

**Gemes: “Nietzsche on Free Will, Autonomy
And the Sovereign Individual”**
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

What is the “sovereign individual” like?

- answers from group discussion are here: <http://wiki.ubc.ca/Course:PHIL449/discussions>
- you can add to these, comment on them, etc. on the wiki

Gemes: sovereign individual has “agency free will” rather than “deserts free will”

1. deserts free will: focused on who deserves punishment or reward; question of whether one could have done otherwise is important (321-322)

-- N denies the possibility of deserts free will: we cannot have wills outside the causal order (324-325)

2. agency free will: focused on the question of agency: one performs an act freely to the extent that one is “the effective agent behind a doing” (323), that one’s acts stem from one’s “character” (327)

-- bigger Q Nietzsche concerned with here: “what is it to be a self capable of acting?” What is it to be “a genuine self”?

3. How the sovereign individual has agency free will

a. SI has a real “self,” true agency because his/her character is “a stable, unified, and integrated, hierarchy of drives” (327)

b. what does this mean?

- persons are bundles of drives, including: forces that move us in search of food, drink, health, sex, self-preservation, truth, knowledge, beauty, distinction, victory, superiority, revenge, and more
- what might it mean to have these drives in a stable hierarchy?

[*class discussion*]

-- to try to control your drives rather than letting them just push you in various directions; we have agency to decide between them, to prioritize some over others

-- consciousness as helping to control these drives, filter them

-- sometimes (or always?) this controlling is done unconsciously, by other drives; we can then ask if we want to consent to it, which may affect which drive is dominant

-- we need consciousness when we have to express ourselves to others

-- Nietzsche: we are ordering and ranking needs according to a “ruling idea”; values come from a physiological state. SI have principle that esteems some needs over others

- importance of having obedience to a single direction, a single drive—quotes read in class from *Beyond Good and Evil* 188, *Gay Science* 290

See: http://nietzsche.holtof.com/reader/friedrich-nietzsche/beyond-good-and-evil/aphorism-188-quote_74fc6a9c7.html

And: http://nietzsche.holtof.com/reader/friedrich-nietzsche/the-gay-science/aphorism-290-quote_04784e1de.html

4. the SI has a strong will; others have weak wills

- a. weak will: having conflicting drives within that pull one in various directions at various times (see BGE 200, quoted in Gemes p. 327)
- b. strong will: “acting from a kind of inner necessity stemming from [a] centre of gravity” (332).

-- only those with strong wills can truly be responsible for holding to promises, because they are consistent over time (see, e.g., Janaway’s portion of this article, p. 351)

5. the SI is also self-legislating

-- sovereign individuals are “autonomous, self-legislators who are not subservient to some external authority, be it a God, the *summum bonum* or an (allegedly) universal moral law” (330)

Gemes: Nietzsche wants his readers to become more unified beings (335)

1. Nietzsche aims to change his preferred readers from being mere conduit points of a vast array of conflicting inherited drives into genuinely unified beings” (335)

-- N’s arguments about free will and strong and weak wills can “awaken his readers to the profoundly disturbing possibility that they themselves are not yet persons” (337).

2. okay, but how might one work to gain a strong will? (Gemes doesn’t say clearly in this article)