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Who Was Nietzsche's Genealogist?*

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Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* is deservedly part of the ethical canon, but it is also be enormously and insistently absent-minded. I'm going to first present, as a textual puzzle, a handful of forgetful moments in the first two essays of the *Genealogy*. To address the puzzle, I will take up a familiar idea, that the *Genealogy* is both a subversive account of ethics and of what it is to be an intellectual. I will describe a strategy for reading the text that makes these out to be differently and more closely connected than they are usually taken to be. That will allow me to address a persistent worry in the secondary literature, by explaining how the *Genealogy*'s criticism of morality can be something other than an instance of the genetic fallacy, yet also not lapse into one or another form of moralism. On the way, I will suggest that Nietzsche's text requires us to modify one of the standard constraints on interpreting philosophical writing.

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First, the puzzle. You may recall that Nietzsche commences the argument of the *Genealogy of Morals* by criticizing another account of the origin of morality, attributed to "English psychologists": "'[o]riginally... one approved unegoistic actions and called them good from the point of view of those to whom they were done, that is to say, those to whom they were *useful*; later one *forgot* how this approval originated and... felt them to be... good in themselves'" (1:2).[1] Nietzsche objects that this account "suffers from an inherent psychological absurdity... how is this forgetting *possible*? ... this utility has... been an everyday experience at all times... consequently, instead of fading from consciousness, instead of becoming easily forgotten, it must have been impressed on the consciousness more and more clearly" (1:3). Forgetting, Nietzsche is telling us, is harder than the British Empiricists and their intellectual descendants think.[2]

Now you may also recall Nietzsche's account of the origin of (what he calls) slave morality: very briefly, that the priestly classes of the ancient world invented an evaluative system for the downtrodden, according to which what their masters considered virtues (think of the virtues of Homeric heros) are evil, and the postures the slaves have no choice but to adopt (ser-

[1] For reasons I will shortly explain, I am going to do something that is now quite unusual in the literature, that of deploying Nietzschean texts only from the *Genealogy* itself. That permits the following convention: standalone references will be to the *Genealogy*, by essay and section, using P to indicate the Preface (so, the first citation above is to *The Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1, sec. 2); I will use Walter Kaufmann's translation (1989).

[2] The view being criticized is evidently paraphrased from Rée, 2003, pp. 98, 120–123, 160–162. However, Paul Rée was a German of Jewish extraction, and so I take it that Nietzsche is using him merely as a representative of British Empiricism; the repetition of "English psychologists" (by my count the Preface and first Essay contain five variants on it) is quite emphatic. The core of British Empiricism, in the nineteenth century, was associationism, and Nietzsche picks out "the *vis inertiae* of habit" and "a blind and chance mechanistic hooking-together of ideas" as preoccupations of "English psychologists" (1:1); at 3:4 he glosses the phrase "*psychologischer* contiguity" as "speaking with the English" (Kaufmann footnotes the use of the English word as an allusion to David Hume, but it was common property of the later Empiricists). Rée enthusiastically quotes Mill on "the primary law of association" (p. 101), and seems to be familiar with Hume and Bain as well (p. 104); he devotes much of *The Origin of the Moral Sensations* to explicitly associationist explanations of—in addition to the sense of 'good' and 'bad'—the retributive theory of punishment (p. 114), the feeling of justice (p. 145), and the intrinsic desire to be admired (pp. 128, 130, 134f).

There is perhaps a further reason not to assume Nietzsche means to pick out Rée alone; of the 'English psychologists,' he says: "I am told... that they are... frogs..." (1:1). Nietzsche knew Rée personally and even intimately, and one does not normally attribute one's character assessments of one's formerly close friends to hearsay.

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vility, submissiveness, willingness to tolerate abuse, and so on) are made out to be virtues—specifically, Christian virtues. The new evaluative structure was supplemented by a fantasied afterlife, in which the slaves were to be rewarded, and their enemies punished.

This account presents two related problems. The first, noticed by Rudiger Bittner, is that the slaves compensate themselves for their suffering by inventing hell. But if the slaves have invented their revenge, they must know it's imaginary; so how can they find it satisfying? The account only makes sense if the slaves have forgotten.[3] The second, noticed by Brian Leiter

[3]Bittner, 1994. One might wonder whether division of labor is a way out of Bittner's problem: the priests do the inventing for the slaves (so they know the afterlife is invented, but don't need to find the revenge satisfying), and the slaves consume the priests' invention (so they find the revenge satisfying, but never knew that it was a fantasy). However, this would require saddling Nietzsche with the implausible view that the priestly classes do not believe the doctrines of their religion, and do not find satisfaction in the fantasy of retribution. And that view is not just implausible in its own right, but textually implausible: for instance, at 1:15, Nietzsche quotes Tertullian at great length on the sufferings of the damned, and Tertullian is both a member of the priestly class, a church father no less, and portrayed as taking great anticipatory pleasure in those sufferings: Nietzsche describes him as "the enraptured visionary".

Leiter objects to Bittner that unconscious or self-deceiving invention would do instead (2002, p. 203n14); if you weren't conscious of inventing the values, there's nothing for you to forget. Alternatively, I have had it suggested to me that what the slaves are up to is not belief but rather suspension of disbelief; they are after the emotional rewards that playacting at righteous indignation brings. However, these proposals do not let us dismiss the problem, for reasons it will instructive to review.

We have over the past one hundred years become very comfortable with the concept of the unconscious, and we tend to treat it—even when we don't accept Freudian psychoanalytic theory—as an unproblematic primitive. So it's easy to import an anachronistic conception of the conscious/unconscious distinction into a reading of Nietzsche. The point now is *not* that Nietzsche naively equated the mental with the conscious; quite the contrary. It is rather that Nietzsche was participating in a difficult intellectual innovation, and so we should expect his understanding of the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious to be very much his own. If we are going to attribute to the *Genealogy* the claim that the nonnoble classes invented slave morality, but unconsciously, we have to be able to gloss that adverb in a plausibly Nietzschean manner.

How can we determine what the distinction came to for Nietzsche? We could start in on the project of reconstructing his theoretical work on the topic, but because that is distributed over most of his middle- and late-period work, this is not the time and place for it. (Anderson, 2002, is indispensible reading, although I do not agree with all of his treatment.) Fortunately, there is a shortcut. I am about to argue that the *Genealogy* is intended to put on display what it is to engage in intellectually ambitious activity in an unselfaware and absentminded fashion. (Put slightly differently, for dramatic effect: the *Genealogy* is in the same business as the priestly classes, that of unconscious invention.) I am making a case to the effect that the narrator's lack of self-awareness is implemented by an inability to remember, almost from moment to moment, what he has said. (It is perhaps

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and others, is that of explaining how the masters could have been taken in by slave morality. One way or another, the masters have to forget an awful lot that's perfectly obvious to them: that they've never seen hell or any reason to believe in it, that the slaves or priests who are telling them about it are (they think) dishonest and untrustworthy, and that it's obviously some kind of revenge fantasy.[4] Apparently, in the short space between criticizing the "English psychologists" and presenting his own alternative, Nietzsche has forgotten how hard forgetting is supposed to be. Nietzsche rubs it in by later referring back to the discussion of his predecessors: "To say it again—or haven't I said it yet? [i.e., I've already *forgotten*]—they are worthless" (2:4). And why worthless? Because they've *forgotten* the history of morality.

The *Genealogy*'s second essay starts out by announcing that "*forgetfulness*...is...an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression," and that Nietzsche is going to describe how "one create[d] a memory for the human animal" (2:1, 3). But that description is itself incoherent. Humans are supposed to acquire a memory by being painfully trained into it. But if you don't have a memory, you can't be trained: it doesn't matter how painful it was if, next time around, you don't remember the pain.[5] That is, by the time he gets to the second essay, Nietzsche has forgotten his criticisms of the "English psychologists"; and by the time he gets to

worth noting that earlier discussions of the problem of unconscious mental states—see, e.g., the chapter of Mill, 1865/1979, entitled "Sir William Hamilton's Doctrine of Unconscious Mental Modifications"—had experimented with the idea that immediate forgetting could account for the phenomena adduced under that heading; the suggestion is not of course that Nietzsche had read Mill on Hamilton, but that such ideas were generally available in the culture.) If that case is plausible overall, then it instructs us that while it is not exactly wrong to describe the phenomenon Bittner is discussing as unconscious invention, if we are careful about how we attribute the conscious/unconscious distinction to Nietzsche, 'unconscious' is tantamount to: forgotten with no time lapse.

We likewise need to ask ourselves what tools Nietzsche has for explaining suspension of disbelief. (We should not treat this as an acceptable primitive: the problematic phenomenon that travels under this label is one of the larger unsolved problems of contemporary aesthetics.) The psychological machinery I am about to claim was Nietzsche's is naturally extended to provide a explanation for it, but one on which it amounts to something on the order of directed forgetting; for further discussion, see note 15, below.

[4]Leiter, 2002, ch. 6; for the masters' view of the slaves' dishonesty, see 1.5. Nietzsche does not tell us outright that the masters take the priests to be untrustworthy, but he puts in place claims that entail that they should have: contemplative and thus unwarlike characters (Nietzsche explicitly lists priests under this heading) arouse the suspicions and mistrustfulness of a militarized society (3:10). The nobility's accepting the deliverances of a priestly class requires explanation.

[5]I'm grateful to David Dick for pointing this out to me.

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his explanation of memory, he's forgotten what it was that needed to be explained.

Perhaps the most interesting phenomemon in this neighborhood is that, while readers, as we've seen, occasionally notice the local problems, they almost never keep track of the commitments Nietzsche assumes in addressing them—that is, keep track of them long enough to notice the pattern of inconsistencies. I can confirm this anecdotally: I have taught the *Genealogy* a number of times, occasionally to classes of over a hundred students; there have been some very bright people in these classes, and they've been quite willing to point out difficulties in Nietzsche's view. I've never had someone raise their hand and ask, apropos the trail of breadcrumbs I've just pointed out, "But didn't Nietzsche say, just a few pages back, that...?" Moreover, the record is not merely anecdotal; none of the professional Nietzsche scholars seem to have noticed that Nietzsche is dangling before his readers a series of inconsistencies having to do with memory and forgetting. Nietzsche has not only forgotten; he has managed to make his readers forget, too.[6] What are we to make of this?

These are not by any means the only inconsistencies and sudden swerves with which the *Genealogy* presents us. Just for instance, in the very first phrase of the book, its author tells us that "we are unknown to ourselves," and immediately follows the first-person plural pronouncement with a bit of intellectual autobiography that purports to exhibit considerable self-knowledge. Or again for instance, the Preface emphasizes the importance of "what is documented, what can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short the entire long heiroglyphic record, so hard to decipher, of the moral past of mankind" (P:7), and thus leads a first-time reader to expect carefully substantiated historical scholarship—as opposed to the Just So story which Nietzsche has attributed to English psychologists and dismissed.[7] As

[6]Nietzsche is not unique in adopting this tactic; as, for instance, Bayard, 2000, esp. ch. 3, points out, the murder mystery genre requires that the clues be available to the reader, which means that concealing the solution requires making the reader not notice, or forget, the clues, and Bayard provides a very suggestive list of techniques used to this effect.

[7]And as Nietzsche's genealogy is put in place, the force of the demand ought only to escalate. Nietzsche purports to explain the development of the value of truth; so at the outset of his reconstructed history, truth is hardly a concern at all; so Nietzsche has systematically impugned the veracity of his own primary sources. Worse, much of Nietzsche's story is placed in what he repeatedly and insistently refers to as prehistory (2:2–3, 9, 14, 19; compare the longish quote from *Daybreak* at the end of 3:9): its subjects are "half-animals" (*Halbthieren*, 2:16f) and "man-beasts" (*Thiermenschen*, 2:20). Prehistory is the period from which we have no historical records, and protohumans are not to be expected to have done much in the way of creating reliable documentation. Given the methodolog-

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frequent readers know, what follows is not historical scholarship at all, but another Just So story. Nietzsche even provides us with a version of the Liar Paradox: an interlocutor's query, as to just what Nietzsche thinks he is doing, receives the response that erecting an ideal requires misunderstanding and slandering reality, and sanctifying lies (2:24); since Nietzsche is clearly on the way to new ideals himself (and the point of his remark is that his new ideals will involve destroying older ones), this is tantamount to applying those descriptions to the *Genealogy* itself. That there are a great many such tensions and inconsistencies in Nietzsche's text will turn out to be a claim to which I am committed, and I will remark on some of those we encounter in the course of the coming argument; I am choosing to focus on the puzzle with which I began because the topic around which it is centered makes the contradictions unmistakably *pointed*: this is an author standing up, waving a large, brightly colored flag, and practically shouting to the skies, "I am contradicting myself!"

Analytically trained philosophers will nonetheless object at this point that attributing contradictions to a philosophical text is uncharitable, and should be allowed only as a very last resort. (The reading isn't 'noticed' because it's a *bad* reading.) Surely we have not yet run out of resources for construing Nietzsche as consistent, and isn't becoming adept at reading Nietzsche a matter of learning to find thoughtful organization in what looks to his popular audience like exuberant chaos? So, before settling on this reading, I must construct and reject all possible alternative readings that purport to do away with the alleged inconsistencies. Instead of doing this, I will shortly discuss the application of the Principle of Charity itself, and later on, I will consider a Nietzschean strategy for short-circuiting the objection. But before I do that, I want to take up the more textual question, of what the relation between the form and the content of the *Genealogy* is supposed to be.

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ical problems such a view poses, one would think that *especially* cautious and rigorous scholarly treatment would be in order. (However, perhaps Nietzsche is also intentionally providing incoherent chronological cues, in which case we cannot take his timelines at face value. For that suggestion, and supporting documentation, see Gemes, 2006.)

The note at the end of the first Essay further emphasizes the tension. In it, Nietzsche proposes a series of academic prize essays (a common institution at the time), and suggests that "perhaps this present book will serve to provide a powerful impetus in this direction". He doesn't quite go as far as suggesting his own writing as a model, but it is striking that no work that allowed itself as many historiographical liberties as the *Genealogy* could be in the running for such a prize.

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The third essay of the *Genealogy* purports to explain the ascetic ideal, and its most refined and extreme form, the scientific—*wissenschaftlich*, scholarly or academic—aspiration to truth. I do not think it is an accident or coincidence that the *Genealogy* is the only one of Nietzsche's mature works that looks, more or less, like traditional academic writing. (But only more or less: it *is* a series of three essays—*Abhandlungen*, better rendered as "treatises"[8]—but the tone is off, and it is full of odd parenthetical digressions, eruptions of emotion, segues from topic to topic managed by ellipses, and the like.[9]) The *Genealogy* has a subtitle: it is a *Streitschrift*, a polemic, that is, a literary production akin to the popular books written on, for instance, the different sides of the nineteenth-century materialism debate (*Streit*).[10] That is, it announces itself as a product of the class of persons introduced by the very first sentence of the book's Preface.

"We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge"—'knowers' would be a less awkward translation, and 'intelligentsia' or 'knowledge workers' might be reasonable renderings in more recent idiom—"and with good reason."[11] This announcement, at the very outset of the book, tells us that Nietzsche's agenda has to do with understanding the "knowers," and it identifies the narrator of the volume as one of the intellectuals or knowledge workers: "*we* men of knowledge," it says. To be sure, the agenda of the *Genealogy* is also to provide a critique of moral values (P:6), and somehow these two agendas must be connected, or turn out to be the same thing. But without yet seeing how that is the case, we can adopt as our working assumption the idea that the *Genealogy* is meant to *exhibit* the workings of a "man of knowledge."

I am thus agreeing with Alexander Nehamas that a productive way to approach Nietzsche's later writings is to ask who the authorial personae they

[8]Kaufmann is not consistent in his translation of this distinctly academic term, and in the note at the end of the first Essay, does render it as "treatise". That note titles itself an *Anmerkung*, and so is a further allusion to academic prose forms.

[9]I'm grateful to Candace Vogler for bringing my attention back to this aspect of Nietzsche's writing.

[10]Not that every *Streit* is necessarily academic: compare the recent *Karikaturenstreit*—the brouhaha that erupted when cartoons depicting Mohammed were run in a Danish newspaper.

[11]P:1; in 3:24 he reiterates the self-identification, and elsewhere in the third Essay he speaks of "us psychologists" (3:19, 20), perhaps giving us a tighter fix on the kind of "knower" he takes himself to be.

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project are supposed to be.[12] But I differ with Nehamas on two further pertinent points. The first of these is his position that all of Nietzsche's texts jointly project a single postulated author; this is why I am adducing only passages from the *Genealogy*. (I will touch on my reasons for demurring towards the end of sec. 4.) The second is his insistence that the authorial persona is, in a nontrivial sense, a unified and coherent character. Nehamas has a body of theory meant to back up these views, and this is not the place to mount a full-fledged argument against it. But the reading of the *Genealogy* which I am advancing is meant as a first move in such a counter-argument.[13]

If the narrative voice of the *Genealogy* is pointedly absent-minded, and if the *Genealogy* is intended to put on display the mind of, perhaps a scholar, perhaps an intellectual, then we need to ask why "men of knowledge" are as forgetful as all that. There are (at least) two ways of using the resources of the Nietzsche corpus to answer this question, but because I want to allow this particular text to direct the interpretation, I'm going to stick to the one that can be made out using only what the *Genealogy* provides.[14]

Suppose you have come to value what Nietzsche calls "intellectual cleanliness" (3:24), and it is very important to you to understand yourself to be consistent. There are, if you think about it, two ways to achieve that self-understanding. One is actually to *be* consistent. But this is difficult. For one thing, it requires a lot of what we might today imagine as processor time: in order to adjust your intellectual assertions and commitments when they conflict, you have to keep track of them, and check them against each

[12]See, e.g., Nehamas, 1985, Nehamas, 1988.

[13]See especially Nehamas, 1981, and Nehamas, 1987. The nontriviality qualification is intended as follows. If a postulated author is shown to be a hodgepodge of inconsistent intentions, a fragmented personality, and so on, it is possible to protect the 'regulative ideal' of 'critical monism' by insisting that text coherently projects *that*. But I take it that only more demanding notions of coherence are worth our attention. (For their own part, Nehamas's readings pursue the sort of integration of character exhibited by protagonists of the classic nineteenth-century novel.)

[14]If I am right, they are in any case compatible. The other reason has to do with the way thinking (*any* thinking) requires what in science we regard as idealization and approximation, which involves, on Nietzsche's view, forgetting that things are not as you represent them. Compare the announcement, at 3:24, that "forcing, adjusting, abbreviating, omitting, padding, inventing, [and] falsifying... [are] of the *essence* of interpreting." To have a mind—to think—*is* to forget that things are not as one represents them. And consequently any mind at all will have forgetting as "an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression... responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it (one might call the process 'inpsychation') as does the thousandfold process, involved in physical nourishment—so-called 'incorporation'" (2:1).

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other, one by one, and in combinations; all in all, it requires you to spend limited intellectual resources on searching out and correcting obvious and unobvious inconsistencies. More importantly, from Nietzsche's perspective, it involves regimenting one's internal emotional life. Nietzsche represents the person as composed of drives, and drives express themselves not merely as urges to the more visible bodily actions, but as opinion and utterance (and, a point we will get back to in a moment, evaluation). Resentment will exhibit itself not only as an urge to kick its object, but in a lower opinion of its object, as when an artist develops dismissive responses toward hostile reviewers (and perhaps adopts a new set of standards on which he does well, and the reviewers and competitors do badly). If conflicting (or anyway different) drives express themselves in conflicting opinions, then to make your theoretical views consistent, one of your drives will have to take control of the others. Overcoming this difficulty requires strength (Nietzsche's metaphor, which I am leaving undischarged), and so we can call this *consistency through strength.*

The other way to achieve consistency as far as you are concerned, that is, to achieve the *appearance* of consistency, is simply to lose track of your commitments: to forget what you said earlier. This is in some ways much easier than the first option, especially if forgetting, as Nietzsche suggests in the second Essay, comes naturally. And we can now see why it does. If (certain) opinions are tied to particular drives, then when one drive surges forward with its opinion, it is also pushing competing drives (along with their associated opinions) into the background: as Nietzsche remarks, apropos the ascetic priests' not unrelated use of the affects, "the chamber of human consciousness is *small*!" (3:18; we need to mark another undischarged and Cartesian metaphor here, of the mind as something like a room or a stage.) Failure to regiment your drives ruthlessly and completely (or, what in Nietzsche's view comes to the same thing, failure of one drive to subordinate the others) produces forgetting as a side effect. Call this *consistency through weakness.*[15]

Now which route to the appearance of consistency (to consistency as

[15] To return briefly to the question of how Nietzsche could have accounted for suspension of disbelief: The obvious mechanism is images and the like, which are associated with one drive, displacing in consciousness conflicting beliefs associated with other drives. Now, if that *is* the way it is supposed to work, then suspension of disbelief is of a piece with forgetting as Nietzsche understands it. We do not know what Nietzsche's account of suspension of disbelief was (or would have been), so the takeaway message is merely that we ought not simply to assume that, in Nietzsche's intellectual world, suspension of disbelief is an alternative to forgetting, rather than one of the forms that forgetting can take.

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far as one is oneself concerned) can we expect the professional knowledge worker to take? According to Nietzsche, the man of knowledge is the current incarnation of the ascetic ideal, and

> *the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life*... it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion... (3:13)
>
> science rests on the same foundation as the ascetic ideal: a certain *impoverishment of life*... the scholar steps into the foreground [during]... ages of exhaustion... (3:25)

The ascetic ideal can be accounted for as a form of medication (possibly self-medication) improvised to cope with suffering, sickness and overall depletion (3:20f); in fact, one of the therapeutic techniques Nietzsche mentions is "self-forgetfulness" (3:18). Moreover, Christianity is presented as two millenia of training in forgetting (as when you learn to forget that you don't love your neighbor, but, rather, hate him),[16] and a contemporary scholar is an inheritor of that training: roughly, a monk in secular garb. So we should expect intellectuals to be quite adept at forgetting, and we should not be surprised if, by and large, the form of consistency exhibited by the "men of knowledge" is consistency though weakness: managing the appearance of consistency by forgetting what one said earlier.

To be sure, the appearance of consistency is not exhausted by having fooled *oneself*. But recall that Nietzsche's readers by and large also fail to notice the pattern of inconsistencies having to do with forgetting. How it is that managed? Let's grant that the recurring outbursts of emotion in the text are Nietzsche showing us what the scientific or scholarly personality is really like: not nearly as impersonal and objective as the publicity has it. In so doing, he is also reminding those of us who eventually notice what is going on how we succeed in slipping consistency through weakness past our own audiences.

If Nietzsche's inconsistencies are not noticed, that is because his readers are swept along by one emotion after another. Nietzsche's drives are put on display in his prose: think of that odd moment when he announces that "Negros... taken as representatives of prehistoric man," scarcely feel pain, and that, for his own part, "[he] has no doubt that the combined suffering of all the animals ever subjected to the knife for scientific ends is utterly negligible compared with *one* painful night of a single hysterical bluestocking" (2:7). Vivisection was a hot-button subject at the time, gender

[16] I'm grateful to Ken Gemes for this last point.

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roles and social class have long been touchy topics, and race was becoming an intensely emotional issue during the period Nietzsche was writing.[17]

Or again, consider one of the many moments at which the author seems to be doing precisely what he seems to be condemning, the point in the text where the priests' ingenuity in revaluing earlier values is described as motivated by poisonous hatred (1:7). The language in which that description is given is itself vitriolic; poisonous hatred would be a pretty good characterization of the tone of that very passage. And of course the project, or one of them, of the *Genealogy* is a revaluation of values. But just where the juxtaposition of authorial performance and description could be expected to make the reader wonder how far he can really take the text at face value, Nietzsche swerves into the rhetoric of then-contemporary political antisemitism: "All that has been done on earth against 'the noble,' 'the powerful,' 'the masters,' 'the rulers,' fades into nothing compared with what the *Jews* have done against them."[18] Antisemitism was a politically explosive movement at the time, which is to say that it was able to evoke powerful affective responses—pro and con—from a surprisingly broad public.

Nietzsche is pushing his reader's buttons. When he invokes his drives, they (frequently enough) resonate in his readers, bringing their analogous drives to the forefront. Those drives foreground the opinions associated with

[17]What is Nietzsche trying to distract us from at this juncture? A number of possibilities come to mind, one of which is the surfeit of explanations for freedom of the will. Later in the same section, Nietzsche informs us that free will was invented to make divine interest in human life plausible; earlier on, we were told that the free agent was invented to allow slaves to blame their 'evil' masters (1:13).

[18]Because the postwar reception of Nietzsche in the United States involved a great deal of defensiveness vis-à-vis his (actual or alleged) antisemitism, I had better be explicit about just what I am suggesting at this point. I am claiming that Nietzsche is self-consciously shifting into a markedly antisemitic register (recall that Nietzsche was quite familiar with political antisemitism, by way of the Wagners and his own sister), and I am suggesting that he is, also self-consciously, presenting his own psychology as containing (what he thinks of as) an antisemitic drive. However, by describing these as tactical choices, I am also implying that it would an interpretative mistake to take up the topic of antisemitism in Nietzsche by launching into argument about whether he was or he wasn't. (Apropos, but under the heading of tensions built into the text, notice that Nietzsche subsequently goes out of his way to insult antisemites, at 2:11, 3:14 and 3:26.)

Nietzsche's remarks about the Jews provide a further instance of a contradiction in the text from which the reader needs to be distracted. The actions of the Jews are described in the language of intentional action: e.g., they "dared to invert," they "were ultimately satisfied with nothing less...," they produced "this most fundamental of all declarations of war...". Only a few sections later, Nietzsche makes the methodological point that reifying a natural, psychological or social process into an agent who lies behind the effect is not just a metaphysical mistake, but to be explained as motivated self-deception (1:13).

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them, and so displace the opinions associated with previously foregrounded drives. That is, his audiences can be induced to forget because they too lack emotional self-control. As Nietzsche reminds us in the second Essay, "[o]n the average, a small dose of aggression, malice, or insinuation certainly suffices to drive the blood into the eyes—and fairness out of the eyes—of even the most upright people" (2:11).

3

Recall the objection to my reading that proceeds from the Principle of Charity. Texts are correctly interpreted when they are charitably interpreted, and the Principle of Charity requires one not to impute contradictions to a text whenever that is at all avoidable. We're now in a position to explain why that response is a mistake, and to do so, we need to ask a question that has almost entirely dropped out of our collective philosophical awareness: Why be charitable? While philosophers are trained to apply and invoke the Principle, if you ask almost any professional philosopher for a justification, you'll get reiterated insistence, but not an argument.[19] But we should not apply the methods we were taught in graduate school merely by reflex.

The Principle of Charity was reintroduced into our literary tradition in the middle ages, as an interpretive methodology developed for one text in particular. The Bible came with a theological guarantee of infallibility, and so here the exegetical technique was warranted by prior knowledge that the word of God could not contain errors, and consequently could not contain contradictions. That is, originally, the use of the Principle was warranted by a feature of the text that made it appropriate, namely, its divine authorship.[20]

I have just argued that we have in front of us a text constructed to ex-

[19]There are a handful of exceptions, of which perhaps the most interesting is Donald Davidson. His argument for using the Principle of Charity depends, in its developed form, on the view that theories of meaning have to have the form of Tarski-style truth theories, and that the evidence to which a theory of meaning must consequently be responsible consists in Tarski-style T-sentences. These have to be collected more or less from observation, and to do this, without already drawing on a theory of meaning, requires supposing the subjects of the theory to be more or less correct in their utterances (Davidson, 1984; for another reconstruction of Davidson's reasons, see Sorensen, 2001, pp. 132f). Two points matter for our purposes. The first is that this argument for Charity deploys a great deal of theoretical baggage, and you have to be a die-hard Davidsonian to find the argument persuasive. The second is that almost no one, I have found, is aware that Davidson actually does have an argument.

[20]I'm grateful to Renée Baernstein for explaining the history to me.

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hibit a particular personality type at work. That personality type, we know from the historical account Nietzsche is providing us, is one for whom actual consistency should be nearly impossible, and the illusion of consistency almost inevitable. That is, the very sort of justification that originally accompanied the Principle of Charity (a view about the fabrication of the text to which it is to be applied) justifies, in this case, *not* applying the Principle. For a text fabricated to exhibit the tendency of a personality type to inconsistency should be expected to exhibit inconsistencies, and we should not count it against the interpretation of such a text that they are found.

I do not mean to suggest that the reading of the *Genealogy* which I have been developing is exhaustive or complete; of course there is much more going on, most notably, the ethical theorizing that has attracted the attention of, by now, several generations of commentators. However, because the theory is presented to us by what I have been arguing is intended as an erratic narrator, and because the theory makes up the backstory of that narrator, the present interpretation complicates the task of making out Nietzsche's theoretical claims, and so further complicates our understanding of the author himself. I earlier remarked that Nietzsche offers us in passing something on the order of a Liar Paradox, and what we have here looks to be a still larger and more elaborate variation on one: the body of theory with which we are presented explains why we should understand the narrator to be extremely unreliable, and defuses appeals to the Principle of Charity; but the theory is presented to us by that very narrator, and if he is as unreliable as all that, how much of it can we believe? I do not here want to try to settle the question of whether there is a stable reading to be had, or if the *Genealogy* is, on the contrary, constructed in order to preempt one. (The latter option would not be philosophically unprecedented: for example, Hume's *Treatise* is arguably built to flip-flop between incompatible readings.) For our purposes it suffices that, once the theoretical backstory is in play, we have enough to make bracketing the Principle of Charity no more than respect for the text in front of us.

4

Earlier on, I put to one side the question of how an investigation that begins with a worry about the self-understanding of knowers could be a critique of morality. That question should by now be considerably more urgent. How could a treatise that exhibits a moment-to-moment inability to remember what it is saying be a compelling critique of *anything*? If the argument is as

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shoddy as that, why should we take its conclusion seriously, whatever it is?

In answering this question, I hope also to explain how Nietzsche's critique of morality can avoid falling into either of two well-known traps. On the one hand, Nietzsche's commentators have been concerned that the problem with morality evidently has to do, somehow, with the people who invented it and who use it; but in that case, why is it not just an *ad hominem* or genetic argument—both fallacies?[21]

On the other hand, his interpreters worry about what we can call *moralism*, that is, making the reconstructed critique depend on the very moral evaluations that it is attacking. We can illustrate the worry with two recently discussed proposals for explaining the force of his criticism. Suppose it is suggested that the problem with morality is that its producers or consumers are self-deceiving. Why isn't the negative evaluation of self-deception that the criticism is inviting one to evince a moral one? Suppose it is suggested that the problem with morality is that the *ressentiment*-driven agent is engaged in a self-frustrating course of action. Why isn't a preoccupation with efficiency and effectiveness merely a marker of some personality types and social strata—and not necessarily the ones Nietzsche seems to have found admirable? (The *nobility* don't worry themselves about such things: "what," Nietzsche asks rhetorically, "had they to do with utility!")[22] And there is a related issue of which we will want to keep track: Nietzsche complains that morality is one-size-fits-all; why won't the negative assessment of morality be subject to just such a complaint itself?

Recall that drives, according to the *Genealogy*, express themselves not

[21]See, e.g., Solomon, 1994, pp. 96f, Solomon, 1996. The term 'argument *ad hominem*' has more than one sense; the one I have in mind here involves conflating personal aspersions cast on one's opponent ("You're ugly and your mother dresses you funny"—that sort of thing) with a refutation of his view. The worry here is not just that it would be uncharitable to ascribe such a clumsy fallacy to Nietzsche, but that he himself insists that one ought to disregard the producer when assessing the work (at any rate when we are considering artists, but it is hard to see why the point would not generalize: 3:4). The analogous concern about genetic fallacies can be anchored in what is sometimes cast as Nietzsche's discussion of genealogical methodology at 2:12–13, where he insists that "the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart."

There is a special class of cases, discussed at Millgram, 2002, p. 182, for which *ad hominem* arguments are legitimate, and on some readings of Nietzsche, his arguments are confined to those cases. I propose to defer this line of inquiry to another occasion.

[22]1:2; "utility" translates *Nutzlichkeit*, so notice the immediately subsequent paraphrase as *berechnende Klugheit*. For both of the suggestions I have just entertained, see Reginster, 1997. Reginster takes his second suggestion—that this particular form of self-deception engenders self-frustrating agency—to underwrite the first, and so to save it from the charge of moralism.

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only in action and opinion, but in producing systems of evaluation. I remarked that garden-variety resentment colors your evaluations of the people you resent; on a larger scale, *ressentiment*, Nietzsche claims, has given rise to a system of evaluations (with an elaborate accompanying theology), the system of evaluation that we call morality. Nietzsche attributes a very important part of the invention of morality to the priestly classes, and the priests, the third Essay of the *Genealogy* explains to us, are the predecessors of contemporary intellectuals and their scholarship.[23] Science is just the "latest and noblest" form of the ascetic ideal cultivated by the priestly class (3:23).

Once we see how systems of moral and intellectual standards are produced and held together, we should expect the earlier evaluative inventions of the religious castes to have been no less shoddy than the productions of contemporary "men of knowledge."[24] This point appeals to the origin of morality without committing a genetic fallacy, that is, without confusing the value of the source with the value of the product: examining the origin of morality shows how its mode of production predictably leaves its imprint on the product. There is all the difference in the world between treating a dismissive assessment of an opponent as itself a refutation of his views, and constructing a plausible argument from that assessment to the inevitable inadequacy or unsatisfactoriness of whatever views he comes up with.

Recall who the *Genealogy* is addressing: "*we* men of knowledge." If you are a product of the line of historical development Nietzsche has been describing, you care about intellectual cleanliness. Once you see how shoddy the system of moral values is bound to be, you have all the answer *you* need to the question posed in Nietzsche's Preface, What value do the value judgements good and evil possess?[25] A Nietzschean critique of the value of

[23]There may be individual exceptions; "with noble men cleverness can easily acquire a subtle flavor of luxury" (1:11), and surely intellectual pursuits might be taken up as an upper-class hobby.

[24]Recall Nietzsche's remark, at 2:11, to the effect that the reactive man is bound to take a false and prejudiced view of the object before him.

Notice, however, that the argument I am now sketching does not require the premise that *all* the priestly knowledge workers of the past were intellectually incompetent in the ways we have had on display; it suffices that, in the course of the collective enterprise of fabricating, transmitting and reappropriating values, *enough* were to guarantee (or almost guarantee) a product that is shoddy by the standards of contemporary intellectuals.

[25]To return to our examples of moralistic interpretation: when Reginster claims that Nietzsche's critique of *ressentiment*-driven morality has bite because such morality turns out to involve self-deception, he does not pause to consider who is going to care about self-deception; but people who have been raised to value intellectual cleanliness will perhaps care.

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values will not forget whose values it is invoking as a standard.

If Nietzsche meant to address his criticisms of morality not just to a class of overeducated intellectuals, if his critiques operate by exhibiting the implied authors or narrators of his books, and if the critique developed in the *Genealogy* appeals to and turns on values that are shared primarily by overeducated intellectuals, then we should expect Nietzsche's mature writings to project *different* authorial personae—personae capable of supporting critiques addressed to different audiences. The *Genealogy of Morals* is a very sophisticated critique of morality—*for intellectuals*, and that is because it is, at the same time, an expose of the intellectuals themselves.

5

It remains to take up the very indirect and apparently patchy form of the argument as I have reconstructed it. Allow that the heart of the argument really is this: that the fabricators of our moral and intellectual values cannot have been expected to deliver a product that lives up to standards such as internal consistency and coherence; that intellectuals such as yourself, the reader, care about niceties of this sort; and consequently that you have reason to reject our moral and intellectual values. Then why doesn't Nietzsche just *say* that? Furthermore, why bother with the roundabout argument that our moral and intellectual values must almost certainly be internally incoherent, etc.? Why not just demonstrate directly (in the way that Voltaire and his followers had tried to, for the religious ideology they inherited) that they *are*? And finally, even if some intellectuals (and their priestly predecessors) are as scatterbrained as I am claiming the author makes himself out to be, how can he be so sure that his own readers are?

I do not think I can tie the suggestion I am about to make nearly as closely to the text as I have the argument up to this point. Nonetheless, the answer I am about to give is a way of tying up our loose ends, and worth considering for that reason. I have already alluded to Nietzsche's complaint that morality prescribes the same medicine for everybody, and drawn the conclusion that we should not expect him to prescribe the same philosophical medication for everybody. We have to let the *Genealogy* tell us who it is written for: as it turns out, not just any 'men of knowledge,' but those who will respond to a particular sort of shock treatment.

Nietzsche was quite aware that there is only so much you can do with straight philosophical argumentation.[26] If he has correctly anticipated his

[26]Compare the passage in 3:17 where Nietzsche explains why he going to ignore the

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readers' intellectual failings, nothing on the order of ordinary argument will suffice: his readers will be all too prone to forget the conclusion itself, or crucial bits and pieces of the argument, or the failings of an unsatisfactory counterargument. In particular, Nietzsche would have been very aware that inconsistencies can be explained away. Intellectuals are very good at this, partly because they're often trained in it; so when you try to insist on inconsistencies in their system of values, you get, not acknowledgement, but theologizing, and centuries of it.[27] (Indeed, you may have experienced the impulse that Nietzsche is trying to preempt. When I presented what I've been claiming are pointed contradictions in Nietzsche's text, did you find yourself looking around for explanations that would make them out to be not really inconsistencies after all?) If I am right, Nietzsche hopes to bypass this response, and the way he seems to think he can do that is to catch the reader out: you are set up, and when you finally notice what has been going on, your sudden awareness of your own lack of intellectual acuity is supposed to bring you up short. That is, in order to make his conclusion stick, Nietzsche is attempting to elicit an *emotional* response.

Nietzsche's writing is often read smugly, as an attempt to partition its audience into a sophisticated elite and naive outsiders. But if my suspicion is on target, we should not take Nietzsche to be exempting readers of the *Genealogy* from the shortcomings of run-of-the-mill 'men of knowledge'. If the *Genealogy* works as I have been suggesting, the audience for whom the book is in the first place written must be just those who *are* liable to fall into the trap: those who fail, at the outset, to notice the pattern of inconsistencies; who eventually do notice; and who are embarrassed enough to acquiesce in the point that is being made about them. If you are an intellectual who is not disposed to produce these responses, for instance, if you approach Nietzsche from what he sometimes describes as an underlying 'great health', then Nietzsche has written a *different* book for you—probably, *The Gay Science*.

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philosophers' struggle against the feeling of displeasure.

Given how dismissive Nietzsche can be about consciousness, why think that his philosophical therapy is intended to operate in ways of which his readers will be aware? (I'm grateful to Ken Gemes for raising this concern.) Here is one reason: the elaborately constructed booby traps I have been displaying will not be effective if they are not appreciated, and appreciating them requires noticing them.

[27]Nietzsche describes an instance of the problem in the guise of autobiography. As a child he was preoccupied with the Problem of Evil (P:3); the Problem looks like a straightforward contradiction; religious academics treat it as an occasion for theory; Nietzsche thinks that he needs to explain his own youthful resolution of it by way of his personal predispositions.

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For related reasons, we ought not to take Nietzsche to be exempting himself from those shortcomings. Nietzsche has every strategic incentive to avoid making himself out to be holier-than-thou (and responsiveness to those incentives is exhibited when, for instance, he includes himself among the "tame domestic animals," at 2:6). In catching his audience with its pants down, Nietzsche must go out of his way not to elicit the wrong emotional responses. This particular audience's psyches are supposed to be built around *ressentiment*. If he were just to manipulate his readers into tripping over their own feet, but present himself the way that academic authors normally do (as fully in control of their own prose, and above clumsy mistakes in reasoning), he would be all too likely to elicit resentful rejection. So Nietzsche presents himself as intellectually fallible partly in order to disarm a certain kind of resistance, and this is a further reason for his use of the first-person plural in that opening line, which I will repeat one last time: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge."

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