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978-1-107-14851-2 — Nietzsche: On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings

Friedrich Nietzsche, Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, Translated by Carol Diethe

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NIETZSCHE  
*'On the Genealogy of Morality'*  
*and Other Writings*

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. First published in 1994, and revised in 2006, the 2017 edition of this best-selling, concise introduction and translation has been revised and updated throughout, to take account of recent scholarship. Featuring an expanded introduction, an updated bibliography and guide to further reading, the third edition also includes timelines and biographical synopses. The Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edition of Nietzsche's major work is an essential resource for both undergraduate and graduate courses on Nietzsche, the history of philosophy, continental philosophy, history of political thought and ethics.

KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warwick.

CAROL DIETHE was formerly a Reader at Middlesex University.

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NIETZSCHE

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of Morality’ and  
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KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON

*University of Warwick*

CAROL DIETHE  
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE



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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.

This third, revised edition features a new introduction by the editor and an updated guide to further reading. The translation has been further modified in an effort to present the reader with a more accurate

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## Introduction

### Introduction

Although it has come to be prized by many commentators as one of his most important texts, Nietzsche conceived *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) as a ‘small polemical pamphlet’ that might help him sell more copies of his earlier writings.<sup>1</sup> 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. For shock value no other modern text on the human condition rivals it. 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): ‘There is so much in man that is horrifying! . . . The world has been a madhouse for too long!’ (*GM* II, 22). Indeed, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche discloses that an ‘art of surprise’ guides each of the three essays that make up the book and admits that they merit being taken as among the ‘uncanniest’ things ever scripted.

Nietzsche intended *On the Genealogy of Morality* as a ‘supplement’ and ‘clarification’ to his previous book, *Beyond Good and Evil*. That book, which has the sub-title ‘Prelude to a philosophy of the future’, is said by Nietzsche to be ‘in all essentials’ a critique of modernity that includes within its range of attack modern science, modern art and

<sup>1</sup> 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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modern politics. Where the vision of the previous text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was that of distant things, the vision of *Beyond Good and Evil* is focused sharply on the modern age, on 'what is around us'. However, Nietzsche holds the two projects and tasks to be intimately related: 'In every aspect of the book', he writes in *Ecce Homo*, 'above all in its form, one will discover the same wilful turning away from the instincts out of which a Zarathustra becomes possible'. 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 (*GM* III, 19). Our modern thinking about morals and politics is characterized by a 'moral sugariness and falsity' and by 'feminism' and 'idealism' (*ibid.*). We find it hard to encounter and stomach 'a single truth "about humanity"!' (*ibid.*). For Nietzsche nihilism stems from the fact that the sight of the human animal now makes us tired (*GM* I, 12; see also III, 14).

With the texts *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche set out to present readers with a set of uncomfortable insights. They include the following: what we call 'high culture' is based on a deepening and spiritualization of cruelty – European man has not killed off the 'wild beast' (*BGE* 229); what we take to be 'spirit' or 'mind', as that which distinguishes the human animal from the rest of nature, is the product of a long constraint, involving much violence, arbitrariness and nonsense (*BGE* 188); 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); the democratic movement is a decadent form of political organization (*BGE* 203); and the enhancement of the type 'human being' can only be achieved by a society that believes in a hierarchical order and in differences in value between people (*BGE* 257). The European morality that Nietzsche takes to task is at work for him in various articulations, including the demand for equal rights, the estimation accorded to unegoistic instincts such as compassion (*Mitleid*),

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self-denial and self-sacrifice and the utilitarian principle of the happiness of the greatest number. He wishes to challenge the assumption that there is a single morality valid for all (*BGE* 228). Nietzsche regards ‘morality’ as the ‘danger of dangers’ on account of the fact that, as he sees it, its prejudices contribute to the situation in which the present is lived 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.*).

Nietzsche is seeking to make a contribution to the science of morality that he thought was at a clumsy and crude state of development. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he contends that almost all moral philosophy is ‘boring and belongs among the sedatives’ (*BGE* 228). There is no thinker in Europe, he further contends, who is prepared to entertain the idea that moral reflection can be carried out in a dangerous and seductive manner, ‘that it might involve one’s *fate!*’ (*BGE* 228). Nietzsche argues that in their attempts to account for morality philosophers have not developed the suspicion that morality might be ‘something 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). Nietzsche seeks to develop a new critical approach to morality, in which all kinds of novel, surprising and daring questions are posed. He sets out to uncover *the different senses* of morality, that is the different meanings morality has acquired in the history of human development. His attempt at a critique involves developing a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances under which values emerged, and this will give us an appreciation of the different senses of morality: as symptom, as mask, as sickness, as stimulant, as poison and so on. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche is also keen to draw our attention to the importance of a pre-history of the human animal, the period he calls ‘the morality of custom’ that pre-dates what we call ‘world history’ and that for him is to be regarded as the ‘decisive historical period’ which has determined the character of man (*GM* III, 9; see also *GM* II, 1–2, 9, 19; *Daybreak*, 9, 18, pp. 137–9, 141–2, here).

Nietzsche’s contribution to a science of morality is twofold: he seeks to advance the project of a ‘natural history’ of morals – this is the title of Chapter 5 of *Beyond Good and Evil* – and he radicalizes the significance of a ‘genealogy’ of morality. Nietzsche’s approach has had a seminal influence on some important developments in the thought of the post-Second World

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War period, including the work of Michel Foucault (1926–84), for example, and we might suppose that Nietzsche can be taken as the originator of the genealogical approach. This would be an error, however. Nietzsche saw himself as contributing to an approach to morality that was already well established. W. E. H. Lecky's *History of European Morals*, first published in two volumes in 1869, opens with a chapter on the 'natural history of morals';<sup>2</sup> and in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche makes it clear on several occasions that certain psychologists and moralists have been doing something we can call 'genealogy' (see, for example, *GM* I, 2 and II, 4, 12 – the latter is the key methodological section of the book). He holds, however, that these researchers have not been carrying out a genuinely historical inquiry or engaging in what he calls 'real history', which is focused on that '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). Such a history will show the human being to be a far stranger animal than we moderns could ever suppose. In addition, an examination of the books of moral genealogists would show, ultimately, that they all take morality to be something given and place it beyond questioning.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche's emphasis is on fundamental transformations, on important pre-historic events and processes and on psychological innovations and moral inventions that emerge in specific material and cultural contexts.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche describes the *Genealogy* as consisting of 'three decisive preliminary studies by a psychologist for a re-evaluation of values'. The First Essay probes the 'psychology of Christianity' and

<sup>2</sup> For references to Lecky in Nietzsche see *Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), Volume 9, p. 473 and Volume 10, p. 240, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> Hume, for example, writes: 'Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with materials, from which we may form our observations and become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behaviour', *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (posthumous 1777 edition), Section 8. David C. Hoy has noted that, as a way of doing 'nonmetaphysical philosophy', Nietzsche's exercise in genealogy has affinities with Hume's experimental mode of reasoning and that Nietzsche's inquiries, in spite of his professions otherwise, are no less psychologically speculative than Hume's. See his essay 'Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method', in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 251–69. For a recent examination of Nietzsche and Hume, both as genealogists, see Peter Kail, 'Hume and Nietzsche', in Paul Russell (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hume* (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 755–77.

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traces the birth of Christianity not out of the ‘spirit’ *per se* but out of a particular kind of spirit, namely, of *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.<sup>4</sup> 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 on account of the fact that to date it has been the only ideal; it has been without a competitor, no counter-ideal has been made available ‘*until the advent of Zarathustra*’. Man has been led to will ‘nothingness’ rather than not will at all, but all of this changes with the appearance of the figure of Zarathustra. He further tells us that each of the three essays that make up the book contains a beginning that is calculated to mislead, which intentionally ‘keeps in suspense’; this is followed by disquiet, ‘isolated flashes of lightning’, with ‘very unpleasant truths’ making themselves audible ‘as a dull rumbling in the distance’; then, at the conclusion of each essay, and ‘amid dreadful detonations’, ‘a *new* truth’ becomes ‘visible between thick clouds’. Each essay begins coolly and scientifically, even ironically, but at the end of each a reckoning is called for, and this demand concerns the future. At the very end of the First Essay, for example, Nietzsche says that questions concerning the worth of morals and different tables of value can be asked from different angles, and he singles out the question ‘value *for what?*’ as being of special significance. The task of the different sciences of knowledge is to ‘prepare the way for the future work of the philosopher’, which consists of solving the ‘problem of values’ and deciding on their hierarchy. He advises that we need to transform the ‘suspicious relationship’ that has hitherto been posited between philosophy, physiology and medicine ‘into the most cordial and fruitful exchange’ (I, 17 note). At the end of the Second Essay Nietzsche appeals to ‘the man of the future’ who will redeem humanity from the curse of its reigning ideal and from all those things that arise from it, notably nihilism and the will to

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche’s counter-ideal is that of a new spirit (see *GS* 382 and the discussion of the type Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo*). In *GM* Nietzsche counsels us to liberate ourselves from the hold the ascetic ideal has over us by becoming comedians of it. For the present this is our only option, he suggests (see *GM* III, 27).

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nothingness (II, 24). In the penultimate section of the Third Essay Nietzsche hints at a new direction for the 'will to truth', arguing that as this will becomes 'conscious of itself as a problem in us' there will follow the destruction of Christian morality, and this is a 'drama' that will be 'the most terrible and questionable' but also 'the one most rich in hope' (III, 27). Moreover, a new will for man is to be uncovered and posited in an effort to sublimate the principal ideal that has hitherto reigned on earth (III, 28). All of this should indicate to us that Nietzsche's critique of morality, as well as his inquiry into the human being and its moral past, is developed from a specific but curious place: it is what he calls 'a pre-mature-born' and as yet 'undemonstrated future' (*The Gay Science* 382; see also *Ecce Homo*, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', 2).

## Nietzsche and the 'English Psychologists'

Nietzsche begins the *Genealogy* 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).<sup>5</sup> 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 mechanical association of ideas. Although Nietzsche has affinities with the empiricist mode of philosophizing he is highly critical of British empiricism. In the attempt of 'English psychologists' to show the real mechanisms of the

<sup>5</sup> By the 'English psychologists' Nietzsche is referring to a broad range of work, having in mind seminal nineteenth-century thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and the work of the associationist school of psychology. In the preface to *GM* he also refers to the work of his former friend Paul Rée as belonging to the English school. In his *Data of Ethics* (1879) Spencer understands the subject matter of ethics to be the form that 'universal conduct' assumes in the last stages of evolution (for example, the transition from 'militant' to 'industrial' existence), especially the values of co-operation and mutual aid. Nietzsche makes an important reference to Spencer's text in Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 11, p. 525. For insight into Nietzsche's critical reception of Spencer see Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 62–72. For insight into Nietzsche's difference from Rée see Christopher Janaway, 'Naturalism and Genealogy' in Keith Ansell-Pearson, *A Companion to Nietzsche*, pp. 337–53. For further insight into the identity of the 'English psychologists' in Nietzsche see David S. Thatcher, 'Zur Genealogie der Moral: Some Textual Annotations', *Nietzsche-Studien*, 18 (1989), pp. 587–99.

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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). At the end of Section 4 of the First Essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche speaks of the ‘famous case’ of Thomas Henry Buckle (1821–62), a Victorian historian of civilization, and claims that the ‘*plebeianism* of the modern spirit’ begins in England. This links up with the criticisms he makes in Section 253 of *Beyond Good and Evil* of ‘respectable, but mediocre Englishmen’, such as the likes of Darwin, Spencer and John Stuart Mill. What the ‘English’ essentially lack, according to Nietzsche, is ‘spiritual vision of real *depth* – in short, philosophy’. This is why he thinks, shockingly, that the likes of Hobbes, Hume and Locke represent a ‘devaluation of the concept “philosopher”’ (*BGE* 252).

Nietzsche refers to the ‘English’ historians of morality in Section 345 of *The Gay Science* and spells out what he sees as their fundamental mistake, chiefly that their inquiries do not go deep enough and the problem of the ‘value’ of morality is not raised by them (see also *GM* preface, 5). 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, and he insists that a history of moral systems and values is quite different from the act and performance of critique. Instead the ‘popular superstition of Christian Europe’ that selflessness and compassion are what is characteristic of morality is maintained and endorsed. Nietzsche stresses that our growing realization that morality has grown out of ‘error’ does not begin to touch on the real problem, which is morality’s value. He then speaks of morality as ‘that most famous of all medicines’. This approach to morality governs his thinking about it in the late period. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for example, he states that he will treat morality as ‘merely sign language, merely symptomatology’ (*TI* VII. 1). Morality, then, is a semiotics (in the original, medical sense of the word), a surface phenomenon that requires meta-level interpretation in accordance with a different, superior set of extra-moral values ‘beyond good and evil’.

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In the first two essays of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche sets out to challenge the prevalence of certain reactive understandings of notions of subjectivity and of law and justice, and in both cases he takes to task those he calls 'moral genealogists'. In the First Essay he aims to show that a set of modern prejudices has determined our thinking on the origins of the notions of good and bad, for example, the view that the value judgment 'good' originates in those to whom goodness is shown, which gives it a quality of usefulness. Nietzsche argues that this deduction contains the typical traits of 'idiosyncratic English psychologists', such as forgetting, routine, utility and error (I, 2). Nietzsche counters this view by arguing that the 'real breeding-ground' for the notion 'good' is to be located in the 'pathos of distance' by which the noble and powerful consider and judge themselves and their actions as good, in contrast to everything they consider to be lowly and plebeian. The idea that the word 'good' is necessarily attached to so-called unegoistic actions is a piece of superstition on the part of our moral genealogists. Nietzsche had first introduced a typology of master and slave moralities in his work in Section 45 of Volume I of *Human, All too Human* (1878). He takes it up again in Section 260 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, and it governs the analysis in the first inquiry of the *Genealogy*. The typology is designed to characterize distinct psychological modes of agency that first arise out of political distinctions between social classes. He makes it clear that what interests him about an aristocratic code of morality is not so much the political power a ruling class wields but the typical character traits by which it defines and affirms itself (I, 16). Modern Europeans are the product of both types of morality. In all higher and mixed cultures, he argues, there are attempts at mediation between the two. The discrimination of values has arisen either amongst the powerful, the rulers, or amongst the ruled (*BGE* 260). In the first case, the possession of a consciousness of difference results in feelings of delight and pride. The nobles have a consciousness of wealth that seeks to give and bestow. By contrast, the slave type of morality, which characterizes the oppressed and those who suffer from life and seek a metaphysical solution to the problem of suffering, results in a pessimistic suspicion about the whole human condition. The eye of the 'slave' and the weak person turns unfavourably towards the virtues of the powerful; they value those qualities that will serve the needs of their existence, such as pity, patience, industry and humility (*BGE* 260). Nietzsche contends that moral designations were first applied to human beings and only later, and derivatively, to actions.

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A master morality, he states, is alien to the modern world and hard to empathize with today, even harder “to dig up and uncover” (ibid.). And yet it is from these sources that our moral feelings and values have developed. By placing *ressentiment*, as opposed to natural sympathy, at the origins of morality in the First Essay of *GM* Nietzsche has called into question the universal status that the moral genealogists accord to the so-called ‘moral sense’.

Although Nietzsche wishes to promote the search for ‘ungodly’ and ‘immoral’ truths, he does not subscribe to the philosophical outlook of the English psychologists, including their mechanistic bias; and although for him there is no rational logic informing history or concealed in what happens, he does hold to the view that ‘life’ – and not just human life – is characterized by ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’, which is rooted in a drive for growth and expansion, a need for interpretation and assimilation, and that involves the spontaneous activity of form-shaping forces. 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 of highlighting some purpose to punishment, for example, and then placing this purpose at the start. His fundamental claim, one that guides the methodology of his own contribution to the genealogy of morality and 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 widespread but naïve assumption 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 is made 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 chance and contingent factors within evolution, be it the evolution of a tradition or an organ. This aspect of his argument has impressed both contemporary philosophers and evolutionary theorists.<sup>6</sup> However, his further claim that ‘every purpose and use is just a *sign*

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (Middlesex, UK: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1995), pp. 461–7; and Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 1214–18.



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that the will to power' is in operation in historical change has not found favour with the same theorists. This is because, like other accounts of evolution in the history of modern thought that appeal to a vital and inner, formative force, it is seen as relying upon an extravagant metaphysics.

Nietzsche is drawn to the theory of the will to power for a number of reasons. In the *Genealogy* he shows a strong commitment to reforming the sciences. He wants the seminal role played by the 'active emotions' to be appreciated (*GM* II, 11), and he calls for the natural sciences to resist the 'democratic bias' which, in his view, has had a ruinous effect on inquiries into human descent and the human past (*GM* I, 4). We suffer from the 'democratic idiosyncrasy' that opposes in principle everything that dominates and wants to dominate (*GM* II, 12). Contra 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). He contends that the will to power is the "*original fact*" of all history' (*BGE* 259). The theory is without doubt the most problematic concept of Nietzsche's mature thought, and it continues to be the subject of considerable dispute amongst commentators.

## Bad Conscience

In the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche outlines a 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. He is also concerned with how a Christian-moral culture has cultivated a type of bad conscience in which feelings of debt and guilt cannot be relieved.

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This is because the bad conscience becomes attached to a set of sublime metaphysical fictions, such as eternal punishment and original sin, in which release is inconceivable. For Nietzsche the sense of ‘guilt’ has evolved through several momentous and fateful events in history. In the earliest societies a person is answerable for their deeds and there is an obligation to honoring debts. In the course of history this material sense of obligation has been subject to increasing moralization and reaches its summit with guilt before the Christian God. Now a person is answerable for their very existence, regardless of any of its actual conditions.<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche opens the essay by reflecting on a paradox of nature, namely, the task of breeding an animal that has the prerogative to make promises and so exists as a creature of time (a creature that can calculate and compute). This requires the formation of memory. This is not a memory of traces, since the memory in question is not a function of the past but of the future; it is, in fact a memory of words and of the will: ‘Remembering the promise that has been made is not recalling that it was made at a particular past moment, but that one must hold to it at a future moment. This is precisely the selective object of culture . . . The faculty of promising is the effect of culture as the activity of man on man; the man who can promise is the product of culture as species activity.’<sup>8</sup> For this cultivation of memory 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 (according to our schema of thought or representation), and to think causally in which it has a conception of the future and can anticipate it. 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 that can make promises requires a labour by which man is made into something ‘regular, reliable, and uniform’. This has been achieved by what Nietzsche calls the ‘morality

<sup>7</sup> One of the places in his writings where Nietzsche takes to task the idea that a person is responsible ‘for simply being there, for being made in such a way, for existing under such conditions, and in such surroundings’, and offers an alternative teaching, is Section 8 of ‘The Four Great Errors’ in *Twilight of the Idols*. See also his definition of freedom as ‘having the will to be responsible to oneself’ in Section 38 of ‘Reconnaissance Raids of an Untimely Man’ in the same book.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983), p. 134.

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of custom' (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*) and the 'social straitjacket'. 'Culture', he stresses, means 'learning to *calculate*, learning to think causally, learning to act preventively, learning to believe in regularity' (*WP* 1019). 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 discipline 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 fruit of this labour of *Kultur* 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

Only in Section 4 does the main question of the essay get addressed and opened up. It is a key section for understanding the nature of Nietzsche's attack on the moral genealogists. Because they are so caught up in 'merely "modern" experience' these genealogists lack knowledge and have 'no will to know the past, still less an instinct for history'. Nietzsche draws 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*). Throughout most of human history punishment has been meted out not because the miscreant was deemed to be responsible for his act, but rather because the idea took root that there was an equivalence between injury and pain, and this has its basis in the original economic relationships set up by human beings, notably the creditor-debtor relationship, and the basic forms of social activity, such as bartering, trading, trafficking, buying and selling. It is in

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche is a forceful critic of the notion of freedom of the will when it is couched in metaphysical terms and language, for example, posited as a miraculous *causa sui* in which the self is dragged by its hair out of the 'swamp of nothingness and into existence'. See *Beyond Good and Evil* Section 21, and also 'The Four Great Errors', Section 7 in *Twilight of the Idols* and I, 13 of the *Genealogy*. In other contexts, however, such as *GM* II, 2 and a few other places such as *GS* 347, Nietzsche is quite happy to assume that the notion is not completely devoid of legitimacy. For further insight see Randall Havas, *Nietzsche's Genealogy: Nihilism and the Will to Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 139ff.

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the context of contractual relationships, Nietzsche stresses, that promises are made. Sovereign individuals are required in order for there to be well-functioning social practices. The debtor will pawn something to the creditor as a way of impressing himself as a good debtor; at the same time the creditor is entitled to inflict all kinds of dishonour and torture on the body of the debtor; for example, ‘cutting off as much flesh as seemed appropriate for the debt’. Pleasure is taken in the cruelty inflicted on the debtor, and this is part of the compensation and enjoyment of the right to exercise power. This particular and curious experience of pleasure also becomes a spectacle for the community or society and gives it a festive aspect. Ancient societies are not humanized in their basic modes of thinking and moralization plays little part, if any, in their cultural practices.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche goes on to stress that it is in this sphere of legal obligations that we find the breeding-ground of the ‘moral conceptual world’ of guilt, conscience and duty (Section 6). The feeling of obligation, the sense of ‘guilt’, is linked to suffering. He is keen to combat the pessimistic view of life and of the human animal that might arise from these insights into suffering and cruelty. It is too easy for us, he suggests, to feel ashamed of our instincts. Instead we need to appreciate the formative role they have played in the development of human culture. He notes that what is most perturbing about suffering is not the fact that it appears to be an ineradicable feature of our being, but rather that human beings have a deep need to find a meaning in it, to the point where, in the words of one commentator, we ‘invent or accept the most ludicrous fantasies’, such as the doctrine of original sin, the theory of the transmigration of souls and the ascription of demonic wills to imaginary gods.<sup>11</sup>

Nietzsche returns to the main theme of the essay in Section 8: what are the origins and sources of the feeling of personal obligation conceived as a basic sense of debt or guilt? He re-iterates the importance of understanding the economic basis of human life – he points out that our word ‘man’ (*manas*) denotes a being that values, measures and calculates – and turns his attention to understanding the emergence of the institution of justice, which involves ‘equity’, ‘good will’ and ‘objectivity’. Justice in these terms

<sup>10</sup> See also Nietzsche’s treatment of cruelty in *Daybreak* 18 (pp. 141–2), where he notes that cruelty ‘is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind’, and that ‘to practice cruelty is to enjoy the highest gratification of the feeling of power’. See also *D* 113 (pp. 146–8).

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 111.

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can only arise when a level of generalization has been attained in the human mind, which then leads to the basic canon of morals being set up, such as that everything has its price and everything can be compensated for. For Nietzsche this is pre-history and establishes the basic relationship between the community and the individual, that of creditor and debtor. Here we get an early sense of punishment: the lawbreaker is the debtor who not only fails to appreciate the benefits that being a member of his community confers on him, he challenges the superior authority of the community and thus needs to be reminded of these benefits. As a community grows in power and becomes more confident it refines its institutions and finds, for example, that it is able to practice mercy, which can be understood as a 'self-sublimation' of morality. Nietzsche contests the idea that the origins of justice lie in *ressentiment*. He thinks this is a modern distortion – shared by anarchists and anti-Semites, he says – in which justice is equated with revenge (see also III, 14). For Nietzsche this overlooks the fact that justice is an attempt to impose measure on the reactive emotions, and so put an end to the 'senseless raging of *ressentiment* among the weaker powers' (II, 11). Justice requires a 'clear eye', a healthy or good conscience; the resentful person who has a thirst for revenge and destruction cannot practice it. He goes further and stresses the fact that notions of 'just' and 'unjust' have no real meaning except in the context of social relations and communal life. Life, he says, simply is injurious, violent and exploitative. A system of law should, therefore, operate essentially as a means of use in the fight between units of power. It becomes a menacing force when it aims to put an end to all competition between the different powers in society. At this point law and the state become enemies of life, they are 'a sign of fatigue and a secret path to nothingness' (II, 11).

Nietzsche considers the question whether, on account of the fact that one of the benefits of punishment is seen to be the arousal of guilt in the guilty party, the origins of the bad conscience can be found here, operating as the 'actual instrument' of the mental reflex we associate with it. He is not happy with this view and argues that it violates 'psychology', including that of pre-historical man. He gives the example of criminals who experience no remorse or pangs of conscience, and notes that punishment often serves to sharpen the feeling of alienation and to strengthen the power to resist. He argues that bad conscience, which he now describes as 'the most uncanny and most interesting plant of our earthly vegetation', did not grow on this soil of guilt.

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It is in Section 16 that Nietzsche advances, albeit in a preliminary fashion, his own theory on the origin of 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 takes place when man finds himself ‘imprisoned within the confines of society and peace’ (II, 16). On the one hand, Nietzsche approaches the bad conscience as ‘the worst and most insidious illness’ that could come into being and as a sickness 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 a momentous event and a spectacle too interesting ‘to be played senselessly unobserved on some ridiculous planet’. In Section 17 Nietzsche states the two main presuppositions of his theory. First, this fundamental change in man was neither a gradual nor a voluntary one; rather, it was ‘a breach, a leap, a compulsion, a fate’ that nothing could ward off, and it involved neither struggle nor *ressentiment*. Second, the formation of a shapeless population into a stable character can only take place through acts of tremendous violence, and thus the oldest state emerges ‘as a repressive and ruthless’ machine of tyranny. Nietzsche imagines a pack of ‘blond beasts of prey’, a ‘conqueror and master race’ that has this ‘power to organize’ and that takes over a shifting populace. Although these beasts of prey are not those in whom bad conscience grows – guilt or responsibility play no part in their mental machinery – the ‘ugly growth’ would not come into existence and assume the form it does without them. This is because they compel the ‘instinct of freedom’ (the will to power) into a state of repression where, ‘incarcerated within itself’, it is now only able to discharge itself against itself. In Section 18 Nietzsche observes that although it represents a painful 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 into the light. Nietzsche also notes that the will to self-violation that is active in bad conscience provides the precondition for the valuation of the unegoistic. This is because the human beings who have been shaped and repressed develop an attachment to ascetic ideals of self-denial and self-sacrifice and take pleasure in the cruelty they must inflict on themselves to be faithful to them.

Nietzsche next turns his attention to discussing later evolutions of bad conscience. In the course of history this illness or sickness has

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reached a terrible and sublime peak. In pre-history, he argues, the creditor–debtor relationship works in terms of a tribal community expressing thanks to earlier generations. Eventually the ancestor is turned into a god and associated with the feeling of fear (the birth of superstition). Christianity cultivates further this sense of debt and does so in terms of a truly monstrous level of sublime feeling: ‘The advent of the Christian God as the maximal god yet achieved, thus also brought about the appearance of the greatest feeling of indebtedness on earth’ (Section 20). At the end of this section Nietzsche asks whether as a result of the decline of faith in the Christian God, and the atheism it gives rise to, we will now see a release of human beings from guilty indebtedness, so giving us the feeling of now living a ‘second innocence’. The problem with this supposition is that it underestimates the extent to which the concepts of guilt and duty have become deeply moralized. Nietzsche argues that the facts speak against a release from guilt taking place when the fundamental premise – belief in the creditor God – no longer applies. This is because any thought of a final payment ‘*is to be* foreclosed’, and this reflects the fact that a terrifying pessimism has taken hold of man’s psyche. The idea has been cultivated that the debtor (man) can never pay off the debt, and so his punishment will be eternal. Even the idea of God as creditor sacrificing himself for the guilt of man in the form of Christ does not produce human liberation, but only serves to intensify the debtor’s feeling of guilt. The ultimate creditor has been conceived in various ways: as the ‘cause’ of man and the beginning of the human race, or as nature, the womb from which man comes into being and that is viewed as diabolical, or even existence in general which has come to be viewed as ‘inherently worthless’ and from which the will seeks escape into nothingness, giving expression to a ‘nihilistic turning-away from existence’. Atheistic philosophers such as Schopenhauer continue to think under the grip of a Christian metaphysics by holding existence itself to be guilty. The essential development has taken place in terms of the human being of bad conscience seizing on religious precepts and carrying out self-abasement with a ‘horrific hardness’: ‘Alas for this crazy, pathetic beast man! What ideas he has, what perversity, what hysterical nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* immediately erupts, the moment he is prevented, if only gently, from being a *beast in deed!*’ (II, 22). Although Nietzsche finds this development highly interesting, he also sees in it ‘a black, gloomy, unnerving sadness’. In the case of Christianity we have a ‘madness of the will showing itself

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in mental cruelty which is absolutely unparalleled'. In Section 23, Nietzsche makes reference to the Greeks in order to indicate that there are 'nobler ways' of using the invention of gods than human self-abuse. Although the Greeks must have had a type of bad conscience, they sought to keep it at bay as a way of enjoying their spiritual freedom. Acts of transgression were viewed by them not as sinful but as merely foolish.

The Second Essay ends on a note of redemption. In contrast to the English word, which suggests the payment of a debt, the German word for redemption (*Erlösung*) means a setting free.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche's line of thought at this point in the text is highly intricate, and the 'over-human' future he now appeals to does not entail a simple-minded release from the kind of creatures we have become. He notes that 'we moderns' are the inheritors of centuries-long 'conscience-vivisection and animal-torture'. Indeed, we have become so refined at such vivisection and torture that we can fairly consider ourselves to be 'artists in the field'. Our natural inclinations are now thoroughly intertwined with the bad conscience. Nietzsche then asks whether a 'reverse experiment' might be possible, in which bad conscience would become intertwined with 'perverse inclinations' and 'all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life and have defamed the world'. Anyone who wishes to subscribe to such a hope will have to contend with 'the good men'. Nietzsche has in mind both those who are satisfied with man as he now is (the lazy and the complacent) and those who impatiently wish to leap over man (the zealous). The task of envisaging a surpassing of humanity is a 'severe' and 'high-minded' one; it is not, for Nietzsche, a question of simply letting ourselves go. He thus looks towards a different kind of spirit, one prepared for and by 'wars and victories . . . for which conquest, adventure, danger and even pain have actually become a necessity', and in whom the practice of the 'great health' has become personified. At this point Nietzsche looks ahead and outside the all-too timely frame of the present. He refers to 'the redeeming human of great love and contempt' who will redeem the earth from the ideal that has reigned on it for so long, and from the nihilism and will to nothingness that arises from it. He speaks fatefully of the 'decision' that will make 'the will free again', give a 'purpose' to the earth and give 'hope' back to us.

<sup>12</sup> See the discourse entitled 'Of Redemption' in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.



*'On the Genealogy of Morality' and Other Writings***The Meaning of the Ascetic Ideal**

Nietzsche's genealogical inquiry into morality culminates with his questioning of the meaning of ascetic ideals, which involve denial and mortification of the will (see Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I, Section 68). Nietzsche couches his inquiry as one into their meaning or significance (*Bedeutung*). It is clear from this final section of the book that he is also concerned with the sense and direction (*Sinn*) of the human will itself. Nietzsche clarifies the specific nature of his inquiry in Section 23 of the essay. Here he speaks of the ascetic ideal as a generic term, and says that the issue of what it signifies is to be approached through an analysis of 'what lies behind, beneath and within it' and 'what it expresses in a provisional, indistinct way, laden with question marks and misunderstandings'. In short, the task is to bring this ideal to self-knowledge by uncovering what it conceals. Nietzsche holds that this ideal possesses a power; moreover, this power has a monstrosity to it, it has produced a monstrosity of effects that have been 'calamitous'. He wants to know why it has occupied so much space in human existence and why there has been so little effective resistance to it. He also poses the question of where the 'opposing will, in which an *opposing ideal* might express itself' can be found. For Nietzsche, however, that this ideal has been so prevalent in history, and continues to be so, reveals something essential about the human will, namely, the 'basic fact' that '*it needs an aim*', to the point that 'it prefers to will *nothingness* rather than *not will*'.

Nietzsche is conscious of the fact that with the formulation 'will to nothingness' he is deliberately subverting the teaching of his great mentor Schopenhauer, for whom willing and nothingness are mutually exclusive conditions. Once we have recognised that incurable suffering and perpetual misery are the essential features of the phenomenon of the will to life and we see the world melt away with the abolition of this will, then we retain before us only empty nothingness. For Schopenhauer this can become our great consolation.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche's claim is that willing something is an inescapable fact of human existence and practices of

<sup>13</sup> According to Deleuze, Schopenhauer's greatest error was to have believed that the will is denied in the values superior to life: 'In fact, it is not the will which is denied in superior values, it is the superior values that are related to the will to deny, to annihilate life. This will to deny defines "the value" of superior values'. G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 97.

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self-denial, which involve the will turning against itself, remain expressions of willing. The ascetic 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, this 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 is not what we might suppose; it is not, for example, a transcendence of the conditions of life (change, death, becoming) but a struggle with and against them. It amounts, in effect, to an artifice for the preservation of life.

Nietzsche says he objects to the medication offered by the ascetic priest because it treats only the symptoms and not the real illness. Of course, this does not prevent Nietzsche from admiring how much the priest sees and finds within this perspective. The priest is a genius in consolation, and Christianity has developed a ‘large treasure-trove of the most ingenious means of consolation’ (means and methods of refreshing, soothing, narcotising), undertaking dangerous and daring risks for this purpose, subtly identifying ‘which emotions to stimulate in order to conquer the deep depression, the leaden fatigue and the black melancholy of the physiologically-obstructed’ (III, 17). All the great religions represent a fight against a weariness and heaviness of life that has become epidemic. Nietzsche offers as a general formula for what is called religion this non-conscious physiological feeling of obstruction that finds its mistaken cause and cure on the psychological-moral level, for example, in the invention of paralogical concepts<sup>14</sup> such as guilt and sin: “Sin” – for that is the name for the priestly reinterpretation of the animal “bad conscience” (cruelty turned back on itself) – has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul up till now’ (III, 20).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For insight into the ‘paralogical’ character of these notions see Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 122–4.

<sup>15</sup> In his *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), William James analyses religious concepts and experiences through a treatment of human sickness and

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Nietzsche holds that our growing appreciation of human sickness may encourage us to nurture a false sympathy with the human condition. It is not fear of the human that we should seek to overcome, since this can serve as a spur to new experiments and tasks, but rather nausea at the sight of, and compassion for, it, for this will only produce the “last will” of the human, its will to nothingness, nihilism’. Nietzsche is fully cognisant of the fact that a goal cannot be ascribed to human history; rather, a goal can only be put into it. The problem is not the mere fact that we suffer from life, but that this suffering is in need of an explanation and justification. He notes that the human animal can even will its suffering, as long as it can be given a meaning and a direction. The interpretation of suffering developed by the ascetic ideal has succeeded in shutting the door on a suicidal nihilism. It 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’, in short a ‘will to nothingness’.

Nietzsche opens his preface to the *Genealogy* on a curious note, speaking of us moderns as knowers who are unknown to ourselves. In the Third Essay he contends that modern knowers and free spirits remain idealists of knowledge. These spirits represent the most intellectualized product of the only ideal that has flourished on earth to date, the ascetic ideal and its longing to get away from appearance, from transience, from growth, from decay, in short, from all the conditions of terrestrial life. Nietzsche appreciates that his claim that science is implicated in the ascetic ideal will sound strange to our ears. Nevertheless, he maintains that science is ‘a *hiding-place*’ for all kinds of ill-humour, ‘nagging worms’, and bad conscience (III, 23). Because science itself rests on a moral foundation it cannot spearhead the fundamental task now facing us, which is what Nietzsche defines as the ‘self-overcoming’ of morality and of the will to truth (III, 27 – just how science can be said to rest on a moral foundation is explained in GS 344, part of which Nietzsche reproduces in III, 24). Science ‘never creates values’ but

deploys Nietzsche’s insights into strong and sickly natures in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*; he refers to Nietzsche as the ‘most inimical critic’ of the saintly impulses.

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rather places itself in the service of a value-creating power, from which it acquires its belief in itself (III, 25). Nietzsche's critical eye is focused on the unconditional character of our modern will to truth and on our belief in the divine nature of truth. We moderns overestimate truth; such is our faith in truth we take it to be something that cannot be assessed or criticized (*GM* III, 25). Nietzsche finds curious the ideal of knowledge free of presuppositions, in which knowledge is pursued without a direction, a meaning and a limit; it is an ideal of knowledge that renounces interpretation and everything that is essential to it (*GM* III, 24).

Nietzsche's ultimate argument is that the will to truth of science needs a justification. The fact that this is not taking place today reveals a gap in philosophy, and this situation is to be explained for him by the fact that the ascetic ideal continues to be master over all philosophy, and this means for us that 'truth was set as being, as God, as the highest authority itself, because truth was not *allowed* to be a problem' (*GM* III, 24). Nietzsche appeals to his 'unknown friends' and says that in them the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a problem (III, 27). As Ken Gemes has noted, it is our love and pursuit of truth that has led us to realize that the ascetic ideal is false and its religious claims are hollow. Now, however, Nietzsche appeals to the same love of truth to compel his readers to recognize the true meaning of this love. Gemes perceptively writes: 'Here Nietzsche is thinking primarily as a psychologist and is looking at the latent meaning of our commitment to truth. That commitment, he maintains, stems from the same motivation that fuelled commitment to religious ascetic values, namely, fear of life and feelings of impotence.'<sup>16</sup> In this way Nietzsche is seeking to bring to consciousness something that we unconsciously practice and are habituated to, namely, fear of, and withdrawal from, life. Whereas the religious person seeks to remove himself from the torments of this world, the world that resists his desires for peace, stability and security, by regarding the events in this life as without importance, placing all his hopes in the eternal life that is to come and promised, the modern scholar 'similarly removes himself from life by telling himself that what is of ultimate value is not acting in this world, not what he does, but in understanding the world, in what he knows. Both the religious ascetic and the ascetic

<sup>16</sup> Ken Gemes, 'Nietzsche on the Will to Truth, the Scientific Spirit, Free Will, and Genuine Selfhood', in Gudrun von Tevenar (ed.), *Nietzsche and Ethics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 19–45, 23.

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scholar believe “the truth will set you free”.<sup>17</sup> As Gemes further notes, in the will to truth Nietzsche is locating a hidden death drive, and this is perhaps the most disturbing or alarming aspect of his riveting analysis. As Nietzsche puts it in the fifth book of *The Gay Science* (1887), “‘Will to truth’ – that can be a hidden will to death’ (GS 344).

The ascetic truth-practices that Nietzsche calls into question prove, in fact, to be absolutely indispensable for his own historical inquiries, including a deep mistrust and scepticism. However, he is now locating a real danger in the existence of the free spirit, or rather the type that passes for a free spirit today: ‘in their faith in truth they are more rigid and more absolute than anyone else’ (III. 24). At work in such a spirit of inquiry is a certain ‘stoicism of the intellect’ that halts before, and bows before, the factual and indeed the fatalism of ‘*petits faits*’, renouncing interpretation and everything that is essential to it, including adjusting, inventing, and falsifying. Such a practice, Nietzsche suggests, is in fact an asceticism of virtue and ‘just as well as any denial of sensuality’, and it is in fact a mode of this denial (ibid.). It is this kind of insight that leads Nietzsche to the conclusion that the unconditional will to truth manifests a faith in the ascetic ideal itself since it is faith in a metaphysical value.

The overall effect of the third essay of the *Genealogy* is a disquieting one: the things we moderns, including Nietzsche, prize the most such as science and atheism are implicated in the ascetic ideal. In considering Nietzsche’s taking to task of the things we godless moderns cherish it is important to bear in mind a point made by Gemes when he astutely describes Nietzsche as a ‘local’ rather than a ‘global’ thinker: ‘He will not simply condemn, for instance, the will to truth but rather will condemn it within a given context’.<sup>18</sup> In some contexts the will to truth might be the manifestation of robust health; in our Christian and emerging post-Christian context, however, this will serves the purpose of belittling life and is proving to be inimical to its further growth and overcoming. Moreover, as Gemes puts it, it is not so much the will to truth in the abstract that is the object of Nietzsche’s attack, but rather the will to truth in its now prevalent context of the Christian scholar’s passive and negative attitude towards life.

Perhaps the key challenge Nietzsche presents in the Third Essay of the text concerns the extent to which philosophy, which historically has

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 27.

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been tied to the ascetic ideal, can free itself from this ideal and creatively posit a new meaning for the earth and for the future of the human. It is clear that for Nietzsche the object of philosophy is not only truth but equally, and perhaps more importantly, questions of sense and value.