

Guy Elgat

Department of Philosophy
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60208
guyelgat2011@u.northwestern.edu

2018 Sherman Ave., #2E
Evanston, IL 60201
home: 847-905-0171
cell: 847-708-0034

Education:

- 2006- Northwestern University, Department of Philosophy
 PhD, expected Summer 2012
- 2002-2006 MA, Summa Cum Laude, Philosophy, Tel-Aviv University, Israel. "Heidegger and
 Skepticism: A Reading of *Being and Time*, Division I".
- 1999-2002 BA Summa Cum Laude, Philosophy, Tel-Aviv University, Israel.

Areas of Specialization

Nietzsche and 19th century German philosophy,
Continental Philosophy (esp. Existentialism)

Areas of Competence

Modern Philosophy (esp. British Empiricism), Ethics, Philosophy of Science,
Pragmatism

Dissertation:

Nietzsche's Overcoming of Pessimism

Supervisor: Rachel Zuckert

Committee: Penelope Deutscher, Peter Fenves, Bernard Reginster (Brown University)

I investigate Nietzsche's engagement with Schopenhauer's pessimism by focusing on Nietzsche's aim, expressed in writings starting in 1886, to "deepen pessimism." Nietzsche's talk of intensifying pessimism seems paradoxical in light of his negative appraisal of Schopenhauer's pessimistic views and his calls to celebrate life. By solving this paradox, I argue that the theme of deepening pessimism, ignored by scholars, provides a central clue for grasping Nietzsche's way of overcoming pessimism and moving towards a Yes-saying attitude to life. I interpret the deepening of pessimism as Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy (broadly construed) which results in pessimism ascribing an even lower value to life. This Nietzsche takes to be of remedial value since it clears the ground for and provides the psychological impetus to the creation of new values and to the affirmation of life. I thus show how the theme of the deepening of pessimism ties together several of Nietzsche's central ideas and uncovers a unity in his thought.

Academic Awards and Honors:

- 2010 Jane E. Simons Memorial Award for best presentation at the 2010 Gonzaga University Graduate Philosophy Conference.
- 2004 Philosophy Department Scholarship, Tel-Aviv University
- 2003 Philosophy Department Scholarship, Tel-Aviv University.
- 2003 Humanities Dean Honors, Tel-Aviv University.

Publications Under Review

- “Amor Fati as a Spiritual Exercise” (under review with *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*)
- “Heidegger on Death as Possibility: A Criticism of Blattner’s Reading” (under review with *Continental Philosophy Review*)

Publications:

- “Introduction,” *Enquiry into Human Understanding*, Hebrew trans. (in Hebrew), Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2009.
- “Introduction,” *How to do Things with Words* (co. written with Prof. Anat Matar), Hebrew trans. (in Hebrew), Ed. Prof. Anat Matar, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2005.

Works in Progress

- “Was Nietzsche a Psychological Egoist?”
- “Nietzsche, the Logic of Genealogy and the Problem of Self-Refutation”
- “The Role of Receptivity in Nietzsche’s Creation of Values”

Translations (into Hebrew):

- Arendt, H. *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2010.
- James, W. *Pragmatism*, Ed. Professor Yemima Ben-Menahem, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2010.
- Hume, D. *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2009.
- Reé, J. and Urmson, J.O. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy*, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2007 (co-translated with Jonathan Levy and Daphna Levy).

Berkeley, G. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Ed. Prof. Ruth Weintraub, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2006.

Silverstone, R., *Why Study The Media?*, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2006.

Austin, J.L. *How to do Things with Words*, Ed. Prof. Anat Matar, Resling, Tel-Aviv, 2005.

Public Presentations:

- 2011 "Nietzsche on Value, Value Creation and Reasons", Nietzsche Workshop, Northwestern University.
- 2011 "Nietzsche's *amor fati* as a Way of Life", Graduate Conference, Emory University.
- 2011 "Nietzsche on the Deepening of Pessimism", Graduate Conference, University of New-Mexico.
- 2011 Comments on Sally Sedgwick's "Becoming Ethical: The Emergence of Freedom in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*", German Philosophy Workshop, DePaul University.
- 2010 "Nietzsche's Attack on Pure Altruism", 7th Annual Intermountain West Philosophy Conference, University of Utah.
- 2010 "Nietzsche's Love of Fate – a Reading of *Amor Fati*", Gonzaga University Annual Graduate Philosophy Conference.
- 2010 "Nietzsche on the Intensification of Pessimism", Dissertation Research Seminar, Northwestern University.
- 2010 Comments on Stephen White's "What is Wrong with Coercion?", Fourth Annual Conference of the Society for Ethical Theory and Political Philosophy, Northwestern University.
- 2009 Comments on Peter Kail's "Hume and the Genealogy of Morality", Rethinking the Genealogy of Morals Conference, University of Chicago.

Languages

Hebrew – fluent
English – fluent
German – reading
French – reading
Arabic - speaking

Teaching Experience

- 2012- Instructor, Northwestern University. Course: Introduction to Existentialism. Duties: course planning, lecturing and grading.
- 2007- Teaching Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Northwestern University. Duties include: Leading discussion sections, grading papers, giving occasional course lectures.
Courses:
2011-2012: Elementary Logic, Introduction to Existentialism
2009-2010: Bioethics, Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Existentialism
2008-2009: Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Bioethics
2007-2008: Introduction to Ancient Philosophy, Introduction to Pragmatism, Bioethics
- 2004-2006 Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Tel-Aviv University.
Course: Hume and Kant: A Guided Reading (twice) (Duties: lectures, discussion and grading).
- 2003-2004 Teaching Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Tel-Aviv University.
Course: Metaphysics and Epistemology (Duties: holding discussion sections and grading).

Other Professional Activities

- 2010- Organizer of the Chicago Area Consortium in German Philosophy.

References

Rachel Zuckert, Northwestern University
Penelope Deutscher, Northwestern University
Peter Fenves, Northwestern University
Bernard Reginster, Brown University

List of Graduate Courses Taken

Realism in the Philosophy of Science
Derrida
Critical Social Theory: The Frankfurt School
Spinoza's *Ethics*
Husserl's Phenomenology
Philosophy of Mind: Freud and Psychoanalytic Theory
Kant's Moral Theory

Aesthetics: Seminar in 19th Century German Philosophy
Habermas and Critical Theory
Pragmatism
Plato's Moral Philosophy
Heidegger's *Being and Time*
Democracy and the Public Sphere
The Philosophy of Nietzsche

List of Graduate Courses Audited

Habermas' Communicative Rationality
Gadamer's *Truth and Method*
Biopolitics after Foucault
Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic
Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
Intrinsic Value: Seminar in Ethical Theory

Guy Elgat
Dissertation Summary

It is well known that Nietzsche was influenced greatly by Arthur Schopenhauer, but that he did not share Schopenhauer's pessimistic view that given the predominance of suffering in life, life is of negative value and that it is therefore better never to have been. Rather, and in direct opposition to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche famously held that life should be affirmed and sought ways to say Yes to existence rather than No. My research focuses on the precise ways in which Nietzsche sought to reverse Schopenhauer's valuation of life and overcome his pessimism.

While various aspects of the Nietzsche's relation to Schopenhauer have been dealt with extensively in the secondary literature, one central issue of immense importance has been typically left out: Nietzsche's stated aim to *deepen* pessimism. While Nietzsche criticizes Schopenhauer's pessimism, as I have noted, he at the same time claimed to be seeking to deepen it. But this seems *prima facie* contradictory: why would one wish to deepen, and thus presumably further, a worldview which one takes to be absolutely wrong? I propose that Nietzsche took the deepening of pessimism to be a means to combat it. Nietzsche's deepening of pessimism consists in arguing against Schopenhauer that neither is it possible to attain the redemptive state of pain-less will-lessness nor has suffering any meaning. I thus examine Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy, of his aesthetics and of the ascetic ideal which underlies his philosophy as a whole. In all three, what is at stake for Schopenhauer in one way or another is the possibility of release from the will. The ascetic ideal, in addition, is crucial for the meaning that it gives to the pessimist's existence. Absent this possibility of release and without meaning to suffering, and given the pessimist's underlying values, life will be ascribed an even lower value and pessimism would thus be deepened.

With regard to morality, I show how Nietzsche consistently argued, especially in his earlier writings, against the idea of pure selflessness and held that all actions are at least to some extent self-regarding. But given that Schopenhauer held that purely altruistic acts of compassion could put one on the road to will-less salvation, Nietzsche's arguments against pure altruism close off this path. In the case of Schopenhauer's discussion of the aesthetic state, Nietzsche argues that in contrast to Schopenhauer's view we have no reason to think that either the perceiver of beauty or its creator (the

artist) could be described as occupying the position of the “pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject.” The aesthetic state is thus shown to hold no promise of redemption either. In the case of asceticism Nietzsche shows how Schopenhauer’s entire metaphysical position could be seen, in light of the analysis of asceticism in *The Genealogy of Morality*, as driven by the life-preserving instincts, that is, by the will to life, not by its denial. This has the consequence of showing not only that ascetic practices cannot hold the promise of redemption as construed by Schopenhauer but also that there is reason to be incredulous about Schopenhauer’s metaphysics and the meaning it provides to the pessimist by explaining his predicament.

But it is precisely the discovery that the ascetic ideal is driven by life-preserving forces that holds the key for how pessimism’s deepening could be turned into its cure. Once Schopenhauer’s pessimism is criticized and thus deepened, I argue, the life-preserving instincts that were attached to it are freed and could – Nietzsche believes – be harnessed for a new purpose, namely, the affirmation of life. I show how this psychological mechanism is operative at the background of many of Nietzsche’s claims and how he takes it to hold the promise of the overcoming of pessimism in the form of a creation of new values. I therefore turn to an account which explains what the creation of values means for Nietzsche and argue that to create a value is to invent a description of the object to be valued which resonates in a proper manner with the psyche of the person to whom the new value is offered. I then connect this idea to Nietzsche’s thought of *amor fati*, the love of fate, by arguing that *amor fati* essentially involves creating values for oneself. I then show how Nietzsche revalues pain and suffering in a way which could ground an affirmative attitude to life.