

Notes on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality

1. Nietzsche's Background

- a. Born in 1844, Nietzsche began his life as an academic wunderkind. Given a Swiss university position in Classical Philology by the age of twenty-four, he was made full professor at twenty-five. But his temperament was not suited to a life of mild-mannered analysis of classical Greek and Latin texts. Already in his first major work (*The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*), he was weaving philosophical ideas in and out of his close (though idiosyncratic) readings of ancient literature.
- b. Health problems, perhaps aided by tensions within the academy, led the newly minted philosopher to strike out on his own in 1879. For the next ten years, Nietzsche would produce a torrent of some of the most well-known works of the latter nineteenth century. These works aimed to weave together a number of threads already spinning through the first part of that century: Schopenhauer's analysis of our sense of reality in terms of our will and representations; increasingly popular forms of materialism (this was the age of Darwin—although Nietzsche might eventually stop short of becoming a truly 'evolutionary' thinker in that sense); and the bold, literary approach to history exemplified by historians like Jakob Burckhardt.
 - i. Nietzsche will also talk much of the 'psychologists,' which is a term with a potentially broad application. Though connections with later psychological and psychoanalytic work can't be ruled out, we should recall that Nietzsche's in the psyche is largely rooted in the material basis of humanity as he explores it. Here we can profitably read Nietzsche in light of Mill, whose utilitarian approach is at once psychological (having to do with utility as pleasure, etc.) and rooted in material economic reality. Mill would likely belong the group of "English psychologists" Nietzsche references—critically, of course—on page 9.
- c. Our text, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, was written in 1887, just a couple of years before Nietzsche suffered his 1889 breakdown on the streets of Turin. After leaving Switzerland, he never had returned to Prussia—or, since 1871, the German state—but instead had wandered around other parts of Europe, thinking and writing. After his breakdown, however, his productive years were over. He died in 1900. His postmortem legacy would go on to be tainted by the use made of his works in fascist theoretical circles (especially, tragically, in Germany).
 - i. This later appropriation of Nietzsche can put us in a tough spot when our goal is to read his texts with an open mind. Nietzsche will criticize people and groups freely and harshly; the Jewish people are no exception. Still, it would be an overstatement to lump Nietzsche in with a generalized group of 'German' or 'nineteenth-century' anti-Semites. Nietzsche is in fact deeply critical of anti-Semitism, seeing it as a weak-minded and foolish attempt to build up a cheap national consciousness and a fraudulent sense of moral superiority. So we should be sure to approach his turns of phrase concerning 'Jews' with that in mind. He isn't always giving us a series of straight-faced historical claims. He is telling us a story—perhaps even a kind of almost mythic history—and he's painting in very broad brush-strokes.

2. Critiquing Moral Values

- a. Nietzsche begins his work on a note of estrangement (perhaps getting to be a familiar note for us by now): "We remain of necessity strangers to ourselves, we do

not understand ourselves, we must mistake ourselves, for us the maxim reads to all eternity: ‘each is furthest from himself’—with respect to ourselves we are not ‘knowers’...” (1.1)

- b. Immediately after this somewhat enigmatic opening, Nietzsche rather bluntly tells us what’s at stake in this text: “the origins of our moral prejudices.” (2.1) As he himself notes, this is a theme he’d already addressed elsewhere. But he also implies, and we hope, that this text will provide the most well-developed form of his critique of our moral values and their historical, cultural, even religious background.
- c. The point, then, is to launch a critique of moral values, to interrogate them as to their validity and their provenance: where did you come from? what is your purpose here? where are your papers? What motivates this critique is a kind of skepticism—not just about our knowledge of how things are (how do we know x is x ?), but also about our knowledge of how things ought to be (how do we know x should be x ? how do we know x should do y ?).
- d. As Nietzsche puts it: “Given a skepticism that is characteristic of me, to which I reluctantly admit—for it is directed towards morality, towards everything on earth that has until now been celebrated as morality... it was inevitable that early on my curiosity and my suspicion as well would stop at the question: what, in fact, is the origin of our good and evil?” (3.2)
- e. Yet that way of putting the question is too big, too unwieldy, too imprecise. And so we must reformulate it: “A little historical and philosophical schooling, combined with an innate sense of discrimination in all psychological questions, soon transformed my problem into a different one: under what conditions did man invent those value judgments good and evil? and what value do they themselves have? Have they inhibited or furthered human flourishing up until now? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or, conversely, do they betray the fullness, the power, the will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?” (3.2-3)
- f. So this critique of moral value poses some tough questions: what is the value of our values? What conditions do our moral values develop within? What soil do they grow in? And the reason this matters is this: our own future possibilities might be foreclosed in advanced by our own values, by the moral limits of our own imaginations. But how can we justify that? How can live that way, if it turns out the moral boundaries of our life-activity are not at all based on immutable reason or unchanging nature?
- g. More specifically, Nietzsche wants to challenge some of the seemingly most dominant forms of moral value, which would appear to crop up all around the world in a variety of different time-periods and cultures. These include: “the value of the unegoistic, of the instincts of compassion, self-denial, self-sacrifice...” (5.4) Skepticism can arise even against these values: “precisely here I saw the beginning of the end, the standstill, the backward-glancing tiredness, the will turning against life, the last sickness gently and melancholically announcing itself...” (5.4)
- h. The challenge, then, is this: “we need a critique of moral values, for once the value of these values must itself be called into question—and for this we need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted... knowledge of a kind that has neither existed up until now nor even been desired.” (6.5)

- i. The great risk of morality is that the dominant values shaping our lives might be destroying or undermining those lives from within. We might be dooming ourselves to a kind of life unlived, to an abbreviated and unsound way of living, simply because we are uncritically and unthinkingly accepting moral values that were merely handed down to us.
 - j. Writes Nietzsche: “What if a symptom of regression also lay in the ‘good,’ likewise a danger, a temptation, a poison, a narcotic through which perhaps the present were living at the expense of the future? Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but also in a reduced style, on a lower level? ... So that precisely morality would be to blame if a highest power and splendor of the human type—in itself possible—were never attained? So that precisely morality were the danger of dangers?” (6.5)
 - k. And so the task Nietzsche sets himself is this: to provide us with a “real history of morality” (7.6) that wouldn’t be merely hypothetical, but grounded in materially embodied humankind. Yet, all the same, Nietzsche doesn’t want to give us a pseudoscientifically ‘Darwinist’ account of morality, as if evolutionary biology alone could answer our questions here. Instead, what is needed is the “art of interpretation,” (8.7) a careful rumination on moral values and their hidden presumptions and presuppositions.
3. Good & Bad (I)
- a. Nietzsche begins his first of three treatises in this book by paying an acerbic homage to those “English psychologists,” among whom we might count Mill. Though they didn’t go at all far enough, these previous thinkers still have a chance of earning some of Nietzsche’s respect, especially since they were willing to critically reflect on the material-historical bases of moral experiences. Nietzsche hopes that maybe, just maybe these social critics “have trained themselves to sacrifice all desirability to truth, to every truth, even plain, harsh, ugly, unpleasant, unchristian, immoral truth... For there are such truths.” (1.1.10)
 - b. But what these psychologizers lack above all, in Nietzsche’s eyes, is a proper sense for history. To be sure, they know their history and some—like Mill—will even begin to historicize apparently natural values by showing their contingent and socially motivated histories. But their shortcoming is that they only use history to back up their ahistorical values—in Mill’s case, utility. So despite their critical erudition, they still reduce history to the footservant of some timeless prime value that guides the entire analysis.
 - c. As Nietzsche puts it: “it is certain that they lack the historical spirit itself, that they have been left in the lurch precisely by all the good spirits of history! As is simply the age-old practice among philosophers, they all think essentially ahistorically...” (1.2.10)
 - d. This ahistorical blind spot concerning timeless values has rendered many unable to see the possible origins of terms like “good” and “bad.” All too many have made the case that the “good” derives from the sense people have when something “good” happens to them. In that case, whatever is useful, pleasant, etc., would be “good” in the original sense. But Nietzsche argues that there is no reason to claim this as the origin of the good, provided that we are not already privileging ideas of utility, etc. And that, in turn, smuggles in preconceptions about the ‘virtues’ of self-sacrifice—and the vice of pride—which are not actually justifiable (not at least without further self-reflection and investigation).

- e. For him, it is much more likely that the original use the “good” was derived from people who thought of themselves as good. It was not about what happens to me, it was about how I act upon the world. First, I am good—and so my works are good.
 - f. As Nietzsche puts it: “it is obvious to me that the actual genesis of the concept ‘good’ is sought and fixed in the wrong place by this theory: the judgment ‘good’ does not stem from those to whom ‘goodness’ is rendered! Rather it was ‘the good’ themselves, that is the noble, powerful, higher-ranking, and high-minded who felt and ranked themselves and their doings as good, which is to say, as of the first rank, in contrast to everything base, low-minded, common, and vulgar. Out of this pathos of distance they first took for themselves the right to create values, to coin names for values: what did they care about usefulness?” (1.2.10)
 - g. To elaborate this argument, Nietzsche next develops a quasi-historical ‘genealogy’ of the noble rulers who would stand as the original ‘good ones.’ Here he’ll link up a number of words, all associated with this class of person: good, noble, aristocratic, true, strong, warlike... And on the other side: bad, ignoble, lowly, deceitful, weak, manipulative... All in all, it’s a question of class or caste or ‘estate.’
 - h. Yet the aristocratic rulers are not always made up of warriors alone. The ruling class can also be the priestly class. With the notion of the priestly, Nietzsche turns to a more complex analysis of his question. The priests are certainly part of the rulers, not the ruled, and yet they twist the simple values of good and bad into the warped dichotomy of “pure” and “impure.” This priestly mode of value then goes on to corrupt our understanding of good and bad. (1.6.15)
 - i. Priestliness, for Nietzsche, stands for the turn away from action and towards inaction—or nothingness. While it maintains a firm moral dichotomy, this dichotomy no longer encourages human activity to reach its terrifying heights; it instead plays a role in maintaining the status quo through valorizing inactivity, stasis, and ultimately an inverted sense of moral worth. Yet, at the same time, priestliness also deepens humanity culturally, opening it up the possibility of new thoughts—and, more darkly, a greater sense of “evil”...
4. Good & Evil (I)
- a. The original distinction between good and bad must not be confused with its later development into the dichotomy of good and evil. For Nietzsche, the latter kind of value-structure brings humanity into a new kind of moral atmosphere. In order to account for this drastic shift in values, Nietzsche then tells us a story about an ‘event’ that led to this re-valuation of moral terms. He names this event the Slave Revolt in Morality.
 - b. Unhappily, Nietzsche chooses to label the paradigmatic group of ‘slaves’ as “Jews.” Here he skirts a line between a mythic account of the “Jews” against the nobles and a historical reference to the actual moral shifts brought about by the West’s adoption of ancient Judaism’s ethical code. Regardless, here we should try to understand the basic movement involved in the Slave Revolt, rather than getting bogged down in the question of why Nietzsche had to emphasize Jewishness here.
 - c. He writes: “Of all that has been done on earth against ‘the noble,’ ‘the mighty,’ ‘the lords,’ ‘the power-holders,’ nothing is worthy of mention in comparison with that which the Jews have done against them: the Jews, that priestly people who in the end were only able to obtain satisfaction from their enemies and conquerors through a radical revaluation of their values, that is, through an act of spiritual revenge.” (1.7.16)

- d. And yet: “We know who inherited this Jewish revaluation...” It is Christianity, Christian Europe that has actually put this inverted moral framework into practice in the fullest sense. Still, it was “with the Jews the slave revolt in morality begins: that revolt which has a two-thousand-year history behind it and which has only moved out of our sight today because it—has been victorious...” (1.7.17) Christian civil society is the most likely site of that victory. (Section 8 makes this clear.)
 - e. So how does this Slave Revolt begin? It begins when a reaction of resentment—or, to stick to Nietzsche’s technical terms, *ressentiment*—brings in its values to supplant the spontaneously established values of the ruling class.
 - f. As Nietzsche describes the scene: “The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of beings denied the true reaction, that of the deed, who recover their losses only through an imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant yes-saying to oneself, from the outset slave morality says ‘no’ to an ‘outside,’ to a ‘different,’ to a ‘not-self:’ this ‘no’ is its creative deed. This reversal of the value-establishing glance—this necessary direction toward the outside instead of back onto oneself—belongs to the very nature of *ressentiment*: in order to come into being, slave-morality always needs an opposite and external world; it needs, psychologically speaking, external stimuli in order to be able to act at all—its action is, from the ground up, reaction. The reverse is the case with the noble manner of valuation: it acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks out its opposite only in order to say ‘yes’ to itself still more gratefully and more jubilantly—its negative concept ‘low-common-bad’ is only an afterbirth, a pale contrast-image in relation to its positive basic concept, saturated through and through with life and passion: ‘we noble ones, we good ones, we beautiful ones, we happy ones!’” (1.10.19)
 - g. Whereas the noble system of value contrasted a simply positive ‘good’ with a merely lacking ‘bad,’ the system of *ressentiment* opposes a paradoxically hidden ‘good’ to a positively destructive ‘evil.’ Only the man of *ressentiment* has “conceived of the ‘evil enemy,’ the ‘evil one,’ and this indeed as the basic concept, starting from which he now also thinks up, as reaction and counterpart, a ‘good one’—himself” (1.10.21) And so evil, in a sense, ‘comes before’ the good within the regime of *ressentiment*. Evil is the horrifying, inimical standard against which good negatively defines itself. (We’re not that! Etc.) This stands in stark contrast to the nobly good, which, as we saw, is merely positive—it holds itself up as the standard.
 - h. There is thus a huge gap between the complementary concept ‘bad’ and the hateful concept ‘evil.’ And yet the same word ‘good’ is related to them both. That can be deceptive. For Nietzsche, the meaning of the word ‘good’ shifts quite substantially when it moves from ‘good-and-bad’ to ‘good-and-evil.’ As a result, our whole sense of what is truly good has now taken on a skewed character.
5. Lambs & Birds of Prey (I)
 - a. Though Nietzsche hopes for a figure that would transcend this warped good-evil dichotomy, he knows that, at least for now, we are stuck in the realm of *ressentiment*. And so that is where our analysis must focus.
 - b. Those fueled by *ressentiment* are, Nietzsche tell us, not unlike lambs stalked and fed upon by birds of prey. They fear the predators; they even come to hate them. If lambs had morals, eagles and hawks would certainly be considered ‘evil.’ But, Nietzsche reminds us, the birds of prey are not necessarily to be judged so harshly. They, for their part, are not at all motivated by hate. They love the tasty lambs! In

fact, they are not motivated by any such base considerations. They are simply doing what they do: soaring, diving, devouring. And, for Nietzsche, what they do is—in a very real sense—what they ‘are.’

- i. Perhaps recall Marx here: we are not cut-off human ‘subjects’ who happen to fall into the world of material action. We are our material action. Our species-being is to use our essential powers to shape the world—to shape nature, which is what we also are.
- c. What seems like somewhat of a silly parable actually turns out to have philosophical consequences. If there isn’t a gap between being and doing, then perhaps we just are what we do. We’d have to rethink or toss out the whole idea that we have a secret, separate self that is ‘who we really are’ and, on the other side, a manifestly material that sometimes does things that ‘aren’t really us.’
- d. As Nietzsche puts it: “For just as the common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a doing, as an effect of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expression of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express strength—or not to. But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything. Common people basically double the doing when they have the lightning flash; this is a doing-doing: the same happening is posited first as cause and then once again as its effect.” (1.13.25)
- e. But the separation of the doer from the doing—for example, by positing a soul—allows the weak to interpret ‘how they are’ as ‘how they choose to be.’ They see freedom, volition, and even merit where there is none. (1.13.26)
- f. ‘Justice’ is then no longer a reality that appears in the world. It becomes something separate from the real world. It is delayed until the end of the world. It becomes ‘the Last Judgment.’ In this form of justice, the strong will suffer an otherworldly comeuppance at the hands of some divine force working on behalf of the weak. This is resentment ratcheted up into a grotesque climax—at least in Nietzsche’s eyes—and once again it is Christianity that has brought this vision into its sharpest, deadliest focus. (1.14-15)
- g. Now if we were to overcome, finally, this moral universe motivated by resentment, we could be said to have gone “beyond good and evil.” But this does not mean that values or valuation would disappear entirely. Rather, it is only the inverted, confused kind of value—where the weak and suffering are rewarded for their very suffering—that would be brushed away. Writes Nietzsche: “at the very least, this does not mean ‘beyond good and bad’...” (1.17.32)
- h. Nietzsche’s problem is the problem of value—but that doesn’t mean value itself is the problem. Humans value. Perhaps there’s no escaping that. But that doesn’t mean every value system is equally conducive to human greatness and flourishing. Not at all. And so, moving ahead, Nietzsche wants us to think both about how we came to value the values we do and about how we might re-value our values in a new, perhaps healthier way.
- i. As he writes: “All sciences are henceforth to do preparatory work for the philosopher’s task of the future: understanding this task such that the philosopher is to solve the problem of value, that he is to determine the order of rank among values.” (1.17.33)
- j. ...

6. To Promise & To Forget (II)
- a. Having already challenged us to rethink our seemingly sacred categories of good and bad, good and evil, Nietzsche now turns to another difficult dichotomy: promising and forgetting. In some sense, he defines the human as the promising animal. Rather than living instinctively, moment to moment, humans—at least we'd like to believe—are able to remember what came before and rationally plan for what's coming. Promising is Nietzsche's name for this 'moral continuity' in our experience. We don't just move from hunting ground to hunting ground, mindlessly chasing down new prey. (Again, ideally...) Instead, we live out our lives on the basis of a series of commitments—to what's happened in the past, but also to what we hope to achieve for ourselves and for others in the future.
 - b. Yet, as ever, the ideal situation might not represent the actual one. On the flip side of promising we find forgetting—not as some merely negative loss of memory, but as an active, positive ability to move past what came before, to refuse to let the past define what must happen in the future. For Nietzsche, then, humankind is not only the promising animal but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, the forgetting animal. In order not to get trapped in the past, we seem to have to forget; and yet all the same we aim to overcome this oblivion by making a claim on the future in the name of the past—that is, by promising.
 - c. Nietzsche describes promising, so reliant on our capacity for memory, in the following terms: “In order to have this kind of command over the future in advance, man must first have learned to separate the necessary from the accidental occurrence, to think causally, to see and anticipate what is distant as if it were present, to fix with certainty what is end, what is means thereto, in general to be able to reckon, to calculate—for this, man himself must first of all have become calculable, regular, necessary, in his own image of himself as well, in order to be able to vouch for himself as future, as one who promises does!” (2.1.36)
 - d. And: “Precisely this is the long history of the origins of responsibility.” (2.2.36)
 - e. The human, originally so difficult to predict, has become at this historical stage highly regularized. Moral custom has conditioned humans to mostly act within certain boundaries. And yet, somewhat strangely, the modern human is also conceived of as the truly free human: free to decide on a way of life, free to make promises about what his or her future life will look like. But what kind of “freedom” is this, really? Is it absolute, utterly uninhibited freedom? Or does this freedom itself arise under certain conditions? Does it come with a catch? (Here we have to attend closely to Nietzsche's sarcastic tone...)
 - f. Writes Nietzsche: the ripest fruit on the tree of morality is “the sovereign individual, the individual resembling only himself, free again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supermoral (for 'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive), in short, the human being with his own independent long will, the human being who is permitted to promise—and in him a proud consciousness, twitching in all his muscles, of what has finally been achieved and become flesh in him, a true consciousness of power and freedom, a feeling of the completion of man himself. This being who has become free, who is really permitted to promise, this lord of the free will, this sovereign... [...] The 'free' human being, the possessor of a long, unbreakable will, has in this possession his standard of value as well...” (2.2.36-37)
 - g. With the idea of the sovereign individual—perhaps recall Mill here—we have the idea of the human as the one who ascribes value to all things. “This is good; that is

evil.’ But these value judgments are no longer credited simply to custom or tradition. The new sovereign individual is “autonomous:” he gives the law to himself. (Kant...) He is truly ‘free,’ not taking his law from any foreign source, and yet he still acts according to an ethical principle within himself. But what ethical principle might that be?

- h. Writes Nietzsche: “The proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and fate, has sunk into his lowest depth and has become instinct, the dominant instinct:-- what will he call it, this dominant instinct, assuming that he feels the need to have a word for it? But there is no doubt: this sovereign human being calls it his *conscience...*” (2.2.37)
7. Bad Conscience Within (II)
 - a. But where does conscience itself come from? Why do we feel those pangs when we do something ‘evil?’ Some might say this is a natural sensation. Conscience ‘just is’ at the core of human experience. Nietzsche disagrees. For him, conscience is something that has been produced in us. And how? It’s been implanted in us over the course of history through force.
 - b. The application of force has been used, according to this story, as a way of burning the memory of ‘good and evil’ into our minds (and even our bodies). Our modern ethical framework, founded not on external laws but on internal conscience, is still beholden to the historical conditions under which the ‘slavish’ moral system was produced. And so perhaps the morally autonomous person is not as absolutely ‘free’ as they at first seemed...
 - c. Writes Nietzsche, with reference to traditional implements of torture and punishment: “With the help of such images and processes one finally retains in memory five, six ‘I will nots,’ in connection with which one has given one’s promise in order to live within the advantages of society—and truly! with the help of this kind of memory one finally came ‘to reason!’—Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, this entire gloomy matter called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: how dearly they have been paid for! How much blood and horror there is at the base of all ‘good things!’...” (2.3.39)
 - i. Here, contra Mill, Nietzsche places the law of force at the heart of our current laws of ‘justice’—though not justice in any sense, but specifically in the sense of good and evil.
 8. Guilt as Debt (II)
 - a. But the above only describes the modern situation, which is in fact a very complex development of ‘guilt’ into the idea of internalized conscience. The basic foundations of the concept of guilt, however, are much more straightforward. Historically speaking, guilt has little to do with questions of ‘intent’ or ‘responsibility.’ It simply has to do with debt—with owing something to a ‘wronged’ party, and so with compensation or restitution.
 - b. Writes Nietzsche: “Have these previous genealogists of morality even remotely dreamt, for example, that that central moral concept ‘guilt’ had its origins in the very material concept ‘debt?’ Or that punishment as retribution developed completely apart from any presupposition concerning freedom or lack of freedom of the will?” (2.4.39)
 - c. The basic idea of guilt, then, has nothing to do with the notion that the guilty party is personally responsible—that they could have freely chosen to do otherwise and so

must be held accountable for their free action. The question of freedom comes later. No, guilt originally has to do with repayment: injury is repaid through injury; pain is rendered for pain. The model of justice here is not so much metaphysical as it is economical.

- d. Nietzsche: “Whence has this age-old, deeply rooted, perhaps now no longer eradicable idea taken its power—the idea of an equivalence between injury and pain? I have already given it away: in the contractual relationship between creditor and debtor, which is as old as the existence of ‘legal subjects’ and in turn points back to the basic forms of purchase, sale, exchange, trade, and commerce.” (2.4.40)
 - e. The resulting ‘duty’ of the guilty party is to make restitution—to pay up. The whole moral sphere of guilt and duty revolves around the material foundations of the violent extraction of exchange-value. The pound of flesh must be taken by force if it is not offered up.
 - f. Here Nietzsche’s account of the origins of guilt takes an even grimmer turn. A creditor’s violent extraction of what is owed by the debtor is not just a dry, emotionless transaction. It is invested with a kind of perverse pleasure. The creditor enjoys getting his payback. If human history is full of evidence of humans loving to see others suffer—witness the gladiatorial arenas—then, for Nietzsche, it is just as full of instances of humans loving make others suffer, as well.
 - g. As he puts it: “Seeing-suffer feels good, making-suffer even more so—that is a hard proposition, but a central one, an old powerful human-all-too-human proposition, to which, by the way, even the apes might subscribe...” (2.6.42)
 - h. Even if we don’t want to follow Nietzsche down into the depths of his claims about the perverse joy of making-suffer, there’s still something compelling about his reduction of human morality to a logic of exchange. Economic language does indeed seem to resonate at the core of much of what we take to be rational, moral, just, and so on. (Think back to Plato and the seemingly unsatisfying arguments that justice is a rendering of accounts owed—to each their own...)
 - i. Nietzsche pushes the importance of exchange-thinking very far: “Making prices, gauging values, thinking out equivalents, exchanging—this preoccupied man’s very first thinking to such an extent that it is in a certain sense thinking itself: here that oldest kind of acumen was bred, here likewise we may suspect the first beginnings of human pride, man’s feeling of preeminence with respect to other creatures. Perhaps our word ‘man’ still expresses something of this self-esteem: man designated himself as the being who measures values, who values and measures, as the ‘appraising animal in itself.” (2.8.45)
9. Justice (II)
- a. What Nietzsche considers the primitive form of justice then develops out of this logic of exchange. Everything has its price, at least for the early human. Even pain, even suffering, even death has a price—which means it can be paid for or paid off. This idea—perhaps a tad disturbing for us now—lies at the heart of all subsequent, more sophisticated definitions of what justice is.
 - b. As Nietzsche says: “Justice at this first stage is the good will among parties of approximately equal power to come to terms with one another, to reach an ‘understanding’ again by means of a settlement—and in regard to less powerful parties, to force them to a settlement among themselves...” (2.8.46)
 - c. Even the community itself, under this regime of justice, can be understood as a giant ‘creditor’ to which all of its members are all debtors. We all owe it to society to

behave, otherwise we shall have to pay for our misbehavior. The community as a whole, then, lays claim to the right to make-suffer and therefore see-suffer. (2.9)

- d. For Nietzsche, justice is also fundamentally active. But he admits that many of his contemporaries would argue that it is instead re-active: justice, for them, has to do with restoring conditions of fairness or equality which have been upset by some kind of unfair advantage. To Nietzsche, this definition of justice is motivated by resentment—recall how the lambs felt about the birds of prey—and it effectively reduces justice to mere “revenge.” (2.11)
- e. Yet the resentment-fueled, reactive conception of justice perverts our view of the historical development of justice, at least as Nietzsche sees it: “just look around in history: in which sphere has the entire administration of justice, also the true need for justice, thus far been at home on earth? Perhaps in the sphere of the reactive human? Absolutely not: rather in that of the active, strong, spontaneous, aggressive. Considered historically, justice on earth represents... precisely the battle against reactive feelings, the war against them on the part of the active and aggressive powers that have used their strength in part to call a halt to and impose measure on the excess of reactive pathos and to force a settlement. Everywhere justice is practiced and upheld one sees a stronger power seeking means to put an end to the senseless raging of resentment among weaker parties subordinated to it...” (2.11.49)
- f. Nietzsche next turns from justice to law. But, unlike some of our classical authors, he does not see law as something that develops out of a more fundamental reality of justice. Law is not determined on the basis of what is just or unjust; what is just or unjust is decided on the basis of law. And law is posited spontaneously by humanity in its active component.
- g. Behold the law: “But the most decisive thing the highest power does and forces through against the predominance of counter- and after-feelings—which it always does as soon as it is in any way strong enough to do so—is the establishment of the law, the imperative declaration of what in general is to count in its eyes as permitted, as just, what as forbidden, as unjust...” (2.11.49)
- h. Then: “Accordingly, only once the law has been established do ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ exist... To talk of justice and injustice in themselves is devoid of all sense; in itself injuring, doing violence, pillaging, destroying naturally cannot be ‘unjust,’ insofar as life acts essentially—that is, in its basic functions—in an injuring, violating, pillaging, destroying manner and cannot be thought at all without this character. One must even admit to oneself something still more problematic: that, from the highest biological standpoint, conditions of justice can never be anything but exceptional conditions, as partial restrictions of the true will to life—which is out after power—and subordinating themselves as individual means to its overall end: that is, as means for creating greater units of power.” (2.11.50)
- i. Regimes of law thus forcefully exert authority over the realm of human action. They define certain uses of violence as just and others as unjust; some legitimate, others illegitimate. But this is a far cry from saying that violence in each and every case is an ‘injustice’ that must be remedied. A universal law that would end any possible violence would simply be anti-life, in Nietzsche’s term. Physical life leads to violence. To try to outlaw violence in any form would thus be to try to outlaw life.

10. Power & Punishment (II)

- a. Life is then for Nietzsche fundamentally linked to power. Here we come upon his contested phrase—the ‘will to power.’ In this context, Nietzsche is interested in emphasizing the way that spontaneous human life projects its own activity into and over the world. This is what it means to be alive, in effect. Yet spontaneity seems all too often to lead to reaction. That in and of itself may not be a problem, but a problem certainly does arise when we start to think that ‘reaction’ comes before spontaneity. This is the move made by the resentment-fueled person, as we’ve seen.
 - b. The context for Nietzsche’s turn to power is his treatment of punishment. Somewhat surprisingly, he critiques those who assume that punishment was invented “for punishing!” To assume this is, for Nietzsche, to succumb to a historical fallacy. The current purpose of a practice needn’t at all be the same as the origin of that same practice. In fact, the act itself—considered purely as a spontaneous act, as a projection of the power of life—comes before the variety of interpretations we can apply to that act. From this point of view, then, the ‘act’ of punishing—the act that we call ‘punishing’ now—need not have originally arisen for the purposes of punishing in our sense (be that taking revenge, deterring future crimes, etc.).
 - c. Says Nietzsche: “Thus one also imagined punishment as invented for punishing. But all purposes, all utilities, are only signs that a will to power has become lord over something less powerful and has stamped its own functional meaning onto it; and in this manner the entire history of a ‘thing,’ an organ, a practice can be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and arrangements, whose causes need not be connected even among themselves...” (2.12.51)
 - d. To conceive of human life and society—punishment included—as purely reactive is to hide the activity that lies at the core of things: “one mistakes the essence of life, its will to power; in so doing one overlooks the essential preeminence of the spontaneous, attacking, infringing, reinterpreting, reordering, and formative forces...” (2.12.52)
 - e. In discussing punishment, then, we have to separate the “act,” which is “permanent,” from the “meaning,” which is “fluid.” (2.13.52) Punishment can mean many things for us, both now and throughout history. We can get lost in the history of its many meanings. But the act comes first—the spontaneous projection of force comes first.
11. Internalization (II)
- a. Now we’ve begun to get more familiar with Nietzsche’s view of human life-activity. Modern society’s causal explanations for why justice and morality is structured this way or that now fall flat. They all seem to call back to a fundamental law of force—much to Mill’s chagrin, perhaps. This law of force is, on the one hand, the power that forces humanity into society; and, on the other hand, it is also the will to power that continues to push against the limits of society.
 - b. Humankind’s violent impulses—in themselves morally value-neutral, we recall—did not disappear with the advent of society. They were not even really tamed. Instead, they were redirected towards their point of origin. As social organization tightens its grip, each person internalizes their drives and applies force to their own selves.
 - c. As he approaches the end of the second treatise, then, Nietzsche returns to the earlier question of ‘bad conscience.’ This turns to be not just the fact that we are indoctrinated with a sense of indebted duty, but also the ongoing action of waging war on ourselves—if not physically, at least psychologically, internally.

- d. As he describes it: “All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn themselves inwards—this is what I call the internalizing of man: thus first grows in man that which he later calls his ‘soul.’ ... Those terrible bulwarks with which the organization of the state protects itself against the old instincts of freedom—punishments belong above all else to these bulwarks—brought it about that all those instincts of the wild free roaming human turned themselves backwards against man himself. Hostility, cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction—all of that turning itself against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of ‘bad conscience.’” (2.16.57)
- e. But, again, this internalization of violence is only a later effect of the role of force in forging human society. It is in fact an after-effect of a more fundamental use of force: the violent founding of society out of mere animal humanity. Nietzsche envisions this hypothetical founding of the state as a radical rupture, a break with all that came before. The free play of instinctive action was all of a sudden beaten down and molded into the shape of society. That is why the impulse towards freedom and power wreaks such havoc within those who have been subjugated in this way.
- f. But who could have brought about such a forceful creation of society or of the state? Here again we find controversy. Nietzsche describes a pack of “blond beasts of prey,” original and active and forceful human beings who would have created order out of nothing, in some sense. They were reacting to nothing in particular, at least. Their founding of society was something like an act of pure creation.
- g. Nietzsche’s argument is not so simple that we can say he leaves us with a crude dichotomy: blond beasts free of bad conscience versus resentment-fueled folks riddled with guilt. It’s true that the blond beasts do not themselves have any motivation to form bad consciences, but they are ultimately responsible for the existence of any bad conscience at all. If they hadn’t forcefully constricted the freedom of others—there was no social contract here!—then there’d be no need for the internalization of violence among socialized humanity.
- h. As Nietzsche puts it: “They [the originary rulers] do not know what guilt, what responsibility, what consideration is, these born organizers; in them that terrible artists’ egoism rules, that has a gaze like bronze and that knows itself already justified to all eternity in its ‘work,’ like the mother in her child. They are not the ones among whom ‘bad conscience’ grew, that is clear from the outset—but it would not have grown without them, this ugly growth, it would be missing, if an enormous quantity of freedom had not been banished from the world, at least from visibility, and made latent as it were, under the pressure of the blows of their hammers, of their artist’s violence. This instinct for freedom, forcibly made latent—we have already grasped it—this instinct for freedom, driven back, suppressed, imprisoned within, and finally discharging and venting itself only on itself: this, only this, is bad conscience in its beginnings.” (2.17.58-59)
- i. Slave morality, then, the values of resentment, would be the outcome of the resulting internalized violence of society. This takes place within the victims of the blond beasts, but it is the blond beasts themselves who ultimately set the wheels in motion. Perceived ‘virtues’ like self-sacrifice (etc.) are merely forms of this violence against itself. By saying ‘no’ to my impulses, I dream that I am winning, conquering, living. But I am only negating for no reason. I am only refusing to affirm activity. I am denying life. (2.18)

- j. So what is the situation ‘now,’ or at least in Nietzsche’s time? Well, we already know that the moral system of resentment has attained dominance. And the name for its dominance is ‘Christianity.’ Only in Christianity, quips Nietzsche, do you find the perverse idea that the divine Creditor—God Himself, as Christ—sacrifices Himself for His many debtors! Christianity is confused not only because it deepens our sense that everyone is guilty for affirming life and projecting their power over others, but also because it forces the one being who is permitted to project power over others—namely God—to hold to the vulgar value of ‘self-sacrifice,’ as if a god would have any interest in paying back anyone for anything (even himself!). (2.21)
 - k. Still, even the idea of a divine figure absolving us of our guilt has not actually gotten rid of the sickness in our internalized violence against ourselves. Nietzsche diagnoses us thusly: “This is a kind of madness of the will in psychic cruelty that has absolutely no equal: the will of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to the point that it cannot be atoned for; his will to imagine himself punished without the possibility of the punishment ever becoming equivalent to the guilt...” (2.22.63)
 - l. So what are we to do? How can we move from sickness to health? Simply affecting an atheist pose in reaction to Christianity doesn’t seem to be enough. We still end up holding on to bad conscience, guilt, and all the rest. Should we destroy all ideals and values, then? No, that would simply lead to a nihilist cessation of our life-activity; we need to keep moving, to keep changing, not simply to stop. Can we erect new ideals, new values now? Perhaps, but only at a great cost. And how could we place such a wager and incur such a cost without knowing what might happen? No, what is needed is a bit of patience. We need to think in the long term. If we are after a truly transformative re-valuation of all values, then we might just have to wait. (For whom? Zarathustra...)
 - m. Concludes Nietzsche: “But someday, in a stronger time than this decaying, self-doubting present, he really must come to us, the redeeming human of the great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength again and again drives him out of any apart or beyond, whose loneliness is misunderstood by the people as if it were a flight from reality—whereas it is only his submersion, burial, absorption in reality so that one day, when he again comes to light, he can bring home the redemption of this reality: its redemption from the curse that the previous ideal placed upon it. This human of the future who will redeem us from the previous ideal as much as from that which had to grow out of it, from the great disgust, from the will to nothingness; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision, that makes the will free again, that gives back to the earth its goal and to man his hope; this Anti-Christ and anti-nihilist; this conqueror of God and of nothingness—he must one day come...” (2.24.66)
12. The Ascetic Act (III)
- a. Asceticism, or the whole complex of ascetic ideals, can mean many things. In that way, it’s like punishment. Philosophers mean one thing by it, artists another, priests still a third. We might call those who take it to its extreme ‘saints.’ But, as with punishment, the multiplicity of meanings we might interpret out of ‘ascetic’ acts does not override the fact that these acts, these practices continue to be done across humankind. The fact that they happen to be done for different ‘reasons’ (i.e., in accordance with different ‘meanings’) is only a superficial aspect of their reality.
 - b. So if forceful self-projection onto another lay at the heart of ‘punishment,’ what is the basic act at the core of asceticism? Nietzsche describes it like this: “*That* the

ascetic ideal has meant so much to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacui: it needs a goal*—and it would rather will nothingness than not will.” (3.1.67)

- c. Ascetic ideals would then seem to have to do with willing nothingness. To be ascetic is not to shut down your will altogether. Nor is it to will—to aim your act of willing at—some specific object in the world. Instead, it is to keep willing, to keep active—but, strangely, to aim that willing at nothing at all. ‘God,’ for Nietzsche, is one of the most commonly used words when it comes to referring to this nothingness that is quite difficult to recognize in active, day-to-day life.

13. Philosophical Asceticism (III)

- a. Nietzsche spends a good chunk of text in the third treatise exploring the various ‘meanings’ of ascetic practices. His favored context here is that of philosophy. For philosophers, he argues, asceticism offers a way of thinking that they have risen above the realm of mere sensuality, drawing ever closer to a zone of pure intellect.
- b. He writes: “And to come back to our first question: ‘what does it mean when a philosopher pays homage to the ascetic ideal?’ we get at least a first hint here: he wants *to break free from a torture*.” (3.6.74)
- c. Yes, the sensual is a torture for the philosopher, as can be seen most clearly when it comes to sexuality. Nietzsche says: “It is indisputable that for as long as there have been philosophers on earth and wherever there have been philosophers (from India to England, to take the polar opposites in talent for philosophy) there has existed a characteristic philosophers’ irritability and rancor against sensuality... there has likewise existed a characteristic philosophers’ prepossession and cordiality regarding the whole ascetic ideal... Every animal, thus also la bête philosophe, instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can vent its power completely and attain its maximum in the feeling of power...” (3.7.74-75)
- d. The philosopher shuns the sensual and especially the sexual, and so there can be no question of marriage or the domestic sphere. A married philosopher would only be a so-called philosopher, a sham-philosopher fit only for farce. But is there anything noble about this continence, this holding-in or holding-back, this self-sacrifice of the sensual? Not according to Nietzsche; for him, this is just another example of how material humanity violently projects its power over the world.
- e. It just so happens that, instead of a warrior violently subduing his enemy on the battlefield, the philosopher uses internalized violence to subdue his own urges in the battle of his own life. So no ‘moral high ground’ is left to the philosopher here. He merely has different dispositions, different tendencies, different ways of projecting power. That he is more lamb-like than predator-like is no great achievement; it’s merely his way of doing things, his mode of activity, his practical life.
- f. Thus: “One can see these are no unbribed witnesses and judges of the value of the ascetic ideal, these philosophers!” (3.8.76) They have a vested interest, even an animalistic interest, in defending the ‘virtues’ of asceticism. They want to withdraw from the everyday bustle of the world and think in peace—but the fact that they want this doesn’t make it absolutely ‘good.’ There’s not much transparency here. So why would we grant them all our trust? Why would we accept the universal superiority of ascetic ideals?
 - i. Here would be a good place to note that Nietzsche isn’t always attacking others in this work. Quite often he’s attacking himself. These passages from 3.8-9 can be read as a kind of self-critique. It’s not just Kant and

Schopenhauer who have a skewed relationship to the sensual and the sexual, to the bustling everydayness of life and its human distractions. Nietzsche, too, feels the draw to quiet anonymity, a room in an inn where he can read and think and write and read again. But he has stumbled upon a disturbing thought: what if the fact that he ‘wants’ to pursue philosophy in that way is baseless? What if it is merely an effect of his impulses, his dispositions, his character. Is there any great value in it then?

14. Re-Evaluating Life (III)

- a. Philosophy, then, has to some degree tricked us into holding up certain ideals over others, as if they were universally superior. Asceticism thus lies above marriage, which in turn lies above wanton lust, and so on. But, as Nietzsche never tires of reminding us, history is a seemingly endless list of such values and meanings and interpretations. There’s nothing terribly fixed about them. As he puts it so memorably: “All good things were once bad things; every original sin has become an original virtue.” (3.9.80)
- b. But there is also a historical dimension to philosophy’s prejudices on this count. The genealogy of philosophy, according to Nietzsche, leads back into the realm of the “ascetic priest.” Only under this guise could something like philosophical contemplation arise in the first place. The warrior has no interest in it; the commoner has no aptitude for it. Only the elite non-warrior—the priest—could first philosophize. But, by then, they had already figured out how to project power over others by claiming supernatural force for themselves. And the means by which they did this was ascetic practices and their after-the-fact justifications: ascetic ideals.
- c. Nietzsche writes: “until the most recent time the ascetic priest has functioned as the repulsive and gloomy caterpillar-form in which alone philosophy was allowed to live and in which it crept around... Has this really changed?” (3.10.82)
- d. The problem, then, is that even modern philosophy continues to keep alive and re-inscribe these old ascetic ideals. Yet it has fallen short of proving that these ideals are really what’s ‘best’ for human life and flourishing.
- e. Nietzsche frames the problem this way: “The idea we are fighting about here is the valuation of our life on the part of the ascetic priest: he relates our life (together with that to which it belongs: ‘nature,’ ‘world,’ the entire sphere of becoming and of transitoriness) to an entirely different kind of existence, which it opposes and excludes, unless, perhaps, it were to turn against itself, to negate itself: in this case, the case of an ascetic life, life is held to be a bridge for that other existence. The ascetic treats life as a wrong path that one must finally retrace back to the point where it begins, or as an error that one refutes through deeds...” (3.11.83)
- f. The ideals of the ascetic priest eventually turn into the philosophical ideal of an invulnerable, disembodied subject of absolute knowledge: ‘mind’ as disconnected from all the distractions and entanglements of life. But, for Nietzsche, there is no such thing. That’s not how life works. That’s not how our engagement with life works. We always see things from a certain point of view; we’re always entangled. We always have our ‘perspective’... Nietzsche: “There is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival ‘knowing;’ and the more affects we allow to speak about a matter, the more eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear on one and the same matter, that much more complete will our ‘concept’ of this matter, our ‘objectivity,’ be.” (3.12.85)
- g. ...

15. Disgust & Compassion (III)

- a. And yet, all the same, Nietzsche doesn't want us to push back through the ascetic ideal to some pre-ascetic, primitive utopia. Somehow, the ascetic revolution has brought with it the power that can preserve life and allow it to keep transforming into something new. Perhaps this is the power of philosophy—of questioning, of critically reflecting on life. But the trick is not to fall into the trap of the ascetic priests entirely. We shouldn't reflect on life only to condemn it or to negate it. We should reflect on life to, ultimately and with some difficulty, affirm it! (3.13)
- b. The worst threat at the moment seem to be “self-contempt.” (3.14) This is the wish that we were someone else, which is in turn founded on the thought that we could have been someone else. But that already is to negate life in the name of nothingness—in the name of some phantom that just is not.
- c. Those who could escape self-contempt would presumably have the best shot at being happy. (3.14) But being happy is a tenuous condition. Given our ascetically conditioned context, our happiness is under assault both from without and from within. Disgust is the external assailant; compassion is the sixth column. (3.14) Disgust is what the low feel at the sight of human happiness. Compassion is what happens when the happy are duped by the low and so undermine their happiness out of guilt.
- d. Given this assault on happiness and, ultimately, on life itself, what was humanity to do? Here is where the priests save the day despite themselves. The ascetic comes into this situation, where the resentment of the “sheep”—recall our lambs—threatens to destroy the possibility of human happiness for anyone. The trick of the ascetic priest is to shepherd the sheep and, in so doing, to redirect their resentment away from the happy and back toward themselves. That is how ascetic ideals, so inimical to life in themselves, come to save life rather than destroying it.
- e. Nietzsche explains: “that most dangerous blasting and explosive material, resentment, is constantly mounting and mounting. To discharge this explosive in such a way that it does not blow up either the herd or the shepherd, that is [the priest's] true feat, also his supreme usefulness; if one wanted to sum up the value of the priestly mode of existence in the shortest formula one would have to say straight away: the priest changes the direction of resentment.” (3.15.91)
- f. Those fueled by resentment feel a cutting pain and they long for an anaesthetic. At first they look for it in revenge against the happy, but then the priest comes onto the scene. It is the priest who gives them a new anaesthetic that works within them—an internal anaesthetic. It is not the happy who are to blame, but those who interpret the world-situation in terms of resentment...
- g. Nietzsche: “I am suffering: for this someone must be to blame!”—thus every diseased sheep thinks. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest, says to him: “That's right, my sheep! Someone must be to blame for it: but you yourself are this someone, you alone are to blame for it—you alone are to blame for yourself!” (3.15.92)
- h. If all of these moral value-judgments are matters of interpretation, then the fact that the ascetic alters our interpretation becomes extremely significant. The depth of interpretation becomes utterly clear at this point. Life must be interpreted not in terms of disgust and compassion, but in terms of digestion: “pain of the soul” itself does not at all count as a factual state but rather only as an interpretation (causal interpretation) of factual states that could not yet be exactly formulated... A strong and well-formed human digests his experiences (deeds, misdeeds included) as he

digests his meals, even when he has hard bites to swallow. If he ‘cannot cope’ with an experience, this kind of indigestion is just as physiological as that other one—and in many cases in fact only one of the consequences of that other.—With such a conception one can, speaking among ourselves, still be the strictest opponent of all materialism.” (3.16.93)

16. Ascetic Strategies (III)

- a. The function of ascetic ideals is thus to assuage a kind of ‘fatigue’ that affects humankind, which fatigue Nietzsche terms “physiological.” (3.17) It does, in a general way, by ascribed psychological and moral etiologies to the symptoms faced by humanity. Yet to do so is mostly to treat the symptoms while leaving the actual illness untouched.
- b. More specifically, one primary ascetic strategy is to overcome fatigue by a cessation of will. We could try simply to bring about the absence of suffering by refusing to desire at all. This would bring about a kind of salvific sleep, nothingness, or plain death. (3.17)
- c. Other strategies include: using mechanistic work as a distraction; engaging in the mutual interchange of minor good deeds (which is basically a microscopic version of the projection of the will-to-power); developing herd-power through love of one’s neighbor (3.18); and so on...
- d. In short, people of ‘good conscience’ moralize everything. They reshape the world according to their own moral value-judgments, without first pausing to reflect on those judgments and, more broadly, on the variety of ways we might interpret the world in general. To moralize is thus to be, for the most part, deeply dishonest.
- e. Writes Nietzsche: “These ‘good human beings’—they are all moralized down to the roots now and with respect to honesty spoiled and ruined to all eternity: which of them could still endure a truth ‘about humankind!’” (3.19.100)
- f. Here we return to the themes of the second treatise: bad conscience and guilt. The ascetic priest’s redirection of the people’s resentment so that it attacks their own selves is accomplished by way of the concept of guilt. Of ‘man,’ Nietzsche writes: “and behold! He receives a hint; from his magician, the ascetic priest, he receives the first hint concerning the ‘cause’ of his suffering: he is to seek it in himself, in a *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he is to understand his suffering itself as a *state of punishment*...” (3.20.102)
- g. As a result, the rulers don’t even really need to maintain order through punishment. The moral system of guilt and responsibility has already been violently carved into our bodies. And so we’re happy to punish ourselves.

17. What Next? (III)

- a. So what are we to do given that the ascetic sickness has metastasized in our society and foreclosed our intellectual horizons? Can science save us? Nietzsche is skeptical of that, too. Disinterested, objective science is merely a development of self-denial, of an anaesthetic that puts us to sleep so that we no longer notice our own perspective on things. (3.23)
- b. This critique of rigorous, even scientific thought can occasion some more self-critique in Nietzsche’s text. He, too, is driven by his attraction to something. His will is not aimless. What he is motivated by is his will-to-truth. This is what makes it impossible for him to accept the moral prejudices and preconceived limits of his philosophical counterparts. He wants to push further, to critique more cuttingly, to think more deeply down to the core—even if it there is no core.

- c. Writes Nietzsche: “nothing is more foreign to these who are unconditional on one point, these so-called ‘free spirits,’ than precisely freedom and breaking one’s fetters in this sense, in no respect are they more firmly bound; precisely in their belief in truth they are more firm and unconditional than anyone else. I know all of this from too close a proximity perhaps...” (3.24.109)
- d. And again: “There is, strictly speaking, absolutely no science ‘without presuppositions,’ the thought of such a science is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a ‘belief’ must always be there first so that science can derive a direction from it, a meaning, a boundary, a method, a right to existence.” (3.24.110)
- e. And furthermore, tying this all back to the ascetic ideal: “Science itself now is in need of a justification (which is not to say that there is one). On this question, just look at the earliest and the most recent philosophies: all of them lack a consciousness of the extent to which the will to truth itself first needs a justification, here there is a gap in every philosophy—why is that? Because the ascetic ideal has until now been lord over all philosophy, because truth was posited as being, as God, as highest authority; because truth was simply not permitted to be a problem. Do you understand this ‘permitted?’—From the moment belief in the god of the ascetic ideal is negated, there is also a new problem: that of the value of truth.” (3.24.110)
- f. More concretely, then, where did this ascetically conditioned will-to-truth come from—at least in ‘the West?’ Christianity would seem to be the culprit. Christianity and its morality instilled in us the will to truth—perhaps first as a will to honesty, to be frank about the reality of creation. But this will to truth, after a long period of gestation and development, eventually came to devour its mother, to cancel out its conditions for being. The will to truth led us to think the thought of atheism: what if, truly, there is no God at all? Intellectually and conceptually, this would change everything.
- g. And yet, while the intellectual side of atheism has become increasingly thinkable and acceptable—especially when we supplant it with a crude naturalism—the moral side of this equation has not been allowed to play out. Even if we have gotten a bit more intellectually honest with ourselves regarding natural ‘facts,’ we haven’t allowed ourselves to be honest about the historical background of our own moral prejudices. We’ve arbitrarily set a limit on our line of questioning, which is a violation of the very will to truth that got us where we at this point in history.
- h. Nietzsche: “In this manner Christianity *as dogma* perished of its own morality; in this manner Christianity *as morality* must now also perish—we stand on the threshold of *this* event.” (3.27.117)
- i. Yet perhaps it is the will to truth, operative within Christianity but now outlasting it, that itself names the problem: “what meaning would our entire being have if not this, that in us this will to truth has come to a consciousness of itself as a problem? ... It is from the will to truth’s becoming conscious of itself that from now on—there is no doubt about it—morality will gradually perish...” (3.27.117)
- j. So again we come upon a recurring problem in Nietzsche: are we to do away with ‘values’ altogether? Or rather simply to do away with a certain regime of values that’s currently in place? It would seem that Nietzsche’s prediction of an end to morality means not the end of any value-judgments whatsoever, but rather the end of our contemporary system of moral value-judgments, which are seldom critically thought through to their foundations. Remember: for Nietzsche, our life is made up of perspective and interpretation. There may be no escaping that. But that does not

at all mean we have to be stuck in our current situation, limited to the present options in perspective and interpretation.

- k. It may be time, then, for the rule of ascetic ideals to come to an end. But Nietzsche concludes by reminding us of all that we've been granted by the intervention of the ascetic priests and their philosophical offspring. Humans, at bottom, suffer. To live is to suffer. Violence and force are part of what it means to live materially as a member of the species. But these facts in themselves were never really the problem. Suffering was never the problem. It lies outside the realm of things that are 'problematic' or not; it lies outside the realm of value-laden interpretation.
- l. No, the problem, says Nietzsche, was that suffering lacked a meaning. Humans suffer, yes, but we also ascribe meaning—we interpret the world. And suffering was proving rather difficult to fit into our interpretive worldview, our perspective. The ascetic ideal was able to grant suffering this meaning. In doing so, it shaped humankind's will, giving it an impetus to set a goal and to guide action in service of that goal. That skill is invaluable, even if we can no longer accept the particular goal set forth the ascetics—that is, nothingness: the antithesis of life. But what if we were to keep the goal-setting, value-ascribing, meaning-interpreting practices of human life and reorient them toward something else? What would that be? Would we even have to know in advance? Could we have an interpretation of life that affirmed life, time, change...? Nietzsche, here, is content to let the future decide.
 - i. In support of this conclusion, we could look to a few final passages from 3.28: "If one disregards the ascetic ideal: man, the animal man, has until now had no meaning. His existence on earth contained no goal..."
 - ii. "The meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering itself, was the curse that thus far lay stretched out over humanity—and the ascetic ideal offered it a meaning!"
 - iii. "One simply cannot conceal from oneself what all the willing that has received its direction from the ascetic ideal actually expresses: this hatred of the human, still more of the animal, still more of the material, this abhorrence of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and of beauty, this longing away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wish, longing itself—all of this means—let us dare to grasp this—a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a will! ... And, to say again at the end what I said at the beginning: man would much rather will *nothingness* than *not* will..." (Much rests on this 'but...!')