

Nietzsche on the Sociality of Emotional Experience

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Abstract: In this paper, I explore the sociality of emotional experience in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Specifically, I describe four key mechanisms through which an individual's sociocultural context shapes her emotional experience on Nietzsche's view—emotional contagion as habitual affective mimicry, the production of emotions' felt character through the assimilation of dominant social beliefs and norms, affective interpretation à la Christopher Fowles, and the imposition of dominant notions of emotional appropriateness—fleshing out a dimension of Nietzsche's thought which is largely taken for granted but remains undertreated. After detailing these mechanisms, I argue that attending to the sociality of emotional experience in Nietzsche's thought is crucial not only for understanding key elements of his moral psychology (including certain of his reflections on freedom and self-transformation), but also for understanding his interpretation of nihilism as a psychological-affective phenomenon produced by the society to which one belongs. On Nietzsche's view, attending to the sociality of emotion helps individuals recognize the way in which the sociocultural contexts they inhabit might undermine their flourishing—and also helps them envision the conditions (especially sociocultural conditions) requisite for healthier, more empowering emotional lives.

I. Introduction

A fair amount of recent scholarship in Nietzsche studies has been dedicated to the role of affects in his thought. In the literature, scholars explore connections between affects and values (Janaway 2009; Bamford 2014; Katsafanas 2016; Poellner 2007; Kail 2018); affects and knowledge (Janaway 2007, 2009; Clark 1998; Clark and Dudrick 2012); affects, motivation, and selfhood (Anderson 2012; Leiter 2019; Creasy 2020); and more. Others offer accounts that focus more narrowly on describing certain features of Nietzsche's thought on affects, including how Nietzsche individuates affects (Leiter 2019; Mitchell 2020) and just what Nietzschean affects *are* (Fowles 2020). Considerably less attention, however, has been dedicated to exploring how Nietzsche thinks an individual's sociocultural context shapes her affective life.

This gap in the literature is surprising.¹ But it is especially surprising in light of the fact that Nietzsche both explicitly tells his readers that we need an account of the sociocultural production of

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affects (HH 1) and goes on to offer such an account.² And if relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the sociocultural shaping of our affective lives on Nietzsche's view, even less has been paid to why Nietzsche finds it so important to flesh out that "chemistry" of the "agitations we experience within ourselves in cultural and social intercourse" (HH 1). The first aim of this paper, then, is to fill a gap in the scholarship by exploring a topic of crucial importance to Nietzsche that remains largely unthematized.

In addition, I intend for the account offered in this paper to serve as an illuminating corrective to one of the very few interpretations of Nietzsche's moral psychology that overtly attends to the sociocultural shaping of affective experience: the account offered in Brian Leiter's recent work (2019).³ While Leiter is one of the few scholars to expressly attend to the social shaping of affectivity in Nietzsche, his contribution to the topic is chiefly negative, as he both denies that one's society plays any interesting or significant role in shaping affective experience (171) and aims to restrict the role one's society and upbringing (as opposed to heritable psychophysiological facts) plays in shaping one's affective life (171-4). In contrast, I argue that sociocultural impacts on affective experience are pervasive and widespread on Nietzsche's view—and that recognizing this allows us to make better sense of many key themes in Nietzsche's corpus.⁴

¹ This gap is especially surprising in light of Christopher Janaway's convincing claims that "drives are responsive to modification by cultural means" (2012 189) and that Nietzsche thinks that "[h]ow an individual's drives operate over time, and even what drives an individual continues to have, is open to change" (2012 198) as a function of one's sociocultural context. After all, if an individual's drive-life can be shaped by her sociocultural context and the affects she experiences are often results of her drives (Alfano 2019 90-1; Creasy 2020 70; Janaway 2009, 55; Katsafanas 2016 117; Richardson 2020 121), it is clear that her affective life will be shaped by that context as well.

² In fact, he offers multiple accounts of the sociocultural formation of emotional experience, a selection of which I will focus on below.

³ Alfano (2019) is another, though he focuses mainly on the social shaping of the self via the specific emotion of social fear. For more on the formative role of social fear, see Bamford 2014.

⁴ According to Leiter, Nietzsche thinks that certain second-order affects (or "meta-affective responses") can "aris[e] from the influence of culture" (77). (Leiter refers to a subspecies of second-order affects he designates as "moral affects" [77], but this category is nebulous. Additionally, it seems that he thinks only *some* moral affects arise from the influence of culture.) On Leiter's view, however, Nietzsche seems to restrict the influence of one's sociocultural context to this subset of affects alone, insisting that affects (especially first-order affects) are otherwise mere productions of drives. In the case of first-order affects (as well as those second-order affects Leiter does not designate "moral affects" [77]), Leiter argues that Nietzsche thinks drives alone "give rise to" them (2019 77). In other words, Leiter's Nietzsche finds an explanatory role for one's culture only in the case of a narrow species of second-order affects; otherwise, Leiter argues that drives alone "give rise to [those] feelings of inclination and aversion" (77) he characterizes as basic or first-order affects. Such a view explains the vast majority of affects an individual experiences by appealing to other, more basic features of one's psychological makeup, glossing over or downplaying other crucial explanatory factors, including elements of the social and cultural milieux in which an individual finds herself. This account of affective experience—is the result of certain psychophysical facts about the person having that experience—is in keeping with Leiter's well-known "doctrine of types" according to which "[e]ach person has a more-or-less fixed psycho-physical constitution" (3), a collection of "heritable type-facts" (9) which are "either *physiological* facts about the person, or facts about the person's unconscious drives or affects" (3). (See Leiter 1998 for the initial presentation of his doctrine of types.) These type-facts

In this paper, I begin by describing four key mechanisms through which an individual's sociocultural context shapes her emotional experience on Nietzsche's view—emotional contagion as habitual affective mimicry, the production of emotions' felt character through the assimilation of dominant social beliefs and norms, affective interpretation à la Christopher Fowles, and the imposition of dominant notions of emotional appropriateness—fleshing out a dimension of Nietzsche's thought which is largely taken for granted but remains undertreated.⁵ While there are other mechanisms through which one's society shapes her emotional life on Nietzsche's view, my current project focuses only on those mentioned above, and thus is not intended to be exhaustive.⁶

After detailing the four mechanisms above, I explain why Nietzsche finds it so crucial for us to understand how our affective lives are shaped. First, to the extent that reflection on the origins of one's emotions (and the actions they motivate) reveals the sociocultural mechanisms above, such reflection both reveals our unfreedom and potentially facilitates Nietzschean freedom.⁷ Second, Nietzsche hopes that his description of the sociocultural shaping of emotions (and their objects) will help his readers understand why certain societies—especially Christian-moral society—tend to be especially life-denying and disempowering, disposing individuals to nihilism (*qua* affective nihilism). Finally, Nietzsche hopes that understanding the sociocultural shaping of our affective lives will motivate us to engage in practical strategies, such as solitude, which help us resist self-alienation and promote individual flourishing.

II. On sociocultural impacts and the scope of the project

Before I detail various ways in which an individual's sociocultural context impacts her emotional experience on Nietzsche's view, let me offer a broad definition of “sociocultural impacts” (henceforth SCIs) and explain what I include under the heading of “SCIs” for this paper. The SCIs I

are “essential natural facts” (123) that determine an individual's personality (124), behaviors (including “morally significant behaviors” [9], but also “how one responds to differing circumstances and environments” [124]), inclinations and aversions, and values, and they play “a far more powerful role than education or upbringing” (178). Additionally, Leiter interprets Nietzsche as a kind of fatalist with respect to type-facts: according to Leiter's Nietzsche, an individual is fated in virtue of her type-facts to a certain character (including certain affects and other traits), as well as various behaviors and values.

⁵ Although affective interpretation (as one mechanism through which emotions are shaped) has been detailed at length by Christopher Fowles (2020), I include it here because the significance of affective interpretation for Nietzsche's broader philosophical project is glossed over fairly quickly in Fowles' article.

⁶ For example, an individual's society might influence her emotional experience by impacting her understanding of herself and her inner states, including her emotions and motivations.

⁷ As I argue elsewhere, Nietzsche's Spinozist notion of freedom consists in becoming a more adequate cause of one's feelings and actions ([redacted] 2020 74).

describe are broadly analogous to social facts *à la* Durkheim, collective “ways of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual” (Durkheim 1982/1895, p.51) which are “general over the whole of a given society” (ibid p.59) and “imposed, or at least suggested from outside the individual” (Durkheim 1982/1917, p.248).⁸ It is in virtue of this imposition or suggestion that such impacts are “capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint” (Durkheim 1982/1895, p.59).

On this broad definition, many features and factors count as SCIs, including shared feelings, beliefs, and norms within a given sociocultural milieu, structural features that emerge from social dynamics (such as social positions or roles), institutions and practices (marriage, law enforcement), linguistic properties (such as dialect), and more. While Nietzsche expresses interest in how many of these social facts impact the emotional lives of individuals, in this paper I construe SCIs more narrowly (while retaining those aspects of Durkheim’s characterization of social facts I mention above, including 1) his emphasis on social facts as involving an “external constraint” to which the individual is typically subject and 2) their pervasiveness or dominance within a given community or collective). Specifically, I limit my analysis of SCIs in Nietzsche to feelings, concepts, beliefs, norms, and values (as well as sets of these, including belief systems or moralities) shared by a community of individuals (a society, culture, or ideological community) to which one is exposed in virtue of her belonging to that community, and which Nietzsche frames as characteristic of that community. In the selections of text I include below, we find two distinct types of SCIs on emotions: 1) features of one’s sociocultural context that function to shape emotions *directly* (via others’ feelings and their impacts on my emotions) and 2) features of one’s sociocultural context that shape emotions *indirectly*, especially non-affective elements through which the influence of one’s sociocultural context is mediated (such as concepts, beliefs, norms, and values).

Of interest will be how certain non-affective features of my sociocultural context are often required by Nietzsche to explain why I have the particular emotional experience that I do. Otherwise put, these features often constitute an important part of the causal story Nietzsche tells about how a given subject comes to experience a particular emotion in a particular instance. More specifically, I explore how offering a thorough explanation of an occurrent emotional experience to which one is subject in a particular circumstance will typically require reference to the non-trivial influence of my

⁸ I do not mean to imply that Nietzsche prefigured this term of Durkheim’s, but rather that Durkheim’s term gives us a helpful starting point. Note that Durkheim’s characterization of “social facts” is intended to identify the proper object of sociological inquiry.

sociocultural context, which will often require reference to some non-affective, often cognitive, content (such as beliefs and social norms).

In the sections to follow, I detail four important ways in which Nietzsche believes an individual's sociocultural context impacts her emotions. Since emotions are a subset of Nietzschean affects—inclinations and disinclinations constituting evaluative feelings, induced by drives and involving fluctuations in somatic arousal or activity—I also include Nietzsche's reflections on SCIs on affect in my analysis. Additionally, since emotions are the result of psychophysiological processes and operations of which I may be either phenomenally or reflectively unaware, my account of SCIs on emotions in Nietzsche will include his reflections on the processes responsible for affects and emotions.

III. Affective contagion as habitual affective mimicry

To some extent, it is obvious that Nietzsche thinks the social, cultural, and ideological milieu an individual inhabits impact her emotional life. After all, in what is perhaps his best-known work, Nietzsche not only describes how interactions among various complex social and psychological forces lead to a *ressentiment*-fueled Christian-moral interpretation of the world (GM I:10) but also remarks upon how that Christian-moral interpretation disposes both its willing adherents *and* those who have merely been exposed to it to a variety of emotions (including compassion [GM Preface 6]; sin [GM III:20]; mistrust [especially self-mistrust] [GM III:10, 20]; fear [GM III:10]; the continued experience of *ressentiment*—redirected at the self as guilt [GM III:15, 16, 20]; and other subtle forms of psychological suffering [GM II:7]).⁹ Nietzsche not only offers psychophysiological explanations for social and cultural phenomena (moralities, systems of religious belief, political ideologies, and so on) (GM III:13; TI, “Morality,” 5)¹⁰ but sociocultural explanations for psychophysiological phenomena, especially affects and emotions (often in the form of a “history of the origins of... feelings and valuations” [GS 345]).¹¹ But while most Nietzsche scholars would likely grant that Nietzsche thinks an individual's sociocultural context non-trivially shapes her emotional experience, very few venture to explain the mechanisms through which this occurs. This is what I pursue in the

⁹ Nietzsche also argues that Christianity characteristically prescribes an “excess of emotion” as anesthetic (GM III:20).

¹⁰ Or, as he puts it in the specific case of morality, “morality as result, as symptom, as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, remedy, stimulant, inhibition, poison” (GM Preface 6). Note that Nietzsche also refers to a “history of ‘higher’ feelings” in *The Antichrist* (6).

¹¹ See also GS 7.

sections to follow, beginning with the mechanism of affective contagion as habitual affective mimicry. Afterwards, I make the case that understanding these mechanisms of social shaping is paramount for understanding certain key recommendations and themes in Nietzsche's body of work.

According to Nietzsche, one way in which affects (including emotions) are socially transmitted is via the phenomenon of affective contagion.¹² In cases of affective contagion, one's sociocultural context functions to shape emotions *directly*, through the feelings to which one is exposed in virtue of one's sociocultural context. This notion of affective contagion appears early, when Nietzsche asks in HH "why... inclinations and aversions [*Neigungen und Abneigungen*] [are] so contagious [*so ansteckend*]" (371) but is also present (though implicit) in Nietzsche's call in the *Genealogy* for "strong" individuals to remain separate from "sickly" ones, in order that strong individuals can avoid being infected by the misery, unhappiness, and doubt of the sick (GM III:14). Indeed, merely being exposed to the self-doubt of sickly individuals puts strong individuals at risk of becoming "ashamed of their happiness" (GM III:14). In GS, Nietzsche describes theatre as a cultural venue that "intoxicate[s] its audience and drive[s] it to the height of a moment of strong and elevated feelings" (GS 86); later, he frames Wagner's music as a cultural vector that spreads illness to those who encounter it by stirring up "affect at any price" (CW "Second Postscript"). Finally, in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche straightforwardly calls compassion a "contagious instinct" (A 7).¹³

In order to better understand the contagion of emotion as a social phenomenon, we need to understand how the social transmission of affect occurs through habitual imitation or mimicry, something Nietzsche famously describes in *Daybreak*, when he claims that "moral feelings [*Gefühle*] are transmitted in this way: children observe in adults inclinations for and aversions to certain actions and, as born apes, *imitate* these inclinations and aversions; in later life they find themselves full of these acquired and well-exercised affects [*Affekten*] (34)." According to this excerpt, one way in which individuals come to acquire certain affects (in the excerpt above, those "inclinations" and "aversions" Nietzsche characterizes as "moral feelings") is by imitating affects in childhood to which they are exposed in virtue of the surrounding adults. Additionally, as he explains later in this same

¹² See Bamford 2014, 78 and Creasy 2020, 83.

¹³ In this section of *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche claims both that compassion is a "contagious instinct [contagiöse Instinkt]" and that it "makes suffering into something infectious [ansteckend]" (7). Thus Nietzsche seems to hold *both* that compassion itself is contagious and that compassion functions to make *suffering* contagious. Thanks to Ian Dunkle for suggesting I clarify this difference.

text, the observation and persistent imitation of a range of affects from others in one's social milieu often establish affective habits that continue throughout one's life (D 111).

Nietzsche offers a (perhaps surprising) explanation for why we engage in affective mimicry of the sort described above: it is a basic impulse that constitutes part of our *animal* nature.

...social morality [can be found] even in the lowest scale of the animal world... animals learn to control and to disguise themselves to such an extent that some of them can even adapt the color of their bodies to that of their surroundings... Others can simulate death, or adopt the forms and colors of other animals, or of sand, leaves, moss, or fungi (known to English naturalists as "mimicry"). It is in this way that an individual conceals himself behind the universality of the generic term "man" or "society," or adapts and attaches himself to princes, castes, political parties, current opinions of the time, or his surroundings: and we may easily find the animal equivalent of all those subtle means of making ourselves happy, thankful, powerful, and fascinating... The beginnings of justice, as of prudence, moderation, bravery—in short, of all we designate as the *Socratic virtues*, are *animal* ... (D 26)

Nietzsche reflects here on the social dimensions of morality's development. Given his well-known later assessment of morality as a "sign-language of the affects" (BGE 187)—and his claim in *Daybreak* that "our moral judgments and evaluations... are only images and fantasies based on a physiological process unknown to us" based in affect-inducing drives (D 119)—I argue his remarks have implications for the social development of affectivity that underpins the development and practices of morality. Rather than matching the color of their physical bodies to their surroundings, human beings tend to match the "colors" of their psychological lives (that is, their affects) to the affects encountered in their surroundings, blending in through habitual affective mimicry.¹⁴ In an aphorism from HH—titled "*Assuming the colors of the environment?*" (371)—Nietzsche makes this quite clear:

Why are inclinations and disinclinations [*Neigung und Abneigung*] so contagious that we can hardly live near a very sensitive person without being filled... with his fors and againsts[?]. As a rule... we are not conscious of the transition from indifference to liking or

¹⁴ The association of affects with "colors" that paint existence appears several times in Nietzsche's corpus (HH 371, GS 7, GS 134) and is likely inspired by both Emerson (who claims that moods are "many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue" [1981]) and Hume (who refers to the "colors borrowed from internal sentiment" that "[gild] and [stain] all natural objects" [1975 294]).

disliking, but we gradually accustom ourselves to the sentiments of our environment, and because sympathetic agreement and acquiescence are so agreeable, we soon wear all the signs and party-colors of our surroundings. (HH 371)¹⁵

This social transmission of emotion through affective contagion (as a form of habitual affective mimicry) helps explain Nietzsche's later claim that our moral judgments have "a prehistory in [our] drives, inclinations, aversions, *experiences*, and *what you have failed to experience* [emphasis mine]" (GS 335)—especially his claim that hearing moral judgments as the "words of [one's] 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 labeled right since your childhood" (GS 335). It also makes good sense of Nietzsche's suggestion that too much "clamor about distress" (typical of the youth of modern Europe, in his view) leads "all too often" to the predominance of "the feeling of distress" (GS 56) in a culture—and that removing oneself from one's sociocultural context can encourage the development of *different* emotions than those into which one has been habituated (GS 338).

IV. The indirect sociocultural shaping of emotional experience by non-affective means

In this section, I explain how an individual's emotional experience is constructed in part by *non-affective* features of her sociocultural context. Specifically, I argue that Nietzsche thinks cognitive sociocultural features (such as concepts, beliefs, values, and norms) often play a role in shaping the phenomenal character of emotions (that is, how emotions feel).¹⁶ While he thinks that the phenomenal character of emotions can also be shaped by other down-the-line processes including the linguistic interpretation of my state as a particular state and my attempts to communicate that alleged state to others—processes informed by social, cultural, and ideological factors that Nietzsche believes make them especially ripe for distortion or confusion about one's emotions—what I describe in this section happens at a causally prior level than this.

Before I continue, it will be helpful to get clear about how Nietzsche typically frames the phenomenal character of emotions. After all, since my claim is that Nietzsche thinks SCIs shape the phenomenal character of emotions, getting clear on Nietzsche's characterization of this phenomenal

¹⁵ See also D 142.

¹⁶ In one key section (D 38), this occurs because such features construct the emotion underlying a given emotional experience.

character will allow us to get clear on what is being shaped. Nietzsche's remarks on affectivity show both 1) that he tends to describe emotions in hedonic terms—as positively or negatively valenced (WLN 10[9]); as “generally pleasant” or “unpleasant” (TI, “Four Errors,” 6); as “pleasant” or “painful” for the individual who undergoes them (D 34)—and 2) that he associates emotions with somatic states of arousal (BGE 19, 259; A 20; KSA 13:15[111], [118]). To do justice to these associations and descriptions (as well as the reflections from Nietzsche I include below), I suggest first that Nietzsche's descriptions of the phenomenal character of emotion, or what it feels like to be in the throes of a particular emotion, are typically hedonic. That is, when Nietzsche describes how SCIs shape the phenomenal character of emotions, he typically frames this in terms of their shaping feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness experienced by the individual undergoing those emotions, especially their valence, intensity, and duration.¹⁷

Given Nietzsche's connection of affects and emotions to somatic states of arousal, however, it may well be the case that the painfulness or pleasantness of a given emotional experience results from an individual's interoceptive awareness of a complex of physiological processes and bodily sensations. That is, it can still be the case that part of explaining what it feels like to undergo a particular emotion for Nietzsche—whether, for example, my emotion is pleasant or unpleasant—will involve reference to underlying physiological states, processes, and fluctuations in arousal, “feelings” as “symptoms” of “what is actually happening” (KSA 12:1[161]) at a bodily level. So although Nietzsche's descriptions of SCIs on the phenomenal character of emotion mainly focus on how features of an individual's sociocultural context impact the hedonic quality of that experience, these SCIs may do so by impacting somatic states and one's interoceptive awareness of those states.

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche describes how the sociocultural context one inhabits can determine the felt valence of her emotion, thus shaping its phenomenal character (38). Specifically, Nietzsche insists that social norms (or customary evaluations) determine whether one experiences a “*painful* feeling of cowardice” or a “*pleasant* feeling of humility” when a particular drive is active (ibid). Although his main claim in this aphorism seems to be that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a drive and the emotion it induces—more specifically, that a drive does not, in every case,

¹⁷ Valence, intensity, and duration are concepts used in contemporary psychological and philosophical literature to describe different aspects of emotional experience. Importantly, however, Nietzsche also uses these same concepts in his own description of emotional experiences. Above, we see that Nietzsche thinks of emotional experiences as valenced (D 34; WLN 10[9]; TI, “Four Errors,” 6). In BGE, we also see Nietzsche describe “strength” (or intensity) and “duration” as two dimensions of emotional experience (72).

induce the same emotion *independent of sociocultural influences*—his insistence that drives have “a definite attendant sensation of pleasure or displeasure” only as a “second nature” (due to sociocultural evaluations and assessments that “baptize[]” them “good or evil”) focuses especially on the shaping of emotional valence by one’s sociocultural context.¹⁸

Not only the valence, but the intensity of an emotion can be shaped by one’s sociocultural context. In HH 132, Nietzsche claims that one’s assimilation of certain beliefs (which one assimilates in virtue of the social, cultural, and ideological milieu she inhabits) can lead to differences in the intensity of emotions, even in cases where the emotion experienced is the same. There, Nietzsche describes how belief in a selfless and unegoistic divine being increases the intensity of one’s discontent with oneself (specifically, one’s “discontent at one’s insufficiency”), insofar as this belief offers an unattainable point of comparison. Indeed, he specifically argues that this discontent “would not be felt so bitterly if man compared himself only with other men (132).” This theme continues in the following aphorism, in which Nietzsche argues that the belief in a deity to which one is consecrated—or, at least, the (potentially unconscious) assimilation of this belief into one’s mental economy—causes the emotion of guilt to be felt more intensely (guilt as “the feeling of sin”). According to Nietzsche, it is belief in such a deity that makes possible “the *sharpest sting* in the feeling of guilt [emphasis mine]”:

...if the idea of God falls away, *so does the ‘feeling of ‘sin’* as a transgression against divine precepts. Then there probably still remains over that feeling of depression which is very much entwined with and related to fear of punishment by secular justice or the disapprobation of other men; *the depression caused by the pang of conscience, the sharpest sting in the feeling of guilt, is nonetheless abolished* when one sees that, although one's actions may have offended against human tradition, human laws and ordinances, one has not therewith endangered the 'eternal salvation of the soul' and its relationship to divinity. (HH 133)

The intensity of different instances of guilt (or, perhaps better, feelings of indebtedness), as a function of different sociocultural interpretations that shape emotion, is also a central theme in the second essay of the *Genealogy*. There, Nietzsche explains that the emotion of guilt (as a “feeling of indebtedness” [GM II:20]) “originated... in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is, in the relationship of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor” (GM II:8), a “contractual

¹⁸ Note that an emotion’s affective valence is an essential part of that emotion, such that a change in affective valence results in a change in the emotion experienced. We see this insight reflected in the selection from *Daybreak* above.

relationship” that emerges only as a function of primitive humanity’s transition into society. Yet the intensity of the feeling of indebtedness felt by the pre-Christian human being—an emotion felt as a result of an unpaid debt to another individual or as a result of lawbreaking (when in breaking a law, one “fails to repay the benefits and advances granted to him” by his community [GM II:9])—pales in comparison to guilt as the “feeling of indebtedness towards a deity” (GM II:20), especially that “greatest feeling of indebtedness on earth” that human beings feel when they interpret the debt as an unpayable debt to the Christian God (GM II:20). The feeling of indebtedness—guilt—that results from “[d]ebt towards *God*” is a form of “self-torture with [the] *most horrid hardness and sharpness* [emphasis mine]” (GM II:22)—and what’s worse, it can never be repaid, since God himself has already paid the debt on one’s behalf.

As we see above, in order to explain the felt quality of Christian guilt (a much more intense feeling of indebtedness than the feeling of indebtedness to a non-divine creditor), Nietzsche appeals to the individual’s assimilation of a socioculturally specific belief: the belief in the Christian God, who created human beings and took on the entirety of their sins and transgressions. On Nietzsche’s view, then, it is this belief in the Christian God as creditor which accounts for a change in the felt quality (specifically, the intensity) of the pre-Christian feelings of indebtedness and results in the transformation of these less intense feelings into Christian guilt, a feeling that does a great deal of psychophysiological damage (due in part to its intensity). Furthermore, in this example, we see how socially and culturally sustained beliefs pre-reflectively shape interpretations of one’s emotion, leading to that experience’s tended continuance or cessation (thus impacting its likely duration). Unlike earlier feelings of indebtedness, Christian guilt (resulting from a belief in one’s indebtedness to God it is impossible to repay) “firmly establishes itself, [eats] into [the individual], broadening out and growing, like a polyp” (GM II:21).

According to Nietzsche, then, non-affective social factors often shape the phenomenal character of emotions, including their valence, intensity, and duration. Notice that my claim here is *not* that Nietzsche thinks the objects toward which one is inclined or averse in virtue of one’s emotional experience will vary according to one’s sociocultural context. Such a claim is not only obvious, but potentially trivial. After all, in addition to the fact that one’s sociocultural milieu often concretely limits the objects available to one—I will not experience disgust in response to a pork tenderloin sandwich if I never encounter one, having grown up in an area without them—this milieu also tends to shape preferences and tended emotions simply through habitual exposure. For example, different people from different cultures will differ in the foods they find disgusting: I might

find a pork tenderloin sandwich disgusting, while my friend from central Illinois might find thin-crust cheese pizza disgusting (having not been exposed to this staple food of the New York metropolitan area). In such examples, the intentional object—the object at which the emotion of disgust is directed—differs, but the quality of the disgust does not. These emotional experiences differ, but the difference is not especially interesting or consequential.

Otherwise put, my claim in this section is not that Nietzsche thinks that the objects of individuals' emotions will vary along with their sociocultural contexts because the availability of objects to which they can respond will vary as a function of one's surroundings (in this case, one's social or cultural environment), a claim Leiter straightforwardly calls "bland and relatively uncontentious" (171). Nor is it that Nietzsche thinks individuals typically prefer what they are used to and feel averse toward what they are not used to—and that one's sociocultural context explains why one is used to certain things and not others. To be clear, he does accept a version of both of these claims, in addition to accepting a non-trivial version of the claim (explicated by Fowles) that one's sociocultural context shapes the intentional objects of individual emotions.¹⁹ But neither is my focus in this section.

By calling to mind Nietzsche's distinction between a drive's aim and object, as well as the relation between drives and affects, we can distinguish between the point I take Nietzsche to be making about emotions in this section and the more trivial claims above. For any Nietzschean drive, there is a characteristic aim or goal, a form of activity at which the drive aims and which the drive motivates us to express, as well as various objects that facilitate the expression of the drive.²⁰ In addition, drives induce affects, which tend to direct drives towards objects which facilitate their expression.²¹ For example, when my drive to hunger is active, I will be motivated to eat; "eating" is the activity at which the drive aims. But there are a huge number of determinate objects that facilitate this drive's expression; that is, there are many things I might be motivated to eat when this drive is active. The affects induced when my hunger drive is active shape how the objects I

¹⁹ In *Daybreak*, for example, Nietzsche explicitly contrasts guilt as experienced when one interprets misfortune as punishment (an interpretation characteristic of a Christian-moral worldview) with guilt as experienced when one interprets misfortune merely as some "innocent misfortune" which the guilty party might have better navigated. As opposed to pervasive, dominating Christian guilt, "the guilt of [Greece's] tragic heroes is... the little stone over which they stumble and perhaps break an arm or put out an eye" (D 78): it is brief and easily overcome. Here we see how the sociocultural context an individual inhabits determines the intentional object of her guilt via dominant interpretations—either misfortune interpreted as mere misfortune in ancient Greece or misfortune interpreted as punishment in a Christian context—which in turn determines the tenacity of the guilt that is felt.

²⁰ Katsafanas 101.

²¹ Anderson 221.

encounter (as objects that facilitate the expression of my hunger drive) show up for me, such that I might be inclined toward certain objects and experience aversions toward others. For example, if my hunger drive is active, I will seek out objects to express that activity. If I experience the aversive affect of disgust in the presence of a particular object (say, a pork tenderloin sandwich) and attractive affect of relish in the presence of another (say, a slice of thin-crust cheese pizza), however, then my hunger drive will tend to seek out the pizza as its object and avoid the tenderloin sandwich.²²

The first trivial version of Nietzsche's claim that sociocultural factors shape emotional experience simply notes that since the proximate objects available to one vary along with the sociocultural milieu individuals inhabit, the objects of one's affective life will be fixed by those milieu. For example, I am unlikely to experience relish or disgust in the presence of thin-crust cheese pizza if it is not widely available, and the availability of such an object is often determined by the sociocultural context in which I find myself. This claim—that the availability of emotions' intentional objects is shaped by the sociocultural milieu one inhabits and thus emotional experience is shaped by this milieu—is not what I emphasize here.

The second trivial version of Nietzsche's claim that sociocultural factors shape emotional experience—a less trivial one, it seems to me—is that the sociocultural context I inhabit often determines the emotions I tend to experience in response to certain objects. Continuing with the example above, one way that an individual's sociocultural context can shape her emotional life is by shaping what she finds delicious and is thus motivated to eat through habitual exposure. For example, if I had grown up in central Illinois, I might experience relish in response to pork tenderloin sandwiches when hungry. Instead, even when hungry, I experience disgust in response to them. Due in part to my upbringing in suburban New Jersey, I tend to experience relish in response to thin-crust cheese pizza, preferring thin-crust cheese pizza over pork tenderloin sandwiches (and almost anything else) every time. That my exposure to certain objects and not others (in the above case, a function of the sociocultural context I inhabit) determines the objects at which my emotions are directed (in the case above, my pleasant emotion of relish and unpleasant emotion of disgust) is also not the claim I make here.

²² In his work on the interaction between affects and drives, Anderson attends to how the manner of a drive's expression is shaped by the affects a particular drive "recruits" (221). The point here, about affects making certain objects salient, is a different one.

The above two trivial versions of the claim that social factors shape our emotional lives focus on how sociocultural contexts might determine the intentional objects of our emotions, the determinate objects at which our emotions are directed—and thus the determinate objects at which our drives are directed (and which serve as means for their expression). Such claims do not attend to how the aims of our drives (the activities at which our drives aim, as well as the manner in which we aim at these activities) might be shaped by our sociocultural context via the socioculturally shaped affects we experience. On Nietzsche's view, society does not just impact how we feel toward particular objects; it also importantly shapes in what broad manners we are motivated to act.²³ This is what I argue Nietzsche calls our attention to when he details the sociocultural shaping of the phenomenal character of emotional experience.

Again, the specific claim I advance in this section is that Nietzsche thinks certain non-affective aspects of an individual's sociocultural context—concepts, beliefs, expressed values, and stated norms—determine the phenomenal character of her emotions *qua* the felt sensations she experiences when certain of her drives are active. In the selections from Nietzsche's text directly above, there are a variety of ways in which these socioculturally contingent factors shape how emotions feel: Nietzsche does not present us with a simple, systematic view of how the felt character of an individual's emotions is shaped by her sociocultural context. But he still finds it important to explain *that* and *how* they are. Keeping in mind the relation between drives and affects, as well as their role in individual transformation for Nietzsche, it is not hard to see why. After all, given that Nietzsche thinks there is a feedback loop mechanism at work between Nietzschean drives and affects, such that affects can change the directionality of one's drives (depending on whether they lead one to feel positively or negatively), this infiltration of one's emotional life by one's sociocultural context is often profoundly formative.²⁴ Nietzsche calls his reader's attention to this because he thinks that what we value, what we pursue (and don't pursue), and who we become is too often the mere result of our inculcation into certain concepts, beliefs, values, and norms endemic to a particular, contingent sociocultural context—a context indifferent to our empowerment, indifferent to our growth and development as the individuals we are.²⁵

²³ Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this way of framing the distinction, especially between the second and third claims I mention in this section.

²⁴ Creasy 2020, 73.

²⁵ My interpretation of the will to power as the will to growth and development in one's form of life—which I assume here—is closest to that of Dunkle, who characterizes the will to power as a disposition to growth (2020 204).

Let us think through one final example involving the hunger drive to see what I argue is the non-trivial Nietzschean takeaway of this section: again, that one's sociocultural context shapes the phenomenal character of her emotions *qua* the felt sensations she experiences when certain of her drives are active. Imagine the case of a woman whose hunger drive becomes active. Since this drive is active, she feels impelled to eat. But imagine, also, that she inhabits a sociocultural context in which thinness is normative in female beauty and fatness non-normative. In such a society, this normativity is disclosed in slogans like "nothing tastes as good as skinny feels."²⁶ If the woman in our example has internalized thinness as normative, Nietzsche's point seems to be, then the activity of her hunger drive may induce aversive affects with a negative valence, such as disgust. These affects will shape the manner in which her hunger drive expresses its aim, possibly leading one only to eat out of a sense of duty.²⁷ But they may also turn her away from the activity at which the hunger drive aims (eating), suppressing the drive or leading it to be sublimated to the aims of a different drive.²⁸ The more normative thinness is in her sociocultural context, the more intense and persistent those aversive affects will tend to be, and the more likely she will be to turn away from the activity at which her hunger drive aims: that is, the less motivated she will be to eat. We can imagine that the enduring experience of such aversive affects may lead to the long-term suppression or sublimation of her hunger drive. In concrete terms, it may lead to disordered eating. The sociocultural shaping of this woman's emotional life does not just lead to a shift in the objects through which her hunger drive gratifies itself, directed by her affects. Instead, it changes her drives, changes the activities toward which she is impelled, changes her values, and ultimately, changes *her*.²⁹

This sociocultural shaping of the phenomenal character of an individual's emotions as the felt sensations accompanying a drive's activity is, I contend, what Nietzsche thinks is going on in D 38, where he indicates that the same drive—a drive to conflict-avoidance, perhaps—can result in differently valenced emotions (that is to say, different emotions altogether), depending on how that drive is received and evaluated at the level of one's culture. But we might ask after how this occurs on Nietzsche's view; in other words, we might ask how customs and norms, which are cognitive, can change the valence of the emotion a drive induces (thus changing the emotion itself). Though

²⁶ This origin of this slogan is unclear. British model Kate Moss cited it as her motto in a 2009 interview in *Women's Wear Daily*, but claims that it was a slogan already in cultural circulation.

²⁷ Anderson 2021 221.

²⁸ Of course, this happens subconsciously.

²⁹ That changes in one's drives change one's values makes good sense when one keeps in mind, following Richardson, that Nietzschean values just are the aims of drives (2004 74-5).

Nietzsche does not offer any obvious explanation, Christopher Janaway's claims that formerly extant drives may "disappear from the agent through lack of 'nourishment' by their environment" (2012 190) and that new drives may arise in the agent (*ibid*) also as a function of that environment offers some insight. If, as Janaway reminds us, Nietzsche believes a "way of thinking can 'become habit, drive and passion' (GS 21) and rule over an individual" (*ibid*) through education, it may well be the case that the feeling induced by the drive to conflict-avoidance results not only from that particular drive, but from the conflict-avoidant drive's interaction with another drive that emerges as a function of one's belonging to a society and/or a particular sociocultural context. For example, Nietzsche might explain this difference in the resultant emotion—specifically, an individual's experience of humility instead of cowardice—as the result of a drive to tranquility interacting with the drive to conflict-avoidance. But this drive to tranquility may be one that emerges only in virtue of one's inculcation into a Christian-moral context, a sociocultural milieu that values passivity and calm and adopts practices that encourage passivity and calm. In such a case, the sociocultural context one inhabits will come to determine the valence of her emotions via the drives it implants and provokes in her. In our example of the woman who develops a dysfunctional hunger drive, we can imagine quite a similar thing is going on: her hunger drive may be suppressed or sublimated due to its conflict with a stronger drive, perhaps a drive to conformity or a drive to beauty.³⁰

V. Fixing the objects of emotions: interpreting affects via socially shaped etiologies

To illustrate another way in which one's sociocultural context influences emotions *indirectly*—by providing content through which one makes sense of one's bodily arousal (via socially shared etiologies offering causal explanations for that arousal) and fixes the intentional object of one's emotional experience—I turn briefly to Christopher Fowles' generative account of affective interpretation in Nietzsche. According to Fowles' account, an occurrent affect is first brought about by a stimulus object which causes bodily arousal.³¹ This state of arousal then provokes an individual's cause-extracting mechanism, a mechanism which leads the individual subject to that

³⁰ Of course, my point here is not that thinness is in fact beautiful. Indeed, it seems that concepts of beauty *qua* physical beauty vary across cultures and time periods, and that two individuals with this drive active in two different cultures or time periods may very well aim at different beautifying activities *as a result of this variance*. Instead, my point is that in certain societies with standards of beauty involving thinness, a drive to become beautiful might conflict with and stifle or sublimate a drive to hunger.

³¹ Fowles' "occasioning object" is similar to what I call (after Anderson 2012) a "stimulus object" (2020 66), an object that provokes a particular affect. As Fowles helpfully indicates, however, the intentional object of the affect need not be identical with the stimulus object in Nietzsche.

arousal to contrive a causal relationship between some feature of her surroundings and the arousal. To identify the “putative cause” of that arousal—which becomes the intentional object of the affect—the individual’s cause-extracting mechanism draws on explanations with which she is already familiar. In other words, by drawing on “the stock of etiologies stored in memory, which have been forged through experience” (Fowles 126), the cause-extracting mechanism identifies an alleged cause for the state to which she is subject, allowing her to make sense of her state and fix the intentional object of her emotion.³²

The etiology of sin offered by the priests in the *Genealogy* serves as one such explanation (GM III:20). In virtue of her Christian context, an individual whose cause-extracting mechanism is active avails herself of this causal explanation, and in virtue of its dominance, she becomes habituated to this explanation and continues to employ it when bodily arousal triggers her cause-extracting psychological mechanism. By continuing to utilize prior explanations of arousal to which she has been habituated in virtue of the social and ideological communities to which she belongs (accessible via memories of prior arousal and corresponding explanations), her social and cultural milieu influences the individual’s emotional life: she continually interprets her suffering as “caused by sin” (Fowles 132). In affective interpretation, then, the cause-extracting interpretive mechanism leads to surreptitious SCIs on affective experience.

Notice here that we have both a stimulus object, the object that *in fact* provokes the affect, and the intentional object of the affect, what the affect is about or directed towards. Although the stimulus object and intentional object of a given affective experience can be the same—for example, my ineptitude at basketball might provoke an emotion of frustration that is about that ineptitude—they need not be. Notice also that for human beings, those “etiologies stored in memory, which have been forged through experience” (ibid) will most often be socially shared and disseminated explanations. Such explanations, which allow an individual to make sense of her bodily state and impose some meaning on it even before she is phenomenally or reflectively aware of that state by providing an alleged cause of it, most often come from one’s broader community: one’s sociocultural context, which includes parents, teachers, ideological communities to which one belongs, texts with which one engages, and so on. That is, an individual subject to a particular bodily

³² In his account of linguistic interpretation—a process following affective interpretation “through which one’s state is subsumed under an affect-word” (137)—Fowles makes quite clear that the etiologies to which the individual’s cause-extracting mechanism refers are “linguistically articulated etiologies” (128) that emerge from belief systems and ideological communities within one’s broader sociocultural context.

state who seeks out a cause for her condition will often avail herself of causal explanations at her disposal in virtue of the social or ideological community in which she finds herself.

Fowles' compelling account of affective interpretation thus illuminates another way in which an individual's sociocultural context potentially impacts emotion in Nietzsche: via the socioculturally contingent ideologies in which we locate causal explanations for the feelings we undergo. Even in the most basic act of affective interpretation (during which one posits an alleged cause of her emotion, employing concepts and explanations from her sociocultural milieu without being aware she is doing so), an individual's sociocultural context typically infiltrates her affective life, impacting emotional experience by providing her with the content to interpret that experience and fixing the intentional object of that experience.

Notice here that Nietzsche again appeals to non-affective features of an individual's sociocultural context (in this case, etiologies or explanations) in order to explain why she has the particular emotion that she does. These features allow for one's sociocultural context to impact one *indirectly*, via mediating concepts, beliefs, values, or norms. Importantly, however, this process unfolds automatically: although the cause-extracting mechanism may draw on rather complex etiologies and explanations involving an array of beliefs, the individual whose cause-extracting mechanism is active is not reflectively aware of this process, nor are they reflectively aware of the fixing of their emotion's intentional object and the interpretation of bodily arousal via this process. Only the end result shows up in emotional experience, when I experience an emotion with a specific valence, intensity, duration, and intentionality that interprets and evaluates (or "colors") the world of experience and its objects and motivates me to act.

VI. The sociocultural shaping of emotional appropriateness

In addition to shaping one's emotions and their objects in the ways described above, Nietzsche also thinks one's sociocultural context shapes one's sense of the appropriateness of their emotional responses.³³ According to Nietzsche, I generally experience my emotional responses as fitting responses to their intentional objects, regardless of whether they are *in fact* merited by those objects.³⁴ Additionally, in the throes of an emotional experience, I typically experience myself as

³³ See also the forthcoming anthology *Nietzsche and Politicized Identities* for this analysis of emotional appropriateness.

³⁴ See also Poellner 2009, in which Poellner argues that my emotions are "experienced as... appropriate response[s] to some feature of the object, as a picking up on some value-aspect pertaining to the object" (162). Note here, by the way, that I use "appropriate" and "fitting" interchangeably, to refer to emotional responses that are warranted by the object

discovering or ‘picking up on’ certain value-laden properties of the intentional object itself: that is, prior to any reflection on my emotional experiences (and sometimes even afterwards), I experience them as disclosive, rather than deceptive. For example, when someone experiences an emotion of guilt *qua* sinfulness in relation to one of their actions or desires, they experience said action or desire (that is, the intentional object of that emotion) as meriting this negative, disapprobatory emotion: that is, they encounter their action or desire as something bad or undesirable *in itself*.

For Nietzsche, as we see above, one’s experiencing an emotion in relation to a particular intentional object, then, includes an implicit assessment of that object: I perceive the intentional object as worthy of whatever emotional response I experience, such that if my emotional experience is positive, I experience the value of the intentional object as positive—and if my emotional experience is negative, I experience the value of the intentional object as negative.³⁵ In addition, Nietzsche thinks that the valence of the emotions I experience incline or disincline me toward their intentional objects, thus shaping my tended behaviors.

Though Nietzsche believes I pre-reflectively experience my emotional responses as merited by their intentional objects, he is keen to indicate that my sense of their appropriateness does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, my emotional experiences unfold in a social context permeated by dominant beliefs, norms, and values, and my sense of their appropriateness is often shaped by what my society understands as appropriate or inappropriate emotions, given a particular intentional object. Indeed, intentional objects often come to me already imbued with a nature and value my society, culture, or ideological community establishes for them. See again, for example, section 335 from *The Gay Science*:

Your judgment, ‘that is right’ has a prehistory in your drives, inclinations, aversions, experiences, and what you have failed to experience; you have to ask, ‘*how* did it emerge there?’ and then also, ‘*what* is really impelling me to listen to it?’ ...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

that provokes them. Importantly, however, my claim here is not about the *actual* fittingness of one’s emotional responses, but the perceived fittingness of one’s emotional responses. Additionally, whenever I intend to refer to the apparent *moral* appropriateness or moral permissibility of emotions, I will indicate that. If there is no such indication, “appropriate” should be read as non-moral fittingness.

³⁵ Of course, there will also be cases in which I experience ambivalent emotions, in which case the purported value of the intentional object will be unclear to me.

accepted what has been labelled right since your childhood; or in the fact that fulfilling your duties has so far brought you bread and honors—

It is thus the case *both* that I experience my initial emotional responses as accurately picking up on value-laden aspects of the intentional object *and* that value-laden aspects tend to be “pre-loaded” into the intentional object, as a function of dominant norms and beliefs within a given sociocultural milieu or ideological community. For example, in a culture dominated by the “morality of compassion [*Mitleid*]” (II, “Skirmishes,” 37)—a culture in which a belief in the positive value of compassionate action is the norm—selfish actions will be understood as meriting disapprobatory emotions (perhaps disdain).³⁶ From the perspective of such a culture, fitting emotional responses to selfishness (or a particular selfish action) will be negatively valenced responses which discourage selfish thoughts and behaviors (whether these are actions are one’s own or another’s).

Let us continue with this typically Nietzschean example—that of compassion—to illustrate this point. According to Nietzsche, his particular Christian sociocultural milieu is one dominated by the “morality of compassion” (II, “Skirmishes,” 37): compassion is a praiseworthy character trait; compassionate acts are worthy of admiration and respect; and a drive to compassion is understood to be a virtuous instinct.³⁷ In such an environment, compassion is viewed as an objectively positive trait (BGE 201-2; GM P, 5-6), and as such, compassionate actions seem to “call for” positive emotional responses: that is, such actions appear to warrant respect and admiration in every case. If in such a sociocultural context I view compassionate actions negatively—experience a negative emotion, such as anger, in response to someone’s compassionate deed—my reaction appears to me as errant, one that indicts me and my emotional life rather than the intentional object. In other words, since a compassionate deed in Nietzsche’s Christian-moral Europe does not warrant anger, irritation, or frustration, to be frustrated in the face of compassion is to react inappropriately. In this way, I encounter compassionate actions *qua* intentional objects as pre-loaded with positive value, bestowed by my sociocultural context. When I experience an approbatory emotion in response to a compassionate action, my emotional life jibes with the emotional patterns and values typical of my sociocultural milieu, insofar as I pick up on positive aspects of the intentional object. My reaction appears, to myself and others, as “normal” and appropriate.

³⁶ Note here that I am translating *Mitleid* as compassion rather than pity.

³⁷ On the other hand, he thinks that “[s]trong ages, *noble* cultures see in compassion, in ‘loving one’s neighbor,’ in a lack of self and of self-esteem, something contemptible” (II, “Skirmishes,” 37).

When I experience a disapprobatory emotion in response to a compassionate action, on the other hand, my emotional life seems at odds with dominant beliefs, values, and emotional patterns. When a compassionate action appears to me, in the throes of a disapprobatory emotion, as undesirable or meriting blame, the social norm which construes compassionate action as objectively positive comes into conflict with my subjective, first-personal emotional experience. My emotional experience here is at odds with what is thought morally appropriate. In such a case, Nietzsche thinks, I become all-too-likely to feel I am perceiving wrongly, and to develop emotions that discourage the kinds of valuations and behaviors that diverge from the emotional patterns and norms of my sociocultural milieu (TI, “Skirmishes,” 45). Furthermore, the more one assimilates this dominant norm, the more likely one is to develop positive, approbatory emotional responses to compassion (which I experience as fitting) and the less likely one is to have negative, disapprobatory emotional responses (which experience compassion as something shameful or blameworthy). After some time, I will not only find myself in the emotional habit of experiencing positive emotional responses to compassionate actions (which just is, for Nietzsche, to experience them as fitting); I will also tend to judge the former to be morally appropriate responses and the latter morally inappropriate responses.

Before I continue, let me flag something. When talking about the fittingness or appropriateness of emotions, as D’Arms and Jacobson argue, one ought to avoid committing the “moralistic fallacy”: conflating the conditions of an emotion’s fittingness (that is, the extent to which it accurately represents its object, or “gets it right”) with whether or not that emotion is morally acceptable to feel (or “morally permissible”).³⁸ D’Arms and Jacobson are indeed right that there seem to be two different senses of appropriateness operating in philosophical debates about emotions and their fittingness. Importantly, however, the Nietzschean account I offer here is about one’s *experience* of her emotional responses as fitting the intentional objects at which those emotions are directed (which are encountered through a particularly valenced affective lens), and how that experience of fittingness is influenced both by what is widely accepted as a fitting emotional response (that is, an accurate reflection of the object one encounters) *and* what is widely accepted as a morally appropriate response. Nietzsche’s point here, it seems to me, is that insofar as an individual’s sense of emotional appropriateness is mediated by her norm-laden sociocultural context or ideological community, she is vulnerable to a kind of affective gaslighting in which she doubts the

³⁸ D’Arms and Jacobson 2000, 66.

warrant of her emotional responses because of the internalization of certain norms and values, including norms of moral appropriateness. And indeed, this is one special danger of internalizing or assimilating certain norms or values from my sociocultural milieu or ideological community. When such internalization or assimilation occurs, I become alienated both from those goals, interests, and values I have that are discordant with the norms and values of my society and from my own evaluative perspective on the world (which I am discouraged from inhabiting). Not only do I doubt certain desires or practices of mine; I doubt the warrant or rationality of my own phenomenological experience.

A final way in which my sociocultural context has the power to shape my emotional life, then, is through shaping my sense of emotional appropriateness and thus increasing the likelihood that I will experience emotions that are widely deemed appropriate (or warranted) in that context. This happens as I unwittingly assimilate ideas, values, and norms from my sociocultural milieu. In such cases, the evaluation of the intentional object manifest in my emotional experience accords with that of my society: I have what my society understands to be an appropriate emotional response to the intentional object I encounter. This happens, for example, when I experience guilt *qua* sinfulness in response to a cruel action of mine *because* I have assimilated a particular conception of God (for example, as the ultimate creditor who can never be repaid) in virtue of my belonging to a society dominated by Christian beliefs and norms.

At other times, however, my initial emotional experience—and its implicit evaluation of the intentional object at which my emotion is directed—will be incongruous with those emotional experiences deemed appropriate within my broader sociocultural context. Imagine, for example, that I experience pride in response to the same cruel action. Given my assimilation of those beliefs and norms characteristic of my Christian society, I am likely to understand such an emotion as deeply inappropriate—and to develop, perhaps, a second-order emotion of shame in response. This second-order affect will function to disincline me against my initial proud response (experienced in relation to my cruel action, which is the intentional object of the emotion). Otherwise put, when one assimilates socially dominant beliefs, values, and norms, one becomes likely to experience second-order affects that discourage emotional responses discordant with those deemed appropriate by one's sociocultural milieu. In short, those second-order affects produced in me in virtue of my assimilating dominant sociocultural norms and values—feelings of disinclination or inclination towards my first-order emotions—nudge me away from “inappropriate” emotions and towards “appropriate” emotions given a particular intentional object. When my emotional responses evaluate

the intentional object in a way that conflicts with the dominant social evaluation, these competing emotions will tend to be stifled. At the very least, I come to second-guess those responses.

VII. The significance of sociocultural impacts on emotions for Nietzsche's thought

As demonstrated in the above sections, then, Nietzsche details a wide variety of ways in which the sociocultural context we inhabit shapes our emotional experience. Below, I summarize and synthesize key elements of his view on SCIs on emotions.

1. Nietzsche thinks that my sociocultural context frequently shapes emotions via habitual affective mimicry.

2. Nietzsche thinks that my sociocultural context frequently shapes emotions (including the phenomenal character of emotions) and their objects by way of non-affective features (such as concepts, beliefs, norms, and socially shared etiologies) that I assimilate. These non-affective features shape emotions and fix their objects without my being reflectively aware of that shaping.

3. When Nietzsche describes SCIs on the phenomenal character of emotions, he typically describes how features of one's sociocultural context impact their hedonic quality. But he also thinks that how emotions feel (whether they are generally pleasant or unpleasant, how intense they are, and how long they last) is partly a product of our physiological life as a complex unfolding of bodily states and processes. This is one way in which elements of our sociocultural context—especially those non-affective features mentioned above—can impact or transform our physiology/bodily states.

4. In addition to shaping emotions and their objects, SCIs shape one's sense of her emotions' appropriateness, which itself has the potential to shape one's emotional life, especially via the inspiration of second-order affects that incline one towards or disincline one against aspects of one's emotional life.

In addition to making explicit certain aspects of the oft-overlooked relation between an individual's sociocultural milieu and her emotional life, these reflections help us understand various key themes and claims in Nietzsche, as well as certain of his characteristic recommendations.

First, Nietzsche thinks that recognizing just how extensively our emotional lives are shaped by social and cultural mechanisms both reveals how deeply unfree we typically are—that is, just how little “follows from our nature, and can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone”³⁹—and potentially facilitates Nietzschean freedom as self-determination (a Spinozist notion of freedom according to which becoming freer requires becoming a more adequate cause of one’s feelings and actions).⁴⁰ According to Nietzsche, affects are a key component of our motivational landscape: they motivate our actions and determine certain behavioral outcomes.⁴¹ If even these most basic components of our psychophysiological nature—our affects—tend to be determined and shaped by our sociocultural milieu, however, then many of the actions we understand ourselves as performing freely are in fact unfree insofar as they do not follow from our nature. Nietzsche’s account of the sociocultural shaping of emotion thus partly explains the unfreedom which he understands as characteristic of human beings (HH “AOM” 50, D 124, BGE 21, TI, “The Four Great Errors” 3). More specifically, SCIs on emotions explain Nietzsche’s rejection of a notion of the free will as involving a notion of *causa sui* which results from our “desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one’s actions [ourselves], and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society involves nothing less than to be precisely this *causa sui*... to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness” (BGE 21).

So, Nietzsche thinks that appealing to the sociocultural shaping of emotions—key elements of an individual’s motivational landscape—partly explains the characteristic unfreedom of human beings. Significantly, however, he also believes recognizing this fact can facilitate the achievement of freedom. If an individual comes to recognize the sociocultural mechanisms through which certain of her emotions are shaped and affirms those emotions nonetheless (perhaps because she finds them empowering), then she becomes a more adequate cause of her feelings and actions; her actions can more properly be said to come from her. If, on the other hand, an individual recognizes these mechanisms and rejects the emotions that result from them (perhaps because she finds those emotions disempowering), this rejection potentially functions to disrupt her assimilation and internalization of those socioculturally contingent concepts, beliefs, values, and norms, thus opening space for her to become less moved by external factors or influences.

³⁹ Spinoza 2017, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Creasy 2020, 74; Katsafanas 2012, 255.

⁴¹ Anderson 2012, 218; Alfano 2019, 53; Leiter 2019, 70.

Relatedly, Nietzsche hopes that attending to SCIs on emotions will help individuals recognize that certain of the negative self-regarding attitudes they harbor do not accurately track the features of themselves at which those attitudes are directed and instead result from their unhappy habitation of an inhospitable sociocultural context. This is especially important from Nietzsche's perspective because many negative self-regarding attitudes—though not all—function as damaging, will-weakening, and disempowering. Given that Nietzsche understands the “good” as “everything that enhances people's feeling of power, will to power, power itself” (2), attitudes that function to weaken and disempower will be attitudes to avoid. Properly attending to SCIs on emotions, then, can help individuals experiencing harmful forms of self-denial recognize that the sociocultural context they inhabit disposes them to such attitudes via the emotions it produces. Nietzsche's hope is that individuals will realize that these negative self-regarding attitudes reflect their embeddedness in a contingent and often mutable context rather than the inherent badness of some feature of themselves, and that this realization will interrupt or disrupt those negative self-regarding attitudes, disrupting the destructive and disempowering force they carry with them.

Especially important for accomplishing this goal of disrupting self-denying, disempowering attitudes is attending to the sociocultural shaping of emotional *appropriateness*. As described above, in addition my sense of my emotions' appropriateness being shaped by my sociocultural milieu, I also tend to be nudged towards those affective responses deemed appropriate by that milieu and away from those deemed inappropriate. This is one way in which my emotional evaluations of the intentional objects at which my emotions are directed—which I experience as merited by the objects themselves—are often surreptitiously shaped by the sociocultural context I inhabit. In cases where the intentional objects of my emotional experiences are my own instincts, desires, aims, and values, noticing this structure is critically important from Nietzsche's perspective. After all, the more I experience affective aversions to certain of my instincts, desires, aims, and values as *merited* by these objects—the more I “[view my] natural inclinations with an ‘evil eye’” (GM II:24)—the more likely I am to develop a second-order evaluative attitude that disposes me negatively toward these features of myself. This aversive attitude—which I henceforth refer to as self-suspicion—develops when I habitually experience affective aversions to features of myself as a function of my assimilation of beliefs, values, and norms from my sociocultural milieu that are at odds with my instincts, desires, aims, and values. Though Nietzsche does not employ this specific term, self-suspicion—an attitude that leads me to distrust certain of my own instincts, desires, aims, and values (GM II:16) and tends

to stifle the outward expression of those instincts at which it is directed—is a psychological state in which he is profoundly interested.⁴²

Although Nietzsche is ambivalent about self-suspicion—he thinks both that it can be a positive transformative force⁴³ and that it is likely an unavoidable feature of social existence, part of being a willing, feeling being who belongs to a society and inevitably experiences urges and emotions that conflict with that society’s norms—as I suggest above, he thinks this attitude has serious risks. First, if left unchecked by critical reflection, self-suspicion—as an involuntary emotional manifestation of the “herd instinct”—will leave me in a position of unwitting, servile obedience to the “herd” rather than self-command (BGE 199). Otherwise put, self-suspicion can undermine my “will to self-determination, to evaluating on [my] own account, [my] will to *free* will” (HH P 3). After all, because I do not typically notice the role that my society plays in producing the emotions I experience, when I assess my instincts, desires, aims, or values negatively at the affective level, I experience this as a justified *self*-evaluation. It is easy for me to miss that this emotional evaluation is produced in part by forces from without (and seems merited just in virtue of the phenomenology of emotional warrant).⁴⁴ Without honest, critical reflection on these automatic emotional self-

⁴² Though Nietzsche does not use the term self-suspicion to describe the evaluative attitude I explore above, he refers to such an attitude with some frequency throughout his body of work. In *Daybreak*, he explains how customary morality inspires one to become “more distrustful [*misstrauischer*] of all excessive well-being” (D 18), including one’s own (given that this suspicion results in “self-chosen torture” (ibid)). In BGE, his treatment of self-suspicion (or self-mistrust) as a socioculturally produced evaluative attitude is pronounced. In one aphorism, he describes how, due to conventional morality, “everything that elevates the individual above the herd... is henceforth called *evil*; and the fair, modest, submissive, conforming mentality, the *mediocrity* of desires attains moral designations and honors. Eventually... every severity, even in justice, begins to disturb the conscience; any high and hard nobility and self-reliance is almost felt to be an insult and arouses mistrust [*erweckt Misstrauen*]” (201). Later, he refers to “the internal *mistrust* [*das innerliche Misstrauen*] which is the sediment in the hearts of all dependent men and herd animals” (206) and claims that those who assimilate conventional, “slavish” morality are “skeptical and suspicious, *subtly* suspicious, of all the ‘good’ that is honored [in the virtues of the powerful]” (260). Throughout the *Genealogy*, he describes how shame, as an emotional response to features of oneself inspired by one’s belonging to a society or ideological community, results in a mistrust of oneself and one’s instincts (GM II:7; GM III:9; GM III:14). (Note that he refers to D 18 and BGE 260 in GM III:9.) In TI, he describes how the criminal’s society inculcates in him a “Chandala feeling” involving suspicion [*Verdacht*] of himself (“Skirmishes,” 45); in *The Antichrist*, he describes how assimilating beliefs endemic to a Christian sociocultural context “arouses mistrust [*Misstrauen*]” in “everything natural in the instincts,— everything beneficial and life-enhancing in the instincts” (43). Finally, in his late unpublished notes, he argues that “[m]an, imprisoned in an iron cage of errors became a caricature of man, sick, wretched, ill-disposed toward himself, full of hatred for the impulses of life, full of mistrust [*voller Misstrauen*] of all that is beautiful and happy in life” (KSA 13:15[73]).

⁴³ For more on this theme, see Alfano 2019, 263.

⁴⁴ In Anderson’s terms, it is easy for me to miss my self-alienation, the way in which I am “being pushed around by others” (2021). We see this in the case of the sick nobles who, after becoming “ashamed of their happiness”, exclaim “It’s a disgrace to be happy!” (GM III:14). Rather than reflecting and recognizing that the negative valuation of “their happiness” has its origin in the values of miserable others “shov[ed]” on to [their] conscience”, they understand the negative evaluation present in their emotional experience as merited by the intentional object of that experience: happiness itself.

assessments (involving a recognition of their origin) and subsequent deliberate endorsement of them, I am prevented from truly “evaluating on [my] own account” (HH P 3), prevented from attaining this necessary condition of self-determination.

In addition to potentially precluding freedom as self-determination, self-suspicion can function to ultimately disempower the individual who inhabits this attitude by turning her against 1) drives the expression of which are central to her unique form of power (those which facilitate her growth and development); 2) desires and aims the pursuit of which offer opportunities for the expression of her “most lively” instincts and drives; 3) emotions the experience of which facilitates the expression of those drives and instincts central to her unique form of power; and 4) values the adoption of which promotes and increases that expression of that power. Indeed, this is when Nietzsche thinks an attitude of self-suspicion is most insidious. Nietzsche offers us an example of this especially insidious variety of self-suspicion in the criminal type from *Twilight*, one whose “most lively drives... [are] entangled... with depressing emotions” as a result of the social stigmatization of her desires, interests, and values. This type of person is a “strong human being under unfavorable conditions, a strong human being who has been made sick” from being “deprived of public approval,” who senses that she is “not perceived of as beneficial, as useful” by the sociocultural milieu to which she belongs. As Nietzsche puts it, such an individual “feel[s] the terrible gap that separates [her] from everything that is conventional and honored”; this leads her to experience emotions of “suspicion, fear, [and] dishonor.” Such aversive emotions are experienced by the criminal herself as merited by her nature (her “most lively” drives) and values (her “virtues”). Given their negative valence, they are experienced as indictments of her nature and values. This indictment leads to weakness, disempowerment, and illness.⁴⁵ In the example of the criminal, we see how Nietzsche believes one’s society might function to manipulate one’s emotional experience, nudging the individual towards certain (allegedly appropriate) emotional responses and away from other (allegedly inappropriate) emotional responses, with the result that desires, instincts, and behaviors incongruous with sociocultural norms but central to one’s own unique form of power are stifled. Otherwise put, the more one is nudged towards socioculturally “appropriate” responses and evaluations that are at odds with one’s own “most lively” desires and instincts—in Nietzschean terms, those desires and instincts that condition one’s own unique form of power—the more likely

⁴⁵ I use “illness” to mean the absence of health as laid out in Ian Dunkle’s analysis of Nietzschean health (*Ergo*, forthcoming).

one becomes to experience a psychophysiological degeneration that makes one's existence paler (II, "Skirmishes," 45).

So far, I have argued that Nietzsche's account of the sociocultural shaping of emotion is essential for understanding certain of his reflections on freedom as self-determination, as well as key mechanisms of personal transformation in his moral psychology. But Nietzsche's account of SCIs on emotions also crucially informs his interpretation of the problem of nihilism, especially his insistence that certain societies (most notably, Christian-moral society) constitute especially fertile breeding grounds for nihilism and his characterization of psychological-affective dimensions of nihilism.

First, by describing how the sociocultural contexts we inhabit determine emotional experience (through habitual affective mimicry), shape emotions' felt character, and fix emotions' intentional objects, Nietzsche hopes to show that certain societies—most notably for Nietzsche, Christian-moral society—tend to be especially life-denying and disempowering, disposing individuals to nihilism *qua* life-denial.⁴⁶ First and most simply, if the dominant emotions individuals encounter within a particular sociocultural milieu tend to be disempowering, then the mechanism of habitual affective mimicry will tend to lead to widespread disempowerment by affective means. And indeed, this is a key part of Nietzsche's critique of Christian-moral society: he thinks this society is uniquely disempowering to individuals because the dominant emotions in that society—guilt and compassion—are especially disempowering, and these emotions will tend to be "caught" by individuals inhabiting that context (as a function of habitual affective mimicry). Second, noticing that emotions can be shaped in their phenomenal character by concepts, beliefs, and norms that are both contingent and local to a particular sociocultural context help us realize that intellectual strategies can be employed in the interest of emotional transformation (D 103). For example, noticing that the intensely negative and typically disempowering feeling of sin results from the assimilation of a determinate, contingent concept of God local to a Christian-moral context helps us realize that rejecting such a concept may facilitate a deeper, affective change (HH 133).

Furthermore, Nietzsche thinks that realizing how the intentional object of one's emotions is fixed via socially shared etiologies enables us to understand how features of oneself or one's circumstances can serve as the stimulus objects for emotions that ultimately take life (that is,

⁴⁶ Nietzschean nihilism as life-denial involves either 1) an implicitly or explicitly negative evaluation of life or 2) the impeding of life as will to power (through the weakening of the will or preservation of weak forms of life).

something else entirely) as their intentional object—and evaluate it negatively. A typically Nietzschean example will illustrate how useful this is for analyzing emotional states of special significance in his thought. Imagine that one’s social or political disempowerment (GM I:10) provokes intense bodily sensations that register phenomenally as an emotion with a negative hedonic quality: that of pain or suffering (GM III:15).⁴⁷ These feelings, when interpreted via one’s cause-seeking mechanism (which they trigger), fix life as their intentional object, due to a life-denying etiology such as that offered by Christianity via the ascetic priest (GM III:15).⁴⁸ All of this happens prior to reflective awareness, yet will produce an emotion with an intensely negative evaluation of life—one that, crucially for Nietzsche, turns one against life, leading one to nihilism.⁴⁹ Importantly for Nietzsche, the socially shared etiologies that dominate the Christian-moral context tend to function in this way: they transform suffering into a justification for life- and self-denial. Without an understanding of affective interpretation as a mechanism through which one’s sociocultural context impacts one’s emotional life, however, we are likely to miss how this unfolds.

Additionally, the process of affective interpretation helps us see how social and cultural contexts can *redirect* emotions towards life and oneself. In his work, Nietzsche is especially interested in the redirection of negative emotions towards the self. For example, he describes how a pretext introduced by the ascetic priest—that “[s]omebody must be to blame: but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame” (GM III:15)—functions to direct one’s negative emotions towards a new intentional object: oneself. Such a pretext, inculcated and sustained by Christianity, disposes inhabitants of a Christian sociocultural context to negative self-regarding emotions that prove harmful to the individual in the long-term. In addition, this fixing of the individual herself as the intentional object of various intensely negative emotions through the deployment of an explanation (as a pretext) which the individual subsequently assimilates explains how those sociocultural milieux with life-denying ideologies and explanations can ultimately lead one into a state of self-disgust and a will to nothingness (GM II:24) characteristic of affective nihilism.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ As Nietzsche indicates in GM, sufferers “remain in ignorance of the true reason, the physiological one, why they feel ill (this can, perhaps, be a disease of the *nervus sympaticus*, or lie in an excessive secretion of bile, or in a deficiency of potassium sulphate and phosphate in the blood, or in abdominal stricture interrupting the blood circulation, or in degeneration of the ovaries and such like).” (GM III:15)

⁴⁸ In this way, suffering functions as an “[argument] marshalled against life” (GM II:7).

⁴⁹ Creasy 2020, 60.

⁵⁰ See Van Fossen 2019 for more on self-disgust. See Creasy 2020 for more on affective nihilism.

With this in mind, we can also see that understanding the extent of SCIs on emotions helps make sense of certain of Nietzsche's recommendations for promoting the flourishing of individuals and claims about ways in which features of individuals' sociocultural milieus can prevent that flourishing. For example, attending to how social and cultural factors produce emotional experience (especially via affective contagion) helps make sense of Nietzsche's recommendation for bouts of isolation from others as a "necessary protective measure" (Van Fossen 100), as well as his identification of solitude (a "drive to get away from...one's in-group or local community and to divorce oneself from aspects of the community that one might otherwise adopt uncritically and by default" [Alfano 234]) as a virtue. Keeping SCIs on emotions in mind, then, one sees that solitude is not only useful for generating new epistemic perspectives on one's own community, as Alfano suggests (*ibid*); it can also be useful for reconfiguring one's emotional life, especially resisting the variety of ways in which "herd pangs of conscience" might make one sick at a psychophysiological level. Understanding SCIs on emotions helps us see why Nietzsche thinks it is sometimes necessary for Zarathustra to go to the mountains and for other free spirits to go into "godless wildernesses" rather than new "cities" (Z II:8).

In sum, attending to the sociality of emotional experience in Nietzsche's thought is crucial not only for understanding key elements of his moral psychology (including certain of his reflections on freedom and self-transformation), but also for understanding his interpretation of nihilism as a psychological-affective phenomenon produced by the society to which one belongs (one made especially likely by Christian-moral society) which one can address by employing certain practical strategies (such as solitude). Attending to the sociality of emotion in Nietzsche helps us recognize subtle ways in which impacts on an individual's emotional life resulting from her sociocultural context might undermine her freedom and empowerment. It also helps us notice that certain sociocultural contexts—and most notably for Nietzsche, Christian-moral culture—will be more likely to undermine freedom and disempower in a widespread way, disposing their inhabitants to nihilism as life-denial. Recognizing this is key not only for identifying harmful SCIs on our emotional lives, but for envisioning the conditions—especially sociocultural conditions—requisite for healthier, more empowering emotional lives.⁵¹

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⁵¹ See also Merrick 2016.

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