

Notes on John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (Oxford, 2004)

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INTRODUCTION

R looks to N's Darwinism in four areas: biology, metaethics, ethics-politics, aesthetics. This lets him discuss N's ontology of living things, method of drawing values from these things, the particular values he draws, and the aesthetic nature of those values.

CHAPTER 1: BIOLOGY

For R, N's Darwinism is the basis of N's naturalism, which grounds his explanations and diagnoses of values. N has three levels of selection: 1) natural; 2) social; 3) individual.

R has to nuance a tricky point. He has to find a way in which N finds will-to-power (WP) in the sub-individual drives and values of living things to have been selected, rather than in his basic ontology of will-to-power in all things to be atomic / primitive / uncaused / unexplainable elements. This latter power ontology "is incredible for most of us" (64). The key is to see WP as an "internal revision of Darwinism" (12).

The problem here is that the classic way of discussing a drive or a value or an "end" ("teleology") is that it is the intentional object of a consciousness that directs action to achieve it (22). So R wants to show how N can "decognitimize and naturalize life's directedness" (14). This is what Darwin's natural selection allows w/r/t species and traits.

15 critical point on alleged "selfish" nature of natural selection. The key here is the "unit of selection" issue and the questions of group selection and prosocial behavior (sometimes called "altruism"). We will have to pay close attention to "selfish" individualism and to prosocial "herd" behavior in Nietzsche.

18 the main disagreement of N and D is over "survival" vs "power." Power or *Macht* = "growth" or "growth in control over other processes," that is, making "functional" something by incorporating it into a "body" or in my terms a hierarchical "body politic" – in DG's terms, an "organism." N thinks D errs by positing a sort of "will to the status quo" or "will to life" or "existence," a view he attributes also to Spinoza.

21 N errs by talking about "survival" bcs D talks about reproduction; currently we talk about "reproductive fitness" or just "fitness." Now if N means "survival" of the "line" or "species," then he's close enough to the notion of reproductive fitness (22). Now if N thinks Darwinian "survival" is an "end" in the sense of "conscious goal," then that can't be right. It confuses levels of explanation. "Survival" qua reproductive fitness / continuation of species is the function of a

long-term structural property of evolution: the persistence and accumulation of fitness-enhancing traits (23). These are “goals” of the organism, but “outcomes” for which traits were selected.

23 WP is a very difficult notion. Sometimes N thinks “wills” and “drives” are the basic elements of the universe, and that each one of these has a “perspective” and even that all the drives are mini-consciousnesses, even if each one of which is unconscious for us as egos or persons: we are only aware of the outcome of their internal struggle: the “self as society” model for N. This is N’s “vitalism” which he opposes to “mechanism.” It ultimately looks like Leibniz, with wills in place of monads.

24 R proposes that N makes this error bcs he misunderstands D’s noncognitive “teleology.” As always with N, there’s another side of the story: he very often attacks the “anthropomorphizing” tendency to attribute the “mental model” of conscious goals, even with – or especially with – human beings. So R says we can see WP not as an example of mental teleology but as an alternative (25).

26 so the question now is: what is noncognitive or “naturalize” teleology?

33 cutting to the chase: the answer is “adaptation” or “fitness from the past.” A thing’s function (the heart is for pumping blood) is the result it was selected to produce. That is, a thing’s function or fit within a whole is explained if that function was selected, if it was adaptive for ancestors. So the “meaning” of a thing is its evolution, which genealogy investigates (35).

34 So, WP is explained if we can derive an adaptation narrative (a “genealogy” for it). But we must pay close attention here. Things have been incorporated as functions in many different wholes over their history. There is never a straight path we can trace from current function to past origin. This is the “essentialist” error N never stops denouncing (42).

35 drives are the primary “units” of WP; they are the “primary proximate explainers” in N’s psychology. There are many competing, conflicting drives in us, and they are mostly unconscious for us (36). But N thinks that D assumes “survival” is the key, so that what gets selected for are drives that are sensitive to the overall function of the organism. Whereas N wants to say that each drive is selfish and not oriented to organismic function, yet the total outcome of the struggle of selfish drives is functional for the organism (37).

38 N’s concern is explaining “dispositions for complex social and cognitive practices.” Thus we have our logic, concepts, beliefs, virtues, values because they were adaptive for our ancestors: they are our “existence-conditions.” Even though they are “false” (40): e.g., GS 111: origin of logic = false equation of similar with identical, even though in truth / reality, no two things are identical. But “life is not an argument” (GS 121).

39: R claims a drive is a disposition selected for a result; it is usually “plastic” for that result (it can take different paths).

40 Self as society: “our thinking is the upshot of a struggle among many such adapted instincts.”

41 social selection. Competition among practices: selection for ease of widespread copying. Much to discuss here about “memes.”

42-43: crucial discussion of genealogy and successive reinterpretations / reincorporations. “So the ‘meaning’ of a drive today is a layering of the functions it was serially selected for, in becoming what it is” (43).

43-44. R lists a few ways in which N anticipates contemporary neo-Darwinism.

1. Sub-individual competition: unit of selection for N is the drive; the organism is “merely the upshot of their intramural struggles.” There are big issues here with gene selectionism vs multi-level selection (including individual and group), as the note to Dawkins implies. If drives are replicators, it’s organisms which are interactors.
2. Population thinking: species as abstractions, but not of individuals but on concrete historical lineages (of drives).
3. Exaptation: reinterpretation / reincorporation. Difficult question of how successful a reinterpretation can be (45). If it’s totally successful, genealogy would be impossible. So most reinterpretations leave some of the old selections peaking through: “signs or traces of much older functions” (45).

CHAPTER 2: METAETHICS

Just as metaphysics is that which is beyond physics (the basic assumptions of physics, those which aren’t thematized in the everyday doing of physics: what is a physical object, what is space and time, what is motion: not how are these measured, but what are they: what is their ontological status), metaethics is that which is beyond ethics. So we will have to look to the fundamental assumptions of ethics, what ethics takes for granted. In R’s reading of N, the relation of N’s Darwinian facts to the values N diagnoses in others and proposes for the best people (self-overcoming) (68).

68: puzzle: how does N reconcile his perspectivizing of values and his ranking of values? If all values are just functions of types of life, then why is self-overcoming better than Christian values of self-abnegation?

69: R will show that values are in accord with three forms of selection: natural selection of animal values, social selection of herd values, and self-selection of self-overcoming. The last form is the superior type of valuing, in that it encompasses the others.

1. WHAT VALUES ARE

71: distinguishing valuing as activity from the valued as content. So a value is the result of the action of valuing, it is dependent upon that action (72). Thus values are real, but not “objective” (rather they are subjective = dependent on the action of valuing). But there are facts about values: facts that relate them to the action of valuing and the conditions of life that expresses.

73: valuing need not be conscious. Most of it is unconscious / biological; conscious, linguistic expression is secondary result (74).

74: each drive is a valuing. Drives are plastic dispositions to behavior. 75: Thus the drive has to be able to “see” its environment in order to “choose” its path to its goal.

75: R pushes the “selfish drive” mode of explanation: selection is for drives with better replicative fitness: how many copies of the drive are produced in the succeeding generations?

NB, note 17, p 75: there would be a nice connection between “evolutionary self-overcoming” and the “evolution of evolvability” argument.

76: teleology as explanation by ends. Thus valuing = being disposed to responsive behavior for a selected goal and value = selected goal of a responsive behavior.

77: value and genealogy: it's the past of the drive that counts and that is multiform and overlapping, including not just natural selection, but also social selection (and maybe in a few cases self-selection).

77-78: very simply: 1. Animal health; 2. Human sickness; 3. Superhuman “great health”

2. ANIMAL VALUES, BY NATURAL SELECTION

78: these are most basic values; associated with “the animal in us” or “the body.”

79: values express life conditions, that is, “preservation and growth conditions.”

80: now it's not just the individual's growth, but also that of the lineage.

81: N thinks Darwin focuses too much on mere preservation / survival, whereas life is better seen as will to power / drive to grow by incorporating / making functional / putting to work something else. These are the “aggressive drives.”

3. HUMAN VALUES, BY SOCIAL SELECTION

81-82: Custom is a new way, via “memory” of propagating / replicating behavioral dispositions, which are no longer “drives” or “instincts” but now “customs” or “practices.”

82: This is “social selection,” which R claims is an “ancestor” of Dawkins’s “memes.” If this is true, then it’s too bad for N, since “memes” aren’t very helpful. They are atoms of social information in the same way genes are supposedly atoms of genetic information. Both the atomic and the informational aren’t helpful: distributed networks regulating gene expression are neither atomic nor informational.

83: a practice gets its meanings and goals from its selective history.

84: DST has a better grip on the Lamarckism R notes here: extrasomatic elements that are regularly repeated can and should be considered elements of inheritance / evolution.

84: N notes the “conflict” of animal and human values, and the way human values make us sick by working against impervious animal values. But this is way too crude. We are social animals. We hunt and are aggressive AS MEMBERS OF GROUPS, not as individuals. N is just way too Romantic in all this.

85: habits are selected for their copyability, their ease at being mimicked

a. Structure of social selection: herd instinct

85: social selection designs drives and practices that serve survival / expansion of the social group: yes, but that group can be hierarchical.

86: habits that produce a copying society will be selected: this is what N calls “herd-instinct”

87: N has a restricted and expanded notion of herd instinct: a structural or second-order social drive: a drive to desire homogeneity through copying behavior: pleasure at being in agreement with others.

88: social selection works through enhancement of cognitive powers that ultimately can produce capacity for self-selection. But first there must be an ethic of custom and an ethic of morality

b. First phase of social selection: ethic of custom

89: Memory for social rules: produced by gruesome punishment

90: consciousness as product of social practice: aiming at communication; self-ness helps facilitate the sharing: GS 354: being conscious of the “average”

91: language fits here too

c. Second phase of social selection: ethic of morality

92-3: Memory of ancestors and debt

93: self-consciousness and bad conscience toward their animal drives

94: language: supporting ideology justifies the moralizing practices that brand animal drives as evil.

94: all together, memory / consciousness / language work to conceal herd drives from moral agent.

4. SUPERHUMAN VALUES, BY SELF SELECTION (FREEDOM)

95: the key here is to take over the selection process. Self-determination (Selbstbestimmung) or self-value-setting (Selbst-Werth-setzung). Having the will to a free will. To become who you are.

But again, all this is a bad substance model and / or a bad Romanticism. You become who you are by modifying your relations to others. Because what you are is a singular pattern of social / somatic interaction.

a. Insight

97: need insight into how values have been selected. GS 335. Need honesty and courage. N thinks Darwinists don't live up to these virtues (99).

b. Incorporating insight.

102: N has the classic philosopher's task: philosophy as a way of life: not just "knowledge," but knowledge incorporated into your body and your life: we have to feel. We have to set up a body that produces intuitions that express our knowledge. We have to learn how to diagnose our lives (our feelings, values, intuitions) to see how and why they express the values they do.

103: so N's "freedom" is not an uncaused cause of action, but overall tendency to self-evaluation, self-diagnosis, and incorporation of self-selected values.

5. REVALUING VALUES

115: this is I think the key: not the content of N's values (Romantic "individualism") but the freedom with which we have selected our values. It's all about genealogy as method for diagnosing values and self-awareness in incorporating them.

116: so it's all about freedom and how N "induces" this in us by drawing us into his diagnostic practices. So reading N's books are practice. But only if we do some diagnoses of ourselves and our culture. It won't work if we just read him for content, as a collection of theses.

118: w/r/t power and freedom: the freedom of self-selection is our greatest power: a power over ourselves. In this way N has made a new value, the value of free self-selection.

120: conflict of animal and human values. Animal values are egoistic, while human values are social.

This is the key mistake: an opposition of animality-biology against humanity-sociality. We are bio-social / bio-cultural. Animal individuality / egoism doesn't fit us; it's based on a bogus outlawing of evolution of "altruism." Or at least egoism is not the default setting for the vast majority of us (everything has to be thought in terms of distribution of traits in a population, and there are psychopaths). Although there are many kinds of culture and hence many kinds of bio-culturality, there is a core prosocial human nature.

121: N thinks he can reconcile body and spirit / animal and human. Use their powers and satisfy their values. The key is to put the new value of freedom above both.

122: freedom takes up spirit / cness / language / truth and redirects it to self-selection. Freedom also takes up the body as a singular system of drives: we have to be self-physicians and we have to be sensitive to the bodily reactions we have to social customs. All in all we have to be true to ourselves (124).

c. Valuing's how.

126: values have to singular to the individual constitution: this is beyond universality, beyond good and evil. The best values will be those that enhance the free value creation of the best people, those capable of self-selection (131).

CHAPTER 3: ETHICS-POLITICS

Outline of the chapter

Introduction (133-137)

1. Links with Social Darwinism (137-146)
2. Roots of Pity and Altruism in Natural Selection (146-153)
3. Formation by Social Selection (153-161)
 - a. Spencer: Selection Progresses in Sympathy and Altruism
 - b. Nietzsche's Critical Genealogy for Pity and Altruism
4. Lessons from this Genealogy: Whether / How We Progress (161-171)
 - a. No lesson?
 - b. Lesson: restore nature's design?
 - c. Lesson: redesign for freedom
5. Self-Selection's Ethics: Revaluing Pity and Altruism (171-186)
 - a. Freeing to select social virtues
 - b. Redesigning social virtues
 - i. Hardness versus pity
 - ii. Selfishness versus altruism
6. Self-selection's politics: revaluing equality and civilizing (186-217)
 - a. Breeding
 - b. Rank order
 - i. Kinds of social difference
 - ii. The new elite
 - iii. The new herd

Summary (217-218)

Comments:

133: Whereas “freedom” is about self-selection / self-relation, ethics-politics is about relations with others, individually and as a matter of social structure.

I don’t really buy this split, as I think that we are singular patterns of social – somatic interaction. The relation to other people is built right into our selves, biologically and neurologically. And those relations are always already conditioned by political structures. So you can’t separate ethics and politics from selves, because we are bio-social-political.

134: R’s schema for treating N:

	Nietzsche	Opposite
Ethics	Hardness	Pity
	Selfishness	Altruism
Politics	Rank order	Equality
	Breeding	Civilizing

135: the reason why N wants to replace pity by hardness is to “spread the capacity to choose one’s ethical and political values oneself.” N tries to shock us to think by his outrageous attacks.

136: the basic value for a self-selector has to be freedom of self-selection. So it’s not just method, but also content. So he’s exapting the values of hardness and selfishness for the new purpose of self-selection as ongoing project.

140: R’s take on Social Darwinism: societies need to let NS work. NS works by “survival of the fittest.” [Implicitly the individual is unit of selection.] We need to impose limits on sympathy and altruism and reward competition / penalize failure.

141: N criticizes Spencer for valuing altruism too much as result of evolution

142: political level: pity and altruism work against NS by preventing selection against weak and sick:

143: as personal virtues, pity and altruism are incompatible with “selfish, aggressive impulses that are the source of all individual achievement.” So pity expresses weakness / sickness and it weakens / sickens. So does altruism.

144: same with political virtues of equality and civilizing: they express and exacerbate weakness / sickness.

147: pity and altruism as drives, as dispositions or habits of feeling / acting.

Pity is kind of sympathy, sharing in suffering; altruism is habit of acting to benefit others instead of oneself.

148: NB: N thinks pity and altruism evolve only by social selection.

I think this is because he restricts NS to individual drives; whereas I accept group selection in NS.

149: Spencer finds altruism in reproduction; N thinks NS breeds only selfishness. Spencer admits selfishness is more basic than altruism.

This is another key point: we can say that in some members of some populations self-survival has a tendency to replace altruism in some high-intensity situations. There is a kind of neurological “trumping” of fear / rage, let’s say.

150: N faults Spencer for seeing egoism progressing into altruism and mostly for constructing a unified ego rather than self as competitive society of drives, a “complex of self-interests.”

152: Drives aim at their own satisfaction; they are selfish in that way. Drives aim at power in their exercise.

154-155: Spencer and Darwin accept group selection for altruism, with war as selection pressure at first. But now in peaceful industrial age (huh?) we now find increasing interdependence of societies, and so war as group selection pressure will cease and individual welfare becomes key factor. But by then NS will have bred pleasure at success of others into us so altruism will continue on that basis.

157: selection for social practices is “memetic”: how well are they copied?

N sees pressure for conformity / homogeneity / instinct for sharing in group selection. As memetic, we find “drive to copy” (158). Interest of group not of individual pursued by all the values of pity, altruism, equality, civilizing (159). But with a twist: we get pleasure from sacrificing ourselves altruistically: so there’s a self-interest there too, although it damages the organism, making it weaker.

160: belief in unified ego also part of herd instinct: we think the way everyone does. But that produces a sickness in that social selection produces values contrary to natural “animal” individual drives / values / feeling.

168-169: it seems N simply wants to say social selection / human values are bad and make us sick in their conflict with NS / animal values. But N is more sophisticated. Although he prefers the “primitive” human as closer to the animal than the weak / sick civilized human, there’s no

going back: we have to redesign / exapt the values we inherit from NS and social selection in free self-selection.

170: we have to synthesize the best parts of both: skeptical intelligence from social selection and bodily health and taste from NS.

171-2: how does self-selection redesign pity and altruism into hardness and selfishness? They aren't universalizable "moral" values, but values a self-selector will choose.

173: freedom depends on genealogical insight into reasons for pity and altruism. You need to step back from your inherited feelings, take a distance from them, make them objects of investigation.

174: N intends to be shocking in his genealogies, to shock us out of our herd instinct.

176: in his exaptations, N changes pity into empathy controlled by hardness as a help to genealogy and altruism into giving rooted in selfishness, for action.

177: hardness has an epistemic end, enabling diagnosis of your own suffering; you need to be hard to have the courage to face internal turmoil. But you also need hardness toward others: tough love in exposing them to genealogy.

178: hardness is exercised at a point in a dialectical process of genealogy, which also needs empathy. Pity is a danger here, as it is a modification of empathy. The pity that is a danger for the genealogist is pity for people falling short of freedom. In fact, you might pity someone for their pity about suffering of others, which keeps them from free self-selection.

181: to put health and truth together we need to bring genealogy and "healing values" together. Simple health = fitness = survival (and for N growth or power). So this health is very close to selfishness for N: what is best for its singular values, as the outcome of struggle of multiple drives.

182: social selection interferes, getting the organism to work against itself; it aims at group cohesion, not singular health / fitness / growth – power. N wants to allow animal drives to find a spiritually sublimated expression.

183: so he's looking for "higher health" of body / animal drives and spirit / social habits. This is aim of freedom and self-selection.

Altruism and "giving."

184: you have to push and pull people toward project of freedom and self-selection of values. Giving is expression of richness and strength of an individual: it displays your excess. It enhances your strength, extending your reach into another.

I sort of like this, but it's very crude. Giving / helping others and yourself at the same time is all about turning others on to their self-improvement, sure, but that means their having a better pattern of social – somatic interaction, which means they learn how to turn others on to turning on still others: your power is increased by being part of a powerfully ongoing social network of turning on others that empower still others.

185-186: R has his own reservations about N's notion of giving in relation to altruism. It seems to have a very audience (potential self-selectors) and seems to ignore material conditions. R's comments here come close to my concerns.

188-89: N's "great politics" = "a kind of social architecture" = how to enable individuals to detach from society. So if self-selection = detachment from society, you need a herd to distinguish yourself from, and so you can't have a society of self-selectors.

I don't like this. No one "detaches from society." They might have more or less leeway (w/r/t rewards and punishments) in developing novel or singular patterns of social relations (including restricting your relations to very few and very formal / mediated by money). On that basis you certainly could have a society whose structure and material support encourages experimentation with social relations, within agreed upon limits of course and with agreed upon rewards / punishments.

190: intermediate class of free spirits btw herd and elite self-selectors.

191: breeding is a way of making self-selection direct how NS and social selection work. If civilizing is means of taming / domestication / herding via suppression of animal instincts.

192-3: Partially, breeding is genetic / NS, aiming at changing animal drives, whereas civilizing is memetic, aiming at practices. But there is N's Lamarckianism, which "erodes the difference between these two kinds of selection." Acquired traits can become heritable; habits can become drives.

This is where DST helps us: it's not NS versus social selection, but the focus has to be on reliably repeated extra-somatic bio-social subjectification practices, which work with distributed networks regulating gene expression, and affecting patterns, triggers and thresholds of affective cognition. The technical biological point is the source of variation upon which NS works. On one reading of Lamarck, the acquired traits retroactively affect the genetic material. But for West-Eberhard, the genetic expression is pre-existing, but unexpressed. (I think we need Deleuze's notion of the virtual to conceptualize this notion of "pre-existing but unexpressed.") For DST the source of variation is not simply genetic in the strict sense of DNA codons, but the distributed network of regulation of gene expression, i.e., the "life cycle."

193: for R, N stresses the genetic / eugenic aspect of "breeding"

196-7: the thought of ER as a means of breeding strength into potential self-selectors. It forces you to affirm immanence of becoming because there is no God or transcendence. It forces you to recognize the “partiality” of your own values.

The ER is an affective experience / experiment: I think R’s formula: “it alters the milieu of ideas of the elite” is too cognitive / rationalist.

197-99: N and eugenics. N wants to engineer values in sex drive to “breed sexual taste in favor of the epistemic powers germane to freedom.”

199: N and “race”: large human group of shared descent and shared practices. How best to mix the “races” of Europe?

200-201: rank order is necessary range of degrees of freedom, from free self-selectors to herd as social “background.”

202: equality: all societies have stressed conformity, but for N, especially in modern democracy.

203: moral universality vs free singularity / self-selection of values, “fine-tuned to drive systems – they need the values that bring those drives into their most effective synthesis and working.”

OK, but still too individualistic / substantial. You only have “drives” insofar as you have social relations. A drive is a tendency to produce a pattern of social relation. You only get affect in the interaction of people, but people are only singular patterns of social – somatic interaction.

204: “taming has worked to shrink the natural variation among individuals in their abilities and achievements.”

This is a big key. There’s no way to separate “natural” from “social” variation, bcs we are bio-social. “natural” here is just a term for “unanalyzed complex of bio-social factors.”

204: “reinforced by herd’s resentment of exceptions, civilizing has set up mechanisms that inhibit exceptional abilities and suppress exceptional achievements.”

I don’t know about this anymore. Haven’t we produced a celebrity / rich people / competition worship culture?

205: classes and castes. 207: do the elite form a class, or only that from which the truly elite individual separates himself?

208: epistemic virtues of strength and courage, a kind of cruelty, needed for skeptical genealogy of morals and values. Developed by “unrepressing” some animal / bodily drives. But these are to be expressed in a spiritual way by the self-selectors: you exercise power by persuading others to adopt your ideas about morality / values / self-selection / freedom, etc.

I don't know about the "epistemic" angle here: what about incorporation / taste? What about philosophy as a way of life? R at least seems to assign this task to the new elite that is not able to produce new values, but can at least assimilate and implement them (209).

210: a new herd: new industrial herd serving "economic machinery." What N wants is to turn the economic machine to the support of the elite and the exceptional.

Well, we've gotten that, post 1980: but they've been the elite at producing a financialization of a previously industrial base.

213-15: the elite can help the herd by making it healthy and less inimical to new elite. They "demoralize" the herd, giving it Enlightenment, but not too much (217).

217: R's criticisms of N's politics.