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## Experimentation, curiosity, and forgetting

Abstract: I examine how curiosity is grounded in Nietzsche's critique of customary morality. I argue that Nietzsche's positive account of active forgetting is compatible with his treatment of curiosity as a key virtue, and that it can be shown to actively support curiosity. To support the latter claim, I suggest that Nietzschean memorial courtesy can be defined as the application of *politeness about memory* toward ourselves, toward others, or with regard to specific matters of inquiry.

Keywords: experimentation, curiosity, inquiry, forgetting, memory, virtue

### **Introduction**

Bernard Reginster has argued that in "Nietzsche's terminology, 'experimentation [*Versuch*]' is a paradigmatic exercise of *curiosity*."<sup>1</sup> According to Reginster, the kind of curiosity in question, as far as Nietzsche's concept of the free spirit is concerned, is not the state of knowing or of being certain of the truth of some proposition, but is rather a matter of the activity or process of truth-seeking and of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> My own view is very similar: I have argued that experimentalism is a form of virtue for Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, as I have suggested, Nietzsche employs experimentalism in two main ways: as a strategy for philosophical engagement, for example through his use of diverse writing styles and authorial voices, and as a form of virtue, including intellectual virtue.<sup>4</sup>

Where my view principally differs from that of Reginster is that I think it is important to

place Nietzsche's thinking on experimentation within the broader context of his campaign against morality, in which Nietzsche's commitment to experimentation as a virtue is grounded. In the first part of this paper, I aim to clarify how experimentation is a virtue and how it is grounded in Nietzsche's critique of customary morality. In so doing, I treat experimentation as a virtue in its own right for Nietzsche, though I also think it is not only paradigmatic of curiosity, but sometimes synonymous with curiosity.<sup>5</sup>

Second, I consider whether Nietzsche's thinking on experimentation and curiosity can be compatible with his positive account of active forgetting. This involves a potentially serious problem of consistency, as Nietzsche makes multiple positive remarks about forgetting throughout his works. In brief, forgetting does not seem compatible with a genuine curiosity about pursuing the truth, or indeed with the effort to produce new experiences as a part of pursuing inquiry through experimentation. I draw on previous work by Christa Acampora to differentiate between types of forgetting in Nietzsche's thought, and argue that (i) Nietzsche's positive account of active forgetting is compatible with his treatment of curiosity as a key virtue, and (ii) it can be shown to actively support virtuous curiosity and experimentation.<sup>6</sup>

In order to support the second claim, in the third part of this paper, I define Nietzschean *memorial courtesy* as the application of *politeness about memory* toward ourselves, toward others, or with regard to specific matters of inquiry. I argue that memorial courtesy can be used to assist the process of inquiry in both individual and social contexts, and show how it is closely connected to Nietzschean cardinal virtues.

### **1. Curiosity as experimentation against customary morality**

Experimentation may be said to count as a virtue for Nietzsche in two main ways.<sup>7</sup> First, in his

well-known discussion of drives in *Dawn*, Nietzsche claims that our experiences are much more “that which we put in them than what is in them already” (*D* 119). By making this claim, he directly incorporates a sense of reflection and of inventiveness into his account of experience. When he raises the question of whether, “[t]o experience is to make believe? [*Erleben ist ein Erdichten?*]” in this aphorism, Nietzsche is suggesting that experience is imaginative and creative, rather than a mere reaction to stimuli (*D* 119). For example, by reading and engaging with Nietzsche’s question in this aphorism, we explore for ourselves whether experiencing (including the experience of reading the sentences that comprise the aphorism) is make-believe (*D* 119). In so doing, Nietzsche’s text does not simply present an argument or describe an approach, but is already in the process of experimenting, a process in which we also find ourselves engaged through the activity of our reading.<sup>8</sup> The most fundamental reason why Nietzsche encourages experimentation is that it offers a way of engaging in the project of campaigning against morality, a project that Nietzsche says he began in *Dawn*. Customary morality is a problem, according to Nietzsche, because it gets in the way of key aspects of human flourishing, including development, innovation, and the capacity for law-giving (*D* 9).<sup>9</sup> This form of morality gets in the way of free inquiry, because it urges and compels our obedience (*D* Preface 3). The extremity of our obedience means that we do not allow ourselves to have new experiences, that we tend to avoid trying to think new thoughts, and that we tend not to challenge old customs, even if they are harmful; thus, development of new, healthier and better, customs to replace older and more harmful ones is stifled (*D* 19).<sup>10</sup> Innovation in thinking, including in moral thinking, takes on the character of “*successful crimes*” when considered from the perspective of customary moral authority (*D* 98).<sup>11</sup>

As I have discussed elsewhere, Nietzsche thinks we need to overcome three main challenges in order to mount a successful campaign against customary morality.<sup>12</sup> The first

challenge is that any project devoted to challenging customary morality will be deemed immoral from the perspective of authority that is occupied at present by that type of morality. Undertaking such a project is therefore likely to invite moral censure, as is incurred by the few ‘freedoers’ who can ‘break the spell of a custom with a deed’ but who are often described as evil (*D* 20). The second challenge is language, which compounds the difficulty of the campaign: Nietzsche reminds us that we only have words for what he calls “superlative” aspects of psycho-physical processes and drives such as ‘compassion’, and not for any milder or lower processes and drives, which form our characters even though we are unaware of them. When we engage in Nietzsche’s campaign by critiquing key concepts of customary morality using language, we may not sufficiently challenge all features of such morality: although we use an “acquired language” to signify a range of nerve impulses, our acquired language does not capture all of the physiological processes involved (*D* 119).<sup>13</sup> This underscores the importance of Nietzsche’s experimentation in writing, as discussed above. The third challenge is that the social embeddedness of customary morality further complicates Nietzsche’s campaign by promoting a mood [*Stimmung*] of fear, which further inhibits challenges to the authority of this form of morality.<sup>14</sup>

The kind of morality about which Nietzsche expresses these serious criticisms has become, he says, a “hallowed place of peace” where thinkers can take a rest, including from themselves (*GS* 345). In contrast, Nietzsche seeks to establish a much more active, experimental, alternative. His alternative will foster inquiry, rather than stifle it. As he complains, what is missing from current inquiry is the impetus to critique “moral valuations”:

I miss even the slightest attempts of scientific curiosity, of the refined, experimental imagination of psychologists and historians that readily anticipates a problem and catches it in flight without quite knowing what it has caught (*GS* 345).

Experimentation does not require us to follow directions from some authority, or to know in advance what we ought to find when we seek knowledge. The virtuous or experimental thinker, according to Nietzsche, is engaged in quite a different process of inquiry:

— A thinker sees his own actions as experiments and questions — as attempts to find out something. Success and failure are for him *answers* above all. To be annoyed or feel remorse because something goes wrong — that he leaves to those who act because they have received orders and who have to reckon with a beating when his lordship is not satisfied with the result (*GS* 41).

In this process of inquiry, the point is to be curious towards the world and ourselves, to experiment toward truth, rather than to reach some specific goal. The curious Nietzschean inquirer must also be willing to take risks and to be counted as a risk-taker from the perspective of customary morality. Nietzsche likens researchers or experimenters to roguish seafarers (D 436). To illustrate the piratical nature of the inquirer seeking knowledge as part of seeking freedom from the constraints of customary morality, Nietzsche creates what he calls a wicked dilemma, in which he asks what we would do if we, as passengers on board a ship, discover that the captain and helmsman are making dangerous mistakes, and that our nautical skills are superior to theirs; are we obliged to incite mutiny against them, or should they lock us up for insubordination? (D 436). He explains that this wicked dilemma is a metaphor for “higher and trickier” situations in which, “the question always remaining is what vouchsafes our superiority, our belief in ourselves in such situations” (D 436). He points out that the dilemma is a test of character that only some will pass, reinforcing the same point in a later aphorism when he claims that he affirms any “*skepsis*” to which the reply “Let us try it!” can be made, but he wishes to hear nothing of “things and questions that do not permit any experiment,” as this would be incompatible with courage (*GS* 51).

While not everyone is able to become a free spirit and while a free spirit's development may falter, Nietzsche's thinking on the kind of inquiry performed by free spirits is reasonably consistent: according to him, the possible trajectory for the development of free spirits over time could move from unfree, to free, to very free, to freed spirits. A free spirit thinks "differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him" (*HH* 225). As is the case with experimentation, free spirits have liberated themselves from tradition, "whether the outcome has been successful or a failure" (*HH* 225). Added to this, free spirits hold the "rare and preeminent distinction" of "*being able* to alter" their opinions (*D* 56).<sup>15</sup> Conformists, Nietzsche remarks, break their hearts at seeing free spirits they love and are attached to change their opinions (*D* 562). Changing one's mind is key to the experimental process of inquiry: according to Nietzsche, the free spirit has "the spirit of inquiry after truth" on their side (*HH* 225). Nietzsche claims that free spiriting [*Freigeisterei*] is initially a kind of polytheism, in which new "eyes" or perspectives" are created (*GS* 143). Free spirits take liberties — including with science (*GS* 180). The free spirits are, fundamentally, inquirers and experimenters. Moving beyond free spirits, the *very* free spirits are the philosophers of the future, who "will not be free spirits merely, but something more, higher, greater, and fundamentally different, something that would not go unrecognized or misidentified" (*BGE* 44). Amy Mullin has pointed out that these philosophers of the future are distinct from mature free spirits by several key characteristics: (i) philosophers of the future integrate diverse perspectives and employ "a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge (*GM* III.12);" (ii) they have developed a taste for what is good for them that separates them from the decadence of merely free spirits; (iii) they are able to command and to legislate values (*BGE* 211), and to organize themselves and society.<sup>16</sup> In the writings of 1888, a third type,

“freed spirits” [freigewordener Geiste], becomes identifiable; the freed spirits are distinct from merely free spirits and include those who have restored the contrast between Christian and noble values (e.g. A 37).<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to accounts of inquiry that is dogmatic and prescriptive with regard to methodology, Nietzsche argues that there is no “one and only” *scientific method* that alone leads to knowledge, and urges us to tackle things “experimentally [versuchsweise]” as we pursue knowledge and engage in inquiry (D 432).<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche’s open-ended approach to experimentation permits self-development and self-cultivation: for instance Nietzsche asks us to consider whether a person would be more useful to another by constantly rushing to help, or “by *fashioning* out of oneself something the other will behold with pleasure, a lovely, peaceful, self-enclosed garden, for instance ...” (D 174). Nietzsche indicates that human instincts can be cultivated and developed in ways that promote health and virtue, yet which are also aesthetically pleasing, including the instincts and experiences most relevant to engagement in processes of inquiry (D 248).<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche remarks, for instance, that he wishes that it were possible to experience future virtues “of purple-glowing galaxies and whole Milky Ways of the beautiful,” and therefore, he calls for the emergence of “astronomers of the ideal” to explore the universe (D 551).<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche’s experimental approach to inquiry involves us in adopting different ways of being towards things in the world, and of developing new experiences through exploring these ways of being; experimentation is fundamental to his thinking on inquiry (D 103). In experimenting, Nietzsche incorporates emotions and feelings such as anger, affection, justice, sympathy, reverence, indiscretion, roguery, passion, and coldness, and approaches such as police interrogation, confession, violence, wandering and curiosity seeking (D 432).<sup>21</sup> He counts diverse affective responses, not only conceptual perspectives, as important with respect to conducting

experimental research (*D* 103; *D* 432). Experimentation explicitly affirms the kind of risk-taking that customary morality inhibits, and explicitly encourages daring instead of promoting fear (*D* 432). Experimentation is virtuous according to Nietzsche, because through it, we counter the vices and harms of customary morality.

## **2. Forgetting**

As we have seen, experimentation is an important Nietzschean emotion and a key Nietzschean virtue.<sup>22</sup> Experimenting as a feeling and as a virtue is rooted in Nietzsche's campaign against customary morality. Yet given his emphasis on curiosity as a way of being towards the world, the fact that Nietzsche also has rather a lot of positive things to say about forgetting might strike us as strange. Forgetting seems unlikely to be a source of support for curiosity as an emotion or an intellectual virtue, let alone as a cardinal Nietzschean virtue.<sup>23</sup> It is unclear how Nietzsche could treat curiosity as a virtue if, at the same time, he also affirms the value of forgetting. As Bernard Reginster has pointed out, someone could not count as genuinely curious if they had no interest in knowing the truth.<sup>24</sup> Hence it seems likely at first glance that forgetting would get in the way of Nietzschean curiosity, rather than support it, as forgetting does not seem compatible with a genuine curiosity about pursuing the truth or indeed with the effort to produce new experiences through different forms of experimentation. And as Mark Alfano has pointed out, because Nietzschean curiosity involves investigating difficult problems and overcoming forms of intellectual resistance to such investigation, the purest form of such curiosity arises in the investigation of nauseating facts about ourselves.<sup>25</sup> It therefore seems reasonable to take it that the Nietzschean intellectually virtuous person must be in a position to confront such facts about themselves in order to investigate them, which would require their being able to remember the relevant facts, as well as the capacity



for memory more generally. Yet I want to suggest that what Nietzsche claims about forgetting is *compatible* with his treatment of curiosity as a key virtue. To do so, I will start by examining some examples of claims that Nietzsche makes about forgetting.

Perhaps the best-known example of Nietzsche's thinking on forgetting occurs in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. During a discussion of the possibility of breeding an animal that can make promises, Nietzsche makes a distinction between two ways of understanding what forgetting is:

Forgetfulness is not just a *vis inertiae*, as superficial people believe, but is rather an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word, to which we owe the fact that what we simply live through, experience, take in, no more enters our consciousness during digestion (one could call it spiritual ingestion) than does the thousand-fold process which takes place with our physical consumption of food, our so-called ingestion (*GM* II.1).

Here, Nietzsche argues that forgetting is an active capacity, and indeed a positive one, rather than being merely the result of a lack of activity on our part. He goes on to suggest that "active forgetfulness" provides the advantages of rest and etiquette to us, including peace, space for something new within consciousness, and for the working of our nobler functions such as ruling (*GM* II.1). Forgetting, he claims, is a strength, something that represents a "robust health," and an important set of human feelings are dependent on it: "happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, immediacy" (*GM* II.1). A person who lacks the capacity for forgetfulness is, by contrast, like "a dyspeptic" who "cannot 'cope' with anything", according to Nietzsche (*GM* II.1).

In her reading of this aphorism, Christa Davis Acampora has pointed out that in distinguishing between absolute and non-absolute forgetting, Nietzsche has given philosophy an important tool.<sup>26</sup> According to Acampora, Nietzsche's conception of forgetting is not a

“celebration of mindless oblivion,” but rather entails a dynamic relationship between remembering and forgetting.<sup>27</sup> She claims that this relationship between remembering and forgetting entails reciprocity, in which our forgetting or marginalizing of the significance of forgetting carries some negative consequences for remembering.<sup>28</sup> A failure at forgetting may therefore ultimately involve negative consequences for remembrance on a Nietzschean account: according to Acampora, the failure to forget can be actively dangerous to remembering, because the kind of logic that makes memory a condition for understanding agents as morally responsible is of a type often operating in moral or political discourses that are conducted in the language of domination, power and control.<sup>29</sup> And she suggests that if we were to challenge the dominating concept of the subject as a “responsible (remembering) agent”, as does Nietzsche, then we would gain a new “ecstatic” logic, which she defines as a logic that “investigates and interrogates or challenges the terms upon which logic unfolds or proceeds” and in which “the terms of development, conflict, incorporation are continually in play.”<sup>30</sup> Acampora claims that an ecstatic logic would enable us to resolve tensions in moral and social philosophy between the interests of autonomous subjects, and the interests of those others who can claim assistance and nurture from those subjects.<sup>31</sup> I think Acampora’s attention to the difference between absolute forgetting and active forgetting carries with it some promise for the project of understanding Nietzsche’s thinking on experimentation and curiosity.

In HH, Nietzsche suggests that morality is born from out of a process of forgetting. For example, he claims that,

The same actions as within primitive society appear to have been performed first with a view to common utility have been performed by later generations for other motives: out of fear of or reverence for those who demanded and recommended them, or out of habit

because one had seen them done all around one from childhood on, or from benevolence because their performance everywhere produced joy and concurring faces, or from vanity because they were commended. Such actions, whose basic motive, that of utility, has been forgotten, are then called moral actions: not because, for instance, they are performed out of those other motives, but because they are not performed from any conscious reason of utility (WS 40).

According to Nietzsche here, moral value begins to become attributed to an action through our forgetting that the utility of the action was originally the determining factor in assigning value to it.<sup>32</sup> The same point is reflected in a subsequent remark by Nietzsche on our forgetting of our experiences, in which he claims,

— He who thinks a great deal, and thinks objectively, can easily forget his own experiences, but not the thoughts these experiences called forth (*HH* 526).

Nietzsche treats thoughts as a kind of residue of experience in this aphorism.<sup>33</sup> In another aphorism from *HH*, Nietzsche brings these two components, truth and morality, into even clearer alignment with respect to their dependence on a process of forgetting of experience:

— The principal stages in the history of the sensations by virtue of which we make anyone accountable for his actions, that is to say, of the moral sensations, are as follows. First of all, one calls individual actions good or bad quite irrespective of their motives but solely on account of their useful or harmful consequences. Soon, however, one forgets the origin of these designations and believes that the quality ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is inherent in the actions themselves, irrespective of their consequences: thus committing the same error as that by which language designates the stone itself as hard, the tree itself as green — that is to say, by taking for cause that which is effect. Then one consigns the being good or being evil to

the motives and regards the deeds in themselves as morally ambiguous. One goes further and accords the predicate good or evil no longer to the individual motive but to the whole nature of a man out of whom the motive grows as the plant does from the soil. Thus one successively makes men accountable for the effects they produce, then for their actions, then for their motives, and finally for their nature (HH 39).

According to Nietzsche in this aphorism, responsibility *requires* a process of forgetfulness in order to be possible. We designate individual actions as good or bad based on their original utility to us, then we forget where these designations came from. This forgetting is then extended from designations to actions, and then to motives for actions, and finally to human nature as a whole. Without our forgetfulness, Nietzsche remarks a little later in the same text, the world would appear “little moral”; he even suggests that a poet might say that “God has placed forgetfulness as a doorkeeper on the threshold of the temple of human dignity” (HH 92).

However, a problem arises with the scope of forgetting, as Nietzsche discusses in an aphorism from *The Wanderer and his Shadow*. The process of extending forgetting results in our moral judgements, derived originally from moral sensations, becoming fixed and immutable:

... as forgetfulness spread its veil over its origin, [they] gradually came to believe they were in possession of a sacred, immutable state of affairs upon which every generation *had* to continue to build (WS 39).

Through the process of forgetting we come to assume that we know the truth about morality and about other values, such as the value of truth, and that these values are fixed and immutable. This “sacred, immutable state of affairs”, or what we might call tradition, takes on the role of arbiter of inquiry and value. But tradition, Nietzsche claims, is damaging because it becomes a “*compulsion*” under these circumstances, even when it is no longer fit for purpose — and also because it provides

too effective a refuge for the “*weak*” (WS 39). The compulsion to uphold tradition even at the cost of the individual is harmful to humans as a whole, not merely to stronger individual types, as Nietzsche claims in a subsequent aphorism:

Without the most refined understanding (so says experience), without the capacity for the most delicate choice and a strong inclination to moderation, the inheritors of morality become squanderers of morality: by surrendering themselves unrestrainedly to their sympathetic, charitable, reconciliatory, ameliorating drives they render all the world around them more indolent, covetous and sentimental (WS 41).

As Nietzsche points out, the children of these “highly moral squanderers” are at best likely to “become pleasant, feeble good-for-nothings” (WS 41). So, while on this account, humans forget in order to make accountability possible, forgetting can be taken to an extreme that makes certain kinds of feeling almost impossible from within the framework of a society governed by conditioned customary moral emotions.

In his later discussion of forgetting in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche tempers the explanation from *HH* and *WS* in his critique of the analysis of the origins of morality offered by “English psychologists” (*GM* I.1, *GM* I.2). Of these English psychologists, Nietzsche points out that,

You always find them at the same task, whether they want to or not, pushing the *partie honteuse* of our inner world to the foreground, and looking for what is really effective, guiding and decisive for our development where man’s intellectual pride would least wish to find it (for example, in the *vis inertiae* of habit, or in forgetfulness, or in a blind and random coupling and mechanism of ideas, or in something purely passive, automatic, reflexive, molecular and thoroughly stupid) ... (*GM* I.1).

However, Nietzsche points out that their moral genealogy is “idiocy” with regard to how it conveys the “descent of the concept and judgment of ‘good’” (GM I.2). His point is that because it focuses so significantly on the passive, their explanation overlooks the active origin of the concept of ‘good’, because the English psychologists are not yet acknowledging “a plain, bitter, ugly, foul, unchristian, immoral truth” (GM I.1). This truth concerns the active origin neglected by the English psychologists, namely the “heated eruption” of feeling by “‘the good’ toward themselves (GM I.2). As Nietzsche puts it, “‘the good’ themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded ... saw and judged themselves and their actions as good” (GM I.2). The right to create and name values was, he claims, in fact given to the good *by the good themselves*, from the standpoint of the “*pathos of distance*” (GM I.2). Hence Nietzsche contends that,

The pathos of nobility and distance, as I said, the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to those ‘below’ – *that* is the origin of the antithesis ‘good’ and ‘bad’. (The seigneurial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers: they say ‘this *is* so and so’, they set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it, as it were). It is because of this origin that from the outset, the word ‘good’ is absolutely *not* necessarily attached to ‘unegoistic’ actions: as the superstition of these moral genealogists would have it (GM I.2).

What Nietzsche is particularly critical of here is the lack of attention to the legislative power of the noble type on the part of the English psychologists. In focusing on explaining the good as what is useful, they fail to see the truth that the good is what the powerful named as good. The noble type’s creation and naming of ‘good’ as a value was originally made out of feeling,

specifically a feeling of their own power or “seigneurial privilege,” not out of cold logic; utility was not their motivation (*GM I.2*). As Nietzsche goes on to discuss, when the priestly method of evaluation splits off from the “chivalric-aristocratic” method and develops into its opposite, humanity loses touch with its capacity for creating and naming values based on the “blossoming, rich, even effervescent good health” that characterizes the aristocratic type (*GM I.7*).

This capacity for feeling, and for naming and legislating based on a feeling of power, is what customary morality checks and inhibits. Experimentation seeks to counter this, and in so doing, to make possible more diverse kinds of feeling, including the capacity for a feeling of superior type that would make legislating values possible once again. One particularly important feeling is curiosity. As Nietzsche had already pointed out in his earlier work, we need to reclaim an understanding that was forgotten generations ago, namely that moral concepts have their origin in experience, including experiences of feeling:

Now one finally discovers that this nature, too, cannot be accountable, inasmuch as it is altogether a necessary consequence and assembled from the elements and influence of things past and present: that is to say, that man can be made accountable for nothing, not for his nature, nor for his motives, nor for his actions, nor for the effects he produces. One has thereby attained to the knowledge that the history of the moral sensations is the history of an error, the error of accountability, which rests on the error of freedom of will (*HH 39*). While we are not in fact free (at least, not yet), we “*regard*” ourselves as free, and this is why we have moral feelings such as remorse (*HH 40*). The error of accountability and the regarding of ourselves as free and thereby, of ourselves as able to be accountable does, however, have an advantage. As Nietzsche puts it, describing what he calls the “*over-animal*,” the “beast in us wants to be lied to; morality is an official lie told so that it shall not tear us to pieces” (*HH 40*). According

to him, without the history of this error, humans would have remained animals. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche does not see us as natural creatures — to the contrary, he is very clear that the moral conscience is tied to the “evolution” of culture (*HH* 39). Rather, we have a natural explanation for the development and sustaining of social norms or values concerning responsibility in inquiry. And Nietzsche also makes the comparable suggestion that if humans have already created values, then Nietzschean inquirers could, in a possible future developed from out of critiquing customary morality and its effects, engage in such work — by authoring laws themselves, building new laws of life and behavior, and making room for the new within our minds (*D* 187, 453; *GM* I.7, *GM* II.1).<sup>34</sup> The history of the error of accountability is no barrier to conducting such inquiry: it does not have to be conducted correctly, perfectly, or in the manner of the “sacred, immutable state of affairs” about which he expressed concern (*WS* 39). Rather, as discussed above, the point is to experiment by engaging in such inquiry. From the perspective of a possible future, in which he foresees inquirers who will be engaged in building new laws, Nietzsche points out that inquirers will have seized “the good courage to make mistakes, attempts [Versuch]” (*D* 501).<sup>35</sup> Knowledge will no longer have the “dreadful importance” that is accorded to it in our current situation, in which values are considered sacred and immutable, and all inquiries must be informed by these existing values (*D* 501). In this possible future, the loss of the sacred means “everything is less important” — humans can make mistakes, inquiries can be pursued over generations as well as by individuals, and humanity will once again be able to aspire to “undertakings” of “grandeur” such as the “greatest sacrifices to knowledge” (*D* 501).

### **3. Memorial courtesy**



Thus far, I have examined why curiosity is an important Nietzschean emotion and indeed, a key Nietzschean virtue, and I have shown that Nietzsche's praise for forgetting should not be considered at odds with the high value he places on curiosity. In this final part of my essay, I want to suggest that Nietzsche provides us with a way to understand why forgetting is not merely compatible with his commitment to experimentation, but how it can be actively supportive of it.

Nietzsche claims that something critical to our relationships with others and with ourselves depends on what he calls, "*Obliging memory* [*verbindliche Gedächtniss*]" (*D* 278).

— Anyone of high rank does well to get himself an obliging memory, that is to say, to retain all possible good things about people and to draw the line at anything else: one thus keeps people in a pleasant sort of dependence. A person can also deal with himself in similar fashion: whether one has an obliging memory or not decides, in the end, one's attitude towards oneself, the refinement, kindness, or the mistrust one feels upon observing one's own inclinations and intentions as well as, in the end again, the type of inclinations and intentions themselves (*D* 278).

By his suggestion in this aphorism that we "draw the line", Nietzsche is not suggesting that we use forgetting to obliterate the bad about ourselves or others entirely; instead, and in line with Acampora's distinction between absolute forgetting and Nietzschean active forgetting, he is suggesting that we circumscribe the target of our memorial attention.<sup>36</sup> We draw the line in order that we may accomplish a particular goal, such as promoting social relations of "pleasant dependence [*angenehmen Abhängigkeit*]" between a higher type and their inferiors (*D* 278). Obliging memory needs to be sufficiently obliging in order to maintain the appropriate relationship between dependent others and oneself. Obliging memory also operates internally, facilitating the maintenance of one's own attitude toward oneself. With an obliging memory, I can opt to be kind

to myself: for example, I can avoid dwelling on losses and inadequacies by circumscribing such aspects of my life when I consider myself, and by focusing on successes and joys.

The importance of developing and exercising the obliging memory is underlined in a subsequent aphorism from *Dawn*, where Nietzsche reminds us of the danger that virtues can pose within social contexts:

— “He forgets nothing, but he forgives everything.” — In that case, he will be hated twofold, for he shames twofold, with his memory and his magnanimity (*D* 393).

Nietzsche claims that magnanimity is dangerous because it can result in shaming when it is combined with excessive remembrance. This dangerous combination increases the sense of indebtedness that someone might feel they owe to their forgiver. This helps to clarify why it is that, when he identifies four important virtues in a later aphorism of *Dawn*, Nietzsche makes specific mention of magnanimity as a virtue that is expressed towards the defeated:

*The good four.* — *Honest* towards ourselves and whatever *else* is our friend; *courageous* toward the enemy; *magnanimous* [*grossmüthig*] toward the defeated [den Besiegten]; *polite* [*höflich*] — always: this is how the four cardinal virtues want us to be (*D* 556).

Those with an obliging memory would be able to circumscribe their recollections magnanimously and politely without failing to be honest and courageous, particularly with respect to the pursuit of inquiry. However, those who lack such an obliging memory, or whose memories cannot be prevailed upon to be sufficiently obliging, might either be forced to be less honest and courageous, or might find that while remaining honest and courageous, they shame others or indeed themselves.

In his discussion of *D* 556, Mark Alfano has suggested that in making such a claim for magnanimity, we should understand Nietzsche as claiming that what is defeated or vanquished are problems, and “perhaps also the moral psychologies of other people.”<sup>37</sup> Alfano’s rationale for this

reading is that displaying magnanimity towards problems, and towards others' moral psychologies, would help us to avoid moral sanction by society.<sup>38</sup> I think Alfano is right to point to the importance of moral sanction in understanding what Nietzsche is getting at in this aphorism, as the worry about sanction fits well with the wider context of the aphorism, namely Nietzsche's campaign against morality in *Dawn*. Two important aspects of this text are most relevant here: Nietzsche's critique of customary morality, and the concern he has for how such morality negatively impacts on human health, which is a significant motivating factor behind his critique.<sup>39</sup> Customary morality demands the sacrifice of oneself so that tradition can win: those who do not make this sacrifice may be subject to demands for compensation from their community, or even to community revenge (D 9).<sup>40</sup> They may also experience pangs of conscience for going against the herd instinct that such morality reinforces. According to Nietzsche, this sacrificial demand and its sanction, revenge, inhibits the flourishing of sick and the weak members of society who lack "the courage to get healthy," and can even carry negative consequences for those few others who may already possess this courage, or come to possess it (D 323). As he points out in stressing the harm of customary morality, its effects are so sickening that "the sun and sky of life" is made dark by it (D 323).<sup>41</sup> Magnanimity as a virtue, then, is particularly important and worthwhile for those engaged in challenging the rule of customary morality, insofar as it can facilitate that project.

However, even so, I see a difference between Alfano's reading and my own. I think that a more holistic approach, in which D 393 and D 556 are treated as being more directly connected to one another, allows us to make a small but important shift of emphasis in which we remove the qualifier of Alfano's "perhaps," and treat problems and moral psychology as equally relevant to Nietzsche's thinking on magnanimity. While problems can certainly be defeated, so too can people, including ourselves, not only others; and magnanimity may be extended toward oneself,

not only toward others. For example, my experience over many years as a member of the exacting profession of philosophy means I have been made only too aware of my many faults as a scholar, and remember them rather too well, all too often enumerating them to myself as I attempt to work — thus making timely completion of promised essays even more challenging than is already the case. However, faced with this situation, I can opt to treat myself magnanimously, by, for instance, reminding myself that it is more reasonable to see myself as pursuing continuous improvement in my writing and in my understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy than to see myself as pursuing (unattainable) perfection in this endeavor. In the earlier aphorism from *Dawn*, Nietzsche suggests that magnanimity may also be a cause of moral sanction — specifically, being hated — because magnanimity can result in shaming (*D* 393). But the later aphorism, *D* 556, shows that cultivating the virtue of magnanimity does not *have* to involve shaming. We can balance being honest with ourselves and courageous towards our enemy, with being polite or courteous [höflich], including towards ourselves (*D* 556).

To perform such a symphony of virtuous feeling with assurance, a Nietzschean moral agent must avoid combining their magnanimity with excessive memory. Instead, they can exercise what I shall call their *memorial courtesy*, whether towards someone else, or towards themselves. Once a problem has been solved, the Nietzschean moral agent need not dwell on it; once they have dealt with a matter involving others, or themselves, they need not keep it at the forefront of their minds, ruminating over it. As we know, Nietzsche was motivated to campaign against customary morality in part because of his concern for human health; it is worth noting that research in contemporary psychology suggests that rumination can be deleterious to our health, for instance when it guides our response to negative life events or mood states, because rumination has been shown to be linked to emotional dysregulation and to a heightened risk for emotional disorders.<sup>42</sup>

Nietzschean *memorial courtesy* is what enables us to constrain our memory without failing as inquirers. Nietzschean memorial courtesy can be defined as the application of *politeness about memory* toward ourselves, toward others, or with regard to specific matters of inquiry. To understand how this is so, I want first to look at an aphorism from *Dawn*, where Nietzsche makes two important claims concerning the “*forgetful*”. Similar to his arguments in TL, HH, and WS, Nietzsche suggests that mankind’s civilized condition evolves from out of the forgetting of primal experiences, “*animality* with its savage grimaces”, an animality that is recalled in “outbursts of passion” and “the fantasizing of dreams and madness” (*D* 312). On such occasions, he claims, human memory rediscovers human prehistory, while our civilized condition evolves from out of our forgetting of primordial experiences “and thus from a waning of that memory” (*D* 312). Nietzsche distinguishes between two types of person: first, the “forgetter on a grand scale” who does *not* experience animality through passion and madness, and the person like himself, who *does* experience it:

Anyone who, as a forgetter of the highest breed, always maintains a great distance from all this *does not understand human beings* — but it is an advantage for everyone if there are here and there such individuals who ‘do not understand us’ and are, as it were, begotten by divine seed and born of reason (*D* 312).

The forgetter on a grand scale does not understand human beings, but is nonetheless advantageous to “everyone”. There might be an advantage to an individual in avoiding passion and madness in favor of an association with reason, but it seems odd to find Nietzsche suggesting that everyone, not merely those individuals, finds an advantage in the existence of forgetters on a grand scale. Insofar as they are born of reason and begotten divinely, forgetters on a grand scale seem to have been excluded from the full range of conditions of human being, including knowledge that may be

gleaned through exploration of affective perspectives as well as through those pursued through reasoning. As such, forgetters on a grand scale do not seem to resemble free spirits with a passion for knowledge, who are willing to explore new perspectives, to test out new fields of inquiry, and to adopt the attitude of curiosity, by which we should — as discussed above — understand something more joyful, creative, and tolerant of danger and uncertainty than severe epistemic austerity.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore hard to see what the advantage they present might be.

One way to respond to this challenge is to consider what the forgetters on a grand scale might be able to exemplify. Reginster directs our attention towards Nietzsche's example of the genius, who is dangerous to a community because of their capacity to challenge "habitual and unquestionable principles" — much like the "sacred and immutable state of affairs" (WS 39) — and yet who is indispensable to community progress and strengthening (HH 224).<sup>44</sup> But the example of the genius does not entirely overcome the worry that the forgetter on a grand scale is a creature of reason, unaffected by the passion for knowledge that, according to Reginster, is demonstrated by free spirits.<sup>45</sup> We know that Nietzsche thinks it is necessary to explore diverse affective responses in order to open up space for new or divergent questions, thoughts, feelings, and investigations on the part of spirits freed from the constraints of customary morality (D 9, 28, 146, 283, 473).<sup>46</sup>

An alternative possibility becomes apparent if we compare the forgetters on a grand scale with a later exemplar to whom Nietzsche directs our attention: Mirabeau (*GM* I.10). In his discussion of noble types in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche points out that even while the noble type of person may experience *ressentiment*, this feeling exhausts itself quickly, and "does not *poison*" such a person (*GM* I.10). In order to explain how this is possible, Nietzsche turns to

discuss Mirabeau, and in so doing, he draws attention to a forgetting as a particularly important characteristic of Mirabeau's nobility:

To be unable to take his enemies, his misfortunes and even his *misdeeds* seriously for long – that is the sign of strong, rounded natures with a superabundance of a power which is flexible, formative, healing and can make one forget (a good example from the modern world is Mirabeau, who had no recall for the insults and slights directed at him and who could not forgive, simply because he — forgot.) A man like this shakes from him, with one shrug, many worms which would have burrowed into another man; actual 'love of your enemies' is also possible here and here alone — assuming it is possible at all on earth (*GM* I.10).

This indicates that the advantage that is made available to us by an exemplar of forgetting like Mirabeau is a cue to memory, including remembrance of the power of forgetting. Unlike the weaker type, the Mirabeau type is sufficiently strong that they can not only shape and heal themselves, but they can also forget insults, and even social censure, to enable their healing. It is instructive for us to contrast such an exemplar of forgetting with the dominance of remembering within the context of intellectual endeavour, as well as within society as a whole. When we encounter a Mirabeau type, then, as with the case of forgetters on a grand scale, we can appreciate the effect of having developed the capacity to forget. In the case of forgetters on a grand scale, however, what we can gain is limited. Because their capacity for forgetting is so fully developed that they cannot recover the feeling of animality, they are permanently distanced from the possibility of reclaiming the understanding of the history of accountability as being the history of an error (*D* 312). We can gain an understanding of the purity and depth of their connection to reason from such forgetters, along with a sense of the power of forgetting, but we cannot gain a

sense of the passion for seeking the truth, or for being a curiosity seeker, at the same time (*HH* Preface 3, *HH* 630; *D* 432). In the case of an exemplar of forgetting like Mirabeau, however, there is no limiting attachment such as reason; moreover, we can observe and seek to emulate the circumscription of memory performed by this type in order to enable the strength of his nature to continue to express itself. In making this claim, I take a different approach to *GM* I.10 than does Michael Ure, who has suggested that this aphorism suggests a retreat into an illusion of narcissistic self-sufficiency.<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche's point in this aphorism is that the Mirabeau type's capacity for forgetting enables him not only to shrug off insults "simply because he — forgot", but in so doing, to respect his enemies, and even to love them (*GM* I.10). As such, I do not think we can sustain the interpretation that what is at stake here is a form of narcissism. As the exemplar shows, what is really at stake is the capacity for active forgetting through drawing a line — literally *circumscribing* the scope and direction of memory — in order to better care for oneself, one's social entanglements, and one's capacity for virtuous curiosity, in the form of ongoing experimentation and inquiry. What is so exemplary about Mirabeau for Nietzsche is that he developed a particularly obliging memory, and as such, he was able to exercise memorial courtesy: this is why Nietzsche thinks the example he offers is instructive.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that experimentation is a virtue and that it is grounded in Nietzsche's critique of customary morality. While experimentation is a virtue for Nietzsche, it is paradigmatic of curiosity and — though I cannot argue for this claim here — I think it can be synonymous with curiosity, especially in as far as one stands in relation to the world curiously and experimentally as a virtuous Nietzschean inquirer. I dispelled a potential inconsistency in Nietzsche's thinking by showing how



his views on experimentation and curiosity fit with his affirmation of forgetting. I differentiated between types of forgetting in Nietzsche's thought, and argued that Nietzsche's positive account of active forgetting is compatible with his treatment of curiosity and experimentation as virtues. As I have claimed, memorial courtesy actively supports virtuous curiosity and experimentation by enabling us to be *polite about memory* toward ourselves, toward others, or with regard to specific matters of inquiry, so that we do not dwell on problems or aspects of personal, social, or scientific inquiries unnecessarily, or harmfully.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Reginster, "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51.3 (2013): 441-463, 454.

<sup>2</sup> Reginster, "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," 456-457.

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Bamford, "The ethos of inquiry: Nietzsche on experience, naturalism, and experimentalism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 47.1 (2016): 9-29.

<sup>4</sup> Bamford, "The ethos of inquiry," 9-29.

<sup>5</sup> Reginster, "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," 454.

<sup>6</sup> Christa Acampora, "Forgetting the subject," in *Reading Nietzsche at the Margins*, edited by Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), 34-56.

<sup>7</sup> The remainder of this paragraph is a condensed version of my earlier argument in Bamford, "The ethos of inquiry".

<sup>8</sup> Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 187. On the point concerning performance, see also Rebecca Bamford, "Mood and Aphorism in Nietzsche's Campaign Against Morality," 55-76.

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<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Bamford. 2018. “Dawn,” in *The Nietzschean Mind*, edited by Paul Katsafanas (London: Routledge, 2018), 25-40, 26. This paragraph is a condensed version of key points of my argument in that essay.

<sup>10</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 28.

<sup>11</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 9-29.

<sup>12</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 26.

<sup>13</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 28.

<sup>14</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 28.

<sup>15</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 9-29.

<sup>16</sup> Amy Mullin, “Nietzsche’s Free Spirit,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38.3 (2000): 383-405, 401-403.

<sup>17</sup> Andreas Urs Sommer, “Is There a Free Spirit in Nietzsche’s Late Writings?” in *Nietzsche’s Free Spirit Philosophy*, edited by Rebecca Bamford (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 9-29. See also Katrina Mitcheson, “The Experiment of Incorporating Unbounded Truth,” in *Nietzsche’s Free Spirit Philosophy*, edited by Rebecca Bamford (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2015), 139-56, 139. Mitcheson argues that Nietzsche rejects inquiry based on a fixed and single method, or involving a strictly demarcated area of inquiry, as these inhibit the scope of investigation.

<sup>19</sup> See also Rebecca Bamford, “Health and Self-Cultivation in *Dawn*,” in *Nietzsche’s Free Spirit Philosophy*, edited by Rebecca Bamford (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2015), 85-109.

<sup>20</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 36.

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<sup>21</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 9-29.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Alfano, “The Most Agreeable of All Vices: Nietzsche as Virtue Epistemologist,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21.4 (2013):767-790, 770.

<sup>23</sup> Alfano, “The Most Agreeable of All Vices,” 767-790, 770.

<sup>24</sup> Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” 457.

<sup>25</sup> Alfano, “The Most Agreeable Of All Vices,” 16.

<sup>26</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 34-56.

<sup>27</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 52.

<sup>28</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 52.

<sup>29</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 52.

<sup>30</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 48, 51-52.

<sup>31</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 48, 51-52.

<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that Nietzsche had made a very similar claim with regard to the role played by the process of forgetting in matters of epistemology in his analysis of truth as emergent from experience, in which he claims that truths are “illusions which we have forgotten are illusions” (TL 1). Nietzsche suggests that being truthful, in a situation in which humans have developed meaning in the first place, means employing “the usual metaphors” (TL 1). In so doing, humans “lie according to a fixed convention” — and, as he points out, “man of course forgets that this is the way things stand for him” and hence, humans arrive at their “sense of truth” through “*unconsciousness*” and “*forgetfulness*” (TL 1).

<sup>33</sup> This fits with his earlier account of truths as illusions that we have forgotten are illusions — “metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force” — in TL.

<sup>34</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 13.

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<sup>35</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Acampora, “Forgetting the subject,” 52.

<sup>37</sup> Alfano, “The Most Agreeable Of All Vices,” 787.

<sup>38</sup> Alfano, “The Most Agreeable Of All Vices,” 787.

<sup>39</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 25-40.

<sup>40</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 26. See also Simon Robertson, “The Scope Problem – Nietzsche, The Moral, Ethical, and Quasi-Aesthetic,” in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity*, edited by C. Janaway and S. Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81-110.

<sup>41</sup> Bamford, “Dawn,” 26.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Jutta Jordan & Tanya B. Tran. “Rumination and intentional forgetting of emotional material.” *Cognition and Emotion* 23.6 (2009): 1233-1246.

<sup>43</sup> Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” 458-459.

<sup>44</sup> Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” 461.

<sup>45</sup> Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” 461.

<sup>46</sup> Bamford, “The ethos of inquiry,” 15.

<sup>47</sup> See Ure, “The Politics of Mercy, Forgiveness and Love: A Nietzschean Appraisal.” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 26.1(2007): 56-69.

<sup>48</sup> I am grateful to Mark Alfano for many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.