

ABSTRACT:

In this work I attempt a reconstruction of what I take to be the very foundations of Nietzsche's philosophical project – his account of what it means to be an agent (i.e. his “psychology”). Yet, my main purpose is far from mere exegesis. On the contrary, by actively thinking through what Nietzsche gives us, I aim to develop a coherent account of the fundamental “logic” of agency as such. That is, of what it could mean to be an agent, understood as a functionally distinct kind of being. In doing so, I proceed in a number of steps. First, I situate Nietzsche's project in the historical context and say a few words about what he has to offer us. Next, I consider Nietzsche's approach to how we should think about the soul (and psychology itself) and attempt to clarify some other key psychological concepts. With these in hand, I develop a formal concept of an organism and connect it to Nietzsche's notorious notion of the “will to power” – which concludes the first part of the work. In Part Two, the “psychological” account worked out in Part One meets ethics. Here I begin by examining Nietzsche's (internalist) theory of motivation, itself derived from the concept of life, and scrutinize his attempted deconstruction of the “selfish/selfless” dichotomy – the foundation of Nietzsche's “moral psychology” and the basis for his rejection of traditional morality. I argue that Nietzsche's initial strategy fails, but I also show that he himself soon opts for a different one – namely, one that challenges our rationality, our capacity to set our own ends (and know “why we're doing what we're doing”), and thus threatens to reduce agency itself to a subjective fiction. However, in the final chapter, I demonstrate that this challenge proves incoherent and must be rejected. I conclude the work by discussing why a merely psychological account of agency cannot suffice; and why it proves necessary to venture “beyond psychology” – into critical metaphysics.