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Friedrich Nietzsche is one of the most influential thinkers of the past 150 years and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) is his most important work on ethics and politics. A polemical contribution to moral and political theory, it offers a critique of moral values and traces the historical evolution of concepts such as guilt, conscience, responsibility, law and justice. This is a revised and updated edition of one of the most successful volumes to appear in Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Keith Ansell-Pearson has modified his introduction to Nietzsche's classic text, and Carol Diethe has incorporated a number of changes to the translation itself, reflecting the considerable advances in our understanding of Nietzsche in the twelve years since this edition first appeared. In this new guise, the Cambridge Texts edition of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* should continue to enjoy widespread adoption, at both undergraduate and graduate level.

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HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



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Frontmatter
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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

*On the Genealogy
of Morality*

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <i>Acknowledgements and a note on the text</i> | page viii |
| <i>A note on the revised edition</i> | ix |
| <i>Introduction: on Nietzsche’s critique of morality</i> | xiii |
| <i>Chronology</i> | xxx |
| <i>Further reading</i> | xxxiii |
| <i>Biographical synopses</i> | xxxvii |
| On the Genealogy of Morality | i |
| <i>Supplementary material to On the Genealogy of Morality</i> | 121 |
| ‘The Greek State’ | 164 |
| ‘Homer’s Contest’ | 174 |
| <i>Index of names</i> | 183 |
| <i>Index of subjects</i> | 187 |

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Acknowledgements and a note on the text

Carol Diethe is responsible for the translation of all the material featured in this book with the exception of the supplementary material taken from the Cambridge University Press editions of *Human, All too Human* (volumes one and two), pp. 123–32 and *Daybreak*, pp. 133–44, and translated by R. J. Hollingdale.

The notes which accompany the text were prepared by Raymond Geuss, who profited from editorial material supplied in the editions of G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1967–88) and Peter Putz (Munich, Goldman, 1988).

The essay ‘The Greek State’ was originally intended by Nietzsche to be a chapter of his first published book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); together with the essay ‘Homer’s Contest’ and three other essays – on the topics of truth, the future of education, and Schopenhauer – it formed part of the ‘Five prefaces to five unwritten books’ Nietzsche presented to Cosima Wagner in the Christmas of 1872. The German text of the two essays, newly translated here, can be found in volume 1 of *Nietzsche. Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 764–78 and pp. 783–93.

Nietzsche’s own italicization and idiosyncratic punctuation have been retained in the text.

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

A note on the revised edition

This second, revised edition features a new introduction by the editor and a revised and updated guide to further reading. The translation has been extensively modified in an effort to present the reader with a more accurate and reliable text. The editor and translator wish to thank those scholars who brought errors in the original translation to their attention and made suggestions for refining the text, in particular Christa Davis Acampora and Duncan Large. Ultimately, we made our own decisions and sole responsibility for the text remains with us. Keith Ansell-Pearson wishes to thank Richard Fisher of Cambridge University Press for supporting the idea of a second, revised edition of the text, and Christa Davis Acampora, Carol Diethe and Raymond Geuss for looking over versions of the introduction and providing helpful comments. Carol Diethe wishes to thank Jürgen Diethe for his considered comments.

Note by the translator: Anyone who has read Nietzsche in the original will be aware of his polished style, and will have admired his capacity to leap from one idea to another with *finesse*, to sprinkle foreign words into his text, to emphasize words with italics, or to coin a string of neologisms while rushing headlong through a paragraph until, finally, he reaches the safe landing of a full stop. Humbling though the experience often was, I have tried to keep faith with Nietzsche's punctuation and to capture as much of his style as was possible in translation while still holding on to the demands of accuracy. For accuracy in translating Nietzsche is increasingly important. When the first edition came out in 1994, I felt I could render a term like 'blue-eyed' as 'naïve', as in the phrase 'naïvely mendacious', which now appears as 'blue-eyed mendacious' in the text (III, 19).

A note on the revised edition

Now, however, there are several dictionaries collating Nietzsche's terms, and the method adopted in the recently published first volume of de Gruyter's *Nietzsche Wörterbuch* (Vol. I, A–E) includes information on the frequency of Nietzsche's use of a given term. For example, there is an entry for 'blue', and we are told that Nietzsche used it seventy-two times. In view of this scrutiny of Nietzsche's vocabulary, one feels duty-bound to be as literal as possible, and the translation has been checked and tightened with this aspect of Nietzsche research in mind.

Nietzsche used foreign words liberally, and these usually appear in italics in the text, though not always, as when Nietzsche actually used an English word in his text, such as 'contiguity' or, more surprisingly, 'sportsman' and 'training', quite modern words at that time (III, 17, 21).

Some of Nietzsche's terms are given in German after a word to clarify the translation of a key word, or a word translated in a seemingly anarchic way; hence *Anschauung* (normally used for 'view' or 'opinion') appears after 'contemplation' to confirm that it is Schopenhauer's aesthetic term under discussion. Often, of course, the context dictates that some words are translated differently within the text. One example is *Freigeist*, translated as 'free-thinker' on page 19 and 'free spirit' on page 77. In Nietzsche's day, the free-thinker was usually an enlightened but still religious person, probably with liberal views. When, on page 19, Nietzsche refers to his interlocutor as a democrat (a term of abuse for Nietzsche), we can safely assume that he has the free-thinker in mind. Yet Nietzsche saw himself as a free spirit, and praised the Buddha for breaking free from his domestic shackles; for this reason, 'free spirit' is used on p. 77, and this is the best translation for *Freigeist* when – as more usually – Nietzsche used it in a positive sense.

Much trickier was the wordplay Nietzsche introduced when explaining that Christian guilt (*Schuld*) stems from a much earlier concept of debt (also *Schuld*). In sections 20–2 of the Second Essay, it is only possible to know which meaning Nietzsche had in mind by the surrounding references to 'moralizing' (where we are fairly safe with 'guilt') or 'repayment' (where 'debt' is necessary). It is not always quite as neat as this sounds, and on a few occasions (pages 62 and 63), 'debt/guilt' is used to indicate that Nietzsche is changing gear.

On one occasion, where Nietzsche describes Napoleon as a synthesis of *Unmensch* and *Übermensch* (p. 33), the German words are given *first* and the English translation is in brackets: a high-risk strategy in any translation. The reason for this is an experience I had when teaching under-

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

A note on the revised edition

graduates who did not know any German, but who wanted to know more about Nietzsche's 'slogans': eternal return, the will to power and especially the *Übermensch* – variously translated as 'superman' or 'overman', though the German term is now in widespread use. Although Walter Kaufmann in his translation of *On the Genealogy of Morals* provided an excellent description of Napoleon as 'this synthesis of the inhuman and superhuman', I could not convince my students that this text contained any reference to the *Übermensch*. Kaufmann's index had no such entry, and nobody grasped that the word 'superhuman' – elegant as it was alongside 'inhuman' – actually translated *Übermensch*. Once the decision had been taken to place the German word in the text 'proper', we felt we had to pay *Unmensch* the same compliment, especially as Nietzsche intends his readers to reflect on the two types of human being, *Mensch*.

Finally, a word about the title. When I first heard about a book by Nietzsche called *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, I assumed the translation would be *On the Genealogy of Morality*, since for me, *die Moral* meant ethics as a formal doctrine, in other words, morality in a grand and abstract sense which naturally comprised morals. I am more relaxed on the matter now, but still feel that to talk about morality as a singular entity and phenomenon is truer to Nietzsche's meaning. Everyone concerned with this book has had that consideration in mind, and a primary concern was to make Nietzsche *accessible*.

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Introduction: on Nietzsche's critique of morality

Introduction to Nietzsche's text

Although it has come to be prized by commentators as his most important and systematic work, Nietzsche conceived *On the Genealogy of Morality* as a 'small polemical pamphlet' that might help him sell more copies of his earlier writings.¹ It clearly merits, though, the level of attention it receives and can justifiably be regarded as one of the key texts of European intellectual modernity. It is a deeply disturbing book that retains its capacity to shock and disconcert the modern reader. Nietzsche himself was well aware of the character of the book. There are moments in the text where he reveals his own sense of alarm at what he is discovering about human origins and development, especially the perverse nature of the human animal, the being he calls 'the sick animal' (*GM*, III, 14). Although the *Genealogy* is one of the darkest books ever written, it is also, paradoxically, a book full of hope and anticipation. Nietzsche provides us with a stunning story about man's monstrous moral past, which tells the history of the deformation of the human animal in the hands of civilization and Christian moralization; but also hints at a new kind of humanity coming into existence in the wake of the death of God and the demise of a Christian-moral culture.

On the Genealogy of Morality belongs to the late period of Nietzsche's writings (1886–8). It was composed in July and August of 1887 and published in November of that year. Nietzsche intended it as a 'supplement'

¹ Letter to Peter Gast, 18 July 1887, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Christopher Middleton (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 269.

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Introduction

to and ‘clarification’ of *Beyond Good and Evil*, said by him to be ‘in all essentials’ a critique of modernity that includes within its range of attack modern science, modern art and modern politics. In a letter to his former Basel colleague Jacob Burckhardt dated 22 September 1886, Nietzsche stresses that *Beyond Good and Evil* says the same things as *Zarathustra* ‘only in a way that is different – very different’. In this letter he draws attention to the book’s chief preoccupations and mentions the ‘mysterious conditions of any growth in culture’, the ‘extremely dubious relation between what is called the “improvement” of man (or even “humanisation”) and the enlargement of the human type’, and ‘above all the contradiction between every moral concept and every scientific concept of life’. *On the Genealogy of Morality* closely echoes these themes and concerns. Nietzsche finds that ‘all modern judgments about men and things’ are smeared with an over-moralistic language; the characteristic feature of modern souls and modern books is to be found in their ‘moralistic mendaciousness’ (*GM*, III, 19).

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche describes the *Genealogy* as consisting of ‘three decisive preliminary studies by a psychologist for a revaluation of values’. The First Essay probes the ‘psychology of Christianity’ and traces the birth of Christianity not out of the ‘spirit’ *per se* but out of a particular kind of spirit, namely, *ressentiment*; the Second Essay provides a ‘psychology of the conscience’, where it is conceived not as the voice of God in man but as the instinct of cruelty that has been internalized after it can no longer discharge itself externally; the Third Essay inquires into the meaning of ascetic ideals, examines the perversion of the human will, and explores the possibility of a counter-ideal. Nietzsche says that he provides an answer to the question where the power of the ascetic ideal, ‘the harmful ideal *par excellence*’, comes from, and he argues that this is simply because to date it has been the *only* ideal; no counter-ideal has been made available ‘until the advent of *Zarathustra*’.

The *Genealogy* is a subversive book that needs to be read with great care. It contains provocative imagery of ‘blond beasts of prey’ and of the Jewish ‘slave revolt in morality’ which can easily mislead the unwary reader about the nature of Nietzsche’s immoralism. In the preface, Nietzsche mentions the importance of readers familiarizing themselves with his previous books – throughout the book he refers to various sections and aphorisms from them, and occasionally he makes partial citations from them. The critique of morality Nietzsche carries out in the book is a complex one; its nuances are lost if one extracts isolated images

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 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

and concepts from the argument of the book as a whole. His contribution to the study of 'morality' has three essential aspects: first, a criticism of moral genealogists for bungling the object of their study through the lack of a genuine historical sense; second, a criticism of modern evolutionary theory as a basis for the study of morality; and third, a critique of moral values that demands a thorough revaluation of them. Nietzsche's polemical contribution is intended to question the so-called self-evident 'facts' about morality and it has lost none of its force today.

Reading Nietzsche

Nietzsche is often referred to as an 'aphoristic' writer, but this falls short of capturing the sheer variety of forms and styles he adopted. In fact, the number of genuine aphorisms in his works is relatively small; instead, most of what are called Nietzsche's 'aphorisms' are more substantial paragraphs which exhibit a unified train of thought (frequently encapsulated in a paragraph heading indicating the subject matter), and it is from these building blocks that the other, larger structures are built in more or less extended sequences. Nietzsche's style, then, is very different from standard academic writing, from that of the 'philosophical workers' he describes so condescendingly in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE, 211). His aim is always to energize and enliven philosophical style through an admixture of aphoristic and, broadly speaking, 'literary' forms. His stylistic ideal, as he puts it on the title page of *The Case of Wagner* (parodying Horace), is the paradoxical one of 'ridendo dicere severum' ('saying what is sombre through what is laughable'), and these two modes, the sombre and the sunny, are mischievously intertwined in his philosophy, without the reader necessarily being sure which is uppermost at any one time.

Nietzsche lays down a challenge to his readers, and sets them a pedagogical, hermeneutic task, that of learning to read him well. He acknowledges that the aphoristic form of his writing causes difficulty, and emphasizes that an aphorism has not been 'deciphered' simply when it has been read out; rather, for full understanding to take place, an 'art of interpretation' or exegesis is required (the German word is *Auslegung*, literally a laying out). He gives the attentive reader a hint of what kind of exegesis he thinks is needed when he claims that the Third Essay of the book 'is a commentary on the aphorism that precedes it' (he intends the opening section of the essay, not the epigraph from *Zarathustra*).

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Introduction

Genealogy and morality

For Nietzsche, morality represents a system of errors that we have incorporated into our basic ways of thinking, feeling and living; it is the great symbol of our profound ignorance of ourselves and the world. In *The Gay Science* 115, it is noted how humankind has been educated by ‘the four errors’: we see ourselves only incompletely; we endow ourselves with fictitious attributes; we place ourselves in a ‘false rank’ in relation to animals and nature – that is, we see ourselves as being inherently superior to them; and, finally, we invent ever new tables of what is good and then accept them as eternal and unconditional. However, Nietzsche does not propose we should make ourselves feel guilty about our incorporated errors (they have provided us with new drives); and neither does he want us simply to accuse or blame the past. We need to strive to be more just in our evaluations of life and the living by, for example, thinking ‘beyond good and evil’. For Nietzsche, it is largely the prejudices of morality that stand in the way of this; morality assumes knowledge of things it does not have.

The criticism Nietzsche levels at morality – what we moderns take it to be and to represent – is that it is a menacing and dangerous system that makes the present live at the expense of the future (*GM*, Preface, 6). Nietzsche’s concern is that the human species may never attain its ‘*highest potential and splendour*’ (ibid.). The task of culture is to produce sovereign individuals, but what we really find in history is a series of deformations and perversions of that cultural task. Thus, in the modern world the aim and meaning of culture is taken to be ‘to breed a tame and civilized animal, a *household pet*, out of the beast of prey “man”’ (*GM*, I, 11), so that now man strives to become ‘better’ all the time, meaning ‘more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian . . .’ (*GM*, I, 12). This, then, is the great danger of modern culture: it will produce an animal that takes taming to be an end in itself, to the point where the free-thinker will announce that the end of history has been attained (for Nietzsche’s criticism of the ‘free-thinker’ see *GM*, I, 9). Nietzsche argues that we moderns are in danger of being tempted by a new European type of Buddhism, united in our belief in the supreme value of a morality of communal compassion, ‘as if it were morality itself, the summit, the *conquered* summit of humankind, the only hope for the future, comfort in the present, the great redemption from all past guilt . . .’ (*BGE*, 202).

Nietzsche argues that in their attempts to account for morality philosophers have not developed the suspicion that morality might be ‘something

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 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

problematic'; in effect what they have done is to articulate 'an erudite form of true belief in the prevailing morality', and, as a result, their inquiries remain 'a part of the state of affairs within a particular morality' (*BGE*, 186). Modern European morality is 'herd animal morality' which considers itself to be the definition of morality and the only morality possible or desirable (*BGE*, 202); at work in modern thinking is the assumption that there is a single morality valid for all (*BGE*, 228). Nietzsche seeks to develop a genuinely critical approach to morality, in which all kinds of novel, surprising and daring questions are posed. Nietzsche does not so much inquire into a 'moral sense' or a moral faculty as attempt to uncover *the different senses* of morality, that is the different 'meanings' morality can be credited with in the history of human development: morality as symptom, as mask, as sickness, as stimulant, as poison, and so on. Morality, Nietzsche holds, is a surface phenomenon that requires meta-level interpretation in accordance with a different, superior set of extra-moral values 'beyond good and evil'.

On several occasions in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche makes it clear that certain psychologists and moralists have been doing something we can call 'genealogy' (see, for example, *GM*, I, 2 and II, 4, 12). He finds all these attempts insufficiently critical. In particular, Nietzsche has in mind the books of his former friend, Paul Rée (1849–1901), to whom he refers in the book's preface. In section 4 he admits that it was Rée's book on the origin of moral sensations, published in 1877, that initially stimulated him to develop his own hypotheses on the origin of morality. Moreover, it was in this book that he 'first directly encountered the back-to-front and perverse kind of genealogical hypotheses', which he calls 'the English kind'. In section 7 Nietzsche states that he wishes to develop the sharp, unbiased eye of the critic of morality in a better direction than we find in Rée's speculations. He wants, he tells us, to think in the direction 'of a real *history of morality*' (*die wirkliche Historie der Moral*); in contrast to the 'English hypothesis-mongering into the blue' – that is, looking vainly into the distance as in the blue yonder – he will have recourse to the colour 'grey' to aid his genealogical inquiries, for this denotes, 'that which can be documented, which can actually be confirmed and has actually existed . . . the whole, long, hard-to-decipher hieroglyphic script of man's moral past!' (*GM*, Preface, 7). Because the moral genealogists are so caught up in 'merely "modern" experience' they are altogether lacking in knowledge; they have 'no will to know the past, still less an instinct for history . . .' (*GM*, II, 4). An examination of the books of

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Introduction

moral genealogists would show, ultimately, that they all take it to be something given and place it beyond questioning. Although he detects a few preliminary attempts to explore the history of moral feelings and valuations, Nietzsche maintains that even among more refined researchers no attempt at critique has been made. Instead, the popular superstition of Christian Europe that selflessness and compassion are what is characteristic of morality is maintained and endorsed.

Nietzsche begins the *Genealogy* proper by paying homage to ‘English psychologists’, a group of researchers who have held a microscope to the soul and, in the process, pioneered the search for a new set of truths: ‘plain, bitter, ugly, foul, unchristian, immoral . . .’ (*GM*, I, 1). The work of these psychologists has its basis in the empiricism of John Locke, and in David Hume’s new approach to the mind that seeks to show that so-called complex, intellectual activity emerges out of processes that are, in truth, ‘stupid’, such as the *vis inertiae* of habit and the random coupling and mechanical association of ideas. In the attempt of ‘English psychologists’ to show the real mechanisms of the mind Nietzsche sees at work not a malicious and mean instinct, and not simply a pessimistic suspicion about the human animal, but the research of proud and generous spirits who have sacrificed much to the cause of truth. He admires the honest craftsmanship of their intellectual labours. He criticizes them, however, for their lack of a real historical sense and for bungling their moral genealogies as a result, and for failing to raise questions of value and future legislation. This is why he describes empiricism as being limited by a ‘plebeian ambition’ (*BGE*, 213). What the ‘English’ essentially lack, according to Nietzsche, is ‘spiritual vision of real *depth* – in short, philosophy’ (*BGE*, 252).

In section 12 of the Second Essay Nietzsche attempts to expose what he takes to be the fundamental naïveté of the moral genealogists. This consists in highlighting some purpose that a contemporary institution or practice purportedly has, and then placing this purpose at the start of the historical process which led to the modern phenomenon in question. In *GM*, II, 13 he says that only that which has no history can be defined, and draws attention to the ‘synthesis of meanings’ that accrues to any given phenomenon. His fundamental claim, one that needs, he says, to inform all kinds of historical research, is that the origin of the development of a thing and its ‘ultimate usefulness’ are altogether separate. This is because what exists is ‘continually interpreted anew . . . transformed and redirected to a new purpose’ by a superior power. Nietzsche is challenging the assump-

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

tion that the manifest purpose of a thing ('its utility, form and shape') constitutes the reason for its existence, such as the view that the eye is made to see and the hand to grasp. He argues against the view that we can consider the development of a thing in terms of a 'logical *progressus*' towards a goal. This naïvely teleological conception of development ignores the random and contingent factors within evolution, be it the evolution of a tradition or an organ. However, he also claims that 'every purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will to power' is in operation in historical change. This further claim has not found favour among theorists impressed by Nietzsche's ideas on evolution because they see it as relying upon an extravagant metaphysics. It is clear from his published presentations of the theory of the will to power that Nietzsche did not intend it to be such.

Nietzsche knows that he will shock his readers with the claims he makes on behalf of the will to power, for example, that it is the '*primordial fact* of all history' (*BGE*, 259). To say that the will to power is a 'fact' is not, for Nietzsche, to be committed to any simple-minded form of philosophical empiricism. Rather, Nietzsche's training as a philologist inclined him to the view that no fact exists apart from an interpretation, just as no text speaks for itself, but always requires an interpreting reader. When those of a modern democratic disposition consider nature and regard everything in it as equally subject to a fixed set of 'laws of nature', are they not projecting on to nature their own aspirations for human society, by construing nature as a realm that exhibits the rational, well-ordered egalitarianism which they wish to impose on all the various forms of human sociability? Might they be, as Nietzsche insinuates, masking their 'plebeian enmity towards everything privileged and autocratic, as well as a new and more subtle atheism'? But if even these purported facts about nature are really a matter of interpretation and not text, would it not be possible for a thinker to deploy the opposite intention and look, with his interpretive skill, at the same nature and the same phenomena, reading 'out of it the ruthlessly tyrannical and unrelenting assertion of power claims'? Nietzsche presents his readers with a contest of interpretations. His critical claim is that, whereas the modern 'democratic' interpretation suffers from being moralistic, his does not; his interpretation of the 'text' of nature as will to power allows for a much richer appreciation of the economy of life, including its active emotions. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche wants the seminal role played by the active affects to be appreciated (*GM*, II, 11). We suffer from the 'democratic idiosyncrasy' that opposes in principle everything

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Introduction

that dominates and wants to dominate (*GM*, II, 12). Against Darwinism, he argues that it is insufficient to account for life solely in terms of adaptation to external circumstances. Such a conception deprives life of its most important dimension, which he names ‘*Aktivität*’ (activity). It does this, he contends, by overlooking the primacy of the ‘spontaneous, expansive, aggressive . . . formative forces’ that provide life with new directions and new interpretations, and from which adaptation takes place only once these forces have had their effect. He tells us that he lays ‘stress on this major point of historical method because it runs counter to the prevailing instinct and fashion which would much rather come to terms with absolute randomness, and even the mechanistic senselessness of all events, than the theory that a *power-will* is acted out in all that happens’ (*GM*, II, 12).

Nietzsche’s polemic challenges the assumptions of standard genealogies, for example, that there is a line of descent that can be continuously traced from a common ancestor, and that would enable us to trace moral notions and legal practices back to a natural single and fixed origin. His emphasis is rather on fundamental transformations, on disruptions, and on psychological innovations and moral inventions that emerge in specific material and cultural contexts.

Undue emphasis should not be placed, however, on the role Nietzsche accords to contingency and discontinuity within history, as this would be to make a fetish of them as principles. Contrary to Michel Foucault’s influential reading of genealogy, Nietzsche does not simply oppose himself to the search for origins, and neither is he opposed to the attempt to show that the past actively exists in the present, secretly continuing to animate it.² Much of what Nietzsche is doing in the book is only intelligible if we take him to be working with the idea that it does. Nietzsche opposes himself to the search for origins only where this involves what we might call a genealogical narcissism. Where it involves the discovery of difference at the origin, of the kind that surprises and disturbs us, Nietzsche is in favour of such a search. This is very much the case with his analysis of the bad conscience. For Nietzsche, this is an ‘origin’ (*Ursprung*) that is to be treated as a fate and as one that still lives on in human beings today.

² Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History’ (1971), in *The Essential Works of Foucault*, volume II: 1954–84, ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 369–93.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

'Good, bad and evil'

In the first of the three essays of which the *Genealogy* is composed, Nietzsche invites us to imagine a society which is split into two distinct groups: a militarily and politically dominant group of 'masters' exercises absolute control over a completely subordinate group of 'slaves'. The 'masters' in this model are construed as powerful, active, relatively unreflective agents who live a life of immediate physical self-affirmation: they drink, they brawl, they wench, they hunt, whenever the fancy takes them, and they are powerful enough, by and large, to succeed in most of these endeavours, and uninhibited enough to enjoy living in this way. They use the term 'good' to refer in an approving way to this life and to themselves as people who are capable of leading it. As an afterthought, they also sometimes employ the term 'bad' to refer to those people – most notably, the 'slaves' – who by virtue of their weakness are not capable of living the life of self-affirming physical exuberance. The terms 'good' and 'bad' then form the basis of a variety of different 'masters' moralities'. One of the most important events in Western history occurs when the *slaves* revolt against the masters' form of valuation. The slaves are, after all, not only physically weak and oppressed, they are also by virtue of their very weakness debarred from spontaneously seeing themselves and their lives in an affirmative way. They develop a reactive and negative sentiment against the oppressive masters which Nietzsche calls '*ressentiment*', and this *ressentiment* eventually turns creative, allowing the slaves to take revenge in the imagination on the masters whom they are too weak to harm physically. The form this revenge takes is the invention of a new concept and an associated new form of valuation: 'evil'. 'Evil' is used to refer to the life the masters lead (which *they* call 'good') but it is used to refer to it in a *disapproving* way. In a 'slave' morality this negative term 'evil' is central, and slaves can come to a pale semblance of self-affirmation only by observing that they are *not* like the 'evil' masters. In the mouths of the slaves, 'good' comes to refer not to a life of robust vitality, but to one that is 'not-evil', i.e. not in any way like the life that the masters live. Through a variety of further conceptual inventions (notably, 'free will'), the slaves stylize their own natural weakness into the result of a choice for which they can claim moral credit. Western morality has historically been a struggle between elements that derive from a basic form of valuation derived from 'masters' and one derived from 'slaves'.

Introduction

The fate of bad conscience

In the Second Essay, Nietzsche develops a quite extraordinary story about the origins and emergence of feelings of responsibility and debt (personal obligation). He is concerned with nothing less than the evolution of the human mind and how its basic ways of thinking have come into being, such as inferring, calculating, weighing and anticipating. Indeed, he points out that our word ‘man’ (*manas*) denotes a being that values, measures and weighs. Nietzsche is keen to draw the reader’s attention to what he regards as an important historical insight: the principal moral concept of ‘guilt’ (*Schuld*) descends from the material concept of ‘debts’ (*Schulden*). In this sphere of legal obligations, he stresses, we find the breeding-ground of the ‘moral conceptual world’ of guilt, conscience and duty (*GM*, II, 6).

Nietzsche opens the Second Essay by drawing attention to a paradoxical task of nature, namely, that of breeding an animal that is sanctioned to promise and so exist as a creature of time, a creature that can remember the past and anticipate the future, a creature that can in the present bind its own will relative to the future in the certain knowledge that it will in the future effectively remember that its will has been bound. For this cultivation of effective memory and imagination to be successful, culture needs to work against the active force of forgetting, which serves an important physiological function. The exercise of a memory of the will supposes that the human animal can make a distinction between what happens by accident and what happens by design or intention, and it also presupposes an ability to think causally about an anticipated future. In section 2, Nietzsche makes explicit that what he is addressing is the ‘long history of the origins of *responsibility*’. The successful cultivation of an animal sanctioned to promise requires a labour by which man is made into something ‘regular, reliable, and uniform’. This has been achieved by what Nietzsche calls the ‘morality of custom’ (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*) and the ‘social straitjacket’ which it imposes. The disciplining of the human animal into an agent that has a sense of responsibility (*Verantwortlichkeit*) for its words and deeds has not taken place through gentle methods, but through the harsh and cruel measures of coercion and punishment. As Nietzsche makes clear at one point in the text: ‘Each step on earth, even the smallest, was in the past a struggle that was won with spiritual and physical torment . . .’ (III, 9). The problem for culture is that it has to deal with an animal that is partly dull, that has an inattentive mind and a strong

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

propensity to active forgetfulness. In most societies and ages, this problem has not been solved by gentle methods: 'A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory' (II, 3). Nietzsche's insight is that without blood, torture and sacrifice, including 'disgusting mutilations', what we know as 'modern psychology' would never have arisen. All religions are at bottom systems of cruelty, Nietzsche contends; blood and horror lies at the basis of all 'good things'. In a certain sense it is possible to locate the whole of asceticism in this sphere of torment: 'a few ideas have to be made ineradicable . . . unforgettable and fixed in order to hypnotize the whole nervous and intellectual system through these "fixed ideas" . . .' (ibid.).

The fruit of this labour of *Cultur* performed on man in the pre-historical period is the sovereign individual who is master of a strong and durable will, a will that can make and keep promises. On this account freedom of the will is an achievement of culture and operates in the context of specific material practices and social relations. Nietzsche calls this individual autonomous and supra-ethical (*übersittlich*): it is supra-ethical simply in the sense that it has gone beyond the level of custom. For Nietzsche the period of 'the morality of custom' pre-dates what we call 'world history' and is to be regarded as the 'decisive historical period' which has determined the character of man (*GM*, III, 9). The sublime work of morality can be explained as the 'natural' and necessary work of culture (of tradition and custom). The sovereign individual is the kind of self-regulating animal that is required for the essential functions of culture (for example, well-functioning creditor-debtor relations). It cannot be taken to be his ideal in any simple or straightforward sense.³

In *GM*, II, 16 Nietzsche advances, albeit in a preliminary fashion, his own theory on the 'origin' of the bad conscience. He looks upon it 'as a serious illness to which man was forced to succumb by the pressure of the most fundamental of all changes which he experienced'. This change refers to the establishment of society and peace and their confining spaces, which brings with it a suspension and devaluation of the instincts. Nietzsche writes of the basic instinct of freedom – the will to power – being forced back and repressed (II, 17–18). Human beings now walk as if a 'terrible heaviness' bears down on them. In this new scenario the old animal instincts, such as animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of changing and destroying, do not cease to make their demands, but have to find new and

³ Nietzsche criticizes the ideal of 'a single, rigid and unchanging *individuum*' in *Human, All Too Human* 618.

Introduction

underground satisfactions. Through internalization, in which no longer dischargeable instincts turn inward, comes the invention of what is popularly called the human 'soul': 'The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin, was expanded and extended itself and granted depth, breadth, and height in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of man's instincts was *obstructed*.' Nietzsche insists that *this* is 'the origin of "bad conscience"'. He uses striking imagery in his portrait of this momentous development.

On the one hand, Nietzsche approaches the bad conscience as the most insidious illness that has come into being and from which man has yet to recover, his sickness of himself. On the other hand, he maintains that the 'prospect of an animal soul turning against itself' is an event and a spectacle too interesting 'to be played senselessly unobserved on some ridiculous planet'. Furthermore, as a development that was prior to all *ressentiment*, and that *cannot* be said to represent any organic assimilation into new circumstances, the bad conscience contributes to the appearance of an animal on earth that 'arouses interest, tension, hope', as if through it 'something . . . were being prepared, as though man were not an end but just a path, an episode, a bridge, a great promise' (*GM*, II, 16). Nietzsche observes that although it represents a painful and ugly growth, the bad conscience is not simply to be looked upon in disparaging terms; indeed, he speaks of the '*active* bad conscience'. It can be regarded as the 'true womb of ideal and imaginative events'; through it an abundance of 'disconcerting beauty and affirmation' has been brought to light.

In the course of history, the illness of bad conscience reached a terrible and sublime peak. In prehistory, argues Nietzsche, the basic creditor-debtor relationship that informs human social and economic activity also finds expression in religious rites and worship, for example, the way a tribal community expresses thanks to earlier generations. Over time the ancestor is turned into a god and associated with the feeling of fear (the birth of superstition). Christianity cultivates further the moral or religious sentiment of debt, and does so in terms of a truly monstrous level of sublime feeling: God is cast as the ultimate ancestor who cannot be repaid (*GM*, II, 20).

Sin and the ascetic ideal

The sense of 'guilt' has evolved through several momentous and fateful events in history. In its initial expression it is to be viewed 'as a piece of

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

animal psychology, no more . . . ' (*GM*, III, 20). In the earliest societies, a person is held answerable for his deeds and obliged to honour his debts. In the course of history this material sense of obligation is increasingly subject to moralization, reaching its summit with guilt before the Christian God. In the Third Essay, the ascetic priest comes into his own. Nietzsche had introduced the 'priests' into his account in the First Essay as a faction of the ruling class of 'masters', who distinguish themselves from the other masters by an extreme concern for purity (*GM*, I, 6–7). Originally, this concern is no more than a variant of the superiority of the master-caste as a whole over the slaves: the priests are masters and thus can afford to wash, wear clean clothes, avoid certain malodorous or unhealthy foods, etc. Slaves have no such luxury. Priestly purity, however, has a dangerous tendency to develop into more and more extreme and more and more internalized forms. Priests become expert in asceticism, and in dealing with all forms of human suffering. It is in the hands of the priest, an artist in feelings of guilt, Nietzsche says, that guilt assumes form and shape: "Sin" – for that is the name for the priestly reinterpretation of the animal "bad conscience" . . . – has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul up till now: with sin we have the most dangerous and disastrous trick of religious interpretation' (*GM*, III, 20). The value of the priestly type of existence, says Nietzsche, lies in the fact that it succeeds in changing the direction of *ressentiment* (*GM*, III, 15).

In the First Essay, we saw the slaves in the grip of a creative *ressentiment* directed against the masters which could be expressed in the following terms: they – the masters – are 'evil', whereas we are not-evil (therefore, good). Important as the invention of the concept of 'evil' is historically, in itself it does not yet solve the slaves' problem. In fact, in some ways it makes it more acute: If we are good, why do we suffer? The correct answer to this question, Nietzsche believes, is that the slaves suffer because they are inherently weak, and it is simply a biological fact that some humans are much weaker than others, either by nature or as a result of unfortunate circumstances. This answer, however, is one no slave can be expected to tolerate because it seems to make his situation hopeless and irremediable, which, in fact, Nietzsche thinks it is. Humans can bear suffering; what they cannot bear is seemingly senseless suffering, and this is what the slaves' suffering is. It has no meaning, it is a mere brute fact. The priests' intervention consists in giving the slaves a way of interpreting their suffering which at least allows them to make some sense of it. 'You slaves are suffering', so runs the priestly account, 'because you are evil'. The *ressentiment* that was

Introduction

directed at the masters is now turned by the slaves on themselves. The sick, suffering slave becomes a 'sinner'. In addition to this diagnosis of the cause of suffering, the priests also have a proposed therapy. Since 'evil' designates the kind of intense vitality the masters exhibit in their lives, the way to escape it is to engage in a progressive spiral of forms of life-abnegation and self-denial. In the long run, this therapy makes the original 'disease' – the suffering that results from human weakness – worse, but in the short run of 2,000 years or so, it has mobilized what energy the slaves command in the service of creating what we know as Western culture.

The 'healing instinct of life' operates through the priest, in which ideas of guilt, sin, damnation, and so on, serve 'to make the sick *harmless* to a degree', and the instincts of the sufferer are exploited 'for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming' (*GM*, III, 16). The priests' remedy for human suffering is the ascetic ideal, the ideal of a human will turned utterly against itself, or self-abnegation *for its own sake*. Such an ideal seems to express a self-contradiction in as much as we seem to encounter with it life operating against life. Nietzsche argues, however, that viewed from physiological and psychological angles this amounts to nonsense. In section 13 of the Third Essay he suggests that, on closer examination, the self-contradiction turns out to be only apparent, it is 'a psychological misunderstanding of something, the real nature of which was far from being understood . . .'. His argument is that the ascetic ideal has its source or origins in what he calls 'the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life'. The ideal indicates a partial physiological exhaustion, in the face of which 'the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with new methods and inventions'. The ascetic ideal amounts, in effect, to a trick or artifice (*Kunstgriff*) for the preservation of life. The interpretation of suffering developed by the ascetic ideal for a long time now has succeeded in shutting the door on a suicidal nihilism by giving humanity a goal: morality. The ideal has added new dimensions and layers to suffering by making it deeper and more internal, creating a suffering that gnaws more intensely at life and bringing it within the perspective of metaphysical-moral guilt. But this saving of the will has been won at the expense of the future and fostered a hatred of the conditions of human existence. It expresses a 'fear of happiness and beauty' and 'a longing to get away from appearance, transience, growth, death'.

The real problem, according to Nietzsche, is not the past, not even Christianity, but present-day Christian-moral Europe. 'After such vistas

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

and with such a burning hunger in our conscience and science', he writes in an aphorism on the great health, 'how could we still be satisfied with *present-day man*?' (GS, 382). We live in an age in which the desire for man and his future – a future beyond mere self-preservation, security and comfort – seems to be disappearing from the face of the earth. Modern atheists who have emancipated themselves from the affliction of past errors – the error of God, of the world conceived as a unity, of free will, and so on – have only freed themselves from something and not for something. They either believe in nothing at all or have a blind commitment to science and uphold the unconditional nature of the will to truth. By contrast, Nietzsche commits himself to the '*supreme affirmation*' that is born out of fullness, and this is 'an affirmation without reservation even of suffering, even of guilt, even of all that is strange and questionable in existence'. Nietzsche stresses that this 'Yes to life' is both the highest and deepest insight that is 'confirmed and maintained by truth and knowledge' (EH 'BT', 2). It is not, then, a simple-minded, pre-cognitive 'Yes' to life that he wants us to practise, but one, as he stresses, secured by 'truth and knowledge'. The 'free spirit' knows what kind of 'you shall' he has obeyed, Nietzsche writes; and in so doing, 'he also knows what he now *can*, what only now he – *may* do . . .' (HH, Preface).

Nietzsche and political thought

Nietzsche's political thinking remains a source of difficulty, even embarrassment, because it fails to accord with the standard liberal ways of thinking about politics which have prevailed in the last 200 and more years. As in liberalism, Nietzsche's conception of politics is an instrumental one, but he differs radically from the liberal view in his valuation of life. For liberalism, politics is a means to the peaceful coexistence of individual agents; for Nietzsche, by contrast, it is a means to the production of human greatness. Nietzsche challenges what we might call the ontological assumptions that inform the positing of the liberal subject, chiefly that its identity is largely imaginary because it is posited only at the expense of neglecting the cultural and historical formation of the subject. The liberal formulation of the subject assumes individual identity and liberty to be a given, in which the individual exists independently of the mediations of culture and history and outside the medium of ethical contest and spiritual labour. Nietzsche is committed to the enhancement of man and this enhancement does not consist in

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 978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
 Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Introduction

improving the conditions of existence for the majority of human beings, but in the generation of a few, striking and superlatively vital ‘highest exemplars’ of the species. Nietzsche looks forward to new philosophers who will be strong and original enough to revalue and reverse so-called ‘eternal values’ and, in teaching human beings that the future depends on their will, ‘will prepare the way for great risk-taking and joint experiments in discipline and breeding’, and in this way, ‘put an end to that terrible reign of nonsense and coincidence that until now has been known as “history”’ (*BGE*, 203).

In the two early essays from 1871–2 included in this volume, ‘The Greek State’ and ‘Homer’s Contest’, we see at work the stress Nietzsche places on political life not as an end in itself but as a means to the production of great human beings and an aristocratic culture. Nietzsche presents a stark choice between ‘culture’ and ‘politics’ (or the claims of justice). He argues that if we wish to promote greatness and serve the ends of culture, then it is necessary to recognize that an essential aspect of society is economic servitude for the majority of individuals. We must not let the ‘urge for justice . . . swamp all other ideas’; or, as Nietzsche memorably puts it, the ‘cry of compassion’ must not be allowed to tear down the ‘walls of culture’.

When Nietzsche took up his teaching appointment at Basel University, he sought to make a contribution to the so-called ‘Homeric question’ which was centred on issues about the authenticity, authorship and significance of the works ascribed to ‘Homer’. He addressed the topic in his inaugural lecture given in 1869, which was entitled ‘Homer and Classical Philology’ (originally conceived as an essay on ‘Homer’s Personality’). He comments upon the significance of the Greek *agon* (contest) in research he had done on a neglected (and maligned) Florentine manuscript on an imaginary contest between Homer and Hesiod (the first part of this research was published in 1870 and a second part in 1873).⁴ An exploration of what constitutes the kernel of the Hellenic idea of the contest (*agon, certamen*) becomes the major concern of Nietzsche’s speculations on the ‘event’ of Homer in the unpublished essay ‘Homer’s Contest’ that we publish here. Two points are worth noting about this research work by the young Nietzsche: first, that it is an early exercise in genealogy in the sense that it focuses on what it means to reclaim something from the past – in

⁴ See Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1967 ff.), 2.1, pp. 271–339.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-87123-5 - On the Genealogy of Morality
Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

On Nietzsche's critique of morality

this case antiquity – for the present, and, second, that the motif of the contest is one that persists in Nietzsche and runs throughout his writings.

Nietzsche's positions on ethics and politics may not ultimately compel us but they are more instructive than is commonly supposed, and certainly not as horrific as many of his critics would have us believe.⁵ He is out to disturb our satisfaction with ourselves as moderns and as knowers. Although we may find it difficult to stomach some of his specific proposals for the overcoming of man and morality, his conception of genealogy has become a constitutive feature of our efforts at self-knowledge.

⁵ See the fine study by John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Chronology

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| 1844 | 15 October: Nietzsche born in Röcken, a Prussian province of Saxony south west of Leipzig, the son of pastor Karl Ludwig Nietzsche. |
| 1849 | 30 July: Death of father. |
| 1858 | Nietzsche enters the Gymnasium Schulpforta near Naumburg, Germany's renowned Protestant boarding-school. |
| 1864 | October: Nietzsche enters the University of Bonn as a student of theology and classical philology. |
| 1865 | October: Nietzsche follows his philology lecturer at Bonn, F. W. Ritschl, to Leipzig as a student. He comes across the work of Schopenhauer in a Leipzig bookshop. |
| 1868 | 8 November: Nietzsche has his first meeting with Richard Wagner in Leipzig. |
| 1869 | February: On the recommendation of Ritschl, Nietzsche, who had not yet completed his doctorate, is appointed Extraordinary Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Basel. 17 May: Nietzsche's first visit to Wagner and Cosima (von Bülow) at Tribschen. 28 May: Inaugural lecture at Basel on 'Homer and Classical Philology'. |
| 1870 | August: Nietzsche volunteers as a nursing orderly in the Franco-Prussian War, but owing to illness returns to Basel after two months. |