

Being and Action: A Metaphysical-Ethical Analysis of St. Thomas and Friedrich Nietzsche

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“It must be said that every being in any way existing is from God. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire.”

—I.44.1

“The theological virtues direct man to supernatural happiness in the same way as by the natural inclination man is directed to his connatural end.”

—II.62.3

Abstract

In this paper, I seek to identify the applicability of the theorem that we only ever act in accord with how we perceive things to be—generally viewed as self-evident until the advent of modernity—to Saint Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* and to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*. More specifically, I seek to determine the relationship between these author’s metaphysical presuppositions (or lack thereof) and their respective ethical theories which differ in both content and aim. More generally, I ask: what can the differences in these authors’ metaphysical and ethical beliefs teach us about what we owe our fellow human beings?

Conclusion

St. Thomas morally obligates himself to all things—creation, humanity, and God—for all things are bound up in this first principle. Meanwhile, Nietzsche obliterates any sense of moral duty to the other along with the notion that there is any sort of transcendent communion amongst creation. In reducing reality to the physical self, Nietzsche does not prescribe an unorthodox moral code but throws out morality all together. Seeing how the presence of metaphysics in Thomas’ work lends itself to a view of the universe that is deeply interrelated and how the absence of metaphysics in Nietzsche’s work limits reality to the individual, it is difficult to argue that the role of metaphysics in each thinkers’ work is not key in understanding the basis of their ethics.

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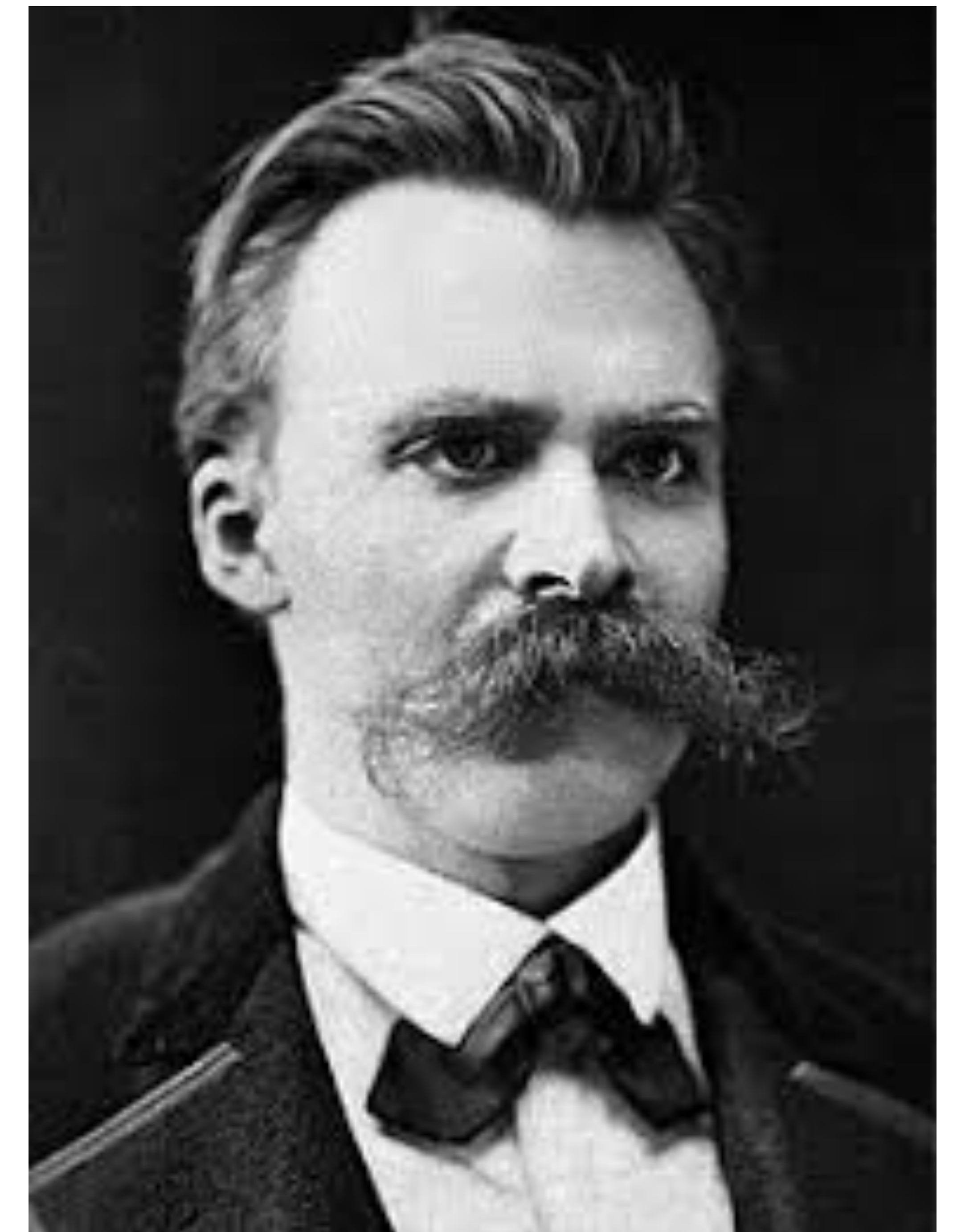
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“The will to truth requires a critique. . . the value of truth must for once be experimentally called into question.”

—Pg. 153

“As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness—there can be no doubt of that—morality will gradually perish now.”

—Pg. 161