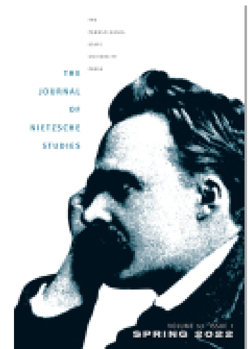
Nietzsche's Dawn: Philosophy, Ethics, and the Passion of Knowledge by Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford (review)



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Routledge, 2016]; Shilo Brooks, *Nietzsche's Culture War: The Unity of the Untimely Meditations* [Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018]; Jeffrey Church, *Nietzsche's "Unfashionable Observations": A Critical Introduction and Guide* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019]; and Andrew Huddleston, *Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2019].) Nevertheless, access to these texts remains difficult, even for the most committed reader. This commentary, like the previous volume, opens them up for fresh scrutiny and enhances our understanding of them as a glimpse of Nietzsche's future—and ours: "But I *saw* the land— [. . .] Great repose in promising, this happy looking outward into a future which shall not always remain a promise!" (*EH* "Books: *UM*" 3, trans. Hollingdale, 57).

Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford, *Nietzsche's* Dawn: *Philosophy, Ethics, and the Passion of Knowledge*
Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020. vii + 270 pp. ISBN: 978-1-119-69366-6. Cloth, $49.95.

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Although caution ought to be exercised when it comes to his retrospective assessment of his past works, Nietzsche's *EH* accurately describes *D* as a significant beginning, and a preparatory work. The preparation in question is for a broad critical reappraisal of the function of morality. More specifically, the object of Nietzsche's critique is that which he titles "customary morality." It is *D* that got the ball rolling on this project, as well as on many familiar Nietzschean themes that find arguably maturer exposition in later works, those more systematically studied on university syllabi. In this respect and others, Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford are justified in their claim that *D* itself is a significant work, making its own distinctive contribution to Nietzsche's philosophy. In *Nietzsche's* Dawn, the first Anglophone book-length treatment of the work, they amply demonstrate many ways in which this is the case.

The theme of knowledge, including self-knowledge, and how Nietzsche construes knowledge as a "passion," is central to Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's volume. Its status in *D* is illuminating, not just for expositing

the independent project afoot in that book. It also gives a clearer sense of some important conceptual developments as Nietzsche's works reconfigured their attention throughout the 1880s. A review of Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's important claims about the passion of knowledge in *Nietzsche's* Dawn will elucidate these developments. Any critical remarks offered here ought to be construed within the context of an easy recommendation to make about the volume: students and scholars alike will profit from reading *Nietzsche's* Dawn.

Nietzsche in *D* is committed to the idea that customary morality has contributed to obfuscating our true selves. As such, any adequate critique of it would facilitate a greater capacity for self-knowledge than before. Yet it is also Nietzsche's contention that knowledge more broadly understood has a role in uncovering this self-knowledge. *D* has Nietzsche promote "the pathos of the search for truth and knowledge" (15). *HH* marks a turn in Nietzsche's thinking to demarcate the remit of human knowledge, without giving free rein to any hard-line metaphysical commitments. There Nietzsche is sensitive to the psychological pull that such commitments can have for fulfilling certain human needs, be they construed as innate or as contingent (16). So too in *D*, with a focus on knowledge as a passion, within this established remit.

Ansell-Pearson and Bamford open their second chapter by discussing the 1886 preface added to *D*, where Nietzsche describes his investigations as having been "subterranean," acting as an "apparent Trophonius" (*D* P:1). They are right to frontload this description of the work, particularly about the kind of self-knowledge that might be available through exploring the formation and longevity of dominant moral systems. The symbolism here is one of secret cave entrances, ones that offer both promise and terror. Notable is the etymology of Trophonius: *trepho*, "to nourish," is a useful metaphor for this journey of discovery. The authors refer to nourishment as one of two important aspects of Nietzsche's account for a positive ethics in *D* (the other is the feeling of power) (63). Although this link between discovery and nourishment in the root etymology is not explicitly made by Ansell-Pearson and Bamford (perhaps it was in mind), in any case, it certainly lends itself to the aptness of their reading.

There is an ambiguity in this metaphor and *D* more widely, and indeed in all Nietzsche's works that follow, about both the limitations upon self-knowledge and its prescriptive import. *D* shares a substantial affinity with the later works on the point that self-knowledge is not best

developed by any conscious enterprise. Nor is there reason to think that such knowledge is gained by a process fully transparent to intellection. While "organizing ideas" are the unconscious movers and shakers for becoming who one is in *EH*, and the claim of being "strangers to ourselves" opens *GM*, both of these ideas build upon the theme first substantiated in *D*, about the limits of self-knowledge through these means. In *D* 86 (quoted on 142), Nietzsche claims our ignorance of the "whole contingent nature of the machine." Indeed, in one much-discussed passage, Nietzsche claims the opacity of the mental economy, specifically the drives, and the inability to discern their "laws of nutriment," before going on to provide more detailed expositions of how those very drives operate (*D* 119). Nietzsche again employs the language of nourishment in the context of this opacity.

In Nietzsche's campaign against morality in *D*, the possible route to its overcoming appears to be a distinctively non-intellectual venture. Feelings, moods, dispositions, instinctual repulsions or seductions—these are the true efficacious means for arriving at a specific sense of self-knowledge, one often located deep under the surface, in the subterranean "caves" of the mental economy. Trophonian Nietzsche returns to these themes later in the proto-psychoanalytic *GM* I:14, about the unconscious fabrication of value ideals. It is in *D* 119 that Nietzsche makes the claim that consciousness may be nothing more than a "fantastical commentary on an unknown and yet unknowable" text: but commonly overlooked is the crucial caveat that such a "text" can be *felt* (*D* 119, quoted on 148). Affects can provide forms of insight where intellection arguably cannot go, or cannot deeply go. So too affects assume greater fundamentality for moral transformation, as pointed out in Nietzsche's imperative to think differently but more importantly to *feel* differently about our moral judgments (*D* 103).

Self-discovery is largely, perhaps solely possible without that process being consciously intelligible. This ties together the image of the Trophonius of self-knowledge with the unintended consequences to come. Again, in the 1886 preface, the subterranean miner and "under-miner" "desires a long period of darkness, an unintelligible, hidden, enigmatic something, knowing as he does that he will in time have his own morning, his own redemption [. . .] ask him not what he seeketh in the depths; for he himself will tell you [. . .] whensoever he once again becomes man" (*D* P:1). Nietzsche marks a time wherein a redeemed self can speak of the discovery of its own ideal, an unexpected outcome culminating its unconscious achievement.

It is in this context that Nietzsche employs the metaphor of pregnancy (*schwangerschaft*) in *D*, specifically as a means of acknowledging new possible approaches to the ethical (62). Arguably by later uses of the same metaphor in *GM* (II:19) and *TI* ("Ancients" 4), Nietzsche's contention in *D* 552 that "the child must emerge from the mildest and best of conditions" drops out of the frame. Indeed, *GM* II suggests that a consequence of bad conscience, the "child" that follows the "pregnancy," is the unexpected new ideal developed out of the harshest conditions (*GM* II:2), although Ansell-Pearson and Bamford curiously do not subscribe to the notion that Nietzsche there offers a genuine ideal (242, on which, more below). However, in *D* we first see Nietzsche's use of this metaphor to acknowledge the capacity for cultivating self-knowledge without any conscious awareness of doing so: "everything is veiled, full of foreboding, you have no idea how it's going to happen, you wait it out, and seek to be *ready*" (*D* 552).

Nietzsche's valorization of a *kind* of self-knowledge is difficult to square with a later topic in Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's book, one central enough to be included in the subtitle, regarding promotion of the "passion of knowledge." How exactly might this enigmatic process of unconscious self-cultivation square with Nietzsche's apparent valorization of a passion of knowledge? How exactly should we construe such a passion?

Ansell-Pearson and Bamford are right to frame Nietzsche's discussions of knowledge in terms of his Enlightenment inheritance. Rather than continuing the Enlightenment project simpliciter, Nietzsche's inquiry goes beyond conventional Enlightenment topics by means of its distinctively psychological orientation (119). Nietzsche is not just seeking truths about the world and reality; he is seeking truths about the kind of people who would engage in such a search! In this respect, as well as sharing "a number of the key ideas and commitments of the modern Enlightenment," Ansell-Pearson and Bamford frame Nietzsche's critique of the Enlightenment by his drawing upon general Enlightenment principles.

Nietzsche thus shares the Enlightenment preconception that certain kinds of knowledge are liberatory and can contribute to facilitating greater autonomy (115). Indeed, the pursuit of such knowledge has become so enculturated that it has developed into a fundamental psychological passion (*D* 429). There remain questions about how we position passions within Nietzsche's conception of the mental economy. In what ways are they distinct from drives, affects, and meta-affects, each of which is discussed in *D*? It may be that Nietzsche does not offer entirely concrete distinctions.

Further, the pursuit of knowledge is identified as the object of a passion (126). But this would be passion *for* knowledge, not necessarily *of* it. A passion of knowledge might indicate some phenomenological state that is felt as an aftereffect, rather than a motivational disposition toward some object or class. Nietzsche speaks of the passion of the search for knowledge as well as the passion of knowledge, so maybe it is a blend of both. But given the prominent place that the passion of knowledge has in the subtitle of *Nietzsche's* Dawn, a little more clarification would have been desirable on this point in chapter 5, which addresses the theme most prominently.

Although Nietzsche endorses the cultivation of this passion for knowledge, the toll of doing so might be more exacting than Ansell-Pearson and Bamford's discussions of it tend to let on. In this regard, it would pay to think about the term "passion" Nietzsche employs in light of its Christian heritage, one of which he was very likely cognizant in using it. The Passion of Jesus describes Christ's endurance through his last great tribulations, ones that cause suffering and result in his death. This is reminiscent of integral aspects of Nietzsche's discussion of knowledge as a passion, that aide in making sense of the terror and potentially fatal danger that Nietzsche views as being intractably involved in its pursuit.

Nietzsche's passion of knowledge is not a lighthearted exercise but rather a "burden" that gives no guarantee for happiness, indeed is very likely to involve suffering and sorrow (*D* 429). Although Nietzsche in *D* recognizes the now strong roots of this passion, such that we cannot want happiness without also having knowledge, it remains open whether Nietzsche sees any ability for modernity to detach knowledge from sorrow. These are important intimations that persist in the later Nietzsche, in his distinctions between something's truth conduciveness and its value. But this was also prefigured in *HH*'s invocation of Byron's "sorrow is knowledge" from *Manfred* (*HH* 109). Ansell-Pearson and Bamford claim that *D*'s emphasis on the passion of knowledge differs from the plaintive relation toward truth and knowledge offered in *HH* 109 (16). Yet *HH* 109 also talks of the possibility of bleeding to death from truth, and this too finds its way into *D*'s discussions of the passion of knowledge.

Though new endeavors of knowledge can lift humanity to "dizzying heights," there is no sacrifice too great in the pursuit of truth, Nietzsche writes (*D* 429)—including the self-sacrifice of humanity (*D* 45). This implies not only that uncovering certain truths can often cause great harm, but that humanity might be expendable in the service of pursuing such truths. The

interpretive sticking point here is whether Nietzsche might mean literal sacrifice, or just some form of denying pleasure and happiness in the service of the more apt pursuit of knowledge (*D* 482). He uses the imagery of martyrdom and inflicting great personal pain for and from such pursuits (*D* 543). But he also alludes to the possibility that mankind will eventually perish from this passion, considering it a toss-up between that and perishing from some human weakness inherited from Christianity (*D* 429). If we take Nietzsche in *D* literally on this point, that humanity ought to burn itself out after a beautiful trajectory like some brilliant firework of knowledge, it gives credence to Bataille's observation that his notion of expenditure is embodied in a pure sense in Nietzsche's philosophy. Whichever interpretation prevails, Nietzsche's discussions of knowledge as a passion frontload the suffering considered part and parcel of it. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford acknowledge that Nietzsche repeatedly stresses "the painful nature of knowledge" (136), but the caveat that knowledge can be at times hazardous and dangerous comes late in the discussion in chapter 5 and is more like an afterthought than as it is central to *D*'s claims about knowledge.

In addition to their sustained discussion of this important topic from Nietzsche's middle period, Ansell-Pearson and Bamford offer a range of novel interpretive contributions to topics from *D*, from those that have been extensively covered to those about which little to no robust scholarship has been dedicated. *Mitleid* is the central topic of discussion in chapter 4. The ethical underpinning of *Mitleid* is bad when subsumed by customary morality for Nietzsche, due to its depressive effects on the mental economy. Certain moods encroach upon the possibility of human flourishing for the sake of the wider social group, as dictated by customary morality. Nietzschean overcoming of customary morality is partly a matter of overcoming an ethic of compassion. Ansell-Pearson and Bamford, however, offer the instructive nuance that there is no reason to think there couldn't develop the presence and experience of *Mitleid* at some other, different time, with "fruitful" outcomes for humanity (103). This might turn out to be the case for the new ethical agents Nietzsche envisaged; those who are self-legislators, capable of punishing themselves, should they contravene their own ethical laws (7).

Much of the background of *Nietzsche's* Dawn concerns the developmental story of arriving at the kind of subjectivity that belongs to potential self-legislators. The "nature of the machine" is contingent (*D* 86): with a

Lamarckian flavor, Ansell-Pearson and Bamford note that "the human animal is the product of a pre-historic labor going back thousands of years. What humanity is now is not what humanity has been destined to be from time immemorial" (123). Providing brief yet illuminating context about La Mettrie regarding Nietzsche's use of the imagery of polyps in *D* 119, chapter 6 emphasizes this structural contingency and its possibility for humans becoming deeper, more complex organisms (147).

Ansell-Pearson and Bamford rightly point out the promise of greater psychic health that this contingency could lead to, should the right knowledge be acquired and the right disposition cultivated. This makes it all the more curious, though, that in chapter 10 they deny the infamous "sovereign individual" as an example of such greater health, despite all the analogies between *GM* II and the set-up offered in *D*. The talk of polyps to this end echoes *GM* II:21, wherein owing to bad conscience, a structural deepening of psychological life occurs, even though it results from initially sickness-inducing phenomena. Promise of a great health where previously there was sickness is likened to a pregnancy (*GM* II:19), as are the new life-affirming ethical practices discussed in *D*. Mirroring the imagery of cultivating one's drives "as profitably as beautiful fruit on a trellis" (*D* 560) we have the sovereign individual described as a late, unexpected yet ripe fruit, the promise that results from the long development of bad conscience (*GM* II:2–3). It is therefore surprising to read their claim that the sovereignty spoken of at *GM* II:2 is not the kind of autonomy or freedom Nietzsche identifies with his ideal, despite its mirroring Nietzsche's talk of rights to forms of self-legislation (at, e.g., *D* 437). Ansell-Pearson and Bamford are right to note the link between bad conscience and customary morality here. But the potential Nietzsche speculates about by *GM*, to transfigure the results developed out of customary morality, might arguably be more sophisticated than merely repudiating such results, Nietzsche's apparent prescriptions in *D*. Nietzsche might best be interpreted as later introducing genealogy to account for these positive transfigurations made possible through the historical contingencies that were and remain at present sickness-inducing.

Chapter 7 offers a Nietzschean care of the self as integral to ethical experimentation, and a freedom from the constraints of moral fanaticism. Chapter 8, on death, is one of the most illuminating. Nietzsche's heritage from Epicurus pervades his middle period, taking from Epicurus that thinking about death correctly is integral to any formulation of the good life. Chapter 9 repays study in opposing the pervasive misconception that Nietzsche's

works after 1875 or thereabouts possess no political recommendations. The chapter looks to the colonial ambitions in Nietzsche's view of migration as possessing self-cultivatory potential. The authors are right to flag a concern about a dark side to Nietzsche's ambitions here, around this concept of colony. Some "quarter of Europe's workers" should emigrate and colonize to facilitate self-mastery, as a response to capitalism, industrialization, and its diminishing effect on self-improvement. As Ansell-Pearson and Bamford point out, this romantic imagery of migrating to "wild and fresh" lands is all well and good, but not to whomever happens already to live in those wild and fresh lands. Colony's promise for self-mastery arguably shows a blind spot to Nietzsche's teachings for humanity more widely—whether or not he would care is a different story.

Although the appendix of letters featured at the end of the volume, translated by Carol Diethe, is of more biographical than philosophical interest, it was interesting to learn from his correspondence that Nietzsche initially wished to call the book "*A* Dawn," one of many proposed titles, rejected only because it wasn't very catchy (252–53). Given his lackluster (at best!) book sales during his productive life, it appears not to have made much difference. But it is something worth keeping in mind, as *D* emphasizes pluralities of experimental forms of existence, from a book written before the arrival of Nietzsche's arguably more doctrinaire concepts and motifs.

Kaitlyn Creasy, *The Problem of Affective Nihilism in Nietzsche: Thinking Differently, Feeling Differently*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. xii + 188 pp. ISBN: 978-3-030-37132-6, 978-3-030-37135-7. Hardcover, $44.99; softcover, $29.99.

Reviewed by Lawrence J. Hatab, Old Dominion University

Kaitlyn Creasy has written a very fine book, in which she sets out an important question—how affect and nihilism correlate in Nietzsche's philosophy—and provides a multifaceted and well-organized answer that pays due attention to the complexities in Nietzsche's texts as well as to current scholarship relevant to the matters at hand. The term "affective nihilism" is not deployed by Nietzsche per se (it was coined by Ken Gemes), but it turns out to be a very useful concept for focusing and coordinating central