NATURE AND THE MORAL EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY IN
NIETZSCHE’S ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALS

By

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The dissertation begins by discussing recent critical treatments of Nietzsche in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Jürgen Habermas, then gives a brief discussion of the broader scholarly reception of Nietzsche’s political thought. The body of the dissertation proceeds through the text of the Second Essay of Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trying to explicate his account of the origin of political society. The dissertation attempts in the first place to show that the historical narrative Nietzsche offers in the Second Essay is coherent, then to illuminate the details of his account of the rise of political society, and thus of civilized morality (what Nietzsche calls “the bad conscience”), and finally to detail the different stages in the development of the bad conscience. The dissertation lays particular emphasis on determining the relation between what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment* and the bad conscience. The dissertation also attempts to shed light on Nietzsche’s view of the relation between nature and political society and morality, as he expresses it both in his analysis of the bad conscience and in the somewhat more thematic discussion of this question at the beginning of the Essay.
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## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Nine</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Over the past hundred or so years, the teachings of Friedrich Nietzsche have penetrated and transformed every realm of human culture in the Western world. A recent indication of the depth and magnitude of Nietzsche’s influence is Richard Rorty’s claim that the term “post-modern” should be replaced by “post-Nietzschean” when it is applied to European philosophy. 1 The length of Nietzsche’s shadow can further be judged by his centrality to the work of two very different, indeed almost diametrically opposed, contemporary political theorists, Alasdair MacIntyre and Jürgen Habermas. Both writers have devoted major works to the history of modern philosophy and its effect upon the current state of political and cultural life. 2 These works show Nietzsche’s pivotal place in current discussions of the fate of modernity, the role and status of reason in modern political thought, and the character of postmodernity and its relation to the modern age. Although they differ fundamentally on the viability of the modern project, 3 both thinkers agree substantially on the character of that project,

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2 Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, Second Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2000 [1987]). In the following paragraphs, parenthetical references are to pages of these two books, using the abbreviations AV and PDM.
3 While MacIntyre argues that the modern, or Enlightenment, attempt to justify morality was intrinsically flawed and doomed to failure from the start (AV 51-61), Habermas believes that theoretical modernity still has the internal resources
and on Nietzsche’s relation to it. MacIntyre and Habermas concur that a novel and constitutive aspect of modernity is its conception of morality as a distinct sphere of human culture. Habermas follows Kant and Hegel in understanding modernity as defined by the threefold division of human culture into morality, science and aesthetics (PDM 16-19 and passim), while MacIntyre speaks of the separation of the moral from the legal, the theological, and the aesthetic (AV 39). Both writers see the real significance of this development in modernity’s break with the past, and in particular with the broader cosmological conceptions that had given moral, political and social life their previous significance and coherence (Habermas focuses on the socially unifying power of religion [e.g., PDM 20, 83-84], MacIntyre on the teleological moral scheme of Christian Aristotelianism [AV 51-61]). The aim of modern philosophy therefore becomes to fill the void created by this rupture, initially on purely rational grounds, but eventually through a radicalized version of the modern project that denies reason sovereignty.

Habermas concentrates first of all on understanding how the concept of subject-centered reason, underpinning modern philosophy since its articulation by Hegel, has unfolded in such a way as to engender the influential criticisms of reason produced by Foucault and Derrida. In Habermas’s narrative, Nietzsche is the pivotal thinker who initiated “postmodernity;” Habermas traces two lines of development running out from Nietzsche’s thought, one through Heidegger to Derrida and the other through Georges Bataille to Foucault. Here I will focus only on Habermas’s account of Hegel’s treatment of the problem of modernity to complete itself through his own theory of communicative rationality (PDM 294-326).
and Nietzsche’s revolutionary transformation of that problem (and even then my summary will be extremely selective).

Because the modern age (understood as beginning around 1500) is unique in being oriented towards the future, it is faced with the novel problem of generating its own norms solely out of itself: “[m]odernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself. Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape” (PDM 7). Hegel was the first to treat this situation as a philosophical problem. Indeed, Hegel saw the resolution of this problem as the guiding or constitutive task of philosophy: “[t]he anxiety caused by the fact that a modernity without models had to stabilize itself on the basis of the very diremptions [or divisions: Entzweiungen] it had wrought is seen by Hegel as ‘the source of the need for philosophy;’” modernity’s need for “self-reassurance” is its need for philosophy (PDM 16). More specifically, this need for normative self-reassurance is “forced on philosophy as soon as modernity conceives itself historically, in other words, as soon as it becomes conscious of the dissolution of the exemplary past, and of the necessity of creating all that is normative out of itself” (PDM 19-20). Modern philosophy, however, cannot generate these norms on the basis of the principle of subjectivity, which thus “proves to be a one-sided principle.”

It does possess, to be sure, an unexampled power to bring about the formation [Bildung] of subjective freedom and reflection and to
undermine religion, which heretofore had appeared as an absolutely
unifying force. But the principle of subjectivity is not powerful enough to
regenerate the unifying power of religion in the medium of reason (PDM
20).

Habermas is thus particularly concerned with the attempts to replace the
power of traditional religion to unify individuals and to provide “the totality of an
ethical context of life” (PDM 83). He begins with a writing of the young Hegel
according to which “[t]he religion of reason is supposed to deliver itself up to art
in order to be shaped into popular religion” (PDM 31), thus making “the people
rational and philosophy sensible” (PDM 36).4 Habermas moves eventually to
Friedrich Schlegel, who propounded a new mythology which “is to owe its
binding force not to some form of art in which all moments of reason are
intimately related, but to a divinatory gift of poetry that is distinct from
philosophy and science, morals, and ethics” (PDM 90). In proclaiming the
autonomy of poetry, or the aesthetic realm of human culture, from theoretical and
practical reason, Schlegel radicalized the threefold Kantian division of modern
culture, thereby abandoning the earlier Hegelian goal of healing this division.

Habermas, like MacIntyre, maintains that Nietzsche not only exploded
what had been the core of modernity but, in some decisive sense, did so through
purely modern means. According to Habermas, “[w]ith Nietzsche’s entry into the

4 In Hegel’s own words, “Before we make the ideas aesthetical, i.e. mythological,
they have no interest for the people; and on the other hand, before mythology is
rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it” (PDM 32).
discourse of modernity, the argument shifts, from the ground up.” By the time Nietzsche arrives, Habermas contends, three different modern attempts to “tailor the concept of reason to the program of an intrinsic dialectic of enlightenment [have] miscarried” (PDM 85).

In the context of this constellation, Nietzsche had no choice but to submit subject-centered reason yet again to an inmanent critique—or to give up the program entirely. Nietzsche opts for the second alternative: He renounces a renewed revision of the concept of reason and bids farewell to the dialectic of enlightenment. In particular, the historicist deformation of modern consciousness, in which it is flooded with arbitrary contents and emptied of everything essential, makes him doubt that modernity could still fashion its criteria out of itself—“for from ourselves we moderns have nothing at all” (PDM 85-86).

With his rejection of subject-centered reason, Nietzsche therefore, in Habermas’s narrative, “continues the Romantic purification of the aesthetic phenomenon from all theoretical and practical associations” (PDM 94). In so doing, he hopes for an “aesthetically renewed mythology,” which will “overcome the inwardness of privately appropriated historical culture[,]…relax the forces of social integration consolidated by competitive society[,]…[and] decenter modern consciousness and open it to archaic [religious] experiences” (PDM 88). At the same time, however, Nietzsche radicalizes the threefold division of modernity
through his exclusive reliance on aesthetic experiences, rather than reason, as the
solution to the problem of modernity’s breaches:

[I]t is now a question of totally turning away from the nihilistic void of
modernity. With Nietzsche, the criticism of modernity dispenses for the
first time with its retention of an emancipatory content. Subject-centered
reason is confronted with reason’s absolute other. And as a
counterauthority to reason, Nietzsche appeals to experiences that are
displaced back into the archaic realm—experiences of self-disclosure of a
decentered subjectivity, liberated from all constraints of cognition and
purposive activity, all imperatives of utility and morality. A “break-up of
the principle of individuation” [cf. GdT 1] becomes the escape route from
modernity (PDM 94).^5

Habermas, in short, presents Nietzsche as destroying Hegel’s project to
heal the divisions or ruptures of modernity through subject-centered reason,
precisely by radicalizing the ruptures on which that project was based.
MacIntyre, on the other hand, focuses on Nietzsche’s devastating critique of the
various modern attempts to replace Aristotle’s teleological ethical philosophy.

^5 Compare Habermas’s account of Schlegel’s position: “[O]nly poetry that has
become autonomous, that has been cleansed of associations with theoretical and
practical reason, opens wide the door to the world of the primordial forces of
myth. Modern art alone can communicate with the archaic sources of social
integration that have been sealed off within modernity. On this reading, the new
mythology demands of a dirempted modernity that it relate to the ‘primordial
chaos’ as the other of reason” (PDM 90-91).
After its rejection of Aristotelian teleology, MacIntyre argues, modern moral philosophy foundered, for “the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a telos leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear.”

There is on the one hand a certain content for morality: a set of injunctions deprived of their teleological context. There is on the other hand a certain view of untutored-human-nature-as-it-is. Since the moral injunctions were originally at home in a scheme in which their purpose was to correct, improve and educate that human nature, they are clearly not going to be such as could be deduced from true statements about human nature or justified in some other way by appealing to its characteristics. The injunctions of morality, thus understood, are likely to be ones that human nature, thus understood, has strong tendencies to disobey. Hence the eighteenth-century moral philosophers engaged in what was an inevitably unsuccessful project; for they did indeed attempt to find a rational basis for their moral beliefs in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on the one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other (AV 55).  

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6 MacIntyre maintains that the content of Enlightenment morality was essentially the same as that of pre-Enlightenment Christianity. It is thus a weakness of his argument that he does not consider the thought of Hobbes and Locke, two of the
MacIntyre, like Habermas, thus depicts the modern moral tradition of which Nietzsche was such an explosive critic as already battered and tottering when Nietzsche appeared. MacIntyre, a bit too glibly, compares Nietzsche to Kamehameha II, the Polynesian king who abolished the taboos in Hawaii in 1819 (AV 113, 111). His reasons for making this comparison are clear enough from his description of the history of taboo rules, which has a structure identical to that of his history of morality in the West.

[Anthropologists suggest] that taboo rules often and perhaps characteristically have a history which falls into two stages. In the first stage they are embedded in a context which confers intelligibility upon them…Deprive the taboo rules of their original context and they at once are apt to appear as a set of arbitrary prohibitions, as indeed they characteristically do appear when the initial context is lost, when those background beliefs in the light of which the taboo rules had originally been understood have not only been abandoned but forgotten (AV 112).

most radical (and influential) of the early modern thinkers. Consider especially their revolutionary teachings on the family (cf. AV 47) in *Leviathan*, Ch. 20 and *Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. 6-7.

7 The drastic difference between the two is that MacIntyre speaks of “the ease with which Kamehameha II abolished the taboos in Hawaii…and the lack of social consequence when he did” (AV 111); such a description obviously cannot be applied to Nietzsche’s attempt to abolish the traditional morality of the West.
Once the traditional moral discourse of the West had, like the taboo rules during Kamehameha II’s reign, been reduced to a mere “survival from some previous more elaborate cultural background” (AV 112-113), Nietzsche steps forth and, with prophetic insight and intensity, demands a wholly new philosophic and cultural dispensation based on an act of sheer will:

The rational and rationally justified autonomous moral subject of the eighteenth century is a fiction, an illusion; so, Nietzsche resolves, let will replace reason and let us make ourselves into autonomous moral subjects by some gigantic and heroic act of the will, an act of the will that by its quality may remind us of that archaic aristocratic self-assertiveness which preceded what Nietzsche took to be the disaster of slave-morality and which by its effectiveness may be the prophetic precursor of a new era (AV 114).

MacIntyre therefore agrees with Habermas in presenting Nietzsche’s irrationalism as his chief legacy (both also present that irrationalism as hankering after “archaic” modes of existence). Where Habermas concentrates on Nietzsche’s influence on later thinkers, however, MacIntyre discusses his fundamental importance to the moral and spiritual life of modern, bureaucratic societies, especially liberal democracies.
I have already argued that the present age is in its presentation of itself to itself dominantly Weberian; and I have also noticed that Nietzsche’s central thesis [that “conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled” (AV 26)] was presupposed by Weber’s central categories of thought. Hence Nietzsche’s prophetic irrationalism—irrationalism because Nietzsche’s problems remain unsolved and his solutions [i.e., the *Übermensch*] defy reason—remains immanent in the Weberian managerial forms of our culture. Whenever those immersed in the bureaucratic culture of the age try to think their way through to the moral foundations of what they are and what they do, they will discover suppressed Nietzschean premises. And consequently it is possible to predict with confidence that in the apparently quite unlikely contexts of bureaucratically managed modern societies there will periodically emerge social movements informed by just that kind of prophetic irrationalism of which Nietzsche’s thought is the ancestor. Indeed just because and insofar as contemporary Marxism is Weberian in substance we can expect prophetic irrationalisms of the Left as well as of the Right. So it was with much student radicalism of the sixties (AV 114).

Finally, MacIntyre, again like Habermas, sees Nietzsche as such a potent opponent of modernity largely because he radicalizes one of its central features. Because MacIntyre’s thesis is that “the peculiarly modern self…in acquiring sovereignty in its own realm lost its traditional boundaries provided by a social
identity and a view of human life as ordered to a given end” (AV 34), he concludes that “the Nietzschean stance turns out not to be a mode of escape from or an alternative to the conceptual scheme of liberal individualist modernity, but rather one more representative moment in its internal unfolding” (AV 259). The modern rejection of these traditional boundaries necessarily leads to “that moral solipsism which constitutes Nietzschean greatness” (AV 258).

Both Habermas and MacIntyre therefore coincide in seeing Nietzsche as an irrationalist who longed to reinstitute or recapture archaic, primitive forms of quasi-religious irrational experience, and indeed to ground or center future human life on them. MacIntyre tends to focus more on Nietzsche’s concern for individual human greatness, Habermas on the religious or mythical dimension of his thought, but both agree on these two major points, Nietzsche’s irrationalism and his view of the archaic, aristocratic past as his model. These views are typical or representative, and they are probably the two most significant reasons that Nietzsche’s political thought has not been taken seriously. Obviously, it has been taken “seriously” in the sense of being the target of various criticisms and polemics, but these criticisms almost unfailingly present Nietzsche’s thought on politics or political life in fairly simple, one-dimensional terms (the same is true, to my knowledge, of most of the admiring works on the same subject).  

8 Of course there have been exceptions; one of the first and most influential in English was Tracy Strong’s *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration: Expanded Edition with a New Introduction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). Some of the European thinkers and interpreters of Nietzsche that Strong draws on have become even more well-established and influential in the academic understanding of Nietzsche. Almost all of these works, however, tend to ignore or downplay Nietzsche’s specifically political
Nietzsche is considered, as he is by Habermas and MacIntyre, to have simply rejected everything modern in favor of a return to or reconstruction of ancient forms of aristocracy which are usually understood as static and monochromatic, defined chiefly and perhaps solely by instantiating the rule of “the strong” over “the weak.” Nietzsche, in short, is usually understood to have been a crudely reactionary thinker on the subject of politics, even if his political views sometimes communicate with or point beyond themselves to much more arresting insights on art, history, morality, language and other topics.

In this dissertation I hope to show that this prevalent or predominant view is mistaken, although there are obviously passages in Nietzsche that support it. In particular, I want to focus on Nietzsche’s treatment of the origin of political

pronouncements and focus instead on the emancipatory consequences or thrust of Nietzsche’s criticism of the concepts and categories of traditional philosophy. In other words, these writers present us with a liberationist or egalitarian Nietzsche only by neglecting his comments on political life or, in many cases, simply by presenting us with an explicitly apolitical or anti-political Nietzsche.

As is almost always the case with Nietzsche, these readings do indeed have some interpretive basis, and my point here is not to condemn or dismiss these works en masse. My point or argument is much more limited or modest; I am simply suggesting that this approach has slurred over something important in Nietzsche. Likewise, it would be unfair and unwise to imply that no important work has been done on Nietzsche as a political thinker. There have indeed been several very good studies on this subject, chief among them Bruce Detwiler, _Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Keith Ansell-Pearson, _An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist_ (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), David Owen, _Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason_ (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), Daniel Conway, _Nietzsche and the Political_ (New York: Routledge, 1997), and Tamsin Shaw, _Nietzsche’s Political Skepticism_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). All of these works, however, tend to focus on Nietzsche’s relevance to or critiques of contemporary political life; in this study, I focus on Nietzsche’s account of the rise and development of political and moral life, and especially on the relation between nature and that development, and thus on Nietzsche’s conception of nature and of its significance for humanity more generally.
society and thus of morality in the Second Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*.\(^9\) Nietzsche’s extended examination of this theme shows that he has a more complicated and thought-out political teaching than is often believed, in the first place by showing that Nietzsche took the trouble to address one of the central or fundamental questions in political philosophy; denials that Nietzsche has a serious political philosophy usually begin by saying that he never did any such thing. Yet the question of the origin of political life is so important, of course, not merely as an historical or developmental hypothesis but because of what it reveals about the relation between humanity, society and nature. And this is the crucial aspect of Nietzsche’s thought that I most hope this dissertation will illuminate, his understanding of the character or nature of nature, of humanity’s relation to it, and of the way nature expresses itself through human action and creativity, and thus through political and moral life.

When I say that I want to show that Nietzsche had a carefully considered and developed political philosophy or political teaching, I do not primarily mean

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\(^9\) Several very good recent studies of the *Genealogy* focus their readings of the Second Essay almost exclusively on the formal characteristics of the kind of morality Nietzsche is discussing, the evocative figure of the sovereign individual, and the meaning of guilt and its relation to the bad conscience. See Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals: A Reader’s Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), David Owen, *Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), and Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and His War on ‘Morality’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Chapter Four. The themes I outline here in the introduction have still been relatively untreated. Likewise, recent discussions of Nietzsche’s naturalism have tended to focus on how it relates to his critique of metaphysics and to contemporary versions of naturalism, saying relatively little about Nietzsche’s conception of nature itself and how it affects or expresses itself through human beings.
that he had normative political views or preferences, e.g. for aristocracy or the creation of the Übermensch. My point is rather to show above all that Nietzsche has a serious and illuminating account of the character and meaning of political and moral life, that he has an explanation of some of the major features of politics that is both compelling and challenging. This is why I am focusing on his account of the beginning and evolution of political societies rather than on trying to piece together his various proposals or demands for the future. Yet this project meets with an immediate difficulty stemming from Nietzsche’s own texts and thought, namely his insistence that the question of origins is irrelevant to a proper understanding of a thing, and in particular to a proper understanding of morality. Nietzsche makes this general claim in the *Genealogy* itself:

[T]here is for all types of history no more important tenet than that which has been achieved with such effort, but which really should be achieved—namely that the cause of the emergence of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and integration (*Einordnung*) in a system of purposes lie separated *toto coelo*; that something existing, having somehow come to be, is always again interpreted from new views by a power superior to it, newly monopolized, reformed and redirected to new uses; that all occurrences in the organic world are an overpowering, a *becoming master*, and that again all overpowering and becoming master are a new interpretation, an adaptation, where the previous “meaning” and “purpose” must necessarily be obscured or obliterated altogether (2.12).
The implications of this view for understanding political and moral development are clear enough, but Nietzsche makes them perfectly explicit elsewhere (e.g., FW 345).

It may therefore seem that Nietzsche does or should have no interest in the origin of political society, for origins can tell us nothing of importance about a thing, and certainly nothing concerning its actual value or worth. Thus the effort that I make in the following chapters to unravel or explicate Nietzsche’s various and at times contradictory statements about the inception and growth of political society is misguided.10 Brian Leiter considers this objection (that a concern with origins necessarily embroils one in the “genetic fallacy”), and argues that the “point of origin of a morality has a special evidential status as to the effects (or causal powers) of that morality, for example, as to whether morality obstructs or promotes human flourishing…by understanding the origin, we understand the effects of adopting a particular morality;” Leiter uses the sun as an example of an object that has had stable or permanent causal powers over time but widely different meanings in different belief systems.11 This claim, however, ignores Nietzsche’s emphasis on the radical variability of both the forces creating or engendering a particular moral belief and the consequences or causal effects of a belief. Thus, for instance, Nietzsche gives extraordinarily high praise to the one

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10 One could of course object that the very effort required shows that Nietzsche is not interested in such questions, but this same objection could be raised against almost any interpretation of almost any area or aspect of Nietzsche’s thought.
who first conceived of the imperative to love man for God’s sake (J 60), and likewise notes that there came a time when the aristocratic morality of ancient Athens was outlived and represented or evinced merely a mendacious hedonism, not the aristocratic flourishing and greatness of soul it once had (J 212). Nietzsche is thus mindful and indeed insistent that the same morality can not only provoke different normative responses over time but also be adopted for different reasons and produce different effects; for a time Christianity deepened and broadened humanity, and after a certain point, no amount of adherence to the moral code of old Athens was enough to ward off disintegration and decay. Indeed, Nietzsche’s emphasis on the non-rational psychological sources of morality suggests that morality is relatively lacking in causal power unless it is imposed; the adoption of a particular kind of morality already indicates something decisive about an individual (e.g., J 3-6, FaW, Epilogue).

Why then should one devote such attention to the question of the origin of political society, and more specifically to Nietzsche’s treatment of it? In the first place because even if the origin of a thing does not determine that thing’s later uses, meanings and values, it can still be very useful for illustrating the basic character of the world and of history. Indeed, Nietzsche could not make the claims that he does about the disjunction or difference between origin and later meaning if he did not know something about the origins. More generally, the picture Nietzsche presents of the world and of human history, especially in 2.12, explains and is exemplified in the account of the origins of human society he
Thus the origins of a thing, and especially of something as fundamental and all-encompassing or defining as human society and morality, can teach us a great deal about the basic conditions of existence and about the character of things like the will to power and especially of nature. Nature is illuminated especially clearly by such an account or investigation, both the form of pre-political human nature and the qualities and action of nature itself in creating or resisting the creation of political life. Nietzsche focuses not only on these questions in the moment of political founding or in the very beginning of political societies, but also on how civilized morality affected human nature, as well as to what extent it was actuated or molded by nature; in answering these questions, Nietzsche presents a wholly novel and highly challenging and stimulating new teaching on the nature, purpose and value of social and political life.

At the same time, of course, Nietzsche is concerned to explain such an enormous and essential event in human history in his own terms, to show that his philosophy can offer a convincing and indeed illuminating account of these topics and themes. I will discuss this more in the chapter on the significance of Nietzsche’s genealogical method, but as I suggested in the footnote in the previous paragraph, it seems to me that Nietzsche’s discussion of the origins of

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12 This of course raises the question of whether Nietzsche bases his account of early society on his larger philosophy or the reverse. Although Nietzsche does seem to think his theories have been or will be vindicated by scholarly research, he himself makes almost no use of this research in arguing his points in the *Genealogy* (or elsewhere), and I think it is clear that he bases his speculative history of the first political societies on his philosophy as a whole, rather than trying to construct the latter (or even only his philosophy of history) on what can be known or reconstructed about the past.
political society and so of morality is more an application of his ideas than it is the foundation for them.

Finally, although Nietzsche argues against taking the present meaning or function of a thing as the cause or purpose of its origin, this does not mean that no feature or aspect of the origin of politics and morality has perdured until today. The original purpose of civilized morality was simply to mold a formless and unruly populace into an ordered whole, or into a living structure. This is not the meaning or purpose morality has today, and most of the specific injunctions and thus the content and significance as well as the aim of morality has changed radically since its inception. But the repression of the natural instincts of aggression or cruelty, what Nietzsche calls “the bad conscience” for much of the Second Essay, has remained the basic condition or matrix for the creation of morality. Thus Nietzsche’s account of the origin of political society, and so of the origin of the bad conscience, is still relevant or important for contemporary morality because it elucidates something crucial about the basic character or structure of all civilized morality.

There is one final general question that should be addressed before turning to the particulars of my interpretation of the Second Essay. Nietzsche’s texts are, of course, almost unique in the history of philosophy for both the volume and the intensity of their rhetorical effects; for many years the major objections to reading Nietzsche as a significant philosopher were his aphoristic style and his poetic way of writing. One might think that this should receive sustained and thematic attention in any study of Nietzsche, and in particular that one would try to discern
an exoteric and an esoteric teaching in Nietzsche’s texts. The chief objection to
this seems to me to be the almost total lack of unanimity about the basic meaning
of Nietzsche’s writings; it is impossible to have an exoteric teaching when there is
no consensus about the most basic meaning of a text. If Nietzsche did try to
construct or deploy an exoteric façade or teaching, he seems to have been rather
inept. Moreover, if Nietzsche does have an exoteric teaching, I think Werner
Dannhauser is right about its character: “If traditionally the exoteric teaching was
noncontroversial, acceptable, and edifying as opposed to the more radical,
controversial, and perhaps shocking esoteric teaching, then Nietzsche must be
said to practice a reverse esotericism. The more shocking pronouncements stand
out and the delicacy is left for the happy few to appreciate.”13 But if this is the
case, and Nietzsche’s more intemperate and incendiary statements are intended to
form the core or basis for an exoteric or popular understanding of his work, then
his work would necessarily seem designed to have a primarily destructive or
reactionary influence. In this case the best readings of Nietzsche would be those
offered by Stanley Rosen and Geoff Waite,14 both of whom argue that Nietzsche
uses his considerable rhetorical powers to persuade or deceive his readers into
embracing either a destructive politics meant to clear the way for new cultural
creation (Rosen) or a regressive and anti-egalitarian politics that does not balk at

13 Werner Dannhauser, *Nietzsche’s View of Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University
14 The best short expression of Rosen’s views on this subject is his essay
“Nietzsche’s Revolution” in *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking
Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 189-208. For Waite’s
reading of Nietzsche’s esotericism see Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche’s Corps/e:
Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or, The Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday
genocide and slavery (Waite). If this is true, then the proper approach to Nietzsche would be a critical or even purely antagonistic one.

Before coming to this conclusion and adopting this approach, however, I think it is worth attempting a purely theoretical or analytic interpretation of Nietzsche, one that simply seeks to understand and make sense of his arguments (which of course will include explaining apparent contradictions where possible). This does not, in my opinion, dispense with or obviate the concerns raised by readers like Rosen and Waite, it simply means that a reading of Nietzsche should begin with his philosophic arguments and explications, rather than with his most extreme rhetorical pronouncements, and to subordinate the latter to the former. This assumption is in itself debatable, of course, but it is the one on which this dissertation will proceed.

I have argued for the importance of the Second Essay in the history of political thought and in establishing Nietzsche as a thinker who had a substantial and developed analysis of political life, rather than simply a series of fulminations against parliaments and odes to the knights of yore. Before turning to the interpretation of the Second Essay, I will try here to say something about its overall place in the Genealogy, both its importance for understanding the other two essays and how the work as a whole should inform our reading or understanding of the Second Essay.

In the Second Essay Nietzsche examines what he calls the bad conscience, the turning inward of the human animal’s instincts of aggression to produce guilt and civilized morality more generally. The two types or aspects of Christian and
post-Christian morality Nietzsche criticizes in the First and Third Essays, the morality of “good and evil” and asceticism, are later forms of morality that can, in my view, only be properly understood by understanding the seedbed or matrix of all morality as Nietzsche describes it in the Second Essay. This is not because these other forms of morality are later derivations from a universal, original or primeval morality that structures or conditions all subsequent forms of morality. Nietzsche’s argument in the Second Essay, condensed in section twelve, makes it clear that this is not his view, and that the purpose of the Second Essay is not to provide a genetic or historical account of morality in which the events described in the Second Essay are the first, defining moment or stage. The point is rather that the condition or set of relations that generates all morality, and thus that defines the limits and essential features of morality, are identified and described in the Second Essay. It is only in the light of these conditions and essential features of morality that Nietzsche’s criticisms of particular forms or aspects of Western morality can be understood, and specifically those he criticizes in the rest of the *Genealogy*.

There are two parts to Nietzsche’s investigation of morality, in the *Genealogy* and elsewhere: a theoretical analysis and explanation and an evaluative critique. The treatment that both parts receive in the *Genealogy* largely revolves around a series of questions about the value and status of society and the moralized repression of instinct on which it relies. Many commenters have noted that Nietzsche’s criticism of “morality” does not apply to all types of morality, that he actually seems mostly to approve of certain moral codes (e.g., aristocratic
moralities like that of the Homeric Greeks). The fundamental question that I think is raised by the Genealogy is, Does the instinctual repression inherent in all civilized morality necessarily poison and debilitate humanity, so that the moralities of which Nietzsche approves are distinguished chiefly by their relative freedom from moralized suppression of instinct. Nietzsche’s account of the origin of the bad conscience highlights this question especially clearly, centering as it does on the role of instinctual inhibition or internalization in the development of morality (2.16-18), but the question is also raised by the other two essays.

The First Essay is most obviously a discussion of the differences between noble and slave morality; noble morality springs from a spontaneous experience of the pathos of distance and so of self-affirmation (1.2), and the noble human being is characterized by emotional immediacy, candor and impulsiveness, and relies on “the perfect functioning of the regulating unconscious instincts” (1.10). The nobles, unlike the social inferiors they hold in check and despise, are able to satisfy these most primal, unconscious instincts by attacking those outside their social order and community, or by attacking “the stranger.” “There they savor a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement within the peace of society, they go back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey,” and enjoy their “horrifying cheerfulness and profound joy in all destruction, in all the voluptuousness of victory and cruelty” (1.11). The slave, on the other hand, is forced to repress and carefully manage his instincts, to calculate and to cultivate prudence (1.10), and ultimately to practice a thoroughgoing self-deception
regarding his desires, abilities and motives (1.13-14). The priest does not correspond to either the noble or the slavish type, but he has more in common with the latter since he is marked by instinctual repression and blockage (1.6) and by a glowering hatred of those more powerful than himself (1.7-8). The priest, even more than the slave, is profoundly sick, and the spread of priestly value judgments and spiritual practices has eventually made almost all of humanity ill (1.6-8). Overall the picture that emerges is one of healthy, unimpeded discharge and gratification of primal, natural instincts on one side and unhealthy and resentful inhibition on the other.

Much of the Third Essay is dedicated to Nietzsche’s explication of his startling claim that modern atheistic science is motivated by or in thrall to the same ascetic ideals as Christian religion and mysticism. The questions discussed above are therefore not as prominent in the Third Essay, but again Nietzsche contrasts the sickliness of the vast majority of humanity with the health of the few rare exceptions (e.g., 3.14), and suggests that humanity has been so chronically and profoundly sick in large part because the human being is an indeterminate animal, an animal without a fixed nature (3.13). Although Nietzsche is not as concerned with the specific influence of society on humanity in the Third Essay, his emphasis on health and on the noxious and enervating effects of the ascetic ideal seem to continue this theme from the first two essays, and in particular to point emphatically back to Nietzsche’s repeated statement in the Second Essay that the bad conscience is a terrible sickness (2.16, 2.18). In other words, it may seem as if the ascetic ideal is a further development or consequence of the original
turning inward of humanity’s innate violent instincts, so that one of the principal purposes of the Third Essay is to demonstrate additional detrimental effects of the moralized instinctual repression Nietzsche has discussed and condemned in the previous two essays.

An intimately related question concerns the role or influence of ressentiment on morality. Following the reading sketched above, it is tempting to read the three essays of the book as a series of ever deeper analyses of ressentiment, which show how profoundly ressentiment has formed or constituted all aspects of human culture, from religion and morality to philosophy and science, and thus how profound or radical a transformation of humanity is required. The First Essay would discuss ressentiment against the politically more powerful and how it spawned Judeo-Christian morality, the Second Essay would unearth the ressentiment against the repression of instinct inherent in all social life and civilized morality, and thus contend that that civilized morality is always decisively shaped and driven by ressentiment, and the Third Essay would argue that ressentiment has been the true source of the asceticism Nietzsche finds at the heart of both religion and philosophy. To a large extent this reading of the Genealogy stands or falls on the answer to one of the questions explored in the Second Essay: does the repression of natural instinct necessarily produce ressentiment? Is all socialized morality a morality of ressentiment, or is the instinctual inhibition that is the matrix of all civilized morality necessarily poisonous and vitiating?
These questions are clearly essential to both the purely philosophical or theoretical analysis of morality and to the evaluation or critique of it, and it is only the Second Essay that addresses them in any kind of a sustained or detailed manner. It is also only in the Second Essay that Nietzsche provides a sustained treatment of the character of nature and of its relation to political society and morality, a subject that is clearly crucial for answering the questions posed above.

It begins, for instance, with an extended but compressed meditation on the relation between nature and society or law; more specifically, Nietzsche advances a novel argument concerning the role and purposes of nature in informing the creation of social and legal forms and structures. And, despite the Second Essay’s various digressions, the question of the relation between nature and society and the relative value of each continues to be the central guiding theme of the rest of the essay. Thus the Second Essay provides the indispensable consideration or treatment of the most fundamental or encompassing questions about the nature and value of morality, beginning with one of the most vexed and difficult questions in the history of philosophy, indeed perhaps its founding question: What is the relation between nature and society? Does nature have purposes? If it does, how do they compare to those of society?

Finally, a brief overview of the argument of the Second Essay will be useful before turning to its interpretation. The Second Essay, after all, is probably the most confusing or apparently incoherent of the three essays of the Genealogy. If the First Essay seemed to present a fairly straightforward argument concerning the differences between noble and slave morality, and especially of the effects of
ressentiment on or in the latter (albeit an argument obviously complicated by Nietzsche’s discussion of the priest), the Second Essay, even on a superficial reading, is far murkier and more perplexing. It is, in the first place, not even clear what the overarching or unifying argument of the essay is, or if indeed it has one at all. The title suggests that the topic of the essay is “‘Guilt (Schuld),’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and related matters (Verwandtes),’” but it is not until the sixteenth section of the essay, almost two-thirds of the way through, that Nietzsche offers a “first, provisional statement of my own hypothesis concerning the origin of the ‘bad conscience.’”\footnote{There is moreover the riddle posed by Nietzsche’s use in the title of the essay of the word Verwandtes, for Nietzsche’s radical originality often consists in suggesting relations between things previously thought completely unrelated. The argument he eventually advances about the origin of the bad conscience is a perfect example—he traces the morality of altruism or self-denial to the instincts of aggression, the desire for dominance, self-assertion and self-aggrandizement, and suggests that altruism or self-abnegation is in fact only an expression of those instincts.} The First Essay had begun, at least in purely formal terms, in a familiar or conventional enough fashion, reviewing and criticizing the work of Nietzsche’s predecessors; however unorthodox Nietzsche’s specific criticisms and manner of conveying them, the general purpose of the first sections was evident enough. The second essay, by contrast, begins much more confusingly, with a discussion of the importance of forgetfulness for mental health and the breeding of a will to remember, and no reference at all to the themes announced in the essay’s title. Guilt or the bad conscience is not mentioned until the fourth section, after a substantial but extremely terse discussion of the relation between nature and society, and when Nietzsche does begin to discuss the essay’s ostensible subject, he immediately goes off on what seems to be a lengthy
digression on punishment, which stretches from the fourth section to the fifteenth (and is itself apparently broken up by smaller digressions like the seventh section of the essay). In the course of this digression Nietzsche offers what appear to be conflicting accounts of the purpose or motive of primitive punishments, before finally announcing, in section fourteen, that punishment has nothing to do with creating or awakening the feeling of guilt or the bad conscience, and indeed never has; the reader is thus left to wonder what the purpose of the previous ten sections could possibly have been. These, it seems to me, are only the most obvious or glaring problems for identifying the argument or even the topic of the essay.

For these reasons, it is best to begin with a simple overview to help clarify the logical and thematic progression of the essay and the distinct topics and arguments it treats (at least in my reading of the essay); it is, of course, often the case that a closer reading yields a more complex or even conflicted interpretation than the simple overviews sketched here. Sections one through three discuss the relation between nature and political society, and in particular the work of both in developing the human conscience or the possibility of a sovereign or autonomous human being. Sections four through six introduce the subjects of guilt and the bad conscience and seem to tie them to punishment, making claims about the prehistoric meaning and purpose of punishment and stressing especially the importance of cruelty. Section seven is in a sense a digression but in another sense an ascension to a more fundamental or significant subject, the centrality or supreme importance of the human need to give meaning to suffering. Sections eight through eleven return to the question of punishment and trace its
development and the larger meaning of justice. Sections twelve and thirteen are, again, in some senses a digression, but in another sense the peak of the essay and perhaps of the work as a whole; they explain the implications of Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will to power for the character of reality and of philosophy, especially historical or genealogical philosophy. Sections fourteen and fifteen argue that punishment does nothing to elicit or inspire guilt in the one punished. Sections sixteen through eighteen introduce Nietzsche’s hypothesis concerning the origin of the bad conscience, that it is the natural instincts of aggression turned inward after they are denied an external outlet by the constraints of society. Sections nineteen through twenty-two trace the development of the bad conscience and in particular the use it made of the concept of Schuld (guilt and/or debt), from the earliest tribal morality to the heights or extremes of Christian piety. Sections twenty-three through twenty-five are a kind of dénouement of the essay as a whole, presenting the ancient Greeks as an alternative or counterpoint to Christian religious attitudes and underlining the incomplete and futural character of the positive project suggested by Nietzsche’s critique.

These divisions and descriptions are, of course, by no means self-evident, but I hope to show in what follows that they do identify and help distinguish the individual topics and movements of what may otherwise seem a confusion of arguments, observations, assertions and speculations, many of them flatly contradicting one another. I thus hope that this sketch of the distinct moments in the progression of the Second Essay, which structures the interpretation below,
will help illuminate Nietzsche’s argumentative wanderings and their theoretical and rhetorical purposes.
Ein Thier heranzüchten, das versprechen darf (To breed an animal, that is permitted to promise)—thus begins the Second Essay of the Genealogy. This fragment captures or expresses much of the paradoxical and knotty character of Nietzsche’s reflections on nature and its relation to humanity. The first words, “An animal,” suggest that Nietzsche is underlining humanity’s bestial, perhaps even purely biological character, and that the explanation of the moral phenomena indicated in the title of the essay will take place entirely or at least chiefly in these terms. 16 These words are immediately followed, however, by the verb heranzüchten, to breed or cultivate, which suggests intentional modification of nature by an intelligence with a set purpose or goal, the animal mentioned at the outset of the essay is not one defined or animated by the spontaneous promptings or workings of its nature. This is made even more clear by the following words, das versprechen darf, “that is permitted to promise.” Both “permission” and “promising” seem like moral terms or concepts, and in any case emphasize the human animal’s orientation towards the future and its general consciousness and control over its basic impulses or urges (something Nietzsche will indeed go on to

16 Ein Thier could also mean “one animal,” and thus suggest both that nature aims to produce a single animal of a particular kind and that it is extremely wasteful or inefficient in doing so (cf. the discussion of J 188 below).

17 A more literal translation of heranzüchten may be “to breed close” or “to breed up” (heranwachsen is “grow up”).
emphasize), making this animal seem even more inherently defined or marked by morality and thought. The biologicist or materialist debunking or reductionism one may have expected from the word “animal” is appearing more and more remote. One must indeed start to wonder what it could possibly mean for an animal to promise, and still more who or what is the source of the permission to promise that Nietzsche stresses equally.

The first sentence of the Second Essay continues, *ist das nicht gerade jene paradoxe Aufgabe selbst, welche sich die Natur in Hinsicht auf den Menschen gestellt hat? ist es nicht das eigentliche Problem vom Menschen?* (is that not precisely that paradoxical task itself, which nature has set itself in regard to the human being? is it not the real problem of the human being?). Here nature is introduced, not just as a philosophic concept or category, but as an active, intentional force at work in the cosmos, or at least on earth. Endowed with an exceptionally clear purpose and an unyielding determination to realize that purpose, nature does not merely direct an individual species to its proper end or perfection; it actively seeks to breed a particular type of animal in accord with its own inner direction or purpose; it is not only the ends or purposes implanted or inborn in individual species that are salient and important, but those of nature as such. Nature, then, appears to function or exist not only as a set of material or formal causes but as something containing its own final cause and achieving it, or attempting to achieve it, through humanity. Several features of this opening sentence, in short, suggest a picture of nature as strongly teleological, if not providential.
Even so, however, nature sets itself a task, it creates a difficult goal that
can only be achieved in the future and with great effort and expenditure; the task
nature sets itself is, indeed, “paradoxical”—nature seems in some way to be
divided or turned against itself. If nature is intentional or teleological, Nietzsche’s
understanding of those terms seems so radically different from any traditional
philosophic conception of them that it becomes questionable whether there is any
point in using them here (and indeed Nietzsche himself does not do so). What
does it mean, moreover, to speak of an animal “that is permitted to promise?”
Permitted by whom? By nature? But what is nature’s sanction if someone
promises when he is not permitted? The answer seems rather to be, especially as
we read on in this section, permitted by himself, permitted by his conscience.
Nature’s goal may therefore seem to be to breed an animal with a conscience.
Nevertheless, Nietzsche speaks of “the problem of the human being,” and indeed
the possession of or need for a conscience suggests a divided nature. Even with
nature at the helm, humanity remains a problem—though perhaps it would be
more faithful to Nietzsche’s thinking to say that humanity is a problem, as a
concept and as a living species moving into the future, precisely because it is in
some way actuated or guided by nature. To anticipate, the problem of the human
being is that humans are originally forgetful, unreliable and irresponsible, but
must become animals able or permitted to promise; the problem of the human
being is the tension between its deep need to forget and indeed to be almost
mindless and its apparently natural need to be a promising or self-governing and
moral animal. One thinks of course of Rousseau, but even at this schematic and
superficial level there are two obvious differences between Rousseau and Nietzsche: Nietzsche seems to be arguing that the moral development of human beings is driven by nature rather than being simply opposed to or destructive of nature, and Nietzsche seems to consider the whole conscious life of the human being, the whole apparatus of memory and its overcoming or pushing back of forgetfulness, to be at least as important as the strictly moral aspect of human social existence.

Nietzsche continues to explore or elaborate the problem posed by nature’s “breeding” a particular type of animal by turning to what is apparently the chief or most insuperable obstacle to the task nature has set itself, the powerful, active force of forgetfulness. “Forgetfulness is no mere vis inertia, as the superficial believe; it is rather an active, in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression (Hemmungsvermögen).” Memory, as Nietzsche stresses here, means not just a failure in the functioning of the basic propensity or impulse to forget, but an active willing to remember, an active willing not to forget, a will that contradicts or opposes the basic tendency or power of human beings to forget.

Throughout this passage Nietzsche emphasizes that forgetting is for human beings a condition of health and happiness. The necessity of error for life is a common theme in Nietzsche’s works, but here Nietzsche is speaking more specifically of the need for forgetting; healthy, cheerful, vivacious human beings need not only to believe a great many false things to make their happiness and health possible, they must also forget a great many things. The character of this forgetting is indicated by the word Kaufmann and Hollingdale translate
“repression” (other translators have “suppression”), Hemmung. “Inhibition” may
be the best translation, but its meanings range from inhibition to restraint,
blockage, scruple, and repression or suppression. The basic idea is that there is a
positive and active faculty or power working in human beings to block or inhibit
memories from breaking into the conscious mind; this reading is supported by
Nietzsche’s subsequent reference to forgetfulness as a closing of “the doors and
windows of consciousness (Bewusstseins),” and as “a doorkeeper, a preserver of
psychic (seelischen) order, repose and etiquette.” Just as humanity’s “entire inner
world” was once inconceivably thin and paltry (2.16), so the human animal’s
conscious mind was originally a tiny, empty room. Human beings were originally
“slaves of momentary affect and desire,” possessed of “partly obtuse, partly
flighty mind[s] attuned only to the passing moment” (2.3); the active force of
forgetfulness kept their minds blank or empty, free of anything other than the
ephemeral passion or desire gripping the animal at any given moment. One is
tempted to call this condition natural as well as original, but according to
Nietzsche’s presentation so far, it is no more natural than what replaces or
obliterates it (and indeed would seem to be even less so).

In many ways Nietzsche’s discussion here mirrors or repeats his treatment
of the relation between life and forgetting in the first section of “On the Uses and
Disadvantages of History for Life,” but with interesting differences. In
Nietzsche’s early essay, life, forgetting and living or acting unhistorically were
grouped together and opposed to history and memory. Here in the Genealogy, the
contrast is between forgetfulness, which seems to imply health and happiness, and
memory, which entails the creation of a will and unhappiness (the will is not mentioned in this section until Nietzsche begins to discuss the creation or breeding of a memory in human beings, after which some form of Wille or wollen is used eight times in one lengthy sentence detailing the meaning of memory).

The will, perhaps the central or cardinal element in Nietzsche’s psychology and his philosophy as a whole, thus appears to belong with memory, unhappiness and, perhaps unexpectedly, nature. Life, or at least health, requires at both the physical and psychological levels disharmonious activities of which we are best left ignorant; this is the crucial purpose served by forgetfulness, to provide us

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18 Nietzsche’s account of what memory means for the will complicates the picture presented in 1.13, according to which quanta of driving, willing and effecting (Treiben, Willen, Wirken) seem to present and discharge themselves immediately, thus making impossible belief in an indifferent or neutral substratum conditioning or managing these quanta; there is, Nietzsche especially argues, no agent or substratum free to express its strength or not to do so. Here in 2.1, however, Nietzsche speaks specifically of “a real memory of the will (ein eigentliches Gedächtniss des Willens);” it is the will which acquires a memory or has a memory imposed on it or burnt into it. This memory of the will means that “between the original ‘I will,’ ‘I shall do’ and the actual discharge of the will, its act (seinen Akt), a world of new strange things, circumstances, even acts of will (Willensakten) may be interposed without breaking this long chain of the will.” Whatever Nietzsche means by speaking of quanta of drive, will and effect, and by ruling out a neutral substratum restraining those quanta, he apparently does not mean that these quanta can only form and discharge themselves immediately or spontaneously as acts of will. It may not be a metaphysical subject, but there is some order or economy in human beings which makes promising and delayed acts or discharges of the will possible (this indeed is also suggested by Nietzsche’s discussion in 1.11 of the way even the strong are “held in check” or must repress their instincts in society).

19 The tension so often remarked in Nietzsche between his concern for rank ordering and his insistence that life is fundamentally chaos, and thus, it would seem, his insistence that a stable order of rank is impossible, is beautifully expressed in this passage. In the same sentence Nietzsche both insists that “our organism is oligarchically aranged (unser Organismus ist oligarchisch eingerichtet)” and speaks of “our underworld of subservient organs working for and against one another (für und gegen einander arbeitet).” It seems to me that
with “a little tabula rasa of the consciousness.” It is therefore obvious that there “can be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present without forgetfulness (kein Glück, keine Heiterkeit, keine Hoffnung, keinen Stolz, keine Gegenwart geben könnte ohne Vergesslichkeit).” Generally this passage harmonizes with the view, presented in section ten of the First Essay, that a healthy or complete human being is one that can assimilate and incorporate experiences, which is to say interpret them, to serve its own ends; Nietzsche uses the word Natur to describe this ability in both 1.10 and the first section of “The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.” Although Nietzsche does not use the word “nature” or “natural” to describe this tendency here, it seems necessarily to be natural, at least in the sense of being the spontaneous result of a nature left untouched by human civilization. Thus, for instance, Nietzsche refers to “this necessarily forgetful animal (dieses nothwendig vergessliche Thier),” suggesting that human beings’ animality consists more in their forgetfulness than in their ability to promise, thus pointing back to the first sentence of the Essay. Yet Nietzsche has just said that nature has set itself the task of breeding a memory in human beings, of abrogating this fundamental, healthy tendency.

Nature therefore apparently desires to deprive human beings of happiness, cheerfulness, hope and pride, by breeding a memory and a will in them; if one objects to speaking of nature as desiring, nature’s effect on human beings, the

much of the tension or incoherence can be resolved if one understands Nietzsche to be arguing for an oligarchy or rank order but not for a stable one. Thus, as Nietzsche argues in 2.12, the organs work both for and against one another because they fight for greater power and thus establish an oligarchy, but not one based on any naturally harmonious order and not one that is necessarily stable.
result of nature’s making itself felt in or by human beings, is to drive them away from the state in which they are happy and healthy. “[T]his necessarily forgetful animal, in which forgetting represents a force (Kraft), a form of strong health (eine Form der starken Gesundheit), has bred into itself an opposing faculty (Gegenvermögen), a memory.” The animal that nature intends or works to breed would thus necessarily seem to be a fundamentally unhealthy animal (cf. 3.13). It may then seem absurd to suggest that memory is in any way natural; it seems rather to be purely anti-natural, not simply in the sense of not being spontaneous, but in the sense of countering and thwarting the natural human inclinations toward happiness, or of forcing human beings out of the condition in which they are naturally happy. Indeed, here nature no longer figures as the breeder; it is instead the human animal who has bred or cultivated a memory in himself (hat sich...angezüchtet).20

After explaining the significance of breeding or constructing a will to remember, Nietzsche turns to explaining how this breeding was accomplished, or what had to happen historically for memory to exist. At the end of the first section Nietzsche highlights specifically the intellectual accoutrements necessary

20 Robert Guay captures the paradoxical or questionable character of Nietzsche’s argument very well when he says that “a tremendous amount of work had to be done to make ourselves reflective and self-governing, and the impetus to do that work did not come naturally, and did not come exogenously.” Robert Guay, “The Philosophical Function of Genealogy,” in Keith Ansell-Pearson, ed., A Companion to Nietzsche (Oxford, Blackwell: 2005), p. 362. Nietzsche’s depiction of nature here, however, suggests that for him this development was in some sense natural, though his understanding of nature is largely unique in the history of philosophy. The impetus, in other words, did not come from the spontaneous promptings of nature but from the work of civilization or the morality of mores, but nature somehow had a hand in creating these apparently anti-natural constructions or machines, as we will see shortly.
for human beings to think accurately about the future, and thus to be able to
promise. Humans had to learn to distinguish necessary events from accidental
ones, to think causally, to see and anticipate the distant as present, to fix the goal
and the means to it, and generally to be able to reckon and to calculate. The
acquisition of these abilities required that human beings themselves become
“calculable, regular, necessary;” the suggestion, especially when this passage is
read in the light of the rest of the Second Essay (or at least the rest of the first half
of it), is that the conceptual grids or tools mentioned above are not simply, and
perhaps not primarily, metaphysical realities or logical conditions of thought
existing independently of human beings, and which humans must become orderly
and civilized in order to grasp or ascertain; they are rather as much products of
humanity’s work on itself, as much creations of humanity or reflections of a
human soul or character made “calculable, regular, necessary,” as they are
anything else. The story of how human beings became necessary and uniform
occupies Nietzsche for at least the next two sections, and to some extent until
section fourteen.

If Nietzsche is suggesting that this development was natural, he clearly
means or understands this word in a radically different way than did ancient
philosophy, as is clear already from the first sentence of the Second Essay. This
difference is again foregrounded in the last sentence of the first section, where
Nietzsche emphasizes that one who promises stands surety for himself “in the
future (literally, “as future,” für sich als Zukunft gut sagen).” As in the final two
sections of the First Essay and in the discussion of nature’s task in the opening
line of the Second Essay, the distance between this stress on the future and the classical conception of nature cannot be overstated. Nietzschean nature is concerned with the future; it acts or expresses itself in the horizon of the future or with an eye to the future attainment of a goal—or the completion of a task—it has apparently set itself.21 Further evidence of the gulf between Nietzsche’s understanding of nature and that of the ancients comes in the first sentence of the second section, where Nietzsche underlines the word “responsibility (Verantwortlichkeit),” a concept that makes little sense in the context of ancient philosophy. If one naturally pursues the good, be it real or apparent, it is hard to see how one can be responsible for this decision. More generally, if human beings are embedded within a cosmic order, and are born with a particular, largely immutable nature, it is not clear what it would mean for them to attempt to take responsibility for what they are, which is the full sense of responsibility at which Nietzsche is driving here.

21 Obviously I am applying extremely anthropomorphic language to nature in this sentence, but I believe that in doing so I am only following the lead of Nietzsche himself, who describes nature as setting itself a task. Section 109 of The Gay Science is a crucial passage here. There Nietzsche shows that, if anything, he was more aware than any previous philosopher of the tendency to speak of nature anthropomorphically, but that he was also above all eager “to begin to be permitted to ‘naturalize’ humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature” (FW 109). This passage shows that, however one understands Nietzsche’s decision to use anthropomorphic language, that decision was not born of ignorance or naïveté. My own sense is that Nietzsche accepted that it was impossible to speak of nature in terms of humanity’s concern with it, or its effect on humanity, without anthropomorphizing nature, attributing purposes, moral qualities, and other such things to it, or in any case that he thought continuing this philosophic tradition or convention the best way to make his point. In other words, he continued to commit the error without believing in it.
The second section continues and tightens Nietzsche’s focus on the role of nature in human moral and social development, and thus on the character or nature of nature. After the opening sentence introducing “the long story of the origin of responsibility,” Nietzsche again refers to “[t]hat task, to breed an animal that is permitted to promise (Jene Aufgabe, ein Thier heranzuzüchten, das versprechen darf),” and tells us that this task first required that human beings “be made to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular and therefore calculable.” It is by now plain that this involved doing enormous harm to the earliest human beings, those “necessarily forgetful animal[s],” as indeed Nietzsche goes on to explain in some detail. This making uniform and calculable was “[t]he monstrous work of what I have called ‘the morality of mores’ (Sittlichkeit der Sitte),” which “has here its sense, its great justification, however much hardness, tyranny, stupidity and idiocy also inhered in it.”

It is evident from the passages Nietzsche cites from *Daybreak* (9, 14, 16), if it was not from the sentence just quoted, that this morality of mores or customs is roughly what the ancient philosophers called convention or law (*nomos*); indeed, the discussions in *Daybreak* suggest that Nietzsche’s view of custom is even darker or bleaker than that of the ancients.

Even so, however, it is difficult to interpret this work of convention or of the morality of mores (Sittlichkeit der Sitte) as simply the gruesome disfigurement or subjugation of nature. Although Nietzsche speaks in this section of “humanity’s work upon itself” rather than of nature as the breeder of an animal

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22 Twice in this section Nietzsche describes this work or process as “monstrous,” ungeheuer.
permitted to promise, it is hard to conceive of the impetus for this work coming from any source other than nature. Indeed, when Nietzsche elsewhere describes those who founded political societies (2.17, J 257), he seems to attribute their activity to nature, to the strength of their natures and thus to the strength of nature working within and through them. To state Nietzsche’s view as briefly as possible, if only partially and inadequately, and to summarize the lengthy discussion below: to the extent that one can discern natural impulses or instincts in human beings, they call for, prompt or drive human beings to create, and above all to create forms of social and political life for themselves; in so doing, however, humans must necessarily destroy and mutilate a great deal of what is natural; in this way, nature induc es or encourages a certain kind of activity in human beings, even though that activity is ruinous of much of what must be considered natural.

The morality of mores therefore seems to be in some sense natural or produced or caused by nature. Nietzsche’s treatment of this form of morality is further complicated by his claim that it eventually overcomes itself and produces the sovereign individual. The prehistoric work of the morality of mores was, as Nietzsche insists here, the necessary precondition or preparation for a human being who is permitted to promise, a formula Nietzsche uses again and again in this section, eventually identifying this ability to promise with individual sovereignty or autonomy. The morality of mores or the work of convention thus overcomes itself by producing it opposite, “the sovereign individual, like only to himself, again free of the morality of mores, that autonomous supramoral individual (das von der Sittlichkeit der Sitte wieder losgekommene, das autonome
When Nietzsche speaks of this as the “great justification” of the morality of mores, his point is not simply that convention or morality eventuates in an autonomous individual, something that sounds attractive to modern or post-modern ears. His point is rather that the morality of mores, the work of custom or convention in the long prehistory of humanity, made human beings more powerful, it created greater units of power, both by making individuals more powerful and by making possible the creation of social units, which themselves became new locations, embodiments, concentrations and stimuli of will and thus of power. These greater units of power both required and then furthered the creation or breeding of a stronger will in human beings, something Nietzsche here ties very tightly to being permitted to promise, and which he emphasizes almost as much. The human being who is permitted to promise, who is able to see and plan into the distant future, and who has the strong and unbending will necessary to act successfully and consistently on those plans, achieves life’s purpose of creating greater units of power (2.11—the social units of power created by the morality of mores do the same). The conscious mental life forced upon human beings by the morality of mores necessitates but also thereby makes possible conscious, spiritual interpretations of life that provide a new focus for the human will and stimulate it to become more powerful and more expansive. The will, and thus power and thus life, is therefore enhanced by

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the process of the morality of mores or the work of convention or custom. This morality, moreover, eventually overcomes itself; like life in its speech to Zarathustra (Z 2.12, “On Self-Overcoming”), or like justice or Christian dogma and morality in the Genealogy (2.10, 3.27), the morality of mores overcomes itself; it ends by producing its opposite, it brings about its own destruction through an act of self-overcoming. To see it simply as an oppressive subjugation or crippling of nature therefore seems inadequate; the process of human socialization seems, at the very least, to be somehow organic, actuated by and serving the same vital impulses of life as any other human creation, and itself only a temporary stage in a larger organic process or evolution.

But in what sense is this process or its conclusion natural? Does it make sense to describe any of this as the work of nature, even if the process is organic or living? The sovereign individual, after all, “with this mastery over himself, also necessarily has in hand mastery over circumstances, over nature (über die Natur) and all more short-willed (willenskürzeren) and unreliable creatures.” The animal into which a memory has been bred, the fruit of the tree of human evolution, attains mastery over nature. So far is he from realizing the perfection of his nature, from living according to nature, that he stands over against it and subdues it. Thus at the end of the second section Nietzsche presents the “proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility” as having “in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct.” The human animal can acquire new instincts over time. Its crucial or dominating instinct, the instinct that sets the most complete human beings apart
from the rest, has been acquired, and in particular has been acquired through the agency of social convention. In what sense can any of this be described as natural, or indeed as anything other than profoundly anti-natural?

The expectation that nature and convention are opposed and even in violent conflict with one another comes largely or at least initially from ancient or classical philosophy. Nietzsche goes further than this here, or rather presents a more complex or contradictory picture. The difference and its depth is first indicated by Nietzsche’s use of the word “breeding;” Nietzsche is not describing either a simple education or formation that can be contrasted with nature or even a suppression or mutilation of nature, but rather an alteration and development of nature. Thus the breeding described here, the moral and intellectual education or breeding which turns human beings into animals permitted to promise, creates new instincts for the human animal, it does not simply order the ones already existing. Even so, however, it is a grave mistake to interpret the work of convention or the morality of mores as simply a shaping or guiding of human nature; it is rather a transformation of the human being from a necessarily forgetful animal (nothwendig vergessliche Thier) to an animal permitted to promise; not only is the character of the human animal revolutionized, necessity itself is apparently overcome or crushed. The work Nietzsche is describing here, and apparently attributing to nature, is a violent reversal or transfiguration of human nature, the creation of an animal soul turned against itself (2.16).
Thus, in the words of Leo Strauss, “Physis calls for nomoi while preserving the distinction, nay, opposition of physis and nomoi.” Straus is commenting on section 188 of Beyond Good and Evil, a passage well worth considering here. There Nietzsche speaks of the “moral imperative of nature (der moralische Imperativ der Natur),” which it addresses to “people, races, ages, classes, but above all to the whole animal ‘human being,’ to the human being.” This moral imperative seems to Nietzsche to be, “You shall obey, someone, and for a long time: else you will perish and lose the last respect for yourself.” Nietzsche describes what this moral imperative has meant, especially for Europe, in language strongly reminiscent (or anticipatory) of the language used here in Genealogy 2.2.

The essential thing (Das Wesentliche), “in heaven and on earth,” as it seems, is, to say it again, that for a long time and in one direction one obeys: from this there emerges and has emerged over time always something for the sake of which it is worth living on earth: for example,

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25 As Strauss notes (p. 183), this is the only time in this section that Nietzsche uses the term nature without enclosing it in quotation marks (and even here he speaks cautiously or hesitantly, of what “seems [scheint]” to be the moral imperative of nature). This section appears in the chapter titled Zur Naturgeschichte der Moral; as in the title of the Genealogy, Zur Genealogie der Moral, the “Zur” could mean either “On the” or “Towards.” It could, in other words, suggest either an authoritative treatment of its subject or preliminary or provisional contributions to a project whose completion seems distant and difficult.
virtue, art, music, dance, reason (*Vernunft*), spirituality (*Geistigkeit*)\(^{26}\)—something transfiguring, subtle, mad and divine. The long unfreedom of the spirit, the mistrustful constraint in the communicability of thoughts [cf. *J* 268], the discipline (*die Zucht*) thinkers imposed on themselves to think within the guiding principles laid down by a church or a court, or under Aristotelian presuppositions, the long spiritual will to interpret all events under a Christian schema and to rediscover and justify the Christian god in every accident—all this, however forced, capricious, hard, gruesome, and anti-rational (*Widervernünftige*), has turned out to be the means through which the European spirit has been bred (*angezüchtet*) to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility, though granted that in the process an irreplaceable amount of strength and spirit also had to be crushed, choked, and ruined (for here, as everywhere, “nature” shows herself, as she is, in all her prodigal (*verschwenderischen*) and indifferent magnificence, which is outrageous, but noble).

That for thousands of years European thinkers thought only in order to prove something…that the conclusions that should have come out of their most rigorous reflection were always settled from the start…this tyranny, this caprice, this rigorous and grandiose stupidity has educated the spirit. Slavery is, as it seems, in the cruder and in the more subtle

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\(^{26}\) Compare the account of the origins of reason (*Vernunft*) at the end of 2.3 and Nietzsche’s account of the initial relation between the spirit and political subjugation in 1.7.
sense the indispensable means also of spiritual cultivation and breeding
*(geistigen Zucht und Züchtung)*.\(^{27}\)

Both this passage and *Genealogy* 2.1-3 emphasize breeding, but a very strange and perhaps paradoxical notion of breeding. The breeding is in some sense carried out by nature, or is at least in some way driven or prompted by nature. At the same time, however, breeding here means obliterating, crushing or mutilating a great deal of what appears to be natural, and what in any case appears to be precisely that quality or capacity that is bred into the human animal (spirit, strength, reason, will, etc.).\(^{28}\) The breeding is accomplished, in other words, not

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\(^{27}\) Nietzsche sometimes criticizes morality for being anti-natural or anti-nature (e.g., *GD*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” *EH*, “Destiny,” 4, 7; cf. J 197). To the extent that morality seeks to diminish or extirpate the basic animal vitality and ferocity found in individuals like Cesare Borgia—and hence simply to tame, to produce orderly, predictable and identical domesticated and undangerous human beings—it is anti-natural or based on a misunderstanding or falsification of nature. This is not because Cesare Borgia is the ideal or telos of either nature or Nietzsche, but because he embodies certain healthy natural forces and impulses that should be bred into something greater and more complicated, rather than simply tamed and reduced to an anodyne and harmless mediocrity. Thus Nietzsche can criticize morality for opposing or trying to suppress or eradicate the basic character and conditions of nature, but still find the tyranny against nature inherent in morality unobjectionable, as he does at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil* 188, insofar as it expresses the moral imperative of nature by seeking to breed a particular type, rather than simply trying to eliminate violence or domination. There is thus a difference between morality as *Widernatur* and morality as “a bit of tyranny against ‘nature’ (*gegen die ‘Natur’*).”

\(^{28}\) Nietzsche’s comments in *The Antichrist* concerning the Laws of Manu may seem to contradict this statement. There Nietzsche is emphatic that the “order of castes, the supreme, the dominating law, is only the sanction of a natural order, natural legality (Natur-Ordnung, Natur-Gesetzlichkeit) of the first rank, over which no arbitrariness (*Willkür*), no ‘modern idea,’ has power (*Gewalt*)…Nature, not Manu, separates from one another the predominantly spiritual, the predominantly strong in muscle and temperament, and the third group, distinguished in neither the one nor the other, the mediocre…In all this, to

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through bringing human nature to its proper end or by arranging or harmonizing the human animal’s instincts, but through arbitrary, tyrannical, and stupid

say it again, there is nothing arbitrary, nothing ‘artificial’ (Nichts ‘gemacht’); whatever is different, is artificial—nature is then confounded (die Natur ist dann zu Schanden gemacht)” (A 57).

Here, however, I think that Nietzsche is simply saying that by nature human beings are different and unequal, not that there is a static natural order that the law or political life should aim to reflect or correspond to. Or rather, while there may be a natural difference between naturally spiritual types and the other types, the actual content or form of that spirituality is radically contingent and mutable, and thus human beings must be bred to each and every particular form of spirituality, rather than a particular spiritual form or ethos existing naturally, independent of human action and an authoritative guide or goal for such action. Thus the Laws of Manu institute a hereditary caste system, not, as in Plato’s Republic, a non-hereditary caste system that relies on the abolition of the family. Though Nietzsche believed that spiritual qualities are often inherited, he seemed to regard this as a kind of unintentional or at least not fully self-aware kind of breeding, not proof that nature was stronger than convention (indeed, as his discussions of this spiritual heritability show, he rather seemed to consider it at least as much the work of nature as of convention). In other words, I do not think that Nietzsche’s comments in The Antichrist(ian) deny or oppose his comments in Beyond Good and Evil and elsewhere about the necessity, desirability and character of breeding (insofar as they do, I think they should be taken as polemical overstatement); on the contrary, they seem to be a further example of them: “The order of castes, the order of rank, only formulates the supreme law of life itself; the separation of the three types is necessary for the preservation of society, for making possible the higher and highest types—inequality of rights is first the condition for the existence of rights at all.” To the extent that society expresses or harmonizes with nature at all, it is hierarchical, precisely because it aims to breed “higher and highest types.” See also GD, “Improvers,” 3 and 5, on the Laws of Manu as a morality of breeding, a law code that aims to breed a particular type of human being.

Incidentally, I think that Nietzsche’s comments in this passage from Twilight of the Idols, suggesting that Christianity is merely a “morality of taming” that can be sharply or cleanly contrasted with moralities of breeding, must themselves be taken as polemical overstatement. There is a strain in Christian morality that aims simply to “tame” or declaw the human animal, a strain to which Nietzsche draws attention throughout his writings, but there is also a strain which seeks to breed a particular human type; Nietzsche himself highlights this strain just as clearly and just as consistently (conversely, based on what Nietzsche says about the effects of socialization in GM 2.16-18, all moralities must be considered to some extent taming moralities; in other words, one cannot breed without taming at least to some degree).
brutality. Even so, however, the breeding is not a simple attack or repression of nature, but is rather an attempt to channel or develop it in a particular direction, however wasteful that attempt may be. Nature’s method of breeding, indeed nature itself, is above all verschwenderisch, wasteful, squandering, extravagant, or prodigal, as Kaufmann has it (cf. the beginning of J 9). And, of course, in both cases the breeding that nature directs eventually produces its opposite, it eventually destroys itself through an act of self-overcoming. Thus Nietzsche continues to speak of nature, and apparently to use it as a normative principle or foundation, even as his conception of nature is wasteful and destructive beyond measure, sacrificing as it does so much human health, happiness, strength and capability to its ends. Moreover, in Nietzsche’s view nature seems necessarily to destroy its own ends eventually; its ends or goals self-destruct, because by their very nature they are destroyed once they are achieved or attained (cf. J 126 and 73).

In both cases nature also seems to have moral purposes; it directs or addresses a moral imperative to humanity, and it seeks to breed a particular type of animal, one that is permitted to promise. Again, however, this must be understood as a use of heavily anthropomorphic language, or simply as a description of how nature or nature’s effects appear to human beings. Human beings can barely begin to grasp how immoral nature is—“wasteful (verschwenderisch) without measure, indifferent without measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power” (J 9)—but
since human beings are moral creatures, or rather valuing creatures, nature works
or expresses itself through their moral and valuing capacities and sensibilities in
order to produce greater units or forms of power, or in order to create through them.

Nature has nothing that human beings can recognize as moral purposes or
concerns, but precisely for that reason, it is magnificently creative, indeed perhaps
the exemplar of creativity. It creates human civilizations and cultures, and it
causes human beings to create—but humans can only create, they can only be
truly artistic or creative, as a result of long compulsion, not from the spontaneous
promptings or effusions of nature. Or, even more precisely and paradoxically,
true spontaneity, including especially artistic inspiration, is only possible as the
result of long unfreedom and compulsion, as Nietzsche stresses in Beyond Good
and Evil 188. The point is not simply that nature and various cultural productions
or creations overcome themselves, but that to achieve or breed one thing (e.g.,
freedom, sovereignty, spirituality, intellectual conscience or integrity, etc.), its
opposite must be imposed ruthlessly and brutally for generations and even
centuries, and thus a great many rudimentary forms or expressions of what will
ultimately be bred or achieved must be crushed and destroyed along the way.
Very simply, to breed freedom, tyranny and constraint must be imposed for ages.
Thus Nietzsche is not simply saying that, e.g., strength or spirit is a late
development; on the contrary, his point is that to breed or create an advanced or
subtle or complicated manifestation or form of any of the things Nietzsche
mentions in these passages, nature had first to destroy an untold quantity of
precisely that thing. This explains Nietzsche’s oft-remarked dictum that to create
is also to destroy. He is not simply saying that to create something new one has
always to replace and thus to destroy something old. He is rather saying
something far more radical and disturbing, that when nature creates it also
destroys—indeed, it perhaps destroys incalculably more than it creates, and it
destroys precisely what it creates. The creation of things like spirit and strength,
and especially of the forms they take in any given culture, requires an
immeasurable amount of destruction and mutilation. It requires, as Nietzsche
says, that an irreplaceable amount of spirit and strength be crushed, choked and
ruined, not only in the form of various individuals who are crushed in the process
of breeding, but of a great deal of strength and spirit that resisted the form being
imposed upon it by this process. The breeding of the European spirit as Nietzsche
describes it in *Beyond Good and Evil* thus required or entailed not only the
destruction of a great many individuals but of countless other possibilities or
directions of evolution or breeding. Thus, again, Nietzsche is not arguing for
anything like the traditional view of a teleological nature; what is natural is a
dynamic and ever-changing activity or process, not any kind of enduring form or
structure. Even the natural possibilities or capacities that have been developed in
the course of human evolution do not represent the essential core or sum of
natural potentials, but rather only a very few possibilities that have been bred or
developed for apparently purely arbitrary reasons. Again, the crucial fact about
nature for Nietzsche is its wastefulness and indifference, even or especially with
and in itself.
I therefore disagree with the interpretation of Nietzsche’s view of nature offered by Bernard Yack: “Every day, nature tears down what it built the day before. It maims without purpose and destroys its greatest achievements. It is capable of producing a Raphael without hands or killing off Mozart at thirty-five.”

In the first place, this statement emphasizes the fragility and transience of nature’s creations, and thus of human life and values. While this is obviously part of Nietzsche’s conception of nature and of human life, it is hardly original and is not the heart of his argument. Nor was Mozart or any other significant product of nature or culture “built the day before.” Major cultural figures like Mozart are rather the product of a long process of breeding and formation, and are made possible only by the annihilation of an immeasurable quantity of strength and spirit and an immeasurable number and range of qualitatively different potential forms or expressions for that spirit and strength. Thus nature’s wastefulness and indifference to individuals is manifested not in its refusal to prolong or safeguard the life of Mozart but precisely in his appearing at all, in the long and gruesome course of history—a progression even more gruesome spiritually or psychologically than physically—that made him possible and created him. This also means, however, that nature does not “maim without purpose;” its purpose is rather inseparable from its maiming activity.

Nature thus creates or produces living forms but in a way that is so wasteful and destructive that it looks almost like an accidental by-product of a

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basic chaotic raging or surging of purposeless activity. If, however, there were only chaos in the purest or most elemental sense, there would be no forms and certainly no humanity; there would be only the extremely chaotic and violent world that cosmologists posit as immediately following the Big Bang. Even if these forms and their creation, growth and transformation are only a tiny portion of the activity of nature, and are in a sense even inessential, they are what are of vital interest and importance to human beings. Thus, while it is probably true that for Nietzsche there is fundamentally only chaos or “becoming,” I think it is a mistake to infer from this that human creation, expressing as it does the imperative of nature, is thereby rendered meaningless or pointless. It may seem insignificant or pointless when seen in the light of certain value judgments, but there is nothing necessary or indeed desirable about these judgments.30

To return to Strauss’s suggestion that “[p]hysis calls for nomoi while preserving the distinction, nay, opposition of physis and nomoi,” there seems on the one hand to be no escape from convention to nature for Nietzsche, for nature’s imperative is contained or expressed in the conventional imperative to obey; one cannot live according to nature without living according to imperatives or tasks

30 Stanley Rosen seems to think that Nietzsche does indeed accept the necessity of these value judgments, and thus that he never moves beyond a simply negative phase of nihilism, or the view that human life is essentially meaningless (as opposed to lacking only the sort of meaning traditional religion and metaphysics claimed it did or ought to have). See especially “Nietzsche’s Revolution,” in The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 196 ff., “Remarks on Nietzsche’s ‘Platonism,’” in The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought (New York: Routledge, 1993 [1988]), pp. 184 f., and The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche’s Zarathustra (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. xii, 58 ff. and passim.
that express or manifest themselves in particular conventional, cultural situations and terms. Again, there is no eternal form of nature from which human beings can take their guidance. Yet Nietzsche’s position can in no way be identified with simple conventionalism, in the first place because nature eventually drives the human animal to overcome and thus destroy whatever conventional imperative it had temporarily assumed as its form. There is still a nature more powerful than and, at least in due time, destructive of convention. Thus while convention, while the breeding accomplished or effected through obedience to stupid and tyrannical conventional imperatives, destroys a great deal of what is natural (at least in the sense of what is original), nature itself eventually destroys any conventional form in which it appears or is constrained or expresses itself, or in which it expresses itself by being constrained. Nature and convention remain opposed and indeed destructive of one another, but ultimately nature seems not merely to triumph but indeed to have only ever been using convention as a means to its own ends.

All of these points are illustrated by Nietzsche’s use of the image of a tree bearing fruit, a metaphor he has already used twice in the *Genealogy*. Here Nietzsche briefly introduces this image in 2.2, when he refers to standing at the end of the process of the morality of mores, “where the tree finally brings forth its fruit,” indeed its “ripest fruit,” the sovereign individual. He then treats this image in greater detail at the beginning of the third section:

To be permitted to stand surety for himself with pride, and thus also *to be permitted to say yes* to himself (*Für sich gut sagen dürfen und mit Stolz,*
also auch zu sich Ja sagen dürfen)—that is, as aforesaid, a ripe fruit, but also a late fruit—how long must this fruit have hung on the tree, bitter and sour! And for a still much longer time nothing at all could be seen of such a fruit—Nobody was permitted to promise it (Niemand hätte sie versprechen dürfen), although everything in the tree was preparing and growing towards precisely this!

This last sentence may at first seem equivocal. On the one hand, nobody, presumably including nature, could have promised the emergence of the sovereign individual. Nature lacked the strength of will, the dominion over itself, to make such promises. Nature cannot stand surety for itself; nature cannot master nature; if nature has purposes, it cannot achieve them. On the other hand, however, everything in the tree was preparing and growing towards precisely this, towards the advent of the sovereign individual and his conscience. This may not have been visible from the exterior of the tree, but nature was acting to achieve its purposes.

In the light of the previous discussion of Nietzsche’s understanding of nature, however, we can see that this ambiguity is simply an accurate reflection of nature itself, which is in some sense at war with itself or which calls for and achieves its purposes or goals through the brutal imposition of irrational and arbitrary laws or customs. Nature achieves its purposes by thwarting or opposing them; it breeds a particular quality or ability by repressing it for epochs. No one could promise or predict the appearance of the fruit because all appearances
suggested only its opposite, as indeed they had to in order for that fruit ever to appear. It was precisely that only the opposite of the fruit, only the opposite of freedom and autonomy, was visible in the tree or the process that made it possible for the fruit finally to be brought forth; it was precisely the dominance of these opposing qualities or forces that ultimately bred or produced the fruit, even if it was impossible to see this until the end of the process.

This crucial aspect of Nietzsche’s thought seems to me the most important point treated in this particular text, but it is also worth considering the character and significance of the sovereign individual as Nietzsche presents him here. In several important respects the sovereign or autonomous individual contrasts sharply with the nobles depicted in the First Essay. The sovereign individual seems to be defined by or at least to experience a greater world of conscious mental activity. Granted, in 2.2 Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual’s consciousness of his power and freedom as “quivering in every muscle (in allen Muskeln zuckendes Bewusstsein),” and this may seem to suggest that the sovereign individual’s “consciousness” is more a matter of physical feeling and instinct than of conscious, rational thoughts. It seems to me, however, that this is simply an instance or expression of Nietzsche’s rejection of the body-soul dichotomy; the more fully something is consciously experienced, the more fully it will also be physically experienced. Furthermore, the words “consciousness” (Bewusstsein) and “knowledge” (Wissen) begin to appear more frequently in this passage, particularly in connection with pride; although it is true that knowledge remains largely instinctual, as with the “proud knowledge” described at the end of
the second section, it is significant that instinct is now presented as conscious or consciously known or experienced, rather than simply as the subconscious determinant of conscious states.

This greater emphasis on consciousness and knowledge highlights another, perhaps more fundamental difference between the sovereign individual and the nobles sketched in the First Essay, the basis or character of their respective acts of self-affirmation. The pride and self-affirmation of the sovereign individual flows from his ability to check or dominate himself, and thus ultimately to master contingencies and even “fate,” from his ability to promise or to see, plan and will into the future. The nobles of the First Essay, on the other hand, experience none of this; their valuing of themselves springs from a simple spontaneous feeling of self-affirmation or of the pathos of distance (1.2, 10). Consciousness, will, promising and the future are all essential parts of what makes individual sovereignty possible, but they are hardly mentioned at all in Nietzsche’s account of the nobles in the First Essay (if anything, they had seemed to belong to the slaves or to ressentiment). The most notable exception is Nietzsche’s discussion of will in 1.13, a discussion which, as we have seen, must be significantly revised or expanded to cohere with Nietzsche’s analysis of sovereignty and promising here in 2.1-3. As we have also seen, the development of the will and the ability or permission to promise were achieved only through terrible violence and in fundamental opposition to the basic or original tendency of the “necessarily forgetful animal.” All of this seems entirely foreign to the nobles as Nietzsche portrayed them in the First Essay.
Whatever this suggests about the relation of the three essays or the narrative or argumentative structure of the *Genealogy* as a whole, it seems clearly to suggest that the picture of the nobles in the First Essay is inadequate, or at least that the nobles are inferior to the sovereign individual. After all, the sovereign individual experiences in himself “a feeling of the perfection [or “completion”] of humanity as a whole (*ein Vollendungs-Gefühl des Menschen überhaupt*).”

There is, however, some reason to doubt that Nietzsche believes that the sovereign individual has been achieved. The motive of one who keeps his promises seems at first to be the sensation of his own “power and freedom,” a sense of mastery even more than self-mastery, of superiority over others and over events and circumstances, even over nature. Because of this sense of mastery, because he knows himself to be so free and powerful, he radiates his value judgments outward; he honors others with his trust; he possesses his own measure of value, and keeps his promises for himself and his sense of freedom and mastery, not to prove himself to others, and even less from guilt or shame. This picture, however, is deeply at odds with the fearful debtor who learns to keep his promises only out of physical terror. To be sure, one of Nietzsche’s central arguments in the Second Essay is that the purpose and character of a thing is frequently changed radically, and that the original purpose or character of that thing does nothing to determine the course of its evolution or the later changes it undergoes. Thus the ability to promise that was originally bred into or attained by the fearful debtor could eventually metamorphize or be employed or embodied in the sovereign individual described here. To the extent, however, that one still
promises from a sense of *Schuld*, or debt and/or guilt, one is not sovereign or autonomous, one does not possess an independent or free will. And the Second Essay as a whole seems largely designed to show how the will is still imprisoned within the conceptual and affective world of morality, and so how the will is still unfree in this sense. Thus Nietzsche closes the essay by fervently hoping or calling for “the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt…who again makes the will free;” the will appears still to be fundamentally unfree.

Although Nietzsche begins by suggesting that the sovereign individual and his will are distinct from the bad conscience and guilt, although he initially discusses these developments separately and thus implies that they are different outcomes of the same process, the morality of mores, this distinction or separation does not seem tenable to me. In the first place, guilt and the bad conscience clearly continue to exist and to operate on human beings well after the end of the era of the morality of mores, which Nietzsche clearly identifies as a very primitive and largely prehistoric era and type or system of morality and social organization. Then there is the rest of the Second Essay, which concludes by asserting that the ability to make promises has been and continues to be tied to or informed by guilt and the bad conscience (though, admittedly, Nietzsche’s treatment of these points late in the Second Essay is rather more compressed than one would like).

Finally, I would like to address two arguments made by Christa Davis Acampora, which are worth considering both as interpretive points and as challenges to the view that Nietzsche regards sovereignty as an ideal and especially as an ideal to be achieved in the future. She first argues, drawing on
Lawrence Hatab’s book *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*,\(^{31}\) that Nietzsche’s depiction of the sovereign individual as conquering or mastering fate (or destiny: *Schicksal*) cannot be squared with one of his central concerns or recommendations, *amor fati*, love of one’s fate.\(^{32}\) Nietzsche, however, in urging us to love or embrace our fate, and more specifically to love or embrace the purely contingent or accidental character of our fate, does not thereby renounce the ability also to urge us to will particular things, or to urge us to will that our fate take a particular form. *Amor fati* does not, in other words, mean that we cannot still will or try to take some control over fate. The mastery over fate and circumstances that Nietzsche describes here at 2.2 does not imply making oneself a *causa sui*, as Nietzsche puts it in the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* that Hatab and Acampora both cite; Nietzsche does not, I think, mean that the sovereign individual somehow embodies or (necessarily) believes himself to embody the “desire for ‘freedom of the will’ in the superlative metaphysical sense…the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one’s actions oneself, to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society” (*J* 21).\(^{33}\) Nietzsche’s *amor fati* rather means recognizing and embracing the role of all of

\(^{31}\) Lawrence J. Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 37-38. It should be noted that Hatab’s comments are much briefer and that he draws much less firm and radical conclusions than does Acampora.


\(^{33}\) Likewise, when Nietzsche here refers to the “independent” and “free” will of the sovereign individual, I think it is clear that he is referring to its freedom and independence from the constraints of morality, not suggesting that it is somehow free in the metaphysical sense that Nietzsche elsewhere critiques and mocks.
those things in making one the person that one is, and thus in fostering and
directing one’s will; amor fati does not, however, mean that one must abandon
one’s will or the desirability and indeed necessity of willing. If the sovereignty
Nietzsche seems to praise here appears to us inherently linked with the longing to
be the causa sui he mocks elsewhere, that is because of the influence of the
moralization of promising, the will and the sense of debt or guilt Nietzsche
describes in the rest of the Second Essay. It is, in other words, proof that the
sovereign individual does not yet exist, not that he is somehow incompatible with
the major themes of Nietzsche’s thought.34

Acampora also contends that Nietzsche cannot be endorsing the sovereign
individual’s attempt to promise, and thus to will something over time and into the
future, because doing so would contradict his critique of a metaphysical subject,
or a neutral substratum which remains the same behind individual acts and acts of
will. “[H]ow could it be that the Nietzsche who so emphasizes becoming, and
who is suspicious of the concept of the subject (as the ‘doer behind the deed’),
could think that [it] is desirable—let alone possible—that a person could ensure
his or her word in the future? How could one promise to do something, to stand
security for something, that cannot be predicted and for which one is, in a sense,

34 Acampora rightly notes that Nietzsche rarely mentions the importance of
promising or of being permitted to promise elsewhere (p. 154), but this is
presumably because promising takes on special importance in the story of the
evolution of moral responsibility that Nietzsche is telling here. He does, of
course, very frequently mention the importance of willing, and here treats
promising principally as an instance of willing, of having the strength to will
sucessfully, and thus to will into the future.
no longer the one who could be responsible for it?” This, however, seems to me to drastically overstate Nietzsche’s point. If Nietzsche’s critique of the metaphysical subject means that he is arguing that it is somehow impossible for human beings to promise, or to sustain their will over time and into the future, then his critique is simply nonsensical. Similarly, Acampora goes too far in my view when she suggests that the intellectual operations or conceptual distinctions Nietzsche sketches at the end of 2.1 are somehow obliterated or made illegitimate by the “perpetual striving that the self becomes when we are attentive to most of the rest of Nietzsche’s philosophy”.

The emphasis on will and the future is at least as important a concern in the rest of Nietzsche’s philosophy as is the notion of the self as perpetual striving. Moreover, even if Nietzsche does not believe that the distinctions or tools he mentions at the end of 2.1 accurately reflect reality (and several of them are clearly untouched by Nietzsche’s emphasis on becoming and his critique of traditional metaphysics), nothing prevents them from being useful tools or means for willing. Regarding Nietzsche’s view of the subject, Acampora herself notes that “Nietzsche conceives of human beings, like all other organisms, as pluralities, as complexes of forces, not as discrete individual entities. This is not to say that there are no individuals; the particularity of the relations among (or arrangement of) the forces we are accounts for our

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individuality.” But these arrangements or relations can, of course, be relatively stable—certain parts or complexes can maintain their dominance over the others for long durations, even for the entirety of an individual’s life—and thus promising and willing into the future can easily be reconciled with Nietzsche’s critique of the subject and emphasis on becoming (even if he does not give a comprehensive account of how all this fits together here).

Nietzsche closes the third section of the Second Essay with an apparently genuinely anguished consideration of “what effort it costs on this earth to breed [heranzuzüchten, the same word applied to nature in the first sentence of the first section] a ‘nation of thinkers,’” and more generally of how much blood and cruelty were required to produce “reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, this whole gloomy affair called reflection (Nachdenken), all these prerogatives and showpieces of man.” It is worth noting Nietzsche’s tone here, which obviously counts against claims that Nietzsche is advocating a new barbarism or is some kind of simple sadist. Even so, however, the following sections discuss in greater detail the purpose, significance and motivations of primitive or prehistoric punishment, and in the course of these investigations Nietzsche makes clear that

38 Nietzsche continues to play on his original use of this word throughout the Second Essay, as for instance when he refers in this same sentence to Germany having a right “to breed every type of mandarins for Europe (alle Art von Mandarinen Europa’s heran zu züchten), or when he later says that modern man has “bred (angezüchtet) himself that queasy stomach and coated tongue through which not only the joy and innocence of the animal has become repugnant to him, but even life itself has grown distasteful” (7; again, note the modification of the physical or biological character and propensities of humanity). In these cases, however, the breeding seems to go against nature, to diminish life and its vital forces.
this humane feeling should be subordinated or secondary to the search for truth.
Chapter Two

Schuld, Punishment and Cruelty: Sections 4-6

Section four finally brings us to the topics announced in the title of the essay, the consciousness of guilt (das Bewusstsein der Schuld), the bad conscience, that other “gloomy thing” (the first apparently being reflection). Nietzsche begins his discussion of the bad conscience by again assailing previous genealogists of morals for having “no knowledge, no will to knowledge (kein Wissen, kein Wille zum Wissen) of the past; still less an historical instinct (historischer Instinkt), a ‘second sight’ which is necessary precisely here.” Nietzsche’s superior knowledge and understanding of the past, so crucial to this Essay and to the Genealogy as a whole, was already indicated in the first sentence of 2.3. One can guess in advance, Nietzsche begins there, that the conscience “has a long history and a variety of forms (Form-Verwandlung) behind it;” far from being “the voice of God in man” (EH III, GM), or the medium through which human beings intuit eternal or transhistorical moral truths, the conscience, like everything else human, is purely contingent and historically variable. Thus, in Nietzsche’s account, before the earliest humans could arrive at even the crudest form of the conscience, they had to learn to remember a few very elementary laws. “One burns something in, so that it stays in the memory: only what does not stop hurting stays in the memory;” only pain, not pleasure, stays in the memory. Nietzsche’s suggestion is that originally, at the very beginning of the use of
punishment, terrifying and excruciating punishments were attached to a command simply to make the command memorable, not to make its transgression more fearful; humans had first to learn to remember commands or laws before they could think of whether to obey or transgress those commands. Indeed, based on what Nietzsche has said earlier about the need forcibly to make human beings capable of thinking in terms of the future, the fear of punishment as a consequence would seem to have been a slightly later development, for in order to fear and try to avoid future pain, one has to be able to think in terms of the future, to plan for the future, and that is precisely what these earliest humans could not do. Initially the transgression of the command was inevitable; the aim of punishment was simply to remind the most primitive subjects of a few basic laws, then to make them afraid of breaking those laws, though this presumably first happened by means of simple association, a feeling of overwhelming terror when one remembered a certain command, not causal thinking, a reckoning that “if I break this law, I will suffer this punishment, therefore I will not break it.” All of this suggests what Nietzsche later makes quite explicit (2.17), that the earliest stages of human social or political development were dominated or suffused by terror.

Even after civil society had established itself and was somewhat secure, and well after human beings had learned not to kill each other on sight, the forms of justice and conscience were radically different from what they have been for almost all of recorded human history; whatever differences one may imagine or observe between different epochs of human history, Nietzsche here argues that the
fundamental assumptions common to them all, particularly those concerning guilt, intention and the justification of punishment, are very late developments or refinements.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, according to Nietzsche, “that major moral concept ‘guilt’ (\textit{Schuld}) has taken its origin from the very material concept ‘debt’ (\textit{Schuld}).” Furthermore, and more importantly, “punishment as a \textit{requital} (\textit{die Strafe als eine Vergeltung}) developed completely apart from any presuppositions concerning freedom or unfreedom of the will…throughout the longest period of human history one absolutely did \textit{not} punish \textit{because} one made the instigator of evil (\textit{Übelanstifter}) responsible (\textit{verantwortlich}) for his act, thus \textit{not} under the presupposition that only the guilty (\textit{der Schuldige}) are to be punished” (2.4).

Why then did one punish at this stage of human development? “[A]s parents punish their children even now, out of anger over an injury (\textit{Schaden}) suffered, vented on the one who caused the injury (\textit{am Schädiger}).” In this passage Nietzsche plays on the similarity between \textit{Schuldiger} and \textit{Schädiger}, but speaks only of the latter as the object or target of punishment. In this earlier stage one simply punished because someone had caused harm, not because one held that person “guilty” in any significant moral sense.

Nietzsche is here arguing, in contrast to Plato, that anger is amoral, that one can be angry at and want to punish someone without thinking them morally

\textsuperscript{39} I am here following Nietzsche and suggesting that these were, apparently everywhere, “late” developments in human culture or civilization, but Frithjof Bergmann has argued that profound differences exist between “advanced” systems of morality or law, precisely concerning the relation between punishment and the freedom of the will and thus moral guilt. See Frithjof Bergmann, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Morality,” in \textit{Reading Nietzsche}, eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 32 f.
accountable, i.e., without believing that they chose to act as they did. More generally, an experience of loss or damage is what triggers anger, not any moral judgment, and the experience of anger is in no way predicated on or necessarily accompanied by any moral judgment, however inarticulate or dimly felt. Yet, Nietzsche is quick to add, this anger can be “held in check and modified by the idea that every injury (Schaden) has its equivalent in something and can actually be paid back (abgezahlt), be it even through a suffering (Schmerz) of the injurer (des Schädigers).” This idea, Nietzsche says, of an equivalence between injury and pain (Schaden und Schmerz) draws its power from the contractual relation (Vertragsverhältniss) between creditor and debtor, which is as old as and indeed constitutive of the notion of “legal subjects (Rechtssubjekte).”

Thus begins Nietzsche’s treatment of prehistoric punishment, its meaning, motivation, and relation to the rest of society. He begins by tracing the primitive forms and presuppositions of punishment back to the earliest forms of trade and exchange. At this very early stage of human political and social life, one did not punish because one thought a criminal deserved punishment for choosing to break the law, and thus not on the basis of anything that we would recognize as justice. One rather regarded punishment as the paying of a debt. The relationship between creditor and debtor, as Nietzsche says at the end of 2.4, in turn points back to the basic forms (die Grundformen) of buying, selling, exchange, trade and traffic. As Nietzsche later explains, it was from this basic activity of setting prices, measuring values, contriving equivalences, exchanging, and the like that humanity first arrived at the belief that “every thing has its price; all things can be
paid back (abgezahlt)—the oldest and most naïve moral canon of justice” (2.8). This basic idea or belief was applied to the harm or damage caused by criminal acts; the harm was interpreted as a kind of debt and the criminal was interpreted as indebted to the one he had harmed, especially, as Nietzsche eventually specifies, to the city or community itself (2.9).

This is how we move, in Nietzsche’s account, from the most primitive form of economics to one of the most primitive forms of legality and punishment. The crucial question that Nietzsche raises in this section and devotes the next two to answering is, How did suffering come to be linked or entangled with damage or debt? Granted that primitive law codes treat crime as a kind of debt that must be paid off, how did they come to regard this debt as capable of being repaid or discharged through the suffering of the criminal? Here at the end of 2.4 Nietzsche says that this idea that an injury (and thus a crime) can be repaid or requited through the suffering of the one who caused it “takes its power” from the primeval relation between debtor and creditor. Is Nietzsche suggesting that this connection was already present there, that this earliest contractual relationship was created for the sake of inflicting pain or suffering upon the debtor? It seems to me that he cannot be saying that, given his claim that this relationship predates any political society. In the absence of any central or political power, one could attain the goal or pleasure of making another suffer simply by attacking him; there is no need to use a contract or economic relationship as an uncertain means to visit violence upon another.
The answer to this question of how harm and pain, *Schaden und Schmerz*, are first connected must be unraveled from Nietzsche’s often obscure or overly terse account in the next several sections, but first we should step back and try to understand the character of the earliest humanity as Nietzsche has presented it here. Specifically, I think that Nietzsche’s narrative so far forces us to ask how these “flighty” and incalculable earliest humans could also devise trade and debt, or indeed any form of economic or social life. If the fundamental instincts of primeval humanity were, as Nietzsche later claims, thoroughly violent and volatile (2.16), or even if they were simply as forgetful as he maintains at the beginning of the essay, how could even as basic an institution or practice as barter exist prior to the founding of political society? I think the only way to answer this question is to suggest that Nietzsche is, for the most part, overstating just how violent and asocial the first humans were. Thus, for instance, Nietzsche abstracts entirely from the family throughout the Second Essay, presumably in order to throw into the sharpest relief possible his image of human beings as asocial or acommunal.40 I think that Nietzsche’s account can be made to cohere if we take these earliest humans’ life as including some basic but purely instinctual familial or tribal organization and an ability and willingness to cooperate for certain very limited purposes or activities. One can still easily imagine, however, that the instincts of these earliest humans were too violent and unstable, and their conscious minds and impulse control still too crude, minuscule, and weak, for them to live

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40 The closest Nietzsche comes to mentioning the family in the Second Essay is a passing reference to the debtor’s wife in 2.5, as a piece of property the debtor can pledge for a loan (and even this may have been as much for the sake of the rhyme *seinen Leib oder sein Weib* as anything else).
in anything approaching a proper society, even if a basic mammalian family life and occasional barter or trade were possible for them.

Let us then piece together the progression from pre-social humans to humans living in a political community that punishes. The earliest humans were “slaves of momentary affect and desire” (2.3), and most of their affects and desires were violent and explosive. They did, however, live together in family groups, perhaps even very primitive tribes, and sometimes bartered with one another. This still predominantly instinctual and forgetful life came to an end with the rise of political society, which began to burn a memory into its citizens through violent punishments. Eventually, the humans living in these communities attained a level of self-conscious awareness and a rudimentary ability to think about the future and keep their promises. At this stage, they began to use contracts, and to think of their relations to the community and to one another as governed or constituted by contracts. I cannot see how they could have conceived of or acted in accord with contracts before this point, and until a basic level of stability and security was achieved, the state or community’s sole reason for punishing was to brutalize the populace into obeying a few basic laws, not to institute a system of counterbalancing private losses or damages with pleasures. A contract would be meaningless to human beings who couldn’t remember the most fundamental laws of society, so I think that it is only at this point that Nietzsche’s accounts of both punishment and debt, as contractual relationships in which suffering is exchanged as a commodity to offset or repay a material loss, can apply.
Nietzsche jumps ahead to this period of human evolution in section five, where he focuses on the use of torture or violence in ancient contracts between creditors and debtors. Nietzsche begins by reiterating his formulae about promising and making a memory for early human beings; because the debtors had to promise, “here precisely it was a matter of making a memory for those who promised.” In this context, however, the reference is to promising to pay off particular debts to individuals, not to obeying laws; it now begins to seem as if individual creditors eventually took a hand in making or breeding a memory in human beings. As we read on, however, the political community seems to have been as important here as anything, as is made clear by the fact that the law quantified and parcelled out discreet amounts of torture, and thus of pleasure.

As the fifth section goes on, the real emphasis and significance shifts to the purpose of these punishments. In other words, we return to the question of how or why pain and debt or guilt, Schmerz und Schuld, were first connected. The initial emphasis on making a memory for those who promised suggests that the objective of these horrific punishments was to ensure that the debts were repaid, and this indeed is what Nietzsche first identifies as the motive behind them. After emphasizing, however, that “from early times and all over” there were legal specifications of how much one could cut off the body of a debtor, Nietzsche says, “Let us make the logic of this whole form of compensation clear to ourselves: it is strange enough.” The fact that the law had to measure and control the administration of these punishments implies that they were treated as something good and pleasurable, something in which one might overindulge.
Thus, Nietzsche begins to argue, the purpose of these legally sanctioned and indeed regulated tortures was not just to terrify the debtor into repaying his debt; it was also to provide the creditor with a pleasure to counterbalance his loss, and the displeasure (Unlust [2.6]) at this loss, in case the debtor could not repay. The pleasure the creditor derives from torturing the debtor “consists in a warrant for and title to cruelty;” it is “the pleasure of being permitted to vent (auslassen) his power safely (unbedenklich) on one who is powerless.” It is, in short, an intense and undeniable sensation of one’s own power. This pleasure (Wohlgefühl, Wollust, Genuss) “is valued (geschätzt) all the more highly the deeper and lower the creditor stands in the order of society, and can easily appear to him as a delicious bite, indeed as a foretaste of a higher rank. By means of ‘punishing’ the debtor (Schuldner) the creditor takes part in a right of the masters: finally he also comes for once to the elevating feeling of being permitted to despise and maltreat a creature (ein Wesen) as ‘beneath him.’” One thinks, as perhaps Nietzsche himself did when writing these lines, of Shakespeare’s Shylock, and certainly of the passage from Tertullian cited in the First Essay.

Grausamkeit, cruelty, is the last word of the fifth section and the theme of the sixth. Nietzsche’s basic argument here is that cruelty was nearly all-pervasive in antiquity, being a constituent or ingredient of virtually every one of ancient humanity’s pleasures and especially of its joy in festivals (Festfreude). Furthermore, Nietzsche contends, cruelty continues to be almost as active and widespread in modern times, albeit in a spiritualized and “deified” form; as an example of this more modern form of cruelty Nietzsche mentions Kant’s
categorical imperative, which “smells of cruelty.” As one would expect from Nietzsche’s call to “relearn (umlernen) concerning cruelty” in Beyond Good and Evil (229-230), this modern form of spiritualized or divinized cruelty is almost entirely turned back on oneself. Kant is therefore an excellent example of this modern form of cruelty, given his intense and rigorous insistence on tyrannizing one’s basic inclinations and desires, on opposing and sacrificing them to an abstract moral law. The categorical imperative, guaranteeing as it does that every inclination one has will, by definition, be immoral, is a perfect instrument of spiritual self-torture.

Even with the enduring presence and even vibrancy of cruelty in modern culture, however, our attitudes towards it have changed completely. While ancient humanity regarded cruelty “as something to which the conscience heartily says yes!,” today there is perhaps nothing which the conscience negates or condemns more fervently than cruelty (consider Judith Sklar’s definition of liberals, famously adopted by Richard Rorty, as people who “think that cruelty is the worst thing that we do”). This accent on the radical mutability of the conscience is in strange contrast to Nietzsche’s statement early in the section that the primeval pairing of guilt and suffering (Schuld und Leid) may now be

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41 One might wonder whether this spiritualizing and divinizing of cruelty is the same as the reduction of human beings to tame animals, which Nietzsche denounces in the First Essay (1.11), among other places. It seems to me that it clearly is not. In the case of culture, cruelty means above all cruelty against oneself (J 229), and it is precisely this form of cruelty of which the maggot man or last man, the insipid products of that process of domestication, are incapable. The last man is contemptible because he cannot despise himself (Z Pr. 5), and in this respect he is identical to the maggot man, and obviously set apart from those who are spurred on to further self-overcoming by the cruelty directed inwards but not thereby simply tamed or etiolated.
permanent. The implication seems to be that this original and largely chance entangling may have forever determined the character of morality, that conscience, duty and other core components of morality have continued to be marked, constituted and animated by cruelty because of their origins. Only later does Nietzsche argue or explain that the origin of something, and especially of a moral belief or practice, does nothing to determine its later uses or meanings (2.12), and further that the self-inflicted cruelty inherent in morality is due to the instincts of aggression or cruelty turned inwards, instincts that have seized upon morality, conscience and the like and used them as a means to direct themselves back on the individual who is their source (2.16 ff.). In other words, the cruelty intrinsic to morality, in Nietzsche’s view, comes not from the origin, from the original purposes of a particular form or instantiation of morality, but from the overriding motivation or instinct ruling, driving and shaping morality as such, the instinct of cruelty directed backwards. The cruelty residing in morality is not, as Nietzsche may seem to suggest here, an accidental feature left over from its origins, but an essential feature of morality given its purpose or aim, to tyrannize and abuse humanity’s animal nature, and thus to satisfy the instinct for aggression or cruelty once it has been denied its more natural, external outlet or vent.

There is one final point or argument that Nietzsche starts to make here in 2.6, which is perhaps the most significant part of his account of early society thus far. It is his reinterpretation or rethinking of retributive justice, a reinterpretation that begins in these sections but does not culminate until later. Nietzsche first suggests in 2.4 that the retributive impulse, at least in its most primitive form, is
simply anger at an injury or loss, something perhaps akin to a dog snapping or growling at someone trying to take food away from it. This initial or spontaneous anger seems more or less synonymous with “the senseless raging of ressentiment,” the “feeling of being aggrieved (Gefühle des Verletzt-seins)” that Nietzsche later describes (2.11). There is some sense of justice attending this feeling, but it is merely a very crude and narcissistic sense of outrage at being harmed, pure ressentiment, an angry conviction that anything that injures or inconveniences oneself is morally wrong. At this stage or moment of moral consciousness, one will likely react angrily to any harm or insult; if one is shoved or hit, one will likely shove or hit back. Yet Nietzsche pushes beyond this stage when he begins discussing contracts stipulating torture as a kind of repayment, and thus instituting a legal, moral and psychological economy of retribution or requital. Nietzsche dismisses the notion of “revenge” as an explanation for any of this, for talk of revenge simply leads back to the same question, “How can making suffer be a satisfaction (Genugthuung)?” Nietzsche is here asking particularly about these early contracts, but one can easily extend or apply his question to the entire sense of retributive justice, the notion that a criminal should be punished, made to suffer, for his crime, that this somehow restores a larger moral order or balance and should provide not only the victim of the crime but all moral people and society as a whole with a sense of satisfaction. What is the source or meaning of this satisfaction?

Nietzsche’s answer here, in the specific context of these ancient contracts, is clearly that “to make suffer did one good in the highest degree.” Throughout
this sixth section Nietzsche emphasizes how “normal” and innocent (*unschuldig*) cruelty seemed to the ancients, and even as recently as the seventeenth century, when Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*. One may wonder if retributive justice is therefore always at least partly animated by this pleasure in cruelty, and perhaps simply a disguised form of it. Nietzsche, however, seems to suggest the contrary by saying that the pleasure in cruelty, as a pleasure, counterbalances or soothes the angry sense of loss that seems identical with (at least the earliest form of) retributive justice; cruelty and justice, pleasure and anger, seem simply heterogeneous and opposed (like two poisons that can be used to counteract each other). Thus although it is tempting to think that Nietzsche is suggesting that the sense of retributive justice is simply a sublimated form of the desire for cruelty—only one such sublimated form, of course, and in competition with or opposition to others—there is not any reason to reach this conclusion here.

It is not until later in the essay that Nietzsche fully explores and explicates the questions about retributive justice he begins to indicate here, or indeed that he fully treats the meaning of the prevalence and power of cruelty. These three sections seem mainly designed to foreground the vital role of cruelty in human culture and morality, especially in prehistory and antiquity. Nietzsche’s depiction of early society, and especially of how it developed out of contractual relationships, is somewhat hazy and even misleading, at times suggesting that contracts between creditors and debtors somehow predated civil society. But this treatment is mostly provisional, and is in a sense continued after section seven, at which point it is expanded, clarified and at times corrected.
presentation Nietzsche seems most concerned to impress upon the reader how widespread and deep the human taste for cruelty is, and to provide the first sketch of his account of the evolution of the earliest society and forms of morality.
Nietzsche closes the sixth section by again adopting or exhibiting an almost humanitarian weariness at the ubiquity of cruelty. “Seeing suffer does one good, making suffer still better—that is a hard principle (Satz), but an ancient, mighty, human all-too-human major principle (Hauptsatz),” he writes, then suggests that apes anticipate humanity by “thinking up bizarre cruelties.” Here Nietzsche seems almost misanthropic, as if the only distinctive thing about humanity is its penchant and capacity for “bizarre cruelties.” This attitude is quickly dispelled or reversed at the outset of the seventh section, however, where Nietzsche begins by announcing that he does not mean to support or encourage pessimists with “this thought,” by which he apparently means his claim that there is an intrinsic relation between festival and cruelty. On the contrary, Nietzsche says, life on earth was more cheerful before humanity had become ashamed of its cruelty and other instincts, and had thus begun to find life itself unappetizing (unschmackhaft); there is no necessary connection between the prevalence of cruelty and suffering and world-weariness or pessimism.

At the same time, however, Nietzsche again suggests that the human joy in cruelty may not have died out after all, and may indeed be as active as ever. If pain hurts more today, when humans are more refined and sensitive, then pain only has to undergo “a certain sublimation and subtilization (Sublimirung und Subtilisirung),” to “appear translated into the imaginative and psychic
in order to be felt, perhaps even as intensely as in the past, and thus to allow humans to experience the joys of self-inflicted cruelty. In other words, an ever smaller quantity of pain is required to achieve the same psychological effect of suffering. Nietzsche makes this suggestion at the end of a digression on the relation between civilization and susceptibility to pain. The digression begins by presenting itself as a “consolation” for the sensitive or tender but then turns into the opposite—it begins by suggesting that pain may have hurt less in antiquity, since humans felt less keenly then, and thus that there would have been less suffering than the prevalence of violence would indicate; Nietzsche then, however, concludes precisely on this basis that since pain hurts more today, pain and cruelty can appear in more subtle, psychological and self-inflicted forms, so that there is therefore likely as much cruelty and suffering as ever. Nietzsche, in other words, repeats his claims from section six about the place of cruelty in modern culture. Nietzsche again stresses the element of cruelty in, for instance, tragic pity. Nietzsche is probably right that, since the tragic or sublime requires violence, there is some measure or element of cruelty in our appreciation of tragedy. It would, however, be too crudely reductionist to treat this as a simple affirmation or embrace of banal forms of cruelty; the fact that cruelty is transfigured, reworked and reinterpreted in the spiritual and cultural economies of human beings is an essential aspect of Nietzsche’s account.

The problem with modern culture thus appears to be less its lack of cruelty than its attitude towards it, its pessimistic negation and disapproval of cruelty, suffering, and the rest of humanity’s animal nature or existence. The pessimist’s
horror and dismay at cruelty seems to be based largely on his horror and dismay at suffering: because suffering is the worst thing in the world, creating more of it is exceptionally heinous. Similarly, it is hard to maintain the distinctively modern abhorrence of cruelty if one considers suffering a necessary and at times even beneficial part of life (which is not to say that there is no other basis for being critical of cruelty). Nietzsche makes this point in what I take to be one of the key lines of this section and of the Genealogy as a whole: “What really excites outrage against suffering is not suffering itself, but the senselessness of suffering.” Thus, Nietzsche suggests, what really underlies the pessimist’s negation of suffering is not so much a distinctive moral stance as an inability to accept or to believe in any justification for suffering, any interpretation of existence that would give suffering sense or meaning. To the pessimist, and indeed to almost all modern human beings who cannot accept previous religious interpretations and justifications of suffering, suffering appears as something repellent, gruesome and absurd, something that must be negated and eliminated from the world. Thus we now run the risk of destroying or vitiating life by eradicating its essential condition or character, suffering.

When Nietzsche urges a relearning and even a partial rehabilitation of cruelty, therefore, he is not valorizing petty cruel acts by individuals, as will

42 This, it seems to me, is why John Updike’s “Dog’s Death” is so poignant, because the reader sees that the puppy’s valiant but uncomprehending attempts to adhere to her training in the face of mortal injury and suffering were pointless. The innocent puppy ascribes an almost cosmic significance to these rules that they obviously lack, just as humans have done for millenia with moral codes and beliefs that now seem vain and senseless, irrational fabrications that only increased the essentially meaningless suffering of humanity. John Updike, “Dog’s Death,” in Collected Poems, 1953-1993 (New York: Knopf, 1995).
become even more unmistakable shortly. He is affirming the necessity or centrality of cruelty to “the amazing economy of the preservation of the species (der Arterhaltung), of course an expensive, wasteful (verschwenderischen) and altogether most highly foolish economy” (FW 1; cf. also EH, “Destiny,” 4, J 44; after The Gay Science, of course—and already at points within it—Nietzsche would focus his attention on overcoming the species rather than simply preserving it). Even more fundamentally, what Nietzsche is urging is a relearning and rehabilitation of suffering, as a crucial, unavoidable quality and requirement of growth and life, as he makes clear when says that it does one good to remember crueler ages precisely because today “suffering must always march forth as first among the arguments against existence, as the worst question mark.” What is essential for Nietzsche is interpreting and giving meaning to suffering, not eliminating it as the ultimate evil of existence. And, again, once one stops regarding suffering as this ultimate evil, one cannot regard cruelty as singularly atrocious; it is this judgment of suffering and so of cruelty that forms the common foundation of pessimism and humanitarianism, despite their radical differences concerning what one can hope for from human existence, and thus of Nietzsche’s intransigent opposition to both.

Nietzsche therefore next turns to explaining how previous ages have interpreted and justified suffering, and gives two examples from the past.

“[N]either for the Christian, who interpreted a whole secret machinery of

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43 Literary examples of this type of petty cruelty with which Nietzsche would have been familiar include the actions of the savage, lynx-eyed major or the vacantly sadistic Lieutenant Zherebyatnikov in Dostoevsky’s The House of the Dead.
salvation (*geheime Heils-Maschinerie*) into suffering, nor for the naïve human of ancient times, who understood to interpret all suffering in relation to a spectator or to one who makes suffer, was there any such *senseless* suffering at all.” Every instant and instance of suffering has meaning in both of these interpretations, in both cases because of divine interest in human beings. Despite Nietzsche’s mention of an impersonal “machinery of salvation,” he will shortly suggest that the conception of God as a friend “of cruel spectacles” remains in the work of Luther and Calvin, and in any case it is ultimately God who views every moment of an individual’s life, of their engagement with the machinery of salvation, and judges the individual saved or damned. The crucial difference between the two interpretations is their relation to morality. The Christian interpretation is obviously thoroughly suffused or dominated by morality, while the ancient conception of the gods as friends of cruel spectacles, as interested in the suffering of human beings because suffering is interesting, is largely amoral, and certainly neither presupposes nor promotes any connection between suffering and guilt. To the ancient Greeks, suffering came from the gods because the gods enjoyed seeing humans suffer, not because they judged human beings guilty or sinful.

This account of the origin of the gods thus contrasts sharply with that given in the First Essay, and even suggests an opposite or contradictory source and motive for belief in the divine, even in the case of Christianity. Earlier Nietzsche had claimed that the Biblical God, at least, began as a means to negate the powerful enemies of the ancient Jews; the invention of God was a necessary part or lever in the revaluation of noble values (1.7). Nietzsche develops this
argument later, maintaining that belief in God is required for the weak and slavish to affirm themselves, and ultimately to believe that their enemies will suffer agonies in hell, thereby compensating themselves, if only in their imaginations, for the suffering and indignities of their actual lives (1.14-15). The gods Nietzsche describes here, on the contrary, are not interested in revenge or in any kind of moralistic punishment. They are not angry or jealous; they simply enjoy the sufferings of human beings as a pleasant spice for their happiness. The humans who believed in these gods, for their part, did not seek to compensate themselves for their sufferings; they did not regard suffering as a loss that needed to be recouped. The entire purpose of their belief in the gods was rather to be able to affirm their suffering, to believe it had meaning and was therefore valuable and worth experiencing, and thus to both affirm and mirror or reproduce the grand, wasteful economy of the whole or of nature. This affirmative attitude towards suffering is precisely what the slaves Nietzsche describes in the First Essay seem incapable of; their God considers suffering every bit as much of an unmitigated evil as they do, and he promises to recompense them for it if they follow the proper moral imperative or rules; both the slaves and the divinity in which they believe negate or condemn suffering and the actual world in which we exist, as well as the powerful who lord it over the slaves (indeed, it seems to me to be one of the essential features of ressentiment that it seeks compensation or reparation for suffering). Given Nietzsche’s emphasis on the different uses to which the same belief or conception can be put, it is worth emphasizing that Nietzsche here mentions the Christian conception or interpretation of existence as one that gives
suffering meaning, as one that is intended or employed to affirm suffering and thus existence. The account of Judaism and Christianity in the First Essay is, in short, not exhaustive of the possibilities of that moral and religious interpretation, nor even of the uses to which it has been put historically.

In order to achieve this affirmative stance towards suffering, ancient humanity was compelled to invent gods who would act as witnesses and interested spectators of human suffering. “So that hidden, undiscovered, unwitnessed suffering could be abolished from the world and sincerely (ehrlich) negated,” one was “compelled…to invent (genöthigt…zu erfinden)” gods and half-divine creatures (Zwischenwesen) who are everywhere and who watch the suffering of humans with interest. The honesty to which Nietzsche refers here consists in creating and believing something that makes suffering meaningful, not in abstaining from lying or fabricating anything (the word here is ehrlich, “honestly” or “sincerely,” not redlich or Redlichkeit, the word Nietzsche later uses to describe the honesty or probity bred by Christianity). The beliefs of ancient humanity were compelled or determined by what they needed to believe in order to justify existence, or, in another phrase Nietzsche uses here, by “the logic of feeling.” Thus, as in the case of those who create new moral values and then believe in their creations in the First Essay,44 religious and moral beliefs are

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44 Rüdiger Bittner has asked how the slaves Nietzsche presents in the First Essay could have both invented their ideals and vision of otherworldly vindication and compensation, and then convinced themselves that this story, which they know they have invented, is somehow actually true; he concludes that they could not have, and that Nietzsche’s argument founders on this point (Rüdiger Bittner, “Ressentiment,” in Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s “Genealogy of Morals,” ed. Richard Schacht [Berkeley and Los Angeles:
the products or outgrowth of affective states, and serve the interests or needs of those states. Nietzsche adds that today life requires a new “trick (Kunststück)” or invention to justify itself, such as “life as riddle, life as Erkenntnissproblem.”

Nietzsche thus indicates that the former, religious interpretations and invention of spiritual beings are no longer effective, even as the passage as a whole indicates that the present-day concern with or authority of knowledge which has displaced them has deeper roots or serves deeper needs and purposes, namely those of the logic of feeling, the necessity of justifying life’s suffering in terms that are compelling in the cultural context at hand.

Finally, Nietzsche closes the seventh section with a discussion of the invention of free will by the ancient Greek philosophers. After describing Homer’s presentation of the Trojan War and “similar tragic terrors” as “festival plays for the gods,” he continues, “[n]ot differently did the moral philosophers of Greece later conceive of the eyes of the gods looking down on the moral

University of California Press, 1994], pp. 127-138). Although Nietzsche does not say anything that explicitly rebuts this criticism, he does repeatedly refer to the darkness in which the passions and the human beings of ressentiment dwell, and this emphasis on darkness and occultation suggests that those who counterfeit ideals are not aware of what they are doing, that they do not consciously “invent” these ideals.

Indeed, Nietzsche makes clear in the both the First and Second Essays that the purpose of inventing or fabricating these beliefs and ideals is to gratify certain affects or passions. Bittner’s emphasis on how those ruled by ressentiment could hold two contradictory beliefs in their minds at once thus seems to me misplaced; one conscious belief is replaced by another, because conscious beliefs are only the tools or outgrowths of the subrational, affective states that truly determine a person’s thoughts. The question to ask, in other words, is not how someone could believe a story they know they themselves have invented, but rather which affects are gratified by a given belief, and how this affect, or these affects, came to dominate in the soul of an individual and indeed an entire class. This is clearly the question that Nietzsche devotes himself to answering in the First Essay.
struggles, on the heroism and the self-torture of the virtuous.” Greek moral philosophy grew out of Greek tragic poetry and served the same needs, or at least the same basic primal need, the need to justify human suffering by conceiving of it as a spectacle of interest to the gods. The philosophers in some sense made human beings more interward or complex, by stressing the freedom of their will or their “absolute spontaneity in good and in evil,” but this is all done for the sake of life, for the sake of justifying life and its suffering. As with the origin of the gods, we here have an account of the origin of the concept of free will that is completely different from the one offered in the First Essay (though, in 1.13, Nietzsche is not so much concerned with the origin of that belief as he is with the uses to which it has been put). The purpose of belief in free will is, according to this passage, not to make moral blame possible but to make the world more interesting for the gods, to assure human beings that they are of constant interest to the gods because their actions cannot be known or predicted in advance, in accordance with a set of deterministic laws. The free will Nietzsche treats here appears to be the same conceptual apparatus described in the First Essay (and elsewhere in Nietzsche), but here it is not intended or employed for moralistic purposes at all.45 Again, it appears to serve the interests of life; it identifies this world as the world of interest and value (and thus is not otherworldly or

45 Granted, the accent here is on the complete spontaneity and thus on the unpredictability of the human will, on its ability to provide the gods with an infinity of unexpected pleasure and diversion, rather than on the freedom of choice and thus the moral accountability of the human will. But the latter is not possible without the former; the basic concept of free will described here is identical to that treated elsewhere, even if one of the conclusions drawn from this concept, or one of the interpretations given to it, is not present here.
backworldly), and it has nothing to do with either moral blame or guilt, but only with allowing human beings to believe that they are of interest to the gods.

The seventh section thus expands and illuminates Nietzsche's understanding of the significance of cruelty and suffering and the most pressing needs of human existence, the needs poetry and philosophy must both strive to fulfill. It is, however, largely a digression, and Nietzsche returns to the treatment of primitive society and punishment in the following section.
Nietzsche begins the eighth section by acknowledging that the previous section was something of a digression. “The feeling of guilt (Das Gefühl der Schuld), of personal obligation, to pick up again the course of our investigation, has, as we saw, its origin in the oldest and most original (ürsprunglichsten) relation between persons (Personen-Verhältniss) that there is, in the relation between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor: here first stepped forth person against person, here person first measured himself against person.” Here again it seems to me that although Nietzsche mentions both buying and selling and debt, he can only mean the first as the oldest and most original form of human relation (and, again, what about the family? Can infant humans really survive without some kind of family relations?). How, after all, can one conceive of borrowing and lending, of debt and credit, without an already existing society? As I have suggested above, one may be able to conceive of a very crude form of barter or exchange as possible before any other social relations, and indeed as the interaction, exchange and relationship in which a human being first becomes self-aware, in which he is no longer simply guided by his instincts. Barter or exchange may well be the first human act and relationship which is not purely instinctual; perhaps this is why Nietzsche calls it the first relation between persons (Personen-Verhältniss) rather than the first human relation; it was here, in the
comparative measuring and valuing required for exchange, that the person was born.

I do not think, however, that one can imagine anything like debt and credit existing at this level. How can there be a contract without a third party to enforce it (as Nietzsche will shortly specify [2.9], there cannot be, especially not at this first stage of justice, involving the contracts between unequal parties that Nietzsche describes here)? How, moreover, could one pay off a debt without having already learned to keep a promise, that is, without already having been socialized to at least some extent? If one cannot keep a few basic rules of society (e.g., do not kill others), how can one be expected to repay or even remember debts? In other words, I think that the stage of society and human intellectual and moral evolution that Nietzsche describes in 2.5, in which contracts between debtors and creditors helped human beings acquire a memory, comes well after the initial founding of civil society. Before humans could undertake to do anything like borrow and repay money, they must, on Nietzsche’s own account, have already been fairly well socialized, “made to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular and therefore calculable” (2.2).

To repeat, then, the relation of buyer and seller must have been the primary or original relationship, out of which the notions of debt and credit and thus the debtor-creditor relationship grew, but only after the founding of civil society.46 What, then, was the character of this first relation between persons?

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46 Yet even the terms “buyer” and “seller” imply some kind of economy based on money, but one can hardly expect the very first material exchange between people to have involved that. In typically compressed and partially anachronistic
Above all, according to Nietzsche, it meant one person measuring himself against another: “[H]ere person first stepped forth against person, here person first measured himself against person (hier trat zuerst Person gegen Person, hier mass sich zuerst Person an Person).” But if this transaction was primarily a matter of one person measuring himself against another, did the actual material goods being exchanged here provide any independent standard of value, or did all sense of value governing the exchange simply emanate from the power of the individuals involved? In the first place, it would seem to be necessary that both parties are close to being of equal power, otherwise there would be no exchange or measuring at all, but one would simply take from the other; the semi-contractual nature of the relationship described here seems to imply something approaching equality. Thus barter becomes physical violence by other means, as the people vie to assert themselves through their evaluations of the goods being traded. This, however, leads up back to the same question: did the goods themselves provide an external standard value determining the quantitative and qualitative details of the exchange? It seems to me that they must have, that even Nietzsche seems to grant that the exchange was motivated by actual need, and thus that early barter and commerce were not simply vehicles for the will to power of the trading parties. Even so, however, it does seem that in Nietzsche’s account economic and intellectual measurements and thought processes proceed from the original impulse of an individual or group to measure its own power against that of

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fashion, Nietzsche seems here to be referring to all pre-political economic or commercial relationships as relations between buyer and seller or debtor and creditor.
another. This impulse continues to inform or color much of the intellectual operations required for economic exchange, as Nietzsche makes clear in the rest of the section.

Nietzsche continues by claiming that something of this relation between buyer and seller, between two people measuring themselves against each other, is noticeable at even the crudest or “lowest (niedren)” grade of civilization. This relation of measuring oneself against another, and thus of beginning to value and assess, is somehow coeval with human sociability and even constitutes it. It has also, according to Nietzsche, largely constituted human thinking. “Making prices, measuring values, contriving equivalences, exchanging (tauschen)—this preoccupied the very first thinking of the human being to such an extent that in a certain sense it is thinking as such (das Denken): here was the oldest type of acumen bred (herangezüchtet); here, too, one may suppose, is the first sign of human pride, his feeling of priority (Vorrangs-Gefühls) in regard to other animals.” Although Nietzsche refers to acumen (Scharfsinn) here, his stress is on the sense of pride that colored and grew out of these first acts of measuring and valuing, and indeed it is this pride and power which the earliest human acumen judged or appraised.47 These first acts of human thinking were above all

47 How does one reconcile this assertion that acumen is an expression of pride with Nietzsche’s deprecation of prudence and spiritual and intellectual complexity in general in the First Essay (e.g., 1.10; on Scharfsinn, see 1.6)? The best answer seems to me to be that once a fairly basic level of intelligence or acumen is reached, no more is necessary, at least not for the nobles, who are distinguished by their political power and so by their emotional spontaneity and openness or candor; for these powerful and simple types, too much acumen, too much attention to utility or advantage, is ignoble. Thus acumen or prudence would have been an outlet or conduit for the will to power at a certain fairly early or rude
accompanied or dominated by a feeling of pride or superiority, not prudence or shrewdness; humans were proud of evaluating things (especially in distinction to the other animals), not primarily interested in the advantage to be gained by measuring and evaluating. All of this, of course, chimes very well with Nietzsche’s account of the origins of values in the First Essay. There, as here, the focus is on moral valuing and affirmation, not on securing an advantage or utility, and least of all a material benefit.

This sense of pride, too, presumably continues to constitute human thinking, so that the mental determinations and movements Nietzsche describes are as much moral as conceptual or intellectual. Human thinking would thus largely mean assigning moral worth to things or infusing concepts or intellectual measurements with moral value and meaning, at least as much as it means engaging in the essentially false operations of logical thinking, such as carving the world up into calculable concepts and experiences, making unequal things equal, assimilating unusual or foreign things to already existing and familiar notions and ideas, and so forth.48 Any attempt sharply to separate the two, the moral and the conceptual or intellectual activities or moments of human thought, would thus be level of civilization, but beyond a certain point it would have been the result of and a tool for weakness, rather than power or strength.

48 Cf. *MAM* I 19, *FW* 110, 111, 355, J 192 and Wolfgang Müller-Lauter’s treatment of this theme in his *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*, trans. David J. Parent (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 7-12 and Chapter One as a whole. As is often the case, in *The Gay Science*, especially in the first two sections cited here, Nietzsche attributes much of this activity to the need or instinct for self-preservation (as does Müller-Lauter’s reading); he tends to interpret life’s activity as aiming primarily at preserving and extending itself. But his basic arguments about the origin and untruth of much of our conceptions of knowledge and logic remain valid here in considering this passage from the *Genealogy*.
fundamentally wrong. This also, of course, means that human thinking has taken
its forms from the external world only in a very crude and imprecise way, and
certainly does not correspond to a metaphysical reality that exists independently
of human beings. Thinking has rather been formed largely to serve human needs,
begining, to repeat, with the need for pride and self-affirmation, and thus with
the need for moral valuation. In the same vein, it is worth noting that Nietzsche
describes the human pride in itself as the valuing animal as a “self-feeling
(Selbstgefühl);” the means of relating to itself that defines humanity is largely,
perhaps primarily, a matter of feeling, not of rational judgment or apprehension.

According to Nietzsche the first notions of political life and justice also
came directly from these earliest economic relationships. “Buying and selling,
together with their psychological accompaniments, are older than even the
beginnings of any forms of social organization and unions: it was rather from the
most rudimentary form of personal legal rights (Personen-Rechts) that the
budding feeling of exchange, contract, debt (Schuld), right (Recht), obligation,
settlement first transferred itself to the crudest and most inchoate social
complexes (in their relation with similar complexes).” As so often, Nietzsche’s
exposition here is less than ideally clear. Nietzsche seems first to be suggesting
that elementary notions of Schuld, obligation and the like existed before any kind
of political society, and transferred themselves from these pre-political contracts
to the first political or social organizations. He then, however, says that this only
happened in the case of these earliest social complexes’ relations with other such
complexes. As I have argued above, I do not think that Nietzsche can intelligibly
or coherently speak of a pre-political contract. It is the political community that first imposes the most basic requirements on human beings, that first begins to make them, through the most savage means imaginable, regular and calculable. On Nietzsche’s account, a pre-political contract could be neither imagined nor enforced. It rather seems that the community itself must introduce the notion of contracts and debt or guilt, as indeed Nietzsche goes on to argue in the ninth section (without ever quite making it explicit that contracts must originate with the political community or state). I therefore think that, to the extent that he suggests otherwise here (and that suggestion is at best ambiguous or contradictory), Nietzsche must be taken as overstating the matter and leaving the fuller explanation until the ninth section.

Doing this enables Nietzsche to discuss the consequences of this view that political life and justice originate in the most primitive economic relations separately, to detail the meaning and consequences of this view over the following sections. We should not lose sight of Nietzsche’s basic point in the second half of this eighth section, that the basic ideas of economic activity, that everything has its price, that everything can be paid for with some kind of equivalent, took over and became the form or the driving logic of our understanding or sense of justice. Contracts may have been created by the state or political community, but the basic notion of exchange and equivalencies predates political life. This basic idea of justice as a kind of exchange or settling of accounts continues, according to Nietzsche, to determine the form and logic of our understanding of justice even today. The following sections are to a large
extent a gloss upon the final few sentences of the eighth section, an elaboration of
what it means for justice to be an extrapolation of these basic economic terms and
interactions, and what it means not only for justice but for “objectivity,” which
Nietzsche here explicitly links with justice, to have originated in this way, and
indeed what it means for these two things to be linked so closely.

Nietzsche closes the eighth section with an argument or sentiment familiar
from Thucydides’ presentation of the Melian dialogue (cf. *MAM* I 92), saying that
justice at this stage is “the good will among roughly equal powers to come to
terms with one another, to reach an ‘understanding’ through a settlement—and, in
reference to lesser powers, to *compel* them to reach an agreement among
themselves.” This description applies especially and in the first place to the early
city or political community. As Nietzsche will make even more clear in section
nine, the city begins by establishing certain norms, particularly in the case of
crime and punishment, and compelling its members to adhere to those norms. It
thus creates justice, and in so doing creates a stable community, the source and
guarantor of profound benefits and protections which have never existed before
and which could only be produced and maintained by the community. The
community is therefore the first entity able to put someone into its debt, to give
someone an advantage or advantages so great that its trading partner cannot
possibly give back anything of equal value, or even ever repay the debt. The
community creates debt, by being able to confer such an almost unlimited good or
service upon its members. It also, then, begins to create or breed the memory into
human beings that they require if they are to abide by the economic agreement governing their membership in the community; in short, it begins to punish.

Thus when someone commits a crime, “[i]t is least of all a matter of the immediate damage which the damager (Schädiger) has instigated: still apart from that, the criminal (der Verbrecher) is above all a ‘breaker’ (‘Brecher’), a breaker of his contract and word against the whole…The criminal is a debtor who not only does not repay the advantages and protections shown to him, but even attacks his creditor.” The criminal is therefore not only deprived of these advantages and protections, he is reminded what they are worth, by being thrust outside the protection of the city, where “every type of hostility may be vented upon him.” “Punishment’ is at this stage of civilization simply a copy, a mimus of the normal attitude toward the hated, defenseless, crushed enemy, who has lost not only every right and protection, but also every mercy.” Punishment has a different character or meaning at different levels of civilization (cf. 2.13); at this extremely primitive level, where the community is still fragile and unsteady, punishment seems to be motivated more by fear than anything else (certainly more than by the pleasure in cruelty described earlier), genuine and profound fear stemming from the realization that the criminal can still destabilize or simply destroy the community, and thus is to be hated and feared as an enemy.

This perhaps explains why, in Nietzsche’s account, the punishment of the early community consists simply in removing its protection from the criminal, as if it is not the city or community that will do the punishing but random passers-by, or as if the community’s sole act of punishment is literally thrusting the criminal
beyond its walls. “Punishment” would seem to require the authority and agency of the government, but here it seems almost as if punishment at this stage consists simply in the community’s removing its protection from an individual. This is presumably because the majority of the members of the community, keenly aware of the benefits and protections which only the community can provide, perceive the criminal as a mortal enemy, as one who would destroy the community and thus inspires a fury born of terror. The other members of the community, in attacking the criminal, thus “vent” (*auslassen*, a word Nietzsche uses repeatedly in the Second Essay) both their fearful anger at the threat posed by the criminal and their intrinsic but usually suppressed instincts of aggression.\(^49\)

Nietzsche begins the tenth section by explaining that as a community becomes more powerful, it takes the transgressions of the individual less seriously, since they are no longer as dangerous to the community’s existence.\(^50\) The community rather starts acting to protect the criminal and to control the

\(^49\) Or so it seems from this line (in light of which one could interpret Nietzsche’s reference to “the community” as a disappointed creditor here as meaning all the other members of the first city, not the legal or political authorities). Nietzsche will quickly explain in 2.11 that those ruling the first city in fact administered the punishments and in particular were very intent on controlling or reining in those very instincts of aggression and *ressentiment* which seem to be driving the punishment of the first lawbreakers here.

\(^50\) One might think that the community’s willingness to let its members punish or brutalize a criminal is a sign of its weakness or the simple result of its inability to control the punitive anger of its members, but the clear suggestion here seems to be that the community is more or less in control throughout, and makes something like a conscious decision first to let the general anger be vented upon him and then to restrain that anger. Thus the community begins to protect the transgressor not because it is now strong enough to rein in its members but because it is now strong enough to begin to soften its punishments.
explosion of anger against him, and thus to consolidate and augment its own power:

[T]he general anger is no more permitted to vent (auslassen) itself upon him as unrestrainedly as earlier—rather from now on the whole is careful to defend and protect the evil-doer (Übelthäter) against this anger, especially that of the one immediately injured. The compromise with the anger of those first affected by the evil-doer; an effort to localise the case and to prevent a wider or even general participation and alarm; attempts to find equivalences and to settle the whole matter (compositio); above all the ever more determined will to take every offence as in some sense repayable (abzahlbar), thus, at least to a certain extent, to isolate the criminal and his deed from one another.

We thus see that it is the community or “the whole” that from the beginning devises and administers the particular legal punishments Nietzsche had mentioned earlier; the suggestion Nietzsche had seemed to make at the beginning of 2.5, that individual creditors began to take a hand in inventing or creating these contracts and punishments, and thus to exist independently of or as the source of the law, was clearly a ruse or purposely misleading intimation (as indeed I have already argued it must have been). The community is the only force or actor that has the power to create law and so to do the things described here, and it does them in its own interest, to increase its stability and power. The taste for cruelty that finds
expression in individual acts of punishment now seems petty, disruptive and reactive, as Nietzsche will stress even more in the following section. The legal specifications and regulations of violent punishments that Nietzsche mentioned earlier were not, as he seemed to indicate then, for the sake of expressing or satisfying cruelty, but rather served the exact opposite purpose, that of restraining retributive anger and cruelty.

The law thus exists as both an expression of the community’s power and an instrument to increase that power; the more powerful the community becomes, Nietzsche argues, the less need it has of its laws, or at least the more mild its punishments become, the less stringently and frantically it enforces its laws. “As the power and self-confidence\(^{51}\) of a community grow, the penal law always becomes milder; every weakening and deeper endangering of the former brings the harsher forms of the latter again to light.”\(^{52}\) The community and its justice therefore end by overcoming themselves, if they can attain to a sufficient level of power and strength. Justice is an expression of the power of the community, but overcoming justice, replacing it with mercy, is a further and in a sense an ultimate expression of power. Justice, like all other powerful and hard-won human

\(^{51}\) “Self-confidence” is the best translation for the German word Nietzsche uses here, *Selbstbewusstsein*, but it is interesting that his usage suggests that the community, like the sovereign individual, experiences an increase in its power as an increase in consciousness of itself.

\(^{52}\) It should be noted here that the power and self-confidence of a community can decrease while those of the larger community of which it is a part increase, at least in modern, pluralistic societies. Thus, for instance, a religious or ethnic community could become more retrograde and punitive while the secular and cosmopolitan society of which it is a part becomes more powerful, and indeed could do so precisely because of the growing power of the larger secular society.
creations and achievements, must obey the law of life and overcome itself (Z 2.12, “On Self-Overcoming”); the community must overcome the expression or creation of its own strength, the justice it has produced, through a greater or more difficult display or manifestation of strength and power. “This self-abolition (Selbstaufhebung) of justice: one knows the beautiful name by which it calls itself—Mercy; it remains, as is readily understood, the prerogative (Vorrecht) of the most powerful, still better, his beyond the law (Jenseits des Rechts).” The ninth section had ended by describing the earliest level or stage of justice and punishment, in which the criminal is treated as a defeated enemy who has lost all hope of mercy; the tenth ends by imagining a height or plenitude of strength and power at which justice and punishment are left behind or transform themselves into mercy, into the self-negation or self-abolition of justice.

Obviously justice cannot overcome or transform itself in this way if it is animated solely by retributive or reactive impulses; everything Nietzsche has said here about justice precludes or runs counter to a purely retributive sense of justice. Having just argued that justice and eventually mercy grow out of strength and affirmation, Nietzsche now devotes the eleventh section to addressing and rebutting claims that justice grows out of ressentiment. 53

53 Nietzsche introduces this term or concept, one of the most important and influential in the Genealogy, in the First Essay (1.10 ff.). Probably the most extended and systematic commentary or application of the concept is Max Scheler, Ressentiment, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961). Bernard Register provides a thorough and careful treatment of ressentiment which distinguishes it from other similar psychological phenomena, and offers an interesting argument for why Nietzsche censures it so severely, in “Nietzsche on Ressentiment and Valuation,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 57 (1997), 2: 281-305.
Nietzsche begins this rebuttal by noting that *ressentiment* “now blooms most beautifully among anarchists and anti-Semites, just as, incidentally, it has always bloomed, in hidden places, like the violet, although with a different scent.” Particular, historically situated expressions of *ressentiment* may differ profoundly in content, style and target, but Nietzsche here suggests that the basic character of *ressentiment* as well as the conditions giving rise to it remain the same; in this respect, at least, Nietzsche seems fairly essentialist about *ressentiment*. The psychological and social causes of *ressentiment* (being confronted with the superiority or success of another, feelings of weakness and alienation so strong one requires secrecy and subterfuge), its structure or character (feelings of rage and violent anger repressed by prudential considerations stemming from awareness of one’s weakness), and its effects (attempts to dress up or “sanctify” the desire for revenge as concern for an impartial and even superhuman “justice,” and to seek a purely imaginary revenge) seem the same in all cases, however different the forms or articulations they assume.

“And as like must always follow from like,” Nietzsche continues, it is no surprise to see attempts in such circles “to sanctify revenge with the name of justice— as if justice were fundamentally only a further development (*Fortentwicklung*) of the feeling of being aggrieved (*Gefühle des Verletzt-seins*)— and with revenge also to bring honor to the reactive affects overall and altogether.” Nietzsche then gives a rather cryptic commendation of this effort, saying that the value of these affects in terms of “the whole biological problem” has been underestimated; an attempt to rehabilitate these affects is thus “a merit.”
This brief salute to the reactive affects is presumably a reference to their necessity in the economy of the whole or of life (again, cf. FW 1), but Nietzsche himself does nothing here to contribute to this meritorious project.\textsuperscript{54} On the contrary, the rest of the section continues in his usual vein of censure of the reactive affects. It is worth noting, in passing, that whatever the enigmatic formulation “the whole biological problem” refers to, Nietzsche here suggests that even biology is a problem, not a field of study or a stratum of existence which yields clear directives or standards.

Nietzsche almost immediately subordinates the reactive affects to the active affects, “such as lust to rule (Herrschsucht), greed and the like.” These are of “still higher biological value,” and therefore are all the more deserving of being “scientifically” appraised and esteemed, although Nietzsche gives no indication of how either set of affects can be “scientifically” evaluated or assessed.

Yet this mention of science is important, for it suggests an objective means or manner of evaluation that Nietzsche opposes to the pretense to scientific fairness he criticizes here, which grows out of and is driven or manipulated by the “spirit of ressentiment,” or by the very affects it pretends to be judging objectively. Having linked the reactive feelings or affects with a lack of objectivity, Nietzsche further develops or emphasizes this connection by returning

\textsuperscript{54} At the same time, however, Nietzsche’s apparent praise or rehabilitation of the reactive effects “in respect to the entire biological problem” is strange—isn’t his criticism of ressentiment precisely that, by sparking the slave revolt in morals and the taming of humanity, it has weakened humanity (presumably biologically, as well)? The reactive affects, if they are triumphant, apparently then weaken or undo themselves, for the taming of humanity also tames or slackens its reactive affects.
to the relation between *ressentiment* and justice. So far is justice from growing out of *ressentiment*, Nietzsche argues, that the two are in fact diametrical and hostile opposites: “the *last* ground (*Boden*) which is conquered by the spirit of justice is the ground of the reactive feelings!” Nietzsche then stresses that justice means not merely remaining “cold, moderate, remote (*fremd*), indifferent”—it is not merely an absence of retributive anger or reactive feelings—but is “always a *positive* attitude.” Being just thus involves or requires not merely being unmoved by an injury or controlling or reining in one’s anger, but rather a positive attitude dedicated to giving a fair and accurate judgment of the person who has injured one, including his virtues, honorable motives, and so forth. Justice, in short, is a matter of seeing and judging accurately, and thus of attaining to a positive attitude or vantage point unclouded by the reactive affects and effects stemming from an injury, not of developing one’s rancor into an argument or claim about the character of justice.

So far, however, Nietzsche has simply opposed one definition of justice to another; he now expands or elaborates his account, and explains exactly why the reactive affects cannot engender justice or even contribute to a just disposition or judgment. He begins by connecting justice with objectivity (and continues to do so throughout this stretch of text), clearly suggesting that objectivity is a necessary condition of justice. Nietzsche emphasizes how difficult it is to remain just and objective in the face of personal attack and insult, saying that “[c]ertainly on average even a small dose of assault, malice, insinuation is enough to drive the blood into the eyes and the fairness *out* of the eyes of even the most upright
people (*rechtschaffensten Personen*).” The reactive affects are, moreover, uniquely opposed to or destructive of justice and objectivity in Nietzsche’s account, for the active and aggressive but unjust human being is “always still a hundred steps nearer to justice” than the reactive. A criminal, for instance, rightly or accurately judge the worth of what he steals, while the one from whom it is stolen, to the extent that his reaction is informed or suffused by *ressentiment*, will exaggerate its value and thus the harm done to him.  

To be sure, it would be a mistake to think that Nietzsche is suggesting that the aggressive or active man is wholly objective or that he sees things as they are simply, just as it would be to think that of the noble. This is not because Nietzsche denies the possibility of objectivity but because the active and aggressive man, like the noble, also distorts reality; he also interprets the world in terms of his interests and advantages. His perceptions are also colored by his affects and desires, in the first place because the most fundamental or vital

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55 Robert Solomon claims that “[l]ack of power is not the *cause* but the *content* of resentment” (Robert C. Solomon, “One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*: Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals,*” in Schacht, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, p. 98). But this seems to me plainly wrong. Lack of power is, in Nietzsche’s account, unmistakably the cause of *ressentiment* (1.10), while *ressentiment* is the cause of morality but not its “content” or “structure,” as Solomon goes on to maintain. The content of morality is the mendacious and sanctimonious praise of meekness that Nietzsche derides, which is informed by a resentful feeling of powerlessness but is not identical with it.

More generally, Solomon’s essay relies on far too expansive a notion of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche is clear that *ressentiment*, as he uses the term, aims only at revenge, involves or entails only the most irrational and ulterior arguments about justice, and has no relation to emotions like compassion and generosity; to the extent that the resentful are concerned with or experiencing any of these things, they are no longer animated simply by *ressentiment*. As Nietzsche says in the present passage, which Solomon quotes but does not address, the sphere of the reactive feelings (like *ressentiment*) is the last to be conquered by the spirit of justice.
perceptions concern what is of value and worth to us; in this regard there is no distinction between perception and judgment, or between description and prescription. A piece of fruit, an orange, for instance, has value to humans as food, and is perceived as such, especially by an active and aggressive human being pursuing his own good. But this is obviously not in any way the intrinsic purpose or use of an orange; oranges are not somehow intended or designed to be consumed by human beings, this is simply the use and thus the value and meaning that we impose on them. More generally, Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes the illusions, forgetfulness, and self-serving interpretations of noble and healthy natures, as we have already seen repeatedly in the *Genealogy*. For all of this, however, the active and aggressive human being distorts and disfigures reality less than does someone dominated by *ressentiment*, which Nietzsche insists necessarily warps reality much more. There seems to be something inherently dishonest or falsifying about *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s view, for here he is not describing a case of *ressentiment* paired with the kind of impotence characterizing the slaves or the priest, much less a case of *ressentiment* caused by this impotence. The *ressentiment* Nietzsche treats here in 2.11 was able to secure actual, physical, violent revenge (otherwise it would not have been a threat to the community), but he still presents it as somehow more mendacious.56

56 Nietzsche complicates matters here by referring to the “better conscience” of the “aggressive human being, as the stronger, more courageous, nobler,” and by saying that the human being of *ressentiment* has “the invention of the ‘bad conscience’ on his conscience.” These statements imply that both types know whether or to what degree they are lying, and that both are possessed of something like an innate and universal conscience informing them of this. I think, however, that based on the rest of Nietzsche’s treatment of these questions, this
Finally, Nietzsche says, let us look around in history: “in which sphere then has the whole use (die ganze Handhabung) of the law (Rechts), also the actual need (das eigentliche Bedürfniss) for law so far been at home on earth? In the sphere of the reactive human beings, perhaps? By no means (Ganz und gar nicht): rather in that of the active, strong, spontaneous, aggressive. Viewed historically, law (das Recht) represents on earth the struggle against the reactive feelings.” On this account, primitive society must have been largely a mass or war not only of violent impulses but specifically of reactive impulses; primitive society was barely able to hold itself together and keep from exploding or imploding under the strain of various attacks and especially counter-attacks, vendettas, etc. The active and aggressive powers used the law “to command a halt and measure to the excesses (der Ausschweifung) of the reactive pathos and to compel a settlement.” These, however, are “excesses” only from the point of view of an established legal or moral code; there does not seem to be a natural limit to reactive feelings or ressentiment; their “senseless raging” is excessive only from the point of view of the strong and powerful, who must impose a limit on them. This also means that the strong can begin to grant some legitimacy to the reactive feelings precisely by setting limits or proportions to them; the raging

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should be taken as a playful or loose usage of these terms, not a serious or integral part of his account of the origin and function of the conscience, human truthfulness, etc.

57 Again, there is here something of the paradox of the first three sections and of J 188, of nature against nature: the law, a partial restriction of the force or will of life, is created or engendered by “the active, strong, spontaneous, aggressive;” spontaneity and aggression produce repression and control.
of ressentiment within those bounds become legitimate and even justice itself, or at least retributive justice itself.

All of this means that the desire for vengeance, and more generally the delight in cruelty and the lust to make another suffer, which Nietzsche had perhaps seemed to praise earlier in the essay, now appear as petty, slavish and even destructive of life, insofar as they are mean and small-minded obsessions with minor personal injuries that disrupt or retard attempts to build greater power-complexes (politically and spiritually).58 The delight in cruelty now appears as

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58 At the same time, however, Nietzsche does appear to be continuing to present the pursuit of power as completely amoral, or to esteem or value the pursuit and expression of power as a completely amoral activity (and, indeed, to have only contempt for attempts to understand it otherwise, as he makes clear at the end of 2.11). He would thus be left open to the criticism or charge which Stanley Rosen frequently makes of him, that Nietzsche’s attempt to reduce nobility to the accumulation and discharge of force or power is incoherent. One version of this argument holds that “[h]ealth, vitality, and creativity are intrinsically quantitative” (“Nietzsche’s Revolution,” p. 198; although Rosen does not develop this as the basis of his critique here, this seems to be the point that he returns to at the end of his essay when he writes, “Dishonesty cannot be distinguished from honesty, or honesty from chaos, unless there is a natural distinction between the noble and the base. Otherwise, there can be no distinction between noble and base nihilism, or between life-enhancing and life-debasing immoralism. On this delicate point, the will to power is too coarse to illuminate us” [p. 206]). This criticism, however, does not seem decisive to me. Though it may be odd to understand nobility, creativity and so forth as quantities of power, it certainly can be done, so that the difference between Goethe and a vengeful, sadistic slave is ultimately the amount of power possessed by or discharging itself through each (the distinction between active and reactive would then, as indeed seems consistent with Nietzsche’s presentation of the matter, be largely a matter of the quantity of strength or power possessed by the active or reactive human being).

Elsewhere, however, Rosen argues that “[i]f one reserves the affirmative sense of power for noble creations, but glosses nobility as power, one has argued in a circle” (The Mask of Enlightenment, p. 246; see more generally the Conclusion as a whole and passim). If one attempts to avoid this pitfall by arguing, as Nietzsche often seems to, that human beings amorally pursue power as power, and that this amoral pursuit should be affirmed, then one has no basis for distinguishing between a father who lovingly raises his children and a father who
“the senseless raging of ressentiment,” or at best as a means of appeasing and controlling that raging, and the specifications of particular punishments for particular injuries or debts, which Nietzsche had brought forth in 2.5 to emphasize primitive cruelty with a good conscience (which he had seemed to favor or praise by contrasting it with contemporary hypocrisy, Tartufferie and tameness), now appear as attempts by the powerful and active to restrain the lust for vengeance of those racked by ressentiment. The taste for cruelty, which Nietzsche had previously examined from the point of view of those in whom it is strongest (and thus had presented in a largely favorable light), here appears as just another tool or means for the powerful to use in building the rule of law and those more stable and stronger, more active political communities.59 This particular psychological penchant for cruelty, like the procedure of punishment, now appears as something which has various meanings or uses, depending upon the perspective from which one views it or the system of purposes in which one employs it.

Having made clear the rationale for the law, Nietzsche goes on to list the means by which stronger powers control the ressentiment of those under them;
most of the examples or items involve redirecting and somehow restraining the 
resentment of the injured party, either by redirecting it towards “the enemies of 
peace” or of law and order, or simply by imposing limits on what resentment 
can demand and “elevating certain equivalents for injuries into norms to which 
from then on resentment is once and for all directed.” Thus the injured person 
demands this or that legally established recompense, rather than succumbing to 
“the senseless raging of resentment” and demanding some kind of infinite or in 
any case absurdly outsized punishment. Most or all of these measures, however, 
flow from the establishment of the validity and legitimacy of law, which 
Nietzsche calls “the most decisive thing, which the supreme power does and 
accomplishes against the predominance of grudges and rancor.” How exactly this 
decisive act is performed, however, is rather obscure. For “the establishment of 
law” is “the imperative declaration concerning what counts overall in its eyes as 
allowed, as just (recht), what as forbidden, as unjust (unrecht): with the 
establishment of law it treats encroachments and willfull acts (Willkür-Akte) of 
individuals or of whole groups as sacrileges (Frevel) against the law, as rebellion 
against the highest power itself; it diverts the feeling of those under it from the 
nearest damage caused by such sacrileges.” But how does the law come to 
acquire or inspire such loyalty and legitimacy? Only by imposing itself on its 
subjects, by forcing them into its mold. Thus the law carves out channels for the 
emotions like resentment to run through, and after some time the emotions can 
find or know no other outlet or channel—but the channels or canals are not there 
originally. The law acquires its power and authority not because there is a natural
sense of justice but because it impresses itself on the individual through the morality of mores or some equally brutal process.

The institution of law not only brings relative stability to the community but also begins to breed objectivity, reason, “mastery over the affects” into human beings.

But the most decisive thing, which the supreme power (Gewalt) does and accomplishes against the predominance of grudges and rancor (gegen die Übermacht der Gegen- und Nachgefühle)—it always does this, as soon as it is in any way strong enough for it—is the establishment of law (Gesetzes), the imperative declaration concerning what counts overall in its eyes as allowed, as just (recht), what as forbidden, as unjust (unrecht): with the establishment of law it treats encroachments and willfull acts (Willkür-Akte) of individuals or of whole groups as sacrileges (Frevel) against the law, as rebellion against the highest power itself; it diverts the feeling of those under it from the nearest damage caused by such sacrileges, and thus achieves over time the opposite of what all vengence wills, which sees only the viewpoint of the one injured, allows only it to count—from now on the eye is trained for an ever more impersonal appraisal of the deed, even the eye of the injured person himself (although this last of all, as was remarked before).
Thus the eye or mind can be clouded by passions or affects, by “blood,” but it can also be trained to resist or identify and discount those passions. There are always forces pushing the mind away from objectivity, but it can be trained, as indeed it has been according to this passage, to recognize and master those pressures, and so to attain to a fairly high degree of objectivity and impersonal evaluation, even of an act which harms oneself.

At the same time, however, and despite Nietzsche’s decision to link objectivity and justice throughout this passage, objectivity does not include for him the ability to discern a universally binding justice in the nature of things. As Nietzsche makes clear at the end of the eleventh section, justice exists only within the framework of a particular law code, which is to say that justice does not exist independently of the specific form it takes in an individual law code.60 There is no supralegal justice which the objective grasp by virtue of their objectivity. An ancient Athenian, a Roman, a Viking, a Christian and a Confucian may all struggle and succeed in remaining objective and just even in the face of personal assault and abuse, but each of these will be just according to the canons of his unique and radically contingent morality.61 The objectivity that is possible, in other words, is an objective application of the law.

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60 This is also indicated by Nietzsche’s speaking of law declaring what is right and wrong “in its eyes;” the law itself expresses a particular, embodied perspective.

61 This may also help to explain Nietzsche’s praise of objectivity and justice in this section; he writes that when, even under the pressure of personal attack and insult, “the exalted and clear objectivity, as penetrating as it is mild, of the just, the judging eye is not clouded, well, that is a piece of perfection and highest mastery on earth.” The objectivity Nietzsche lauds here requires mastery over the affects or passions; it is the product of immense spiritual tension, and thus is the
To repeat, then, Nietzsche maintains that this training in impersonality, which especially includes or relies upon mentally isolating the criminal from his deed, in time achieves the opposite of what vengeance wills, or simply overcomes or dominates the desire for vengeance and the other reactive affects. Aaron Ridley argues that this claim is “surely a piece of desperation, and false to boot. For it is perfectly clear that what is going on here is precisely that separation of doer from deed (the ‘error’ of the popular mind) which marks a crucial moment in the first stage of the slave revolt in morality.” The distinction between agent and deed, however, like the notion of free will, is susceptible of multiple interpretations and uses. The act of isolating the criminal from his deed does not, as Ridley suggests, here serve the same purpose as it does in 1.13, as indeed one would expect from Nietzsche; in fact it does the complete opposite. Here the point is not to make moral blame possible but to prevent the sense of injury from washing completely over the wrongdoer, so to speak; it is to restrain and focus ressentiment, not to justify or rationalize it and still less to inflame it. In 1.13 the opposite of the “castration of the intellect,” the absence or extirpation of the affects, that Nietzsche decries in 3.12. Being just, as Nietzsche notes, “is always a positive attitude;” it is not simply coldness or indifference. In other words, as long as objectivity is tied to justice it is always in the service of a particular attitude towards the world or of a particular constellation of affects, and thus is still animated by passion. In this case objectivity does not attempt to ascend to the level of generality and abstractness, to escape from the particular affects and desires informing the justice which Nietzsche praises, as more ascetic and “metaphysical” understandings of justice and objectivity demand.

Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche’s Conscience: Six Character Studies from the “Genealogy”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 52. I also think Ridley is mistaken to suggest that the legal channelling and regulation of ressentiment “leaves the basic direction of ressentiment unaltered—it is still aimed outward, at the hostile external world and the injurious deeds it contains” (p. 53). Indeed it is, but now both its focus and intensity are controlled in a way that greatly diminishes the threat it poses to the community and its power or stability.
operation of isolating the doer from the deed is used to make blame possible, to provide a space into which to pour or write the neutral subject who is free not to be strong but chooses to be so because he is evil; in other words, the purpose is to facilitate a more intense hatred and anger towards the individual who performs an act. Here the point of isolating the deed from the doer is to focus one’s anger on the act, not the agent; in other words, the purpose is to direct anger away from the individual who has performed the act, to encourage a sense of proportion, and is thus the exact reverse of the intention Nietzsche describes in 1.13.

Nietzsche returns to the origin of justice at the end of the section, both to state more fully and forcefully the consequences of the view of law he has propounded here and to further rebut Dühring. There is “just” ("Recht") and “unjust” ("Unrecht") only after the establishment of the law, according to Nietzsche.

To speak of just and unjust in itself lacks all sense, in itself an injury, violation, exploitation, annihilation can naturally (natürlich) not be “unjust,” insofar as life essentially (das Leben essentiell), that is in its basic functions (Grundfunktionen) operates through injury, violation, exploitation, annihilation and can in no way be thought of without this character. One must even admit something still more alarming (Bedenklichere): that, from the highest biological standpoint,63 legal

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63 It is hard to know what to make of this sudden appeal to biology as a normative standard or source of normative standards, especially since, as Nietzsche has made clear beginning in the preface to the Genealogy, modern Europe is
conditions (Rechtszustände) are always only permitted (dürfen) to be

*exceptional conditions*, as partial restrictions of the actual life-will

(*eigentlichen Lebenswille*), which is bent upon power, and are subordinate
to its total goal as a single means: namely as means to create *greater* units
of power.

The barrage of metaphysical language used here to describe the violence of life
and the world does not contradict Nietzsche’s usual criticism of metaphysics, for
what Nietzsche objects to in traditional metaphysics is not that it describes the
world or reality but that it is used to escape from the violent world he describes
here; Nietzsche’s metaphysical picture is, unlike those Nietzsche reproaches, not
back-worldly (cf. Z 1.3, “Von den Hinterweltlern,” “On the Backworldly,” or, as
Kaufmann has it, “On the Afterworldly”).

Thus ultimately the law only exists or should only exist “as a means in the
struggle between power complexes,” not as a means to prevent struggle or to
attain to conditions of peace. Justice is justified for Nietzsche, so to speak, only

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embracing precisely the attitude towards law and justice that Nietzsche condemns
here as “a principle hostile to life.” Whatever it means for Nietzsche to appeal to
biology as a normative standard, it does not appear to mean that biology or
physical nature can guarantee certain developments or outcomes. At the same
time, however, I do not think that this contradicts or undercuts Nietzsche’s claim
about the character of life; life continues to have this character, it is just
diminished, weakened and enervated by the ascendancy of a sovereign and
universal legal order.
to the extent that it is in the service of a higher power, namely life; to the extent that it begins to sap that power, Nietzsche views it with horror and hatred.64

Let me pause here and summarize Nietzsche’s argument in this extraordinarily dense and important section. Generally, and beginning almost immediately in this section, Nietzsche opposes or contrasts ressentiment, the keen sense of having been injured and demanding vengeance, with justice, which is a matter of accurately or truthfully judging the meaning and value of someone’s action. Revenge focuses on the harm and the desire for retribution (“the feeling of being aggrieved”), while justice focuses on the larger good according to which one judges (even if that larger good is only the law as an expression and generator of greater power). Revenge remains locked in the perspective of sole concern for

64 Peter Berkowitz suggests a distinction between Gerechtigkeit, a form of justice that precedes and determines positive law, and Recht, the form of right that exists only in individual law codes. Thus, Berkowitz argues, “the distinctions between strength and weakness, nobility and baseness, and courage and cowardice preexist both law-making and value-creating.” Peter Berkowitz, Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 87-88. While very crude or basic distinctions between these terms may preexist the particular forms they are given in individual law codes and systems of values, it is clear from Nietzsche’s overall presentation of the development of human society and morality both that the particular forms or instantiations of strength, nobility and courage change radically over time, and that what is distinct or unique in individual forms of these virtues is more important than what is common (cf., e.g., J 268). Even if the noble soul, for instance, is always marked by a few general features or qualities (e.g., reverence for itself, gratitude towards existence), the particular expressions and experiences of these qualities are of far greater importance than their abstract formulation.

Moreover, the way that Nietzsche links Gerechtigkeit with objectivity earlier in the eleventh section, and says clearly that neither the active nor the reactive possess simple objectivity (he says the same of the nobles and slaves in the First Essay), suggests that Gerechtigkeit in the specific sense in which he is using the term here is a late development, rather than a specific or precise form that predates any particular law code—indeed, Nietzsche’s discussion of meaning, interpretation and the will to power in 2.12 makes Nietzsche’s rejection of the latter (quasi-Platonic) view abundantly clear.
oneself and one’s injury and desire for vengeance, while justice has a much
deeper and freer view, looking towards the goal or larger good by which it
orientes itself, and measuring and judging acts, people, and so forth in the light of
or by means of that larger and more encompassing source of value on the horizon.
Historically, Nietzsche argues, justice does not grow out of ressentiment as its
development or refinement, but is rather an impersonal evaluation that is the
result of long breeding or training, and is thus the opposite of ressentiment in any
form. Justice requires not only seeing this or that harmful or criminal act in
proportion, but also seeing that the individual who committed the act is not
defined by it.

Justice exists only in the particular form given it by an individual law code
and only for the sake of increasing the power of the community which it governs.
Thus the law comes into existence not to mirror the order of justice written in the
nature of things or to satisfy an innate human sense of justice, but only as “a
partial restriction of the will of life, which is bent upon power,” and which uses
the law “as a means to create greater units of power.” Law developed not out of
the feeling of vengefulness or grievance, not as a way to articulate and hone the
desire for retribution, but as a means for a more powerful force to organize,
control and direct social energies, and in particular to curb or repress the petty,
pointless and irrational ragings of ressentiment of those beneath it, and
particularly of those too petty and self-absorbed (and thus, almost by definition in
Nietzsche’s view, too weak) to discipline or direct themselves towards the higher
end ordained by the more powerful rulers of the community, and ultimately by the
will of life. Again, law does not proceed from vengefulness or retribution, but from the desire to bring warring subordinates under control, to create harmony for the sake of greater power. This also suggests that law is often not created by equal powers but by a superior power, and, when it is created by equal powers, it is when they have put aside retribution or their individual desires for vengeance, and instead are looking to build something larger than themselves.

Let me also pause here and try to piece together Nietzsche’s various statements about the origin and nature of retributive justice. Nietzsche’s basic position is that the interpretation retributive justice gives of itself is false, indeed utterly unbelievable.65 One does not desire violent revenge to restore some

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65 It is worth noting here that at least in this case Michel Foucault seems right to say that for Nietzsche “[t]here is nothing absolutely primary to interpret, because at bottom everything is already interpretation. Each sign is in itself not the thing that presents itself to interpretation, but the interpretation of other signs…This is also what Nietzsche says when he says that words have always been invented by the upper classes: they do not indicate a signified; they impose an interpretation. Therefore it is not because there are primary and enigmatic signs that we are now dedicated to the task of interpretation, but because there are interpretations.” Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schriff, eds., Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 64-65. Nietzsche does not examine a pure or original form of retributive anger or justice, he rather finds and interprets a form already at work in a system of purposes, that of the primitive political community, and thus in an interpretation. Nor does Nietzsche engage in a Socratic or dialectical examination of the claims of retributive justice and show them to be incoherent or wanting—indeed, this would be impossible for Nietzsche, since Socrates’s refutation or critique of retributive justice relies on questions or beliefs about the intent of the criminal, and Nietzsche denies that there is any necessary connection, logical or historic, between the earliest forms of retributive justice and any concern at all for the criminal’s intention. Rather, Nietzsche simply opposes his own interpretation to the traditional one.
cosmic balance or to satisfy an innate sense of justice\textsuperscript{66}—but then why does one desire revenge, what is the meaning of punitive or retributive justice? Nietzsche first discusses punishment in the Second Essay from the perspective of the primitive city or political community, which punishes in order to teach or remind its members to obey a few basic and crucial laws. When he addresses retributive anger or justice as it is experienced by individuals, as an emotion that seeks satisfaction in punishment, he identifies two elements, anger at an injury suffered and a sense of pleasure in the suffering of the one who caused it, a pleasure that can offset or restrain the anger (2.4). Though obviously there is something cruel or violent about the initial anger, Nietzsche presents the pleasure in cruelty as somehow distinct from and indeed capable of placating or counterbalancing the anger. Thus both anger and cruelty, according to Nietzsche, feed into or motivate and give meaning to punishment; both are an integral part of the experience of retributive justice. And this seems to be true of the sense of retributive justice as such: the anger at the crime or wrong is mixed with a desire to see the criminal punished and a sense of satisfaction when he is.

The anger seems clearly to be primary in Nietzsche’s account, both in the initial account at 2.4 and at 2.9, where Nietzsche describes the earliest and most vulnerable community punishing the criminal from fear and anger. The anger Nietzsche first describes in section four, and to which he repeatedly returns, precedes the pleasure in cruelty he later discusses. One is genuinely angry and

\textsuperscript{66} It seems to me highly unlikely that one can maintain or defend retributive justice on a purely natural basis, i.e., without an eventual appeal to the supernatural, but in any case one can certainly not do so on the basis of nature or reality as Nietzsche presents it at the end of 2.11.
wants to vent one’s anger on the one who has caused the harm or who threatens one’s security; cruelty is not primary, but is only introduced to counterbalance and gain control over the initial anger. There is something cool, calculating and self-aware about cruelty, while the original burst of anger is hot, explosive, immediate, self-forgetting (even though it is born of or expresses a [likely excessive] concern for oneself, a sense of one’s unique importance); indeed, it is only with the law’s introduction of particular amounts of cruelty as discrete equivalences and compensations that retributive anger begins to acquire a sense of proportion and thus to become somewhat rational.

Where does this anger, the primary element in retributive justice, come from? If Nietzsche rejects the interpretation that retributive justice gives of itself as something self-explanatory or unproblematic, what is the meaning or object of this anger? There may well be a basic and irreducible sense of anger at an injury or attack, as there seems to be in dogs, for instance. According to Nietzsche, however, this anger is not purely irrational or purposeless, but nor is it for the sake of self-defense or self-preservation; it does not aim at frightening off the attacker so that one can be safe and at peace, but rather at regaining the sense of power or mastery that one has lost through being attacked.\(^\text{67}\) If the anger simply sought a return to peace and security, retributive justice would make no sense;

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\(^\text{67}\) Which means that one may indeed desire or value security or safety, but at bottom only as an experience or affect of power (which may be very intense in some cases, for instance when one first lives in society and enjoys its protections).
there would be no desire to harm the criminal for his crime, only a desire to
imprison or execute him and thus to restore order and peace.68

Nietzsche’s usage at times suggests a distinction between anger (Zorn) and
ressentiment, where the former is more irrational and the latter more closely tied
to a sense of justice or grievance, but he does not develop this distinction, and it is
not especially important here in any case. There is a clear and significant
difference between anger or ressentiment as a motive for punishment, or
retributive anger, and cruelty as an amoral pleasure in another’s suffering. The
motive or aim is the same in both cases, however, as it is in the case of
humanity’s presocial instincts of aggression: an affective experience of power,
the enhancement or restoration of one’s feeling of power. Even granting that one
involuntarily continues to associate a criminal with the harm he has caused to
oneself, and thus continues to feel the anger initially excited by the assault or
injury, this anger is not a pointless or inexplicable reflex but rather aims at a
renewed sense of power, as Nietzsche stresses in 2.6 when he dismisses “revenge”
as a motive for the brutality of primitive punishments—“revenge itself leads back
to precisely the same problem: ‘How can making suffer be a satisfaction?’” Why,
for that matter, does one react to a loss or injury, for instance the murder of a
loved one, with vengeful anger or rage at all? Why not rather with sadness, fear,

68 There is also Nietzsche’s interpretation of punishment as offering the injured
party a kind of pleasure to balance and moderate their anger. Although it is
probably not necessary that the exchange proposed by punishment be between
two forms of the experience of power—in other words, that cruelty be able to
counterbalance or placate anger because it offers an equivalent quantity of the
same pleasure that has been lost—this certainly is the simplest and most
convincing explanation for the character of early punishment as Nietzsche
describes it.
or any number of other emotions (obviously, one can and does, but the interpretation retributive justice gives of itself suggests that the reaction of punitive anger is somehow essential and perhaps even most important)? The retributive impulse can rather only be understood as an attempt to regain or recoup the feeling of power one has lost as a result of the damage suffered.

Yet although cruelty and retribution both inform and are to some extent reined in or given specific form by a code and system of punishments, neither has been completely tamed or mastered by society. Cruelty can and obviously does arise and express itself quite independently of any sense of justice, retributive or otherwise; cruelty is an expression of the fundamental instincts of aggression which have not been tamed by society, though Nietzsche also suggests that it can be exacerbated or intensified by greater repression, or that cruelty is in part a reactive affect (e.g., 1.14-15, 2.5). Yet retribution or retributive anger, for its part, can also exceed the limits dictated to it by the law, overriding or manipulating the intellectual and moral restraints placed on it; if retribution tends to produce arguments or sentiments about its justice, those arguments are entirely in the service of or dominated by retribution, not a check or limit on it. Nietzsche’s account, I think, is unclear on whether this tendency of retributive anger to overflow the channels into which the law directs it is due to

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69 It is interesting to note the parallel and the difference between Plato and Nietzsche on this point. Both think that retributive justice is an imperfect grasping towards something higher and fuller—for Plato, a coherent account of justice (philosophy), for Nietzsche, an active, affirmative experience or expression of the will to power. For Plato, what is noteworthy or significant about retributive justice is its intellectual incoherence; for Nietzsche, it is its attempt to satisfy a repressed will to power through securing a warrant for cruelty.
ressentiment’s boundless and boundlessly irrational character, or because the ineradicable instincts of aggression, the basic desire to do harm and thus to feel more powerful, also find an outlet in retributive justice, so that there is a wholly other motive or drive expressing itself in retribution besides rezzentiment. Either way, much of our experience of retributive justice is simply a matter of feeling our desire or drive for power running through the channels or circuits sanctioned by the law, through which they have been compelled to run for millennia now. Today our anger or retributive impulse seems as natural and essential as our belief that criminals should be punished because they have chosen to do wrong, but both, according to Nietzsche, are the result of long training or breeding, a long schooling and compulsion to experience and permit the discharge of certain powerful drives only under certain very limited conditions and in response to certain very specific prompts or triggers (though, again, even today this training or schooling has not completely succeeded).

Finally, rezzentiment or the sense of retributive justice, as a reactive affect, is in part a response to external pressures; as these external pressures diminish and eventually fade away altogether, as in the case of a community so powerful that no amount of external pressure can harm it, passions like anger and even cruelty dissipate as well (2.10). Cruelty, anger, punishment all aim at power, and can thus be overcome or left behind when the community becomes strong enough to experience its power in other ways; retributive anger and pleasure in cruelty become unnecessary when a community or an individual feels its own power strongly enough without either. Thus, according to Nietzsche, the highest,
“noblest” possibility for a community is to leave behind or abrogate the demands of justice as it itself has prescribed them. Retributive justice, a legal, moral and affective instrument created by the political community, ultimately overcomes itself by producing a higher or fuller expression and experience of power.
Nietzsche begins the twelfth section by echoing the beginning of the eleventh section (—Hier ein ablehnendes Wort gegen [11]...Hier noch ein Wort über Ursprung und Zweck der Strafe [12]), suggesting that the twelfth section is somehow a restatement or development of some of the points raised in the eleventh. Most obviously, the twelfth section provides an example of the claim or argument that Nietzsche makes at the end of the eleventh section. The history of punishment shows that it has been used and given a meaning by a series of more powerful forces, and thus that the meaning or aim of punishment, as well as the understanding of justice it presupposes or is bound up with, do not exist independently of a particular system of purposes. The various meanings punishment has had through history illustrate both the process or character of existence Nietzsche describes at the end of section eleven, and shows particularly that there is no sovereign or transcendent justice or legal order. Here in section twelve Nietzsche offers the theoretical underpinning or explanation of not only his rejection of such a conception of justice, but also of his account of how a political entity, as it grows in power, takes up both the practice of punishment and the individual interests and passions that swirl around it, reconstituting and redirecting both. The twelfth section, in short, explains both Nietzsche’s rejection of sovereign and universal notions of justice and his account of historical development.
“Here still a word on the origin (Ursprung) and purpose (Zweck) of punishment—two problems, which fall or should fall apart from one another (die auseinander fallen oder fallen sollten): unfortunately one usually throws them together into one (leider wirft man sie gewöhnlich in Eins).” Nietzsche’s formulation suggests that it is only due to an almost willful and somewhat violent misinterpretation that this fairly self-evident fact is not seen; among those who make this mistake are the previous genealogists of morals, who here as always proceed (treiben) naïvely, if less forcefully than others. They unsuspectingly find some purpose for punishment, such as revenge or deterrence, and place it at the beginning as the cause of the origin of punishment. Nietzsche’s critique here is thus like his critique at the beginning of the First Essay; there the previous genealogists had assumed that the same meaning had always attached to the relatively stable but vacuous term “good,” while here they assume that punishment, like the value judgment “good,” has always had the same meaning, and indeed was invented only in order to serve or express that meaning.70 In other words, Nietzsche’s critique or dismissal of earlier genealogists of morals here is another variation on the theme of their lack of the historical sense. Note, however, that Nietzsche is in no way arguing that an earlier meaning of either punishment or the value judgment “good” continues to determine its current

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70 Nietzsche’s account, especially in 2.13, may suggest that the present meaning of punishment is more complicated or vexed than that of the word or value judgment “good,” but it seems to me that this is more likely an accidental feature of his presentation, and that he thinks that the meaning of the value judgment “good” is as complicated and multifarious as that of punishment (as indeed he suggests in 1.16).
meaning or function in some accidental, senseless and residual manner, as the
English psychologists had argued in the case of the word “good.”

It is impossible to improve upon Nietzsche’s own formulation of his
position, so I will simply quote Nietzsche himself and then provide brief examples or illustrations of his argument.

The “purpose in law (Zweck im Rechte)” is, however, the very last thing to employ in the history of the emergence (Entstehungsgeschichte) of law:71 rather there is for all types of history no more important tenet (Satz) than that which has been achieved with such effort, but which really should be achieved—namely that the cause of the emergence (Entstehung) of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual (thatsächliche) employment and integration (Einordnung) in a system of purposes lie separated toto coelo; that something existing (Vorhandenes), having somehow come to be (Zu-Stande-Gekommenes), is always again interpreted from new views by a power superior to it, newly monopolized, reformed and redirected to new uses; that all occurrences in the organic world are an overpowering, a becoming master, and that again all overpowering and becoming master are a new interpretation, an adaptation, where the previous “meaning” and

71 Granted, Nietzsche may himself seem to have just provided an ahistorical and universal definition of the purpose of law in the previous section, but that is in the most general and abstract terms of the purpose of life; the law, like everything else created by a stronger will, serves the purpose of increasing the power of that will or of the one possessing that will. The particular or concrete purposes of law, however, change radically; thus there is no contradiction in Nietzsche’s presentation.
“purpose” ("Sinn" und "Zweck") must necessarily be obscured or obliterated altogether. 72

72 Habermas maintains that Nietzsche’s concern in the Genealogy is to show that “What is older is earlier in the generational chain and nearer to the origin. The more primordial is considered the more worthy of honor, the preferable, the more unspoiled, the purer: It is deemed better. Derivation and descent serve as criteria of rank, in both the social and the logical senses” (The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, pp. 125-126). This passage and sections twelve and thirteen overall should make plain that this is by no means the case (Peter Berkowitz makes the same mistake: Ethics of an Immoralist, p. 70). Cf. also FW 345, M 37, 44. For further discussion of Habermas’s treatment in this section of The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, see Raymond Geuss, “Nietzsche and Genealogy,” in Morality, Culture and History: Essays on German Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 5-9.

Tracy Strong acknowledges that “Nietzsche’s intention is to uncover the origin, while recognizing full well that there is no obvious link between the two [between the origin and the present purpose or “empirical manifestations of a particular moral code”]. In the very next sentence, however, Strong maintains, “Since, however, the origin lives on in the event, he will by the act of unmasking have discovered what necessities are being served” (Strong, Politics of Transfiguration, p. 91). Thus Nietzsche is concerned with the origin not because it is better or “purer” but because it best illuminates the nature of the thing under consideration. This passage from the Genealogy, however, shows that Nietzsche’s view is the opposite, that anything can be seized upon and refashioned and reformulated, given new purpose and meaning, by new necessities and new systems of purposes. Thus the two examples on which Strong focuses, Socrates and Christ (Politics of Transfiguration, Chapter Five), had their teachings almost instantly taken up and transformed by their disciples, Plato and Paul. In this regard Raymond Geuss’s reading of Nietzsche’s view of early Christianity, which offers an interesting and, I think, convincing account of the difference between Jesus and Paul, is more accurate in my view (Geuss, “Nietzsche and Genealogy,” pp. 16-17).

To be sure, Nietzsche seems clearly to think that the original forms, meaning and consequences of these two sources of Western civilization continue to animate and inform our world, but this is because the forms created by Socrates (or Socrates and Plato) and Christ (or Christ and Paul) and the meaning assigned to those forms by their creators have not yet been overcome or reinterpreted, not because of a general proposition that the origin must always determine the subsequent meaning and purpose of anything. One consequence of this, in my view, is that Nietzsche’s aim is to give some of the spiritual expansions, needs, faculties and possibilities created by Socratic rationalism and Judeo-Christian values new meaning and purpose, not simply to obliterate or renounce them altogether.
Thus after stating his basic thesis Nietzsche moves immediately to insist, in contrast to both the English psychologists and the ruling democratic instinct he will shortly criticize, that he is not arguing that human life or development is utterly random or senseless, the result of a thoroughly stupid and mechanistic process. The evolution or development of something in the organic world, and thus the process whereby it becomes severed completely from its original purpose or use, is driven by a struggle for power, but this struggle is a struggle of interpretations; power in the organic world consists of or operates or manifests itself through interpretations. Meaning and interpretation are a function of the will to power, but that is also to say that the will to power essentially expresses itself through creating meaning and interpretations.

Nietzsche continues elaborating the implications of his thesis.

However well one has grasped the utility (*Nützlichkeit*) of any physiological organ (or also a legal institution, a societal custom, a political practice, a form in art or in religious cults), one has thereby still grasped nothing in regard to its emergence: however uncomfortable and unpleasant this may sound to older ears—for one had always believed to grasp in the demonstrable purpose, in the utility of a thing, a form, an institution also the reason for its emergence (*Entstehungsgrund*), the eye being made to see, the hand being made to grasp.
Thus so many religious forms and practices were taken up and given a completely
different meaning and purpose by Christianity as it spread; one can also think of
how the same musical instruments have been employed in different types of
music. Language furnishes another example of Nietzsche’s argument, one all the
more apt given his emphasis on meaning and interpretation in this process.
Language has not been devised by human beings in order to represent the physical
or metaphysical world accurately, nor to allow them to exercise an inborn
capacity for reason or philosophic or religious speculation. In short, there is no
stable or universal metaphysical meaning or purpose for human language.
Individual languages are continually growing, changing, adopting new words
from other languages, coining new words and phrases, inventing words to
describe new realities (inventions, social and artistic phenomena, etc.), even
meshing with another language, especially that of an invader; meanwhile its
political meaning may change drastically (e.g., the native language of a colonized
people), different pronunciations come to have different meanings (e.g., as
indicators of class or regional origin or ethnic or national membership) which are
themselves ever changing (e.g., ethnicity becomes more important than class),
feeding into and being shaped in turn by the larger, fluid social world.

Nietzsche continues his argument, now making explicit mention of the
will to power.

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73 On the contrary, it has been invented to express basic and common needs, and
fails ever more completely the rarer the experiences it tries to capture or convey:
But all purposes, all utilities are only signs that a will to power has become master over something of lesser power and has stamped upon it the meaning (Sinn) of a function; and the whole history of a “thing,” an organ, a practice can in this way be a continual sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations, whose causes do not even need to be connected to each other, but rather may follow after and replace one another purely accidentally (bloss zufällig).

To take three random examples, the many separate causes that led to the creation of modern Germany, to the rise and fall of Holland as a colonial power, or to the emergence of *homo sapiens* as a species have no necessary connection, even if they did lead to a single result in each case. This then also explains Nietzsche’s confusing and seemingly contradictory presentation of the history of punishment, his strange procedure of asserting various and obviously incompatible or contradictory purposes, motives and origins for punishment. He was representing the various uses to which punishment had been put, often at the same time, by different forces or perspectives, throughout its history; his seemingly incoherent hodgepodge of origins and meanings in fact simply reflected the manifold and dappled history of punishment—though not, it should be noted, from a perspective of either evaluative or theoretical relativism. The will to power serves to ground or orient both Nietzsche’s value judgments and his theoretical account of the world, history, psychology, and so forth.
Having made this point, Nietzsche gives an especially brilliant and compelling summary of his argument.

[The] “evolution” ("Entwicklung") of a thing, a practice, an organ is accordingly not in the least its progressus towards a goal, still less a logical and shortest progressus, achieved with the smallest expenditure of force and cost—but rather a succession of more or less profound, more or less independent processes of overpowering (Überwältigungsprozessen) playing themselves out (sich abspielenden), together with the resistances employed against them each time, the attempted transformations of form (Form-Verwandlungen) for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful counteractions. The form is fluid, but the “meaning” (der “Sinn”) is more so.

Again we see that, for Nietzsche, the organic process is wasteful, violent, indifferent, squandering. It has no ordained end or goal, and its movement or development is neither logical nor efficient nor reasonable. The immediate causes driving or shaping the history of something may come from completely outside of the path or evolution of the thing and may bear no logical relation to the other causes spurring and directing its development; indeed they may even be directly

74 One can of course only speculate on why Nietzsche does not mention nature specifically in this section, but it may be in part because he here focuses on or foregrounds the will to power, the more fundamental and encompassing quality that exhibits itself in both nature and life and that gives them their particular character and significance.
opposed to them. The development of religious doctrine, for instance, is driven not only internally by doctrinal tensions or debates between different sects or major theological figures, but from outside pressures from political and economic forces, the pressures of other religions (or the rise of schisms within the religion in question), social trends, attempts to convert new peoples, and so forth; thus much of Catholic dogma is marked by its “transformations of form for the purpose of defense and reaction” during the Reformation, not by the inner and necessary development of its original meaning and form. The university is another example—founded by the Church, eventually taken over or reshaped to serve national, scientific and other secular (but by no means harmonious or homogenous) ends, it has always been and continues to be shaped both by intellectual and ideological conflicts within the university itself and by those outside of it, as well as by the material interests which sustain and enhance it (governments, corporations, etc.).

“The form is fluid, but the ‘meaning’ is more so.” This sentence is an especially compressed but cogent critique of Platonism. Nietzsche rejects

75 Raymond Geuss offers an especially good illustration of Nietzsche’s argument using the example of Christianity (“Nietzsche and Genealogy,” pp. 9-17). In a nutshell, “One can’t give a ‘definition’ of Christianity if one means by that an account of a purported essential meaning (or purpose or function) which is invariably characteristic of Christianity” (p. 13). On the other hand, one must acknowledge that there are certain very broad doctrinal teachings or precepts that seem always to characterize Christianity, such as a depreciation of this world in favor of the next. To some extent, then, one can give a definition or identify certain essential features of Christianity. In other words, I think it is a mistake to assimilate Nietzsche’s understanding of Christianity to his understanding of punishment, as Geuss does (p. 13). On Nietzsche’s understanding of morality and history see also Geuss’s “Nietzsche and Morality,” in Morality, Culture, and History, pp. 167-197.
Platonism not so much because the “form,” the *eidos* or the *idea*, has been shown by the fossil record and modern historiography to be fluid and unstable (although it has), but because the meaning or sense which attaches to the form is even more fluid and unstable. The emphasis of philosophy needs to shift from a realm of forms or ideas that somehow determine the meaning of particular, concrete or physical forms to the act of human interpretation through which meaning or significance is assigned to these forms (which themselves stand in the stream of history and are constantly, though less dramatically, being reshaped by that stream).

More generally, the picture of human evolution with which Nietzsche wants to present us is clear: although it is pervaded and driven by wills to power, and so fundamentally by the will to power as the only observable quality, and is thus not simply mechanistic or senseless, it is purely accidental and illogical. Neither history, nature nor God made this evolution necessary or assured, in either its form or its end-point. As life itself says to Zarathustra, “That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end (Zweck) and an opposition to ends—alas, whoever has guessed my will should also guess on what *crooked* paths it must proceed” (2.12, “On Self-Overcoming”).

Nietzsche then applies his argument to individual organisms:

Even within each individual organism it stands no differently: with every essential (*wesentlichen*) growth of the whole the “meaning” (*der ‘Sinn’*) of the individual organ also shifts—in some cases their partial going-to-
ground, their reduction in numbers (for instance through negation of the intermediate members) can be a sign of growing strength (Kraft) and perfection. I meant to say (Ich wollte sagen): even the partial becoming useless, the atrophy and degeneration, the loss of meaning and functionality (Sinn und Zweckmässigkeit), in short death belongs to the conditions of actual progress (wirklichen progressus): which always appears in the shape of a will and way to greater power and is always carried through at the expense of numerous smaller powers. The greatness of an “advance” is even measured by the quantity of all that must be sacrificed for it; humanity as a mass sacrificed for the thriving of a single stronger human species—that would be an advance.

Nietzsche here specifies that the conception he is advancing entails struggle and even death, the sacrificing of the less powerful to the more powerful, the growth and expansion of the latter at the expense of the former. This takes place even within individual organisms, “for our organism is an oligarchy” (denn unser Organismus ist oligarchisch eingerichtet [2.1]). The same point can be applied to political or social bodies as well as to biological ones; thus the various classes of the aristocracy in any number of medieval European countries struggled against each other, some aligning with the Church, some with the monarchy,

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76 On this point and on Nietzsche’s closing argument about the priority of activity and spontaneous, form-giving, interpreting forces, see Chapter Nine of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter’s Nietzsche, “The Organism as Inner Struggle: Wilhelm Roux’s Influence on Nietzsche.” I think, however, that the present passage from the Genealogy is a better statement of Nietzsche’s rejection of both teleology and a senseless mechanistic determinism than all of the unpublished notes Müller-Lauter cites.
some trying to remain as independent as possible, before finally uniting as a class, to the benefit of some of the constitutive classes and the detriment and derogation of others (one could also, of course, use the examples of the various struggles within the Church).

In this passage Nietzsche also emphasizes that his teaching on life and the will to power is in no way democratic, although it may at first sound like a radically democratic or socialist doctrine, at least insofar as it explodes or destabilizes the structures which conservative thought takes as given and immutable (cf. Z 2.7, “On the Tarantulas”). Indeed, Nietzsche goes so far as to write that “humanity as a mass sacrificed for the thriving of a single stronger human species—that would be an advance” (one thinks, of course, of the Übermensch and of the terrible wars and suffering Nietzsche says will be necessary to achieve it). A process this senseless, destructive and chaotic obviously has no place for or affinity with a notion of the sanctity of the individual. Nietzsche closes by specifically identifying and rebuking the democratic instinct and its hatred of any that “rules and wants to rule,” which would rather make do with “the absolute accidental character (Zufälligkeit), indeed the mechanistic senselessness of all events, than with the theory of a power-will (Macht-Willens) playing itself out in all events;” this instinct would rather believe that life is stupid and senseless than admit that there may be a basic impulse to rule and establish hierarchies. This ruling instinct or democratic idiosyncrasy has become master even over physiology and the doctrine of life, with the result that it places “adaptation,” a purely reactive and accidental action
or operation, in the foreground, thus ignoring life’s will to power, the priority of
the “spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, newly-interpreting, newly-directing and
shaping forces.”

In section twelve Nietzsche had given his teaching the most sharply
paradoxical expression possible: “Thus one also conceived of punishing as
invented to punish.” In section thirteen he discusses in some detail the various
meanings or purposes punishment has borne throughout history, and thus
illustrates the argument of 2.12 using the example of punishment. Nietzsche
begins by returning to the distinction between two aspects of punishment: “on the
one hand the relatively permanent in it, the practice, the act, the ‘drama,’ a certain
strict sequence of procedures, on the other the fluid in it, the meaning (Sinn), the
purpose (Zweck), the expectation tied up with the execution of such
procedures.”\textsuperscript{77} The former, the procedure, is older than its meaning or use as
punishment; the meaning “is projected and interpreted into the procedure (which
has long existed but been employed in another sense).”

Nietzsche soon develops a very radical consequence of this point; again, it
is best simply to quote Nietzsche himself.

As for that other element in punishment, the fluid element, its “meaning,”
in a very late condition of culture (for example in present-day Europe) the
concept “punishment” in fact no longer represents one meaning, but a

\textsuperscript{77} Actually, he begins the thirteenth section by saying that he is returning to “the
subject, namely to punishment,” thus suggesting that 2.12 has been a digression
within a digression, since the lengthy discussion of punishment seems to be a
digression from the supposed subject of the essay, the bad conscience.
whole synthesis of “meanings:” the previous history of punishment
overall, the history of its employment for the most diverse purposes,
crystallize at last into a sort (Art) of unity, which is hard to dissolve, hard
to analyze and, what one must emphasize, totally and utterly undefinable.
(It is today impossible to say for certain why people are really punished:
all concepts in which an entire semiotic process is concentrated elude
definition; only that which has no history can be defined [definirbar ist
nur Das, was keine Geschichte hat].)

At an earlier stage of development, on the other hand, the “synthesis of
‘meaning’” still appears as both more soluble and more changeable, and one can
see the individual elements of the synthesis alter their valency (Wertigkeit) and
reorder themselves at different times, with certain elements at times dominating
and even eclipsing the others.78

Nietzsche’s brilliant argument that punishment today represents a whole
synthesis of meanings that cannot be disentangled, and thus that there is no single
or unitary purpose or meaning for punishment, explains why debates over the
purpose of punishment are endless—because they are by their nature insoluble. It
does, however, also raise some questions about the purpose of the Genealogy. If
it is now impossible to discern a definite or cohesive meaning for punishment,

78 Literally, Nietzsche says that at times one element in the synthesis steps
forward and dominates at the expense of the others, and at times even seems to
negate (aufzuheben) them. Nietzsche differs from Hegel chiefly in maintaining
that this synthesis of meanings remains compound and disharmonious, which
means, among other things, that even those elements that had seemed to be
aufgehoben can reemerge and reassert themselves.
much less to change that meaning, is this true of morality as well? After all, one may expect that morality is a much more complicated phenomenon than punishment; indeed, it is the phenomenon or set of phenomena that gives punishment its manifold and conflicting meaning. Can one then identify a distinct and coherent form of morality, now or at any point in recorded history?

Yes, because in Nietzsche’s view morality is, at least ideally, pure meaning or interpretation; it is one of the powerful, interpreting, form-giving forces that take up individual forms or practices, like punishment, and give them new shape, meaning and direction. The purpose of a form, practice or procedure flows from or is subordinate to or dictated by the meaning: “[a]ll purposes, all utilities are only signs that a will to power has become master over something of lesser power and stamped upon it the meaning (Sinn) of a function.” Hence the confusion of purposes that attaches to punishment is a sign that, as a practice or procedure, it has been employed and thus given meaning by a series of different moralities. In the case of punishment, the meaning it has been given necessarily implies a larger moral picture; thus punishment has a different function or meaning depending on the view of human beings and human capacities upon which it is predicated. Even if, for instance, one understands punishment as existing solely for the sake of retribution, the exact meaning and purpose of retribution, and thus of punishment, will still vary greatly depending on whether or not one believes the criminal deserves punishment because he chose to commit the crime, or indeed on whether or not one believes the criminal has free will. And, of course, punishment is even more dependent on a larger moral context for
its meaning if one understands it as aiming at “reformation,” for the very form to which punishment is trying to return or deliver the criminal exists only in that context.

Thus the problems one has with determining the meaning of punishment are due to its being a form or practice, and thus inherently meaningless, rather than a meaning or interpretation; meanings or interpretations themselves are, on Nietzsche’s view, coherent and intelligible on their own terms (even if, of course, a particular kind of morality as it exists in actual historical practice may be something of an amalgam of two or more distinct and even opposed moralities or moral interpretations, or certain moralities may be incoherent from a logical point of view, etc.). Moreover, punishment seems to be almost unique in the extent to which its meaning is informed or constituted by such a diverse and contradictory array of meanings (perhaps because there are certain functions or purposes that punishment must serve in any society or legal order, though Nietzsche is silent on this point). Other forms or practices, individual virtues, for instance, change their meaning and even their form without becoming multivalent in the same way. The practice of modesty (or later humility), for instance, has meant very different things and had very different values in ancient, Christian and modern bourgeois moralities, and even been constituted or defined by different acts, attitudes, and so forth, but its present meaning is very much the meaning it has solely in the presently reigning morality, not a farrago of meanings and purposes it has had throughout its history. In other words, I see no evidence that Nietzsche would claim that modesty is a virtue in liberal or bourgeois morality because of the
lingering but forgotten or unconscious influence of Christianity (one sees similar virtues promoted in moralities with similar aims or ideals but that have no relation to Christianity), any more than he would suggest that humility was displaced as a virtue in liberal morality because ancient value judgments had somehow perdured in Christian morality or society without anyone’s knowledge and suddenly reasserted themselves. One could make the same argument using the examples of guilt or, indeed, the conscience itself, both of which are affective-intellectual practices or forms of morality, or that constitute morality, and both of which can be given widely different purposes, meanings, orientations, contents and so forth by diverse moralities; but none of this means that these individual moralities themselves do not have clear and relatively stable meanings (which is not, of course, to suggest that a stable meaning in any way ensures or even promotes the continued existence or dominance of the morality in question).

Again, though, let me stress that here the point is not that it is somehow impossible for an individual to be motivated by both Christian and liberal moralities, and thus to practice both liberal modesty and Christian humility at the same time, and perhaps even to be unable himself to say which he is practicing or in what measure he is trying to practice each. But this is, again, because Christian morality has not been completely vanquished, obliterated or overwritten by liberal morality, so that it continues to animate individuals and other entities (churches, universities, charities, etc.) even in a predominantly liberal, secular society, not because Christian morality somehow continues to be present in liberal morality.
itself, though without anyone being able to perceive or experience this.\textsuperscript{79} Thus two moralities can exist side-by-side and both be active or influential, but this is because each still exerts power over the moral, social and political world, not because one cannot separate the two, or say clearly what morality is actually being practiced. In short, against those who prefer a senseless and absolutely accidental world to one ruled or animated by the will to power, Nietzsche denies that a value judgment or moral interpretation comes into being and then travels through history continuing to dominate or structure people’s thinking and affective attitudes simply through habit, forgetfulness, inertia, or any of the other things that dictate the English psychologists’ thinking about the history of morality (1.1-2).

That being said, Nietzsche’s own emphasis on unavowed or unconscious meanings and purposes means that the meaning or interpretations motivating people will not always be apparent to those individuals, nations, etc. They may be masked by relatively superficial and false interpretations, for instance those contemporary Germans give of themselves (cf. J 244); indeed, Nietzsche himself often stresses that there is more than one morality active and animating us today (e.g., 1.16, J 215, 244, 260, beginning, \textit{FaW}, Epilogue). But the crucial point is

\textsuperscript{79} Obviously, I am here assuming that liberal and Christian morality are sharply distinct and to some extent even opposed to one another. Of course many would debate this, but my concern here is only to illustrate Nietzsche’s argument.

But, one might rejoin, Nietzsche himself considered liberal morality to be descended or derived from Christian morality. This is certainly true, but in my opinion this was principally because both forms of morality shared certain concerns, aims and fundamental beliefs (above all the belief in the dignity of the individual and the desire to alleviate suffering), and this obviously does not prevent the two moralities from being clearly discrete and even at variance with one another on many points.
that even these unacknowledged or undetected meanings, which it is in large part
the purpose of genealogy to uncover, still possess force as meanings or
interpretations, as living, willing, interpreting forces (like unconscious drives), not
simply as mindless historical remainders. When one learns of or detects their
influence, one experiences a shock of recognition, an awareness that this is,
indeed, what has been motivating one or what one has been after, not a sense of
embarassment or confusion that something so obviously irrational and at cross-
purposes with one’s avowed aims should really have been molding or directing
one’s thoughts, feelings, actions, etc. without one’s knowledge.

To sum up and recapitulate, then, there is a clear difference between the
meaning, purpose or interpretation of a morality, and that attaching to a form or
practice like punishment. The final and perhaps decisive sign that there is such a
difference in Nietzsche’s mind is his continued interest in the history and indeed
present meaning and possibilities for morality; if morality were simply an
undefinable tangle, as punishment is for Nietzsche, there would seem to be no
point to his genealogical inquiries or his attempts to assess the meaning and value
of contemporary morality, apparently with a view to transforming that morality
(Nietzsche simply drops the topic of punishment after declaring that its present
meaning cannot be defined).

This is probably the place to discuss one of the most well-known and
influential readings yet given of Nietzsche, Michel Foucault’s essay “Nietzsche,
Genealogy, History,” first published in 1971. Foucault’s achievement here is very impressive; in a relatively brief essay he manages to advance a highly distinctive, largely convincing interpretation of Nietzsche that accounts for many of Nietzsche’s most prominent and enduring concerns. Foucault is especially strong on the historicist or anti-metaphysical thrust of Nietzsche’s argument, and particularly on the significance of Nietzsche’s claim that the origin of a thing does nothing to determine its later use or meaning. Thus, according to Foucault, Nietzsche challenges “the pursuit of the origin (Ursprung)” because it “assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession…if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (p. 78).

Therefore, according to Foucault, Nietzschean genealogy focuses on descent (Herkunft) and emergence (Entstehung).

An examination of descent also permits the discovery, under the unique aspect of a trait or concept, of the myriad events through which—thanks to

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80 In Paul Rabinow, ed., The Foucault Reader (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 76-100. Parenthetical page references in the following paragraphs will refer to this essay.
81 Raymond Geuss’s “Nietzsche and Genealogy” is also very good on this point.
82 I am somewhat doubtful that Foucault’s claims about the precise meaning of various terms Nietzsche uses (Ursprung, Herkunft, Entstehung, etc.) can be sustained, but the basic point he is making in his discussion of these terms is, I think, important and largely faithful to Nietzsche’s own views.
which, against which—they were formed. Genealogy does not pretend to
go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the
dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past
actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the
present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes (p.
81)…In placing present needs at the origin, the metaphysician would
convince us of an obscure purpose that seeks its realization at the moment
it arises. Genealogy, however, seeks to reestablish the various systems of
subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play
of dominations (p. 83). 83

And genealogy thus understood can be applied to “everything considered
immortal in man. We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment,
particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history” (p. 87; see also the
discussion of the body, pp. 87-88).

Yet whatever the virtues of Foucault’s treatment, it seems to me that he
differs from Nietzsche on several important points, in the first place concerning
the degree to which things “have no essence.” For all Nietzsche’s emphasis on
the discontinuities and variations in Christian teaching and morality over the years
(to take probably the most important example for Nietzsche), and the largely
accidental or extraneous origins of these variations (e.g., the way Catholic

83 As these quotations make clear, Foucault often employs highly poetic language,
which, I think it is fair to say, sometimes obscures his argument—though it also at
times unmistakably makes it more powerful or compelling.
doctrine was transformed to serve the purposes of the Counter-Reformation), he
does seem clearly to think that there is an underlying and animating unitary
essence of Christian or Christian-Platonic morality and intellectual valuation;
Nietzsche’s analysis and critique of contemporary nihilism as the inevitable result
of Christian morality seems to rely decisively, indeed entirely, on such an
underlying and animating fundamental unity. Obviously, this is not to claim that
such a unity or meaning is of supernatural or metaphysical origin, that it is
somehow an “immobile form” that precedes “the external world of accident and
succession.” It is simply to say that the Christian-Platonic system of moral and
intellectual valuations is not a mere hodgepodge or patchwork of unrelated forms,
but has an essential unity or core.84

For Foucault, on the other hand, genealogy is largely a matter of
dissolving or unmasking the pretended unities of historical phenomena like
values, morality, asceticism, knowledge. In this project “the historical sense can
evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses
the certainty of absolutes. Given this, it corresponds to the acuity of a glance that
distinguishes, separates, and disperses; that is capable of liberating divergence and
marginal elements—the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing
itself, capable of shattering the unity of man’s being through which it was thought
that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of the past” (p. 87). Therefore
“effective” history, which Foucault associates with genealogy, “deprives the self

84 But probably not an essential or unvarying purpose. Nietzsche seems to allow
that the world-denying character of Christianity can be an expression of or means
to great strength and power (and not just a means of conserving what little
strength and life one has): J 60, 51, 46.
of the reassuring stability of life and nature…This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (p. 88). With this surprisingly essentialist definition of the purpose of knowledge, Foucault expresses his concern to use genealogy to disrupt, subvert and disintegrate any given “system of rules” in which “humanity installs each of its violences” (p. 85).85

The first point to address here is whether Nietzsche’s genealogy aims solely or even primarily at shattering and dispersing pretended unities, including the unity of its own activity. As I have just suggested, I do not think that for Nietzsche all unities are pretended; part of the purpose of genealogy, then, seems to be to identify or ascertain the unfolding of the inner logic of value systems like Christianity, not to show that it has no inner logic or to confuse or splinter its attempt to claim that it does.

One may also want to object that Nietzsche does seem to allow that philosophy or the theoretical life aims at truth or understanding, at least in part, not simply at cutting or disruption or subversion. Nietzsche, in other words, seems to want to replace errors with truths, not just one system or mechanism of domination with another. Foucault, however, argues very well that his position is supported by Nietzsche’s own views, and indeed follows with absolute necessity from them.

85 The full sentence is worth quoting: “Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.”
If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations (p. 86).

Doubtless Foucault’s rhetoric, with its recurrent emphasis on violence and domination, can sound too extreme, even lurid. But, it seems to me, he has raised a supremely important question about Nietzsche’s thought: if all interpretations flow from or serve the will to power, how can there be any truth other than domination? The question becomes all the more pressing given Nietzsche’s willingness, even eagerness, to claim the status of interpretation for his own doctrine: “Supposing that this also [the application of the concept of “the will to power” to physics] is only an interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better” (J 22). Nietzsche’s insistence that there can be only interpretations is the necessary consequence of his rejection of any metaphysical order towards which the human mind is somehow naturally directed or with which it has a special or intrinsic relationship; humanity is just an animal species that has made itself sick, and thus is in no way directed towards or part of a metaphysical order which can ground or illuminate human thought.
Before continuing, I should distinguish between two possible uses of the word “metaphysical” and explain how I use it here to characterize or explicate Nietzsche’s thought. On the one hand, Nietzsche famously attacks or dismisses any conception of a metaphysical order that comprises a realm of existence of higher reality and importance than the world we experience. With this critique of traditional metaphysics Nietzsche wants above all to reverse or dissolve the classical metaphysical valuation animating both Plato and Christianity (and thus Western civilization), which “affirm[s] another world than the world of life, nature, and history” (*FW* 344); he wants to affirm precisely this world, “our world,” the world negated by metaphysics or philosophy, and thus to translate humanity “back” into nature, rejecting notions of humanity as having a “higher” origin or being of a different and higher kind than the rest of nature (*J* 230). This does not mean, however, that he stops giving descriptions or accounts of the world, and specifically of life, nature, and history; he does not abandon or condemn the traditional activity and even subject matter of metaphysics, just the valuations and desires expressed in its previous self-understanding. In this second sense of metaphysics, Nietzsche can be said to still practice metaphysics; he does not stop attempting to describe and explain the world, to understand its character and what this character means for us as human beings.

One must stress, however, the ways in which Nietzsche is not a metaphysician or rejects metaphysics. In the first place, Nietzsche’s metaphysical teaching, that will to power is the fundamental reality of life and the world, cannot be understood as referring to a deeper or higher level of reality, or to a
constitutive or generative metaphysical principle.\textsuperscript{86} This also means that Nietzsche’s metaphysical teaching is not grounded in or does not correspond to the metaphysical order of classical philosophy; Nietzsche’s accounts or explanations of the world, including his view of life as will to power, can thus “only” be interpretations. Nietzsche cannot appeal to such a metaphysical order to “prove” his interpretation is superior to those with which he disagrees, which is indeed just as well for Nietzsche, who regards all such appeals to the authority of a metaphysical system or order as empty and pointless gestures that express the worst in human beings. Nietzsche thus willingly and indeed cheerfully accepts the status of interpretation for his doctrine of the will to power and for his philosophy as a whole.

To return to Foucault’s claim that for Nietzsche truth is simply an effect of or a euphemism for domination: the question is in no way answered by observing that Nietzsche’s interpretation engages with and critiques other interpretations, often offering internal critiques of other positions in terms of their consistency or

\textsuperscript{86} On this point see the excellent discussion in Müller-Lauter, \textit{Nietzsche}, Chapter Eight, “Nietzsche’s ‘Doctrine’ of the Will to Power,” especially pp. 130 ff. Very briefly, “the will to power is the \textit{sole quality} that can be detected, no matter what one examines. But we must refrain from substantializing quality in any way, however sublime. Quality does not exist as something self-subsisting, not as a subject or quasi-subject, also not as the one, whose ‘productions’ then are the complex structures with relative duration, as Heidegger states. The sole quality is rather always already given in such quantitative particularizations, otherwise it could not be \textit{this} quality. For every will to power relies on the conflict with other power-wills in order to be able to \textit{be} will to power. The quality, ‘will to power,’ is not a real unity; this unity exists neither in any way for itself, nor is it ever the ‘ground of being.’ There is a ‘real’ unity only as organization and interplay of power-quanta…the power-will is not a principle or a metaphysical entity [p. 133]…[The will to power] is not an underlying foundation of the world that produces life or externalizes itself as art or realizes itself as mankind” (p. 134).
coherence. For the most important rival interpretations, like those of Christianity or Platonism, are not vulnerable in this way—or, in any case, Nietzsche does not oppose them by means of internal critiques. Nor can one claim that Nietzsche grounds his interpretations in determinate forms, objects or processes that exist independently of it and can provide the means to adjudicate between different interpretations—of course the things that he interprets exist independently of his interpretation, but his interpretation of, for instance, nature is not self-evidently truer than or otherwise superior to that of Plato or Christianity. Again, such appeals to “objective” standards or reference points may work in relatively uncomplicated cases in relatively specific contexts, but when it comes to something as vast and varied as nature or human nature, the object of interpretation does not clearly command or require a particular interpretation, for instance that of Nietzsche over that of Plato or Christianity (especially when one considers Nietzsche’s admiration for Dostoevsky and, polemical excesses aside, Socrates and Plato). One cannot appeal to “human nature” to decide whether the strongest or most fundamental human need or impulse is the will to power or the desire for God or for wisdom, for human nature is precisely what is at issue in this dispute; to assert that human nature proves the truth of one position over another is simply to argue in a vacuous circle. Thus things like the will to power and particular understandings of nature, life, and so forth ground Nietzsche’s

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87 Which is not to say that this aspect or tendency in Nietzsche’s thought should be ignored or deprecated. For an intelligent and careful consideration of how Nietzsche uses internal critiques in his revaluation of values, see Aaron Ridley, “Nietzsche and the Re-evaluation of Values,” in Acampora, Critical Essays, pp. 77-92.
interpretation internally, or in the sense of being the basis on which he judges other things like morality, Christianity, democracy, etc., but these terms or concepts do not ground his interpretation in the sense of somehow existing outside of or “beyond” interpretation, and giving his interpretation its form or substance or making it true or false. Nietzsche’s grounding concepts enter into his interpretation only as something already interpreted, not as something with a self-evident meaning that structures any possible interpretation of it. Thus, for instance, when Nietzsche suggests that the Christian experience of sin is just a misinterpretation of a physiological state (e.g., 3.15-16, M 10, 83, 86, GD, “Four Great Errors,” “‘Improvers,’ 1), he cannot be simply appealing to the physiological or biological interpretation as the “true” one, as if there is some obvious or indisputable reason to take the physiological description as exhaustive or definitive (cf. FW 373). Nietzsche himself acknowledges and indeed stresses this point: “I proceed in this essay, as one sees, on a presupposition that I do not first have to demonstrate (begründen) to readers like I need: that man’s ‘sinfulness’ is no fact (Thatbestand), but merely the interpretation of a fact,

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88 Again, to some extent these grounding or foundational concepts do indeed do that; Nietzsche frequently dismisses other interpretations of morality, psychology, history, etc. because they are too crude or superficial, or because they are inadequate as interpretations; Nietzsche is not, in other words, authorizing purely arbitrary interpretations. But, again, the most important or challenging rival interpretations do not suffer from these glaring defects, and thus cannot be rebutted in this way.

89 Likewise, Christian readers could object that when Nietzsche introduces the will to power to explain apparently disinterested religious or moral feelings, acts, etc., he is simply introducing something that does not exist to explain occurrences that are perfectly intelligible according to the interpretations Christians themselves give of them.
namely of physiological depression—the latter viewed in a moral-religious perspective that is no longer binding on us” (3.16).

Here, I think, we come to the basis on which Nietzsche founds his interpretation, or the criteria by which he judges it as truer than any other. The historical epoch or dispensation in which Nietzsche is living is, of course, defined by the death of God; the “moral-religious perspective” that reigned for nearly two millennia is “no longer binding on us.” It is not simply that it has somehow fallen away, like scales from the eyes of Paul on the road to Damascus. It is rather that it now has the conscience against it.

This is the locus of his [Schopenhauer’s] whole integrity (Rechtschaffenheit): unconditional and honest atheism is simply the presupposition of the way he poses his problem, as a triumph achieved finally and with great difficulty by the European conscience, as the most momentous (folgenreich) act of two thousand years of discipline (Zucht) for truth that in the end forbids itself the lie in faith in God.

One sees what really triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness taken ever more rigorously, the father confessor’s refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. Looking at nature (Natur) as if it were proof of the goodness and care of a god; interpreting history to the honor of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and moral ultimate purposes;
interpreting one’s own experiences as pious people have long enough interpreted theirs, as if everything were providential, a hint, devised and destined for the sake of the salvation of the soul—that is all over now, that has the conscience against it, that is considered indecent and dishonest (unehrlich) by every more refined conscience—mendaciousness, feminism, weakness, and cowardice. In this severity, if anywhere, we are good Europeans and heirs of Europe’s longest and most courageous self-overcoming (FW 357; cf. also 122, 319, GM 3.27, M, Preface).

Zarathustra couches his contempuous rebuke to his apostate disciples in the same terms.

“We have become pious again”—so these apostates confess; and some among them are even too cowardly to confess it.

Those I look in the eye, and then I say it to their faces and to their blushing cheeks: you are such as pray again.

But it is a disgrace to pray! Not for everybody, but for you and me and whoever else has a conscience in his head too. For you it is a disgrace to pray!

You know it well (Du weisst es wohl): your cowardly devil within you, who would like to fold his hands and rest his hands in his lap and be more comfortable—this cowardly devil urges you, “There is a God.”
With this, however, you belong to the light-shunning kind who cannot rest where there is light; now you must daily bury your head deeper in night and haze (Z 3.8, “On Apostates,” 2).

Nietzsche thus grounds the superiority of his philosophy, its superior cogency or force, in the complex and historically constituted or determined phenomenon of the conscience.

In these passages Nietzsche does, of course, maintain and even highlight the truth of his view or of the views of the good Europeans. But much more than that he stresses, in these and in many other passages, that what is important about his interpretation of the world, what makes it more binding or compelling for him and those like him, is not so much its greater explanatory power or coherence but its greater honesty, its greater willingness to face harsh, unpleasant and even destructive truth, and thus to obey the great moral imperative of the age, to participate in or advance the self-overcoming of the Christian God and ultimately of Christian morality itself. Nietzsche’s interpretation or philosophic teaching, while drawing on many of the findings and saluting many of the methods of contemporary science (philology as much as the natural sciences), is more than anything based on observations and realities that have always been accessible to human beings—the wasteful and destructive character of nature, the immoral wellsprings and motives of moral feelings and actions, the accidental, often violent and in any case certainly not providential character of human existence, the prevalence of change and even chaos at all levels of life and the world. It is
only due to the imperative of honesty or intellectual cleanliness that humans have begun to devise the sciences and focus them on highlighting these features of existence: “Hurray for physics! And even more for that which compels us to turn to physics—our honesty (Redlichkeit)!” (FW 335).

At the same time, however, Nietzsche is also presumably, as a philosopher and thus “of necessity a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow,” the “bad conscience of his time,” who aims to know “of a new greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement,” and who thus says to his contemporaries, “We must get there, that way, where you today are least at home” (J 212; cf. also the description of Dionysus in J 295 and FW 377, 382). Hence the image of the madman announcing the death of God, who is light years ahead of his contemporaries, who despises and wants to rouse them from their complacency and their self-satisfied interpretation of the death of God (FW 125; cf. 343). In short, one must remember and indeed stress that Nietzsche’s ambition is not merely to embody the truth of his time, and if his philosophy or interpretation of existence is grounded in a certain historical reality or a certain moment in the historical evolution of the human conscience, that does not mean a simple contented affirmation of the conventional wisdom or prevailing opinions of the age. On the contrary, it is the reality of the age as it is experienced by a very few choice spirits (the “we” Nietzsche frequently addresses, and whom his writings are no doubt intended to help create) who are above all concerned with transforming their age, and thus driving humanity forward and upward.
All of this, I believe, shows that Nietzsche does not conceive of the alteration or succession of interpretations as the sheer play of dominations occurring in a vacuum.\textsuperscript{90} Nietzsche believes that certain interpretations are truer or more compelling than others because they are grounded in historical experience, and thus in something very deeply known and felt, if not capable of rational or scientific demonstration (something belonging to the domain of \textit{Wissen} but not \textit{Erkenntnis}, to use a distinction often found in Nietzsche’s texts).\textsuperscript{91} Thus

\textsuperscript{90} On the other hand, Foucault is probably right that, at the deepest level, Nietzsche does conceive of this movement from one interpretation to the next as purely a matter of domination (as Nietzsche himself stresses in the end of 2.11 and in much of 2.12).

\textsuperscript{91} Compare the following statement by Gianni Vattimo: “The ‘end of modernity,’ or in any case its crisis, has also been accompanied by the dissolution of the main philosophical theories that claimed to have done away with religion: positivist scientism, Hegelian and then Marxist historicism. Today there are no longer strong, plausible philosophical reasons to be atheist, or at any rate to dismiss religion. Atheistic rationalism had taken two forms in modernity: belief in the exclusive truth of the experimental natural sciences, and faith in history’s progress towards the full emancipation of humanity from any transcendent authority… the untenability of scientistic and historicist rationalism—both of which repudiated the very possibility of religion—has been widely accepted as given in our culture.” Gianni Vattimo, \textit{Belief}, trans. Luca D’Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 28-29.

In my reading, Nietzsche’s atheism, and his philosophy or interpretation as a whole, does not instantiate or rely upon any rationalism of the type Vattimo describes here. I do not think that Nietzsche’s argument is that a modern form of rationalism has disproved or displaced religion but rather that the severe and uncompromising honesty to which we have been bred has forced us to admit that the theological and providential interpretation of reality is false, a comforting but untenable lie. It is not that we now know so much more than our ancestors, either quantitatively (though we clearly do) or qualitatively through the emergence of a new system of thought. It is rather that we can no longer ignore or explain away the violent and senseless character of the natural world, and indeed of so much of the human world, the obviously accidental and chance character of history and existence generally, and related matters. Even major and disquieting discoveries like Darwin’s are significant not because they are integrated or synthesized into an overarching and totalizing rationalism, but because they are a further spur to (and are likely only made possible by) rigorous and unsentimental introspection.
Nietzsche remains eager to claim the status of interpretation for his teaching or philosophy, in order to avoid a metaphysical picture of human nature and thought, without thereby claiming either that all interpretations are equally valid or convincing or that the cogency of an interpretation depends solely on the rhetorical powers (or simple physical force) of the one who advances it.

This, I think, helps to distinguish Nietzsche’s conception and practice of genealogy from that of Foucault. If, however, Nietzsche does not intend genealogy to be purely disruptive or subversive, what is its purpose? In the first place, I agree with those (including Foucault) who emphasize that part of Nietzsche’s concern in the *Genealogy* is to give a naturalistic account or explanation of the origin of moral sentiments, experiences and practices formerly thought to be of supernatural (including metaphysical) origin, this, indeed, is what Nietzsche stresses in his discussion of the *Genealogy* in *Ecce Homo*. This means, of course, that Nietzsche’s claim that his philosophy is “only” an interpretation does not imply abandoning every traditional requirement of a philosophic theory; it simply means abandoning the attempt to ground this interpretation in a supernatural or metaphysical authority. Thus there is no metaphysical trump card that Nietzsche can or would like to lay down against his

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92 There are other points on which Foucault differs from Nietzsche (especially in the seventh section of his essay, where, it seems to me, he is clearly sketching his own project rather than Nietzsche’s), but I see little reason simply to enumerate and describe each of them.

93 Cf. also Maudemarie Clark’s “Introduction” to the Clark and Swensen translation of the *Genealogy*, pp. xxi-xxiii, Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, pp. 172-173 and *passim*. 
opponents, but he still wants and needs to account for seemingly supernatural phenomena to himself and in the terms of his interpretation of the world.

I think there is also, however, an unmistakable forward orientation and thrust to Nietzsche’s concern with genealogy. This aspect of Nietzschean genealogy has been described very well by Robert Guay: “We have made ourselves into malleable, historical animals, and what is at stake is not the genetic story of how we got here, but the forward-looking issues of how to construe the meaning of our historical inheritance and the character of our self-determination.”

For both of these reasons I therefore disagree with much of Alasdair MacIntyre’s treatment of Nietzsche’s genealogical project. In the first place I disagree with MacIntyre’s claim that on Nietzsche’s “own account assent by those inhabiting the culture of his age could only be accorded to theories infected by distortion and illusion.” As I have noted above, although Nietzsche obviously has a largely adversarial relation to his own age and culture—although he is untimely—he also suggests that certain of his contemporaries constitute “the honor of our age” (GM 3.24), and even in large part grounds his philosophy or interpretation of the world in the historical dispensation of his culture—while, of

95 Alasdair MacIntyre, “Genealogies and Subversions,” in Schacht, Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality, p. 292; see more generally pp. 290-293. This essay also appears as the second chapter of MacIntyre’s Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).
course, also trying to overcome or push beyond that dispensation. Moreover, as the context of the citation from the Genealogy makes clear, Nietzsche honors precisely “these last idealists of knowledge in whom alone the intellectual conscience dwells and is incarnate today;” he does not, as MacIntyre claims, simply condemn the will to knowledge or truth, not even in the form it takes in scholars or academics (FW 366, J 207; cf. also the discussions of German scholars and especially philologists in J 209 and 244).

MacIntyre thus opposes a rather extreme version of Nietzsche as an aesthetic irrationalist to the type of scholarly or positivist conception and valuation of truth embodied in the Ninth Edition of The Encyclopedia Britannica. The latter, the “encyclopedist’s conception,” is “of a single framework within which knowledge is discriminated from mere belief, progress toward knowledge is mapped, and truth is understood as the relationship of our knowledge to the world, through the application of those methods whose rules are the rules of rationality as such.”96 In obvious contrast to this, we find in Nietzsche a “subordination of the elucidatory academic treatise to the poem and the epigram, a subordination designed to enable us finally to dispense with elucidatory treatises altogether in favor of a mode of discourse and a way of life in which mockery, celebration, and disruptions of sense make use of assertions only in order later to displace them.”97

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96 “Genealogies and Subversions,” p. 292.
97 Ibid, p. 298. Here I think MacIntyre is pushing Nietzsche much further in the direction of Foucault’s essay than is warranted, and indeed this sentence appears in a discussion in which MacIntyre essentially identifies the two (pp. 297 ff.).
MacIntyre thus frames the choice as one between a fairly dogmatic form of the rationality that prevailed among Victorian-era encyclopedists and an irrationalism bordering on inanity. Obviously, I do not think that this is a fair or accurate characterization of Nietzsche’s position; in fact, if he had to choose between the two, I think he would choose the encyclopedists’ position as closer to his own. Certainly all of Nietzsche’s works evince a strong and consistent concern with honesty and truthfulness, the critical scrutiny of moral, religious and aesthetic experiences and beliefs, and indeed anything previously thought to be “higher” or “inspirational,” and generally a commitment to articulating a picture of the world and of human life that is more intellectually satisfying, because more honest and more willing to acknowledge the amoral complexity and often savagery of existence, than those previously offered. What Nietzsche does maintain is that none of this is a matter of getting in touch with or representing an eternal metaphysical order; his philosophic or interpretive activity is thus not pursuing the kind of certainty promised or guaranteed by such an order, nor is that activity given special meaning or dignity by such an order. This is a major part of the difference between Nietzsche and so many of his contemporaries (including the encyclopedists MacIntyre discusses), but this obviously does nothing to commit him to a life devoted to “mockery, celebration, and disruptions of sense.” On the contrary, Nietzsche’s emphasis on interpretation and his frequent use of a text as the metaphor for the thing interpreted suggest that Nietzsche is engaged in a positive, sense-making enterprise.
The metaphor of a text as the thing interpreted seems especially significant to me. On the one hand the text (the physical world, human nature, morality, history, etc.) requires interpretation; its meaning is not self-evident or unambiguous. Yet the text imposes clear and unmistakable requirements or limits on the interpretation; the text requires interpretation, and it may be impossible ever to arrive at an interpretive consensus, but that does not make every possible interpretation valid or even plausible. Although Nietzsche rejects the claims of logic to find equal or identical things in the world, to find enduring substances, etc. (*FW* 110-111), he does maintain that his alternative version of physics, “with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation (*Interpretationskunst*),” would describe “the same nature and the same phenomena” as modern physics and would arrive at the same conclusions, “namely, that it has a ‘necessary’ and ‘calculable’ course” (*J* 22). Thus, however radically different Nietzsche’s interpretation is from that of modern physics in other respects, it remains bound to the same text and identifies and describes the same features, and indeed reaches the same descriptive conclusions. At the same time, however, this passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* seems especially important to me because it shows Nietzsche’s relative disinterest in maintaining a strict distinction between describing and explaining. Moral presuppositions and consequences are as clear and integral in Nietzsche’s interpretation as in that of the democratically inclined modern physicists. So often Nietzsche combines a devastating intellectual or theoretical critique of his opponents with incisive psychological criticism of the intellectual dishonesty or insidious moralism that has led to or bred the theoretical
errors (e.g., in his criticism of the English psychologists in 1.1-3). He does this in *Beyond Good and Evil* 22, but his point is not to urge a value-neutral approach to physics but to advocate an interpretation of nature couched in different, contrary evaluative or moral terms. I think that this helps to indicate Nietzsche’s difference from both of the extreme positions MacIntyre describes.

At the same time, since Nietzsche’s interpretation does not represent or conform to a metaphysical order, but rather is in large part a contingent product of history, I think MacIntyre is mistaken to claim that genealogy involves “an appeal away from themselves [those writing genealogy and their opponents] and the particularity of their own claims to what is timelessly, logically, ontologically, and evaluatively.”98 Nietzsche does not think that any arbitrary interpretation is valid, nor does he seek to replace critical self-reflection with celebration and disruption of sense, but even the sciences which he uses to interpret and indeed often to isolate or identify his texts, from physics to philology, are open to radical internal change. This change could come for contingent reasons (e.g., a discovery of a great fund of new documents from antiquity, documents which, for instance, decisively refute the etymologies Nietzsche puts forward in the First Essay), or because the sciences discover new dimensions or “pages” to the text they interpret (as has happened, for instance, with quantum physics99), or because the sciences develop or revolutionize themselves according to their own inner logic (and this,

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98 “Genealogies and Subversions,” p. 295.
99 Obviously, the development of quantum physics has raised all sorts of questions about the history and philosophy of science, and it is no doubt extremely facile simply to claim that physics has “discovered” more text with which to work. I hope, however, that even this vague and superficial formulation makes my point clear.
of course, begins to entail a discussion of philosophy of science which does not seem to me essential here). In short, Nietzsche is not dogmatic enough to think that the interpretations offered by the modern sciences, or possibly even his own interpretations (consider his hopeful and self-deprecating attitude toward the philosophers of the future), are “timeless.” Granted, MacIntyre also seems to suggest in the same passage that the genealogist’s metaphysical commitment is merely to giving and considering reasons, but I do not see how this is in any meaningful sense “metaphysical,” much less concerned with what is “timeless” (consider, for instance, exchanging reasons or arguments regarding the best player in the history of baseball).

Nietzsche’s position can be further clarified by one final comparison, this one with Richard Rorty. Nietzsche’s goal is clearly not the same as that articulated by Rorty in his picture of an ideal liberal culture:

[I]n its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible… The process of de-divinization…would, ideally, culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meaning of their
lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings.¹⁰⁰

Nietzsche, by contrast, is not aiming for a situation in which humanity seeks guidance or meaning in nothing beyond itself, as his concern with or invocation of things like nature and life makes clear. Yet Nietzsche’s position is also more complicated than a straightforward appeal to universal normative and theoretical foundations, for the demand that humanity recognize the true character of nature is rooted not in nature but in the demands of honesty, in the virtue and conscience of the age. Nietzsche thus does not simply claim nature or life as authorities, but rather that our authority is the values we hold in this historical epoch, which in substance are purely human and contingent.

Thus, in my view, although Nietzsche thinks that we have finally understood—or simply accepted—the truth about nature, he does not believe that nature must for some reason always be the foundation or starting point for our thinking (theoretical or normative); in the first place, various trends or moments in modern philosophy (some of which are clearly evident in Nietzsche’s own thought) show that nature need not always or necessarily occupy such a crucial or defining role in philosophy. Even beyond that, however, the most fundamental or decisive aspects of nature for Nietzsche’s interpretation of it have always been evident; what is new is the insistence on “facing” them and indeed on centering one’s interpretation of nature on them. Nietzsche’s view or interpretation of

nature is superior or more convincing not because he has access to revolutionary conceptual or experimental innovations, but because our psychological insight and our conscience enable us to see and understand the ways in which the Christian interpretation of nature was deceptive or delusional, and to see what needs it served.

Yet even granting that Nietzsche’s interpretation of nature is truer than the alternatives or rival interpretations, there is no necessary or obvious reason why it is normatively binding on us. In other words, for Nietzsche it is an enormous challenge to live according to nature, and one can turn one’s back on that challenge and live a perfectly pleasant and comfortable anti-natural life. If for Plato the non-philosopher who lives an unnatural life is doomed to a tragic life, torn by the contradictions in his most deeply held beliefs, for Nietzsche it is the life according to nature that is tragic, and nature itself cannot force anyone to embrace this tragic life. The relative weakness of nature as Nietzsche understands it is made clear by his view that humanity is declining into a sterile and feeble existence, and thus is denying and divorcing itself from the basic character of nature and the world as he presents it, for instance, at the end of 2.11; nature is dispensable. This weakness of nature is made especially clear at the end of the First Essay (1.16-17), where Nietzsche speaks of “the ancient fire” of the conflict between Roman and Judean values (or perhaps simply of Roman values themselves) and asks, “Must the ancient fire not some day flare up much more terribly, after much longer preparation? More: must one not desire it with all one’s might? even will it? even promote it?” Whether Roman values represent
the highest fulfillment of human nature, or the struggle between Rome and Judea must be rejoined so as to further the development of that nature, nature as a normative standard cries out for “the ancient fire” to erupt again. There is, however, no guarantee that this will happen; one must will it and even actively promote it; nature seems to depend entirely on human will or choice.

Nietzsche’s argument here is not that of Plato in his image of the cave in the *Republic*. Nietzsche is not claiming that human beings are trapped or imprisoned inside a cave and forced to observe only “the shadows of artificial things” (515c), that their natural impulses must be constrained and misdirected by convention. Nietzsche is rather arguing that humanity’s natural impulses are becoming ever more faint in modern human beings, that nature is dying out. Thus the problem for Nietzsche is not the forcible suppression or imprisonment of nature but the prospect of the last man.101

Yet even aside from this, nature cannot, in my reading of Nietzsche, serve as a simply compelling or organizing foundation for human thought and action.

For even if acting or living in accord with nature will give us greater vitality or

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In *Beyond Good and Evil* 264 Nietzsche does reference Horace’s line “Try with a pitchfork to drive out nature, she always returns,” but there he is talking only about the (specifically plebian) tendencies and habits inherited by individuals, not nature in the broader or fuller sense in which it is used above. In other words, some basic instincts may be ineradicable or inexpungable, but the more majestic and creative character of nature can dissipate or dry up in Nietzsche’s view.
health, as Nietzsche often seems to suggest, why should these things be taken as the *summum bonum* of human existence? They were, after all, not so taken by any of the previous philosophers who based themselves on nature. Why should vitality be *a priori* or universally more important or valuable than safety? Why is splendor more choiceworthy than security (cf. Pr. 6)?

Or, to return to the comparison with Rorty, why is vitality more important than the justice, mutual respect and reduction of cruelty and senseless suffering achieved in liberal democracies? Part of the difference between Nietzsche and Rorty rests on a difference in their understanding of nature: for Rorty, nature has no purposes, while for Nietzsche it has purposes, but they are not unitary or harmonious. But even more importantly, Rorty prefers the achievements and imperative of history or culture, while Nietzsche prefers those of nature—but in doing so obeys or embodies the imperatives of history and culture as well as those of nature.

Nietzsche’s position is thus as complex and paradoxical as nature itself. We accept and digest the truth about nature not because nature is our final or ultimate authority, but because we have been bred by history and culture to seek

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102 It is also important to clarify Nietzsche’s assertions that morality stands opposed to greater health and splendor. He is not saying something analogous to what a doctor might say to a patient in urging him to lose twenty pounds. “You’ll feel better, you’ll have more energy, you’ll look better, you’ll live longer and have better quality of life.” Nietzsche is not claiming that overcoming morality means sloughing off or jettisoning an unhealthy encumbrance that makes us sluggish and unhealthy. Overcoming morality, for Nietzsche, means “living dangerously” (cf. *FW* 283), and is thus more akin to encouraging someone to jump twenty parked buses in a motorcycle or to explore a jungle or climb a mountain. “Trust me, you’ll never feel so alive…which is good, because you may not survive the experience, so you should enjoy that feeling in its strongest form while you can.” In short, Nietzsche’s appeals to health and vitality are in no way appeals to prudence.
the truth about nature and to attempt to build our thought and lives on that truth. We have now arrived at a view of nature which emphasizes or foregrounds its most destructive, wasteful and indifferent aspects; our accession to this view of nature, and the collapse of the previous, Christian-Platonic view, is in large part what Nietzsche means by nihilism. Accepting this conception of nature and incorporating it into our lives is the great challenge of our age, the most difficult prospect for us—and thus precisely what we must do. We must do this because it is the challenge that we know with an intuitive knowledge to be the greatest for us, the greatest of our age, and to shirk it would be defeat. It is not so much that we must serve or achieve an abstract vitality as that this particular, concrete task or trial calls to us, and our conscience hears the call and demands that we respond. Thus, to return to Rorty, it is not so much that Rorty prefers culture and Nietzsche prefers nature as it is that Rorty prefers liberalism or liberal justice and Nietzsche prefers honesty. Yet Nietzsche does not “prefer” honesty through an arbitrary choice or because of some personal fact about him. It is the one virtue that remains to us and from which we cannot get away (J 227), the virtue that our conscience demands that we practice.

Nature expresses itself through culture and history, but obviously not every culture has eventuated in the Nietzschean view of nature. Indeed, and in a paradox typical of Nietzsche’s presentation of nature, humanity has been brought to its truest view of nature only by an extraordinarily unnatural historical and cultural evolution. The immense complexity of consciousness and conscience in late modern Europe, a burden under which its bearers are in danger of collapsing,
is precisely the sort of larger power complex that nature, life or the will to power aims to create or breed—but nature has been able to create it only by severely restricting and indeed mutilating nature (cf. again J 188 and the discussion above), and the restrictions necessary to create this complicated and finely tuned intellectual and affective complex are now on the verge of suffocating nature or life completely. All of this is experienced in conscious terms as the struggle to accept the immoral view of nature and the previous system of justification for human suffering. Thus the imperative Nietzsche obeys, that of honesty, is an historical imperative while also being a particular, culturally conditioned imperative of nature. It is the imperative to move beyond the present cultural order, and thus to strengthen and expand the complex of power created by both nature and culture, by incorporating the knowledge of nature’s immorality that we now confront. This imperative, in short, is neither simply natural nor simply historical or cultural.

To sum up or recapitulate, then, my view is that Nietzsche advances and intends his arguments as interpretations, that he self-consciously and indeed happily assigns them the status of interpretation. This is because he rejects any view of the human being as a metaphysical creature, and thus as a creature that can generate beliefs or theories that can or should be judged right or wrong, good or bad, according to a metaphysical, superhuman reality. This does not mean, however, that Nietzsche rejects “foundations” in his thinking or that his writings eschew the major traditional or classical philosophic subjects; Nietzsche simply
understands and presents his treatments of these topics as self-aware
interpretations rather than as stabs at metaphysical truth. He also does not think
that an appeal to these foundations or traditional concerns can decide any
important theoretical dispute in his favor, for neither “the world” nor “nature” nor
“life” nor any other such concept or reality declares unequivocally whether the
fundamental or definitive human desire is the love of wisdom, the love of God, or
the will to power. Note, however, the emphasis on the future and on striving or
intentional activity in Nietzsche’s formulation, which obviously marks it as
belonging to the modern and perhaps late modern era. This brings us to the final
point, that Nietzsche understands his writings as informed in important ways by
the prevailing historical dispensation or ethos, and in particular by the particular
form or articulation of conscience animating and governing it, though he is as
much trying to overcome or radicalize and thus move beyond that ethos as he is
trying to express its unique truth.
Chapter Six

Punishment and Guilt: Sections 14-15

In the fourteenth section Nietzsche springs deftly from the astonishing and brilliantly stated argument of the previous two sections to an equally astonishing and brilliantly argued thesis—that punishment, for all the other meanings or purposes it has, does not elicit or inspire a feeling of guilt. Punishment does nothing of the kind, Nietzsche insists, both today and throughout history, especially during the earliest periods of human social or political life. After closing the thirteenth section with a diverse but “certainly not complete” list of uses to which punishment has been put, Nietzsche continues into the beginning of section fourteen by noting that, given all the utilities with which punishment has indeed been “overloaded (überladen),” one is permitted to deduct a “supposed utility from it.” “Punishment is supposed to (soll) have the value of awakening the feeling of guilt in the guilty one, one seeks in it the actual instrumentum of that psychic (seelischen) reaction which is called ‘bad conscience,’ ‘conscience bites.’” In thinking this, however, one drastically misunderstands reality and psychology even today, and much more so in the case of prehistory; one does not find the “gnawing worm” of the bad conscience in prisons, “all conscientious (gewissenhaften) observers” agree on that, in many cases unwillingly and against their own wishes. Nietzsche then explains the actual results of punishment in superbly compressed and precise prose: “Generally speaking, punishment makes hard and cold; it concentrates; is sharpens the feeling of alienation; it strengthens
the powers of resistance. If it does happen that it breaks one’s energy and brings about a miserable prostration and self-abasement, such a result is certainly even less pleasant than the usual effect of punishment, which is characterized by a dry, gloomy seriousness.”

Finally, then, we return to the ostensible subject of the essay, guilt or the bad conscience, only to be told that punishment, the focus of most of the essay so far, does nothing to induce guilt or remorse, and in fact usually produces a psychological state that is its exact opposite. What then has been the purpose of the first thirteen sections of the essay? I think the answer has to be in part that the title itself is misleading; clearly the subject of the essay is not solely and perhaps not primarily the bad conscience. To be sure, delaying the disclosure of his thesis on the origin of the bad conscience creates the effect Nietzsche describes in his account of the Genealogy in Ecce Homo; it makes his theory appear that much more dramatic and dramatically, so that it strikes with greater force and energy. And many of the elements of Nietzsche’s eventual account of the origins and character of the bad conscience are themselves quite radical and are accordingly introduced piecemeal earlier in the essay, for instance the brutality of early government, the subordination of justice and morality to the vital force of the will

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103 Incidentally, it seems to me highly likely that Nietzsche was here influenced by Dostoevsky’s The House of the Dead, which he read in the months before writing the Genealogy (see Kaufmann’s note 8 on 3.24); Nietzsche’s assertion resembles both Dostoevsky’s insistence that he could find no remorse or guilt for their crimes among his fellow prisoners, and his description of the effects of punishment on the prisoners. Fyodor Dostoevsky, The House of the Dead, trans. Constance Garnett (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004 [1862]), pp. 11-12 and 143 ff. (Dostoevsky returns to the theme of corporal punishment and its effect at various points in the first three chapters of the second part). The lack of repentance among the convicts is mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel.
to power, the importance and prevalence of cruelty in social and cultural life, the completely asocial and apolitical nature of the earliest humans. The critique of the traditional understanding of retributive justice that I have tried to reconstruct above also helps support Nietzsche’s critique of the traditional understanding of the bad conscience. No doubt there are many more ways in which the form or organization of the Second Essay makes Nietzsche’s argument in 2.16 and the following sections more compelling. Yet some of the most important sections in the essay, for instance sections seven, twelve and thirteen, do not in any obvious way make Nietzsche’s account of the origin of the bad conscience either more gripping or more convincing. Indeed, the entire emphasis on the historical variability of meaning and purpose does not, at least in any way that I can see, strengthen Nietzsche’s arguments about the bad conscience, which he presents as a universal and enduring condition of social or cultural life. I therefore think that one must conclude that some, perhaps much, of the Second Essay serves purposes other than preparing the reader for Nietzsche’s argument in the final third of the essay.

To return to the particulars of the fourteenth section, Nietzsche’s argument here is that punishment does nothing to cause or educe guilt, and that whatever the origin of the feeling of guilt or the bad conscience, it is completely separate from the experience of punishment. This is a simple matter of observation or empirical fact today, and was even more true in prehistory, when “it was precisely through punishment that the development (Entwicklung) of the feeling of guilt was most powerfully hindered—at least in the victims (die Opfer) upon whom the
punitive force was vented (die strafende Gewalt ausliess).” For since the city
practices all sorts of crimes to catch and punish criminals, it is impossible for the
criminal himself “to feel (empfinden) his deed, the type of his action as such,
reprehensible.”104

Thus the type of guilt or bad conscience Nietzsche has in mind here is
apparently that arising from a view of this or that deed as bad or evil, rather than
the results or context of that deed. One could, of course, potentially feel guilt for
committing an act that harms the city, towards which one is supposed to feel
indebtedness and loyalty. Given the rest of Nietzsche’s picture of primitive
humanity and of the effects of punishment upon it, however, we can see why he
rejects this type of bad conscience as the earliest. It is only by first forcing human
beings into a relationship with the city that these later feelings of loyalty and guilt
can be created or bred, but the original punishments did not and were not intended
to promote or construct these feelings. Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes that the
earliest forms of personal obligation or responsibility (financial, political,
religious), and so of guilt or debt, were motivated purely by fear. It is only later
that human beings begin to infuse these once amoral relationships with moral
feelings and intensity. In the same way, one begins here by abstaining from or

104 Nietzsche suggests that these earliest criminals perceive the violence and
deception practiced by the city as “not even excused (entschuldigte) by affect.”
This reference to a notion of affect or emotion partially excusing crime seems an
anachronism on Nietzsche’s part, since distinguishing between acts committed
under emotional strain and those done in cold blood seems a rather late and subtle
distinction, revolving as it does around questions of conscious intention, and thus
precisely not the sort of thing that would have occurred to anyone in the time
frame which Nietzsche is describing. If the criminal was seen as an innocent but
irresponsible (unverantwortlichen) piece of fate, whether he was moved by
emotion hardly seems relevant.
avoiding a particular act, or by coming to see it as forbidden; only later does one infuse or interpret this newly acquired instinct of avoidance or inhibition with moral emotion and meaning.

On the one hand, then, this type of bad conscience or moral evaluation, in which one views one’s deeds as such as reprehensible (and presumably also their psychological or affective wellsprings [anger, lust, desire to dominate, greed, etc.]), is far more severe and rigorous than one which condemns only acts that harm the city (or the family, Church, or some other authority). It is thus precisely this type of moral evaluation that the bad conscience creates for itself; by identifying a series of inevitable acts and emotions as abhorrent by themselves, in any circumstance, the animal instincts of one afflicted with the bad conscience never lack an opportunity to lacerate themselves. At the same time, however, this type of moral evaluation also makes possible a much greater degree of autonomy, or at least points towards such autonomy, for one begins to evaluate one’s deeds as such, on their own terms and using only one’s own judgment, not on the basis or in the light of their relation to an external authority. It therefore seems to me that Nietzsche focuses on this type of moral judgment or conscience for more than purely historical reasons.

Nietzsche concludes the fourteenth section by arguing that even those judging and punishing the primitive criminals did not think of them as “guilty” in any morally significant sense, just as the criminals themselves suffered no “inward pain” but merely regarded punishment as “a terrible natural event (Naturereignisses);” thus the earliest humans on both sides of the law had a
completely amoral view of crime and punishment. Nietzsche develops this view in section fifteen, further arguing that primitive, pre-moral humans felt no sense of guilt when punished. Nietzsche’s basic argument is that the violence of punishment does nothing to make the criminal feel guilt or indeed to elicit any moral experience or development at all; on the contrary, punishment only makes a criminal a better criminal, by making him more prudent and careful. “Without question we must seek the real effect of punishment above all in a heightening of prudence (Klugheit), in a lengthening of memory, in a will henceforth to go to work more carefully, more mistrustfully, more secretly, in the insight that one is once-and-for-all too weak for many things, in a type of improvement of self-criticism.” As the mention of memory makes clear, the type of punishment carried out by the earliest political community, which aims at breeding a memory in its members, may create people who prudently remember to obey a few laws, but they feel no more guilt about their basic instincts or desires than do animals who have been tamed by punishment. Punishment, in short, does nothing to begin producing genuinely moral reflection, behavior or self-criticism. How this momentous change in human psychology is effected is explained in the following sections.
Chapter Seven

The Origins of the Bad Conscience, Political Founding, and the Life of Noble Societies: Sections 16-17 and Part Nine of Beyond Good and Evil

The sixteenth section finally introduces Nietzsche’s hypothesis concerning the origin of the bad conscience, and thus finally addresses the professed subject of the essay. Indeed, with its focus on historical speculation and the early history of society and morality, the essay proves to be above all a search for the origins or original causes of guilt and the bad conscience, not an analysis or phenomenology of their character or the experience of them; Nietzsche seems to take it for granted that his readers will know precisely and in some detail what he means by these words. These three sections (16-18) are thus in many ways the definitive treatment of the topic announced in the title of the essay.

Nietzsche begins the sixteenth section with an odd but suggestive and even foreboding sentence. “At this point it is no longer to be evaded (ist es nun nicht mehr zu umgehn), helping (zu verhelfen) my own hypothesis on the origin of the bad conscience to a first, provisional expression: it is not easy to hear (sie ist nicht leicht zu Gehör zu bringen) and wants (will) to be pondered, guarded, and slept with (bedacht, bewacht und beschlafen) for a long time.” First, of course, it is strange that Nietzsche should suggest that he has so far been trying to “go around” (umgehn), to evade or avoid, giving expression to his hypothesis concerning the origin of the bad conscience (although this obviously accords with his not having done so until now). The theory is so monstrous that it must be
avoided; one cannot hope to master or neutralize it, only to avoid it, to postpone one’s confrontation with it. Likewise, although Nietzsche must “help” it to a first, provisional expression, it remains somehow distinct from or independent of Nietzsche; even if it originates with Nietzsche, it remains a sovereign entity with its own powers and identity, not simply something that Nietzsche possesses or dispenses, something to which he gives existence or expression. Nietzsche’s suggestion has a will of its own, and once one hears it, it makes demands on one. It wants or wills to be pondered, guarded and slept with. It is clear enough what it means to ponder or consider Nietzsche’s hypothesis, but the notion of “guarding” this idea suggests keeping constant watch or surveillance on it, but also trying to limit its spread, to detect and prevent its influence or dissemination through the rest of one’s mental or affective life. It also suggests that one should try to guard it from others, to keep it to oneself (cf. the beginning of J 229). The final word, beschlafen, is often translated “slept on,” but German has another word, überschlafen, which carries those connotations of mastery, both in the literal, physical sense of sleeping “on” or “over” the idea, and in the sense of attaining control or dominance over the idea after sleeping on it. Beschlafen, however, “sleeping with,” even if it does not suggest a kind of erotic or procreative relationship with the hypothesis (cf. Diotima’s speech in Plato’s Symposium, especially 210a ff.), again suggests that there is an independent entity alongside oneself, that the idea will be in bed with one, so to speak, but will not thereby be reduced to a simple proposition that can be easily manipulated or restrained, easily accepted or rejected.
After this somewhat ominous beginning, Nietzsche states his hypothesis: he takes the bad conscience to be the “deep sickness” which humanity was bound to fall into (verfallen) under the pressure of the “most fundamental of all the changes it has ever experienced,” that change that occurred when the human being “finally found himself enclosed in the spell of society and peace (endgültig in den Bann der Gesellschaft und des Friedens eingeschlossen fand).” As Mark Migotti notes, Kaufmann and Hollingdale’s translation, “enclosed within the walls of society and of peace,” obscures Nietzsche’s meaning by suggesting that any kind of social life necessitates or creates the bad conscience (though, in defense of the translation, it is unusual to speak of someone being “enclosed in a spell”). As I have argued above, however, Nietzsche’s account seems to imply some kind of pre-political, tribal social existence, which predated the sudden and violent founding or imposition of a political order described in 2.17; indeed, Nietzsche’s mention of “previously unchecked [or “uninhibited,” ungehemmten] and unshaped populations” in 2.17 further supports this reading. I therefore agree with Migotti’s claim that for Nietzsche “life in hierarchically structured state-governed communities is preceded by something simpler, more amorphous, and more egalitarian.”

I disagree, however, with some other points in Migotti’s description of these ur-communities, as he calls them. Although I think that Migotti is right about perhaps the most important feature of these communities, that they would

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106 Ibid.
lack “publicly enforced and codified practices of punishment,” it seems to me that they would also lack the system of customs and the non-hierarchical, diffused mechanisms of enforcement that Migotti ascribes to them.\textsuperscript{107} It seems to me much more likely that these earliest communitites were governed almost entirely by instinct, and that the humans living in them had not attained to a level of consciousness at which they would either need or be able to formulate or comprehend even the simplest of customs.\textsuperscript{108} As for the instincts reigning in these communities, although they must have been internally relatively “peaceful,” as Migotti suggests,\textsuperscript{109} they must have been extremely aggressive and violent towards the rest of the world, for Nietzsche’s entire theory of the bad conscience relies on a basic layer or fund of violent instincts which needed to be suppressed by society and law. In other words, Nietzsche’s argument is the reverse of Rousseau’s; he is not arguing that an originally or naturally peaceful humanity has been made cruel and thus sick by society, but that an originally or naturally violent humanity has been made peaceful and thus sick by society (though, again, one must allow for the complex and indeed paradoxical character of the relation between nature and society in Nietzsche’s thought). For Nietzsche, the “instincts of freedom” that society had to suppress were instincts that desired attack and violence, not to be left alone or to be free from domination.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., and ibid., pp. 119-124.
\textsuperscript{108} Nietzsche also seems to insist or at least imply throughout the Second Essay that punishment necessarily relies on or can only be executed by a hierarchical authority, and thus that the non-hierarchical modes or mechanisms of punishment that Migotti describes are impossible.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., pp. 128-129, n. 28.
I therefore think that the phrase “finally found himself enclosed in the spell of society and peace (endgültig in den Bann der Gesellschaft und des Friedens eingeschlossen fand)” should be read in the following way. Endgültig, “finally,” can mean “finally” in the sense of “conclusively,” “for good,” “once and for all,” and that is, I think, how it should be read in this context. The bad conscience is the deep sickness that the human being was bound to fall into when he found himself enclosed or trapped in the spell of society and peace once and for all, with no hope of going back or reversing or undoing the process. The human being found himself locked into or surrounded or enclosed by the spell of society and peace; it is not simply that he was living some kind of social existence, but that the demands of society and peace had begun to effect a mental change in him—they had, as Nietzsche makes clear, demanded that he “suspend” or repress his instincts. Thus humanity first contracted the sickness of the bad conscience when it left behind the instinctual tribal life of a “necessarily forgetful animal,” a “slave of momentary affect and desire,” to become an animal enchanted or bewitched by the authority of society, learning to obey the law and thus to think, to infer, to reason, to promise.  

110 Though I agree with Paul Loeb that Nietzsche’s discussion of the morality of mores and the breeding of memory at the beginning of the Second Essay is important here, or rather that Nietzsche is there describing the same process that he is here, I think Loeb vastly overstates matters when he claims that “bad conscience is fundamentally memory,” or that “the socially-bred memory faculty is the true inhibitor of the instincts” because it prevents forgetting (Paul S. Loeb, “Finding the Übermensch in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality, in Acampora, Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy or Morals, pp. 166 and 165). Though memory is obviously an essential part of the socializing process as Nietzsche describes it, and specifically an indispensable condition of the suppression of instinct and thus
To fall under “the spell” of society and peace, however, as we have already seen and as Nietzsche is about to stress again, means to be shocked and cowed into compliance with the demands of a brutal, terrifying and unrelenting tyranny. In other words, the “spell” of society and peace is less a magical loyalty or obedience it somehow inspires in its members than it is the forced repression of one’s basic animal instincts, in the first place out of simple fear. But while the word “spell” may seem too weak to describe this destructive and monstrous process, it captures what is perhaps essential about it, that it began to transform the inner world of human beings, to breed a will and a conscience into them, and thus to bring them under its spell, to make them reshape themselves and act in accordance with its demands, and, after the first rudimentary stages, willingly to advance this process.

The language used here also echoes Nietzsche’s portrayal of the nobles in the First Essay, who had compensated themselves in the wilderness for “the tension which a long confinement and enclosure in the peace of the community (eine lange Einschliessung und Einfriedigung in den Frieden der Gemeinschaft) produces” (1.11). Moreover, to the nobles the “perfect functioning of the regulating unconscious instincts (die vollkommne Funktions-Sicherheit der regulirenden unbewussten Instinkte)” is more essential than any form of prudence (1.10), just as here the humans first enclosed in society had to abandon their former guides, “the regulating, unconscious, infallible drives (die regulirenden of the bad conscience, it is not identical with it or the purest or most important form or expression of it.
unbewusst-sicherführenden Triebe). All of this suggests, as indeed had seemed likely from the First Essay, that the nobles are still closer to this state of original humanity; the victory of society and its constraining customs over the unconscious, regulating instincts has been less complete in the case of the nobles (they are not completely under the spell of society and peace), at least as they are presented in the First Essay, and they are able to return even more completely to that state by escaping from society “back” into the wild and discharging the drives society has forced them to check or “suspend.” In short, the nobles experience or are marked by the bad conscience to a much lesser extent than other classes in primitive society (though they are indeed still marked or shaped by it), and this explains their greater health and capacity for self-affirmation as well as their greater stupidity and lack of depth.

Stated more fully, then, Nietzsche’s hypothesis regarding the origin of the bad conscience is that it is a “sickness” that consists of humanity’s most basic animal instincts being turned back inward upon their possessor; these most basic instincts, in Nietzsche’s account, are aggression and violence, a desire for destruction and change. The humans in whom the bad conscience first developed were “half-animals (Halbthieren) well-adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling about (Herumschweifen), to adventure.” Thus, in the superb simile Nietzsche offers here, pre-political humans were borne along in the wilderness by their instincts, like fish borne along by water. The image of sea animals walking

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These are only the most obvious examples; 2.16 abounds in references to the confining character of society and custom and the contrasting freedom of the wilderness.
on land beautifully illustrates how profound the change from pre-political to political life was for the earliest humans. In particular, this transition forced them to become conscious of all their actions, even the simplest and smallest, and thus to stop relying on or being “borne along” by their instincts; in time, however, all of this conscious activity was again subsumed by or returned to the unconscious, just as so much of social and moral life has for human beings. The intellectual and moral operations and abilities our ancestors had to learn so painfully and haltingly are now as much a matter of subconscious instinct for us as are standing and walking.

Nietzsche explains the deeper or more defining process at work here after emphasizing the extreme discomfort of these humans newly enclosed within political society.

I believe that never on earth has there existed such a feeling of misery (Elends-Gefühl),\(^1\) such a leaden uneasiness (Missbehagen)—and at the same time those old instincts had not suddenly stopped making their demands! Only it was difficult and seldom possible to give them their way (ihnen zu Wille zu sein): in the main they had to seek new and as it were subterranean satisfactions (Befriedigungen). All instincts, which do not discharge (entladen) themselves outwardly, turn themselves inward—

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\(^1\) Here Nietzsche plays on his earlier mention of the word Elend in 2.9, where he had been describing the misery of being exiled or cut off from the community. Long before such a thing could be miserable or painful, being in the community at all was at least an equal misery, indeed an exile from the human animal’s first home.
this is what I call the *internalization* of the human being: with it there first grows up in the human being that which one later calls his “soul” (*Seele*). The entire inner world, originally as thin as if stretched between two membranes, has expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth and height, in the same measure as outward discharge of the human being has been *inhibited* (gehemmt). Those fearful bulwarks, with which the political (*staatliche*) organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom—punishment belongs above all to these bulwarks—brought it to pass that all those instincts of wild, free, prowling (*schweifenden*) human beings turned themselves backwards, turned themselves *against the human being himself*. Enmity, cruelty, pleasure (*Lust*) in persecution, in attack, in change, in destruction—all that turned against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of the “bad conscience.”

As so often with Nietzsche, it is tempting simply to quote the entire passage. This, however, is the statement of his crucial point or argument; what exactly does it mean?

The first question is how and whether this could have actually happened. Nietzsche’s broader point that the “bad conscience” or morality grew out of or expressed the very instincts it seems to negate or at least restrain is clear and powerful; but what would it mean for the instincts of aggression and violence to turn against themselves or against their possessor?
Imagine that I am one of those human beings who have just been violently enclosed in the enforced peace of a new political society. I am walking down the street when suddenly I see some toothless, stoop-shouldered, sunken-chested old geezer, easily twenty-five years old if he’s a day, gumming a glob of rancid meat in imbecile contentment. I have the strong urge to rush up to him, smash his head against the ground, and eat his food myself (or perhaps simply to kill him). But I have some vague but powerful inkling or premonition that this will not end well for me. So I restrain myself, but it is not possible simply to dissolve or expunge the furious, primordial rush of this instinct of pure aggression and hunger. It can only turn back on itself; I can only restrain myself by turning my aggression back on itself, somehow splitting off some part or sense of that instinct or affect of aggression and turning it back against the original source or manifestation of it. It seems to me that this would happen immediately, that only by turning this instinct against itself could I control it; in other words, only by violently repressing this instinct, and thus in some sense satisfying it, could I repress or check this first, particular instance of the aggressive instinct (my desire to kill the geezer and take his food) at all. Thus already some division is created within myself, and it seems to me likely that, in Nietzsche’s view, the experience of the violent repression of instinct, the extremely crude and half-conscious affect that has been separated off from the original instinct or drive of aggression, constitutes a new mind or sense of self, and thus instantly becomes a new locus of power, meaning, and value, the one that will become augmented or hypertrophied in or by the development of the bad conscience. After this initial operation has been successfully performed a few
times, and I begin to restrain or check my aggression more successfully, it begins
to ache and long for expression, for satisfaction, for a sense of play, mastery,
venting, self-enjoyment. The momentary and largely prudentially motivated
discharge of the drive against itself is insufficient. Thus it turns on itself in a
much deeper and more serious way; it begins to attack itself morally and
psychologically, and indeed to attack all of my basic animal instincts (though this
may be more likely to happen over several generations or even centuries rather
than in a single lifetime). It does so through or in the form of this new sense of
self, the conscience, that has been created by repression. Thus the “bad
conscience,” the feeling of guilt at all of my desires and instincts as such, begins
to form and grow, and this new part of myself swells in power without
recognizing itself for what it is, an instance or expression of the very instinct of
aggression that it is supposedly trying to repress or extinguish.

Concomitant with this process is the development of human
consciousness; while originally the conscious mind had no awareness of the
instincts, which simply asserted and discharged themselves without any need for
reflection or even basic conscious awareness, with the emergence of the bad
conscience the conscious mind begins to expand as it is forced to become
cognizant of and to exercise conscious control over a few very basic and coarse
but very powerful and important instincts. Thus one begins to become
consciously aware of one’s violent or aggressive instincts, and also of the need to
control them; this awareness necessitates or is perhaps identical with a conscious
effort to check or suppress these instincts, an effort which sets in motion an
attendant or auxiliary thought process. From here one not only starts to make value judgments about the different instincts or drives; one also begins to develop the ability to think, reckon, infer, and generally to reason, to think about the future, as well as to think in a more general or “theoretical” way, thinking in this sense being merely the relation of one drive to another (J 36). Thus the first step not only toward any moral life for human beings but also toward any intellectual life at all is the inhibition of instinct or drive, which forces one to become conscious of the drive and thus to judge it—initially on purely prudential grounds (to avoid punishment), but soon enough in a manner charged with moral intensity and self-inflicted cruelty—and to think in an intellectual sense, however crude that sense may have been originally (am I more hungry or thirsty? which is stronger, my desire to kill this person or my fear of being tortured to death as a result?—though even such questions as these would have first been asked and answered with only a simple pre-verbal or pre-linguistic relation and comparison, i.e., struggle and rank-ordering, of the drives).

I hope that this has helped to make Nietzsche’s argument more clear and convincing. Nietzsche’s attitude toward the bad conscience as he has described it is, as one might expected, somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand he seems to be seized with something like pity for “this fool, this yearning and despairing prisoner [who] became the inventor of the ‘bad conscience,’” and he repeatedly refers to the bad conscience as a terrible illness, indeed as “the greatest and most uncanny illness, from which humanity has so far not recovered, the suffering of the human being at the human, at himself.” Even more, however, Nietzsche uses
laudatory language to describe the bad conscience and its effects, maintaining especially that it is only with the bad conscience that humanity first becomes creative, that it first begins to have a future and indeed to point beyond itself.

“The fact (Thatsache) of an animal soul (Thierseele) on earth turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, deep, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory and full of future (Zukunftsvolls) that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered. In fact, divine witnesses were needed to appreciate the spectacle…The human being henceforth counts as included among the most unexpected and most exciting lucky throws which the ‘great child’ of Heraclitus, be he called ‘Zeus’ or ‘chance (Zufall),’ plays.” This is, of course, high praise from Nietzsche, especially since he suggests that the bad conscience is or can be appreciated as an amoral but creative phenomenon. If the gods were created by the bad conscience, they were not meant as escapes from this world or as agents of vengeance but as spectators who view it with the same innocent, playful interest with which a child views a game of chance.

This, as one will recall, is the same origin of the gods suggested in 2.7, though here the emphasis is not only on the present interest to which the bad conscience gives rise but also on the promise for the future, the promise of even greater and more complicated developments and creations. With the bad conscience the human being awakens “an interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something is announcing itself, something preparing, as if the human being is no end (Ziel), but only a path, an episode, a bridge, a great promise…” Here we see the fuller sense in which the human being is “an animal
permitted to promise.” It is not merely that individuals make and keep particular promises (to repay loans and so forth); it is that, in the best case, the work or effect of the bad conscience will transform the human being as such, the human species as a whole, into an animal permitted to promise something further and greater, the conscious achievement of something superhuman.

Section seventeen moves to the particulars of this first founding of political society and its effects or consequences, and does so by stating two presuppositions of Nietzsche’s hypothesis. The first is that the transition from pre-political to political life was “not gradual, not voluntary (freiwillige) and did not represent an organic growing into (Hineinwachsen) new conditions, but a break, a leap, a compulsion, an ineluctable disaster (Verhängnis), against which there is no struggle and not even ressentiment.” As Nietzsche goes on to explain, those trapped in society and the bad conscience feel no ressentiment because the violent imposition of law has been too savage and too sudden; the founding of a political order leaves its members too dazed and traumatized to feel vengefulness or ressentiment towards the “fearsome tyranny…[the] crushing and remorseless machine” of the early state. Thus while ressentiment was explosive and nearly ubiquitous in primitive society, as Nietzsche suggested earlier, it was directed at other members of the community, not at the state or law or those in power, who constituted a merciless and terrifying machinery of domination.

The second presupposition, which indeed seems to ground the first, is that “the adaptation (Einfügung) of a previously unchecked (ungehmmten) and unshaped population (Bevölkerung) to a fixed form, takes its beginning from an
act of violence (Gewaltakt) and is led to its end only by pure acts of violence—that the oldest ‘state’ accordingly appeared as a terrible tyranny, as a crushing and remorseless machine, and continued working until this raw material of people (Volk) and half-animals was finally not only thoroughly kneaded and compliant but also formed.”

Nietzsche quickly explains what the first “state” must have been in this case: “some pack of blond beasts of prey (Raubthiere), a conqueror and master race, which, organized for war and with the power (Kraft) to organize, unhesitatingly lays its terrible paws (Tatzen) upon a population perhaps enormously superior (ungeheuer überlegene) in numbers but still shapeless, still prowling (schweifende).” If the pre-political Volk was a mass of “half-animals,” Nietzsche figures the founders of the first state as still wholly animal (cf. J 257: those who founded the first hierarchical or aristocratic societies were “more whole human beings [which at every level also means ‘more whole beasts’]”). On the one hand, this language highlights the greater animality and thus naturalness of these lawgiving blond beasts (and indeed Nietzsche is about to describe the lawgiver or political founder as “by nature ‘master’”); on the other, it highlights Nietzsche’s paradoxical conception of nature, for to be more natural and more animal means, in the case of a human being, to create and found a political society, and thus to sever a great mass of human beings from their natural, animal instincts and existence. For the human being to be most fully or vitally the animal that it is means something radically different from what that means for any other animal.
Yet even with this vivid animal imagery or metaphor, it is essential to note that although this pack of lawgiving blond beasts is terrible and violent, it is above all concerned with organization (organized and with the power to organize), as becomes even more clear shortly. Unlike the nobles of 1.11, this master race does not delight or take pleasure in simple destruction; it seeks to form and organize other humans.

Nietzsche then immediately adds, “This, after all, is the beginning of the ‘state’ on earth: I think that enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) which has it begin with a ‘contract’ is finished.” Let us begin with what appears to be the historical claim in this sentence. Nietzsche’s contemptuous rejection of the notion that the state began in a contract seems to apply equally well to his own earlier claims that political life somehow grew out of the contractual relation between debtor and creditor (2.4, 2.8). Here at 2.17, however, Nietzsche dismisses not only the belief that society originated in a contract but also the possibility of any kind of organic evolution from the first economic or social arrangements to the embryonic political community. I have argued above that Nietzsche’s claims about the primacy of the contractual relation between debtor and creditor can be made to cohere and find their place in his overall account of the development of the earliest society and the forces active in that development; in particular, I have tried to show how the debtor-creditor relationship could fit into a pre-political, predominantly instinctual form of tribal society. I think that all of that explanation remains valid, although clearly we must abandon the impression Nietzsche gives earlier that one arrived at the first political community by a
gradual organic progression, or even by a rapid or sudden leap that was
nonetheless prompted and directed by some inner logic or impulse of pre-political
society. Nietzsche now maintains that political society was instituted or founded
by a sudden act of violence, and that this represented a total, radical and
cataclysmic transformation of the human animal.

Even so, it seems likely to me that the first law-givers, however great their
power and artistry may have been, would have used whatever forms and
conventions were at hand, and thus would have construed or constructed the law
or political community as a creditor, and its members as debtors; the artist-
lawgivers would have presented the law in terms familiar and comprehensible to
its subjects, at least to the extent possible.\footnote{\textsuperscript{113}} Thus the debtor-creditor relation
serves a vital purpose in the first political community, as Nietzsche has said
earlier, but that purpose is already subject to or embedded within a new
interpretation. The first practice of the contractual relation between debtor and
creditor does not give its meaning or character to the first society, but is rather
taken up by those powerful enough to found the first society and given a
completely new meaning and purpose, made the focus and nucleus of a wholly
new set of passions, wills, purposes and interests. Such similarities as there are

\footnote{\textsuperscript{113} This may also have been the term most comprehensible to the artist-lawgivers
themselves. Nietzsche’s emphasis here is upon the lawgivers’ organizing power,
their ability to create a new structure that lives, not so much new meaning
(indeed, that seems rather to be the province of those afflicted with the bad
conscience). In other words, the artist-lawgivers seem more concerned with
employing the already existing debtor-creditor relation in their new structure and
organization, in their work of giving form to a population, rather than with
abolishing previous forms or conventions or with creating a meaning or
interpretation for human life that is so radically new that it simply eradicates
everything that came before it.}
between the two exist not because the debtor-creditor contract, as the origin of political society, marks or shapes it decisively, but because both are conditioned by or expressions of the will to power, even the most primordial economic activity being in Nietzsche’s view animated or determined by the will to power rather than by considerations of material interest or utility.

Nietzsche continues, “One who can command, who is by nature ‘master’ (wer von Natur ‘Herr’ ist), who steps forth violent in work and gesture (wer gewalthätig in Werk und Gebärde auftritt)—what has he to do (zu schaffen) with contracts!” Nietzsche thus shows that he has not clumsily mistaken social contract theories for actual historical hypotheses. Nietzsche’s argument is not simply or even primarily that historically the state did not begin with a contract; his argument is rather that nature does not warrant or underwrite any conception of equal rights or a sovereign legal order in which all individuals are treated as equal and inviolable. On the contrary, nature makes some masters, makes them capable of violently commanding and molding others.114

But what does it mean to be “by nature ‘master’”? What does nature create or achieve in and through such a person? In the first place, it creates forms and structures, it organizes, it creates a new, organic, living whole. The one who is by nature “master” does not simply lord it over others or use them to satisfy his desires for pleasure or even recognition or honor. He creates. Thus nature is creative, but this creation must be violent and terrible. The prepolitical populace

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114 As Keith Ansell-Pearson puts it, Nietzsche “is very much concerned with combating what he takes to be a ‘reactive’ view on this question: the view that the origins of social order lie in the passions and needs of weak and insecure individuals” (Nietzsche as Political Thinker, p. 138).
is formless, nature gives it no form or direction, in fact nature seems only to give it a formless chaos as its nature, but it must be formed into something: nature itself demands that it be formed into something. Thus the pre-political populace must be formed through violence, it must be given a definite form by acts of violence, like a stone being smashed and cut into a sculpture. At the same time, violence here is formative or creative, not simply destructive, as it had appeared in the portrait of the nobles in 1.11; hence, to repeat, the “blond beasts” described here are not simply destructive (barbarian invasions, etc.); they rather roam and raid in order to impose a form on the conquered populace. The motivation of the artist-lawgivers of this passage is thus somehow distinct from the joy in destruction attributed both to the aristocratic blond beasts at 1.11 and to pre-political humanity in 2.16. It is essential to stress, however, that Nietzsche employs the word “nature” only to describe the violent artist-lawgiver, not the formless prepolitical populace, just as he describes those who found aristocracies in *Beyond Good and Evil* as “human beings with a still natural nature (Menschen mit einer noch natürlichen Natur)” (*J* 257); it appears that the violent but form-giving artist is what is natural, not the violent but formless original or primeval mass of people (again, cf. *J* 188).

The artist-lawgivers’ creation exemplifies Nietzsche’s discussion of interpretation and the giving of meaning in 2.12, as he makes clear in his description of their activity and its significance.
Their work is an instinctive form-creating, form-imprinting (*ein instinktives Formen-schaffen, Formen-aufdrücken*), they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists that there are (*es sind die unfreiwilligsten, unbewussten Künstler, die es gibt*)—soon something new stands there, where they appear, a ruling-structure that *lives* (*ein Herrschafts-Gebilde, das lebt*), in which parts and functions are delimited and coordinated, in which nothing at all finds a place which is not first assigned a “meaning” in regard to the whole. They do not know what guilt, what responsibility, what consideration is, these born organizers; at work in them is that terrible artist-egoism…It is not in *them* that the “bad conscience” has grown, that is understood at once (*das versteht sich von vornherein*)—but it would not have grown without *them*.

This passage may seem familiar enough at first. The artist-lawgivers, like the nobles of the First Essay, are powerful, violent and unrepressed, indeed governed by their unconscious and involuntary instincts. One might think that they are the same people or at least the same human type at different points in time. As we have just seen, however, the nobles retain the pre-political populace’s joy in destruction; indeed their ability to revert to “the wild” and vent or discharge the pressure caused by socialization prevents the bad conscience from affecting them nearly as profoundly as it does their social inferiors. The nobles lack the tension and sense of dissatisfaction necessary to envision new
ideals and forms of life; in short, the nobles do not create. The artist-lawgivers
do not appear to be the same as the self-satisfied but sporadically violent nobles,
who mainly occupy themselves with slapping themselves and each other on the
back, occasionally going out to kill and torture when the tension engendered by
the demand for reciprocal admiration grows too great.

The nobles, in short, are able to take a self-affirming attitude towards
themselves and thus towards life or the world, which fills them with gratitude
and love for existence. These are obviously good things, but the nobles take their
place within a social order already established by others—indeed their affirmative
stance towards themselves and life is entirely dependent upon their place in that
order—and tend to be static and conservative elements within the living structure.

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115 Nietzsche says that the nobles seek release from “the tension (Spannung)
engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society”
(1.11). The problem with the nobles seems to be that they find that release, that
they are able to relieve their tension before it becomes creative. Nietzsche usually
employs the word “tension” (Spannung) in favorable contexts. One notable
example appears in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche writes
that the struggle against Plato and Christianity has “created in Europe a
magnificent tension (Spannung) of the spirit the like of which had never yet
existed on earth: with so tense (gespannten) a bow we can now shoot for the most
distant goals.” Tension is here associated with vision, creativity, and going
beyond oneself. For the ancient nobles, on the other hand, tension is an
unpleasant symptom of living in society, but one which they are able to assuage
by returning to the wilderness. By slackening their tension through uninhibited
violence, the nobles close off any possibility of overcoming themselves; they
remain what they are, politically powerful and self-affirming but one-dimensional
and stagnant.

116 At least this is how Nietzsche presents them in the First Essay of the
*Genealogy*. Elsewhere Nietzsche presents the noble classes of societies as
somewhat more spiritually complex and sophisticated, as for instance when he
says that the troubadour ideal of love as passion is of noble origin (*J* 260), a
suggestion somewhat at odds with the portrait of vacant self-congratulation which
Nietzsche paints in the First Essay.
they inhabit. 117 Their emotional or affective experience is one of self-affirmation, but the organized whole in which they live as well as the content of their beliefs and their form of life are determined by the artist-lawgivers who founded the community. 118

117 This point can also be made or elucidated by referring to the definition of conscience Aaron Ridley uses in his book on the Genealogy: “To have a conscience, then, good or bad, is to be not merely conscious but self-conscious: it is to have the capacity to make oneself the object of one’s own consciousness and a corresponding potential to make oneself the object of one’s own will” (Ridley, Nietzsche’s Conscience, p. 15). The nobles, at least as Nietzsche presents them in the First Essay, are self-conscious enough—though barely, and perhaps not always—to be the object of their own (self-affirming) consciousness, but have little or no reason to make themselves the objects of their own transformative will (and are not presented as doing so in Nietzsche’s account). They have, in this sense, half a conscience.

In this context, it is also worth citing Ridley’s discussion of why the original nobles are not Nietzsche’s models or goals (Nietzsche’s Conscience, pp. 131-134). Although I (inevitably) disagree with various aspects of Ridley’s construal of human development as it is presented in the Genealogy, I think his basic account of Nietzsche’s dissatisfaction with the ancient nobles is correct. 118 James Porter suggests that Nietzsche’s portrait of the nobles (chiefly in the First Essay) is fundamentally incoherent. Porter bases this argument on the premise that Nietzsche’s nobles require only “the sheer performativity of an active, unhesitating, and unreflexive self-affirmation, whereas to think and feel in contrasts is to stoop to ressentiment” (James I. Porter, “Unconscious Agency in Nietzsche,” Nietzsche Studien 27 (1998), p. 162). This, however, seems to me to greatly overstate and even obscure Nietzsche’s argument. Nietzsche does not claim that “to think and feel in contrasts is to stoop to ressentiment,” but rather that to allow one’s judgment of something or someone to originate in and be governed or permeated by a hostile reaction is to stoop to ressentiment. Moreover, the various examples Porter adduces of the nobles desiring revenge and even experiencing ressentiment are not, it seems to me, as decisive as Porter takes them to be (and are not, as he claims, “structural” inconsistencies [p. 162, n. 20]), for the central distinction between the nobles and slaves is the role that ressentiment plays in generating and shaping their valuations (on this point, see Aaron Ridley’s discussion of creative and noncreative ressentiment in Nietzsche’s Conscience, pp. 22-25). In other words, there is no inconsistency here, for Nietzsche never claims that the nobles are completely untouched by reactive feelings, only that their experience of these feelings is quickly shrugged off and does not insinuate itself into their valuations.
This disjunction between the nobles and the artist-lawgivers helps, I think, to explain a surprising feature of Nietzsche’s discussion of the bad conscience. Nietzsche maintains throughout these sections that inhibition or repression of instinct is the ever-present double of spiritual development, as its (apparently) sole cause, formative agent, or driving force; in other words, Nietzsche seems to be arguing that there is only spiritual development for so long as and “in the same measure as” there is instinctual inhibition. This seems clearly at odds with Nietzsche’s claim that without the “pathos of distance” which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata…that other, more mysterious pathos could not grow up at all, that longing for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states—in brief, simply the enhancement of the type ‘human being’ (die Erhöhung des Typus ‘Mensch’), the continual ‘self-overcoming of the human,’ to take a moral formula in a supra-moral sense” (J 257). That activity, that longing, seems already to have begun with the first moments or stages of civilization, and, conversely, the pathos of distance seems itself to require a fairly high level of civilization and thus of internalization (or of internalization and thus of civilization).

On the other hand, I think Porter makes an important point when he notes that “the phrase ‘pathos of distance’—that famous blazon of nobility—appears, strangely, to be a figura etymologica for ‘ressentiment’: the feeling of distance is reactive, and yet power seems impotent without this feeling; it needs an echo within from without” (p. 163). This points, I think, to the difficulty of conceiving of a self-affirmation as pure as the one Nietzsche sometimes seems to be ascribing to the nobles.
I therefore think that the relationship between political nobility and human
growth or enhancement or elevation—especially in the sense in which Nietzsche
means human enhancement here, an inner widening of the human soul—is more
complicated than Nietzsche may suggest in section 257 of *Beyond Good and Evil*,
where part of his concern is to insist that political hierarchy is necessary to human
enhancement or evolution. I think that a more careful reading of Nietzsche’s
treatment of this problem reveals that Nietzsche suggests a dialectic or struggle
between political nobility and those seeking to transcend the current political,
cultural and moral dispensation or ethos, of whom the philosopher is perhaps the
purest example. For a time, Nietzsche argues, a particular noble class and thus a
particular expression of nobility reigns with impeccable self-assurance and
demands that all else be sacrificed to it (e.g., *J* 258, 259, 265). A healthy
aristocracy “accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings
who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to
slaves, to instruments. Their fundamental faith simply must be that society is not
permitted to exist for society’s sake but only as the foundation and scaffolding on
which a select type of being (*ausgesuchte Art Wesen*) is able to raise itself to its
higher task and overall to a higher *being*” (*J* 258).

Yet this instinct and ability to breed a certain select type relies largely
upon the presence of danger and outside pressure:

*A species (Art) comes to be, a type (Typus) becomes fixed and strong,
through the long fight with essentially constant unfavorable
Now look for once at an aristocratic commonwealth—say, an ancient Greek *polis*, or Venice—as an arrangement, whether voluntary or involuntary, for *breeding* (Züchtung): human beings are together there who are dependent on themselves and want their species (*Art*) to prevail, most often because they *must* prevail or run the terrible risk of being exterminated. Here that boon, that excess, that protection which favor variations are lacking; the species needs itself as a species, as something that, by its very hardness, uniformity, and simplicity of form can prevail and make itself durable in a constant fight with its neighbors or with the oppressed who are rebellious or threaten rebellion. The most manifold experience teaches them to which qualities above all (*vornehmlich*) they owe the fact that, despite all gods and men, they are still there, that they have always triumphed: these qualities they call virtues, these virtues alone they cultivate (*züchtet*).  

They do this with hardness, indeed they

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119 Cf. *A* 57: “Such a law-book as that of Manu comes into being as does every good law-book: it summarizes the experience, prudence (*Klugheit*) and experimental morality of long centuries, it settles accounts, it creates nothing new…At a certain point in the evolution of a people its most circumspect (*umsichtigste*), that is to say most backward- and forward-looking, class declares the experience in accordance with which the people is to live—that is, *can* live—to be fixed and settled (*für abgeschlossen*). Their goal is to bring home the richest and completest harvest from the ages of experimentation and *bad* experience. What, consequently, is to be prevented above all is the continuation of experimenting, the perpetuation of the fluid condition of values, tests, choices, criticizing of values *in infinitum*.” Nietzsche goes on to explain that the absolute authority of the gods and the ancestors, as the origin of the law (which is presented as “of divine origin, whole, perfect, without history, a gift, a miracle, merely communicated”), is invoked to insure this rigidity or inflexibility of the law and the virtues or way of life it inculcates; the “higher reason (*Vernunft*) of such a procedure lies in the intention of gradually making the way of life recognized as correct (that is *demonstrated* by a tremendous amount of finely-
want (will) hardness; every aristocratic morality is intolerant…they consider intolerance itself a virtue, calling it “justice.”

A type (Typus) with few but very strong traits, a species (Art) of severe, warlike, prudently taciturn men, self-contained and closed off (geschlossener und verschlossener) (and as such possessed of the subtlest feeling for the charms and nuances of association), is in this way fixed beyond the changing generations; the continual fight against ever constant unfavorable conditions is, as mentioned previously, the cause that fixes and hardens a type (J 262).

In time, however, “a day arrives when conditions become more fortunate and the monstrous tension decreases…At one stroke the bond and compulsion of the old discipline (Zucht) are torn…Variation (Variation), whether as deviation (Abartung) (to something higher, subtler, rarer) or as degeneration (Entartung) and monstrosity, suddenly appears in the greatest fullness and magnificence, the individual dares to be individual and to stand out.” The emergence of the sifted experience) unconscious: so that a complete automatism of instinct is achieved—the presupposition for any type of mastery, any type of perfection in the art of living.” Both of these passages suggest that the law-giving described here in Genealogy 2.17 is far from final or complete; the ruling structure established by the artist-lawgivers is subject to and indeed inevitably requires significant revision and reformation later in its existence, though these revisions will hardly be presented as such.

This also further highlights the play and mastery of chance in human affairs, or the wastefulness and indifference of nature, for it seems highly likely that countless law codes and living structures, however powerful or magnificent their initial creation and first functioning, were wiped out before they could be modified to respond to changed conditions or even the imperfect foresight of the founders.
individual, a development made possible and indeed propelled by the enormous
tension and momentum created by the old breeding and compulsion, marks a
crisis for the previously reigning morality, both in the sense of being a sign of that
crisis and of deepening or intensifying it immeasurably; again we witness the
spectacle of a morality overcoming itself, an event suffused with both splendor
and terror. Earlier Nietzsche had compared the relation of vital or organic forces
and growths in a healthy aristocracy to the relation between a sturdy oak and
“those sun-seeking vines of Java—they are called Sipo Matador—that so long
and so often enclasp an oak tree with their tendrils until eventually, high above it
but supported by it, in the free light they can unfold their crowns and display their
happiness” (J 258). When this old aristocratic morality starts to fade or founder,
however, there is a wild new explosion and struggle of growths, wills, energies.

At these turning points of history, there appear next to one another and
often involved and entangled with one another a splendid (herrliches),
manifold, junglelike growth and upward striving, a type (Art) of tropical
tempo in the competition of growths (im Wetteifer des Wachsthums) and a
monstrous ruination and self-ruination (ein ungeheures Zugrunde-gehen
und Sich-zu-Grunde-Richten), as the savage egoisms that have turned,
almost exploded, against one another wrestle for “sun and light” and no
longer know how to derive any limit, restraint or protection from the

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120 An diesen Wendepunkten der Geschichte, a phrase which calls to mind
Nietzsche’s description of Socrates as “the one turning point (Wendepunkt) and
vortex of so-called world history (Weltgeschicht)” in The Birth of Tragedy (GT
15).
previous morality. It was this morality itself that accumulated such monstrous strength and bent the bow in such a threatening manner; now it is “outlived.” The dangerous and uncanny point has been reached where the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life transcends and lives beyond the old morality; the “individual” stands there, compelled (genöthigt) to give himself laws and to develop his own arts and wiles for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption (Selbst-Erhaltung, Selbst-Erhöhung, Selbst-Erlöung). All sorts of new what-fors and what-withs, no common (gemeinsamen) formulas any longer; misunderstanding allied with disrespect; decay, corruption and the highest desires gruesomely knotted; the genius of the race overflowing from all cornucopias of good and bad (Guten und Schlimmen); a disastrous simultaneity of spring and fall, full of new charms and veils, that characterize young, still unexhausted, still unwearied corruption\(^{121}\) (J 262).

Here Nietzsche uses the image or metaphor of growths or plants, as he does throughout the Genealogy (e.g., 1.6, 1.8, 2.2), to refer to forces and forms which,

\(^{121}\) I have not noticed any major difference between Nietzsche’s uses of Corruption and Verderb or Verderbniss in Beyond Good and Evil. Corruption tends to refer more specifically to the instincts or a kind of primarily instinctual confusion and corruption, almost a short-circuiting of the instincts, a tendency for the instincts to choose what is worst or even self-destructive for themselves or for their organism (cf. J 258 and 233). Nietzsche often uses Verderbniss in a broader sense of corruption, and particularly to refer to decay or demise of a form or morality and perhaps society, but I do not think he means for the two to be understood as sharply distinct.
although organic or natural, have been decisively shaped by cultural experiences or determinants. The explosion and tropical tempo and competition of growths Nietzsche describes here is made possible by the collapse of the previous morality, or rather by the fact that it is “outlived.” For a time a particular morality was able to impose a form and direction on the surging, chaotic vital forces of the community and the individuals comprising it, but eventually the form begins to crack and dissolve, and the vital forces start to break through it.

Nietzsche uses this same word, überlebt, outlived or obsolete, to refer to an outworn morality both in his discussion of philosophers as “extraordinary furtherers of humanity” (J 212) and in his depiction of his own situation and of the “thou shalt” that informs his critical examinations of morality: “we do not want to go back (zurückwollen) to that which we consider outlived and decayed (überlebt und morsch)” (M Pr., 4). In other words, these moments of crisis for an outlived morality, and especially for an outlived aristocratic morality, are the moments in which a philosopher steps forward and impels humanity forward by insisting that the old morality is outlived and must be overcome or transcended. It thus appears to be the philosophers, rather than the nobles, who elevate, develop and enhance humanity; philosophers are marked not by their love of wisdom or radical questioning but by what Nietzsche calls their “own secret: to know of a new greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement (Vergrösserung)” (J 212; cf. also the end of 211). It also seems, based on the description of noble morality and its intolerance Nietzsche gives in J 262, that a healthy aristocracy or nobility necessarily excludes philosophy; a strong
aristocracy will not tolerate philosophy or any kind of individuality or diversity, while philosophy thrives in the conditions of danger and uncertainty attending the decay of an established morality.\(^{122}\)

All of this, of course, suggests a more complicated or nuanced picture than that which emerges from a consideration of *Beyond Good and Evil* 257 alone. The ambiguity characterizing the nobles becomes still more pronounced when one considers Nietzsche’s answer to the question “What is common?” in section 268. There he describes a process that sounds remarkably similar to that portrayed in section 262. Nietzsche titles or at least begins the section by asking, “What, in the end, is common (Was ist zuletzt die Gemeinheit)?” As Kaufmann observes in a footnote to his translation, *Gemeinheit* can mean commonness but usually means

\(^{122}\) At the end of *J* 262 Nietzsche speaks of “moral philosophers (*Moral-Philosophen*)” who, in the face of the danger and moral chaos described above, preach (*predigen*) a morality of mediocrity because they see that the mediocre human being is the only type that will survive (*die einzig Überlebenden*). I do not, however, think that this is a reference to Socrates. Even in Nietzsche’s most polemical treatment of Socrates, “The Problem of Socrates” in *The Twilight of the Idols*, where he stresses Socrates’ relation to “the rabble,” and where he describes a cultural situation very similar to that described in *J* 262 (cf. especially sections 9-10), Nietzsche does not identify Socrates with a teaching of mediocrity. Moreover, the terms Nietzsche says the morality of mediocrity will use to disguise itself—“measure and dignity and duty and neighbor-love (*Maass und Würde und Pflicht und Nächstenliebe*)”—appear to belong to modern, post-Kantian morality rather than to anything taught by Socrates, and certainly these are not the terms Nietzsche himself tends to associate with Socrates. And although Nietzsche accentuates the irony of this morality of mediocrity, its irony is the opposite of the sort practiced by Socrates. The irony of these moral philosophers must be hidden, while Socratic irony is obvious and is used to conceal something else, and while the first type of irony inflates or embroiders the morality of which it is a part, Socrates uses irony to make himself appear more lowly or comical than he is in reality (cf. “Problem,” 4). I thus think that, despite certain resonances or similarities between the end of *J* 262 and other passages, the picture I have given above of the philosopher as one who furthers or advances humanity, and of Socrates as a paradigmatic example of this, remains valid.
vulgarity, lowness, meanness, nastiness, baseness. In the larger context of the previous sections, and of Part Nine as a whole, the title thus suggests an examination of vulgarity or baseness as opposed to nobility.\(^{123}\) It soon appears, however, as if Nietzsche is asking what makes something common in the sense of shared or mutual. He begins by saying that words are acoustical signs for concepts; “concepts, however, are more or less definite image signs for often recurring and associated sensations, for groups of sensations. To understand one another, it is not enough that one use the same words; one also has to use the same words for the same species (\textit{Gattung}) of inner experiences (\textit{Erlebnisse}); in the end one has to have one’s experience in common (\textit{seine Erfahrung mit einander gemein haben}).”

Therefore the individuals of one people (\textit{Volk}) understand each other better than they understand members of another people, even if they speak the same language; thus, for instance, the English understand one another better than they understand Americans, in part because of the subtle but crucial differences in how each people understands the same words. These differences are the result of long common experience and need: “[W]hen human beings have long lived together under similar conditions (of climate, soil, danger, needs, and work), what \textit{emerges} from this is something that ‘understands itself’—a people (\textit{ein Volk}).” Again the picture of a people growing out of a climate and soil both ties this passage to some of the other discussions of noble society (or of society in general) in this chapter, and indicates that Nietzsche is describing the shaping of natural

\(^{123}\) Just previously, in section 263, Nietzsche had referred to “the vulgarity of many a nature…”(\textit{die Gemeinheit mancher Natur}…”).
growth by history and culture. The result, the formation of a people, means that “[i]n all souls an equal number of often recurring experiences has come to predominate over those that come more rarely: based on this one understands oneself, quickly and ever more quickly—the history of language is the history of a process of abbreviation—and on the basis of such quick understanding one associates (verbindet), closer (enger) and ever closer.” This process of abbreviation, the ability or necessity of certain experiences or sensations dominating and expressing themselves in a soul, “is decisive for the whole order of rank of its values, it ultimately determines its table of goods. The values of a human being betray something of the structure of his soul and where it finds its conditions of life, its actual need.”

Yet it is above all not the similarity in climate or soil that produces mutual understanding and a people, but shared danger and need: “The greater the danger is, the greater is the need to reach agreement quickly and easily about what must be done; not misunderstanding one another in times of danger is what human beings simply cannot do without in their relations” (cf. *FW* 354: the ability to communicate, and indeed consciousness itself, is born of mutual need and dependency). Nietzsche concludes the section by explaining the consequences of this fact.

Supposing now that need (die Noth) has always brought close to each other only such human beings as could indicate with similar signs similar needs (Bedürfnisse), similar experiences, it would follow on the whole that
the easy communicability of need (Mittheilbarkeit der Noth), which ultimately means the experience of merely average and common (gemein) experiences, must have been, of all the powers (Gewalten) at whose disposal humanity has been so far, the most powerful (gewaltigste). The more similar, the more ordinary were and are always at an advantage; the more select, finer (Feineren), stranger, harder to understand easily remain alone, fall victim, in their isolation, to accidents (Unfällen), and rarely propagate (und pflanzen sich selten fort; cf. J 276). One must invoke (anrufen) monstrous counterforces (Gegenkräfte) in order to cross this natural, all too natural (natürlichen, allzunatürlichen) progressus in simile, the further formation (Fortbildung) of the human being into the similar, ordinary, average, herd-like—into the common (gemeine; cf., again, FW 354)!

Thus there is no sharp distinction in Nietzsche’s view between common in the sense of shared or mutual and common in the sense of low, base or vulgar; indeed, the one almost necessarily implies the other. As he will say shortly, “solitude is a virtue for us, as a sublime tendency and urge for cleanliness (Hang und Drang der Reinlichkeit), which intuits how contact between human beings—‘in society’—must involve inevitable uncleanness (unvermeidlich-unreinlich zugehn muss). Every community makes one, somehow, somewhere, sometime—‘common’ (Jede Gemeinschaft macht, irgendwie, irgendwo, irgendifwann—‘gemein’)” (J 284).
This seems necessarily to include community in an aristocratic class or type, and indeed Nietzsche’s discussion of aristocracy in section 262 stresses, as we have seen, that it is opposed to individuality and ruthlessly represses or exterminates any deviations from the common type its morality seeks to breed. This point comes into even sharper focus, I think, when we observe Nietzsche’s reference to this tendency towards the average and common as “natural, all too natural (natürlichen, allzunatürlichen).” Aristocratic societies embody the basic or essential character of organic life precisely because they are exploitative: “‘Exploitation’ belongs not to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function (als organische Grundfunktion); it is a consequence of the actual will to power, which is just the will of life (der eben der Wille des Lebens ist)” (J 259). Among the features or manifestations of this exploitation are “overpowering the strange and weaker, suppression (Unterdrückung), hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation” (cf. J 192). Nietzsche, of course, makes a very similar statement at the end of 2.11, but here he highlights not only the violent and exploitative aspects of life but its form-giving (or form-imposing) and incorporating tendencies as well. A healthy aristocracy thus exhibits or incarnates the same properties that Nietzsche describes in purely spiritual or intellectual terms in his discussion of the “basic will of the spirit,” in which he compares the spirit to a stomach for its ability to appropriate, to assimilate and incorporate, what is new and foreign (J 230; cf. J 192). Similarly, in the First Essay, in the course of explaining why the nobles are relatively free of ressentiment, Nietzsche speaks of
“strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget” (1.10). Thus noble or aristocratic society, like all living things, seeks to increase its power and to reproduce or sustain itself by imposing its forms on what is foreign or alien, subjecting, appropriating and incorporating the foreign in the process. In doing so, however, it tends towards the “natural, all-too-natural” production and replication of the common and ordinary. This indeed chimes with what Nietzsche says earlier in Beyond Good and Evil about morality and breeding: “Consider any morality with this in mind: the ‘nature’ in it is that which teaches hatred of the laisser aller, of the all-too-great freedom, and implants the need for limited horizons and the nearest tasks—teaching the narrowing of our perspective, and thus in a certain sense stupidity, as a condition of life and growth” (J 188; cf. MAM I, Pr., 6).

To be sure, there do seem to be some significant differences between the production or breeding of a noble type as it is described in section 262 and the production of a people as it is described in section 268. Perhaps most importantly, it is the explosion and dispersal of the forces that had been gathered together in the aristocratic morality and the type it bred or produced that makes the individual possible or that is identical with his emergence. And the breeding involved in aristocratic society and morality implies more than simply letting nature run its course (though, as we have seen above, it certainly does not mean simply opposing or repressing nature). Overall, however, noble morality and society seems to evince or exemplify the workings of nature, beginning with its founding by those whose nature is still natural (J 257). Moreover, noble society is
a community which tightly binds its members together and enforces a conformity and adherence to a common way of life and experience, and is born of a struggle with need and unfavorable circumstances. If it is thus not simply identical with the process or situation described in section 268, I do not think it can be sharply or fundamentally separated from it either. In fact, I think section 268 marks a turning point in Part Nine of *Beyond Good and Evil*; once Nietzsche has shown the propensity of even noble societies to tend towards the common and average, he turns from the defining characteristics of aristocratic societies to the ways in which the nobility embodied in those societies can still manifest itself among those who are not possessed of the self-assurance and bounded horizons of political nobility, and whose souls are thus more complicated and fractured. This emphasis on the noble and the rare is especially important for Nietzsche because the philosopher, in order to transform or overcome his time, must be its contradiction and bad conscience; thus while in previous ages philosophical greatness might have required humility or irony, “today the concept of greatness entails being noble, wanting to be by oneself, being able to be different, standing alone and having to live independently” (*J* 212; cf. 272 and 284). Hence he considers the imperilled “higher human beings” who struggle with great suffering and solitude (beginning with his discussion of “the corruption, the ruination of the higher human beings, of the souls of a stranger type” in 269), those who need masks and dissimulation (e.g., 270, 278, 288-291), and the place of nobility in the modern world generally (especially 272, 287). This discussion, and indeed Part Nine and the book as a whole, concludes with Nietzsche’s portrait or invocation
of Dionysus,\(^\text{124}\) and then a final comment deprecating what can be made common and communicable.

In sum, then, noble morality, in each of its particular forms or instantiations, is something that must be overcome in order for humanity to elevate or enhance itself. This, indeed, is what Nietzsche himself suggests in section 257. The ultimate justification for aristocratic society is not the strength of the type it produces or the feeling of power of its upper class, but the fact that it overcomes itself, that it engenders or creates the desire to overcome itself, indeed to overcome the human condition as it has been known hitherto. The “pathos of distance” leads to “that other, more mysterious pathos…that longing for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states—in brief,

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\(^{124}\) Nietzsche’s presentation of Dionysus does not stress nobility either in Dionysus himself or in the qualities Dionysus admires and wishes to promote in human beings. Dionysus is introduced as “the genius of the heart,” “that great concealed one,” “the tempter god (Versucher-Gott) and born pied piper of consciences,” “the genius of the heart who silences all that is loud and self-satisfied.” When Nietzsche suggests offering “you, my friends, a few tastes of this philosophy” of Dionysus, it is “[i]n an undertone, as is fair, for it concerns much that is secret, new, strange, odd, uncanny.” And Dionysus admires, even “loves,” humanity because the human being is “to my mind an agreeable, courageous, inventive animal that has no equal on earth; it finds its way in any labyrinth,” and he wishes to “advance him and make him stronger, more evil, more profound” and finally also “more beautiful.” In short, Nietzsche’s description of Dionysus calls to mind more his depictions of the priest (especially in \textit{GM} 1.6-8) and of human sickliness (\textit{GM} 3.13) than his treatment of nobility.

On the other hand, Dionysus is “the genius of the heart from whose touch everyone walks away richer, not having received grace and surprised, not as blessed and oppressed by alien goods, but richer in himself,” a line that resonates with many passages in \textit{Zarathustra}. In other words, and in line with the interpretation of the latter segment of Part Nine that I have suggested above, Dionysus seems again to be trying to achieve or inspire some distinctly noble attributes in human beings without simply reproducing the forms of life of previous noble societies.
simply the enhancement of the type ‘human being’ (*die Erhöhung des Typus ‘Mensch’*), the continual ‘self-overcoming of the human,’ to take a moral formula in a supra-moral sense.” This may well be a reference to the emergence or development of the priest, and I believe there are details in Nietzsche’s discussion of the priest in the First Essay that support this suggestion.

The title of the First Essay, “‘Good and Evil,’ ‘Good and Bad,’” suggests a simple typology of two basic and distinct types of valuation, and indeed most of the Essay seems to provide exactly that. The priest, however, does not simply correspond to either type. As Nietzsche says when he introduces the figure of the priest and the subject of priestly aristocracies (1.6), the characteristic priestly morality is a morality of the ruling caste, and as such is self-affirming. Priestly morality, however, is based on the distinction between pure and impure, not on that between either good and evil or good and bad. To affirm himself as “pure,” the priest must negate or disvalue part of himself; indeed, priestly valuation or morality seems, in Nietzsche’s account, to be born primarily of negation or disvaluing, or at least of aversion. While the values of the “warrior caste” or “knightly aristocrats” spring from an affirmative feeling of their own goodness and superiority (the pathos of distance), and are able to occur and express themselves fluidly or spontaneously (e.g., 1.2, 1.10), the priestly concept “pure” first arises from a kind of primitive neurosis, or rather from a complex of neuroses. The priests’ abhorrence of such primal realities as blood and sex create habits in a priestly aristocracy that turn the priests away from action and make them at times prone to brooding, at times prone to emotional outbursts (*gefühls-*)
The priests’ valuations, by contrast, arise out of aversion or repulsion and become more powerful and unweildy by virtue of being repressed and brooded upon; the priests’ lack of activity means that they are unable to discharge their feelings through acts, leading both to an inner deepening or complication and to an ever deepening sickness.

This picture already suggests that the priest arises from the ruling class or caste of an already existing aristocracy, even if a fairly crude or rudimentary one. This supposition is further supported by other aspects of Nietzsche’s account. When discussing what made someone “pure” in prehistory, Nietzsche mentions not sleeping with “the dirty women of the lower strata,” implying that there are already lower strata before there are priests; what makes a priestly class is not the institution of a caste system but a new attitude towards the existing castes, and specifically a more “spiritual” or inward attitude toward them. Likewise, at the beginning of 1.7, Nietzsche says, “One will have guessed already how easily the priestly mode of valuation can branch off (abzweigen) from the knightly-aristocratic and then develop into its opposite,” further evidence that every aristocracy begins as a warrior aristocracy.125

125 The case with which Nietzsche is most concerned, in the Genealogy and elsewhere, also seems to strengthen the view that the priest evolves out of a knightly or warrior class, and thus that a priestly aristocracy is derived from a martial or warrior aristocracy. The Jews began as a noble race, as we learn from Nietzsche’s praise of the Old Testament later in the Genealogy (III 22) and in Beyond Good and Evil (52), and from his discussion of the religious history of Israel in The Anti-Christ(ian) (25-27). As Yirmiyahu Yovel notes, Nietzsche thus distinguishes between two phases in the history of ancient Judaism, as indeed is fitting given his emphasis in the Genealogy on historical variability. There is the noble biblical period and the priestly period of the Second Temple (around the
Aside from indications about the historical process by which the priest comes into the world, there are of course the similarities between Nietzsche’s description of “that other, more mysterious pathos” in section 257 of Beyond Good and Evil and his depiction of the priest. Nietzsche is obviously much more ambivalent toward the priest than he is towards the mysterious pathos mentioned in Beyond Good and Evil, but his ambivalence toward the priest seems to reflect his ambivalence towards human development or evolution as a whole, a process in which the priest plays a crucial role. The priest makes human existence more dangerous, but also more interesting, deep, evil—in a word, genuinely human. Nietzsche expresses this ambiguity best at the end of section six:

For with the priests everything becomes more dangerous, not only cures and remedies, but also arrogance, revenge, acumen, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease—but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form, that the human being first became an interesting animal, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire depth and become evil—and these are the two basic respects in which human beings have hitherto been superior to other beasts (1.6)!

Yet however critical Nietzsche may be of the priest at times, the priest’s concern with purity (Reinheit) has been transformed into the desire for intellectual and

spiritual cleanliness (Reinlichkeit), so that the philosophic life as Nietzsche understands it, or at least the philosophy of the future, owes a decisive debt to the spiritual innovations and legacy of the priest (J 271, 284; cf. FW 357, where the word is Sauberkeit rather than Reinlichkeit). Indeed, Dionysus’s stated aim of making human beings “stronger, more evil, more profound; also more beautiful,” with its obvious parallels to the passage quoted just above (GM 1.6), suggests that Dionysus (and Nietzsche) wants somehow to continue and intensify the process begun by the priest but to purge it of its sickliness or its tendency to make human beings sick, to teach humanity to become more evil and more profound while also growing stronger and more beautiful, rather than sick.

I am therefore suggesting that Beyond Good and Evil 257 should be read not as saying that there is a simple causal connection between political hierarchy and spiritual hierarchy, that the former produces the latter in an uncomplicated and harmonious way, but rather that both forms of hierarchy express or exemplify the same basic vital will, and thus that both have the same cause or source. Political hierarchy would thus be a condition or an expression of the condition for spiritual overcoming, or a first manifestation of the deeper ground common to both, rather than the simple cause of spiritual hierarchy or enhancement; it is, in any case, certainly not its sole cause. Two chief figures emerge in Nietzsche’s thought as the agents of this spiritual self-overcoming, at least or especially in the

\[126\] There is also Zarathustra’s statement that there are “heroes” among the priests and that his blood is related to theirs in his speech “On the Priests” (Z 2.4), as well as Nietzsche’s highly favorable account in the Anticrist(ian) of the highest, priestly caste described in the Laws of Manu (A 56-57), however unflattering Nietzsche’s comments about priests in the rest of that book.
Genealogy and Beyond Good and Evil, the philosopher and the priest. Nietzsche sometimes refers to both, who in any case do not seem always to have been clearly distinguished or separated historically, under the rubric of “the contemplative type,” and even suggests that the philosopher developed out of the priest and his devotion to the ascetic ideal (e.g., GM 3.9-10, M 41-42). In my reading of Nietzsche, the priest is necessary to advance or develop or deepen humanity, and is indeed an almost universal figure (3.11), but Western civilization has been given its distinctive cast and trajectory by two particular contemplative types or attitudes that have informed it most deeply or decisively.

On the one hand there is Socratic rationalism, “that unshakable faith that thought, with causality as its guide, can reach down into the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of correcting it” (GT 15; see more generally 13-15). Granted, Nietzsche would later come to insist on the vulgar utilitarianism inherent in Socrates’ concern for the good and the rational pursuit of it, but even if one discounts Nietzsche’s early heroic portrait of Socrates in light of this later criticism, there remains his account of Plato’s much nobler and more magnificent endeavor. Plato “wanted (wollte) to expend all his strength (mit Aufwand aller Kraft)—the greatest strength any philosopher so far has had to expend (aufzuwenden)!—to prove to himself that reason and instinct of themselves tend toward one goal, the good, ‘God’” (J 191; cf. J 190). This attempt not simply to suppress, rework or redirect the instincts but to align them with reason and to show that both aim for the same transcendent
good, a divine realm of superhuman truth (*FW* 344), has largely shaped or composed Western civilization.

The other essential or defining element in Western civilization, according to Nietzsche, is the particular form of priestly valuation that has suffused or animated it. There seem to me to be two major features of this primarily Jewish priestly valuation. In the first place, the Jews achieved an inversion of values; they not only promulgated a morality of purity, they reversed the values of their noble enemies and predecessors (*GM* 1.7, *J* 195), and thus created a wholly new morality that treats the poor, weak and sick as the good, and the powerful, wealthy and sensual as evil and ungodly. The Jews, in short, effected the “slave revolt in morals,” which in turn has made possible the modern morality of altruism, pity and equality. 127 Along with this, and perhaps intimately related to it (cf. *J* 46), Europe owes (*verdankt*) to the Jews “above all one thing that is both of the best and of the worst: the grand style in morality, the terribleness and majesty of infinite demands, infinite meanings, the whole romanticism and sublimity of moral questionabilities” (*J* 250). When this style or bent for infinite

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127 Mark Migotti suggests that Socrates is somehow an indispensable part or precursor to the slave revolt in morals (Migotti, “Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen,” pp. 114-117). But while Socrates may encourage and indeed demand that individuals give reasons for their actions, he does not encourage a moralistic distinction between good and evil—indeed, with his famous doctrine that virtue is knowledge and that vice is therefore ignorance that needs to be educated rather than punished, he does the exact opposite—nor does he promote the morality of selflessness, humility, etc. that Nietzsche identifies as the core of slave morality. Migotti bases this claim on his view that slave morality introduces and is uniquely reliant upon or bound up with a notion of free will or of what Migotti calls “impartial value” (p. 112). Yet, as Aaron Ridley notes, there is no necessary reason for the noble not to believe himself possessed of free will (Nietzsche’s text is, I think, silent on whether the nobles do or not). Ridley, *Nietzsche’s Conscience*, pp. 28-29.
demands and meanings is married with the Platonic-Socratic conviction “that God is the truth, that truth is divine” (FW 344), it produces—among other things—the peculiar intensity of the Occidental insistence on intellectual cleanliness or probity, first in the form of Christianity, the synthesis of Platonic and Jewish valuations, then in the forms of cultural and especially intellectual life that succeeded and descended from Christianity.

Obviously, Nietzsche is mostly critical of the Jewish revaluation of values, the “slave revolt in morals.” But the ways in which the Jews have made their spiritual descendents deeper, more evil, and more interesting are important achievements that Nietzsche does not want to discard or undo. More generally, both Socratic-Platonic philosophy and Judeo-Christian religious values have contributed to, or rather constituted, the “enhancement of the type ‘human being’” particular to Western civilization. Both, in other words, resist or overcome the “natural, all-too-natural” tendency to produce and reproduce the similar, average and ordinary (J 268). The question then arises of whether this resistance should be understood as simply anti-natural or opposed to a unitary or harmonious nature, or whether nature opposes, resists or wrestles with itself.

The process or sequence Nietzsche is describing seems clear enough: a morality takes a band of disparate and largely chaotic human animals (or perhaps human beings who still retain something of the form and ethos of a fading and ever more dissipated morality) and begins to work them into a new type; in time this type grows in power and strength and finally peaks, at which point it either explodes and gives birth to a wild growth of individuals or its vitality begins to
dwindle and it tends ever more toward the common, similar and average. This process or movement can be represented as an arc, with the possibility of an eruption of individual lines at the peak, most of which will be dead ends, but some of which may trace their own, new trajectories.\textsuperscript{128} The basic progression or growth represented by the arc is clearly the work of nature in Nietzsche’s view, but is the dispersal of forces at the peak also natural?

In answering this question, I think it is important to remember Nietzsche’s vigorous declaration that life is characterized above all by the active force of the will to power, by the “spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, shaping forces that give new interpretations and meanings,” and only secondarily by adaptation (\textit{GM} 2.12). This means that the breeding Nietzsche describes in \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} 262 cannot be simply a matter of adaptation or reaction to a hostile environment; it must rather be primarily an active, form-giving impulse that is strengthened and enhanced by its struggle against opposing forces or adverse circumstances. If, therefore, the cause of the strength, purity and durability of an aristocratic type is not external pressure but an internal sculpting and driving force, it seems to me likely that the eventual explosion or self-overcoming of that type and the energies and forces that it united is as much due to the inner impetus or development of the morality breeding that type, or to the forces expressing themselves through that morality, as it is to a slackening of external stress; this, in any case, is much more

\textsuperscript{128} In every case, it appears the arc-movement will occur, for Nietzsche seems clearly to maintain that the trend towards mediocrity continues alongside the outbreak and rapid growth of new types and moral experiments.
in keeping with Nietzsche’s account of the moral imperative of nature and its self-overcoming in section 188 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Thus nature creates certain forms and tends to the simple reproduction or replication of those forms, and thus to the replication of the similar, average and ordinary, but this tendency is fought by something that, it seems to me, is internal to the same process or impulse that produces the tendency towards the similar and average. Although the formulation I have just used suggests that this counter-force is also natural, there are other indications that its status or identity is more uncertain. On the one hand, one can obviously call it life, especially given life’s emphasis on its own self-overcoming and crooked path in Zarathustra’s speech “On Self-Overcoming” (Z 2.12). I think, however, that it would be a mistake to regard life as in this case simply opposed to nature; again, the counter-force or resistance to the all-too-natural tendency towards similarity seems to have the same source or substance as that tendency itself. If nature breeds a type, the eventual self-overcoming of that type and the eruption of the forces and wills bound and ordered within it seems also to be due to an inner impulsion of nature itself.

One might object that Nietzsche frequently stresses the importance of overcoming or mastering nature, and that it is precisely this “natural, all-too-natural” tendency towards similarity and mediocrity that must be mastered and overcome; Nietzsche is thus unambiguous that nature must be opposed and dominated, and that the production of higher and rarer types is the work of humanity to the extent that it divorces or alienates itself from nature, but certainly
not of nature itself. It is beyond doubt that Nietzsche highlights humanity’s constant struggle to surmount and master nature as one of its defining and indeed most admirable characteristics. The sovereign individual, for instance, attains mastery over nature (2.2), and later, in one of the great passages of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche writes of the mixture of daring and sickness that characterizes the human animal:

Where does it come from, this sickliness? For the human being is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that—he is *the* sick animal: how has that come about? Certainly he has also ventured more, innovated more, braved more and challenged fate more than all the other animals taken together: he, the great experimenter with himself, discontented and insatiable, wrestling with animals, nature and gods for ultimate dominion (*Herrschaft*)—he, always still unvanquished, eternally directed toward the future (*ewig-Zukünftige*), who finds no rest from his own restless energies, so that his future, like a spur, digs mercilessly into the flesh of every present—how should such a courageous and rich animal not also be the most imperiled, the most chronically and profoundly sick of all sick animals (3.13)?

Part of wrestling with nature for dominion involves broadening one’s horizons or perspectives, pushing out beyond the narrow perspective imposed by nature as a condition of growth, strength and health, as Nietzsche makes clear in
Beyond Good and Evil 188: “Consider any morality with this in mind: the ‘nature’ in it is that which teaches hatred of the laissez aller, of the all-too-great freedom, and implants the need for limited horizons and the nearest tasks—teaching the narrowing of our perspective, and thus in a certain sense stupidity, as a condition of life and growth” (J 188; cf. MAM I, Pr., 6).129 Thus, again, humanity must fight to overcome and expand itself in order to resist the natural movement toward narrowness and similarity; the philosopher, above all, must fight the spiritual and intellectual restriction and stupidity to which every morality, to the extent that it represents or expresses nature, subjects it adherents. Likewise, in the Genealogy Nietzsche refers to the “self-criticism of knowledge (Erkenntniss-Selbstkritik)” as “unnatural science” (3.25), implying that the degree of self-awareness and self-criticism required for knowledge to critique itself is somehow a violation of nature, of the natural needs expressed and served by knowledge, even of the relatively scientific or philosophic knowledge indicated by the word Erkenntniss. All of these passages suggest that human development or enhancement, and especially the type of enhancement envisioned and guided by philosophers, requires that nature be subdued and overcome.

Elsewhere, however, Nietzsche speaks of a movement toward nature as his own goal. Thus he expresses his impatient desire to “have nature wholly de-deified” in order to “be permitted to begin to naturalize (vernärrlichen) humanity with the pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature” (FW 109), and

129 Cf. MAM I, Pr., 6, where Nietzsche attributes the same basic activity to life, thus suggesting that life and nature may be identical or at least deeply akin to one another, and thus that life’s self-description to Zarathustra (Z 2.12) may apply to nature as well.
famously describes his task as the attempt to recover “that eternal basic text (Grundtext) homo natura,” “[t]o translate the human being back into nature” (J 230). He also declares, in a passage titled “Progress in my sense,” that “I too speak of a ‘return to nature,’ although it is not really a going-back but a going-up (Hinaufkommen)—up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness, such as plays with great tasks, is permitted to play (spielen darf) with them” (GD, “Expeditions,” 48). And in the spring of 1887 (a few months before writing the Genealogy), in a note titled “The Naturalization (Vernatürlichung) of human beings in the 19th Century,” Nietzsche writes: “Not ‘return to nature:’ for there has never yet been a natural humanity (eine natürliche Menschheit). The scholasticism of un- and anti-natural values is the rule, is the beginning; the human being arrives at nature after a long struggle—he never goes ‘back’…Nature: i.e., daring to be immoral like nature.” All four passages make clear that a properly natural or naturalized human life is something that is yet to be achieved, a goal towards which one must work, and towards which Nietzsche himself is specifically working.  

130 KSA 12, p. 482; 10 [53] (182). The note was also published as section 120 of The Will to Power.  
131 The first and third also emphasize permission, using the verb dürfen, again underscoring Nietzsche’s view that what is natural is a long breeding and compulsion that culminates in permission to act in a certain way or the capacity to accomplish a particular task, not an insouciant or high-spirited laisser-aller. Indeed, in the final quotation, nature itself requires permission to “play with great tasks.” If nature is dependent on humanity’s performing certain actions or acts of will in order to achieve this permission (a possible but not, I think, self-evident reading), this perhaps suggests a symbiotic relation between nature and humanity, where nature relies on humanity in order to accomplish a particular goal or task, but humanity nonetheless remains dependent on nature for its existence, animating concerns, orientation in the world, and so forth.
This critical contradiction is, in my opinion, only apparent, given Nietzsche’s view that nature is not a static structure or permanent configuration of forces but a constant movement and activity of growth, overcoming, assimilation, incorporation and other necessarily vital and dynamic processes. Since there is for Nietzsche no stable template or form of human nature, there is no fundamental or original nature that is either overcome, subjugated and surpassed or disfigured and deformed by human evolution; Nietzsche’s view is the opposite of Rousseau’s, that originally human nature was whole and pure, but has been warped, deformed and debased by society. What is natural is thus the process or activity of growth and reinterpretation described in 2.12, and the qualities that exhibit or manifest themselves in this process, rather than a fixed form or an enduring substance. As Nietzsche suggests in the note cited above, perhaps the chief reason there has never yet been a natural or naturalized humanity is that humanity has not dared to embody or approximate nature’s immorality, which means in large part to accept and to live in accord with the reality that there is no being, only becoming, and thus that there is no changeless or eternal structure for human nature and morality.

It is, however, more accurate to say that nature is both form and process for Nietzsche; nature takes particular temporary forms throughout the organic world—for instance, an organ or an animal species—and in the specifically human case it seeks to breed both a particular type of animal and discrete and diverse types within the species (in both cases using morality to accomplish the breeding). Nature thus sets the imperative to breed a particular form, and at the
same time to overcome or explode that form, after which nature reorders and reconstitutes the energies and forces that had been given a temporarily stable structure and relation in the previous form or, in the case of human societies, in the previous morality. Since human nature, like all of nature, is continually becoming, there is no original, final or permanent form of human nature to deform and mutilate, only impermanent forms which are inevitably overcome and destroyed or exploded. But what does the destroying or exploding, what could possibly do the destroying or exploding, but nature itself?

I must add at once, however, that I have obviously overstated one point. I have spoken as if nature simply animates or structures individual moralities, and thus as if every morality is natural. This is clearly not Nietzsche’s view; as the passages cited above show, Nietzsche wants to create a natural humanity for the first time in human history, to naturalize humanity by ascending to nature. Nature expresses itself through human beings to some extent, but human history has, for Nietzsche, plainly been shaped or defined in large part by an anti-natural morality, or by a series of anti-natural moralities designed to obscure nature’s immorality and to convince human beings that they have a supernatural origin and significance. It is this morality that, in Nietzsche’s view, has made humanity so terribly sick. Thus, to return to another point made above, Nietzsche wants to retain the autonomy and capacity for self-experimentation and self-creation or reformation developed by the priest, but to embrace and try to live in accord with nature, and thus to make humanity healthier and stronger as well as more evil, more profound and more beautiful.
But what of the natural, all-too-natural tendency to produce similar and average human beings, and thus to breed the rare and high out of human existence? How can Nietzsche want to naturalize humanity or to live in accord with nature if this is one of the fundamental properties or bents of nature? Even if, as I have maintained above, nature tends towards the breeding of both the exceptional or higher and the common and average, how can Nietzsche uncritically accept both? And if he does not, in what sense can he be said to be trying to naturalize humanity, or to translate humanity back into nature?

I am not sure that this question can be answered by anything other than speculation. As is often remarked, Nietzsche’s uncannily acute and profound cultural, philosophical and psychological observations tend to give way to very vague and somewhat visionary proposals for the future. Although Nietzsche gives some indication of what he wants humanity’s political future to look like, and considerably less indication of how to get there, I do not think one can do more than conjecture as to his concrete political objectives for the future. Having said that, the most convincing answer to these questions seems to me to be that Nietzsche intends for a hierarchical society roughly based on the Laws of Manu to separate human beings out into at least three classes, and thus to assist or direct nature in its breeding of both extraordinary or rare new human types and of the average and common. This I think is part of the significance of Nietzsche’s insistence that the separation of human beings into three types and thus three classes is the work of nature, not Manu (A 57). Granted, in this passage Nietzsche’s chief concern is to argue that this division and the different roles or
tasks allotted to each class is natural, and he accordingly emphasizes how the
nature of each of the three types directs them to a particular kind of work and a
particular kind of happiness. But the third, “mediocre” type and even to some
extent the second, guardian or warrior type seem to represent nature’s replication
of the average and common; this is perhaps most clearly indicated by the
relatively static character of the needs, abilities and specific tasks of these two
classes, especially as compared to the third and highest class. In Nietzsche’s ideal
society, I think, these two classes would exemplify or surrender to the “natural,
all-too-natural progressus in simile, the continual development (Fortbildung) of
humans towards the similar, ordinary, average, herd-like—to the common!” The
highest, most spiritual class, on the other hand, would invoke and instantiate
within itself, within its own life, ethos and education, the “enormous counter-
forces” necessary to cross this natural tendency. This highest class would thus
resemble the highest class of the Laws of Manu as Nietzsche describes them in
The Antichrist(ian) 57,132 as well as the philosophers of the future and their
attempts and temptations to cultivate a new human greatness; this highest, most
spiritual class would in particular address the problem of breeding ever new,
higher and more expansive types, new developments of human possibility who

132 The whole passage is of course worth reading, but these lines are especially
relevant here: “The most spiritual human beings, as the strongest, find their
happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity
towards themselves and others, in attempting (im Versuch); their joy lies in self-
constraint: with them asceticism becomes nature, need, instinct. They consider
the hard task a privilege, to play with burdens which overwhelm others a
recreation…Knowledge—a form of asceticism.”
will set themselves new problems and tasks and thus become ever stronger, deeper, more evil and more beautiful.

Throughout his writings Nietzsche exhibits both a keen admiration for the higher, rarer, more subtle and more spiritual human being and an equally keen sense of the dangers attending precisely those qualities, the likelihood that precisely the rarer and higher human types will come to ruin and be destroyed, or simply live out their lives in isolation and without the means to realize or employ their abilities. In short, the most spiritual human beings are “by far the most painful tragedies” (GD, “Expeditions,” 17). I therefore think it is reasonable to conclude that part of his project or aim is to combat or even correct this recurrent tragedy, to preserve and indeed strengthen and augment or enhance these rarer and more spiritual types. Yet this answer to the question of how Nietzsche can or wants to reconcile the two contradictory tendencies of nature may seem not to answer it at all, for how exactly will this highest class or caste repulse or overcome the natural tendency toward the common and average? Nietzsche’s answer seems to be that by consciously and actively willing and breeder a higher human (or superhuman) type, this tendency can be espied and thwarted. In other words, it has been in large part the accidental and unwitting character of even the highest or most successful previous attempts at breeding (with the possible exception of the Hinduism of the Laws of Manu) that has allowed the higher types to succumb to accident, or more precisely to this natural tendency. Even so, however, how or why is this a solution? How is self-consciously attempting to breed a particular, “higher” human type by itself a means of resisting the natural
tendency towards simple replication of the common and ordinary? What, in short, are the “tremendous counter-measures” that can and will be invoked or called upon to resist this tendency? Again, here Nietzsche seems not to provide an answer, only a vague sketch of what a future society might look like (and, to some extent, only a vague sketch of what will constitute or define the “higher,” possible superhuman type ruling that society).

At the same time, however, it is only fair to consider the possibility that Nietzsche does not provide terribly distinct or concrete plans for the future because that is not his aim. It seems to me an equally plausible reading of Nietzsche that he is less concerned with outlining strategies and procedures for the future than he is with articulating a new philosophy and understanding of existence that will serve as the basis or the matrix for future political, cultural and moral activity and reformation, and in particular for the reformation which will follow the great European wars that Nietzsche foresees. In this case Nietzsche’s chief aim or task would be to present humanity with a new image of itself and its relation to the world around it, specifically one based on or informed by a new conception of nature, a nature which is thoroughly “immoral,” godless and so redeemed, a nature that is animated by or evinces only the will to power. It is in the light of this new teaching and self-understanding that humanity will make the revolutionary decisions about their future which can only be made once that future has begun to take shape in a clearer and more meaningful way.

There is one final major question that I think is raised by the interpretation presented above. Is humanity, in Nietzsche’s view, to embrace and live in accord
with nature and in particular with nature’s wasteful, squandering indifference, or is humanity rather to master nature and bend nature to its will by forcing it to breed ever new and, so to speak, more exotic types? In other words, there remains the basic question of whether by “naturalizing” humanity Nietzsche means taking control of nature and actively causing—or rather forcing—it to produce higher and more expansive human types, thus compelling nature to become less wasteful (though nothing could compel it to become less indifferent). Or, on the contrary, does Nietzsche want for humanity simply to affirm and indeed to will the actual character nature has and to try to live in accord with it? There is obviously a larger set of questions in play here, questions regarding Nietzsche’s attitude towards chance and accident generally, and whether his or Zarathustra’s aim of redeeming humanity from the gruesome and senseless rule of accident means teaching them to affirm and will the accidental character of existence, or to eliminate accident or chance from the human world altogether. Though I can obviously not answer this question definitely or decisively here (in other words, I cannot deal here with all the relevant texts), my provisional view is that while the breeding Nietzsche calls for undeniably involves some mastery of nature, in the obvious sense of breeding higher and more complicated human beings, the basic wasteful, squandering and indifferent character of nature would remain the same even in Nietzsche’s ideal society or political order, as would the fundamental challenge of accepting and living in accord with that character. Indeed, the ability to live this type of life is largely what constitutes the higher
types Nietzsche hopes to create or breed. In other words, Nietzsche’s goal is to naturalize humanity, not to humanize nature.

There is one other major question or subject raised by the seventeenth section that must be addressed. Henry Staten and, following him, Aaron Ridley have argued that Nietzsche’s claim that the founders of states are free from the bad conscience is incoherent, and that his account of the bad conscience shows that all of humanity, or at least all of humanity living in society, is subject to the same repression of instinct as the slaves Nietzsche had depicted in the First Essay. This also means that all of humanity, to the extent that it lives in society and thus suffers repression of instinct, is animated or colored or dominated by *ressentiment*, not merely the weak and vengeful slaves, as Nietzsche had suggested previously (1.10 ff.).¹³³ There are two different arguments here; the first, made only by Staten, is that *ressentiment* necessarily attends or flows from repression of instinct, so that what Nietzsche describes in the Second Essay as the bad conscience is another instance or manifestation of *ressentiment*. This would mean that *ressentiment* is one of the fundamental constituents of the mental and affective life of every human being living in society, and thus that the noble-slave dichotomy or typology Nietzsche had constructed in the First Essay is ultimately untenable. The second, more limited, contention, made by both authors, is that Nietzsche’s claim here in 2.17 is incoherent; although Nietzsche proclaims that the founders of political society produced or brought the bad conscience into

being without experiencing it themselves, this assertion is simply impossible on Nietzsche’s own terms.

The first argument is very attractive; it is certainly tempting to read the Genealogy as a whole as a sustained investigation of ressentiment, one that identifies ressentiment at ever deeper levels of human consciousness and morality. The book as a whole would thus move from the relatively superficial case of ressentiment directed at political superiors and producing a particular form of morality to the more profound case of ressentiment directed towards oneself and one’s animal instincts and permeating all of civilized life and morality, and finally show how ressentiment has been directed against the very conditions of our existence itself, and has suffused and defined ascetic religion and even the scientific will to truth. This reading is obviously intellectually satisfying, and helps to tie together the three essays (and in particular to explain how the Second Essay relates to the other two, and indeed what its purpose and subject are). But Nietzsche explicitly and emphatically maintains that this is not his argument, that the bad conscience represents an active force, indeed the same active force at work in the founders of states, not the reactive force of ressentiment (cf. 1.10).

One should take care against thinking poorly of this whole phenomenon merely because it is ugly and painful from the beginning. Fundamentally (Im Grunde) it is after all the same active force (aktive Kraft) that is at work on a grander scale in those artists of violence and organizers and that builds states, which here, internally, on a smaller and pettier scale,
directed backwards, in the “labyrinth of the breast,” to speak with Goethe, creates for itself the bad conscience and builds negative ideals—it is precisely that instinct for freedom (in my language: the will to power): only the material on which the form-giving and violating nature (Natur) of this force vents itself is here precisely the human being himself, his whole animal ancient self—and not, as in that greater and more obvious phenomenon, the other human being, other human beings.

Nietzsche goes on to lavish the bad conscience with some of the highest praise found anywhere in the Genealogy: “this entire active ‘bad conscience’ has ultimately—one could guess it already—as the actual womb of ideal and imaginative events (Ereignisse) also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation and perhaps even for the first time beauty itself (die Schönheit).”

Thus Nietzsche makes it clear that, no matter how attractive the Staten/Ridley reading may be, it does not represent his position; the bad conscience is not an instance or effect of ressentiment, and the Second Essay is not a further exploration of the meaning, manifestations and consequences of ressentiment. The bad conscience, or at least the phenomenon Nietzsche describes with that name in 2.16-18, is the expression or result of an active, creative, form-giving force.

One may well object, however, and Staten does object, that of course Nietzsche remembers to use the proper terminology, but the point is that the
distinction between active and reactive, and so Nietzsche’s claim that the process depicted here is free of ressentiment, makes no sense in this case; how can the repression of instinct, specifically of the instinctual urge for power and revenge, poison with ressentiment in one case but not in the other? What are the differences between the two situations that make the distinction viable? In the first place Nietzsche argues that the transition from the pre-political to the political state is “a break, a leap, a compulsion, an ineluctable disaster, against which there is no struggle and not even any ressentiment” (2.17). The law, the rule of the “fearful tyranny” of the “crushing and remorseless machinery” of the earliest state, is a piece of fate, a disaster, something too great, and specifically too terrible and terrifying, for one to feel ressentiment towards it. The change or “break” was so massive, so total, so violent and so brutal that one was simply too terrified, staggered and beaten to resent it. The situation was therefore not that the desire for revenge was thwarted and needed to be suppressed and satisfied covertly or mendaciously, but rather that there simply was no desire for revenge, only a kind of stupefied terror and acceptance of the dictates of the law and rulers.134

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134 One might also think that the sense of self was too rudimentary or nonexistent for those being terrorized or tyrannized to experience the sense of personal aggrievement and rancor that are necessary to ressentiment. But the rest of Nietzsche’s treatment of ressentiment, especially his discussion of its relation to the earliest law codes in 2.11, suggests that the sense of self is well-developed enough to allow for ressentiment from almost the first instance of human sociability. Thus however primitive the sense of self and therefore of ressentiment at the founding of a political society, it is still a possibility, and its absence in those coerced by the law must be explained in another way.
It is worth pausing here to note that in his explanation of why the imposition of law or a political form does not provoke *ressentiment*, Nietzsche emphasizes the horrific violence of the first state and the dread that violence aroused, rather than the finality or the lack of intention inherent in the catastrophe he describes. The founding of political society is a disaster or a piece of fate, as is “time and its ‘it was,’” but the latter is still able to inspire *ressentiment* or, as Zarathustra calls it, “the spirit of revenge” (Z, 2.20, “On Redemption”). Social constraint and repression do not trigger *ressentiment*, according to Nietzsche, not because human beings are too rational to resent such an enormous, overwhelming, impersonal and irresistible process, but rather purely because of the logic of the affects, purely because *ressentiment* cannot coexist with or spring from such intense and absolute fear. Likewise, Zarathustra teaches not resignation to or reconciliation with the inexorable necessity of time’s passage, but rather redemption through creative willing and affirmation.

Yet there is another, probably deeper or more important reason why the bad conscience is not colored or driven by *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s view, or why the creation of negative ideals is not or need not always have been informed or attended by *ressentiment*. Considered purely in its own terms and not with reference to its origins or the other emotions or affects that would have been experienced at the beginning of political or social life, the bad conscience is not an attempt to get revenge on anyone, but an attempt to discharge or gratify the animal instincts of aggression that have been repressed. These instincts do indeed find something to work over and mold, namely “the human being himself, his
whole animal ancient self;” the fact that the individual’s will to power is thus satisfied or exercised in this case thus saves him from ressentiment, from a stymied and hence rancorous lust for dominance and revenge. Ressentiment, in contrast to the instincts and drives which constitute or express themselves through the bad conscience, must content itself with a purely imaginary revenge, which is to say with a purely imaginary effect. Most simply, the bad conscience is not ressentiment because it is an actual form and experience of mastery and power, while ressentiment is not, and is indeed born of an experience of impotence. Thus what is most significant about the slave revolt in morals, or the rise of a morality of ressentiment, is not that the slaves’ will to power or instinct of freedom needed to find a secret outlet or satisfaction, but rather that this will or instinct was poisoned by ressentiment, by the desire for vengeance; the poisoning effect of ressentiment is crucial. This also then means that the cardinal failing of the slaves (as opposed to the priests) is not simply their lack of political power and thus of an external outlet for their aggression, but their weakness with regard to themselves, their inability to turn those instincts inward and refashion or reshape themselves. Their inversion of noble morality, as Nietzsche emphasizes (1.13), thus amounts to nothing more than self-congratulatory prudence, not to a new moral code or spiritual dispensation which would enable them to serve the goal of furthering or enhancing humanity.

Another look at the actual mechanics of the bad conscience and its development will help clarify this point. In the first place, it is important to note that Nietzsche specifically identifies “the same active force…namely, the instinct
for freedom (in my language: the will to power)” as the power driving and shaping the bad conscience; he is, in other words, not simply describing violent impulses, whether purely mindless or possessing a degree of calculation or control. The instinct for freedom manifests itself in all the violent instincts that must be suppressed in society, but is not exhausted by or identical with them; the instinct for freedom, or the will to power, is somehow present in all of the most fundamental drives or desires, and is thus able to create a bad conscience and negative ideals, while it is not clear that simple violent impulses could do anything of the sort. If one simply had violent impulses, one could at best suppress them for prudential reasons, like a kind of Pavlovian response. But because the violent impulses are in fact somehow tied to or informed by the instinct for freedom, that instinct takes over and begins shaping or reworking the “ancient animal self” from which it emanates. This then explains how the basic psychological substance or drive which gives rise to the bad conscience is more than simple cruelty or aggression, and why it is active rather than reactive.

But if, as Nietzsche claims in 2.18, this fundamental urge for freedom or power “creates a bad conscience for itself and builds negative ideals,” how can this still be considered an expression of an active, affirmative impulse? How can negative ideals not be inherently reactive or evidence of ressentiment? Because, as Nietzsche makes clear in section eighteen, the bad conscience is profoundly creative. “This entire active ‘bad conscience’…as the actual womb of all ideal and imaginative events”—just as the priest must create a new ideal with which to negate and ultimately to achieve the spiritual subjugation of the nobles, so here it
is not enough simply to negate, in this case to negate the “ancient animal self” and its drives and instincts; one must create an ideal with which to negate what exists, and then strive to attain that ideal. Again, however, in this case even if one is negating or creating “negative ideals,” the force which does so is still active, not a vengeful or reactive manifestation of ressentiment. The key point is that the basic active force of the will to power is at work in the bad conscience, creating new ideals and imposing its forms and directions on the animal self from which it has separated or alienated itself; that active force has been compelled to turn inward but not poisoned by ressentiment; legal and social constraint have forced the will to power to change its direction and objects, but the force shaping and driving the bad conscience does not originate in a vengeful reaction to this constraint. The ressentiment of the slaves, by contrast, the force or energy that drives their creation of values and ideals, originates in a negative, resentful or reactive reaction to another, and in particular to one superior to oneself. Thus the whole of slave morality is an attempt to gain some kind of compensation or solace for one’s impotence and inferiority by negating (chiefly through lies) the more powerful cause of one’s subordination; it is an attempt to convince oneself that one does not really want to satisfy one’s most basic need or desire, rather than, as in the case of the bad conscience, the actual satisfaction of that need and desire, in however involuted and painful a form.\footnote{Again, the priest complicates matters considerably. Although Nietzsche stresses the depth of the priest’s experience of ressentiment, the priest’s value judgments seem to originate in a basic negation of or aversion to certain aspects of physical reality, and however great his ressentiment towards the more physically powerful knightly aristocrats may be, he is eventually able to despise}
For these two reasons, then, the bad conscience is not simply another, deeper experience, manifestation or product of *ressentiment*. In the first place, the cause of the bad conscience, the imposition of law and social order and thus the external compulsion forcing one to inhibit or turn one’s instincts inward, is too savage and too terrifying to permit of any kind of reaction even approaching *ressentiment*. Secondly and probably more importantly, once those instincts turn inward, they find something on which to vent themselves, and are thus able to experience themselves as powerful, as discharging themselves on something and reworking or molding it into something new. This experience of power thus prevents the impotent rage and vengefulness that creates *ressentiment*. Thus even after the initial terror of the founding of political life there is no necessary reason why the bad conscience, or the internalization of the instincts of aggression that Nietzsche describes with that name, must generate or fuse with *ressentiment*.

As for the second objection, that Nietzsche is mistaken to claim that the founders of states caused the bad conscience to grow without being subject to it themselves, it does seem hard to understand how a group of people “organized for war and with the power to organize” could be so highly socialized and regimented without having acquired the bad conscience. Part of the problem is the lack of historical examples. If Nietzsche is suggesting that an entire tribe or, even less plausibly, a class of a settled urban populace is somehow suddenly and

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Thus the priest does not seem to be simply another instance or even simply a more capable or articulate version of the slave; while slave morality is at bottom just a thwarted and mendacious deformation of noble morality (an attempt to enjoy or experience a sensation of power by affirming oneself), the priest’s values and way of life seem largely unique.
collectively seized by this form-giving unconscious activity, then this certainly seems unpersuasive. But it may be possible to make sense out of Nietzsche’s statements if we take him to be suggesting that the law code being imposed on one people (or a series of peoples) is experienced by the subjected population as an oppressive restriction, but by the conquerors as a vehicle for their will to power, or for this unconscious form-giving activity. Indeed, Nietzsche emphasizes especially the constraint of a poet or a musician who must work with and within certain forms and who must obey a “thousandfold laws” in the act or moment of creating, but who only thereby can attain the highest feeling of mastery, the fullest exercise and realization or perfection of his creative powers (J 188; cf. EH, “Books,” Z 3, FW 354). Likewise, the founders of states are “the most involuntary (unfeiwillgsten), most unconscious artists there are” (2.17). The freedom from the bad conscience, then, is perhaps best understood not as a lack of all constraint or the free expression or discharge of every instinct or drive, but as the channeling and molding, and thus necessarily the partial compulsion and constriction, of the instincts of freedom or the will to power into a specific creative activity. The artist-lawgivers themselves are the purest example of this phenomenon, but their followers, the rest of the “pack of blond beasts” who violently found states and impose law-codes and political structures, also participate in it. Thus, for instance, when Umar ibn Khattab converted to Islam he had to forego drinking wine and eating pork, and thus to check some of his desires or the particular forms taken by some of his instincts, but the religious, moral, political and legal structure of Islam obviously provided him with a
medium or instrument through which to express or satisfy his most fundamental drive or instinct, his will to power, and to do so on a scale of far greater power and magnitude than mere personal morality. And this did not mean only military conquest and rule, but forming the conquered peoples and civilizations into a new living structure, that provided by Muhammad and his revelation. Thus Umar’s mild suppression of certain instincts or desires and, more significantly, his spiritual and political subordination to Muhammad were secondary to the power and creative achievement they provided him.

Obviously, the Islamic conquest occurred at a much later and more developed stage of civilization, and effected a much less complete transformation, than the process described in 2.17, but I believe we can extrapolate from the former to the latter. With these questions about the basic coherency or plausibility of Nietzsche’s argument answered, we can turn to the rest of Nietzsche’s account of the bad conscience and its meaning and influence on subsequent human life and cultural development.
Chapter Eight

The Significance and Consequences of the Bad Conscience: Section 18

The major questions raised by Nietzsche’s treatment of the origin and influence of the bad conscience seem to me to revolve around the role of cruelty in the creation of morality and culture. More specifically, is the instinct for freedom or the active form-giving force, what Nietzsche here calls the will to power, simply motivated by cruelty, or rather by the desire to create? Is there a difference between the two manifestations of this desire to create—the grander, outwardly-directed version and the smaller, inwardly-directed one—such that the former is relatively free of cruelty while the latter is much more steeped in or inspired by cruelty? In short, which is primary, creation or cruelty?

At times Nietzsche seems to suggest that cruelty is an integral part of this drive to create and form that he also identifies as the will to power. For instance, Nietzsche groups cruelty (die Grausamkeit) among the primal instincts denied outward expression and consequently turned inward by the advent of society in section sixteen; these “instincts of freedom” which the first political human beings had to check or inhibit seem also to be the will to power, to include all the forms of the will to power that Nietzsche later names and ascribes to the artist-lawgivers. On the other hand, in his extended description of these artist-lawgivers who found states in 2.17, Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes their capacity for violence but does not attribute cruelty to them; violence is necessary for them to create, but they are not, according to this passage, actuated by cruelty, by the
desire to inflict pain on others. Thus “under the pressure of their hammer blows and artists’ violence (Künstler-Gewaltsamkeit)” an untold quantity of freedom was expelled from the world or at least made latent, repressed and forced to find release and satisfaction inwardly, within the individual’s psychic structure or economy. But in this passage the artist-lawgivers’ motive or aim is clearly to create, to fashion a “new…ruling structure that lives,” not to experience or enhance their own power through acts of cruelty.

Thus primitive or pre-political humanity seems to have been cruel, but not the artist-lawgivers who found states; these latter were physically violent and imposed their forms with the same amoral certainty of purpose, or ruthlessness, as any other artist, but were indifferent to the suffering they caused rather than gratified or exhilarated by it. Even in the case of pre-political humanity, however, Nietzsche may be speaking too loosely when he says they were moved by cruelty. After all, cruelty in the strict sense seems to require a much greater degree of self-consciousness, of awareness of oneself as a particular and distinct entity separate from the rest of the world and engaged in antagonistic or competitive relations with the other entities in that world, than these first humans possessed according to Nietzsche. Thus Nietzsche’s use of the word “cruelty” may be a polemical overstatement or anachronism, intended to impress upon his readers how violent and pitiless the original human beings were, and thus to underscore his differences not only with their humanitarian sensibilities but also with previous thinkers like Rousseau.
It is therefore when Nietzsche turns to portraying the effects or workings of the bad conscience, or to illuminating the bad conscience “from the inside,” so to speak, that he begins to dwell on or foreground cruelty. It is important to quote the passage at length.

Fundamentally it is after all the same active force that is at work on a grander scale in those artists of violence (Gewalt-Künstlern) and organizers and that builds states, which here, internally, on a smaller and pettier scale, directed backwards, in the “labyrinth of the breast,” to speak with Goethe, creates for itself the bad conscience and builds negative ideals—it is precisely that instinct for freedom (in my language: the will to power): only the material on which the form-giving and violating nature (Natur) of this force vents itself is here precisely the human being himself, his whole animal ancient self…This secret self-violation, this artists’ cruelty (Künstler-Grausamkeit), this pleasure (Lust) in giving a form to oneself as a hard (schweren), reluctant, suffering substance, in burning in (einzubrennen) a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a no, this uncanny and horribly pleasurable (entsetzlich-lustvolle) work of a soul willingly in conflict with itself, which makes itself suffer out of pleasure (Lust) in making suffer, this entire active “bad conscience” finally—one could guess it already—as the actual womb of ideal and imaginative events (Ereignisse) also brought to light an abundance of
strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps even for the first time
beauty itself.

Those who found states are artists of violence (Gewalt-Künstlern), and are
distinguished by “that terrible artists’ egoism (Künstler-Egoismus) that has the
look of bronze and knows (weiss) itself justified to all eternity in its ‘work,’ like a
mother in her child” (2.17); although this egoism is hard and amoral, it is not
particularly cruel or sadistic; it is concerned with the beauty and perfection of its
creation, not with glorying in the pain it causes to others. Those who live in these
states, on the other hand, and who are thus afflicted with the bad conscience, are
animated by an artists’ cruelty (Künstler-Grausamkeit). Again and again in this
passage Nietzsche stresses the pleasure (Lust) in cruelty and in making suffer that
inspires and permeates the work of the bad conscience, and so the capacity for
moral self-criticism and self-reformation that it brings into existence.

Thus, to ask it again, which is primary, creation or cruelty? One
possibility is to suggest, especially in the light of Nietzsche’s emphasis on the role
of cruelty in the bad conscience or in civilized morality, that the violence of the
artist-lawgivers depicted in 2.17 is impelled or caused by their desire to create, or
by the creative force of nature working through them, but that the self-violation
and imposing of a form on oneself described in 2.18 is largely the result of
cruelty, since the instincts have been stymied and turned inward. In other words,
the repression of instinct would make the instincts of aggression more self-
consciously cruel, or would make them demand a compensatory cruelty in
addition to simply creating new forms or reworking the basic structure or relation of one’s primal drives and instincts. Nietzsche’s emphasis on cruelty as a constituent or substrate of culture, both here and in sections 229 and 230 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, would then be appropriate to our dual natures as civilized or socialized human animals: as beings who still experience the promptings of nature we desire to create, we have a positive, spontaneous impulse to create, but as socialized creates whose natures have been mutilated or completely reworked, that impulse can no longer be separated from self-inflicted cruelty; cruelty is always there and part of that desire in us, as socialized or historical creatures.

The important point here seems to me to center on whether the bad conscience necessarily involves or is evoked by the need for compensatory cruelty, and to the extent that compensatory cruelty is synonymous with *ressentiment*, we have already discussed this in some detail. I therefore think that although the work of the bad conscience, or the violence and compulsion which constitutes or energizes social and moral life, involves more cruelty simply because cruelty in the strict sense requires more self-consciousness than pre-political humanity possesses, civil society effects no fundamental change in the character of aggression or violence (or cruelty in the broader sense in which Nietzsche seems to use it here), except to change its direction or objects, to force it to turn inward. The frustration of these basic impulses does not, however, make them more cruel or savage, something which probably tells us more about how violent primeval humanity is in Nietzsche’s conception, and how violent and tyrannical creation and particularly political creation and founding is, than it does
about how he understands the results of living in society. In other words, although the distinction between cruelty and pre-social or pre-political violence or aggression is important for descriptive psychological or phenomenological purposes, there is no essential difference between the two kinds of violence or desire for mastery. Both are equally savage or repressive and both involve the same element or degree of creative potential or aspiration.

But then, once again, we are back to the same question, which is primary, cruelty or creation? One cannot, on the reading I have proposed, sustain any meaningful distinction between a pre-political or pre-social era of pure creation and a civilized realm of inhibition and cruelty, or of a new form or kind of creativity driven by or infused with cruelty. But then what is the true motive or engine of the will to power or the instincts of freedom, the urge to create highlighted in 2.17 or the lust for cruelty which Nietzsche accentuates in 2.18? My basic view, for which I will argue in the following paragraphs, is that creation is primary, that the will to power is principally a will to create and to give or impose forms, and that Nietzsche’s emphasis on cruelty in 2.18 is chiefly for the sake of making a point about the character of morality, and in particular a polemical point about the origin and purpose of the morality of selflessness. Cruelty, as a sensation of power or mastery, may be an attendant pleasure to the artistic activity described in these passages, but to say that cruelty is the sole or even the primary motivation of creativity, that people write poetry or symphonies only because they enjoy the cruelty of forcing themselves to keep to a particular
form, seems to me both too grim and too crude to be Nietzsche’s position, and as I will try to show below, the text does not support this reading in any case.

I think it is first of all important to remember that, as we noted above, the source or substance of the bad conscience is not simple mindless cruelty or violence. It rather seems to be Nietzsche’s view that the instinct for freedom or the will to power is somehow present in all of the most fundamental drives or desires, including those apparently purely mindless and chaotic violent impulses of pre-political humanity. Thus the active force Nietzsche is describing is form-giving and artistic, not simply violent (in fact, it seems opposed to the simple destructive violence of pre-political humanity, since it restricts or represses it); the formation or building of the bad conscience is powered by this active, form-giving force, not by simple violence or cruelty turned inward.

Moreover, if cruelty is the primary motive of human creation and valuing, then self-affirmation seems impossible, since one is always acting based on one’s reaction to another, and even if that reaction is impulsively aggressive without being vengeful, it is still not self-affirming but rather directed or oriented towards another from the outset.

I believe this reading is further supported by the example of the artist-lawgivers, the purest exemplars or embodiments of the active, creative power under consideration here. There is first, of course, the fact that Nietzsche stresses their own artistic and creative activity, rather than any pleasure they derive from cruelty or even from their experience of power over others. They find their satisfaction and justification in their artistic creation or work. Furthermore,
however commanding or masterful the artist-lawgivers are, the will to power or the will of life is greater than them and only acting through them. Thus although they feel some sense of power and dominance both over others and within themselves (as one part of them dominates over the others), their aim is not only to subjugate and brutalize others but to discharge this larger will making itself felt or acting through them; their own sense of power or dominance is then not the essential aspect of their activity or experience. In short, creation is such an integral part of power or dominance as Nietzsche understands it that cruelty without creation is merely a sterile and inferior version or expression of the will to power.

Finally, I believe that this interpretation is confirmed by Nietzsche’s description of “the form-giving and violating nature (formbildende und vergewaltigende Natur) of this force” that creates both states and political life and the individual bad conscience. I think it is clear from Nietzsche’s account of the nature and activity of this force that it violates because it is form-giving, it does not form in order to violate; the violence and destruction of the artist-lawgivers is subordinate to or in the service of their creation and imposition of new forms. Here, moreover, Nietzsche again uses the word nature to describe the creative or form-giving action or propensity of the will to power, not the simply destructive or chaotic. However much the instincts of freedom or the will to power also delight in attack, destruction, change and so forth, Nietzsche only describes the will to power as natural when it is building and establishing new forms.
Although I think that this interpretation offers the most coherent and, to my mind, intellectually satisfying account of Nietzsche’s understanding of the relation between creativity and cruelty, specifically in the founding of political societies and the growth of the bad conscience, there is no denying that he repeatedly underlines the importance of cruelty in this section. As I have argued, however, the cruelty inherent in or animating civilized morality and culture does not arise in response to frustration or weakness (in contrast to ressentiment), and is therefore also not the primary or defining feature of that morality and culture. Yet even beyond that, Nietzsche’s emphasis on cruelty in the eighteenth section seems to me to be above all due to his tendency to overstate his negative or polemical point. Perhaps the most significant example of this tendency is his question, “After all, what would be ‘beautiful’ if the contradiction had not first become conscious of itself, if the ugly had not first said to itself: ‘I am ugly’?” According to this formulation there would be no natural, primary or spontaneous experience of beauty, only the negation or turning against one’s basic impulses or instincts (and thus a judgment that “I am ugly”). Yet Nietzsche goes on to qualify or restrict this claim by saying that “[t]his hint will at least make less enigmatic” how selflessness, self-denial or self-sacrifice could come to signify an ideal or a form of beauty; the “at least (Zum Mindesten)” suggests that his radical claim that beauty is only a secondary and negative phenomenon is an overstatement, and indeed it contradicts other claims Nietzsche advances elsewhere with at least equal vigor and passion (cf., e.g., GD, “Expeditions,” 20). When Nietzsche turns to this topic of the unegoistic and the morality of self-sacrifice, he reinforces the
impression that he has been exaggerating the role of cruelty in human creativity for the sake of debunking this morality, saying that the foregoing makes clear “the type (Art) of the pleasure (Lust) that the selfless man, the self-denier, the self-sacrificer feels from the first: this pleasure belongs to cruelty.” Thus perhaps some of the emphasis on cruelty in this section, rather than on a positive creative impulse or goal, is due to Nietzsche’s attempt to conclude with an explanation or demystification of the unegoistic, or of the refusal or negation of one’s instinctual demands, and to explain that it owes its allure and indeed its very possibility to (self-inflicted) cruelty: “only the bad conscience, only the will to self-maltreatment provided the presupposition for the value of the unegoistic.”

Even so, in this section Nietzsche again confers considerable praise on the bad conscience. Nietzsche describes the bad conscience as “the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena;” this is a compressed formulation, but it suggests that all “ideals” and even all imagination is the result of the inhibition or repression of humanity’s basic animal instincts, and in particular its violent or aggressive instincts. More broadly, in the case of the bad conscience “the form-giving and violating nature of this force” is turned inward, but also directed toward something much more general, “the human being itself;” in a sense, this is more impressive and “pregnant with a future” than simply molding this or that group of men into a social or political order; the bad conscience starts to change or rework humanity as such.
There is one final and major point that Nietzsche’s account of the bad conscience in these sections makes, one that is especially important for his overall presentation of the history and meaning of morality. The picture that seems to emerge from this discussion of the origins of the bad conscience is that “that uncanny and possibly insoluble intertwining of the ideas ‘guilt and suffering (Schuld und Leid)’ was first effected” (2.6) by the repression of instinct. One was unable to discharge or satisfy one’s basic desires or instincts, especially one’s violent impulses, and so one turned against them, and in particular tortured oneself for having them, condemned them, made oneself suffer (psychologically and, often enough, physically) for having them. Thus it becomes clear that the moralization of Schuld, the intertwining of legal and moral guilt and thus of guilt/debt and suffering, began almost immediately with the advent of political society. Through the process described above, one began to turn against one’s basic aggressive instincts and to attack them, and thus to attack oneself for having them. Nietzsche’s earlier suggestions that there was a pre-moral stage of society must therefore be taken as referring only to the pre-political, tribal and instinctual kind of society sketched above. If a fully developed or realized moralized sense of guilt is not as old as society itself, the construction or formation of that sense of guilt begins immediately with the imposition of law and consequent repression or inhibition of instinct.
Chapter Nine

The History and Development of the Bad Conscience: Sections 19-25

In the nineteenth section Nietzsche turns to consider the history of the bad conscience and “the conditions under which this illness has reached its most terrible and most sublime peak—we will then see what has really thereby made its entrance into the world.” Repeatedly in these sections Nietzsche refers to the bad conscience as both a pregnancy and an illness, thus recalling Nietzsche’s discussion of the priest in the First Essay (especially 1.6) as well as illustrating the painful and sickly character of even organic or natural creation in Nietzsche’s view. Even when nature creates, it does so by violating the boundaries or integrity of one of its own forms, breaking it open so as to produce or draw forth something beyond it (much more so, obviously, in the case of the bad conscience, a necessarily dynamic psychological process or attitude that constantly seeks to intensify or improve itself, than in the case of actual pregnancy, in which one member of a biological species seeks simply to reproduce itself).

In any case, in this and the following sections Nietzsche passes over a more detailed treatment of how precisely the bad conscience or moral faculties developed out of basic or primal violent instincts. He instead suggests, in a surprisingly Platonic or Aristotelian vein, that the fully developed form of the bad conscience will give us the truest picture of what it is. This part of the Second Essay seems to me to be the weakest part of Nietzsche’s account of the rise and history of morality, which is perhaps not surprising. Any attempt to compress the
entire history of morality and religion from prehistorical times to the present day into a few paragraphs is bound to be incomplete at best. Be that as it may, I will try in what follows to present the best possible case for what I take to be Nietzsche’s position, while still noting what seem to me to be the irremediable or indisputable problems with his analysis, as well as the questions it simply leaves unanswered. I will also try to consider whether or in what way these problems or omissions create difficulties for the larger argument and narrative of the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*.

Nietzsche begins this investigation by noting that the “private law (privatrechtliche)” relationship of a debtor to his creditor has “once again (noch einmal)” been interpreted into (hineininterpretirt) a relationship in which it is “most unintelligible (unverständlichsten)” to us moderns. The “once again” emphasizes both that this relationship has again and again been interpreted or read into other, new relationships, and that this interpretation has so often been incomprehensible to modern humanity. The particular relationship that Nietzsche focuses on here is that between a primitive or prehistoric tribal community and its ancestors and especially its founders, and the basic argument of section nineteen is that the earliest communities recognized a debt or legal obligation to their ancestors, whom they believed continued to exist as powerful spirits and to protect the community and increase its power. An integral part of Nietzsche’s argument is that the more powerful one’s tribe or community became the more primitive humanity believed in and feared the power of the ancestors, while a decline in the fortunes of the community was experienced almost as a liberation...
from their power, or in any case made one fear and esteem the ancestors less. These claims may be true, but Nietzsche offers no particular evidence for them, and it is not clear if he is referring to facts he takes as established and widely known or if he is simply asserting all of this.

“Within the original tribal community (der ursprünglichen Geschlechtsgenossenschaft)—we are speaking of primeval times (Urzeiten)—the living generation always recognized a juridical duty towards earlier generations, and especially towards the earliest, which founded the tribe (geschlecht-begründende).” The first and most obvious question raised by this statement concerns the time period or stage of civilization of which Nietzsche is here speaking. Despite some of the indications Nietzsche gives that he is here describing a pre-political, primarily familial and thus more “organic” form of society or community than that described in 2.16-18, I think that he is in fact describing a time after the founding of political society. In the first place, the existence of some sense or conception of debt, in however crude or vague a form, the notion of a specific, concrete good for which the present generation owes its ancestors (even as gross or all-encompassing a good as its survival), implies that a

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136 The word that Nietzsche uses for this form or phase of society and which Kaufmann and Hollingdale translate as “tribe,” Geschlecht, perhaps suggests above all a form of social organization or community based on blood lines or lineage (a reading further supported by the opening of the twentieth section), but it could also mean race or species, and Nietzsche here twice uses the phrase Menschengeschlechts, the human race. At the end of section nineteen Nietzsche speaks of noble races, vornnehmen Geschlechter, by which he appears to mean the ancient Greeks (cf. the end of 2.19 with 2.23). He has then apparently purposely chosen the word Geschlecht because of its capaciousness or flexibility, in order to facilitate his narration of the history of this sense of guilt or obligation to the ancestors from pre-history to at least the time of the ancient Greeks. In other words, the terminology by itself settles nothing.
more powerful group has already appeared and imposed the legal interpretation or
appropriation of the concepts of equivalences and debt on the tribe. When
Nietzsche mentions the statutes and commands (Satzungen und Befehle)\(^{137}\) of the
ancestor-founders, it becomes even more apparent that he is describing a political
community with clearly defined laws, not a nomad population still unformed and
unchecked by a law code and political structure. It is then easy to see how the
violent and terrifying origin of political society described in 2.17 would lead to
the religious fear of the ancestors described here, and how the founders of the
tribe and its law would later be conceived of as heroes emerging from and
impressing order upon the anarchic world predating the religious, political and
legal systems governing the tribe (though in recorded religious history these
founders often act with the help or direction of a god or gods, in Nietzsche’s
account they become the gods rather than being begat or instructed by them).

Indeed, it should perhaps be rather obvious that Nietzsche is here dealing
exclusively with political or social life, since he is, as he announces at the
beginning of the section, discussing the development of the bad conscience,
which belongs entirely to political society, as Nietzsche has just argued at some
length. In other words, Nietzsche is here describing the evolution of the bad
conscience, no longer the origin of society or political life. One might object that,
at least in this initial part of his argument in section nineteen, Nietzsche does not
seem to be treating the specifically moral phenomenon of the bad conscience, but
rather a purely amoral period in the history of Schuldgefühl, and that what

\(^{137}\) The word Befehle further calls to mind the founders of states who “can
command (befehlen kann), who are by nature ‘master’” (2.17).
Nietzsche is describing here is a purely external relation of debt to the ancestors, not the internal or introspective work of the bad conscience. As Nietzsche explains at the beginning of 2.21, however, he is here purposely refraining from mentioning “the actual moralization of these concepts” of Schuld and duty. In short, this part of Nietzsche’s account or narrative unmistakably concerns a very early stage of political society (perhaps the earliest, or the earliest after the initial extreme violence and relative chaos of the founding has subsided), not a pre-political world of organic or purely instinctual association. Thus the debtor-creditor relationship, or the basic idea of economic exchange and equivalence, has already been reinterpreted, reused and redirected, from a method for two individuals to confront and evaluate or measure one another to a concept or relation by which the community demands obedience of its members, and finally to a means for the founders of a political society to enforce obedience among subsequent generations of their community.

This reading also, I think, helps to explain the extreme fearfulness Nietzsche attributes to these early humans. There is, after all, no obvious or self-evident reason why they should be plagued or haunted by the “suspicion” that they have not repaid their ancestors sufficiently, much less why that suspicion should “remain and grow.” In primeval times, Nietzsche argues, an increase in power did not, as modern men may think, lead to an increase in the feeling of independence and freedom, but rather to an increase in superstitious fear, for these prehistoric humans did not believe that they could be the cause of their own success or power (Nietzsche’s emphasis here on the mere survival of the tribe and
on the “prudence, foresight and present power” of the ancestors makes clear just how Hobbesian this part of his account is). But why should they have been so fearful, and does this abject cringing leave any room for the will to power? The answer seems to be that the memory of the terrible and astonishingly violent founding of the political community still lives in their memory (in the somewhat transfigured form of a religious terror or dread of the founders and ancestors). This would also then have been during the epoch of the morality of mores, which both indicates that the members of these tribes were probably still more violent and disruptive or chaotic than Nietzsche’s brief sketch here may suggest, and thus also explains the need for the enormous fear and angst attending the customs imposed on the tribe (see again the discussions of the morality of mores from *Daybreak, M 9, 14, 16*). In short, the people living at this time or stage of political and cultural development were presumably wild and savage enough that they needed this kind of intense fear as a bulwark or constraint, to keep them from tearing the still relatively embryonic political community to shreds. This fear did not preclude or obliterate the other, more violent and aggressive drives and instincts, but rather had to counter and master them. At the same time, at this earliest stage or incarnation of the bad conscience the instincts of aggression were

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138 Nietzsche may seem here to be giving a crude, monocausal account of why and how a tribe’s belief in the power of its ancestors waxes and wanes, one that, if nothing else, does not jibe with what we know of ancient religious attitudes in recorded history. The Spartans and the Athenians, for instance, had radically different postures towards the gods and towards their respective ancestral laws when the two cities were the most powerful in Greece. Nietzsche would presumably respond that the religious and moral lives of prehistoric tribes were indeed so crude and monochromatic or one-dimensional that his account accurately represents them.
being turned against precisely these unruly or disobedient impulses, and it was
against these most fundamental urges for freedom or chaotic autonomy that the
bad conscience would have directed its sense of hostility and abuse, and for which
these earliest humans would have first begun to feel guilty. They would have
needed to condemn and wage war against their basic violent impulses in order to
exist in society, but it would have been in terms of defiance to the ancestors and
their laws that they would have first conceived of and experienced actual guilt or
moral self-censure (obviously mixed with a large dose of simple fear).

This helps, I think, to make sense of and to fill out Nietzsche’s account of
the earliest society and the origin of the bad conscience. To proceed to the heart
of Nietzsche’s argument in the nineteenth section: he maintains that in these
primeval societies or unions, the living generations feel indebted towards their
ancestors and especially towards the earliest generation of the tribe for their
“sacrifices and achievements (*Opfer und Leistungen*):” “Here reigns the
conviction that it is only through the sacrifices and accomplishments of the
ancestors that the tribe exists—and that one has to *pay them back* with sacrifices
and accomplishments: one thus recognizes a *debt* (Schuld) that constantly grows
greater, since these forebears, in their continued existence as powerful spirits, do
not stop affording the tribe new advantages and advance payments (*Vorschüsse*)
by means of their strength.” This claim raises the question of how exactly the
founders’ and forebears’ sacrifices and achievements come to be the cause of the
power of later generations. It is not entirely clear what the achievements or
contributions (*Leistungen*) of the ancestors were, but the prominence Nietzsche
assigns to their sacrifices suggests that suffering was a crucial part of the power the ancestors built up and possessed as spirits. This is consistent with Nietzsche’s earlier and repeated claims that suffering was a form of payment or credit among prehistoric humanity, but in this case one must ask, To whom is the payment being made? Did primitive humanity simply read this into the order of things, as if suffering won the sufferer credit with the universe? Nothing else Nietzsche says anywhere in the Second Essay (or in his other writings) suggests this. On the contrary, as Nietzsche says in section seven, ancient humanity understood all suffering in relation to a spectator, as justified or given meaning to the extent that it was observed and found interesting by an observer. This also would have prevented the religious beliefs of humanity at this relatively early stage of the bad conscience from being too moralized, for the ancestors won their power not by submission to a legal or financial order, not because they “deserved” or “earned” this posthumous power as a compensation for their suffering, but because they were interesting to the gods. But in this case it seems as if the gods must have already existed in people’s imaginations, and the suggestion that Nietzsche later makes that the gods originated from this early view of the ancestors as powerful spirits seems untenable, and even flatly contradicted by the rest of his account, including this portion that proceeds it by just a few lines.

Indeed, Nietzsche’s claim that the belief in the gods, and in fact the very concept of a god, first sprang from the awesome and deranging fear of the ancestors seems to me wholly unpersuasive and generally a weak point of his argument here. As I have just suggested, the fear of the ancestors itself seems to
rely on a belief in gods who are more powerful than the ancestors, and in any case, if these prehistoric humans already believed in a supernatural or numinous realm of spirits that survive death (and are perhaps immortal), why shouldn’t they also already believe in gods? For that matter, is there in Nietzsche’s account, indeed could there be, an actual defining moment when a spirit becomes a god, much less one that can be recovered historically and have any actual theoretical or even historiographic significance? Finally, it is odd that Nietzsche seems to take his proposal here, that belief in the gods originated in fear, as so novel and daring when similar arguments had been advanced earlier by Lucretius and Thomas Hobbes. Granted, there is a characteristic difference between Nietzsche and Hobbes: Nietzsche is arguing that this fear comes from a guilty sense of indebtedness and submission to the ancestors, while for Hobbes the fear comes from primitive humanity’s lack of control over their physical safety and comfort. Although Nietzsche does focus on the concern for simple preservation in this section, the fear he is describing must ultimately be viewed in primarily moral and psychological terms (and this is in any case the aspect of it which draws Nietzsche’s interest), while for Hobbes it is explicable as simple self-interested anxiety over mundane reality, and can be assuaged by giving human beings control over that reality through science and technology. Even given these differences, however, Nietzsche’s basic claim that belief in the gods arose out of fear is not as original or as audacious as he seems to think it is.

Leaving aside Nietzsche’s account of the origin of the gods, which he admittedly presents in somewhat hypothetical or speculative terms, one cannot
help but wonder if the “juridical [or “legal”] duty (eine juristische Verpflichtung)” that prehistoric humanity recognized towards its ancestors was really as contractual or legalistic as Nietzsche makes it out to be. To be sure, Nietzsche is almost certainly right to emphasize the purely legalistic, ceremonial and even purely contractual character of early religion, especially compared to Christianity. But did filial piety play no part in the ancestor worship he describes, either in its origins or in its development and lasting strength? As he did earlier in his account of the rise or origin of political society, Nietzsche here abstracts completely from the family and makes ancestor worship into a purely economic-contractual matter. Again, Nietzsche is probably right that early religion was primarily a matter of fear (though he seems to me to differ from Hobbes on this point chiefly only in introducing the arrangement or configuration of debtor and creditor as the relation structuring or informing that fear). But the extent to which he denies any other motivation or meaning for this primeval ancestor worship is perhaps surprising, and certainly helps to throw Nietzsche’s position into sharper relief.

Granted, it is difficult to contest or query Nietzsche’s claim that these early humans honored the “statutes and commands” of their ancestors solely out of fearful obedience, since he is apparently speaking of prehistory, and there are thus no records to which one can appeal. But certainly written history contains many examples of ancestral laws that claimed to be binding on members of a particular group both because the laws themselves constituted that group and because the laws were good or useful. In other words, and to put the matter in Socratic terms, Nietzsche seems to deny or prescind entirely from both the love of
one’s own and the love of the good. This is in keeping with Nietzsche’s presentation of the character of the morality of mores and of primitive society in *Daybreak*. So tenuous is early society, so lacking is it in any kind of natural support or attraction, that “[a]mong primitive peoples there is a species of customs (Sitte) whose purpose appears to be custom in general: minute and fundamentally superfluous stipulations…which, however, keep continually in the consciousness the constant proximity of custom, the perpetual compulsion to practice customs: so as to strengthen the mighty proposition with which civilization (*Civilisation*) begins: any custom is better than no custom” (*M* 16; the section is titled “First Proposition of Civilization”). The first principle of civilization is not to seek the good or even to seek greater security or comfort but rather simply to establish custom in order to make settled communal life possible at all.

All of this reflects or illustrates Nietzsche’s larger anti-Socratic or anti-Aristotelian insistence that human beings are not naturally directed to political community, neither to pursue the good through politics nor to satisfy some natural need or longing for community, nor even to better secure or provide for themselves materially. As we have seen in some detail at this point, it is difficult to ascribe a simple or uniform position to Nietzsche regarding the relation between nature and politics; or more accurately, for Nietzsche it is not possible accurately to represent the relation between nature and politics in simple or uniform terms. Political life seems to do tremendous violence to the original and apparently natural character of humanity, but precisely this violence seems to
express nature’s purposes for Nietzsche. A crucial part of the difference between Nietzsche and the ancients seems to be that for the ancients humanity occupies a privileged place in nature, that nature expresses its highest or most important purposes through humanity, while for Nietzsche human beings are just another substance, or another temporary but determinate form of the will to power, which nature molds, shapes and then destroys in order to shape again. Humanity is a means or medium through which nature expresses its creative purposes, but not an especially significant or prized medium.

In the twentieth section Nietzsche explains or sketches the transition from communities based on familial or blood bonds to larger political communities, and affirms that the feeling of Schuld towards the deity did not end with this transition. One of the major questions that I think is raised by these sections is the identity and status of the noble tribes Nietzsche discusses here, and how they relate to his other treatments of nobility, both as a political class and as a spiritual quality. Towards the end of section nineteen Nietzsche says that human beings did not begin regarding the gods with piety (as opposed to pure fear) until an “intermediate age (mittlere Zeit),” in which this attitude of piety or reverence apparently first appeared in “the noble tribes (die vornehmen Geschlechter)” who developed in the same period. Given that Nietzsche later cites Homer to illustrate the beliefs and attitudes of these nobles, the archaic Greeks are presumably one of the purest instances of these noble tribes or races, and the “intermediate age” to which Nietzsche refers presumably encompasses this time period (perhaps the era
Nietzsche has in mind is intermediate between prehistory and modernity, or between prehistorical or primitive humanity and the emergence of Christianity.

This means, then, that the early or primitive tribal nobility Nietzsche describes in the twentieth section do not belong to this period of noble reverence for the gods. Nietzsche makes this clear by saying that, just as humanity has inherited from “the tribal aristocracy (Geschlechts-Adel) the concepts ‘good and bad’ ...(together with its psychological propensity (Grundhange) to establish orders of rank),” so too it has acquired, “along with the inheritance of the tribal and family divinities (Geschlechts- und Stammgottheiten), also the pressure of still unpaid debts and the longing to be relieved (Ablösung) of them.” If the rest of humanity inherited this sense of indebtedness to the gods, and the earliest form of this Schuldgefühl was fearful obedience devoid of any sense of reverence or piety, then the tribal aristocracy with which this sense or feeling originates is clearly a different aristocracy or nobility from that which later ennobles the gods.\footnote{On the other hand, one wonders why it should have been these prehistoric nobles from which this feeling and set of beliefs emanated. Why should the feeling of indebtedness towards the ancestors not have been universal to begin with? I think Nietzsche’s answer would be that the highest class of society had the most power and thus the most for which to feel indebted, and that it was thus in this caste that the bad conscience first began to take or create this particular form for itself.} Thus despite the fact that, as Nietzsche explicitly states here, this prehistoric tribal aristocracy made the distinctions between “good” and “bad” that Nietzsche treats in the First Essay, it still viewed the gods with fear, as angry and terrible creditors, not yet as a means for these aristocrats to affirm themselves. These earliest nobles would have been self-affirming but still superstitious and
fearful, and thus only self-affirming vis-à-vis the lower orders of their own society. The later “noble tribes” ennobled the gods by using them to affirm themselves, which meant in the first place making the gods the source of human “guilt” or mistakes, rather than moralistic observers judging and punishing human sin; by contrast, these early tribal aristocracies which have been the focus of Nietzsche’s attention here in sections nineteen and twenty still feared the punishment of the ancestor-gods. Thus, as Nietzsche says at the end of the nineteenth section, *pietät*, reverence or piety, arrives only with the noble tribes, who treated the gods as objects of reverence, rather than of simple fear; only these later nobles affirmed themselves in their gods both by using the gods to maintain their own sense of self-worth and self-affirmation and by reading their own nobles qualities into the gods, and seeking to repay the gods by being noble themselves, by manifesting those noble qualities in themselves.

As for Nietzsche’s treatment of the history or development of the belief in divinity, he tends to present some major features or principles of his analysis rather casually. His suggestion, for instance, that “the confused genealogies (*Genealogien-Wirrwarr*)” of the gods, “the sagas of the gods’ struggles, victories and reconciliations,” are the product or reflection of the racial or ethnic struggles that have occurred in the history of a people or a nation seems a major proposition, especially if the essay is a genuine attempt at history or at shaping future scholarly research. Nietzsche, however, simply tosses it off offhandedly and indeed parenthetically and with no real evidence or elaboration. Again one wonders if this is meant to be a point Nietzsche takes as established or a common
feature of contemporary scholarship, or a radically new suggestion. Likewise with his claim that “the progress toward universal empires is always also the progress toward universal divinities; despotism, with its subjugation of the independent aristocracy (Adels) always also paves the way for some kind of monotheism.”

Whatever the status or full implication of this contention, it is the basis for a crucial but, it seems to me, highly dubious step in Nietzsche’s argument concerning the development of the bad conscience. The despotism of the late Roman Empire presumably provided the fertile ground for the emergence and rise of Christianity, but Nietzsche here describes the Christian god as “the maximum God (Maximal-Gottes) attained so far.” But why should this be so? If, as Nietzsche suggests in 2.19, the fear of the gods or the belief in their power grows with the power of the tribe, why should the Judeo-Christian God have been the most powerful, since its tribe clearly was not? Why should Christianity have been the religion to emerge from the Roman empire? And, for that matter, how does Nietzsche’s account of the rise of religious belief and feeling here square with his discussion of the priest and the rise of Judeo-Christian morality out of political weakness in the First Essay?

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140 This assertion may seem like a crude reduction of spiritual experiences or phenomena to purely material relations of political power, but Nietzsche is simply maintaining that a certain material or political situation is a necessary condition of a particular religious belief, not that all spiritual phenomena are reducible to material causes. Moreover, it is possible that both the political reality of despotism and the religious reality of monotheism are produced by a deeper cause or complex of causes.
Moreover, what does it mean to say that the Christian God is the “maximum God”? If there is only one type of God, and the Christian God is the maximum form or type of that God, then the difference between the Christian God and the Greek gods, a difference that Nietzsche will soon insist is crucial, seems rather trivial. Yet this conclusion that there is fundamentally only one type of god is in keeping with Nietzsche’s presentation of the bad conscience as a sickness which afflicts or constitutes every human being living in society. Similarly, Nietzsche says here that the feeling of guilty indebtedness (Schuldgefühl) towards the divinity “always increases in the same measure as the concept of God and the feeling for God (der Gottesbegriff und das Gottesgefühl) increased on earth and was carried to the heights.” Presumably this means the holiness of God, at least if the Christian God is the maximum god attained so far. This, indeed, seems to be what Nietzsche goes on to argue: the more holy, the more exalted above earthly existence, one imagined God to be, the more abject or intense the feeling of guilt or debt before him. Again, however, this seems to suggest a single kind or type of “feeling for divinity” which is carried to its highest pitch or furthest limit in the case of Christianity; in this case a species of gods that deify the animal in man rather than negating it, as Nietzsche later claims the Greek gods did, seems impossible.

In any case, Nietzsche concludes his reflections about the relation between the feeling for divinity and the feeling of guilt by proposing that with the end of belief in the Christian God, this human feeling of guilt may also be doomed. More specifically, Nietzsche suggests at the end of section twenty that the loss of
faith in God may do away with humanity’s feeling of Schuld “toward its beginning (Anfang), its causa prima,” for if one sees the origin or first cause of humanity as a purposeless or at least amoral cosmos, rather than a god who makes demands on humans, it is still possible to feel grateful or otherwise to affirm such a cosmos, but it is hard to see how or why one would feel guilty or even indebted before it. Yet, as we learn at once in the twenty-first section, this optimistic suggestion is simply false; humanity has developed a moralized sense of Schuld towards its origin or first cause even when that cause is understood as impersonal and amoral, and therefore the way remains blocked to the easy regression to or recovery of innocence (Unschuld) that Nietzsche had held out at the end of 2.20 as a happy consequence of the death of God.

Nietzsche announces all of this in the first sentence of section twenty-one: “This for the time being briefly and crudely on the connection of the concepts ‘Schuld’ and ‘duty (Pflicht)” with religious presuppositions: I have so far intentionally ignored the actual moralization of these concepts (their pushing back into the conscience, still more precisely, the involvement of the bad conscience with the concept of God).” In other words, thus far Nietzsche has been describing only a very crude and amoral concept of indebtedness, and explaining how it came to be coupled with religious presuppositions, and more specifically how it has affected people’s attitudes toward the gods or God. The basic concept with which he was working, or the form in which he was deploying it in the previous section(s), was one of a debt which people wanted to discharge, not a moralized sense of guilt. Now he turns, as he puts it, to the moralization of these concepts,
their becoming bound up with the conscience and in particular with the bad conscience, the will to self-maltreatment of the socialized human animal. Nietzsche speaks of these concepts being pushed “back” into the conscience, and in some sense the conscience seems to be hidden from view or subterranean; it is more inward, more complicated, more mysterious, darker—we move from an external sense of debt which one wants to discharge or be relieved of to an internal sense of guilt which, by its very nature or purpose, can never be discharged.

The moralization of the concepts of guilt and duty, according to Nietzsche, represents an attempt “to reverse the direction of the development described above,” namely the development towards a second innocence. The aim of this moralization is to make it impossible for humanity ever to discharge its debt, ever to be rid of its guilt or Schuldgefühl. In other words, the moralization of the concepts of Schuld and of duty (which Nietzsche has linked with Schuld throughout the Second Essay) marks an attempt to bind humanity forever to its sense of Schuld, to make it impossible for humanity ever to free itself from its sense of guilt. The fundamental purpose or motive here is for humanity not only to turn against itself, to judge itself hopeless or worthless or evil or perverse, but to turn against its origin as well, whether that origin is a human ancestor, nature, or existence itself, and thus finally to reject or condemn existence in general—all, ultimately (as Nietzsche tells us in the next section), to pass the most severe judgment or to turn as severely as possible against oneself, against one’s nature and one’s existence, in order to negate oneself as thoroughly and cruelly as
possible, in accord with the dictates of the bad conscience, of cruelty turned inward. The goal here is to produce a view and feeling of oneself as irredeemable, of humanity as irredeemable, and of existence as irredeemable, to declare and believe and feel all of these things to be purely evil and only to be negated, in order to serve the bad conscience, to be as cruel as possible to oneself and to follow through on the logic of the bad conscience, to negate and attempt to destroy what actually exists, to negate and make war against one’s natural impulses as strenuously and thoroughly as possible.

Thus “at last the irredeemable _Schuld_ gives rise to the conception of irredeemable penance, the idea that it cannot be discharged (‘eternal’ punishment),” the idea that the individual is guilty beyond all redemption, that he is wholly and hopelessly sunk in sin and cannot be redeemed, that he cannot be saved, that life in general cannot be saved or affirmed. Again, this judgment spreads or extends from the individual to existence as a whole as the source of the hopelessly corrupt or sinful individual. Finally, according to Nietzsche, Christianity provides a “paradoxical and horrifying expedient” for “tormented humanity,” by suggesting that humanity can be redeemed by the sacrifice of its creditor, of God Himself. This means, however, that Christianity is a solution to a problem or a gruesome logic that predates it, or a response to an earlier and deeper phenomenon. Christianity would thus seem not to be uniquely bad or life-denying, but rather a moment in the unfolding of a much older and more universal process or set of consequences. In other words, Christianity seems merely to offer a solution or expedient to a problem that predates it, to the terrible tension or
suffering caused by the bad conscience or by the will to self-maltreatment of the human animal trapped in the cage of society. Christianity seems to be secondary to this action and this process, and if it represents the height or the most intense form of this process or logic of self-torture, it does not seem to be different in kind from any other religious or moral system. Thus what Nietzsche goes on to condemn in section twenty-two seems to be the more general activity of the bad conscience using religious presuppositions to create ideals for the sake of negating and tormenting and persecuting humanity, and especially its fundamental animal nature. Despite Nietzsche’s specific and fervent strictures against Christianity, nothing that Christianity does seems truly unique or unprecedented; Christianity seems rather to come fairly late in the process Nietzsche is describing and to respond to a grisly problem that has already existed for some time.

One of the most significant purposes of these sections seems to me to be to illustrate Nietzsche’s earlier claims about the character of history and especially of the history of morality. In this case, we see that the debtor-creditor relationship was just lying around, so to speak, like everything else in history, and was seized upon by a more powerful living, shaping force, in this case the impulses and energies bound together or collected in the bad conscience, and reinterpreted and redirected to a new end and purpose. Thus the amoral sense of debt, including the amoral debt to the ancestors that could be paid through simple obedience to customs, was transformed into the moral sense of Schuld, was pushed “back” into the (bad) conscience, and became a conceptual instrument of self-torture for the caged human animal. In this sense, then, these final sections of the essay reiterate
the central point, the one expressed in sections twelve and thirteen, rather than building to a crescendo or major teaching of the essay.

As we move to the twenty-second section of the Second Essay, it is once again difficult to improve upon or add anything to Nietzsche’s own statement (and it is again tempting simply to quote the passage at length). The basic point of this section, and to some extent of this whole discussion of religion (beginning in section 19), is expressed in the first two sentences: “One will have guessed already what has really happened with all of this and under all of this: that will to self-tortment, that repressed (zurückgetretene) cruelty of the human animal made inward and chased back into himself, locked up in the ‘state’ so as to be tamed, who invented the bad conscience in order to hurt himself after the more natural outlet (natürlichere Ausweg) for this will-to-hurt was blocked—this human being of the bad conscience seized upon religious presuppositions in order to drive his self-torture to its most horrible height and severity. Guilt before God: this thought becomes for him an instrument of torture.” Nietzsche spells out the consequences or meaning of this maneuver brilliantly.

He apprehends in “God” the ultimate antitheses that he can find to his actual and irremovable (unablöslichen) animal instincts, he interprets these instincts themselves as guilt (Schuld) before God (as hostility, rebellion, revolt against the “Master,” the “Father,” the ancestor and beginning of the world), he stretches himself upon the contradiction “God” and “Devil,” all of the No he says to himself, to nature, to
naturalness, to the actuality of his essence,\textsuperscript{141} he casts out from himself as a Yes, as something existent, real (leibhaft), actual, as God, as the holiness of God, as God the Judge, as God the Executioner, as beyond, as eternity, as torture without end, as hell, as the immeasurability of punishment and of guilt (Schuld).

Again, the negation of one’s self, of one’s naturalness or natural instincts, is itself the creation of an ideal, and in this case not only an ideal of conduct but a superhuman judge and punisher, a judge and punisher who is “holy,” who is free from all the naturalness of the human. God is the antithesis of the qualities of humanity, but the divine attributes are considered superior to or exalted above the human only because they are the opposite of the natural instincts of the one forced to negate and make war on himself; there is no natural, logical or independent basis for preferring or honoring the characteristics attributed to God, it is merely a matter of identifying and praising or valuing the opposite of what humanity possesses or feels in itself. There is no reason, for instance, to value or prefer the eternal over the temporal, and indeed there is good reason to value and prefer the temporal, since that is what actually exists, and since one could argue that nothing is eternal. But precisely because this is what exists, precisely because this is what marks or characterizes humanity and its existence, the bad conscience condemns and negates it and makes an ideal and perfection out of its contrary or opposite.

\textsuperscript{141} Or, “the No he says to himself, to the nature, the naturalness, the actuality of his essence (Alles Nein, das er zu sich selbst, zur Natur, Natürlichkeit, Thatsächlichkeit seines Wesens sagt).”
Nietzsche continues or sharpens this argument in the twenty-second section, which to a large extent simply makes the same point as the eighteenth section, only now with a polemical thrust. In particular, Nietzsche emphasizes here that the bad conscience forces a human being to turn his negation of himself into an affirmation and an ideal, and is harshly critical of this fact. But isn’t that precisely what Nietzsche had praised the bad conscience for doing in section eighteen? Moreover, Nietzsche emphasizes here that the bad conscience denies “nature, naturalness, and actuality,” but based on everything he had said previously in the Second Essay, the bad conscience seems to be as much an expression of nature and actuality (Thatsächlichkeit) as is anything. Although Nietzsche does not explicitly say that the bad conscience is natural or caused by nature, he does refer to “the form-giving and violating nature (formbildende und vergewaltigende Natur) of this force” that creates both states and political life and the individual bad conscience, implying that the force itself, the instinct for freedom or the will to power, is natural, or at least that its nature remains intact or unaltered or undeformed even when it expresses or manifests itself in the bad conscience. Thus the “more natural outlet for this will-to-hurt” of which Nietzsche speaks here may be more natural in the sense of more basic or more spontaneous, but, as Nietzsche insisted in 2.18, the same basic active force is at work in both cases. So his discussion or presentation of the bad conscience here seems rather one-sided, focusing on or mentioning only one part of its activity or significance, the part that negates a certain basic set of natural drives, but ignoring
the ways in which doing so is itself an expression or articulation of the nature of
the will to power.\textsuperscript{142}

There is, more generally, the fact that nature itself seems to desire to
create, and thus to create the same inhibitions and impositions which constitute or
make possible the bad conscience. Thus the problem with nature, in Nietzsche’s
view, seems once again to be not that it has no intentions or purposes, nor even
that it cannot realize its intentions, but rather that it has contradictory intentions,
that nature creates convention, that it creates the conditions of its own
enslavement or mutilation or subjection—both the artist-lawgivers in 2.17 and the
founders of aristocratic societies in \textit{J} 257 are distinguished by their naturalness,
but they act to found society, to impose forms on nature. This also, however,
makes it difficult to distinguish between nature and anything else (e.g., life or the
will to power in \textit{J} 9), for nature itself seems to “call for” or to produce or bring
forth constraints on nature; nature seems to impose forms and direction on a
formless and directionless nature, or at least on a formless and directionless
original chaos.

\textsuperscript{142} Of course, the exact relation between nature and the will to power in
Nietzsche’s work is less than ideally clear, and saying that the will to power has a
nature is not the same as saying that it is natural or somehow the equivalent or an
expression or manifestation of nature. On the other hand, what Nietzsche
describes as the will to power in 2.18 seems very similar to what Nietzsche
describes as nature or says about nature in \textit{J} 188, only in the latter case it is
perhaps viewed from a broader perspective, from the perspective of the
imposition of constraints and the wastefulness of nature’s form-giving or –
building activity, rather than focusing on what it means in the psyche of the
individual. But in both cases, there is considerable violence inherent in the form-
giving, which is presented as a forcible imposition of form and direction upon
something which previously lacked it.
It is therefore important to understand that Nietzsche is not simply contrasting the pre-political, natural state of humanity with its later, civilized or moralized state, and arguing that the first was superior (though at times he may seem to be doing so). Nietzsche laments or is horrified by the “anti-nature (Wider-natur)” exemplified in the Christian form of the bad conscience, but this is because the bad conscience eventually begins to choke or wither the active force of the will to power that operates in its earlier forms. In other words, some imposition of forms, and thus inhibition and even destruction of primal energies and powers, is necessary, and indeed natural. If nature were pure chaos or flux, then there would be no forms at all, not even temporary or ephemeral and changing forms. The bad conscience, or the moral work of socialization and the form-giving or form-imposing work or effect of the founders of states, thus forces the primordial chaotic raging into some shape and direction, and thus executes the work or intentions of nature. In time, however, the bad conscience goes too far, so to speak, and turns against the basic vital and changing process or course of life itself, and erects what Nietzsche will call in the next essay the ascetic ideal, which attempts to oppose or negate the basic character of life itself; the healthy or proper moral life or mode of creative life is somewhere between pure senseless and destructive chaos and a sterile, petrified and mummified asceticism, a belief in eternal forms and an attempt to judge life using those forms as the standard. The latter, however, is the ultimate or end stage of the development of the bad conscience as Nietzsche describes it here in the Second Essay, not the character of the bad conscience or civilized morality as such.
The twenty-second section ends with an impressive rhetorical flourish, which seems to express more genuine horror and even pity than polemical furor, but again this seems to be a one-sided or polemical account of Christianity. For instance, Nietzsche here laments the fact that Christianity has turned the earth into a “madhouse,” but in “David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer” Nietzsche had denounced the philistinism of precisely this claim: Strauss had said that “in our time [Jesus] would barely escape the madhouse” (7; the same word, Irrenhaus, is used in both works). This by itself probably proves nothing, but there is, again, Nietzsche’s earlier, positive description of the bad conscience and its formation of ideals, its creation of “an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself” (2.18), which seems irreconcilable with his denunciation here. To the extent that Nietzsche’s statements in this section, in many ways the rhetorical climax of the essay or at least its most fervid passage, clash with his earlier, more fully argued and elaborated treatment of the bad conscience, I think that they should be ignored.143 On the other hand, I do not think that Nietzsche is simply contradicting himself. As I suggested in the previous paragraph, at a certain point the bad conscience may have become simply or at least chiefly destructive of nature and of life. Moreover, Nietzsche’s criticisms of Christianity here do not contradict or nullify some of his praise of Judeo-Christian spirituality in other passages. The feeling of Schuld which he denounces here, for instance, is

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143 Nietzsche himself suggests in section twenty-four that a great deal of reality must be “slandered and misunderstood” in order to destroy the previously existing temple and to make way for new ideals. At the very least, he seems to be exaggerating here so as to denigrate or ruin the previous focus and locus of longing and aspiration or the previous source of meaning and values.
clearly distinct from, and indeed is in many ways the contrary of the attempt to
love man for the sake of God described in J 60, though both involve exalting God
and deprecating humanity. In Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche had described the
need to justify or elevate the love of humanity, while here he is describing
redemption from the sense of guilt and sin through love. The one proceeds from
“the nobles and most remote feeling yet attained among human beings,” the other
from the most dejected and depressed sense of worthlessness and despair.

Nietzsche begins the twenty-third section by announcing that “This should
suffice once and for all on the origin of the ‘holy God.’” He then moves to
discuss the Greeks and their religion, and in particular to show that the
“conception of the gods” does not in itself necessarily lead to the same results as
does the conception of the holy or Christian God. The crucial significance of the
Greeks here is as evidence that Nietzsche is not calling for the abolition of society
or culture or a simple return to animality; the Greeks show that what Nietzsche
has described as the bad conscience, the effect of morality and political and social
life on the human animal, can produce more than laceration and torture of the
animal in man. The Greek gods were “reflections of noble and autocratic human
beings, in which the animal in humanity felt itself deified and did not tear at itself,
did not rage against itself! For the longest time these Greeks had their gods serve
to hold off precisely the ‘bad conscience,’ 144 so as to be permitted to rejoice in

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144 Nietzsche’s use of quotation marks here indicates that he means the narrower,
specifically Christian form of the bad conscience, not the broader phenomenon of
socialization or morality as such, which Nietzsche has designated with the term
“bad conscience” for most of the essay.
their freedom of soul—thus the opposite of the use which Christianity made of its God.”

How exactly did the Greeks do this? In the first place Nietzsche stresses the belief that Homer attributed to Zeus and that was also shared by “the Greeks of the strongest, bravest era,” namely that the Greeks’ misdeeds or atrocities were caused by foolishness or folly (Unverstand), not sin or evil (this harmonizes with what Nietzsche has said earlier about the gods of antiquity and especially those of the Greeks). Although this belief seems strikingly amoral or serene when compared to the moral and religious worldview of Christianity, by itself it was not enough to allow the Greeks fully to affirm themselves; even the relatively amoral concept of foolishness or folly still indicates an imperfection or fault, and the noble Greeks could not accept this about themselves. They still wondered how such foolishness was possible for “we human beings of noble (edlen) descent, happy, well turned-out, of the best society, noble, virtuous,”145 and they ultimately had to ascribe or trace the cause of their failure or temporary madness to a god. “In this way the gods served at that time to justify the human being to a certain degree even in his wickedness (Schlimmen), they served as the causes of evil—at that time they took upon themselves not the punishment, but, what is nobler, the guilt…” Thus the Greek gods seem to be themselves noble chiefly because they made human nobility possible; they served a “nobler type” of purpose than the Christian God because they allowed the Greeks to affirm themselves, to feel themselves perfect and noble. This noble self-affirmation in turn made possible

145 “wir Menschen der edlen Abkunft, des Glücks, der Wohlgerathenheit, der besten Gesellschaft, der Vornehmheit, der Tugend.”
the Greeks’ relatively amoral attitude towards or conception of human guilt or crime.

When one looks at Nietzsche’s overall account of the formation of political society and of the bad conscience, however, one wonders how this could ever be possible. Granted, Nietzsche here puts the term “bad conscience” in quotation marks, as if he is classifying Christianity as only one instance of the effects of socialization, but so far he has written as if the attack on the animal instincts, and the feeling of guilt engendered by that attack, is the essence of the bad conscience in its broadest sense, or is the essence of the human animal’s experience in society. Christianity, as we have seen above, thus appears as only the ultimate or most intense stage or form of the bad conscience, the stage that takes the basic or intrinsic logic of the bad conscience to its highest point, but not a stage that is essentially different from any other stage or variation. To live in society means to make war against one’s animal instincts, according to everything Nietzsche has said so far; how then is it possible for anyone to deify the animal in themselves and to prevent it from tearing at and raging against itself? Put somewhat differently, to believe in gods of any kind one must have attained to a level of humanity as opposed to primeval animality, and humanity is produced or defined only in war-like opposition to and negation of the original animal instincts of the human being.

Thus it seems to me that this is either a vast or gross polemical overstatement on Nietzsche’s part or that there is a gap or lacuna in Nietzsche’s account; given what Nietzsche says here and in the following section about the
importance of the Greeks, this lacuna seems to be crucial. I think that there is probably something of both possibilities at work here: Nietzsche’s eagerness to draw as sharp and as invidious a contrast as possible with Christianity leads him to state the conclusion of an argument he never makes, namely the argument or explanation of how the Greeks avoided the self-laceration integral to the bad conscience as Nietzsche has described it everywhere else in the Second Essay. That being said, much of what Nietzsche says here chimes both with various Greek texts and with his other statements about the Greeks, so I do not think that this passage can be simply brushed away or dismissed. Though Nietzsche does not provide an explanation for his claims here, I do not think we can or should simply assume that one is not possible (especially given his sustained interest in the Greeks in other works).

Even apart from whether such amoral self-affirmation is possible, however, there is the question of whether it is Nietzsche’s goal or ideal. Can such invincible self-congratulation really be Nietzsche’s ideal? Can he expect any among his readers, the best of whom practice the virtue of honesty or probity, to accept it as such? The answer seems to me most likely to be “no.” Nietzsche himself perhaps indicates this by referring to the Greeks as “splendid and lion-hearted children (prachtvollen und löwenmüthigen Kindsköpfe);” the word he uses for “children,” Kindsköpfe, is affectionate but slightly patronizing or even contemptuous. I think that Nietzsche’s more important aim here is simply to stress the difference between the Greeks gods and the moral life they made possible and the Christian God and Christian morality. The Christian god was
used to negate, torture and mutilate the animal nature of man by providing a
conception of humanity and its relation to the divine that condemned the human
and fixated on and magnified human sin and imperfection. The Greeks gods, in
an obvious contrast, were used to explain away or account for humanity’s bad acts
or moments of wickedness or self-destructive folly, and thus to prevent as much
as possible the sort of self-flagellation and negation of oneself that Christian
morality sought to maximize or drive to its highest pitch. In short, the forces
motivating or impelling and shaping both the gods and the moralities they
anchored or authorized were the exact opposite in the case of Christianity and the
ancient Greeks.

The final, larger question that I think is raised both by the twenty-third and
the twenty-fourth sections concerns not the relation between the human and the
divine but that between the human and the animal. Much of what Nietzsche says
about the Greeks suggests that he wants to deify the animal in man, or sees this as
somehow desirable. Likewise, in the twenty-fourth section, he writes of a
possible attempt to reverse the work or direction of the bad conscience. “An
ttempt at the reverse would in itself be possible—but who is strong enough for
it?—that is, to wed the bad conscience to all the unnatural inclinations, all those
aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature,
animal, in short all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals
that slander the world.” Nietzsche here seems to group “nature” with “the
animal” and to suggest that he is hoping for a return to both. As we have seen
repeatedly, however, or at least as I have argued repeatedly, the bad conscience or
something remarkably similar to it seems to be natural in Nietzsche’s view; the creativity that only the bad conscience makes possible is natural, it expresses or simply is the intention of nature.

On the one hand, then, there is no essential difference in kind between animals and human beings in Nietzsche’s view, but then this also means that when he praises the animal, he is not praising something radically or profoundly different from the human. The animal vitality, or the natural vitality of the animal, Nietzsche admires and wants to promote, but this is only because of the creative power of nature. The animal in human beings is both amoral and violent, but also creative, and this is what Nietzsche wants to unleash or to set free. This means, however, that he wants human beings who harness their animal vitality and use it to create in social, human terms, not that he wants a simple return to a bucolic, pre-political world of bestial harmony and satisfaction (since, indeed, Nietzsche does not believe that any such world ever existed), nor to a pre-political world of chaotic violence and mindless savagery. If Nietzsche wants a return to nature, it is a return to the creative (and thus also destructive) power and splendor of nature, not to a time before creation and destruction. And, for human beings, creation means social, moral and political creation, it means having much of their animal nature and vitality destroyed and mutilated. It is when a morality makes war on or tries to extirpate humanity’s animal nature, its natural fund of animal energy and vigor, that Nietzsche opposes it. All of this is indicated even here in section twenty-four, where Nietzsche discusses the extreme difficulty and danger of the goal he is proposing as well as the rarity of the human beings who would be
capable of achieving it, and thus shows again that he is not advocating a simple return to a mere easy-going or bovine animality.

Moreover, although Nietzsche emphasizes war, conquest, adventure and the like in this passage, he also emphasizes knowledge and indeed lays a special stress on redemption and the future (as at the end of the First Essay), both throughout the latter part of this section and in section twenty-five. In other words, Nietzsche focuses especially on elements that cannot be read as part of any simple “return” to a pre-Christian or pre-moral stage of human evolution (on the contrary, the concern with redemption is clearly a legacy of Christianity, as is the concern with knowledge [as the reader of the Genealogy as a whole knows]). In short, Nietzsche seems clearly to be describing here a further step forward, not a regression or undoing.
Conclusion

In the introduction I announced two major objectives for this dissertation: to show that Nietzsche has a coherent and indeed compelling account of the origin of political society and human morality, and thus that he has a more fully developed and convincing political philosophy than is often supposed, and to illuminate or expound his understanding of nature, to show how it is novel and why it is important for human life. The first objective runs counter to the common view of Nietzsche as a thinker who had no developed political thought, and indeed little interest in the central questions animating Western political philosophy. The second objective attempts to shed light on one of the most vexing aspects of Nietzsche’s thought, though it is perhaps the defining question of Western philosophy.

I have argued above that a coherent narrative about human political development can be reconstructed from Nietzsche’s somewhat unfocused and at times contradictory remarks on the subject in the Second Essay. In Nietzsche’s account, the earliest stage of human development was a pre-political and effectively pre-human stage of instinctual life in which human beings lived as animals in packs. It is clear from Nietzsche’s description of pre-political humanity in 2.16-18 that these human animals must have been fairly violent and even chaotic, but there was an instinctual basis for some kind of community or tribal life—though, again based on Nietzsche’s account of the origin of political society and morality at 2.16-18 and 2.1-3, this life was based purely on instinct,
not on any kind of coercion or repressive set of laws or customs. This still predominantly instinctual and forgetful life came to an end with the rise of political society, which began to burn a memory into its citizens through violent punishments; as we learn in 2.17, this happened through the sudden and ferocious imposition of political life on these nomad populations. Eventually, the humans living in these first political communities attained a level of self-conscious awareness and a rudimentary ability to think about the future and so to keep their promises. At this stage, they began to use contracts, and to think of their relations to the community and to one another as governed or constituted by contracts; the use of contracts was therefore initiated by the earliest state, not by individuals. It does not seem possible that these primitive humans could have conceived of or acted in accord with contracts before this point, and until a basic level of stability and security was achieved, the state or community’s sole reason for punishing was to brutalize the populace into obeying a few basic laws, not to institute a system counterbalancing private losses or damages with pleasures (of the sort that Nietzsche describes in 2.5). Though Nietzsche suggests early in the Second Essay that political society was the result of a gradual and organic evolution of the first human relation, the debtor-creditor relationship, his account of pre-political humanity and especially his explicit rejection of such a progressive development in 2.17 make it clear that this is not actually his view.

Political society is founded by the violent artist-lawgivers who, in keeping with Nietzsche’s paradoxical understanding of nature, both express and subjugate and inhibit nature. This obviously raises a series of profound questions about
nature and its relation to politics and morality, but in the present context of our review of Nietzsche’s historical account of the origin of political society, it raises another series of important questions about the relation between *ressentiment* and political and moral life. Again Nietzsche’s sketch of primitive social life in the earlier sections of the Second Essay (especially sections 4-6) are misleading. There he suggests that individuals first contrived contracts and economic systems of exchange to gratify their instinct for cruelty; as we see later, however, in the much more substantial discussion of law at 2.11, it is the first community that establishes and enforces the first laws, and it does so for the sake of consolidating and then expanding its own power (this process is further explicated in 2.1-3 and 2.16-17). Thus legal codes and punishments did not exist, as Nietzsche suggests at 2.5, for the sake of expressing or venting cruelty and reactive impulses, but rather as means to curb and channel them, and ultimately to “educate” or redirect them towards enemies of the law and the community as such, rather than towards the particular harm or wrong suffered by the victim of a crime. Law and justice are therefore, as Nietzsche declares emphatically in 2.11, not a product of *ressentiment*, but rather exist precisely for the sake of restraining and mastering *ressentiment*. They are creations of the active political founders, whose aim is to express their own will to power and in so doing to create greater units or complexes of power that enhance life. *Ressentiment* is a petty and reactive force opposed to this project, and as such the founders must find a way to control and subordinate it, if they cannot eradicate it altogether.
As for civilized morality, or what Nietzsche calls “the bad conscience” for much of the Second Essay, it is not another, deeper experience or product of ressentiment, and this for two main reasons. In the first place, the cause of the bad conscience, the external compulsion forcing one to turn one’s instincts inward, is too savage and too terrifying to permit of any kind of reaction even approaching ressentiment. Secondly and probably more importantly, once those instincts turn inward, they find something on which to vent themselves, and are thus able to experience themselves as powerful, as discharging themselves on something and refashioning it into something new. This experience of power prevents the impotent rage and venom that create ressentiment. Hence even after the initial terror of the founding of political life there is no necessary reason why the bad conscience, or the internalization of the instincts of aggression that Nietzsche describes with that name, must generate or fuse with ressentiment.

Moreover, since the instincts being repressed and redirected are primarily desires for attack, change and destruction, the condition or process Nietzsche names ‘the bad conscience’ is ever changing, ever driving forward, ever needing to ‘reshape,’ i.e., to obliterate, so much of what presently exists, and particularly so much of its own present form—it is, in short, tremendously pregnant and fruitful. In Nietzsche’s account, however, the primal urge for destruction and change which drives the bad conscience does not appear to be what is natural; it is rather giving this primal urge a particular form, and so necessarily constraining and even mutilating it, that is natural, both in the case of individuals and of founders of states (see again not only Nietzsche’s identification of the founders of
states as natural, at both 2.17 and J 257, but especially his discussion in J 188). We now stand at a time when this self-overcoming energy seems in danger of withering away, but that is the result of particular value judgments that have composed Western philosophy and spirituality, not of an intrinsic tendency of civilized morality to sap human fecundity and vitality.

The creative and natural activity of both political society and morality is illustrated in Nietzsche’s treatment of noble societies in Beyond Good and Evil (in Part Nine, “What Is Noble?”). In a famous passage at the beginning of that segment, Nietzsche suggests that the pathos of distance that grows out of social stratification, the spiritual sense of distance that stems from political distance, is what has led to the furthering and enhancement of the human being (J 257). According to the relevant discussion in the Second Essay of the Genealogy, however (especially 2.16-2.18), the self-overcoming of humanity which Nietzsche attributes to specifically aristocratic societies in Beyond Good and Evil 257 is coeval with political society itself and the instinctual repression which it enacts or requires. Indeed, a more careful reading of Part Nine of Beyond Good and Evil shows that while Nietzsche does praise aristocracies for the way they cultivate a distinct type of human being, he also recognizes this cultivation as the result of external pressure and as ultimately tending toward the production of a uniform mediocre type. It is only when the old aristocratic type of morality starts to break down, and new, individual types emerge, that the truest or most important work of self-overcoming is done. These individuals, and above all the philosopher (though, in his own way, the priest makes critical contributions to this process),
are the ones who are most responsible for furthering or enhancing humanity by forcing it to move beyond its old, “outlived” morality. As Nietzsche himself puts it: “The dangerous and uncanny point has been reached where the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life transcends and \textit{lives beyond} the old morality; the “individual” stands there, compelled (\textit{genöthigt}) to give himself laws and to develop his own arts and wiles for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption (\textit{Selbst-Erhaltung, Selbst-Erhöhung, Selbst-Erlösung})” (\textit{J} 262). And again we see the paradoxical nature of nature, at least in Nietzsche’s thought, as he identifies both the tendency toward the common and mediocre and the revolutionary explosion or transformation toward a new conception of human virtue and greatness to be natural.

This, then, leads us back to the question asked above, what is the relation between society and morality on the one hand and nature on the other?

Nature is creative. For Nietzsche this does not mean that nature reproduces a set form or forms, or that it implants in each species an impulse toward its natural end. Nature rather begins as chaos, and somehow imposes some form on itself. It therefore must necessarily restrict and concentrate, and so compel, the various lines of energy or force that shoot off in every direction; in the case of organic life, these lines of force express themselves as instincts, and the original or most primal form of these instincts is the desire for change and destruction Nietzsche describes at 2.17. Yet as we see again and again in the Second Essay of the \textit{Genealogy} (and in Nietzsche’s other writings), the primal urge for destruction and change which drives the bad conscience does not appear
to be what is natural; it is rather giving this primal urge a particular form, and so necessarily constraining and even mutilating it, that is natural, both in the case of individuals and of founders of states (see again not only Nietzsche’s identification of the founders of states as natural [2.17, J 257] but his discussion in J 188).

Nietzsche begins the Second Essay by adumbrating this process. Nature seeks to breed a particular type of animal, but that breeding can only be accomplished by doing tremendous violence to the instinctual life of the pre-political human animal. As Nietzsche traces the movement of human beings from tribal animals to social beings (however oblique or uncertain that narrative may be at times), he indicates how nature employed or expressed itself through humanity’s instincts, and above all its desire for dominance or will to power. It was the will to power which first drove human beings to begin measuring themselves against each other (2.8), and it is the will to power (which Nietzsche also refers to as “the instinct for freedom”) that is at work in both the founders of states in the bad conscience that begins to transform the human animal into an animal permitted to promise (2.16-18). It is also clear that it is the active will to power which attempts to build larger power-complexes through creating and enforcing law (see especially 2.11 and more generally 2.9-11). In other words, the Second Essay describes the process by which the human will to power goes from being directed outward in a chaotic but uncomplicated way to being directed inward, thus making the human animal sick or tortured but also capable of greater power and self-mastery, and in time even autonomous, both as individuals and as a species.
Thus one should not read Nietzsche’s account in the Second Essay as arguing for a return to a pre-political state of nature or even to a less developed, quasi-barbaric stage of human evolution. Though these earlier periods may seem, in retrospect, more full of vitality and healthy, uninhibited instinctual discharge, Nietzsche clearly indicates that they are not his goal. In the first place, what the will to power of these earlier humans gains in simple intensity it loses in complexity and self-awareness. They are less inhibited but precisely for that reason are not only less interesting but less capable of genuine self-mastery or autonomy. The will to power expresses itself through knowledge and the sorts of self-transformations both required and enabled by knowledge, and the healthy barbarians of yore lack these capabilities. Moreover, Nietzsche makes it clear that the instinctual repression he is describing is, again, natural; it is nature itself that directs or demands the reining in and channeling of instinct that civilized morality sets in motion and intensifies. What nature commands is the creation of ever more complex and thus ever more powerful forms; human consciousness is precisely such a form.

This is clear from Nietzsche’s account of nature and the rise of political society, and I have tried to explain it in more detail in the discussion of Nietzsche’s conception of philosophy, a discussion centered on Nietzsche’s account of meaning, interpretation and the will to power at 2.12. I argue that Nietzsche bases his own theoretical insights as well as his practical stance on the historically conditioned form of conscience which compels him and a very few of his contemporaries to see certain truths and act on them in certain ways. While
this requires making humanity more natural, it certainly does not require making humanity more ignorant or mendacious. Nietzsche’s proposal is rather the opposite, to naturalize humanity by having humanity, for the first time in its existence, consciously embrace and seek to enhance its natural will to power. Thus, in my interpretation, at the center of Nietzsche’s thought is his concern with conscience and knowledge, with making humanity more self-aware and self-governing, and thereby more natural.

Since the will to power or nature manifests itself in human beings through consciousness and eventually through historical consciousness, the way in which that consciousness is cultivated and expanded or overcome is essential in the life-affirming process Nietzsche describes and aspires to enact or assist. Nietzsche’s own conception of the will to power is, of course, especially important here, both because it responds to the particular crisis Nietzsche diagnoses in his own age and because he seems to regard it as the final or irrefutable truth about life and nature. At the same time, however, given the importance for Nietzsche of particular and unique historical conditions or dispensations, Nietzsche’s basic doctrine of will to power will be given various, perhaps innumerable, more determinate understandings that will animate cultural life for a time, before necessarily being overcome in the direction of greater, more expansive and more complex forms of life and spirit. In that sense a completely final or stable dogmatic teaching is profoundly undesirable for Nietzsche, even if it is possible. Nietzsche’s new teaching or interpretation of the will to power provides the essential (because true)
intellectual and spiritual conditions for human creativity and life, but for that very reason it also points beyond simple affirmation of itself.
Appendix: Nietzsche’s Books and the Place of the *Genealogy* Among Them

When I started writing this dissertation, I was certain that limiting oneself only to Nietzsche’s published works was a necessary condition of writing a good interpretation of them. I no longer believe this—though I do think that interpretations of Nietzsche should be judged by how well they illuminate the published works, where Nietzsche gave his thought its most polished and considered form. Even by this standard, however, several very good studies of Nietzsche have focused almost exclusively on his unpublished writings, for instance the work of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, which I cite at several points above. Similarly, many less than illuminating books have confined themselves to the material Nietzsche himself intended for publication. Yet even if one is not so militant about what must constitute the center of gravity of any good reading of Nietzsche, the question remains of why the *Genealogy* should be given such close attention, and, more fundamentally, whether Nietzsche’s published works are the best expressions of his philosophy in its most fully developed form. This second question arises chiefly because of the influence of Martin Heidegger, whose four-volume study of Nietzsche concentrated on Nietzsche’s unpublished works, or *Nachlass* (literary estate), and especially on *The Will to Power*, as the most profound and truest articulation of Nietzsche’s thought. Heidegger has left an undeniably deep impression on subsequent Nietzsche scholarship, and his decision to treat the *Nachlass* as the definitive source of Nietzsche’s philosophy
must be considered carefully. In other words, it is not so much a question of insisting on my focus on the published works as it is of justifying or at least explaining it.

Heidegger’s decision, although it has been seconded by countless interpreters since, has been perhaps the most controversial feature of Heidegger’s study. Walter Kaufmann, for instance, derides Heidegger’s “systematic preference for non-contextual readings—for taking bits out of context and using them willfully and arbitrarily.” To be fair to Heidegger, however, one must note that he bases his decision on several undeniably telling statements in Nietzsche’s correspondence. Perhaps the most significant is in a letter to Franz Overbeck, probably Nietzsche’s most trusted and respected friend: “Now I must work through a whole series of disciplines step by step, for I am resolved to devote the next five years to the construction of my ‘philosophy,’ for which I have in my Zarathustra constructed a vestibule.” Also noteworthy are remarks in letters to his mother and sister (“For the next four years the creation of a four-

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148 Letter to Franz Overbeck of 7 April 1884, quoted in Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991 [1979-1987]), Volume I, The Will to Power as Art, p. 12. Heidegger’s study is comprised of four volumes, and both the original and the translation are published as two books, which will be referred to as Nietzsche I and Nietzsche II. Unless otherwise noted, all page references in the present discussion will be to Volume I, “The Will to Power as Art.” (On the differences between the German and English editions, see Krell’s note on pp. xxxv-xxxvii of Volume I.)
volume *magnum opus* is proposed. The very title is fearsome: ‘The Will to
Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values’”¹⁴⁹), and to Peter Gast:

the next six years belong to the elaboration of a schema in which I have
outlined my “philosophy.” The prospects for this look good and
promising. Meanwhile, *Zarathustra* retains only its entirely personal
meaning, being my “book of edification and consolation”—otherwise, for
Everyman, it is obscure and riddlesome and ridiculous.¹⁵⁰

Despite this last comment, Heidegger maintains that “the common assumption”
that *Zarathustra* had been a failed attempt to communicate Nietzsche’s
philosophy poetically, and that *The Will to Power* was meant to explicate
Nietzsche’s philosophy in a more accessible manner, “is an error. The planned
major work, *The Will to Power*, is in truth as much a poetic work as *Zarathustra*
is a work of thought” (12).

One must go farther in defending Heidegger against the charge of being
simply arbitrary in his interpretation of Nietzsche. On the contrary, it is only fair
to acknowledge that Heidegger spends some time considering Nietzsche’s various
drafts for the final work, and trying to understand how the three themes (Will to
Power, Eternal Recurrence, and Revaluation of All Values) which clearly
preoccupied Nietzsche in these drafts coalesce as one teaching.¹⁵¹ Ultimately,

¹⁵⁰ Letter of 2 September 1884, quoted in ibid., p. 13.
¹⁵¹ Ibid., chapters 3 and 4.
however, the problems with Heidegger’s approach, if not its basic untenability, are brought out by his own attempts to ground it. On the basis of the centrality of these three themes to all the drafts of plans for the *Will to Power*, Heidegger declares:

Now, if we do not thoughtfully formulate our inquiry in such a way that it is capable of grasping in a unified way the doctrines of the eternal return of the same and will to power, and these two doctrines in their most intrinsic coherence as revaluation, and if we do not go on to comprehend this fundamental formulation as one which is also necessary in the course of Western metaphysics, then we will never grasp Nietzsche’s philosophy (17).

Yet Heidegger can only maintain that “[t]he doctrine of the eternal return coheres in the most intimate way with that of will to power” through a series of questions and answers, which are worth quoting in full so that the reader can judge how compelling they are (as for the relation of revaluation to these other two themes, Heidegger makes the sensible suggestion that “[t]he unity of these two teachings may be seen historically as the revaluation of all values” [18]).

What is will to power itself, and how is it? Answer: the eternal recurrence of the same.
Is it an accident that the latter teaching recurs continually in
decisive passages throughout all plans for the philosophical main work?
What can it mean when in one plan, which bears the unadorned title,
“Eternal Return,” Nietzsche lists the first part under the title “The most
difficult thought”? To be sure, the question of Being is the most difficult
thought of philosophy, because it is simultaneously its innermost and
uttermost thought, the one with which it stands and falls (19).

Ultimately, Heidegger goes so far as to deny that *The Will to Power* is a
cohere nt whole, even as he maintains that it is still the most perfect embodiment
of Nietzsche’s teaching.

The book that lies before us is still something supplementary. Nobody
knows what would have become of these preliminary sketches had
Nietzsche himself been able to transform them into the main work he was
planning. Nevertheless, what is available to us today is so essential and
rich, and even from Nietzsche’s point of view so definitive, that the
prerequisites are granted for what alone is important: actually to think
Nietzsche’s genuine philosophical thought (24).152

152 Since Heidegger wrote, Mazzino Montinari has shown not only that the
version of *The Will to Power* actually published was an entirely inadequate
representation of Nietzsche’s plans for that book, but even that, by the time of his
collapse, Nietzsche had abandoned the plan to publish a *magnum opus* (or a book
of any sort) titled *The Will to Power*. See Mazzino Montinari, “Nietzsche’s
Unpublished Writings from 1885 to 1888; or, Textual Criticism and the Will to
Power,” in Mazzino Montinari, *Reading Nietzsche*, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana:
Reading these passages, one cannot help but suspect that Heidegger is giving himself all but complete interpretive license in the pursuit of Nietzsche’s “essential” and “genuine” thought, while at the same time admitting that Nietzsche’s “major work” is so incomplete as to be uninterpretable, so that the “genuine philosophical thought” of Nietzsche that will emerge from Heidegger’s pages will be more Heidegger’s creation than Nietzsche’s, as indeed many have argued it is. Yet however questionable Heidegger’s procedure and the interpretation stemming from it may be, he clearly identifies an undeniably important problem for the interpretation of Nietzsche: Nietzsche’s avowal that *Zarathustra* is simply a vestibule to the major structure of his thought, which was to be presented in a work which he never completed.

Upon closer inspection, however, even this claim may prove to be weaker than first appears. Heidegger himself seems to undercut it to some extent by saying that

in the last year before his collapse (1888) the initial plans [for *The Will to Power*] were finally abandoned. A peculiar restlessness now possessed

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Nietzsche…Nietzsche himself had to speak, he himself had to come forth and announce his basic position vis-à-vis the world, drawing boundaries which were to prevent anyone’s confusing that basic position with any other. Thus the smaller works originated (8).

The smaller works include, of course, Ecce Homo, where Nietzsche continues to give pride of place to Thus Spoke Zarathustra (indeed, the extravagance of his praise of Zarathustra at times becomes embarrassing); to the extent that these shorter works superseded The Will to Power, Zarathustra remains the heart of Nietzsche’s philosophy. It also worth remembering that, if The Will to Power was still incomplete at the time of Nietzsche’s collapse, so too was Zarathustra: Nietzsche’s notes suggest that he had planned several more parts after the “interlude” of Part IV. 154 This fact casts at least some doubt on the view that Nietzsche continued to think of Zarathustra as a mere vestibule.

Moreover, the testimony of the letters is not quite as reliable as Heidegger suggests. The two strongest avowals that The Will to Power was meant to supplant Zarathustra, in the letters to Overbeck and Gast, were both written in 1884. This was before Nietzsche had even begun writing Beyond Good and Evil, 155 which, as we learn from Ecce Homo, is intimately related to Zarathustra.

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154 On Nietzsche’s plans for further parts of Zarathustra, see the discussion of Lampert, pp. 287-89.
155 “The book [Beyond Good and Evil] was written ‘summer 1885 in the Upper Engadine and the following winter in Nizza’ (letter to Georg Brandes, April 10, 1888). This is borne out by other letters, except that additions and revisions were made until June 1886. The book was printed in June and July and published the
as “the No-saying, No-doing part” of his task to the Yes-saying part (“Books,” Beyond); or, as Nietzsche wrote in a letter to Jacob Burckhardt, Beyond Good and Evil “says the same things as Thus Spoke Zarathustra but differently, very differently.”\(^\text{156}\) Beyond Good and Evil, therefore, was meant as a sort of commentary upon or elaboration of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and its composition was undertaken during the time which was, according to the letters to Overbeck and Gast, to be devoted to the “\textit{magnum opus}.“\(^\text{157}\) This is a very strong piece of evidence that Nietzsche had changed his mind about the relation of Zarathustra to his thought as a whole. Furthermore, Heidegger cites the cover of Beyond Good and Evil as promising that the next book of Nietzsche’s to appear would be titled \textit{The Will to Power}: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values (14). Yet in fact, of course, Nietzsche’s next published book was \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}, which the title page announced was “[a] sequel to my last book, Beyond Good and Evil, which it is meant to supplement and clarify;”\(^\text{158}\) Nietzsche was now writing supplements to the supplement to Zarathustra, further suggesting that the latter was seeming more central to him that it had in 1884 (the \textit{Genealogy} was published in 1887).


\(^\text{157}\) See Montinari, pp. 87-90, for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between Beyond Good and Evil and the plans and materials for \textit{The Will to Power}.

Finally, there are the descriptions of his writings after *Zarathustra* which Nietzsche himself gives us in *Ecce Homo*, written during that final, restless year of activity mentioned by Heidegger, 1888. There Nietzsche says that “[a]fter the Yes-saying part of my task had been solved [through *Zarathustra*], the turn had come for the No-saying, *No-doing* part: the revaluation of our values so far, the great war—conjuring up a day of decision” (“Books,” *Beyond*, 1). Here, in Nietzsche’s final evaluation of his previous work, he seems clearly to say that the task of revaluation, which Heidegger argued was an essential feature of the work that was to eclipse *Zarathustra*, is secondary, not to say inferior, to the material presented in *Zarathustra*.\(^{159}\)

None of this goes so far as simply to obviate the problems for interpreting Nietzsche posed by the evidence Heidegger marshals (at least the plans for a *magnum opus*, if not the deprecatory references to *Zarathustra* in Nietzsche’s letters). Whether his thought would have received its final form in *The Will to Power*, in a final version of *Zarathustra* with an untold number of parts, or in a wholly different work, the fact remains that his work was left incomplete. This is where Nietzsche’s own testimony about the extraordinary care required to read his works must be decisive; this testimony is given especially clearly in the final sections of the prefaces to *Daybreak* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Whether or not Nietzsche’s books offer the completed version of his thought (and there is some reason, based on Nietzsche’s statements in *Ecce Homo*, to think that they

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\(^{159}\)“The critique of all values so far that is contained in *The Will to Power*, the no to modernity, presupposes the already gained Yes to the eternal cycle of things.” Löwith, p. 24 (cf. also the context).
do), there can be no doubt that they provide the most carefully crafted and fully
thought-out form of his philosophy available, and there can further be no doubt
that Nietzsche himself considered attention to this form the crucial condition of
understanding his thought.\textsuperscript{160}

The preceding discussion has addressed the question regarding
Nietzsche’s published works as the authoritative source of his philosophy. There
remains the question of why the \textit{Genealogy} should receive special attention (aside
from the thematic reasons discussed in the Introduction). The answer to this
question is already partly apparent from the discussion above of the centrality of
\textit{Zarathustra} and its two successor volumes, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} and \textit{On the
Genealogy of Morals}, to Nietzsche’s thought. These three interlocking works
form the core of Nietzsche’s mature thought. \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals} is the
third in the series, presented as a supplement and clarification to \textit{Beyond Good
and Evil}, which was itself meant to supplement and clarify \textit{Zarathustra}.\textsuperscript{161} In

\textsuperscript{160} There is one final argument to be made for using the Nachlass fragments, one
based on Nietzsche’s emphasis on masks and his often maddeningly allusive and
hypothetical manner of writing. This argument is made by Wolfgang Müller-
Lauter, \textit{Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of
[1971]), pp. 124-125. This seems to me a stronger argument—although one could
certainly contest the notion that the unpublished writings somehow give one a
“shortcut” to a pure form of Nietzsche’s thought, one somehow free from
ambiguity or internal tensions—and it does not prevent Müller-Lauter’s reading
of Nietzsche from harmonizing with, and indeed illuminating, Nietzsche’s
published works (conversely, there are many unconvincing studies of Nietzsche
that focus exclusively on the published works). Nevertheless, it seems to me that
even in cases like this, Nietzsche’s published works must remain in some decisive
sense the criteria by which interpretations of his thought are judged.

\textsuperscript{161} This is not to deny that the \textit{Genealogy} has direct relevance to \textit{Zarathustra}
without the mediation of \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, as is obvious from Nietzsche’s
other words, the *Genealogy* is presented as the simplest and most introductory presentation of Nietzsche’s mature thought, as indeed is suggested by its subtitle, “A Polemic;” it is, according to Nietzsche’s own design, the starting point on the path leading to the heart of his philosophy.

As for the suggestion that *Zarathustra* is somehow at the peak of Nietzsche’s published writings, it is not merely an extrapolation from a few comments in Nietzsche’s letters; the notion that Nietzsche’s thought developed towards a “mature” phase centering on *Zarathustra* is common to much of the Nietzsche scholarship. The usual partition of Nietzsche’s works is into three periods. The first period of Nietzsche’s writings comprises *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations*; at this stage Nietzsche was an increasingly less devout Wagnerian concerned primarily with German cultural rejuvenation. The second period encompasses *Human, All-Too-Human, Daybreak*, and the first four books of *The Gay Science*. This period is marked by Nietzsche’s turn away from Wagner and the concern with German cultural rebirth and towards a sceptical rationalism and cosmopolitanism (the first edition of *Human, All-too-Human* was dedicated to Voltaire); this period is usually called his “positivist” period. The second period is also marked by Nietzsche’s shift from the essay form to the aphorism, beginning with *Human, All-Too-Human*. The third period includes the three major works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, as well as the five shorter works published late in his working life: *The Case of Wagner, The Twilight of the Idols, The Anti-Christ*,

presentation of the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* as a commentary on an aphorism from *Zarathustra*.  

309
Nietzsche Contra Wagner, and Ecce Homo, although this third period is sometimes itself divided into a “mature” period, comprising Zarathustra, Beyond Good and Evil, and the Genealogy, and a “late” period, comprising the five short works. There is no clear consensus on the exact character of this third period, or of its relation to the previous two. Karl Löwith, however, gives a perceptive account of how the three periods cohere and culminate in the teaching of Zarathustra: “[t]wo critical metamorphoses justify the differentiation of Nietzsche’s writings into three periods: first, the transformation from the reverential disciple into the self-liberating spirit, and second, from the spirit that has been liberated into the teaching master.”162

Finally, to return to the arguments for focusing on the Genealogy, there is Nietzsche’s own, private estimation of the work, expressed in a letter to his friend Meta von Salis. This letter may at first seem a poor proof of Nietzsche’s regard for the Genealogy, given that in it he professes to have forgotten completely not only the preface but the contents of each of the essays. Yet this temporary oblivion only served to heighten the extremely favorable impression the Genealogy made upon him when he reread it.

The first look in it gave me a surprise: I discovered a lengthy preface to the Genealogy whose existence I had forgotten....Basically, I remembered merely the titles of the three essays; the rest, meaning the contents, had

162 Löwith, p. 22. The chapter as a whole, “The Division of Nietzsche’s Writings into Periods,” provides a more elaborate argument for Löwith’s understanding of this transformation and of the continuity underlying it, as well as the textual grounding for his interpretation.
completely escaped me. This [is] the consequence of an extreme intellectual (geistigen) activity that consumed this winter and this spring and that placed a wall between them, so to speak. Now the book has come alive for me again—and at the same time, the circumstances of the previous summer, from which it arose. Extremely difficult problems for which a language, a terminology, was not available; but I must have been in a nearly uninterrupted state of inspiration, that this writing came to me like the most natural thing in the world. It required no toil. The style is vehement and provocative, full of finesses as well, and supple and richly colored, prose the likes of which I had never written before.\textsuperscript{163}

This passage shows the enduring, or at least the renewed, significance of the Genealogy for Nietzsche. Similarly, in the Epilogue to The Case of Wagner Nietzsche describes the Genealogy as “my touchstone for what belongs to me,” and suggests that “perhaps there is no more decisive turning point in the history of our knowledge of religion and morality.” The supreme value Nietzsche accorded this book is thus evident.

Bibliography

Nietzsche’s Works


I have used the following translations, though I have often modified them or substituted my own translation. I have mostly used the Kaufmann and Hollingdale translation of the Genealogy, but I have also consulted the Clark and Swensen translation at times.


Other Works


