit our natural drive spontaneously, but only by imitating (*nachbilden*) the example of others (SL 220). We need to learn the presuppositions that underpin moral agency: "by means of education, [humans] receive, *as premises for their own judgments*, what the human species has agreed upon up to this point and what has now become a matter of universal human belief" (SL 176, emphasis mine). This quote evinces that according to Fichte we need to actively reflect upon the moral doxa (or "premises") that we receive via social education. This moral education is not limited to institutional civic or religious schooling; it is rather a continuous and society-wide process. In *Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar* (1794), Fichte theorises that the project of self-perfection demands the exercise of two related educational drives: that of communication (*Mitteilungstrieb*) and that of receptivity (*Trieb zu empfangen*). Since "nature forms each

21 Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 154.

22 See Wood, "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," 18–23, and *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 200–3. See, however, Daniel Breazeale, "In Defense of Fichte's Account of Ethical Deliberation," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94/2 (2012), 178–207: 203–4, which contends that interpreters tend to over-emphasize the import of intersubjectivity in Fichte's moral philosophy.

person in a one-sided manner," rational intercourse is needed to correct each person's unique defects (VBG 315) – in Fichte's ideal society, we are all perpetually educating and being educated by one another.

Fichte also provides a transcendental argument for why we are obliged to presuppose the existence of at least one other free consciousness, namely, that it is only another free consciousness that can meaningfully limit the pure I.[23] The summons issued by the other gives the I the determination it needs in order to be individual, in order to give the I a conceptually meaningful alternative to the natural drive: "I cannot comprehend this summons to self-activity without ascribing it to an actual being outside of myself, a being that wanted to communicate to me a concept: namely, the concept of the action that is demanded [of me]" (SL 220). I then determine my individuality by freely acting in response to this summons, which functions as the enabling precursor for the moral activity of my conscience. Since the supposition that rational others exist is a necessary condition of my free activity, "[i]t follows that my drive to self-sufficiency absolutely cannot aim at annihilating the condition of its own possibility, that is, the freedom of the other" (SL 221). For this reason, I need to make my own agential ends harmonise with the ends of others, and I am therefore unable to impinge on others' freedom in pursuing self-sufficiency without falling into self-contradiction (SL 231). While a global consensus vis-à-vis our ends is impossible (SL 234), Fichte holds it to be a duty to "advance the end of reason" (SL 232), and to optimistically strive to approximate this regulative ideal.

Fichte's socio-political programme, which is constructed around the goal of fostering rationality in others, naturally follows from his individual ethics. This goal is promoted both as a condition of our receiving a rational summons, but also as a condition of fostering the convergence of humanity upon common ends. Echoing Spinoza, Fichte conceives social harmony as a function of widespread individual rationality. And in *Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*, he adumbrates his vision of society as a "relation of rational beings to one another" (VBG 302), adamantly maintaining that such a society must be founded upon a principle of equitable co-ordination, as opposed to one of sub-ordination (VBG 308). He reasons that if one cohabits with slaves, or other individuals held in a state of ignorance, one ends up living alongside humans that have been reduced to the status of animals. But since one's freedom depends upon being surrounded by other free rational beings, this political arrangement would undercut the conditions of one's own self-sufficiency (VBG 308–9). Nonetheless, Fichte accepts a division of labour, and acknowledges differences of talent and physical ability. And although his conception of "class [*Stand*]" is closer to what we might call "profession," he proposes that people should be able to choose their "class," and that "every [class] is equally deserving of our respect [*Achtung*]." Moreover, every individual should be

23 Fichte's transcendental arguments for the necessary existence of rational others (i. e., his refutation of solipsism), can also be found in *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (33–5) and *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*.

treated as an end in themself, whether they work as, for example, a labourer or a scholar (though Fichte does nonetheless grant scholars a privileged function in society). And he argues that this condition of rational community should be given a global, cosmopolitan extension – indeed, "the ultimate object of society, [is] the ever-increasing ennoblement [*veredeln*] of the human race [*Menschengeschlecht*]," that is, by means of elevating all its individual members to rational, free activity (VBG 321).

This overview gives us a sufficient, albeit slightly reductive, picture of Fichte's ideal theory of subjectivity and the political conditions of self-cultivation. To recapitulate: for Fichte self-determination is the *summum bonum*; coordinating one's drives is necessary for self-determination; the exercise of conscience is a precondition of this psychic coordination; and finally, a rational, egalitarian society is required for the cultivation of one's conscience. What remains to be seen is the extent to which Nietzsche's thought is in accord with this vision.

3 Nietzsche on the Aristocratic Conditions of Self-Cultivation

We have already analysed Nietzsche's refutation of the substantial self and surveyed how he redefines subjectivity in terms of pure activity. But, to repeat the question that we previously posed to Fichte, what are the defining characteristics of this activity? Nietzsche does not, like Fichte, believe the self-positing I to be foundational. There are *no* immediate certainties regarding the self according to Nietzsche. As he highlights in *Beyond Good and Evil*, introspection, even careful, discerning introspection, does not reveal anything to which we can unproblematically give total credence:

> Whoever dares to answer these metaphysical questions right away with an appeal to a sort of *intuitive* knowledge, like the person who says: "I think and know that at least this is true, real, certain" – he will find the philosopher of today ready with a smile and two question-marks. "My dear sir," the philosopher will perhaps give him to understand, "it is improbable that you are not mistaken: but why insist on the truth?" – (BGE 16)

Honest self-examination regarding the nature of thinking reveals an insuperable lack of clarity. This criticism can be directly levelled at Fichte's notion of "self-positing" – the meaning of which is hardly as self-evident as Fichte would have us believe. As Frederick Neuhouser has emphasised, Fichte himself conceives of his foundational self-positing in different and incompatible ways depending on the phase of the *Science of Knowledge* under examination.[24] There is also then a great deal of disagreement within the criti-

24 Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity,* Cambridge 1990, 57.

cal literature itself regarding the nature of this starting point.[25] This lack of consensus seems to bear out Nietzsche's point. Fichte's response to Nietzsche would likely be that Nietzsche is one of those who are unable, or simply unwilling, to see the self as anything other than an illusion. On account of Nietzsche's refusal to acknowledge the phenomenological keystone of Fichte's entire system, he would undoubtedly be one of those with whom Fichte simply refuses to engage.[26] As we saw above, there is no deductive proof for the foundational existence of the self-positing I – it is *felt*, and the truth of this feeling is founded on a faith-like species of conviction. Hence, the contrary conviction cannot be rebutted by adducing any objective evidence, which is why Fichte simply turns away from those who reject his starting point.

Despite these doubts concerning the foundations of subjectivity, Nietzsche nonetheless inclines to *assume* something "given" in self-consciousness, namely, the world of our drives: "Assuming that our world of desires and passions is the only thing 'given' as real, that we cannot get down or up to any 'reality' except the reality of our drives (since thinking is only a relation between these drives) –" (BGE 36). While we should carefully remark the conditional form of the quoted sentence, and the two sets of scare quotes that it contains, it nonetheless demonstrates that Nietzsche does not think that introspection can penetrate to anything beyond the organised plurality of our drives. Drives are, for Nietzsche, cognitive and behavioural impulses, the units of will to power that propel both thought and behaviour alike.[27] They are part biologically inherited and part culturally acquired.[28] An individual's sense of I-hood is then simply equated with the perspective of their dominant drive or drives.[29] Congruent with his scepticism regarding self-transparency, Nietzsche advances this vision of the self qua "society constructed out of drives" (BGE 12) as a *hypothesis*. His phenomenological grounds are therefore, unlike Fichte's, provisional and defeasible. Although he disavows both intellectual intuition and faith-like belief as vehicles of self-knowledge, he nonetheless, like Fichte, grants his model of the self a special epistemic status, one that makes no claim to verifiable objectivity.

Nietzsche's fundamental ontological concept, the will to power, should be thought of as a will to organisation – as a lust to over-power (*Überwältigen-wollen*) that which is perceived as useful and to *incorporate* (*einverleiben*) such things, to transform them

25 For an overview of the dissensus, see Wood "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," 6.

26 See EE 439; Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 53; and Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy*, 18.

27 Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 257–67, instructively compares some of the key points of contact between Nietzsche's and Fichte's drive psychologies. The similarities between Fichte's and Nietzsche's accounts of how drives underpin human agency is a topic that still merits further critical attention.

28 For a more comprehensive account of Nietzsche's drive psychology, see Pearson, *Nietzsche on Conflict, Struggle and War*, 223–45.

29 This is implied in D 109.

into auxiliary parts, into organs (Nachlass 1887, 9[151], KSA 12.424).[30] It is by means of this process, which resonates with Fichte's description of both longing and the natural drive, that any living organisation survives and thrives. Like Fichte, Nietzsche rejects the idea that this natural impetus is motivated by the telos of survival; its guiding end is rather survival *and* growth (GS 349). Within Nietzsche's philosophical psychology, the activity of the drives can then be explained in terms of the activity of the will to power – hence psychology, for Nietzsche, is simply a "morphology [...] of the will to power" (BGE 23); and the mechanism of the affects is susceptible to a "reduction to the will to power" (Nachlass 1886/87, 6[26], KSA 12.244). Since drives structure the way we perceive the world, it stands to reason that for Nietzsche cognition is shaped by a will for incorporation, and in a manner that unequivocally recalls Fichte's striving-based conception of cognition. This is neatly borne out in the following posthumous note:

> The meaning of "knowledge": [...] In order for a particular species to maintain itself – and increase its power –, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behaviour on it. The *utility of preservation*, not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived – stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge – they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words: the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the *measure* to which the *will to power* grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in *order to become master of it, in order to press it into service* (Nachlass 1888, 14[122], KSA 13.302).

In the final sentence of this *Nachlass* fragment, Nietzsche describes perception (*Wahrnehmung*) as a process of reducing the foreign to the familiar, the different to the identical, and thereby dilating the circle of the self, all of which is strongly redolent of Fichte's account of perception as a process of the I striving against the not-I.

Further recalling Fichte's drive-based moral psychology, Nietzsche maintains that internal unity and "freedom" are attained with the ascendency of a single drive or instinct. This is perhaps most salient in his oft-cited portrait of the sovereign individual:

> This man who is now free, who actually *has* the *prerogative* to promise, this master of the free will, this sovereign. [...] The proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom and power over himself and his destiny, has penetrated him to his lowest depths and become an instinct, his dominant instinct: – what will he call his dominant instinct, assuming that he needs a word for it? No doubt about the answer: this sovereign human being calls it his *conscience* ... (GM II 2)

Nietzsche is openly parodying the Kantian conception of conscience as something innately inhering within the rational agent. In striking contrast to Kant, Nietzsche conceives conscience as the culmination of a protracted process of socialisation – a brutal

30 For Nietzsche's grounds for conceiving all living entities as will to power organizations, see Ciano Aydin, "Nietzsche on Reality as Will to Power: Toward an 'Organization–Struggle' Model," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 33/1 (2007), 25–48, and Pearson, *Nietzsche on Conflict, Struggle and War*, Chapter 4.

history of discipline and punishment. But the idea that it is consciousness of, and presumably a drive towards, *freedom* that characterises this dominant, stabilising instinct, is strikingly similar to Fichte's notion of the pure drive (even if Nietzsche tends to operate with a compatibilist notion of freedom, in contrast to Fichte's markedly libertarian conception). As in Fichte, this dominant instinct is manifested by means of socialization. What is more, it institutes the psychological stability needed for one to be consistent, which in turn enables one to make good on one's promises. Without this stability, one becomes capricious and unpredictable, even to oneself, and consequently one's promises end up carrying little weight.[31] Given that in this condition one is unable to realise one's higher order intentions, one is, in Nietzsche's view, unfree. Crucially, for Nietzsche, this dominant instinct does not have the special ethical status that it does for Fichte. In D 109, for instance, he writes that in situations where "'we' believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive *which is complaining about another*." There is therefore a decisionist element to Nietzsche's account of how holism is internally achieved, that is, it is not so much the ascendancy of a particular drive, with a particular content that is essential or worth striving for; rather, he valorises the ascendancy of any drive or group of drives that can successfully bridle the antagonism of competing drives into a productive hierarchy. This ascendant drive then becomes one's conscience, fulfilling the role of maintaining rank and file among one's impulses. As such, it is the structure, not the moral content of our drives that is of paramount ethical importance to Nietzsche.

Such affirmative comments regarding the development of conscience will come as something of a surprise to anyone familiar with Nietzsche's pronounced critique of conscience. He is wholeheartedly opposed to the idea of what we might call moral intuitionism, that is, the idea that our conscience somehow discloses objective morality to us. By contrast, he tends to conceive conscience as a product of social inculcation, of spiritual conditioning, and as an ideological tool with which the strong control the weak (BGE 61). As he states in GS 335:

> But *that* you hear this or that judgement as the words of conscience, i. e. *that* you feel something to be right may have its cause in your never having thought much about yourself and in your blindly having accepted what has been labelled *right* since your childhood; or in the fact that fulfilling your duties has so far brought you bread and honours […]. For all that, the *firmness* of your moral judgement could be evidence of your personal wretchedness, of lack of a personality; your "moral strength" might have its source in your stubbornness – or in your inability to envisage new ideals.

Despite Nietzsche's criticism of those who blindly obey their conscience, he acknowledges Fichte's thesis that conscience is all we have to fall back on. How can we ascertain the fittingness of an action if not by the yardstick of our own judgement? As can

31 On this point, see Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche on Free Will, Autonomy, and the Sovereign Individual," in Ken Gemes / Simon May (eds.), *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, Oxford 2009, 33–50: 37.

be seen in the above quote, Nietzsche was as critical as Fichte when it came to those who simply defer to convention or other external authorities. He therefore exhorts his readers to heed their "intellectual conscience [*intellectuelles Gewissen*]," or what he also calls the "conscience behind your conscience" (GS 335). In GS 335, Nietzsche describes this second conscience as the means by which we scrutinize our moral convictions, search out inherited prejudices, and formulate norms for agency that are authentically ours – norms that are aligned with our unique needs as individuals – what Nietzsche elsewhere refers to as "probity [*Redlichkeit*]" (BGE 230).

At first blow, all this appears to be broadly compatible with Fichte's conception of genuine conscience as a process of deliberation, or reflection, as opposed to a passive act of complying with our knee-jerk moral intuitions. However, very much unlike Fichte, Nietzsche explicitly distinguishes his positive conception of conscience from any sensation of certainty. As he states in GS 2, the individual who lives in accordance with their intellectual conscience "does not consider the desire for certainty to be his inmost craving and deepest need." In a sense, then, intellectual conscience is meant to restrain us from precipitously enacting our moral convictions and to reconcile us with uncertainty (an idea echoing Keats' conception of negative capability). Yet it would appear that Nietzsche at least feels certain regarding this need to relinquish certainty, and as such is unable to escape the fact that conscience ultimately manifests itself as a form of normative bedrock, as conviction. The problem with this is that Nietzsche's doubts concerning conscience can be directed against his own conviction. Who is to say that his cherished intellectual conscience is not a product of inculcation – of, say, a romantic yearning for authenticity? There comes a point at which we simply need to have faith in our considered normative convictions. Otherwise, it becomes impossible to act in accordance with an inner criterion at all, which is the nub of Fichte's argument. In this respect, then, Nietzsche's affirmative conception of conscience is ultimately not so far from that of Fichte.[32] This raises the important question as to when we ought to give up probing the possibly inauthentic bases of our conscience. These considerations point to a golden mean of suspicion – one lying somewhere between the extremes of gullible assent (the vice of deficiency) and paranoiac scouring (the vice of excess). Nietzsche would undoubtedly find Fichte guilty of the vice of deficiency, but in formulating his alternative, he arguably courts the contrary vice of excess.

Where Nietzsche most conspicuously departs from Fichte, however, is in his account of the social and political means by which conscience is most effectively cultivated. If we return to the formulation of conscience in GM II 2 (quoted above) – i. e., qua dominant instinct – we see that he describes the social conditions under which conscience emerges in terms quite distinct from those envisioned by Fichte. Certainly, Nietzsche

32 For the sake of brevity, I am bracketing out the issue of universalizability, which plays an important role as a ground of conscientious conviction for Fichte (see Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 151 ff.), but certainly *not* for Nietzsche (see GS 2 or BGE 43).

would agree that conscience presupposes socialization, but he nonetheless does not take it to be a product of *rational* community; rather, in his view, man "was made predictable" by means of the "morality of custom and the social straitjacket" (GM II 2). A regimented psyche is developed, Nietzsche avers, over many generations by means of brutal "mnemonic techniques." Humans have etched a sense of responsibility into themselves by means of, among other things, asceticism, religious ritual, and violently punitive legal institutions:

> When man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices: the most horrifying sacrifices and forfeits (the sacrifice of the first-born belongs here), the most disgusting mutilations (for example, castration), the cruellest rituals of all religious cults (and all religions are, at their most fundamental, systems of cruelty) (GM II 3).[33]

The stability of our drives, and the norms that correspond to these drives, is a product of socio-cultural conditioning and biological selection (as is implied in his reference to castration). Further distancing himself from Fichte's view, Nietzsche maintains that only a steeply *inegalitarian* form of polity is going to be able to carry out the disciplining and breeding required to engender conscience. In BGE 257, for example, he states: "Every enhancement so far in the type 'man' has been the work of an aristocratic society – and that is how it will be, again and again, since this sort of society believes in a long ladder of rank order and value distinctions between men, and in some sense needs slavery." In a similar vein, in BGE 258 Nietzsche praises the way in which an aristocracy "accepts in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who have to be pushed down and shrunk into incomplete human beings, into slaves, into tools, all for the sake of the aristocracy."

The thrust of Nietzsche's apology for slavery – by which he means *any* form of exploitative social relation, as opposed to simple chattel slavery[34] – is that competent social agency demands smooth functional coordination, such as one finds in the military. Such agency requires relations of command and obedience: everyone needs to play their part if higher goals are to be achieved, particularly the goal of cultivating, or in Nietzsche's words, *breeding*, coordinated individuals. Indeed, an aristocratic social organisation is exigent according to Nietzsche because it provides an institutionally secure basis for such breeding (*Zucht und Züchtung*). As he bluntly puts it, aristocracy functions as an "institution with the purpose of breeding [*Züchtung*]" (BGE 262). Owing to the biologically and culturally entrenched nature of our drives, the project of generating higher individuals is, as demonstrated above, not achievable within the span of a single lifetime. We are unable to simply shuffle our drives into their ideal order,

33 See also James S. Pearson, "Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression," *Inquiry* 66/1 (2018), 1–30.

34 For Nietzsche's views on slavery, see, e. g., BGE 207, where he describes the scholar as a slave (in a manner starkly opposed to Fichte's *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*). See also Pearson, *Nietzsche on Conflict, Struggle and War*, 251–4.

as Fichte at times seems to prescribe. Rather, the task of psychologically organizing people requires a transgenerational breeding programme – one that is both biological and cultural in nature, involving the regulation of both marriages and institutional education.[35] Such a project is not, Nietzsche claims, possible without the stringent and tenacious authority peculiar to aristocratic order (see BGE 262).[36]

Breeding represents one of the most effective ways of increasing the net force of humanity, and so, in a sense, even those on the bottom of the pile stand to gain: "Taming, as I understand it, is a means of accumulating the tremendous force of humanity" (Nachlass 1888, 15[65], KSA 13.450). The higher individuals born of this breeding project *justify* existence (they are *rechtfertigend*) for those condemned to toil (Nachlass 1887, 10[17], KSA 12.463).[37] Nietzsche's prescriptions are therefore, like Fichte's, given for the benefit of humanity (*Menschheit*) as a whole.[38] And yet his calls for an aristocratic breeding project are completely at odds with Fichte's egalitarian demand that we cultivate ourselves by means of free rational intercourse, and that we abstain from in any way exploiting and thereby animalizing our fellow human beings. Indeed, Nietzsche explicitly enjoins modernity to breed "an *animal* [*Thier*] with the prerogative to promise" (GM II 2, emphasis mine). When it comes to determining which political regimes are most conducive to subjective coordination, Fichte and Nietzsche therefore present us with a dilemma. For Fichte, this ethical end can only be achieved by an egalitarian, democratic mode of government, whereas for Nietzsche only a steeply hierarchical, aristocratic polity is up to the task.

Although this captures one of the deepest disagreements between Nietzsche's and Fichte's philosophies, even on this front they may not, in the final analysis, be as incompatible as they at first seem. When we adopt a more embracing view of their political writings, one that extends beyond the phases of their thought to which we have hitherto confined ourselves, we find that this dilemma is not so clean-cut. For instance, in his

35 Nietzsche sometimes vacillates over whether this breeding programme is biological or cultural in nature, or both. He wilfully plays on the double meaning of *Züchtung*, which can be translated as either "breeding" or "cultivation." See John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, Oxford 2004, 190–200.

36 See also BGE 188 and 203. Continuing this line of thought in A 58, Nietzsche also commends intransigent and transgenerationally durable religious and legal orders, such as that of the Roman Imperium, as a condition of flourishing of life.

37 We might even say that Nietzsche's prescriptions abide by, in their own peculiar way, a kind of difference principle. I discuss this kind of inegalitarian meeting of ends (i. e. between the different ranks of society) in the context of Nietzsche's earlier philosophy in James S. Pearson, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall: The Early Nietzsche on the Struggle for Organisation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 49/4 (2018), 508–33.

38 As Herman W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So … Nietzsche's Equivocations on the Relation between Democracy and 'Grosse Politik'," in Herman W. Siemens / Vasti Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, Berlin 2008, 231–68: 234, has observed: "At stake for Nietzsche is not the interests of one class, an elite of 'higher' or 'exceptional' humans in whom he invests exclusive value, but the future of humankind."

later writings, Fichte seems to acknowledge some of the weaknesses associated with his earlier egalitarian ideals, and advocates a far more stringent – some have gone so far as to say despotic – political system, even admitting slavery under certain conditions (GGZ 163).[39] Likewise, the program of moral formation espoused by the later Fichte is markedly more disciplinarian than that which he proposes during his Jena period (see, e. g., RDN 435). Contrariwise, at several places in Nietzsche's corpus, particularly in his middle period, he maintains that democratic regimes *can* sometimes facilitate the generation of unified individuals.[40]

Here is not the place to fully unpack these arguments, nor to analyze the relative merits of aristocracy versus democracy with respect to the goal of propagating subjective coordination. What I wish to highlight is that when we take a broader view of their political philosophies, we find them both adopting a more mixed approach, and countenancing the advantages of regimes to which they otherwise stand opposed. Any serious attempt to engineer political institutions that enable citizens to cultivate psychological coordination will need to consider the strengths of various modes of political organization, and to synthesize these insights into a pluralistic solution – for instance, by trying to combine the free and equitable intercourse characteristic of democracies with the stability and long-termism traditionally associated with aristocracies. So, while Fichte's and Nietzsche's politics are for the most part sharply incompatible, their wider political theories nonetheless invite pluralistic solutions to this dichotomy.

Conclusion

My chief purpose in this paper has been to demonstrate the significant overlap between Nietzsche's and Fichte's theories of subjectivity. Both deny the existence of a substantial self, preferring instead to reconceive subjectivity in terms of activity and activity alone; they comparably describe the subject as an active striving to incorporate otherness; both frame some form of *conscience* as a prerequisite of achieving psychological coordination; they similarly deem social interaction to be essential for the cultivation of conscience; and finally, we have seen how Fichte and Nietzsche share a common concern for the betterment of humanity taken as a whole.

While mapping this sizeable overlap, however, we have also flagged some areas of profound disagreement. For example, Nietzsche holds that we are unable to intuit the

39 For the despotic reading of Fichte, see Georg Geismann, "Fichtes 'Aufhebung' des Rechtsstaates," *Fichte-Studien* 3 (1991), 86–117. It should also be borne in mind that even in his earlier political philosophy, Fichte allows for hereditary aristocracy, provided it has the people's consent (GNR 163).

40 See Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So," and Herman W. Siemens, "Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy (1870–1886)," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 38/1 (2009), 20–37, for a full overview of Nietzsche's pro-democracy writings.

pure I in the manner proposed by Fichte. Further, their analogous deflations of the substantial self were found to be informed by quite distinct practical concerns. In staging a confrontation between the two thinkers, we also encountered two philosophically significant dilemmas. The first concerns their conceptions of conscience. While conscience is central to Nietzsche's normative project, he certainly does not concur with Fichte's claim that considered conviction of conscience represents an unproblematic source of normativity: our moral convictions, however profound or considered, could always, unbeknownst to us, be the result of cultural conditioning. As such, these convictions cannot be taken as unshakeable foundations for self-coordination and authentic agency. But the question remains: where to draw the line? When can we be confident in our feelings of normative certainty? In other words, when can we legitimately *act* on these feelings? It is by no means obvious that Nietzsche's invocation of intellectual conscience is impervious to his own critique of conscience. The task of answering this question, however, falls beyond the scope of our current study, though I have suggested that we might find a golden mean of suspicion lying midway between the polarized views of Fichte and Nietzsche.

The second dilemma, and the most substantial point of disagreement between the two thinkers, concerns their distinct views regarding the political preconditions required to cultivate a coordinated psyche. Fichte advocates for global mutual respect, egalitarianism, and rational intercourse as the necessary means of generating ethically attuned individuals capable of governing their natural impulses. Nietzsche by contrast campaigns for a transgenerational breeding project, one that he believes demands aristocratic hierarchy, exploitation, brutal cultural conditioning, and potentially even eugenics. My contention has been that this divergence can be traced back to their differing conceptions of conscience and drives. Whereas Fichte argues that the cultivation of a rational conscience is sufficient to produce internal harmony, and that only an open, egalitarian regime can produce such a conscience, Nietzsche's conception of drives implies that they are too deeply embedded for Fichte's proposals to bear fruit. This is why Nietzsche insists that a strong conscience can only be developed by means of a long-term breeding program, which demands a stable aristocratic order. This demonstrates how subtle differences in how one conceives of drives, and the faculty of conscience, can have a potentially seismic impact on one's ethical and political outlook.

I have suggested that we might overcome this dilemma by widening the scope of our analysis to include the earlier Nietzsche (pre-1880) and the later Fichte (post-1800). This reveals Nietzsche countenancing more democratic modes of governance, and Fichte conditionally endorsing some typically inegalitarian institutions. On this basis, I have argued that their wider philosophies suggest a more pluralistic approach to the problem, wherein the advantages usually associated with particular types of regime might be *combined* with an eye to promoting psychological holism. Though I have confined myself to specific phases of their writings, our efforts to resolve this dilemma make clear that a more comprehensive solution would need to include both Nietzsche's earlier writings and Fichte's later writings. A more expansive study of this sort would

also need to examine their respective views on German nationalism. But however we tackle the dilemmas raised in this paper, we should not let these tensions distract us from Nietzsche's and Fichte's deeply shared concern with making humans whole.

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