

On the Genealogy of Morality, Lecture Notes

Nietzsche, 2023

Alex Silk

a.silk@bham.ac.uk

public.websites.umich.edu/~asilk

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- 1 Nietzsche? Or Not Nietzsche?
- 2 Some themes
 - Ruthless skepticism
 - Genealogical method
 - Evaluative critiques of values
- 3 Reader beware

Nietzsche?

The Christian Church is the highest of all conceivable corruptions. It has turned every value into an un-value, every truth into a lie, every integrity into a vileness of the soul.

Nietzsche ✓

The Christian Church is the highest of all conceivable corruptions. It has turned every value into an un-value, every truth into a lie, every integrity into a vileness of the soul.

The Antichrist §62

Nietzsche?

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Kelly Clarkson et al.

Compare Nietzsche: “What doesn't kill me makes me stronger.”
“What helps feed or nourish the higher type of person must be almost poisonous to a very different and lesser type.” (*Twilight of the Idols* I:8; *Beyond Good and Evil* §30)

Nietzsche?

I will never live in that world again where the weak would rather guilt the strong than become strong themselves. No, I will stay in this world. This world doesn't care what the weak want. This world eats the weak.

I will never live in that world again where the weak would rather
guilt the strong than become strong themselves. No, I will stay in this
world. This world doesn't care what the weak want. This world eats
the weak.

Elsa Dutton, 1883

(Compare Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morality* I:11–12, II:7,
III:14)

Nietzsche?

We have thought the matter over and finally decided that there is nothing good, nothing beautiful, nothing sublime, nothing evil in itself, but that there are states of soul in which we impose such words upon things external to and within us.

Nietzsche ✓

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Daybreak §210

Nietzsche?

I have now already experienced various things, joys and sorrows, things that cheer and sadden, but in everything God has led me as a father his frail little child. Many grievous things he has already inflicted upon me, but in everything I recognize with reverence his sublime power which gloriously guides everything forth. I have firmly made up my mind to devote myself to his service forever. May the dear Lord give me power and strength to do my intentions and guard me through my life's path. Childlike I trust in his grace.

Nietzsche ✓

I have now already experienced various things, joys and sorrows, things that cheer and sadden, but in everything God has led me as a father his frail little child. Many grievous things he has already inflicted upon me, but in everything I recognize with reverence his sublime power which gloriously guides everything forth. I have firmly made up my mind to devote myself to his service forever. May the dear Lord give me power and strength to do my intentions and guard me through my life's path. Childlike I trust in his grace.

“From My Life” [1858]

Nietzsche?

When the conscious mind has attained its highest degree of freedom it is involuntarily led to the individual virtues, moderation, justice, repose of soul.

Nietzsche ✓

When the conscious mind has attained its highest degree of freedom it is involuntarily led to the individual virtues, moderation, justice, repose of soul.

The Wanderer and His Shadow §212

Nietzsche?

The truth is horrible, frightening. The truth is more than you can bear.

The truth is horrible, frightening. The truth is more than you can bear.

Meredith Grey, *Grey's Anatomy*

Compare Nietzsche: “My truth is *terrible*.” “[Truth] requires greatness of soul: the service of truth is the hardest service.” “The strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure,” “conceiving reality *as it is*, being strong enough to do so.” (*Ecce Homo* IV:1,5; *Beyond Good and Evil* §39; *The Antichrist* §50)

Nietzsche?

“God is dead.”

Nietzsche ???

“God is dead.”

The Madman (*The Gay Science* §125)

Nietzsche?

A very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions; rather it is a matter of having the courage for an *attack* on one's convictions!

Nietzsche ✓

A very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions; rather it is a matter of having the courage for an *attack* on one's convictions!

Note, Spring 1888

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Non-transparency of attitudes and motives

“We are **unknown to ourselves**, we knowers — and with good reason...

Whatever else there is in life, so-called ‘experiences’ — who of us ever has enough earnestness for them? or enough time? I fear we have never really been ‘with it’ in such matters ... Rather, like somebody divinely absent-minded and sunk in their own thoughts ... we, too, afterwards rub our ears and ask, astonished, taken aback, ‘What did we actually experience then?’ or even, ‘Who *are* we, in fact?’...

We are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not understand ourselves, we *have* to to misunderstand ourselves ... — we are not ‘knowers’ when it comes to ourselves.”

(*On the Genealogy of Morality* P:1)

Response: Ruthless questioning

We must question even our deepest, most central values and commitments.

Perhaps we'll come to endorse them on reflection. But we must be prepared to reject them if they prove to be based on a false or unhealthy conception of the world.

Response: Ruthless questioning (cont'd)

The truths about ourselves and the world may be ugly. We may not like what we see. The pursuit of truth requires **strength** and **honesty**:

“Intellectual conscience. — ... The great majority lacks an intellectual conscience ... To the great majority it is not contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly without first becoming aware of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterwards.”

(The Gay Science §2)

“A very popular error: having the courage of one’s convictions; rather it is a matter of having the **courage for an attack on one’s convictions!**”
(Note, Spring 1888)

Response: Ruthless questioning (cont'd)

It's a measure of strength as to how much “terrible insight into reality” one can bear and affirm:

“Error ... is not blindness, error is *cowardice*.”

Nietzsche's human exemplar “conceives reality *as it is*, being strong enough to do so.” (Ecce Homo Z:6, P:3, IV:5)

How to proceed?

1 Nietzsche? Or Not Nietzsche?

2 Some themes

- Ruthless skepticism
- Genealogical method
- Evaluative critiques of values

3 Reader beware

A multiplicity of perspectives

“[O]bjectivity” is “*having in our power* the ability to control one’s Pros and Cons and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge ...

[T]he *more* affects we allow to speak about a thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes we can use for the same thing, the more complete will our ... ‘objectivity’ be.”
(*Genealogy* III:12)

Method of “genealogy”

Methodological naturalism: Philosophical inquiry should be continuous with empirical scientific inquiry. Our philosophical conclusions should be supported by, or at least consistent with, the findings of our best sciences.

Philosophical strategy: use truths about the (biological, psychological, social) origins of our beliefs and values as a basis for critiquing them, investigating their value, and determining whether to accept them

- What is the *function* of our beliefs and values?
- And what do they *reveal* about us?

Against “hypothesis mongering”

“My real concern is something much more important than hypothesis-mongering ... on the origin of [e.g.] morality ... What is at stake is **the value of morality.**” (*Genealogy* P:5)

Two components: empirical and evaluative

- The inquiry into the causal origins of our attitudes and practices is in the service of “much more important” philosophical ends.

The ultimate goal is *constructive*: discerning what to believe and value, what kind of person to be, and why

- (not necessarily “debunking”)

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Application to morality

Applying the “genealogical” method to our *moral* values and practices:

- Why do we value the things we do? (say, generosity vs. punching kittens)
- What is the function of our values? (What are they for? Who are they good for?)
- What do our values reveal about us and what kind of person we are?
- How should we modify our values in response?

Skepticism

Questioning our core values and commitments:

“One has taken the *value* of these ‘values’ as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing ‘the good person’ to be of greater value than ‘the evil person,’ of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of humanity ... But what if the opposite were true? (*Genealogy* P:6)

Skepticism (cont'd)

We can't take the value of traditional morality for granted. We can't just assume that the things that have been traditionally valued are actually valuable.

- Are all things (acts, motives, etc.) traditionally valued as “good” actually worth promoting? To what extent?
- Should all things (acts, motives, etc.) commonly deemed “evil” be categorically rejected? Or might some be worth promoting?

Genealogical method

“Let us articulate this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called in question* — and for that there is needed a knowledge of the **conditions and circumstances in which they grew**, under which they evolved and changed.” (*Genealogy* P:6)

- What is the function of traditional morality?
- What kind of psychology or “moral outlook” do traditional moral values express?
- How do the answers to these questions bear on what values to accept ourselves?

Evaluative critiques of values

Basis for assessing values: to what extent they “further the advancement and prosperity of humanity”

Evaluative critiques of values (cont'd)

“What was especially at stake was the value of the ‘unegoistic,’ the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice ... It was precisely here that I saw the *great* danger to humanity ... I understood the ever spreading morality of pity ... as the most sinister symptom of a European culture that had itself become sinister, perhaps as its by-pass to ... — *nihilism?*” (*Genealogy* P:5)

- Do prominent moral values promote human flourishing, strength, excellence, and an affirmation of life?
- Or is a morality of selflessness and pity ultimately dangerous to humanity?

The *Genealogy*

Three case studies

- Essay I: evaluative concepts of “good,” “bad,” “evil”, and the types of moral outlooks that use them
- Essay II: **conscience and guilt**
- Essay III: **ascetic ideals**

Some takeaways

- **physiological** origins for various psychological phenomena (thoughts, values, motives)
- Not everything we've come to value is good for us or promotes things we care about.
- Human beings are “the **sick** animal.”
 - conflicting attitudes and constraints from our biology, social nature, and self-consciousness
- Demonizing some of our attitudes, stifling them, or pretending they don't exist only makes us sicker.

Against nihilism. Toward a positive ideal

Next steps: How, then, can we come to affirm ourselves, understand our place in nature and society, and express and regulate our attitudes in a constructive, healthy way?

Nietzsche's broader goal: to construct a system of values that helps channel our natural drives and feelings in ways that promote psychological health and human excellence — positive, life-affirming values that express the “ultimate, most joyous, most wantonly extravagant Yes to life” (*Ecce Homo* BT:2).

Situating the *Genealogy*

Genealogical method recap:

- Naturalistic inquiry (the focus in the *Genealogy*)
- Use the naturalistic inquiry as a basis for an evaluative critique
- Construct a positive ideal in response (developed more elsewhere)

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Hazards :/

“*On the question of being understandable.* — One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood. It is not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand: perhaps that was part of the author’s intention — they did not want to be understood by just ‘anybody’.”
(The Gay Science §381)

“If this book is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on their ears, the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and has not spared some trouble in doing so: for they are, indeed, not easy to penetrate.”
(Genealogy P:8)

Pro tip

“[Y]ou need one thing above all in order to practice the requisite *art* of reading, a thing which today people have been so good at forgetting — ... it is *ruminatio*n ...” (*Genealogy* P:8)

“It is not for nothing that I have been a philologist ..., that is to say, a teacher of slow reading ... Nowadays it is not only my habit, it is also my taste — a malicious taste, perhaps? — no longer to write anything which does not reduce to despair every sort of person who is ‘in a hurry’ ... [I]n the midst of an age of ‘work’, that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to ‘get everything done’ at once, including every old or new book: — this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers ... My patient friends and philologists: learn to read me well!” (*Daybreak* P:5)

On the Genealogy of Morality: Preface

Alex Silk

Some themes

- *Skepticism* (provisional): We must question even our most central commitments. Perhaps we'll come to endorse them on reflection. But we must be prepared to reject them if they are rooted in a false or unhealthy conception of the world.
- *Genealogical* method of investigating and critiquing values and beliefs
 - *Task*: use empirical truths about the origins of our attitudes as a basis for examining the value of those attitudes and determining whether to accept them
 - *Methodological naturalism*: Philosophical conclusions should be informed by, or at least consistent with, the findings of our best sciences.
 - *Evaluative critiques* of values: assess values in terms of how they promote or inhibit human excellence and flourishing
- *Conceptual ethics*: Not all ways of framing inquiry or conceptualizing the same states of affairs are on a par. What concepts should we use in posing questions about how to live, making ethical judgments, and expressing our evaluations of actions, attitudes, people, states of affairs?

Roadmap

- §1. Intro tone-setting: "we are unknown to ourselves"
- §2. Preliminary statement of the topic
 - "my ideas on the origin of our moral prejudices"
 - some autobiographical details
- §3. Clarifying and expanding on the preliminary statement of the topic from §2
 - *Clarifying* ("Descriptive"): What do traditional moral judgments characteristically indicate and cause? (Of what are they *symptomatic*, and what do they *promote*?)
 - *Expanding* ("Evaluative"): Do traditional moral judgments have value? Are they worth accepting? How might the former Descriptive question bear on the latter Evaluative question?
 - more autobiographical details
- §4. Comparisons with other (deficient) approaches
- §5. Nietzsche's ultimate concern: the "Evaluative" question
- §6. Rhetorical climax: reiterating the importance of the "Evaluative" question, and the methodology of using inquiry into the "Descriptive" question (the principle focus of this book) as a basis for addressing the "Evaluative" question (considered more explicitly elsewhere)
- §7. Prospects ("falling action"): the present critical project is a preliminary phase en route to a more "cheerful" perspective and evaluative outlook
- §8. Reader beware

Section 1

- on self-knowledge — or lack thereof
 - “We are unknown to ourselves [...] We are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not understand ourselves, we *have to* misunderstand ourselves [...] We are not ‘knowers’ when it comes to with respect to ourselves.”
 - **Q:** Who is the “we” here?
 - **Q:** Why do we lack knowledge of ourselves? In what sense are “we knowers today” alienated from ourselves?
 - **Q:** Why is this lack of self-understanding in some sense “necessary”?
- **Q:** What is the purpose of this intro? Why does Nietzsche bother to include it before beginning the overview of the book’s central topics and themes in §2?

Section 2

- **“the subject of this polemic”: “My ideas on the origin of our moral prejudices”**
 - **Q:** In what sense is the book a “polemic”?
 - **Q:** Why the shift from “we” people of knowledge to “my ideas”?
- history of the development of Nietzsche’s ideas on the subject
 - a unified treatise, expressing his own values and intellectual development
 - “That I still cleave to them today, however [...] strengthens my joyful assurance that they might have arisen in me from the first *not as isolated, capricious, or sporadic things* but from a common root, from a *fundamental will of knowledge*, pointing imperiously into the depths, speaking more and more precisely, demanding greater and greater *precision*. For this alone is fitting for a philosopher.”
 - **Q:** Why would Nietzsche include autobiographical details about the origins of the ideas presented in the *Genealogy*?
 - **Q:** Should the fact that our ideas express a unified perspective or “will of knowledge” give us more reason to believe them? How, if at all, might facts about the psychology of a philosopher be relevant to our evaluation of their philosophy?

Section 3

- more autobiographical details
 - a lifelong disposition toward skepticism, especially about morality
 - Note the reversal of and distancing from Kant: Nietzsche’s imperative enjoins *skepticism* about morality.
- **CENTRAL TOPIC AND METHODOLOGY**
 - *Topic:* “the question of where our good and evil really *originated*” — **“under what conditions did humanity invent those value judgements good and evil? and what value do they themselves have? Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity?** Are they a sign of distress, impover-

- ishment, and the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the fullness, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?"
- *Methodology* of “Genealogy”: investigating the natural biological, psychological, social factors shaping our moral beliefs and practices as a basis for assessing their *value* and determining whether to accept them
 - By uncovering the origins of different moral values and practices, we can learn what they characteristically *indicate* and what are their characteristic *effects*.
 - We can thus discern to what extent our moral views express and promote things that we truly care about — notably, human flourishing.
 - **Q:** What values will Nietzsche use in assessing moral practices, judgments, and concepts?
 - Nietzsche denies committing the “genetic fallacy,” of taking the origin of something to entail something about its value: “Even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not so much as touch the problem of its value” (*The Gay Science* §345). Then how might empirical information about the origins of our moral values and practices bear on whether they are justified?
 - “Genetic fallacy”: (1) *Causal premise*: S’s belief that *p* has such-and-such cause(s) *C*. (2) *Normative premise*: *C* is problematic in such-and-such way. (C) So, *p* is false.
 - “Debunking” argument: (1) *Causal premise*: S’s belief that *p* has such-and-such cause(s) *C*. (2) *Normative premise*: *C* is problematic in such-and-such way. (C) So, S’s belief that *p* is unjustified/worth questioning.
 - **Q:** examples?
 - **Q:** What makes a given “debunking” argument better or worse?
 - Distinction: **descriptive** vs. **endorsing** uses of ‘value’/‘morality’
 - Not all uses of ‘value’/‘morality’ express the speaker’s endorsement of those values. Consider “Traditional values are of no value”: one refers to things traditionally valued, and expresses that they aren’t valuable.
 - *Descriptive* uses describe a body of values, norms, practices accepted by some individual or group. E.g., there was ancient Greek morality, there is Nazi morality, etc. Saying that something is a value, in this sense, needn’t imply that it’s something we should accept.
 - *Endorsing* uses express one’s endorsement of the values, etc. in question. Saying that something is of value, in this sense, expresses that it’s genuinely valuable.
 - Nietzsche’s question is whether to endorse values (in the descriptive sense) associated with traditional Western morality. Are compassion, pity, selflessness, etc. genuinely valuable?

Section 4

- more background on the history of the development of Nietzsche's ideas on issues broached in the *Genealogy*
 - *Human, All-Too-Human* §45 (re concepts of "good", "bad", "evil"; cf. *Beyond Good and Evil* §260; esp. Essay I)
 - *Human, All-Too-Human* §§136ff (re asceticism; esp. Essay III)
 - *Human, All-Too-Human* §§92, 96, 99; *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* §89; *The Wanderer and His Shadow* §§22, 26, 33; *Daybreak* §112 (re punishment and practices anteceding morality proper; esp. Essay II)
- note the distancing and honesty: "I advanced for the first time those genealogical hypotheses to which this treatise is devoted — ineptly, as I should be the last to deny, still constrained, still lacking my own language for my own things and with much backsliding and vacillation."
 - **Q:** Might this shed light on why Nietzsche doesn't reference any of his most recent work?

Section 5

- "**my real concern** was something much more important than hypothesis-mongering, whether my own or other people's, on the origin of morality [...] **What was at stake was the value of morality.**"
 - Two components of the genealogical method: empirical and evaluative
 - Nietzsche's aim is to uncover the origins of our moral practices as a basis for critiquing them and determining to what extent to promote them going forward.
 - The empirical inquiry into the naturalistic origins of our moral practices is a *means* to "something much more important": investigating the *value* of our moral practices.
 - **Q:** Given that Nietzsche's project isn't simply scientific, how might his broader aims influence the *presentation* of his ideas? (writing style, rhetoric)
 - **NB:** The genealogical method isn't essential for a critique of morality. It's "one means among many."
- Why the project is non-trivial: "instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice"
 - We must question the value of moralities of selflessness, pity, guilt. Do such moralities express and promote strength and an affirmation of life? Or do they express and encourage "*nihilism*," being a "*great danger*" to life?

Section 6

"Let us articulate **this new demand: we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question — and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed [...]**

One has taken the *value* of these 'values' as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing 'the good person' to be of greater value than 'the evil person,' of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of humanity in general (the future of humanity included). But what if the reverse were true?"

- *Skepticism*: We can't assume the value of traditional morality uncritically.
 - We must question whether dominant moral values (in the descriptive sense) are *genuinely valuable* — whether to accept and promote them.
- Recall Nietzsche's two-part project: (i) inquiry into the causal origins of our values; (ii) critiquing whether to continue valuing such things and determining what to value going forward, and under what conditions
 - Nietzsche's primary focus in the *Genealogy* is part (i), as "crucial preparation" (*Ecce Homo* "Genealogy of Morals") for part (ii).
 - Nietzsche's evaluative standard for part (ii): health, strength, human excellence and flourishing
- *Key question*: Do traditional moral values express and promote flourishing, health, and an affirmation of life?
 - Is it possible that certain things often deemed "evil" are in fact valuable? Could certain allegedly "evil" motives, acts, etc. in fact be worth promoting in certain circumstances?
 - Is a morality of selflessness and pity good for individuals capable of excellence? Or is it ultimately dangerous to humanity, inhibiting human flourishing and the development of human excellence?
 - (Cf. "We are egomaniacal narcissists. I bet Columbus was – and Magellan. And they had to be to do what they did. I say here's to selfish pricks. 'Cause we move the ball forward for mankind." – *For All Mankind*)

Section 7

- *Naturalism and Genealogy*:
 - Note Nietzsche's interest in "real history" and investigating "the morality which has really existed, really been lived." It's only by uncovering actual origins of our moral beliefs that we'll be in a position to assess their value.
 - **Q**: If Nietzsche is wrong about certain of the empirical facts, need that undermine his primary evaluative aims?

Section 8

- Reader beware:
 - "Regarding expression, intention, and the art of surprise, the three inquiries which constitute this *Genealogy* are perhaps uncannier than anything else written so far [...]"

Every time **a beginning that is *calculated to mislead***: cool, scientific, even ironic, deliberately foreground, deliberately holding off [...] In the end, in the midst of perfectly gruesome detonations, a *new* truth becomes visible every time among thick clouds." (*Ecce Homo* "Genealogy of Morals")

- Think of the narrator as someone progressing along a process of discovery. Don't assume that every sentence on the page is in Nietzsche's own voice or expresses Nietzsche's final, considered view.
- Occupational hazards: "If this book is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on his ears, the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and has not spared some trouble in doing so: for they are, indeed, not easy to penetrate [...] One thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an art in this way, something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays [...] — something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a 'modern man': *rumination*." (cf. *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* 137, *Daybreak* Preface §5, *The Gay Science* §381, *Twilight of the Idols* "What the Germans Lack" §§5–7)
 - To understand the *Genealogy* we must read slowly and carefully, attending to the context — to Nietzsche's remarks earlier and later in the *Genealogy*, and in other works. (no easy task!)
 - We must read with emotional involvement.
 - Attend not just to *what* Nietzsche says, but *how he says it* — what emotions and attitudes he's trying to elicit in the reader, and what such emotional reactions may reveal about ourselves and our values.

On the Genealogy of Morality, First Essay,
“‘Good and Evil,’ ‘Good and ‘Bad’ ”:

Ressentiment

Alex Silk

“The truth of the *first* inquiry is the birth of Christianity: the birth of Christianity out of the spirit of *ressentiment*, not, as people may believe, out of the ‘spirit’ — a countermovement by its very nature, the great rebellion against the dominion of *noble* values.” (*Ecce Homo*, “Genealogy of Morals”)

Preliminaries

Method of *genealogy*: method of investigating the naturalistic origins of certain attitudes, concepts, practices as a basis for assessing their value.

- A genealogical argument about (say) certain moral values will need to rely on true claims about their origins. However, remember that such claims are presented with a broader philosophical aim of *critiquing* traditional morality. This aim calls for a “Polemic.”
- A key goal of Nietzsche’s is to encourage his readers to question the value of traditional morality. Given how psychologically and culturally engrained this morality is, writing in the manner of a typical scholarly treatise likely wouldn’t be effective. Nietzsche’s rhetorical style can thus be seen as instrumental, as a tool. “Humanity prefers to see gestures rather than to hear reasons” (*The Antichrist* §54). Though we must “*learn to think differently*,” what can be more important, and more difficult, is learning “*to feel differently*” (*Daybreak* §103).
- So, two questions to keep in mind as you’re reading: Which empirical claims are important for Nietzsche’s argument? Why is Nietzsche presenting them in the way that he is?

Reading hazards — recall:

- “Regarding expression, intention, and the art of surprise, the three inquiries which constitute this *Genealogy* are perhaps uncannier than anything else written so far. Every time **a beginning that is calculated to mislead**... Gradually more unrest; sporadic lightning; very disagreeable truths are heard grumbling in the distance — until eventually a *tempo feroce* is attained in which everything rushes ahead in a tremendous tension. In the end, in the midst of perfectly gruesome detonations, **a new truth becomes visible every time among thick clouds.**” (*Ecce Homo*, “Genealogy of Morals”)

The Three Essays

Methodological naturalism: we’re to attempt to explain the origins of moral concepts, values, practices in terms of natural mechanisms. Each essay of the *Ge-*

nealogy targets a particular feature of morality, and posits a primary psychological mechanism in explaining it:

- Essay I:
 - *Phenomenon*: the rise of “‘good’/‘evil’ morality”
 - *Psychological mechanism*: *ressentiment*
- Essay II:
 - *Phenomenon*: the rise of bad conscience and guilt
 - *Psychological mechanism*: internalized cruelty
- Essay III:
 - *Phenomenon*: the rise of the “ascetic ideal”
 - (The account of the rise of this type of ideal will help explain the prominence of “good”/“evil” morality (Essay I) and the moralization of bad conscience in the form of guilt (Essay II).)
 - *Psychological mechanism*: the will to power
 - (with supporting roles from the mechanisms underlying *ressentiment* and internalization discussed in Essays I–II)

Essay I: the origins of a “‘good’/‘evil’” moral outlook

Case study: Judeo-Christian morality in the Roman Empire

- Judeo-Christian morality isn't to be explained, fundamentally, in terms of some divine inspiration. It's the product of a perspective characterized by weakness and a state of festering resentment, frustration, bitterness (“*ressentiment*”), from a position of felt oppression.
- Judeo-Christian morality was accepted by the oppressed ultimately because it was good for them and it provided an outlet for their frustration and bitterness toward their oppressors.
 - Since the oppressed were unable to express their hostility physically, they came to express it in values that devalued the nobles and the nobles' traits, deeming them “evil”.
 - The oppressed people's judgments about what is “good” afford a means of justifying their weakness and felt inability to take action.
- NB: on Nietzsche's talk of Judaism and Christianity
 - Nietzsche is interested here in Judeo-Christian *morality*, not in Jewish or Christian religion. In this context, Nietzsche uses 'Judea', 'Jew', 'Judaism', interchangeably with talk of Christianity (“Jewish, Christian, or plebeian (never mind the words!)” (I:9; cf. 16)).¹

¹ Heads up: All references will be to the *Genealogy*, unless indicated otherwise. Capital roman numerals are for the essay number, and Arabic numerals are for the section number. For example, 'I:9' refers to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Essay, section 9.

Roadmap

- §§1–3: how not to give an account of the origins of concept of “good” (with hints at Nietzsche’s own account in §2)
- §§4–5: etymological considerations that helped point Nietzsche toward a better account
- §§6–9: developments of the concept of “evil” in the “slavish” outlook
- §§10–11: contrasting the “noble” and “slavish” evaluative outlooks
- §§11–12: interlude on prospects of humanity
- §§13–15: the concept of “good” in the slavish evaluative outlook
- §§16–17: recap and next steps

Key Ideas

- *Main aim*: to distinguish two interesting types of psychologies and moral outlooks, or ways of conceptualizing moral issues and making moral judgments: “‘good’/‘bad’ morality” and “‘good’/‘evil’ morality” (compare *Human, All-Too-Human* §45, *Beyond Good and Evil* §260)
 - How do these different types characteristically express their negative and positive evaluations of things? What motivates these evaluations? How do the individuals understand themselves in relation to the things they positively evaluate and the things they negatively evaluate?
 - (NB: from now on I’ll leave the ‘characteristically’ implicit)
- Roughly put:
 - “‘Good’/‘Bad’” evaluative perspective:
 - positive evaluations (“good”-judgments) are motivated from a position of strength and self-affirmation
 - negative evaluations (“bad”-judgments) are an afterthought, expressing contempt toward the “other” things, conceived as “lower” or “beneath” one
 - “‘Good’/‘Evil’” evaluative perspective:
 - negative evaluations (“evil”-judgments) are motivated by bitterness and frustration, from a position of weakness
 - positive evaluations (“good”-judgments) are an afterthought, to rationalize weakness and cope with discontent

“‘Good’/‘Bad’” evaluative perspective

- characteristically associated with nobles
 - “The judgment ‘good’ [originated with] the noble, powerful, high-stationed, and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to the all the low, low-minded, common, and plebeian [...] The protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a ‘below’ — *that* is the origin of the antithesis ‘good’ and ‘bad!’” (I:2; cf. 10)

- The positive evaluative concept (what's "good") is conceptually primary.
 - motivated by self-affirmation, from a position of strength
 - characteristic values: activity, action, strength, power
 - "[T]he exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank [...] Everything it knows as part of itself it honors: such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power. The noble human being honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself" (*Beyond Good and Evil* §260).
 - (compare a lion's dispositions toward things that promote and express their natural instincts of strength)
- The negative evaluative concept (what's "bad") is derivative.
 - Judgments about what's bad arise "as an afterthought" (I:10), to refer to the others, those who are not good (i.e. not "like me").
 - What's bad is viewed with contempt, from a position as "higher"
 - "The noble human being separates from himself those in whom the opposite of such exalted, proud states finds expression: he despises them." (*Beyond Good and Evil* §260)

"Good"/"Evil" evaluative perspective

- characteristically associated with the weak, the oppressed
- The negative evaluative concept (what's "evil") is conceptually primary.
 - motivated by *ressentiment*: a kind of festering resentment, bitterness, frustration in reaction to negative situations that one feels powerless to change (more on this below)
 - characteristic disvalues: "precisely the 'good one' of the other morality" (I:11), namely the strength, power, action, etc. that one resents
 - "Suppose the violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary, moralize: what will their moral valuations have in common? Probably, a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of humanity will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of humanity along with their condition. The slave's eye is not favorable to the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and suspicious, *subtly* suspicious, of all the 'good' that is honored there — he would like to persuade himself that even their happiness is not genuine..." (*Beyond Good and Evil* §260)
- The positive evaluative concept (what's "good") is derivative.
 - Judgments about what's good arise "as an afterthought" to refer to themselves, those who are "not evil", to help ease their dissatisfaction with themselves and their situation. (I:13–14; more on this next week)

- “Conversely, those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored — for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence.” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §260)
- assumes free will (cf. I:13)
 - Q: Why? How would assuming free will help rationalize their attitudes toward themselves and their oppressors?

Clarifications and refinements

• “good”/“bad”/“evil”

- The project in the First Essay isn’t, in the first instance, to give a normative ethical account of what is good (what to value) or what is bad/evil (what to devalue). It’s to give an account of different *concepts* of “good”, “bad”, “evil” and types of moral psychologies.
- Lessons:
 - One can positively evaluate the same thing as “good” from *very* different motivations, dispositions, outlooks.
 - Negatively evaluating something as “evil” needn’t be psychologically equivalent to negatively evaluating it as “bad”. (a concept of “evil” ≠ a concept of “bad”)
 - Not all ways of conceptualizing a situation are on a par. What concepts we use in ethics and inquiry can be as important as the valence of our evaluations. (“conceptual ethics”)

• “noble”/“slave”

- Although Nietzsche starts by using ‘noble’ and ‘slave’ for individuals in certain socio-economic classes, he comes to apply the terms more broadly for distinctive kinds of psychologies. These *psychological types* — a psychology typified by a strong ruling noble at the top of a hierarchy, and a psychology typified by a weak oppressed slave — are what’s of primary interest.
 - So, for example, someone who is socially in the aristocracy could have a “slavish” morality.
 - cf. Nietzsche’s talk of “priestly,” “knightly-aristocratic,” “noble” “*mode[s] of valuation*” (I:6,7,10)
- Contemporary moralities are typically *mixes* or *hybrids* of these two types.
 - “As I was wandering through the many subtle and crude moralities that have been dominant [...] I found certain traits regularly recurring together and linked to each other — until I finally discovered two basic types [...] There is a *master morality* and a *slave morality* — I will immediately add that in all higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts to negotiate between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur

directly alongside each other — even in the same human being, within a single soul." (*Beyond Good and Evil* §260)

• **ressentiment and the “slave revolt in morality”**

- **Q:** What is the psychological state of *ressentiment*? How does it help explain the slaves’ “revaluation”/“inversion” of the noble evaluative outlook?
 - “The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself’; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye — this *need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself — is of the essence of *ressentiment*” (I:10).
- *Ressentiment*: a reactive state that arises in response to some unpleasant situation which one feels powerless to change through action
 - a pent-up festering hatred or bitterness resulting from repeated suppression or frustration of desires to respond, retaliate, avenge (I:10–15)
 - *reactive*: things are conceived as coming “against” you
 - not a fleeting attitude — rather, a stable disposition, habit, or pattern of feeling resulting from repeated stifling of occurrent negative attitudes
 - (NB: German ‘ressentiment’ contrasts with English ‘resentment’ (and the original French ‘ressentiment’) in connoting more of a grudge)
- *Claim*: When *ressentiment* can’t be expressed outwardly through action, it may find a natural expression in one’s *values*. This is the psychological origin of the “slave revolt in morality”.
 - Faced with oppression and suffering which they feel they can’t change via action toward their oppressors, the oppressed may express their negative attitudes via their evaluative judgments, e.g. in deeming their oppressors “evil”.
 - This outlet for *ressentiment* shapes the color and content of one’s evaluative judgments and perceptions. (→ a distinctive evaluative outlook)
 - *color*: one’s negative evaluative judgments become an outlet for one’s pent-up negative attitudes; thoughts about the oppressors become associated with feelings of hatred, bitterness, etc.
 - *content*: one comes to devalue the relevant unpleasant situation or what causes it
 - → “revaluation” of the nobles’ values
 - two assumptions: (i) The oppressed come to demonize as “evil” the traits associated with the nobles, since those traits are characteristically associated with their own suffering. But (ii) those very traits are valued by the nobles as “good”, as an expression of self-affirmation.

- So, the set of things deemed “evil” by the oppressed comes to mirror the set of things deemed “good” by the nobles.
- NB: the “creation” of values needn’t be conscious or intentional. (compare e.g. the talk of the “invent[ion]” of the hand in II:13)
- NB: Though the noble person may experience *ressentiment*, it is eventually expressed in action; it doesn’t “poison” by continuing to fester, as with the slaves (I:10).

The scope of Nietzsche’s critique

- **Q:** How might Nietzsche’s inquiry into concepts of “good”/“bad” and “good”/“evil” play a role in his broader project of determining what values to accept? (more on this next week...)
- How might a critique of a certain type of moral outlook (e.g., one originally motivated by *ressentiment*) inform a critique of its values and disvalues?
- If Nietzsche’s account of the origin of the concept of evil was correct, would it give us reason to stop using that concept? Why or why not?
- Be *very* careful in drawing conclusions about Nietzsche’s own ethical views in light of the Essays in the *Genealogy*.
 - Nietzsche does *not* reject all values: “*Beyond Good and Evil*. — At least this does *not* mean ‘Beyond Good and Bad.’” (I:17)
 - His initial aim is to provoke us to question the value of our values.
 - Endorsing a “‘good’/‘bad’ morality” doesn’t imply endorsing the particular morality of certain ruling nobles.
 - For example, Nietzsche’s picture of *ressentiment* isn’t black-and-white:
 - *Ressentiment* is the “*instrument of culture*; which is not to say that the *bearers* of these instincts themselves represent culture” (I:11). It helped “the human soul [become] *deep*,” “*interesting*,” “*superior to other animals*,” “*clever*”; without it, human history would be “*stupid*” (I:6,7,10). Because of their physical powerlessness, the oppressed were forced to think, reflect, and develop an inner life.
 - By contrast, the original masters “are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey [...] It was the noble races which left the concept of ‘barbarian’ in their traces” (I:11). Though the masters are sometimes described as “*splendid*,” they are also described as “*stupid*,” “*hideous*,” and “*appalling*” “*monsters*” (I:7,11).
- **Q:** Why this mixed response? Whence the conflicting affects in response to the traits, actions, dispositions of the nobles and those of the oppressed?
 - “There is from the first something *unhealthy* in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling in them which turn them away from action and alternate between brooding and emotional explosions [...] Humanity is still ill with the effects of this priestly naïveté in medicine!” (I:6).
 - “One may be quite justified in continuing to fear the blond beast at the core of all noble races and in being on one’s guard against it: but who

would not a hundred times prefer to fear if one can also admire, than to *not* fear but be permanently condemned to the repellent sight of the failed, stunted, atrophied, and poisoned," "the hopelessly mediocre and insipid"? "And is that not *our* fate?" The one who can "feel distanced from the superabundance of failed, sickly, tired, and exhausted people" may be "at least still capable of living, at least affirming life" (I:11).

- (cf. "The dress felt like a prison built just for me, choking me by the neck. Digging into my underarms. Flattening my breasts against my rib cage. It disguises everything that makes me a woman from the glare of jealous women and rapacious men. As if their lack of self-esteem or will power should be my only concern. I will never live in that world again where the weak would rather guilt the strong than become strong themselves. No, I will stay in this world." (1883, Elsa Dutton)
- Could there be a way of exploiting certain of the instincts of the "noble" mode of evaluation (affirmation, strength, overcoming) in a more thoughtful ("deep," reflective) way, in the service of healthier, more constructive ends ("culture")? (more on this in Essay II)

Unresolved question: Given that the oppressed were just that—the *oppressed*—how did their system of values become the prominent one in history? Why would the rulers come to endorse the moral outlook of the oppressed?

- We get a hint that it has something to do with the "ascetic ideal" (I:6,7), but a fuller answer must wait until Essay III...

On the Genealogy of Morality, First Essay (cont'd)

Alex Silk

Last week we began characterizing what Nietzsche takes to be two basic types of psychologies and evaluative perspectives: a “good”/“bad” (“noble”) mode of evaluation and a “good”/“evil” (“slavish”) mode of evaluation.

Key questions: How does the noble type’s positive evaluative concept of “good” differ from the slavish type’s positive evaluative concept of “good”? How does the noble type’s negative evaluative concept of “bad” differ from the slavish type’s evaluative concept of “evil”? For instance:

- What characteristically motivates their positive evaluations of things and their negative evaluations of things?
- What sorts of things do they characteristically value and disvalue?
- How do they view themselves in relation to the things they value and the things they disvalue?

So far we’ve focused on how the noble type’s evaluative outlook is shaped by attitudes of strength and self-affirmation, in contrast to the slavish type, whose evaluative outlook is shaped by *ressentiment*.

§13 transitions to how the slavish type expresses their positive evaluations, i.e. to “the problem of the other origin of the ‘good,’ of the good as conceived by the person of *ressentiment*.” Nietzsche claims that, unlike with the noble type, the slavish type’s judgments about what is good are not fundamentally driven by self-affirmation.

Key questions for this week will be: What is the *function* of the slavish type’s positive values and concept of “good”? How might that function help explain the prominence of those values?

- What do the slavish type’s judgments about what’s good indicate about them and their circumstances? Of what are they *symptomatic*?
- What would result from accepting the slavish type’s perspective on what’s good? What are their characteristic *effects* for different types of people in different circumstances?
- How might the previous questions bear on the question of what to value?

§13 characterizes the slavish type’s conception of what’s good as reflecting a kind of “prudence”.

- “What if people who were violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, weary, and unsure of themselves were to moralize: what type of moral valuations would they have?” “Qualities that serve to **ease existence for those who suffer** are pulled out and flooded with light: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness are honored — for these are the most useful qualities and practically the only way

of enduring the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility." (*Beyond Good and Evil* §260)

In a manner to be explained, the weak, slavish types came to endorse values such as patience, humility, etc. because doing so was *good for them*.

- (i) Since the oppressed felt unable to take action against their oppressors, they legitimized the sorts of responses they could have by viewing these responses as praiseworthy and *good*.
- (ii) Accepting the resulting conception of what's good was good for them in their circumstances (e.g., psychologically, socially, materially).
- (iii) This helps explain why the values were endorsed.

some examples from the highly rhetorical climax of the Essay in §§13–14:

- "When the oppressed, downtrodden, outraged exhort one another with the vengeful cunning of impotence: 'let us be different from the evil, namely good! And he is good who does not outrage, who harms nobody, who does not attack, who does not requite, who leaves revenge to God, who keeps himself hidden as we do, who avoids evil and desires little from life, like us, the patient, humble, and just' — this, heard calmly and impartially, amounts to nothing more than: 'we weak ones are, after all, weak; it would be good if we did nothing *for which we are not strong enough*' " (I:13).

| Explicit value | Implicit state |
|---|--|
| "goodness of heart" | impotence, inability to take action |
| "humility" | anxious lowliness |
| "obedience" | subjection to those one hates |
| "patience" | inoffensiveness, cowardice |
| "forgiveness," "loving one's enemies" | inability for revenge |
| "being chosen by God" | misery |
| desire for "justice," righteous indignation | desire for retaliation and revenge |
| hatred of "injustice" | hatred of their position and the oppressors |
| "faith" and "hope" in the future "Kingdom of God" | desire to be the strong, desire for freedom and compensation |

The theme is that "weakness is being lied into something *meritorious*" (I:14).

Q: What does this mean? In what sense(s) are the things in the righthand column "lied into" the things in the lefthand column?

- (i) first pass: The slavish types lack the virtues on the left because of having the attitudes on the right: they're ignorant of their true motives and so aren't virtuous in the ways they think.
 - For example, one isn't genuinely forgiving if one desires revenge.
 - can't be the whole story:

- awkward for some of the examples (e.g., obedience, patience, being chosen by God)
- ignores what's at issue: the origins of the slavish type's conception of what's good, and why they came to accept certain virtue concepts
- leaves unexplained the idea that the people's "good"-judgments were in their interest
- (ii) second pass: The attitudes and states in the righthand column are *reconceptualized* in the terms from the lefthand column: the slavish types' explicit endorsements of the values on the left *express* or *indicate* the states on the right; and the slavish types are generally unaware of this or would deny it.
 - For instance, rather than viewing oneself as powerless to change one's circumstances, one **reconceptualizes** one's being forced to "linger at the door" of the masters as a **voluntary exercise of a virtue: patience**.
 - Or, rather than viewing oneself as miserable, in a situation one deplors, one comes to think of one's tribulations as a "test" and "a sign of being chosen by God". Rather than viewing oneself as vengeful and filled with hate toward one's oppressors, one understands one's expressions of these attitudes as expressions of "righteous indignation". And so on.
- *Nietzsche's idea*: (i) these reconceptualizations — the positive evaluations of themselves, their behavior, and their situation in these terms — were good for the oppressed; (ii) this function is part of why the values gained currency among the slavish types of individuals in their circumstances.
 - Claims:
 - Developing dispositions to follow orders, keep their head down, "linger at the door," etc. would be good for the oppressed and slavish types in their circumstances.
 - But how to cultivate such dispositions? One way: through one's evaluative concepts — i.e., by coming to conceive of such behaviours as praiseworthy exercises of virtues of obedience, humility, patience, etc., and thereby coming to *value* those behaviours.
 - This *function* of reinforcing adaptive dispositions in stable, psychologically and socially sustainable ways helps explain the resulting prominence of the values and conception of what's good among the individuals in question.
 - How so? How was accepting these values and coming to conceive of themselves and their circumstances in these ways good for the oppressed and slavish types? (psychologically? socially? materially?)
 - Consider, e.g., the assumption of free will: "this prudence of the lowest order [...] has [...] clothed itself in the finery of self-denying, quiet, patient virtue, as if the weakness of the weak [...] were a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a *deed*, a *meritorious* act.

This type of person *needs* to believe in a neutral independent 'subject,' prompted by an instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified [... This belief] makes possible to the majority of mortals, the weak and oppressed of every kind, the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom, and their being thus-and-thus as a *merit*."

On the flip side, by believing "that *the strong person is free to be weak*," they "gain the right" to hold the strong "accountable" (I:13; recall *Beyond Good and Evil* §260).

Questions:

- Does Nietzsche's account require thinking that the oppressed endorsed these values for the explicit conscious reason that doing so would be good for them? Need the responses have been intentional?
 - The positive "good"-judgments and virtue concepts in the slavish moral outlook are treated as an **adaptive psychological response** to their (internal and external) circumstances.
 - Compare: how some "insects" might come to be disposed to "pos[e] as dead when in great danger, so as not to do 'too much' " (I:13)
 - re "prudence" (or "intelligence"): personifying naturalistic processes by which creatures may come to internalize certain adaptive dispositions; needn't be intentional (but: potential complications with humans due to capacities for reflection and sociality (cf. "priests"))
- How is the slavish types' response of endorsing the values in question relevantly (dis)analogous to an insect's response of "playing dead"?
 - Is "playing dead" adaptive for all types of insects in all circumstances? What responses would be more adaptive for other types of insects, or insects in other circumstances?
 - By comparison, does accepting Judeo-Christian moral values promote the well-being of all types of individuals in all circumstances? If not, is there another kind of evaluative outlook that would be better for certain individuals? If accepting different values would be better for such individuals, would that imply that the Judeo-Christian values don't apply to them?
- Why does Nietzsche present the account of the origins of the slavish type's concept of "good" in such a stylized way? How does the rhetorical style contribute to Nietzsche's philosophical aims?
 - Why does Nietzsche describe the slavish types' response and conception of what's good as reflecting a prudence of "the lowest order" ("rank")?
 - Could Nietzsche be using the rhetoric as a tool to evoke certain emotional reactions in the reader, who likely identifies with the slavish type's values? What reactions might Nietzsche be trying to elicit?
 - How might the "prudence" (or "intelligence") that's manifested be non-ideal, or of a low rank?

- It would be too quick (indeed “rash”?) to say that there is nothing valuable in the oppressed people’s response. For instance, it reveals an “instinct of self-preservation and self-affirmation,” affording a way of living through their situation while maintaining some sort of positive self-conception — certainly better than sinking into despair, drowning in self-loathing, or losing the will to live.
- Yet, first, the mechanism for explaining their values is ultimately the same kind of mechanism at play in explaining an insect’s disposition to play dead in the presence of a predator. As impressive as both might be, it’s a far cry from being “[born] out of the ‘spirit’”
- Second, the response is a response characteristic of and adaptive for a particular type of passive, weak individual, in particular circumstances of actual or felt oppression. The motive of self-preservation can itself sometimes even be non-ideal, “a sign of distress, of a limitation” (*The Gay Science* 349). Is this type of response the best we can hope for for humanity?
- Why might Nietzsche choose the analogy of an *insect’s* behavior to illustrate the point that the slavish types’ endorsement of certain values was an adaptive response? Assuming that the reader wouldn’t want to identify with an insect, how might the rhetoric help goad the reader into taking up an alternative outlook?
- Why is Mr Rash and Curious’s response so emotionally charged? In what sense is his response “rash”? In what sense does it manifest “curiosity”?
- What is going on in the transition from §14 to §15? Why does Nietzsche bother to include the extended quotations from Aquinas and Tertullian in §15? What kind of psychology would be disposed to find their views compelling? – or to express their views in the ways they did? Are such psychologies likely to be reliable on matters of how to live?
- What relation, if any, is there between the claim that certain values were endorsed by the slavish types because doing so was good for them, and the claim that the slavish moral outlook is shaped principally by *ressentiment*?
- §17 concludes by reiterating how Nietzsche’s genealogical inquiries fit into his broader philosophical aims:
 - “*Beyond Good and Evil* — At least this does *not* mean ‘Beyond Good and Bad!’”
 - The inquiry into the origins of different types of evaluative outlooks isn’t mere “hypothesis mongering” (P:5); it’s a “preparation” for the “future task of the philosophers: [...] the solution of the *problem of value*” — i.e., a solution to the substantive normative questions of how to live, what values and evaluative outlook to accept, and why. How, then, might the inquiry in the First Essay be in the service of addressing the “question: what is the *value* of this or that table of values” (Note)?

- That is, suppose that Nietzsche is right about the psychological facts regarding the conditions under which certain types of people in certain circumstances came to endorse the values and virtue/vice concepts that they did. What would be the practical upshot, if any, for our deliberations about what values to accept (what kinds of people to be, etc.)?
 - Would it show that we shouldn't value patience, humility, justice? Or that they shouldn't be valued in all circumstances, for just any reason?
 - Do the psychological investigations bear on what values to promote, actions to perform, and attitudes to have? Do they bear on what evaluative concepts we should use, and how we should conceptualize ourselves, our circumstances, our actions? Both?
 - What, if anything, might be worth preserving from the "noble" type of evaluative outlook? What, if anything, might be worth preserving from the "slavish" type of evaluative outlook?
 - NB: the particular values accepted by certain masters/nobles \neq a "good"/"bad" or "noble" evaluative outlook generally

On the Genealogy of Morality, Second Essay,
“‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like”:
Internalized Cruelty
Alex Silk

“The *second* inquiry offers the psychology of the *conscience* — which is not, as people may believe, ‘the voice of God in man’: it is the instinct of cruelty that turns back after it can no longer discharge itself externally. Cruelty is here exposed [...] as one of the most ancient and basic substrata of culture that simply cannot be imagined away.”

Ecce Homo, “Genealogy of Morals”

In the First Essay we saw Nietzsche’s naturalistic genealogical method at work in explaining the origins of two basic types of moral outlooks: a “good”/“bad” (“noble”) moral outlook, and a “good/“evil” (“slavish”) moral outlook, which Nietzsche takes to be characteristically associated with (e.g.) Christianity. Rather than explaining the latter kind of morality in terms of some divine source, Nietzsche posits a naturalistic psychological mechanism: *ressentiment*. The original “ancestor” of many of our deepest values is a perspective characterized by weakness and a state of festering resentment, frustration, and bitterness.

The Second Essay applies Nietzsche’s method in explaining the moralization of conscience. Rather than starting by explaining conscience as “the voice of God,” Nietzsche posits a naturalistic mechanism to help explain it: *internalized cruelty*.

- *Question*: How did humans develop a capacity for self-assessment? How did this capacity become moralized and develop into a guilty conscience?
- *Nietzsche’s answer*: Human beings have natural aggressive and cruel impulses. These impulses often conflict with our needs and impulses for cooperative, communal life. The impulses for cruelty must often be suppressed. But they cannot remain unexpressed indefinitely. If they aren’t sufficiently expressed outwardly, we may come to express them inwardly, toward ourselves; we may internalize them. An awareness of our debts and shortcomings affords a ready opportunity for doing so via emotional self-punishment (“bad conscience”). With the aid of existing metaphysical and religious concepts, the feeling of debt can become moralized into a feeling of guilt. Bad conscience is, then, an expression of *cruelty toward oneself*.
- NB: on the genealogical method: “The major point of the historical method just developed” is “that the procedure itself” is “something older, pre-dating” its current expression or purpose (“meaning”); and “one and the same procedure can be employed, interpreted, adapted to ends that differ fundamentally.” So, in order to understand the origins of phenomena such as conscience, punish-

ment, guilt — what needs they serve, what instincts they express — we can't just look at their present purposes and the practices in which they're embedded. (II:12–13)

- NB x2: If you feel confused when you start reading the Essay, you should be. Recall Nietzsche's warning to the reader in *Ecce Homo*: "Every time a beginning that is *calculated* to mislead" — and on that note...

Roadmap

- §§1–3: From promise-making to conscience: preconditions and data points
- §§4–18: From conscience to bad conscience: cruelty internalized
 - §§4–7: Punishment and cruelty: observations and explanations
 - §§8–11: Punishment in society: law and justice
 - §§12–15: Punishment and the genealogical method: lessons
 - §§16–18: Putting it all together: the origins of bad conscience
- §§19–23: From bad conscience to guilt: the role of religious concepts
- §§24–25: The future

I. The origins of conscience (§§1–3)

- *Question*: How did "the human animal" acquire a conscience, and a capacity to bind themselves to a standard?
- *Answer*: the "social straitjacket" of "custom," and "mnemonics" of pain
 - Subquestion: How did we acquire an ability to make a promise?
 - preconditions: a conception of oneself as an enduring subject, with a "protracted [...] will" and "power over oneself and over fate" (II:2), so as to earn "the right to stand security for oneself" and be held accountable for some (possibly future) state of affairs (II:2,3)
 - How to "breed" such a creature with a conception of themselves as having that power over their external environment and their own possibly conflicting desires?
 - Two conditions: (i) regularity of behavior; (ii) memory
 - Factors promoting these conditions:
 - (i) "custom"
 - Social custom can make individuals more regular in their behavior. This regularity of behavior can promote the sorts of expectations (in promisor and promisee) needed for a practice of promise-making.
 - (ii) "mnemonics of pain"
 - Our capacity for memory is something that needs to be explained: An ability to forget can often be good for us, promoting "happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride" (II:1).

- (Cf. “Days like this when I can remember everything I usually forget, these are the worst days.” – *Sons of Anarchy*)
- “The oldest [...] psychology on earth” assumed that “‘If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory!’” “Mnemonics” of “blood, torments, and sacrifices” then helped the “human animal” develop a habit of remembering. “With the aid of such images and procedures, one was eventually able to remember five or six ‘I will not’s,’ in regard to which one had given one’s *promise* so as to participate in the advantages of society.” (II:3)
- (note Nietzsche’s distancing himself from the assumption: “the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth”)
- **Q:** Why would Nietzsche begin an essay on the origins of bad conscience and guilt by raising a problem of promise-making? What is the relation between having “the right to make promises” (II:1–3) and having a “conscience” (II:2–3)? One preliminary idea:
 - Suppose we think of internalizing a norm like an intrapersonal case of making a promise. In internalizing a norm to (say) clap at the end of a talk, there’s a part of me that “makes a promise” to myself to act accordingly, should the circumstances arise. I come to identify, in part, with that collection of motivations and abilities to see to it that I clap when a speaker finishes a talk that I’m attending, come what way. The “voice of conscience” is, in effect, that part of you — that drive to meet the particular standard set for yourself — emerging into consciousness. (**Q:** how to cash out the talk of “parts” of oneself?)
 - The “sovereign individual” in whom “this power over oneself and over fate has in this case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct [...] calls [this dominating instinct] their *conscience*” (II:2).
- **Takeaways:** (i) Social customs regulate and constrain our actions. (ii) Humans have been wondrously creative and opportune in inflicting pain.
 - re (i): How might pressures from social norms conflict with other drives and desires? How might such conflicts affect our psychology?
 - re (ii): *Why?* Why the near universal assumption throughout history that the way to instill something in a creature’s memory is by inflicting pain? Why such a powerful tendency to use teaching as a pretext for inflicting pain? Whence the extent and severity of such practices? ...

II. The origins of *bad* conscience (§§4–18)

- **Question:** How did this capacity to bind oneself to certain commitments, or conscience, develop into a *bad* conscience, and a disposition to feel critical toward oneself for one’s debts and shortcomings?

- *Answer*: internalized cruelty
- **(A) PSYCHOLOGICAL HYPOTHESIS: Human beings have a deep instinct for cruelty.** (see the EH quote above)
 - Evidence for this hypothesis: It helps explain the pre-moralized practice of punishing debtors. The “warrant for and entitlement to cruelty” in the punishment of the debtor is viewed as repayment because it brings “*pleasure*” to the creditor.
 - “Let’s be quite clear about the logic of this whole matter of compensation: it is strange enough. The equivalence is provided by the creditor’s receiving, instead of an advantage directly making up for the wrong (so, instead of compensation in money, land, possessions), a compensation in a kind of *pleasure* — the pleasure of having the right to vent one’s power freely over the powerless,” “the elevated feeling” of “*seeing* the debtor” as “ ‘beneath them.’ ” “The compensation, then, consists in a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty.” (II:5,6)
 - Mark Twain shoutout: “Of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel. He is the only one that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing it.”
 - NB: no necessary assumption of free will or moral responsibility: Punishment was enacted “out of anger,” an “anger [...] held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* and can actually be paid back, even if only through the *pain* of the culprit” (II:4).
- **(B) PSYCHOLOGICAL HYPOTHESIS: repression + internalization.** One’s instincts must be expressed somehow or other. When instincts are denied outward expression, they turn inward.
 - “All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn *inward* — this is what I call the *internalization* of man” (II:16).
- from stifled instincts for cruelty to bad conscience:
 - “Those fearful bulwarks with which the political organization protected itself [...] brought about that all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward *against man himself*. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction — **all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the ‘bad conscience’.**” “This *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent [...] and repressed [...], incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings.” (II:16,17)
 - cf. “In peaceful conditions, the warlike man will attack himself.” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 76)
 - We often don’t feel able or willing to express our aggressive instincts outwardly. For instance, they may conflict with internalized social norms and other pro-social needs and desires (recall part I above). These bottled-up aggressive attitudes find a ready outlet in response to an awareness of one’s debts, by coming to feel bad about them.

- All you need in order to be able to rationalize venting your stifled instincts for cruelty is a standard for yourself that you have failed to meet. Find yourself thinking of how you've fallen short, and the act of feeling bad or punishing yourself discharges some of those aggressive instincts — all in a way that makes sense to you and preserves your "participat[ion] in the advantages of society."
- So, bad conscience is a product of an instinct for cruelty that is denied outward expression and comes to be expressed against oneself in light of an awareness of one's debts or shortcomings.

III. The origins of a *guilty conscience* (§§19–23)

- *Question*: How did the feeling of debt in bad conscience become *moralized* into a "feeling of *guilt*, of personal obligation" (II:8)?
- *Answer*: as a particular, effective way of internalizing the instinct for cruelty. Moralizing the feeling of debt affords additional means for inflicting pain on ourselves.
 - elevating the feeling of debt via metaphysical concepts: free will; we conceptualizing our norm-violations as things we're ultimately responsible for
 - elevating the feeling of debt via religious concepts: debt toward God; we conceptualize our norm-violations as (free) acts against God
 - "This human of the bad conscience has seized upon the presupposition of religion so as to drive their self-torture to its most gruesome pitch of severity and rigor. Guilt before *God*: this thought becomes an instrument of torture to them [...] They apprehend in 'God' the ultimate antithesis of their own ineluctable animal instincts; they reinterpret these animal instincts themselves as a form of guilt before God [...] In this psychical cruelty there resides a madness of the will which is absolutely unexampled: the *will* of humanity to find themselves guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for; their *will* to think themselves punished without any possibility of the punishment becoming equal to the guilt [...]; their *will* to erect an ideal — that of the 'holy God' — and in the face of it to feel the palpable certainty of their own absolute unworthiness" (II:20, 22).
 - Religious conceptual schemes can provide a framework to rationalize punishing ourselves emotionally via guilt. For example, one may exploit one's (already existing) concept of God to transform the feeling of debt into a feeling of debt that can't be repaid (cf. original sin, or redemption of sin through sacrifice, epitomized in the sacrifice of God incarnate in Jesus; see also *Daybreak* 77).
 - NB: religion isn't necessary (or sufficient) for guilt

IV. Keeping bad conscience “at bay” (§§23–25)

- *Question*: Is it possible to keep bad conscience from transforming into guilt, attitudes of self-loathing and practices of self-punishment? If so, how?
- *Response*: We may not be able to escape our aggressive instincts, and perhaps we can't keep from internalizing them. But we can work to express them more constructively, in the service of life-affirming ends.
 - The Greeks had bad conscience but used their religious concepts to help them *avoid* expressing it in terms of guilt. (II:23)
 - How? By setting up an ideal of “noble and proud men, in whom *the animal* in man felt deified” — i.e., by incorporating an ideal that *affirms*, rather than demonizes, their natural instincts.
 - Contrast the “epochs” of “morbid softening and moralization through which the human animal finally learns to be ashamed of all its instincts [...] not only the joy and innocence of the animal but life itself [becomes] repugnant” (II:7). “Modern man” has “an ‘evil eye’ for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his ‘bad conscience.’” Such ideals “are one and all hostile to life and [...] slander the world” (II:24).
 - “An attempt at the reverse [i.e., affirming our natural inclinations] 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 [...] The attainment of this goal would require a *different* kind of spirit from that likely to appear in this present age: spirits strengthened by war and victory, for whom conquest, adventure, danger, and even pain have become needs [...]; it would require even a kind of sublime wickedness, an ultimate, supremely self-confident mischievousness in knowledge that goes with great health; it would require, in brief and alas, precisely this **great health!** [...] this **Antichrist and antinihilist**; this victor over God and nothingness — *they must come one day...*” (II:24; cf. P:6, *Beyond Good & Evil* 56)
 - NB: It's *theism* that's seen as nihilistic!?!?

Connections to Nietzsche's evaluative critique

- *Dangers*: our stance toward cruelty and natural drives, instincts, impulses
 - If human beings have a strong instinct for cruelty, and traditional morality explicitly demonizes cruelty, can traditional morality be fully affirming of life and human nature? Will it promote psychological stability, unity, and health? Or might it foster a kind of pessimism, an “icy No of disgust with life,” “shame of all [one's] instincts,” “shame *at being human*” (II:7)?
 - “Prisons and penitentiaries are *not* the kind of hotbed in which [the criminal and convict] is likely to flourish [...] Generally speaking, punishment makes human beings hard and cold; it concentrates; it sharpens the feeling of alienation; it strengthens the power of resistance. If it happens that punishment destroys the vital energy and brings about a miserable prostration and

self-abasement, such a result is certainly even less pleasant than the usual effects of punishment — characterized by dry and gloomy seriousness [...] Punishment *tames* human beings [...] but does not make them 'better' — we would be more justified in asserting the opposite" (II:14–15).

When internalized, "thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, humanity suffering of *humanity, of themselves* — the result of a forcible sundering from their animal past [...], a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which their strength, joy, and terribleness had rested hitherto." "Existence [...] is left standing as *inherently worthless*." "All this is interesting, to excess, but also of a gloomy, black, unnerving sadness [...] Here is *sickness*, beyond any doubt, the most terrible sickness that has ever raged in humanity." (II:16, 21, 22)

- *Prospects*: incorporating an ideal that exploits bad conscience in the service of positive ends, and channels cruelty and instincts such as for power in (psychologically, socially) constructive, healthy ways
 - The results of bad conscience aren't all bad: "bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness." It's the basis for culture, for our "inner world," for regulative ideals against which we compare and potentially better ourselves. And it expresses positive drives of life. (II:18,19)
 - The "feeling of superiority," of "*measur[ing oneself]* against another" (II:8), can be expressed inwardly as well as outwardly. Our drives often conflict. In identifying one's will with a given drive, one "measures oneself" above another inclination. In lacerating oneself with guilt, the stronger drive gets expressed via emotional self-punishment; one might even come to demonize the other drive or feeling as something one simply *must not* have or act on (more on which in the Third Essay). This raises a question: Is there a healthier stance we can take toward these other parts of ourselves? Are there healthier ways of regulating them and "measuring" ourselves above them? And of doing so in the service of more constructive ends?
 - *Task* (compare Part I above)
 - Just as (i) humans sometimes co-opt existing material resources in the service of expressing an instinct of cruelty *outwardly*, and develop those resources in ever more creative and destructive ways of punishing *others* (II:3), so (ii) humans have in some cases co-opted existing *conceptual* resources (e.g., religious concepts) in the service of expressing an instinct of cruelty *inwardly*, and developed those resources in ever more creative and destructive ways of punishing *ourselves* (e.g., "original sin").
 - Likewise, on the positive side, just as (i) we can ask how we might instead use and develop material resources in the service of outwardly expressing an instinct for cruelty in a more constructive way, to improve peoples' circumstances, so (ii) we can ask how we might use and devel-

op religious and evaluative concepts and ideals in the service of internalizing an instinct for cruelty in a more constructive way, to better and improve ourselves. (cf. II:23–25, *The Birth of Tragedy* 3, *Beyond Good and Evil* 56, *Ecce Homo* II:9–10)

- Compare §3 with §§19–22. We might be horrified at the methods of physical torture described in §3. What if we took seriously the idea that certain of our moral and religious practices have played an analogous role in our psychology? Perhaps that might shed light on some of the force of Nietzsche's rhetoric.
- more subtle manifestations of cruelty:
 - "One should guard against thinking lightly of this phenomenon merely on account of its initial painfulness and ugliness. For fundamentally it is the same active force that is at work on a grander scale in those artists of violence and organizers who build states, and that here, internally, [...] creates for itself a bad conscience and builds negative ideals — namely, the *instinct for freedom* (in my language: the will to power); only here the material upon which the form-giving and ravishing nature of this force vents itself is man himself, his whole ancient animal self — and *not*, as in that greater and more obvious phenomenon, some *other* man, *other* men. This secret self-ravishment, this artists' cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself [...], this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labor of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer — eventually this entire *active* 'bad conscience' [...] as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation" (II:18).
 - **Q**: The instinct that gives rise to bad conscience is here described as an "*instinct for freedom*" (II:17,18). What might this suggest about how Nietzsche understands cruelty?
- "Perhaps I can even be allowed to admit the possibility that pleasure in cruelty does not really need to have died out: perhaps [...] it needed [...] some kind of **sublimation and subtilization**." In earlier work "I pointed cautiously toward the ever-increasing spiritualization and 'deification' of cruelty which permeates the entire history of higher culture (and in a significant sense actually constitutes it)." "[Pain] had to be transformed into the imaginative and spiritual, and adorned with such inoffensive names that they do not arouse the suspicion of even the most delicate hypocritical conscience." (II:6,7)
 - cf. "As the power and self-confidence of a community grows, its penal law becomes more lenient [...], more humane [...]; finally, the *amount* of his wealth determines how much injury he can sustain without suffering from it." The "noblest luxury" is to be able to let "its malefactors go *unpunished*. 'What do I care about my parasites', it could say, 'let them live and flourish: I am strong enough for that!' The justice which began by saying, 'Everything can be paid off, everything must be paid off', ends [...], like every good thing on earth, by **overcoming itself**. This self-overcoming of justice: we know the

nice name it has given itself — *mercy*; it remains, of course, the privilege of the most powerful, or better, their way of being beyond the law." (II:10)

- **Q:** How do the treatments of mercy and justice in §§10–11 compare with the remarks on forgiveness and justice from “Mr Rash and Curious” in I:14?
- exploiting internalized cruelty in theoretical and practical inquiry:
 - The search for truth “requires greatness of soul: the service of truth is the hardest service.—So what does it mean to be *honest* in intellectual matters? That you are strict with your heart [...], that you make your conscience from every yes and no!” “The strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure” *and affirm*, “conceiving reality as it is, being strong enough to do so.” (*Ecce Homo* IV:5, *Beyond Good and Evil* 39, *The Antichrist* 50)
 - “We should reconsider cruelty and open our eyes [...] Almost everything we call ‘higher culture’ is based on the **spiritualization of cruelty**, on its becoming more profound [...] To see this we must, of course, chase away the clumsy psychology of bygone times which had nothing to teach about cruelty except that it came into being at the sight of the sufferings of *others*. There is also an abundant, overabundant enjoyment at one’s own suffering, at making oneself suffer [...] Finally consider that even the seeker after knowledge forces his spirit to recognize things against the inclination of the spirit, and often enough also against the wishes of his heart — by way of saying No where he would like to say Yes, love, and adore — and thus acts as an artist and transfigurer of cruelty. Indeed, any insistence on profundity and thoroughness is a violation, a desire to hurt the basic will of the spirit which unceasingly strives for the apparent and superficial—in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty.” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 229; also *Daybreak* 18, *Beyond Good and Evil* 44, 225–230, *Ecce Homo* P:3, Z:6, *Twilight of the Idols* “What the Germans Lack” 6-7)

Unresolved issue: Ideals of “*selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice*” are explained in part by a pleasure from self-cruelty. Bad conscience “provided a precondition for the *value* of the unegoistic” (II:18). But whence the particular pleasure in self-cruelty and attraction to ideals of “*self-maltreatment*” and self-denial? Why has moralizing bad conscience in guilt been as prominent throughout history as it has? More on this in the Third Essay...

On the Genealogy of Morality, Third Essay,
“What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?”:
the Sick Animal and the Human Will

Alex Silk

“The *third* inquiry offers the answer to the question whence the ascetic ideal [...] derives its tremendous *power* although it is the *harmful* ideal *par excellence* [...] Answer: not, as people may believe, because God is at work behind the priests but *faute de mieux* — [...] because it had no rival. ‘For a human being would rather will even nothingness than *not* will.’ — Above all, a *counterideal* was lacking — *until* Zarathustra.” (*Ecce Homo*, “Genealogy of Morals”)

Lingering questions from the previous essays:

- *Essay I*: Why did the “good”/“evil” morality of the oppressed become so prominent? Why would the strong be taken with the evaluative outlook of the weak?
- *Essay II*: Why has the moralization of bad conscience in the form of guilt been so prominent? Why didn’t the “noble” strategy of managing bad conscience have more influence?

Nietzsche will address these questions by addressing the phenomenon at issue in the Third Essay: the rise of “the ascetic ideal”

- *Question*: Why would ideals that categorically denounce certain natural desires be so widely endorsed across cultures and throughout history?
- Recall Nietzsche’s methodological naturalism:
 - The rise of the ascetic ideal isn’t to be fundamentally explained in religious or non-naturalistic terms (e.g., as the work of God in the priests).
 - But it also isn’t to be dismissed as inexplicable or a psychological abnormality (III:11,13,17; cf. *Human, All Too Human* 136).
 - Then what human needs or interests does the ascetic ideal speak to that might explain its attraction to people in general?
- *Response*: Human beings are threatened by a profound problem of managing pent-up negative attitudes that accumulate from pain and suffering and conflicting features of human nature and existence. The ascetic ideal addresses this problem by rationalizing acts of self-denial and self-punishment. Such acts afford an outlet for negative attitudes (staving off “emotional explosions”) and strengthen drives of life, in particular a will to power (staving off “nihilism”). The *basic function* of the acts of self-denial and self-punishment enjoined by the ascetic ideal is to **regulate negative affect** in a way that **strengthens the will**. The prominence of the ascetic ideal is explained by its comparative effectiveness in doing so.
 - *Psychological mechanism*: the will to power
 - (with supporting roles from the mechanisms underlying *ressentiment* and internalization discussed in Essays I–II)

Roadmap

- §1: Cryptic overview
- §§2–10: Preliminaries: en route to what’s at issue
 - §§2–5: roles of ascetic ideals among artists
 - §§5–10: roles of ascetic ideals among philosophers and contemplative types
- §§11–15: The core account: the basic function of the ascetic ideal
 - §11: the ascetic ideal among its chief spokesmen: the explanandum characterized
 - §12: interlude
 - §13: the account, part I: what the ascetic ideal reveals and effects
 - §14: interlude
 - §15: the account, part II: the “how”
- §§16–27: The functioning of ascetic ideals in particular contexts
 - §§16–22: religious concepts and practices
 - §§23–27: modern science and secular scholarship
- §28: Cryptic “recap”

I. Nietzsche’s question is “whence the ascetic ideal [...] derives its tremendous *power*” despite being paradigmatically “harmful”. What does this mean? What is the phenomenon he’s setting out to explain?

- First: What is “the ascetic ideal,” in Nietzsche’s sense? What’s the thing that Nietzsche thinks has been so powerful and influential?
 - Note Nietzsche’s transition in the course of the Essay from talking about “ascetic ideals” to talking about “*the* ascetic ideal”. There is a distinctive *type* exemplified by the various specific ascetic ideals that we find.
 - (compare the use of ‘the dodo’ in ‘the dodo is extinct’)
 - **ascetic ideal**: an ideal of categorically denying or purging oneself of certain desires (drives, instincts, impulses)
 - “a certain asceticism” (III:7–9; *Beyond Good and Evil* 189, *The Antichrist* 57), in the colloquial sense, isn’t necessary or sufficient for the ascetic ideal
 - **Q**: Why? exercise: come up with counterexamples in both directions
 - “poverty, humility, chastity” might be “buzzwords” (“catchphrases”) of the ascetic ideal, but they aren’t what distinguishes the general type
 - Deciding never to act on or entertain a certain desire, given one’s circumstances, is itself also insufficient.
 - What distinguishes the ascetic ideal is rather a certain “valuation” (III:11): a stance of condemning (demonizing, mistrusting) certain of one’s desires and oneself for having them or “giving in” to them. Merely having the de-

sire is viewed as a problem, something to feel bad about, and reason for punishment, no matter the circumstance (cf. III:7,8,10).

- we can use *‘the ascetic ideal’* as a technical term for this type of psychological state and stance toward some or other of one’s desires
- Nietzsche’s question becomes: What explains the prominence of this type of (possibly implicit) stance toward oneself and certain of one’s desires? — of regarding some types of desires as never okay to feel or act on, no matter what, and of regarding oneself as blameworthy if one does feel or act on them?
 - Why would people be attracted to such an outlook, that promotes categorically denying certain of one’s desires and enjoins inflicting further physical or emotional pain on oneself? What is its **“meaning”** — what is its value, function, purpose, role (psychologically, socially, etc.), what human needs does it address (cf. III:23) — that would explain its “tremendous power” and influence for people across time, place, social status, background, culture?

II. Case studies: setting up what’s centrally at issue (III:2ff)

- Nietzsche starts by examining the function of ascetic ideals for certain types of people. Perhaps explaining the function of ascetic ideals for such people will help explain the significance of the general type of ideal? The **upshot** of these sections: it won’t.
 - (compare II:12–13 on the multifarious “meanings” of punishment)

Artists (III:2–5)

- There isn’t any distinctive “meaning” (function, role, significance) of ascetic ideals among artists. “In the case of an artist, [... ascetic ideals mean] so many things it amounts to nothing whatever!” (III:5).
- Artists are typically “the valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion” (III:5). So, to better understand the origins of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche turns first to its function for a philosopher.

Philosophers and contemplative types (III:5–10)

- How might ascetic ideals help promote a philosophical way of life?
- (i) Accepting an ascetic ideal can help keep one’s attention and energies focused on intellectual pursuits, by “put[ting] a check on” “wanton sensuality” and “love of luxury and refinement” (III:8).
 - Ascetic ideals may promote “what, to them, is absolutely indispensable: freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, business, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, bounce and flight of ideas”; “poverty, humility, chastity” serve as “the most proper and natural prerequisites for their *best* existence and *finest* productivity” (III:8).
- (ii) Accepting an ascetic ideal could give them the chance to pursue philosophy by weirding people out enough to become tolerant of their way of life.

- Their self-directed cruelty instilled fear in others, which encouraged others not to interfere. "*The ascetic ideal* for a long time served the philosopher as a form in which to appear, as a precondition of existence [...] The peculiar, withdrawn attitude of the philosopher, world-denying, hostile to life, suspicious of the senses, freed from sensuality, which [...] has become virtually the *philosopher's pose par excellence* — it is above all a result of the emergency conditions under which philosophy arose and survived at all"; "for the longest time philosophy would not have been *possible at all* on earth without ascetic wraps and cloak." (III:10; cf. *Daybreak* 18, *Human, All Too Human* 143)
- thus helps make their way of life possible in a society that valued "war, adventure, hunting, dancing, jousting, and everything else that contains strong, free, happy action" (I:7)
- Is Nietzsche caricaturing a "philosophical" way of life? It doesn't matter:
 - Most people aren't philosophers and don't engage with what philosophers think. If most people aren't attracted to the philosopher's way of life, why are they nevertheless attracted to the ascetic ideal?
 - *Lessons*:
 - If we're to explain the "tremendous power" of the ascetic ideal for people in general, it won't do to explain the ideal's function for any particular subtype of person or way of life.
 - Note: "There is also something typical in [the case of Schopenhauer]." "And, to return to our first question, 'what does it *mean* when a philosopher pays homage to the ascetic ideal?' — here we get at any rate a first indication: he wants *to gain release from a torture.*—" (III:7,6)
 - **Q**: What is the torture in Schopenhauer from? How does accepting an ascetic ideal provide a "release"?

Priests (III:11ff)

- The previous discussion raises the question: Where did the "ascetic wraps and cloak" of those "*previously established* types of contemplative man — priest, sorcerer, soothsayer" come from? What's the function of the ascetic ideal for that "*ascetic priest,*" who internalizes and promotes the ideal?
 - NB: Though Nietzsche at times considers religious priests as case studies, he uses 'priest' for advocates of the ascetic ideal more broadly. (III:11)
- The power of the "ascetic priest" among the masses is, in part, parasitic on the power of the ascetic ideal. But why would people be compelled by what he's advocating? — an ideal that seems to set itself up "against life" (III:11,13)? Why don't people instead take the ascetic ideal as a *reductio* of the priest's authority on matters of how to live and what values to accept?
 - *Upshot*: To fully explain the influence of the advocate of the ascetic ideal, we need to explain the independent attraction of the ascetic ideal to people in general.

- *The question*: Why would "so monstrous a mode of valuation" as the evaluative perspective described above (section I of the handout) "stan[d] inscribed in the history of humanity not as an exception and curiosity, but as one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena" (III:11)?
- *A hint*: "it must indeed be in the *interest of life itself*" (III:11)

III. The function of the ascetic ideal for people in general (III:13ff)

- Recall what we're trying to explain: the prominence of a stance of condemning certain of one's desires — a stance of treating certain desires as things that must never even be felt, a disposition to suppress those desires or punish oneself for having them no matter what the circumstance
- Argument strategy: to explain the prominence of this kind of state in terms of its *function*
 - What explains the widespread attraction to the ascetic ideal is that it affords a distinctively effective response to a comparably widespread problem facing human beings. The function of the ascetic ideal in addressing this human need is what explains its "tremendous power" and influence, despite being "the harmful ideal par excellence."
- What, then, is this function of the ascetic ideal? **Questions** to get clear on:
 - i. What is the basic human need addressed by the ascetic ideal?
 - ii. How does the ascetic ideal address it?
 - iii. Why is the ascetic ideal's means of addressing it so effective?
- a central passage:
 - "But let us return to our problem. It will be immediately obvious that such a self-contradiction as the ascetic appears to represent, 'life against life', is, physiologically considered and not merely psychologically, a simple absurdity. It can only be *apparent* [...]
 - Let us replace it with a brief formulation of the facts of the matter: *the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life* which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence; **it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with new methods and devices. The ascetic ideal is such a method;** [...] life wrestles in it and through it with death and *against* death; **the ascetic ideal is a trick for the preservation of life.**
 - That this ideal acquired such power and ruled over humanity to the extent that it did in history, especially wherever the civilization and taming of humanity took place, reveals a great fact: the **sickliness** of [this] type of person [...], and **the physiological struggle of humanity against death (more precisely: against disgust with life, against exhaustion, against the desire for the 'end')** [...]
 - You will see my point: this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this *denier* — he is actually **among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life** [...]

Even when they *wound* themselves, this master of destruction, of self-destruction — the very wound itself afterward compels them *to live*." (III:13)

- **The gist:** The ascetic ideal affords a way of sustaining life by invigorating a flagging will.
 - There is a powerful tendency for human beings to become "**sick**" due to a combination of central features of human nature and existence.
 - *Sources of "sickliness"*: Pain and suffering are ubiquitous. There are deep conflicts among our attitudes, in particular between certain attitudes (drives, feelings, values) we have in virtue of our biology, shared with other animals, and attitudes we have in virtue of our distinctively human capacities and social life. Our rationality, sense of self, and sociality significantly constrain how these attitudes may be expressed. This constellation of factors threatens to leave our physiological and psychological state deeply unstable.
 - "For the human is more ill, uncertain, changeable, unstable than any other animal, there is no doubt of that — they are *the sick animal* [...] How should such a courageous and richly endowed animal not also be the most imperiled, the most chronically and profoundly sick of all sick animals?" (III:13)
 - Recall the Second Essay: "The human who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted, and mistreated themselves; this animal who rubbed themselves raw against the bars of their cage as one tried to 'tame' them [...] Thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, the human's suffering of *being human*, of *themselves* — the result of a forcible sundering from their animal past." (II:16)
 - A principal effect is a weakening of one's will.
 - Accepting the ascetic ideal supplies one with resources to mitigate the effects of the above "sickliness" in a way that makes sense to you and preserves life.
 - Demonizing some of one's desires rationalizes acts of self-denial and self-punishment. Such acts strengthen the will and temporarily regulate the sort of affective instability that precipitated it to decline.
- now in a bit more detail...
- (1) We have negative attitudes and aggressive drives that need expression. (2) We aren't always in a position to express the strong attitudes we experience. (3) These unexpressed attitudes can build up and fester. (4) But they can't build up indefinitely; we need relief. (5) Accepting the ascetic ideal provides readily available means for relief in ways that sustain life.
 - (1) strong attitudes in need of expression (Essays I–II)
 - natural aggressive instincts and drives
 - negative attitudes resulting from pain and suffering
 - from others; from ourselves, e.g. internalized cruelty, bad conscience, guilt; from conflicts among our own attitudes; from social causes; from

natural internal and external causes; from lacking an answer to “the problem of what [we mean],” and how to justify and explain our existence (II:7, III:28)

- (2) We aren’t always in a position to express the strong attitudes we experience. (e.g., feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, bitterness; drives for revenge, punishment, cruelty, power, control)
 - (a) There may be no “trigger” that causes the attitudes to be expressed.
 - e.g. “needing a good cry” and no movies, songs, etc. are doing the trick
 - (b) There may be no basis for expressing the attitudes in action, or nothing one can take oneself to have reason to do in order to express them.
 - When we act, we need some way of making sense of what we’re doing, a way of rendering what we do intelligible to us. (contrast tics)
 - “As a rational being, one has to have reasons for one’s For and Against” (*Daybreak* 34); “we want to have a *reason* for feeling as we do” (*Twilight of the Idols* “The Four Great Errors” 4).
 - contrast: other animals
- So, we can’t express our attitudes in any old way; we can’t do just anything when we need something to do, or vent on whatever might be available when we need an outlet. So we may look for a “pretext,” “any pretext at all” to rationalize doing so.
 - e.g., socially acceptable venues or opportunities for “erupt[ing],” or “releas[ing our] emotions” (I:11, III:15):
 - “The same [noble, powerful] men who are held so sternly in check *inter pares* by custom, respect, usage, gratitude, and even more by mutual suspicion and jealousy [...] — once they go outside, where the strange, the *stranger* is found, they are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey. There they savor a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society, they go *back* to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey, as triumphant monsters who perhaps emerge from a disgusting procession of murder, arson, rape, and torture, exhilarated and undisturbed of soul, as if it were no more than a student’s prank, convinced they have provided the poets with something to sing about and celebrate. (I:11; cf. II:3–6)
 - “The suffering are [...] frighteningly willing and inventive in their pretexts for painful emotions; they even enjoy being mistrustful and dwelling on wrongs and imagined slights: they rummage through the bowels of their past and present for obscure, questionable stories that will allow them to wallow in tortured suspicion, and intoxicate themselves with the poison of their own malice — they tear open the oldest wounds and make themselves bleed from scars long-since healed, they make evildoers out of friend, wife, child, and anyone else near to them.” (III:15; cf. *Daybreak* 119)

- Yet there are limits to our powers of rationalization. Circumstances will constrain what one can do; and one's values, internalized social norms, and self-conception will constrain what one treats as an option, something *I* might do.
 - compare: punching a wall, road rage, picking a fight, yelling at a child, kicking a puppy, "raiding", ...
 - recall §13: the "*sickliness*" is pronounced "especially wherever the civilization and taming of humanity has been carried through" (cf. II:16, *Beyond Good and Evil* 208)
- (3) The unexpressed attitudes can thus build up and fester. (recall the basis for *ressentiment* and internalized cruelty from Essays I–II)
 - One might not even understand what one is feeling, just a "constantly accumulating" vague "tormenting, secret pain," angst, restlessness (III:15).
- (4) Yet the attitudes can't build up indefinitely. We need relief.
 - What if repeatedly there were no triggers, or no perceived grounds for doing something that would express one's attitudes?
 - The result would be physiologically and psychologically unsustainable.
 - Something's gotta give — e.g.:
 - (a) one's agency: you burst and find yourself behaving in a way that doesn't make sense to you or doing something you think you have no reason to (say, snapping at a friend or child)
 - (b) one's will: you regress toward "suicidal nihilism," a state of willing nothing, feeling nothing, lifelessly wishing for "deep sleep" (III:28,17)
 - That is, we may either "emotional explo[de]" (I:6), as an outlet,
 - The "hidden core needs to erupt from time to time," and "the animal" parts of our nature "must get out again" (I:11).
 - [deadpan:] "In my village, there's this little wishing well. It's made of white bricks, right in the middle of the village green. Everybody says how pretty it is. But I swear to God, if I spend another day in that village, I'm going to blow it up with dynamite. Probably blow my hands off with it, but it will be worth it. Just to see all those pretty white bricks spread over the pretty green village." (*Peaky Blinders*)
 - or, as a coping mechanism, stop feeling things at all (emotional death).
 - costly (e.g., cognitively, socially) and maladaptive
- *Upshot*:
 - **the basic problem**: managing pent-up negative attitudes that accumulate in response to certain characteristic features of human existence — notably, pain and suffering, and individual and social constraints — without bursting or losing all will and feeling
 - physiological, psychological, intellectual causes and effects of the problem
 - **the basic function** of the ascetic ideal: to address this problem...

(5) **The solution of the ascetic ideal**

- something else that might “give” in step (4) above: (c) one’s values
 - potentially costly — e.g., coming to take yourself to be the kind of person who would, say, kick a puppy
 - enter the ascetic ideal — coming to treat certain of your inclinations as never okay to have or act on
 - comparatively easy to internalize
 - plays to our “taste”, even “need”, “for the unconditional” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 31, 199): “It is easier to renounce a desire altogether than to enjoy it in moderation [...] Unconditional obedience is more comfortable than conditional,” which “requires much more spirit and reflection” (*Human, All Too Human* 139).
- **A.** the solution afforded by the ascetic ideal: an “available pretext” for doing things that regulate negative attitudes and strengthen one’s will
 - How so? By providing one with subjectively compelling reasons (i) to strive to overcome certain of one’s desires, or (ii) to punish oneself for having or acting on them
 - How would suppressing one’s desires or punishing oneself help? In (i) providing an outlet (staving off emotional explosion), and (ii) exercising and thereby strengthening active drives (“instincts of life”), notably a will to power (staving off emotional death)
 - How does it address the problem in a comparatively effective way? Because of the inevitability of the desires and one’s categorical rejection of them.
 - now in more detail...
- key features of the ascetic ideal: it *demonizes* desires which one will *inevitably have* or act on
 - (i) a standard we can always strive toward
 - One accepts that certain of one’s desires must be resisted no matter what. These desires provide something one can take oneself to have reason to struggle against and strive to overcome.
 - (ii) a standard we’ll continually violate
 - One accepts that even having the relevant desires is something to feel bad about and a reason for punishment (blame, reproach). There is thus a ready object one can rationalize expressing negative attitudes against: oneself, for falling short (III:15, 20).
- *Claim:* The acts of self-denial and self-punishment — psychologically, via guilt or self-loathing, or physically — regulate negative affect and strengthen the will.
 - expressing a “will to power”: roughly, a drive for overcoming resistance, or growth in control; a basic instinct of life (more at the end of the handout)
 - compare: outward physical exertion, road rage, berating someone else, etc. In both cases, significant and prolonged energy and attention may be required. (e.g., desiringgod.org/articles/anthem-strategies-for-fighting-lust)

- In “tyrannizing over certain parts of their own nature, over, so to speak, segments or stages of themselves,” they “exercise their strength and lust for power.” (*Human, All Too Human* 137)
- Expressing drives for power, freedom, control — even if over some other part of oneself, or by inflicting bodily harm or psychological pain — yields a kind of pleasure and relief.
 - “The human, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; they *desire* it, they even seek it out, provided they are shown a *meaning* for it.” (III:28)
 - “To relieve his state of tension he seizes the spears of his enemies and buries them in his own breast”; the “discharge of his emotion” “offers the highly tensed heart an opportunity to relieve itself” (*Human, All Too Human* 138). The “venting of their affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering at relief, *anesthesia*.” The “tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unendurable” is “drive[n] out of consciousness, at least temporarily.” (III:15; cf. *Human, All Too Human* 142)
 - “The kind of *pleasure* which the selfless, the self-denying, the self-sacrificing feel [...] belongs to cruelty” (II:18; cf. III:20, *Daybreak* 18, 113, *Beyond Good and Evil* 229).
 - contemporary empirical evidence: the primary function of intentional non-suicidal self-injury is generally affect regulation (e.g., Klonsky, “The functions of deliberate self-injury”)
- The resulting feelings of pleasure or power strengthen the drives that motivated one to seek the means that led to those feelings. (“feedback mechanism”)
 - Accepting the ascetic ideal provides the will with a “goal”: something to strive toward or overcome, such as by struggling against the relevant desires or by punishing oneself. Exercising the will by performing these acts strengthens it. In this sense, “*the will itself was saved*” (III:1,28).
 - *Claim*: Expressing a drive strengthens it. (cf. *Daybreak* 109,119)
 - “the basic fact of the human will”: “*it needs a goal — and it would rather will nothingness than not will*” (III:1).
- *the “genius”* (III:17): the materials for these results are internal and comparatively available
 - You don’t need a suitable movie, a punching bag, someone who’s annoying who, etc. (think: lockdown). You just need to find yourself feeling such-and-such desire (hatred, lust, jealousy, unforgiveness, etc.), or thinking of some time you did.
 - hence the importance of one’s *categorical* rejection of the desire in question: No consideration of whether the desire was appropriate in the circumstances is needed. It wasn’t, no matter what; and you are responsible for falling short (cf. III:11,13,15). And so, your will and “deepest instincts of life” have their recipe for “sustain[ing] itself” (III:13).

- **B.** *Particular ascetic ideals* may gain currency by incorporating existing metaphysical, religious, and social concepts, values, practices.
 - e.g., using concepts of "'guilt,' 'sin,' 'sinfulness,' 'depravity,' 'damnation'" to make sense of "direct[ing] *ressentiment*" and "the bad instincts" "back upon [oneself]" (III:16,20; recall II:20–23).
 - NB: religious concepts are *not* necessary for an ascetic ideal
 - they were required only "for a time" (III:16)
 - One can accept that certain desires must be resisted no matter what without conceptualizing or justifying this "must" in religious terms.
 - The ascetic ideal can even be manifested in atheistic contexts and the practice of science! (Though, as Nietzsche points out, it doesn't have to be.) (III:23–27; cf. *The Gay Science* P:4, 344)
 - **Q:** What impulses, needs, desires are demonized in the examples of secular scholarship considered in §§23–27?
 - other (potentially non-ascetic) "means of consolation" which particular ascetic ideals may exploit for managing effects of our "sickliness" (III:17–21)
 - expressing strong emotions (positive or negative) ("indulgence in excessive feeling")
 - deadening feelings of life in general ("hypnotic muting of all sensitivity, of the capacity to feel pain")
 - "mechanical activity" and work
 - "petty pleasures" such as helping others
 - "by prescribing 'love of the neighbor,' the ascetic priest prescribes what is in fact an arousal of the strongest, most life-affirming drive, even if in the most cautious dose — the *will to power*"
 - (note: Again, the will to power can be expressed in constructive or destructive ways, sometimes to build up ourselves and others, sometimes to "hurt one another, obedient, of course, to the same basic instinct.")
 - pleasure in identifying with the strength of a group ("awakening of the communal feeling of power through which the individual's discontent with themselves is drowned in their pleasure in the prosperity of the community")
 - **Q:** Which part(s) of the problem might such practices address? ("feelings of displeasure"? "depression" of the will?) How?
 - **Q:** For each of the above "means of consolation", explain why it isn't essential to the functioning of the ascetic ideal.
 - These same "refreshments, palliatives, and narcotics" (III:17) may also provide future grounds for self-punishment when those practices are unavailable.
 - e.g., weeping in a prayer service at the thought of God's forgiveness, and later feeling guilty for being "vain" about whether others noticed you; or reprimanding yourself for not working hard enough

- C. recap re Nietzsche's explanatory project:
 - The general prominence of the ascetic ideal — an ideal of being purged of certain natural desires, or the stance that certain of one's desires must never be felt — is explained fundamentally in terms of its function in *managing negative attitudes while sustaining the will*.
The basic way the ascetic ideal fulfills this function is through rationalizing acts of *self-punishment* and *struggling to overcome one's desires*. These two sources of relief are afforded by all instances of the ascetic ideal.
 - low internalization costs (easy to internalize among people in general)
 - minimal resource costs (relief is readily available for most anyone)
 - embeddable in broader social contexts and practices...
 - Yet not all ways of demonizing certain of one's desires will be equally effective or compelling. There will be differences in, e.g.:
 - the desires that are demonized (how many, how strong, how common)
 - the types of pain and suffering that are addressed (physiological, psychological, existential)
 - the physical, social, conceptual resources to rationalize doing things that provide relief (e.g., guilt, communal repentance, fasting, work)
 - We should expect corresponding differences in the prominence of instances of the ascetic ideal. (compare the "great treasure house of ingenious means of consolation" in Christianity vs. a pursuit of "truth at any price" in science)
- **Pluses and minuses**
 - *Pluses*: one doesn't burst and one retains a will to act, feel, and overcome, all central to what it is to be alive
 - (a) *Affect regulation*: The acts of struggling against parts of oneself and inflicting (emotional or physical) pain provide a much needed outlet.
 - The advocate of the ascetic ideal "defends his sick herd [...] against [...] all of which smolders in the herd itself, [...] where that most dangerous of blasting and explosive materials, *ressentiment*, continually piles up. His particular trick, and his prime use, is to detonate this explosive material without blowing up either herd or herdsman." "The direction of *ressentiment* is [...] *changed*" — that is, "at least temporarily." (III:13, 15–17, 20)
 - (b) *Strengthening of the will*: The acts of self-denial and self-punishment strengthen active drives, notably the will to power (for Nietzsche, the essence of life; see below).
 - One gets relief through an *act*, by exercising one's will.
 - contrast passive means of relief in, say, finding oneself crying, or other (literal or emotional) "narcotics" to "reduce the feeling of life" (III:17)
 - The "happiness" of "superiority" — even over a part of oneself — "excites [...] the strongest, most life-affirming drive [...] — namely, the will to power" (III:18).

- “Even when they *wound* themselves [...] — the very wound itself afterward compels them to *live*” (III:13).
- Hence “this ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life [...] actually is among the greatest *conserving* and *yes-creating* forces of life.” “The ascetic ideal is an artifice for the *preservation* of life.” (III:13)
 - “You will guess what, according to my idea, the curative instinct of life has at least *attempted* through the ascetic priest [...] — to *exploit* the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming.” (III:16)
 - One has ends, a “*to-that*” for one’s drives and a will to act and overcome, even if in punishing oneself; and one would still rather feel pain than nothing at all: “*the will itself was saved.*”
 - “We can no longer conceal from ourselves what is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal [...] — all this means — let us dare to grasp it — a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life [...]; but it is and remains a *will!* ... And, to repeat in conclusion what I said at the beginning: a human being would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will. (III:28, cf. III:1, *Ecce Homo* “Genealogy of Morals”).
- *Minuses*: not a cure and one risks getting “*sicker*” (III:21)
 - (recall our discussion of dangers of bad conscience and guilt from Essay II)
 - The root of the problem isn’t addressed. We’re still stifling certain attitudes, and we’re no closer to finding constructive outlets for some of our natural drives.
 - “There is from the first something *unhealthy* in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling in them [...] Humanity itself is still ill with the effects of this priestly naïveté in medicine!” (I:6)
 - “‘Medication’ of this sort, mere affect-medication, cannot possibly yield a real cure of the sick in the physiological sense [...] It is only the suffering itself, the discomfort of the sufferer, that [it] combats, not its cause, not the real sickness: this must constitute our most fundamental objection.” (III:16–17; also 20–21)
 - The practices of self-punishment cause additional suffering and reinforce maladaptive coping strategies.
 - The relief is only “for a time” and “has to be *paid* for afterward.” One “soothes the pain” while “poison[ing] the wound.” (III:15,17,20)
 - The negative attitudes from the self-inflicted pain will need an outlet.
 - What counts as an outlet is unstable. The pleasure and feeling of power strengthens the drives that motivated one to pursue what led to those feelings. One’s will gets stronger, but by reinforcing practices of self-punishment. (How intensely does one need to cry? How strongly does one need to punish (harm, criticize) oneself?)
 - So, worse yet, the more “effective” the ideal, the “sicker” one risks becoming over time. (see also *Daybreak* 52)

- which sets us up for...

Next steps: Nietzsche's positive project

- part I: to wake people up to the dangers of the ascetic ideal (see the interludes in I:12 (and end of §11), II:7, III:14)
 - "Is it not dreadful to make necessary and regularly recurring sensations into a source of inner misery and in this way to want to make inner misery a necessary and regularly recurring phenomenon *in every human being!* [...] Must everything that one has to combat, that one has to keep within bounds or on occasion banish totally from one's mind, always have to be called *evil!*" (*Daybreak* 76)
 - "We tremble at the mere idea of a torment which could be inflicted on a human or an animal, and suffer quite dreadfully when we hear of a definitely attested fact of this kind. But we are still far from feeling so decisively and with such unanimity in regard to torments of the soul and how dreadful it is to inflict them [...] Even today humanity regards [...] spiritual torture and instruments of torture with the same anxious toleration and indecision as it formerly did the cruelties inflicted on the bodies of humans and animals." (*Daybreak* 77)
 - "The darkening of the sky above humanity has deepened in step with the increase in humanity's feeling of shame *at being human*. The weary, pessimistic glance, mistrust of the riddle of life, the icy No of disgust with life [...] only come to light as the swamp weeds they are when in the swamp to which they belong — I mean the morbid softening and moralization through which the animal 'human' finally learns to be ashamed of all their instincts. On their way to becoming an 'angel' (to employ no uglier word) humanity has evolved that queasy stomach and coated tongue through which not only the joy and innocence of the animal but life itself has become repugnant to them." (II:7)
 - "The sick represent the greatest danger to the healthy [...] Those who are failures from the start, downtrodden, crushed — it is they, the *weakest*, who most undermine life among human beings, who call into question and poison most dangerously our trust in life, in humanity, and in ourselves.

Where can one escape that veiled glance which burdens one with a profound sadness, that inward-turned glance of the born failure which betrays how such a person speaks to himself — [...] 'If only I were someone else [...] *I am sick of myself!*' [...]

They monopolize virtue, these weak, hopelessly sick people, there is no doubt of it: 'we alone are the good and just,' they say, [...] as warnings to us — **as if health, success, strength, pride, and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities** for which one must pay some day [...] There is among them an abundance of the vengeful disguised as judges, [...] always ready to spit upon all who are not discontented but go their way in good spirits. There is no lack among them of that most disgusting species of the vain, the mendacious failures whose aim is to appear as 'beautiful souls' and who bring to market their wrecked sensuality, wrapped up in verses and other swaddling clothes, as 'purity of heart': the species of moral masturbators and 'self-gratifiers'. The will of the weak to represent *some* form of superiority, their instinct for devious

paths to tyranny over the healthy — where can it not be found, this will to power of the weakest! [...]

When would [these physiologically unfortunate and worm-eaten people of *ressentiment*] achieve their ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph of revenge? Undoubtedly if they succeeded in *shoving* their own misery, in fact all misery, *on to the conscience* of the happy, so that one day the happy start to be ashamed of their happiness and perhaps say to one another: 'It's a disgrace to be happy! *There is too much misery!*' But there could be no greater or more disastrous misunderstanding than for the happy, the successful, those powerful in body and soul, to begin to doubt their *right to happiness* in this way. Away with this 'world turned upside down'! [...]

That the sick should *not* make the healthy sick [...] should surely be our chief concern on earth [...] [The healthy] alone are the *guarantors* for the future, they alone are *liable* for the future of humanity. What *they* can do, what *they* should do, the sick can and should never do." (III:14)

which brings us to...

- part II: to initiate a task of constructing a "*counterideal*" (*Ecce Homo* "Genealogy of Morals") (gestured at in II:24; taken up more elsewhere)
 - goal: a healthy overall perspective on ourselves and our place in nature and society, to structure our (often conflicting) attitudes and overcome pain and suffering, leaving us "more alive," bettering ourselves and others
 - a "courage and [...] excess of strength" for "the highest affirmation, born of fullness, of overfull-ness, a Yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, [...] this ultimate, most joyous, most wantonly extravagant Yes to life" (*Ecce Homo*, "The Birth of Tragedy" 2)
 - (cf. "You know, pain is just pain. Not good, not bad. Just part of being a human being. And sometimes, good can come out of it. And if we're brave enough and willing to go a little deeper work our way through it, try to overcome it, well, we just might find our better selves." – *Dopesick*)
- some challenges
 - how to promote regulating our desires without demonizing them?
 - how to revise evaluative and ethical concepts, or create new ones, to promote healthier patterns of thinking?
 - how to internalize the new concepts, values, and attitudes?

NB: the "**will to power**"

- roughly: a drive for overcoming resistance, or growth in control
 - "Every animal [...] instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power; every animal abhors, just as instinctively and with a subtlety of discernment that is 'higher than all reason', every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to the optimum (I am *not* speaking of its

- path to happiness, but its path to power, to action, to the most powerful activity, and in most cases actually its path to unhappiness)." (III:7)
- "To wish to preserve oneself is a sign of distress, of a limitation of the truly basic life-instinct, which aims at *the expansion of power* and in so doing often enough risks and sacrifices self-preservation" (*The Gay Science* 349; cf. *Beyond Good and Evil* 13, *Twilight of the Idols* "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" 14)
 - "I consider life itself to be an instinct for growth, for durability, for the accumulation of forces, for *power*: when there is no will to power, there is decline" (*The Antichrist* 6). "[A] means of *preventing* all struggle in general [...] would be a principle *hostile to life*, an agent of the dissolution and destruction of humanity, an attempt to assassinate the future of humanity, a sign of weariness, a secret path to nothingness" (II:11).
 - a rival empirical hypothesis to claims that people are motivated fundamentally by a desire for pleasure (psychological hedonism) or self-preservation
 - Q: What is the relation between the will to power and the instinct of cruelty posited in the Second Essay? Could positing a basic drive for power help explain the instinct for cruelty?
 - power ≠ physical domination or destruction. As the discussions of the philosopher and the priest make vivid, the will to power can be expressed in many subtle ways, such as in self-control (cf. II:18–19) and even explicit denials of power. A drive to overcome is necessary for any human excellence and achievement. (Recall the ideas from Essay II about channeling an instinct for cruelty to better ourselves and others. "Let us be careful not to pull gloomy faces as soon as we hear the word 'torture'" (III:7), or, we might say, 'power'.)
 - The ascetic strives to "triumph [...] over himself" in an "extremity of power"; "those who can control themselves [...] are thereby accustomed to a feeling of power" (*Daybreak* 113, 65, also 18, *Human, All Too Human* 137–142)
 - The "sense of duty, conscience, [...] self-condemnation" are "disguised forms" of the will to power (*Will to Power* 774).
 - Even "benefitting [...] others [is a way] of exercising one's power upon others"; it "[restores] balance in respect of benefits received, a giving in return, a demonstration of *our* power [...], of being *able* to dispense honors." (*The Gay Science* 13, *Will to Power* 775; cf. GM III:18)
 - "This was during the Depression, but there was plenty to eat on Mary Ida's table for the principal meal of the day, which was served at noon and to which her sweating husband and his helpers were summoned by clanging a big bell. I loved to ring the bell; it made me feel *powerful and beneficent*." ("Hospitality," Truman Capote)
 - "[T]he strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the 'truth' one could still barely endure" and affirm, "conceiving reality as *it is*, being strong enough to do so." (*Ecce Homo* IV:5, *Beyond Good and Evil* 39, also 44, 225–230, *The Antichrist* 50, *Ecce Homo* P:3, "Zarathustra" 6)

- "If we draw up a list of the particular drives and virtues of the philosopher — their drive to doubt, their drive to deny, their drive to prevaricate (their 'ephectic' drive), their drive to analyze, their drive to research, investigate, dare, their drive to compare and counter-balance, their will to neutrality and objectivity [...]: surely we realize that all these ran counter to the primary demands of morality and conscience for the longest period of time? [...] the case is no different with all the other good things we are so proud of nowadays" (III:9).
- "As knowers, let us not be ungrateful towards such resolute reversals of familiar perspectives and valuations [...]: to see differently, and to *want* to see differently to that degree, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity' — the latter understood not as 'contemplation without interest' [...], but as *having in our power* the ability to engage and disengage our 'pros' and 'cons': we can use the difference in perspectives and affective interpretations for knowledge [...] The *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we can use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity'" (III:12; cf. *Twilight of the Idols* "What the Germans Lack" 6–7)

Function of the ascetic ideal: Overview (see the Essay III handout for details)

Nietzsche's argumentative strategy: What explains the prominence of the ascetic ideal among human beings is its *function* in addressing a comparably prominent problem facing human beings.

- What is this problem?
- How does the ascetic ideal address it? How does it do so in a distinctively effective way?

The problem: a problem of managing pent-up negative attitudes that accumulate in response to certain characteristic features of human existence, without bursting or losing all will and feeling

1. Humans have aggressive drives and negative attitudes resulting from pain and suffering, which need to be expressed.
2. Yet humans aren't always in a position to express these strong attitudes.
 - a. There may be no "trigger" that causes the attitudes to be expressed. (e.g., nothing that makes you start crying)
 - b. There may be no basis for expressing the attitudes in action.
 - i. When one acts, one needs to take oneself to have some reason or other for doing what one is doing, some answer to "Why are you doing what you're doing?" that renders what you're doing intelligible to you.
 - ii. There are limits to human beings' capacities for rationalizing their actions. (e.g., constraints from external circumstances, internalized values, self-conception, social norms)
3. The unexpressed attitudes may build up and fester.
4. Yet the attitudes can't build up indefinitely.
 - ⇒ threats of
 - "emotional explosion" (bursting, behaving in a way that doesn't make sense to you), or
 - emotional death ("nihilism", exhaustion, flagging of the will)
 - costly and maladaptive

The ascetic ideal: a type of ideal of categorically denying or purging oneself of certain desires (or, by extension, the state of accepting such an ideal)

- requires an evaluative stance of condemning (demonizing, mistrusting) certain of one's desires and oneself for having them or "giving in" to them (contrast asceticism and desire-regulation generally)

- The ascetic ideal's *basic function*: to regulate negative attitudes in a way that sustains one's will
 - One accepts certain of one's desires must never be felt in any circumstance, no matter what. Accepting this affords available means of *expressing* pent-up negative attitudes, and of doing so in an *active* way that strengthens the will and basic instincts of life.
 - the basic means: rationalizing acts of *self-denial* and *self-punishment*
 - i. The ascetic ideal gives one reasons to strive to overcome the desires in question, and to punish oneself for having them or acting on them.
 - ii. The acts of self-denial and self-punishment regulate negative affect, strengthen active drives (notably the will to power), and reinforce means of doing so.
- comparatively effective and cheap
 - low internalization costs: The ascetic ideal is relatively easy to internalize given preferences for the simplicity of unconditional norms.
 - low resource costs: Given the inevitability of the desires and one's categorical rejection of them, relief is readily available. You just need to find yourself feeling the desire, or thinking of some time you did.

Next steps:

- to wake people up to the dangers of the ascetic ideal (e.g., it doesn't yield "a real cure" and risks making us "sicker" over time)
- to construct a positive "counterideal" that addresses the problem, but without demonizing parts of ourselves or resorting to self-punishment—to inculcate an overall perspective on ourselves, pain and suffering, and our place in nature and society, that structures our (often conflicting) drives and affects, affirming and channelling them in a constructive, healthy way (cf. the end of Essay II)