

# Nietzsche on Constructing Emotions

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“Thus, I deny morality as I deny alchemy, that is, I deny their presuppositions: *not* that countless people *feel* themselves to be immoral, but there is any *true* reason so to feel... We have to *learn to think differently*—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* §103

“...human life is never without interpreted feeling; the interpretation is constitutive of the feeling.”

Charles Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals”

**Abstract:** In this paper, I argue that Nietzsche thinks emotional experience is constructed. To say that my experience of a particular emotion—for example, compassion—is constructed is to say that any instance of compassion I experience is something of my own making. Specifically, it is a feeling-state fabricated by my mind as it (automatically and unwittingly) interprets the phenomenally experienced bodily feelings to which I find myself subject in a particular circumstance. In other words, any compassion I experience is the result of my mind having constructed such a feeling. What’s more, since Nietzsche thinks the process by which my mind interprets these bodily feelings will always involve the deployment of socially available emotion concepts and emotion narratives, he will think not only that emotions are constructed, but that they are constructed via social artifacts. Recognizing that our emotional lives are shaped by the emotion concepts and narratives we utilize to make sense of them suggests that enlarging our emotional vocabulary and familiarizing ourselves with new emotional narratives can be profoundly transformative. It also highlights the possibility of reflective intervention into our emotional and perceptual lives, potentially opening up new ways of feeling and seeing.

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I argue that Nietzsche thinks emotional experience is constructed. What does this mean? Looking at the case of a particular emotion will be instructive here. To say that my experience of a particular emotion—for example, compassion—is constructed is to say that any instance of compassion I experience is something of my own making. Specifically, it is a feeling-state fabricated by my mind as it (automatically and unwittingly) interprets the phenomenally experienced bodily feelings to which I find myself subject in a particular circumstance. In other words, any compassion I experience is the result of

my mind having *constructed* such a feeling. This will also be true of instances of simpler emotions, such as anger. What's more, since Nietzsche thinks the process by which I interpret these phenomenally experienced bodily feelings will always involve the deployment of socially available emotion concepts—such as *compassion* or *anger*—and emotion narratives (for example, narratives about circumstances in which compassion is typically experienced and/or appropriate), he will think not only that emotions are constructed, but that they are constructed via social artifacts.<sup>1</sup>

Importantly, the emotions my mind constructs constitute genuinely new feeling-states on Nietzsche's view, states distinct from both the phenomenally experienced feelings of which they are interpretations and the psycho-physiological activity that underpins those phenomenally experienced feelings.<sup>2</sup> To construct an emotion, in other words, is to create a new feeling by interpreting other ones. And as a new state—one that Nietzsche also treats as causally efficacious—the particular emotion my mind constructs can do different things to me than the inner states from which it is composed: it can give rise to new desires, aversions, and so on. So, although they are fabricated, the instances of discrete emotion that my mind constructs are real feeling-states with the power to shape my motivational life.

## 2. What is psychological constructionism?

To get clear on what it means to call Nietzsche a constructionist about emotion, it will be helpful to take a detour through key features of contemporary constructionist views.<sup>3</sup> On such views, our emotional experiences originate in valenced states of physiological arousal—that is, states that are broadly pleasant or unpleasant, involving varying degrees of calmness and agitation—resulting from one's interoception of fluctuations in bodily sensations (Barrett 2017: 73). These states, which are “simple feelings of pleasure, displeasure, arousal, and calmness” unfold continuously (including as one sleeps [ibid.: 72]) and

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[Acknowledgements redacted.]

<sup>1</sup> The terminology Nietzsche uses to discuss discrete emotions varies, and there's considerable overlap between the terms he uses when discussing discrete emotions (*Affekte*, *Gefühle/n*, *Leidenschaften*, *Emotionen*) and the terms he uses when discussing phenomenally experienced bodily feelings (*Affekte*, *Gefühle/n*, *Leidenschaften*). Given this overlap, I avoid using the term “affect” to designate any stage in the process of emotion construction Nietzsche outlines. Notice, however, that what I call phenomenally experienced bodily feelings in this paper—valenced states of physiological arousal of which I am phenomenally aware (those “general feelings [*Gemeingefühle*]” resulting from one's “interoceptive representation of the body” [Fowles 2020: 121])—play the same functional role in the production of emotion as “basic affect” does in Lisa Feldman Barrett's constructionist account (2017). More on this account below.

<sup>2</sup> For readability, I sometimes use constructions in the paper such as “I construct,” “I deploy an emotion concept,” “I avail *myself* of a particular rationale,” and so on. These make the process of emotional construction sound like something that I do consciously and willfully. Such constructions are therefore potentially misleading, since emotion construction is (at least typically) an unwitting and automatic mental process involving the deployment of certain emotion concepts to make sense of bodily feelings. Still, they are to my mind far preferable to the clunkiness of other, more passive constructions.

<sup>3</sup> Here, I use Lisa Feldman Barrett's view to pick out key features of psychological constructionist views. This is not an endorsement of Barrett's view.

enter into phenomenal awareness only when “moments of... interoceptive sensation” are sufficiently intense (ibid.: 67). Yet according to psychological constructionist views, such states (which constructionists designate states of “core affect”) only become emotional experiences—i.e., “instance[s] of emotion” (ibid.: 39)—when the brain deploys an emotion concept or category to make sense of them.<sup>4</sup> In this way, we come to “feel what our brains believe” (paraphrase, ibid.: 78). Importantly, the emotions we construct as a result of our use of specific emotion concepts both anticipate and produce new affective states; they have the potential to change the state of core affect to which we are subject (ibid.: 78-9). By categorizing our bodily sensations, then, we both regulate and transform them.

The emotion concepts we use to make sense of the affective states to which we are subject are deployed by the brain predictively, as guesses about what one might be undergoing and the most appropriate way to react, given the circumstance (ibid.: 28-30).<sup>5</sup> In addition to explaining my phenomenally experienced affective states (ibid.: 60), the predictive emotion concepts I deploy—which are formed from a host of past experiences and involve a high degree of situational specificity—also tend to prescribe certain courses of action, motivating me to do certain things and not others.<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, however, the emotion concepts we deploy are learned from our sociocultural context: they are pieces of socially shared knowledge unwittingly assimilated from emotion discourse we encounter, both as part of our society or culture generally and as part of an individual’s particular upbringing (e.g., the emotion discourse an individual encounters in the course of her childhood, as part of her family life). Specifically, our emotion concepts develop as the result of our being exposed to certain emotion words “spoken by other humans in [our] affective niche” (ibid.: 102), as well as through our combination of existing emotion concepts (ibid.: 105). It is by “synchronizing” our emotion concepts with others that we become able to “perceive” others’ emotions and to “communicate” about those emotions (ibid.: 110). On views like these, there is typically an extremely high degree of intra-cultural consistency among emotions (due to communally shared emotion concepts), as well as intercultural variance among emotions (due to the cultural dependence of emotion concepts and the emotion words to which these concepts are anchored). But our “familiar emotion concepts are built-in only because [we] grew up in a particular social context where those emotion concepts are meaningful

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<sup>4</sup> Notice here that Barrett characterizes emotion concepts as cognitive categories: one’s “muscle movements and bodily changes become functional as instances of emotion *only when [one categorize[s]] them that way*, giving them new functions as experiences and perceptions” (133).

<sup>5</sup> In order that one might “stay alive and well” (66).

<sup>6</sup> One way emotion concepts help an individual make sense of her sensations and situation on Lisa Feldman Barrett’s view is by functioning as *explanations* on which she might then draw to extract a cause for the valenced state of arousal she experiences in a particular context. This is worth mentioning since, as we see below, it bears striking similarity to Nietzsche’s account of emotional sense-making via emotion concepts and narratives.

and useful... emotions are not inborn, and if they are universal, it is due to shared concepts” (ibid.: 33, 38).

Finally, contemporary psychological constructionists emphasize that even after an emotional experience is constructed, the myriad “interoceptive sensations” that form affective states—again, pleasurable or unpleasurable states of arousal—roil constantly. While “sometimes the sensations are transformed into emotions... even when they’re only in the background, they influence what you do, what you think, and what you perceive” (ibid.: 72). So, although the emotion constructed by an individual’s use of a particular emotion concept may prescribe certain actions (Barrett 2015: 56), her motivational landscape always exceeds the actions prescribed by the particular emotion she has constructed in a given instance.

### 3. Nietzsche’s psychological constructionism

Devoting an entire section of a paper on Nietzsche to a contemporary emotion theory might seem a strange thing to do. But as we’ll see, Nietzsche’s reflections on emotional experience share striking similarities with contemporary psychological constructionism and are thus productively read alongside such theories. Attending to these similarities not only helps us get clearer on Nietzsche’s view of our emotional lives and the more active role we can play in shaping them—the importance of which cannot be overstated, given how damaging he finds the typical emotional repertoire of modern individuals—but also suggests that Nietzsche is best read as a psychological constructionist about emotional experiences.

In several places, Nietzsche makes claims suggestive of psychological constructionism. In an 1881 note, he claims that “what is really going [in the case of] human affects are [various] physiological movements... the affects... *are only intellectual interpretations*, where the intellect knows nothing at all and thinks it knows everything. With the words ‘anger,’ ‘love,’ ‘hate’ [the individual erroneously] supposes the Why? to have identified the cause of [those physiological] movement[s]” (KSA 9:11[128], emphasis mine).<sup>7</sup> That emotions are intellectual constructions—and, specifically, interpretations of phenomenally experienced bodily feelings which themselves are the result of physiological activity—is echoed by Nietzsche in an 1883 note titled “Belief in ‘affects.’”<sup>8</sup> There, Nietzsche claims that “affects are a construction of the intellect, a fabrication of causes which do not exist [*Affekte sind eine Konstruktion des Intellekts, eine Erdichtung von Ursachen, die es nicht giebt*]. All bodily general feelings [*körperlichen Gemeingefühle*] that we do not understand are *interpreted intellectually*, i.e., a reason is sought for feeling one way or another...[this is done] for the sake of the conceivability [*Denkbarkeit*] of our state” (KSA 10:24[20],

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<sup>7</sup> In this same note, Nietzsche refers to “*learned affect-feelings* [*angelernten Affekt-Gefühle*]” (emphasis mine).

<sup>8</sup> It seems to me significant that he puts “affects” in scare quotes here.

emphasis mine). As an example of one such interpretation, he suggests that “frequent blood-flows to the brain, with the feeling of suffocation, [may be] interpreted as anger” (ibid.). Finally, in an 1887 note, Nietzsche “maintain[s] the phenomenal nature of the inner world”: that “everything *we become conscious of* has first been thoroughly trimmed, simplified, schematized, interpreted... the ‘apparent *inner* world’ is managed with quite the same forms and procedures as the ‘outer’ world. We never encounter ‘facts’: pleasure and unpleasure are late and derivative phenomena of the intellect” (KSA 13:11[113]). As suggested by the Kantian language Nietzsche uses here—and as I’ll shortly explain—the “interpretation” or “schematization” that takes place as an individual constructs her experience of her inner world involves the deployment of specific concepts. Specifically, it involves pressing sensory information from the body into emotion concepts.

So, Nietzsche thinks our emotions are “construction[s],” “fabrication[s],” and “interpretation[s].” How, then, are they constructed? On Nietzsche’s view, the emotions an individual experiences originate in her psycho-physiological “overall state” (KSA 12:1[61], 12:26[92]), the totality of her drive activity and organismic processes manifest in a particular moment. This psycho-physiological activity shows up in phenomenal awareness as valenced “bodily general feelings [*körperlichen Gemeingefühle*]” (KSA 10:24[20]) when it reaches a sufficient level of intensity (D 115).<sup>9</sup> As he remarks in a late note:

Everything that enters consciousness is the last link in a chain... the series and sequences of feelings, thoughts, etc., that appear are symptoms of what actually happens [unconsciously]!—Below every thought lies an affect. Every thought, every feeling, every will is... born of... an overall state... [that] results from how the power of all the drives that constitute us is fixed at that moment. (KSA 12:1[61])

So, behind every conscious thought and emotional experience Nietzsche posits a “bodily general feeling.”<sup>10</sup> It is this valenced, phenomenally experienced bodily feeling from out of which we construct emotion (II, “” 6; A 15). As I’ll explain shortly, when this bodily general feeling becomes an object of reflective awareness, Nietzsche thinks I make it intelligible to myself by deploying emotion concepts (often by fitting it into a socially available emotion narrative). But notice that the feeling I interpret to construct emotion is itself a registering of psycho-physiological dynamics in phenomenal awareness: that is, a registering of the activities of our drives as well as other organismic processes (such as the operations of our nerves and organs) (KSA 9:11[103]; II, “Errors” 4; A 15).

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<sup>9</sup> My account benefits greatly from Fowles’ excellent paper on Nietzsche and affectivity (2020). Rather than offering an alternative account, the constructionist picture I include here is best understood as incorporating and expanding upon key elements of Fowles’ somatic account of the affects—though I’ll note one key difference a bit later.

<sup>10</sup> As Fowles highlights, Nietzsche’s term “general feeling/s [*Gemeingefühl(e)*]” was “borrowed from physiology” (2020, 121). This concept “referred broadly to the interoceptive representation of the body” (ibid.).

According to Nietzsche, when various psycho-physiological dynamics register as valenced bodily feelings, human beings will typically attempt to interpret those feelings in order to render them intelligible. This interpretation of one's phenomenally experienced bodily feelings—the process of making obscure bodily feelings intelligible, resulting from a deep and strongly felt human need to make sense of our experiences, including inner ones<sup>11</sup>—most often happens unwittingly and involuntarily.<sup>12</sup> Importantly for understanding Nietzsche's view as a version of psychological constructionism, however, making anything intelligible or conceivable to myself will always require the deployment of concepts *qua* categories with “linguistic” (Katsafanas 2016: 72) or “linguistic-conceptual” (Riccardi 2021: 77) contents. Otherwise put, Nietzsche thinks that interpreting bodily feelings involves a process of (linguistic) conceptualization: that is, representing those feelings to myself as instantiating emotion concepts.<sup>13</sup>

We see this when he speaks of the way in which we use concepts like “repentance” and “a pang of conscience [*Genissensbiss*]”—elements of what he calls the “sign-language of religious-moral idiosyncrasy”—to interpret “pleasant or unpleasant general feelings [*Allgemeingefühle*]” such as those resulting from the “sympathetic nervous system” (A 15). This is echoed in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche remarks that that our “supposed explanations” for “generally unpleasant...[and] pleasant feelings” are “*results* and, as it were, the translation of feelings of pleasure or pain into a false dialect [*Dialekt*]” (“Errors” 6). As examples, he'll contend that we “insinuate” the “feeling of ‘sin,’ or ‘sinfulness,’ into a sense of physiological unease” and the “‘good conscience’ into “a physiological state similar to good digestion” (ibid.).

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Fowles (2020) explains this by appealing to a “cause-extracting mechanism.”

<sup>12</sup> So it is that Nietzsche will say “our general feelings... excite our causal instinct” (TI, “Errors” 4). This compulsion to make sense of our experiences—to wrap our minds around what happens, both to us and around us—is the result of (1) a deep-seated, painful aversion human beings experience in response to anything unfamiliar or unintelligible (D 114; GS 355; TI, “Errors” 4-5) and (2) the feeling of power that result when we “familiarize the unfamiliar” (TI, “Errors” 5).

<sup>13</sup> Notice that the picture of emotional construction I develop here jibes with two influential and competing contemporary interpretations of Nietzsche on consciousness: those of Paul Katsafanas (2016) and Mattia Riccardi (2021). While their accounts differ in other crucial respects, both understand the mental states of which I am reflectively aware as conscious states requiring conceptualization, a process which itself involves the application of language-dependent concepts. While Katsafanas argues that for a mental state to be conscious on Nietzsche's view is just for that mental state to have conceptual content (understood as linguistic-conceptual content, since there are no “concepts without words” [2016: 26] on his view), Riccardi argues that Nietzsche is a pluralist about consciousness, recognizing reflective, qualitative, and perceptual varieties of consciousness (2021). On Riccardi's view, although reflectively conscious mental states always possess linguistic-conceptual content (ibid.: 77-80), this is not so for “perceptually” and “qualitatively” conscious mental states, which do not require the mediation of language and instead may possess either imagistic-conceptual or non-conceptual content. On both views, however, conscious *emotional* experience requires the deployment of language-dependent concepts. Notice, however, that the view I develop on Nietzsche's behalf in this paper will conflict with Riccardi's interpretation of reflectively conscious mental states as epiphenomenal. Here, I simply think Riccardi gets Nietzsche wrong. In Nietzsche's account of the damaging effects of the bad conscience once it's conceptualized as guilt, for example, we can readily see the causal contribution a reflectively conscious mental state may make to one's actions and the development of one's inner life. See Katsafanas 2016: 59-60 for an extensive analysis of this example.

Claims of this sort also appear in Nietzsche's unpublished notes. In an 1881 note, he claims that one who has "suffered a physiological change experiences this in general feeling *and interprets this in the language of their affects*" (KSA 9:11[103]).<sup>14</sup> And in an 1888 note, he insists that "inner experience... enters our consciousness only after it has found *a language the individual understands*— i.e., [after it has been translated into] a condition *familiar* to the individual; 'to understand' means merely: to be able to express something new in the language of something old and *familiar*" (KSA 13:15[90]). In sum, we construct emotions by reflecting upon and conceptualizing bodily feelings—feelings produced by various psychophysiological dynamics—in order to make those feelings intelligible to ourselves.<sup>15</sup> In conceptualizing them as *particular* feeling-states or emotions, we thereby construct *discrete emotions*, fabricating distinct emotional experiences. This is but one way in which we "invent" experience on Nietzsche's view.<sup>16</sup>

There are a few key things to note at this point. First, Nietzsche thinks that interpreting my bodily feelings in order to make them satisfactorily intelligible typically involves giving myself an account not only of *what* I am feeling but of *why* I am feeling that way (II, "Errors" 3-6). In other words, arriving at a satisfying explanation of bodily feelings to which I am subject requires identifying both a discrete emotion (via my application of a particular emotion concept) and a rationale for my experiencing that particular feeling—and not necessarily in that order, since the rationale my mind lands on might incline me towards the adoption of a particular emotion concept. For example, Nietzsche thinks that utilizing a priestly rationale to make sense of one's suffering in a particular situation—that is, deploying a socially available emotion narrative according to which suffering is caused by one's sinful nature—will tend to suggest to the sufferer that her negatively valenced bodily feeling is an instance of guilt.<sup>17</sup> Here, it is availing herself of a particular rationale that prompts the individual's use of the concept *guilt* to construct her guilty emotion.

Notice that our attempts to answer the *what* (by deploying a particular emotion concept to make sense of my bodily feeling) and the *why* (by utilizing certain emotion narratives to explain or make sense of my bodily feeling) often won't come apart in practice. For example, my mind may apply a particular emotion concept to interpret my bodily feeling because that concept fits neatly into a familiar narrative with which I am acquainted (e.g., in virtue of my social and cultural context). Or: my mind will often get

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<sup>14</sup> He continues: "...without realizing that their *physis* [i.e., their principle of growth] is the seat of the change."

<sup>15</sup> In fact, we *must* do this, on Nietzsche's view, to make them intelligible.

<sup>16</sup> In *BGE*, Nietzsche remarks that "[g]iven some stimulus, our eyes find it more convenient to reproduce an image that they have often produced before than to register what is different and new about an impression" (192). This tendency to "improvise an approximation" of what we are sensing does not just impact our perceptual capacities, however: later in this aphorism, Nietzsche generalizes this point, remarking that "[e]ven in the middle of the strangest experiences we do the same thing: we invent most of the experience" (*ibid.*).

<sup>17</sup> Katsafanas (2016, 59-60) and Fowles (2020, 131-2), especially Fowles, highlight this important dynamic.

the *what*—i.e., the emotion concept I deploy, which answers the question “what am I feeling?”—out of my attempt to answer the *why*.<sup>18</sup> (“Why do I feel this bad feeling? Because I committed an act of wrongdoing. Oh! I must feel guilty!”) But Nietzsche also thinks that I may make a bodily feeling intelligible to myself as a discrete emotion without appealing to a robust emotion narrative (typically as a result of habituation). In such cases, it is only *after* constructing a particular emotion that I seek a rationale for that emotion. This typically takes the form of *rationalization* on Nietzsche’s view—which is another interesting way in which I not only construct a particular emotion but complexify my experience of it. We see this first in the priests’ rationalization of their (constructed) hatred in GM I: “What is this intensely negative feeling? Hatred! Why am I hateful? Because I have been mistreated and deserve better!” (GM I:6-8, paraphrase). “And what’s more, the nobles are *free* to treat me better, but they refuse to do so!” (GM I:13, paraphrase). But we also see this in Nietzsche’s description of the conventional rationalization of (constructed) compassion, as appears in GS 14 and 118: “What is this ‘pleasant stirring’ I feel (GS 118)? Compassion! Why do I feel compassion? Because I am (admirably) responsive to the suffering of others around me!”

Additionally, notice that interpreting the bodily feelings I experience will always involve a sensitivity to the particular circumstance or situation in which those feelings arise: what I am interpreting is not just *this feeling* but *this feeling experienced in this situation*. Landing on any particular emotion concept to

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<sup>18</sup> Rather than mutually informing processes of emotional interpretation that may *together* facilitate the construction of emotion, (1) identifying the *what* and (2) seeking the *why* might seem like mechanisms of emotion interpretation so distinct as to suggest two different accounts of how our emotional lives are constructed, accounts which are perhaps in tension with one another. For example, it might be thought that while the first mechanism of emotional construction (i.e., identifying the *what*) involves interpreting some bodily feeling B as emotion E by applying emotion concept <E>—thus *leaving open* what caused the bodily feeling—the second mechanism (seeking the *why*) involves a process of emotional interpretation in which the mind constructs an emotion by identifying some emotion E as the *cause* of B. (Thank you to [redacted] for framing the worry this way.) Since emotion construction can occur without resolving the causal question on the first mechanism, whereas what allows for emotion construction on the second mechanism is answering the causal question, these two mechanisms may be in tension with one another, suggesting distinct and incompatible accounts of the formation of our emotional lives. It seems to me, however, that while these mechanisms *may* come apart (and thus can be held apart conceptually), in practice they often don’t. (Note that this will be true *both* for Nietzsche and for the contemporary constructionist, who sees an important role for emotion narratives in the construction of emotion via concepts.) And importantly, while *one* kind of causal question may be left open by the first mechanism (when, e.g., an emotion concept is applied merely habitually)—i.e., the question of the particular concrete happening that *caused* my bodily feeling (which I may inquire into after ascribing a particular emotion to myself)—since discrete emotions represent the world in particular ways (e.g., fear represents *something* in my environment as dangerous), there is another kind of causal question that is answered the very moment an emotion concept is applied (and a particular emotion constructed): the kind of thing *in general* my bodily feeling is caused by (e.g., something fearsome or dangerous in the case of an instance of fear). Moreover, what is crucial on my account—and what the above framing misses—is that both mechanisms *will end in the application of an emotion concept to a bodily feeling*. What differs is simply the process by which the mind gets there—i.e., whether the mind applies a concept automatically (e.g., due to habituation) or moves through a more temporally extended (though still near-automatic) process in which emotion narratives are called upon to make sense of the bodily feeling. Regardless, we do not have a discrete emotional experience without the deployment of an emotion concept. (Or: the second mechanism only produces a particular emotional experience once I’ve landed on an emotion concept. Indeed, this is what the emotion narrative offers me!) Thanks to [redacted, p.c.] for raising this issue.



make sense of my feeling, then, involves a contextual sensitivity—one that attunes me to the type of situation in which I am experiencing a particular feeling—in order that my memory might pull sense from similar contexts, contexts with which I am already familiar as a function of my past experience. As Nietzsche notes:

...our general feelings...arouse our drive to find causes: we want to have a reason for feeling that we're in such and such a state—a bad state or a good state... we allow the fact [that we're in such and such a state]... only if we've given it some kind of reason [*Motivierung*]. Memory, which comes into play in such cases without our knowing it, calls up earlier states of the same kind, and the associated causal interpretations... [Memory then] also interjects the belief that the ideas, the accompanying train of consciousness, had been the cause. This is how a particular cause comes to be *habituated*; this interpretation in fact inhibits an *investigation* into the cause and even precludes it. (II, "Errors" 4)

So, my memory supplies a sense for my feeling, drawing on past experience (including previously emotion concepts) to provide me with a reason for that feeling. In this way, "causation gets attributed to something we are already *familiar* with, something we have already encountered and registered in memory" ("Errors" 5).<sup>19</sup> Importantly, Nietzsche understands this process as influenced by an individual's drives, which nudge her toward the use of certain emotion concepts and narratives (that is, concepts and narratives likely to serve the dominant drive's aims) and away from others (that is, concepts and narratives likely to foil the dominant drive's aims) (D 119). Such nudges (often strongly) incline the individual to use certain concepts and narratives in order to make sense of her feeling. But they do not *necessitate* the individual's application of a particular emotion concept or adoption of a particular emotion narrative.

In other words, the emotion concepts an individual lands on and ultimately deploys to construct emotions result from a contextual sensitivity that informs the way in which her memory—directed by her drives—draws on similar past experiences, as well as available emotion concepts and narratives, to make sense of her feeling. And Nietzsche is clear: when we attempt to interpret our feelings, the "*preferred* type of explanation [is the] one that will most quickly and reliably get rid of the feeling of unfamiliarity and novelty... [it is] the *most common* explanation" (II, "Errors" 5).<sup>20</sup> As a result, "a certain type of causal attribution becomes increasingly prevalent... and finally emerges as *dominant*... completely rul[ing] out *other* causes and explanations.—The banker thinks immediately of his 'business', the Christian of 'sin', the girl of her love" (*ibid.*). This tendency to avail ourselves of the most common or familiar explanation,

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<sup>19</sup> As should be clear from the footnote directly above, the "reason" for my feeling can be as general as the formal object of an emotion (as it will be when my mind habitually applies an emotion concept in a particular circumstance rather than deploying a more robust causal narrative). Thanks to [redacted] for encouraging me to make this clearer.

<sup>20</sup> Notice in this section from II that Nietzsche straightforwardly frames emotion concepts (such as "sinfulness" and "love") as providing explanations for the feelings we experience.

together with the fact that the emotional explanations with which I am familiar come not just from personal experience but from my sociocultural milieu, explains how we can construct emotions at odds with the aims of the drives guiding the interpretive-constructive process.

Of course, Nietzsche thinks that the narratives we draw on to explain our feelings, as well as the emotion concepts we deploy, are social artifacts. In other words, we must draw on socially available narratives and concepts—narratives and concepts that are historically and culturally situated—to make our feelings intelligible to ourselves.<sup>21</sup> This is why the construction of emotion is inherently social on his view. In an 1880 note, Nietzsche emphasizes the social dimension of this construction, remarking that “[w]e all believe that when we feel envy, hatred, etc., we know what envy, hate, etc. is—[but this is] a mistake! Just like with thinking: we believe we know what thinking is. [In both cases,] we experience some symptoms of an illness that is essentially unknown to us and believe that this is precisely what the illness consists of” (KSA 9:6[444]). He goes on to suggest that emotional misunderstanding is the result of “already interpreting the symptoms incorrectly, namely according to the prejudices of society, which has its benefits and harms in mind” (ibid.). Nietzsche expresses this same sentiment in GS 354, where he claims that an individual’s understanding of “what distress[s] him... how he [feels]... and what he [thinks]” always already involves the deployment of language-dependent concepts, concepts that developed as a means of communicating within a particular historically and socially situated linguistic-conceptual framework. This is why Nietzsche will claim that “each of us, even with the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible... will always bring to consciousness precisely that in ourselves which is ‘nonindividual’, that which is ‘average’” (ibid.). Insofar as it requires linguistic conceptualization, consciousness translates our inner life “back into the herd perspective” (ibid.).

To experience an emotion at all requires already having conceptualized bodily general feelings. But, crucially, the interpretive-constructive process is almost always involuntary and automatic. I do not *decide* to construct a positively valenced bodily feeling as an instance of love or gratitude or pride; I just do. (Or, better, my mind just does.) What’s more, I can interocept psycho-physiological activity, experience bodily feelings as a result, conceptualize those feelings by applying a particular emotion concept, and generate quite a robust explanation for why I am experiencing that emotion *all* without being aware of having done so. Let me say a bit more here. On Nietzsche’s view, to *feel guilty* or to *feel compassionate* is to have always already interpreted phenomenally experienced feelings via the deployment of the socially available emotion concepts of *guilt* and *compassion*, respectively. But I can *feel* guilty or *feel* compassionate as the result of deploying *guilt* or *compassion* to interpret my bodily feeling *before* reflecting

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<sup>21</sup> It seems to me that this is not only something *Nietzsche* obviously thinks; it is also something that cannot but be the case. Even so, noticing this has important implications, especially regarding limits to self-understanding.

on that particular emotion as such (“this is guilt!”) or ascribing that emotion to myself (“I feel guilty!”).<sup>22</sup> All that is required for experiencing an instance of a particular emotion is that a bodily feeling makes its way into my reflective awareness and is coded as an instance of a particular emotion via my conceptualization of that feeling, a mechanism which functions automatically. Once my feeling is coded as a particular emotion, my mind will tend to draw on habituated explanations for that feeling—if I haven’t already, as part of the coding of the emotion. This further specifies the emotional experience I undergo, directing it towards certain objects. But all of this, Nietzsche thinks, typically unfolds beneath my awareness.

When my mind constructs an emotion, then, I am rarely aware of its having played any role in the process: the emotion constructed *feels* like something happening to me, not something of which my mind is the partial author. It is because this process unfolds beneath our awareness that Nietzsche thinks we understand emotions as feelings to which we are passively subject, rather than as feelings we play an active role in constructing (II, “Errors” 4). Indeed, as Nietzsche mentions in *Twilight*, not only am I unaware of this process; my memory also prompts me to identify my “ideas”—my emotions *qua* conceptualized feeling-states—as the *causes* of the bodily general feelings themselves. All of this obstructs inquiry into the actual origins of our emotions, making such inquiry not only unlikely but exceedingly difficult.

There are a few final points to which I’ll draw our attention, rounding out Nietzsche’s psychological constructionism. First, notice that when my mind constructs an emotional experience—of anger, or compassion, or guilt—Nietzsche thinks that a new causally efficacious feeling-state is created,

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<sup>22</sup> Attending to this allows us to respond to someone who worries that Nietzsche’s priests *in fact* experience resentment *even though* they do not conceive of themselves as experiencing this emotion (i.e., they do not believe they are experiencing resentment). (I treat the emotion of resentment here rather than *ressentiment* because I understand *ressentiment* proper as a complex psychic mechanism rather than a discrete emotion constructed through the process described in this paper.) One way of putting this worry is the following: while Nietzsche’s priests from GM “feel resentment, [they] don’t use that concept to conceptualize their affective life” (redacted, p.c.). In response, it is important to recall that conceptualization of one’s inner life and emotional self-ascription may come apart: although emotional self-ascription will always involve emotional conceptualization of some sort, the emotions constructed through conceptualization will not always be (and need not be) reflected in our emotional self-ascriptions. While the application of emotion concepts is a process that typically unfolds beneath the individual’s awareness, emotional self-ascription (i.e., the attribution of a particular emotion to oneself) takes place at the level of awareness. So, while resentment may not be part of the priests’ emotional self-understanding—i.e., while they may not believe they are experiencing resentment—this is not evidence that their bodily feelings have not been unwittingly and automatically subsumed under the emotion concept *resentment*. Even if Nietzsche’s priests do not believe that they are experiencing resentment, they may still have unwittingly and automatically deployed the concept *resentment* “to conceptualize their affective life”—in which case they will *actually* experience resentment. For example, as Jeremy Pober helpfully frames it (using the notion of “seemings” from philosophy of perception), the priests may have a seeming of being resentful and thus would *in fact* be resentful *even if* they do not believe it (2018: 649-650). In any case, I do wonder whether the priests’ distinctive affective experience is better characterized in terms of a felt unease with an intensely negative valence resulting from their experience of impotence—an affective experience that kicks the psychic mechanism of *ressentiment* into action—rather than the discrete emotion *resentment*.

one that interacts with other elements of my mental life, often provoking new desires and motives, inclining me to assent to particular beliefs, and disposing me to inhabit a particular view on my world. This is perhaps most evident in Nietzsche's reflections on guilt, especially (1) in his claim that feeling guilty about certain desires can suppress or make one averse to those desires and (2) in his account of the many consequences that result from conceptualizing the bad conscience as guilt.<sup>23</sup>

Second—and this is crucial, for it is what makes Nietzsche's view a version of psychological constructionism—there is no such thing as *feeling angry* or *feeling guilty* without the socially available concepts of *anger* and *guilt* and the conceptual frameworks in which they are situated. There are no discrete, delineable inner states with distinctive physiological signatures and determinate motivational-behavioral outcomes to which our concepts of *anger* and *guilt* correspond. Instead, Nietzsche thinks that there is just a constant succession of psycho-physiological activity that becomes open to emotional interpretation only when this activity manifests as phenomenally experienced bodily feelings. In other words, it is through the interpretive-constructive process that we carve up a host of dynamic inner states into discrete emotions. Emotions have no clear joints in nature.

This claim may be surprising. And to those steeped in classical emotion theory—and that's most of us—it may seem implausible. Don't our conventionally acquired emotion concepts map onto *patterns* of bodily feeling, at least?<sup>24</sup> Mustn't the *valence* of the bodily feeling affect the emotion I construct?<sup>25</sup> While I understand the force of these intuitions, I want to note two things in response. First, my aim here is to offer an interpretation of Nietzsche on the formation of emotional experience. And Nietzsche's answer to both questions is *no*. Recall, for example, his claim that even “pleasure and unpleasure are late and derivative phenomena of the intellect” (KSA 13:11[113]). While I incorporate and expand upon several insights from Christopher Fowles' remarkable analysis of affect in the constructionist view put forth in this paper, then, my account calls into question his characterization of Nietzschean affects as “particular states” *qua* “broad, *sfumato* categories of (somewhat imprecisely) recognizable general feeling” that correspond to certain “affect-words” (2020: 129).<sup>26</sup> I find no clear basis for this claim in Nietzsche. In other words, if Nietzsche is a constructionist about emotion—as I've argued he is—even Fowles' careful, nuanced characterization of the relationship between “affect-words” and “general feeling” will be overly essentialist.

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<sup>23</sup> Katsafanas (2016: 59-60) describes this at length.

<sup>24</sup> Thank you to [redacted] for raising this issue.

<sup>25</sup> Thank you to [redacted] for raising this issue.

<sup>26</sup> See also 132-33, especially Fowles' claim that Nietzsche thinks we can identify discrete bodily feelings for which specific “affect-words are usually deployed” (*ibid.*).

Second, I want to suggest (as contemporary psychological constructionists often do) that the forcefulness of the above intuitions may simply be a consequence of the historical dominance of classical emotion theory and our exposure to the frameworks for understanding emotion they offer. In other words, it may be that a constructionist account of emotion like the one detailed above acquires its “intuitive implausibility” from background beliefs about emotion which are themselves products of our uncritical adoption of dominant, conventional theories of emotion. In any case, regardless of the plausibility of (certain varieties of) psychological constructionism—and I refer anyone wishing to reject this interpretation of Nietzsche on the basis of its implausibility to the robust contemporary debate on the nature and origins of emotions in philosophy and psychology—my focus here is on arguing that Nietzsche is plausibly interpreted as a psychological constructionist.

Finally, although the narratives and concepts we draw on to explain our feelings are social artifacts—and although Nietzsche thinks that in the process of constructing emotion, we tend to make sense of our feelings with reference to socially dominant or “common” concepts and narratives—we can (and do) engage with these social artifacts in uniquely personal ways. For example, an individual might interpret certain of her feelings with the use of more localized emotion narratives from her upbringing, rather than prevailing cultural narratives. Although these local narratives will undeniably incorporate socially available emotion concepts and elements from socially available narratives, we can imagine cases in which there is meaningful divergence, resulting in a less conventional emotional repertoire. Additionally, Nietzsche thinks that individuals can make “specialized personal *use*” (Murdoch 1970: 25) of the emotion concepts available to them, personally engaging with these concepts in ways that modify their sense and the range of contexts in which the individual finds certain emotions to be called for. Along with vast differences in the extensiveness of individuals’ emotional vocabularies—and thus, vast differences in the complexity of individuals’ emotional repertoires—the specialized personal use of emotion concepts helps explain divergences in emotional experience across individuals. For example, it explains how two individuals utilizing the same emotion concept (such as *guilt*) can nonetheless have different emotional experiences, experiences with different phenomenological profiles and meaningfully different motivational-behavioral outcomes (even as enough of a family resemblance remains for us to make sense of both experiences as instances of guilt).

#### **4. Getting ourselves wrong**

So, Nietzsche is a psychological constructionist about emotion. And while it seems to me beside the point to sort out just how similar his view is to certain contemporary theories—again, I include key features of such theories only to orient my analysis and not to anachronistically attribute these much more sophisticated, empirically-informed views in all their detail to Nietzsche—there is a question asked

of contemporary psychological constructionists that is well worth asking of him, too. On Nietzsche's view, what could it possibly mean to "get it wrong" about what I am feeling when I self-ascribe an emotion? After all, in designating my feeling with a particular emotion concept (as I do in acts of emotional self-ascription), my mind constructs the emotion that concept picks out. So how can I, in an act of self-ascription, ever get myself wrong? This is a pressing question for contemporary emotion theorists. But it's especially pressing for Nietzsche, since he's quite clear that we get ourselves wrong. Modern individuals' problematic and inaccurate interpretation of the bad conscience as guilt (GM II: 21; III: 20, 21) is but one example of this.<sup>27</sup>

Let me say more. On Nietzsche's constructionist view, when you self-ascribe an emotion (e.g., you think to yourself "I feel guilty") there's a sense in which you can't help but get yourself right (so long as the emotion concept itself does not necessarily involve false beliefs, as in the case of sinfulness treated below). This is because by applying an emotion concept to make sense of your feeling, you *put yourself into* the emotional state designated by that concept (i.e., your mind generates the corresponding emotion). In other words, by applying an emotion concept, the individual constructs a discrete emotional experience, producing a new feeling-state that comes to function as one would expect the emotion designated by that concept to function (given the social and cultural context in which the individual finds herself).<sup>28</sup>

Continuing with the Nietzschean example of guilt: When I stamp a bodily general feeling experienced in a particular context with the emotion concept *guilt* and self-ascribe that emotion, I *really do* feel guilty—and that guilty feeling has real effects on me. This is true *even if* the story I tell myself about the origin or cause of my emotion is inaccurate (e.g., "I feel guilty because of my grievous wrongdoing" when I did not act in a morally impermissible way). Otherwise put, I can "get myself right" on Nietzsche's view—that is, I can be right about the emotion I am experiencing—even as I perpetuate a "psychology of errors" that involves positing "imaginary causes for physiological general feelings" (KSA 13:19[9]).

How, then, can we get ourselves wrong on Nietzsche's view? The first thing to note here is that "getting ourselves wrong" will *not* be a matter of failing to correctly pick out a distinctive inner state with the use of a particular emotion concept. After all, Nietzsche rejects the idea that there are unified feeling-states with distinctive, fixed physiological and behavioral signatures that my emotion concepts designate. Instead, as suggested by his analysis of the "psychology of errors," getting oneself wrong will typically

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<sup>27</sup> In this section, my focus is not on more typical cases of self-deception. For a response to worries about the possibility of self-deception (where that involves an agent's falsely believing that she is *not* experiencing an emotion that she is *in fact* experiencing), see footnote 22 above.

<sup>28</sup> Although as mentioned above, emotional conceptualization typically takes place *prior* to awareness, acts of self-ascription will *also* always involve conceptualization.

involve the individual's faulty understanding of her emotion's origins and an oversimplified picture of how she is feeling in particular moment.

One common way to get myself wrong on Nietzsche's view is to misunderstand the etiology of a particular emotional experience. This form of misunderstanding can arise, e.g., when an individual mistakenly takes the intentional object of the emotion (the object at which the emotion is directed) for the stimulus object (what causes the emotion). We see this in the case of the bad conscience interpreted as guilt. On Nietzsche's view, the individual who interprets her bad conscience as guilt will *in fact* feel guilty—she will be subject to a guilty feeling-state that will tend to shape her motivational life in certain respects, dispose her toward certain behaviors, and so on (GM II:21; GM III:15, 20)—and so will accurately self-ascribe if she designates her feeling *guilt*. Even so, she misunderstands herself by failing to recognize the origin of her feeling in her bad conscience, instead understanding the feeling as caused by her allegedly sinful nature or some act of wrongdoing (and what's more, as a warranted reaction to these) (GM II:21, III:20).<sup>29</sup> In other words, she confuses the intentional object of her emotion—her allegedly sinful nature or a particular wrongful act—with the cause of that emotion, the complex set of conditions from which the emotion emerges. Misunderstanding the origin of her guilt thusly, she gets herself wrong.

Notice here that Nietzsche is especially attuned to instances of emotion, like the interpretation of bad conscience as guilt, in which an individual's misunderstanding leads to poorer psychological health or the development of various life- and world-denying attitudes. Attending to this focus helps us see why he finds it so crucial to emphasize the construction of emotion. After all, he thinks modern Europeans are often impelled towards personally harmful and life-negating etiologies and emotion concepts by the Christian-moral culture they inhabit.

Another way to get myself wrong on Nietzsche's view is to understand how I'm feeling in a particular moment *solely* in terms of the constructed emotion to which I am subject, in which case I get myself wrong even as I get myself right. An individual gets herself wrong in this sense when she understands the emotion she constructs as capturing the full extent of her affective landscape in a particular moment, when she comes to understand this distorted and limited picture of her affectivity as the *whole* picture. And, indeed, this is what he thinks we tend to do when we understand how we feel solely in terms of the occurrent emotions to which we are subject. Too often, he will say, we “rediscover in things... *only what [we] had put into them in the first place*” (II, “Errors” 3, emphasis mine). To be subject to this form of self-misunderstanding is problematic on Nietzsche's view because the shallow view of the individual's affectivity it delivers impedes her from progressing in self-understanding.

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<sup>29</sup> As Peter Poellner explains, Nietzsche thinks 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” (2009: 162).

The problem here is not the individual's failure to comprehensively understand her drive-life or affective landscape in a particular moment of emotional experience. In fact, Nietzsche thinks that individuals can never achieve a complete and accurate understanding of the complex dynamics underlying a particular emotional experience: he straightforwardly rejects the notion that individuals can ever fully and accurately describe the (socially influenced) affective and conative dynamics underlying a given mental state.<sup>30</sup> On his view, these dynamics are far too complex and fluxional (D 119), the language we have for describing them far too limited (D 115).<sup>31</sup> To be sure, the necessarily distorted and narrow views individuals have of their mental states—views they produce as a result of their deep need to make their experience comprehensible—seem to trouble Nietzsche. Seeing this partial view as unavoidable (D 115, 116; GS 354; KSA 13:14[152]), however, he adjusts his expectations for self-understanding accordingly.

What Nietzsche finds problematic about this second form of misunderstanding, then, is the exceptionally limited picture it delivers of the individual's affective landscape. While the individual cannot know the entirety of her affective landscape in a particular moment on Nietzsche's view, she can certainly know more than she does when she reduces the landscape of her feeling in a particular moment to the discrete emotion she self-ascribes (for instance, when she understands "what she is feeling" merely as guilt). Specifically, the individual can come to recognize this feeling of guilt as but one (socially influenced) interpretation of a much more complex conative and affective landscape than is captured by that concept. In other words, the individual can come to realize that her guilty emotion—which "presents itself as a unitary, distinct feeling"—"conceals an unconscious diversity" (Katsafanas 2016: 62) of drives, feelings, external influences, and interactions among these. Only after this realization can the individual begin to envision a more complex picture of her emotional experiences, a picture of the sort Nietzsche develops throughout his body of work.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For an agent to "get it right" in this sense would require her to know and describe the exceptionally complex psychosocial dynamics underlying her emotional experience: the activity of her drives (as well as the desires and motives that spring from them), the activity of her organs and other bodily components, the bodily feelings induced by both of these forms of activity, the social influences underlying the construction of the particular emotion she fabricates (including emotion concepts and fleshed-out emotion narratives), and so on. On Nietzsche's view, "getting it right" in this sense simply won't be possible.

<sup>31</sup> As Nietzsche notes in *Daybreak*, "words really exist only for *superlative* degrees of [inner] processes and drives; and where words are lacking, we are accustomed to abandon exact observation" (115). Note that I take this to mean *not* that certain emotion concepts track certain affective patterns or bodily feelings, but that we will only conceptualize those bodily feelings that reach a particular threshold of intensity (following Fowles 2020).

<sup>32</sup> In an aphorism titled "*Chemistry of concepts and sensations*" from *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche suggests that we must develop a "chemistry" of the "agitations we experience within ourselves in cultural and social intercourse" (HH 1). In the accounts Nietzsche develops of a wide variety of emotional experiences—cowardice and humility (D 38), guilt (HH 133; GM II:20) and compassion [*Mitleid*] (GS 14; BGE 201, 202; GM "Preface" 5, 6), and many more—we find him developing such a "chemistry," offering detailed, nuanced pictures of the psychosocial dynamics underlying discrete emotional experiences. In Nietzsche's view, an individual's reductive understanding of her emotional experience



Additionally, Nietzsche thinks that I can get my emotional experience wrong by failing to see that experience as the result of a constructive process, understanding it as a brute ahistorical and acultural response to features of my environment or circumstance rather than the result of a predictive mental process involving the application of socially available concepts and narratives in an attempt to make sense of my bodily feelings (which themselves are the result of psycho-physiological activity). In the context of the current project, we can put this Nietzschean point another way: when an individual understands her constructed emotion through the lens of a classical emotion view (on which human beings are passively subject to emotions, which themselves are natural kinds), she misunderstands that emotional experience.

On Nietzsche's view, this misunderstanding is also pernicious. First, it conceals the active contribution an individual makes to her emotional experience: that her experiences are "much *more* that which [she] put[s] into them than that which they already contain" (D 119). But it also obscures the contribution the historically situated culture in which she finds herself makes to that experience: it stops her from seeing that she "[is] being acted upon... [i]n every moment" (D 120) by her culture, in part through the conceptual frameworks available to her to make sense of her bodily feelings. These concealments limit the individual's sense of her abilities to critically engage and resist socially available emotion categories and to play a more active role in her self-constitution—and these limitations to her view make the individual less likely to *actually* engage these categories critically and participate in self-creative practices. Again, given that Nietzsche thinks the dominant (Christian-moral) emotion categories and narratives available to modern Europeans tend to be psychologically damaging as well as life- and world-denying, curbing an individual's ability to critically engage and resist these will be a dangerous limitation.

Finally, an individual can get herself wrong in an act of emotional self-ascription because the correctness conditions of the emotion she self-ascribes simply cannot be met. This is what happens when someone self-ascribes sinfulness (or the "feeling of sin") (II, "Errors" 6). After all, on Nietzsche's view, I can only experience an instance of genuine sinfulness if there a divine being to whom I am indebted. But of course, on Nietzsche's view, there is no such deity. Since the emotion concept *sinfulness* necessarily involves a false belief in the existence of sin *as well as* other concepts that fail to track reality—e.g., a concept of God as a deity to whom I'm indebted (HH 133)—in self-ascribing that emotion, I'll get myself wrong.<sup>33</sup>

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prevents the agent from developing complexified pictures of her affective landscape (of the sort he develops in his work).

<sup>33</sup> Thanks to [redacted] for suggesting I include this.

Notice that is consistent with Nietzsche's insistence that interpreting my bodily feeling as sinfulness (rather than, e.g., garden-variety guilt) leads to a much more intense and damaging form of guilt. We might say of someone experiencing this particular form of guilt (and its distinctive phenomenology) that they *feel* sinful. But crucially for my point here, someone can *feel* sinful without *being* sinful. In fact, this will hold of everyone who *feels* sinful, on Nietzsche's view—since neither sin nor God exist. And accurately self-ascribing an emotion of sinfulness requires not just that one *feel* sinful, but that one *be* sinful. Importantly, however, Nietzsche rarely treats emotions whose correctness conditions simply cannot be met. In fact, *sinfulness* may be the only case like this.

While getting one's emotional experience wrong on Nietzsche's psychological constructionist view looks very different than it does on classical views of emotion—it will not be a matter of an individual failing to properly label a clearly delineable inner state with a distinct physiological and behavioral-motivational signature—Nietzsche still thinks individuals can misunderstand the emotional experiences they self-ascribe. In fact, he thinks individuals do this with great frequency, by (1) misunderstanding the specific etiology of their emotional experience; (2) assuming that the emotions they self-ascribe exhaust how they feel in a particular moment; (3) failing to recognize that the emotions they self-ascribe are results of a process of construction; and (less often) (4) self-ascribing emotions whose correctness conditions simply cannot be met.<sup>34</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

If Nietzsche is a psychological constructionist about emotion, why should we care? First, understanding Nietzsche's psychological constructionism helps us get clearer on the extent to which Nietzsche thinks our psyches are surreptitiously shaped by the historical, cultural, and social circumstances in which we find ourselves. As we can see, this influence runs deep. "How I feel" will never come cleanly apart from

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<sup>34</sup> Above, I describe how (and to what extent) we can assess emotional self-ascriptions for correctness on Nietzsche's variety of psychological constructionism. In the philosophy of emotion literature, however, much more time is spent on a separate task: identifying the accuracy or correctness conditions of emotions (i.e., their fittingness). Here, I want to suggest—albeit rather quickly—that, in all but a few cases (e.g., the case of emotion concept *sin*), Nietzsche would likely find such attempt (i.e., the attempt to sort out whether an emotional experience is warranted or merited by its object) wrong-headed. First, the account I develop here, together with Nietzsche's view that "concepts [are] conventional fictions for the purpose of description and communication" (BGE 21), suggests that our emotions are not as straightforwardly responsive to the world as we tend to think they are. And second, fittingness on Nietzsche's view is a normative concept (Creasy 2023, 2024). The attempt to assess an emotion for non-normative (e.g., an epistemic) fittingness, on his view, will be misguided and problematic. The most we can likely ask with respect to an emotion's fittingness is whether a particular emotional experience is typical or atypical within a particular normative framework. But this is much less important than another question Nietzsche wants us to ask: whether our emotional experiences facilitate or hinder our well-being and empowerment. To echo a point made by Simon May (1999) with respect to Nietzsche's assessment of truth: Nietzsche is much more concerned with assessing the life-hindering or -facilitating conditions of our emotional experiences than he is with assessing the correctness conditions of those experiences.

how my historically situated culture “makes” me feel. Recognizing the depth of this social influence helps us make sense of what are, to my mind, some of Nietzsche’s most interesting claims and projects. First, since emotions shape perceptual experience, getting clear on Nietzsche’s constructionist view about emotion helps us understand the social and historical contingency of perceptual experience. It makes sense of his claim, for example, that ancient Greeks actually inhabit a different *world* than modern Europeans, in part because they have a different emotional repertoire available to them.

Second, understanding Nietzsche’s view on the construction of emotion makes clear sense of his well-known claim from *Daybreak* 103 that we can learn to feel differently by thinking differently. Recognizing that our emotional lives are shaped by the emotion concepts and narratives we utilize to make sense of them suggests that enlarging our emotional vocabulary and familiarizing ourselves with new emotional narratives can help us develop healthier, more life-affirming emotional repertoires. And while the typically automatic nature of emotional construction means that one cannot simply *choose* how to feel, one can certainly attempt to cultivate reflective distance from socially dominant emotion concepts and narratives, in hope that in time one will tend to deploy damaging and/or life-denying emotion concepts and narratives less often.<sup>35</sup> This reflective intervention into our emotional lives opens the possibility for intervention into our perceptual lives, opening up new ways of seeing and attending to the world around us. Notice furthermore that interpreting Nietzsche as a psychological constructionist about emotion makes sense of a lesser-referenced section of D 103: Nietzsche’s insistence that thinking differently will likely lead to feeling differently only “perhaps very late on.” After all, it takes time to revalue values, to change the dominant conceptual framework through which we interpret our affective lives.<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, attending to Nietzsche’s psychological constructionism about emotion deepens our understanding of the self-opacity he attributes to human beings, the indeterminacy that characterizes our volitional lives. According to his constructionism, a central feature of our volitional lives—the “core affect” or bodily feeling out of which emotional experience is produced—is indeterminate. Though it is fixed into a discrete emotion in the moment of emotional self-interpretation, my bodily feeling and the psycho-physiological activity underpinning that feeling will always exceed that determination.

Finally, quite apart from these interpretive benefits, it seems to me that a constructionism of the sort Nietzsche develops might be personally instructive. If psychological constructionism turns out to be

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<sup>35</sup> With regard to the emotion concepts modern Europeans use to construct emotional experience (and experience more generally), Nietzsche’s intervention is mainly negative: he wants to deconstruct culturally dominant emotion concepts, showing not only how limiting they are but also how damaging it can be to understand our bodily feelings in terms of such concepts.

<sup>36</sup> Such “conceptual replacement work” (Acampora and Ansell-Pearson 2011, 39), aimed at facilitating more life-affirming modes of existence, is a task for Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future (BGE 14, 20).

right—and contemporary theorists makes a convincing case for it—there will be genuine limits to my emotional life, and thus my perceptual experience, that are set in part by the emotion concepts and narratives at my disposal. If richness of experience is something one values, then psychological constructionism suggests that one ought to pursue an education in feeling, an education that enlarges one's emotional vocabulary. After all, on such a view, the expansion of one's emotional vocabulary potentially facilitates the development of a fuller, more nuanced emotional life—one which in turn complexifies one's experience of the world, adding richness and depth to one's experience.

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