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Genealogy and Morality

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In a previous article in this journal, "Genealogy,"[1] I offered a sort of "genealogy of genealogy," an account of the method's development, according to which it mainly grew, not from English or French antecedents, but out of a German tradition that began with Herder and then continued with Hegel before eventually culminating in Nietzsche himself.

I also argued that the method's primary function is explanatory (rather than evaluative), a function of advancing understanding, especially self-understanding. And I argued that this explanatory function includes both *essential* and *typical* aspects: *Essentially*, the method shows that some modern psychological outlook or psychologically laden practice originally emerged from a historical period in which it was more or less entirely absent via the development of variant forms. It thereby (1) dispels the illusion that the outlook or practice in question is universal or indispensable, as well as revealing its distinctive character by way of contrasts. It also thereby (2) shows that rather than having existed for ever or having suddenly emerged fully-formed at some point in history, the outlook or practice in question in fact developed from a state of affairs in which it did not exist at all via a series of intermediate forms; shows what exactly that process of development has been; and normally in addition explains its emergence in one or another more specific way, for example as rational (as in the mature Hegel's account of the development of our modern outlook as the self-consistent result of a protracted escape from self-contradictions in earlier outlooks) or as

[1] Michael Forster, "Genealogy," *American Dialectic*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (May 2011): 230-50.

irrational (as in Nietzsche's account that our modern moral commitment to love and forgiveness emerged out of, and still reflects, quite contrary motives of hatred and resentment). *Typically*, though not invariably, the method also (3) traces the outlook or practice in question back to an origin in social oppression, and (4) identifies some sort of implicit self-contradiction in the outlook or practice in question.

Presupposing this account of the method of genealogy, the present article will consider the method in relation to one of its most important areas of application: morality.

I

Herder, Hegel, and Nietzsche all insist that it is essential for the success of a genealogy that it be *historically accurate*.[2] Moreover, this requirement seems quite correct given that genealogy is

[2] Commentators have sometimes tended to deny this. For example, B. Williams in *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), while he concedes that Nietzsche's genealogies are meant to be historical rather than purely fictional, seems dismissive of this pretention and himself makes a case for the value of fictional genealogies instead (see especially 34-38). And his student, S. May even goes further and claims that Nietzsche's genealogical accounts are themselves best taken as fictional (*Nietzsche's Ethics and his 'War on Morality'* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999], 52, 73). However, Nietzsche on the contrary repeatedly insists that historical veracity is essential for the success of genealogy (see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* [London and New York: Routledge, 2002], 167, 180-81; Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 10 and following, 26). Moreover, Williams' and May's cases for the value of fictional genealogies are very weak. In fact, all that Williams and May are doing here is perpetuating and foisting on Nietzsche precisely the sort of British philosopher's fondness for historical "just so" stories that Nietzsche was concerned to repudiate with his method of genealogy. Similar points apply in connection with the other German genealogists mentioned above, who likewise insist on historical veracity. For example, concerning Herder, one should re-read the long passage from the *Fragments* that I quoted in "Genealogy," (Forster, 234-35) where he insists that genetic explanations must be historically accurate ("Not how language should have arisen, could have arisen, but how it arose—that is the question!"). And concerning Hegel, he repeatedly insists in such works as the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that he is doing "history [*Geschichte*]."

supposed to have the sorts of explanatory functions described above.

Now, it is by no means clear that the specific genealogies developed by Herder, Hegel, and Nietzsche always meet this requirement. However, I believe that they sometimes do. In particular, it seems to me that Hegel and Nietzsche develop certain genealogies of central aspects of our modern morality[3] that do.[4] I would therefore like now to present two such genealogies from Hegel and Nietzsche. The two genealogies in question realize not only the model of an essential genealogy but also that of a typical genealogy. I will subsequently go on to complement them with a

[3] In speaking of "our modern morality" here I do not, of course, mean to imply that all people, or even all people in certain societies, today subscribe to it. Among the genealogists discussed in this and its companion article two are at least somewhat inclined to think in such monolithic terms (Hegel and Foucault), whereas two are strongly opposed to doing so (Herder and Nietzsche). On this issue, my sympathies are firmly with the latter rather than the former. Still, even if countless individual exceptions need to be conceded, generalizing about periods and societies seems defensible as long as the presence of such exceptions is recognized. Indeed, it seems indispensable.

[4] Foucault sometimes characterizes his genealogies as concerned with "ethics" (see, for example, M. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in his *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* [New York: The New Press, 1997], 253 and following). This might lead someone to suppose that Foucault's work would be especially important here too. However, that turns out not in fact to be the case. For Foucault's conception of "ethics" virtually equates it with *sexual* ethics, dietary rules, etcetera, or even just with the aspect of sexual ethics, dietary rules, etcetera that involves what Foucault calls technologies of the self (see, for example, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, 266). But this is at best only a small part of the domain of morality. It is true that Foucault sometimes tries to justify such an equation by suggesting that for the Greeks and Romans the moral code was less important than technologies of the self focused on sexuality, diet, etcetera: "Now it seems clear, from a first approach at least, that moral conceptions in Greek and Greco-Roman antiquity were much more oriented toward practices of the self and the question of *askêsis* than toward codifications of conducts and the strict definition of what is permitted and what is forbidden" (M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2* [New York: Vintage, 1990], 30). However, this suggestion is extremely dubious, historically speaking (for, setting aside Foucault's red herrings "codifications" and "strict definition," what about Greek and Roman moral attitudes concerning civic duty, courage, murder, piety, and filial obedience, for instance?). And Foucault would have done better simply to concede that the topics he is concerned with are relatively marginal to morality.

third such genealogy that I would propose.

In preparation for this undertaking, it may be helpful to draw a rough distinction between several different general aspects of moral outlooks (such as our own), which may vary significantly in their specific characters from case to case. One aspect is a moral outlook's *form*: the distinctive quality of its normativity (its "oughtness," so to speak). Another is its *content*: which activities, character traits, etcetera does it approve of and which does it disapprove of?[5] A third is its *scope*: the range of individuals who are included when the moral code protects individuals from various forms of harmful behavior (all members of a certain human community?, all human beings?, all living creatures?, etcetera).[6]

The genealogies to be discussed here will be concerned with each of these three aspects of morality in turn.

II

Hegel in his early theological writings identifies a certain *form* of morality that he believes to be distinctive of the Judeo-Christian-

[5] Concerning these first two aspects, compare R.M. Hare's distinction in *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) between the *prescriptive* and the *descriptive* meaning of moral discourse. (Unlike Hare, though, I do not mean to restrict my distinction to features that are internal to the *meaning* of moral terms.)

[6] This list of general but variable aspects is by no means exhaustive. For example, one might add: the conception of who is and who is not obligated to obey a moral code; the role that *intentions* play (or fail to play) in ascriptions of moral praise or blame to people; the role that *metaphysical presuppositions*, such as freedom of the will, play in such ascriptions; and the (relative) *strengths* of the sorts of approval/disapproval that constitute a morality's content. (The anthropologist E. Westermarck rightly emphasizes the importance of this last aspect—strengths—in a general way in *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* [London: Macmillan, 1906], and A.W.H. Adkins rightly emphasizes its importance for assessing the character of the change from Homeric morality to later forms of Greek morality in particular in *Merit and Responsibility* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975].)

Kantian tradition—especially in contrast to the form of morality that was normal for pagan Greeks and Romans—and he develops a genealogy for it.

The distinctive form in question is *tyrannical* or *imperatival.* Specifically, it is so in two ways: First, the relevant moral obligations are experienced as essentially opposed to and oppressive of the agent's desires. Second, they are conceived as imperatives directed toward the agent.

Hegel implies that by contrast neither of these features was part of the normal form of pagan Greek and Roman morality. In pagan Greek and Roman morality, moral obligations were instead normally both felt and conceived to be especially deep desires freely embraced by the agent.[7]

According to Hegel, the Judeo-Christian-Kantian tradition's distinctively tyrannical or imperatival form of morality occurs in two main subforms. First, in the Judeo-Christian tradition it appears as divine commands that are to be obeyed simply as such (Hegel calls

[7] There is certainly something to this characterization. For example, pagan Greeks and Romans often associated morality intimately with happiness, and they did not usually think of morality as the commands of a deity to whom one had to submit. On the other hand, there are also certain things that could be said against it. For instance: (i) Homer does *not* perceive any inevitable link between morality and happiness (see, for example, *Odyssey*, bk. 6, ll. 188-89; bk. 18, ll. 272-76). (ii) From a very early period in the development of ancient Greek the two commonest ways of saying that a person must or ought to do something were *chrê* + acc. + inf. and *dei* + acc. + inf., and while the former word is cognate with *chraô*, meaning to *need*, and hence fits Hegel's account well, the latter is cognate with *deô*, meaning to *bind*, and hence does not fit it well. (iii) One does in fact occasionally find pagan Greeks and Romans characterizing (specific) moral principles as divine commands or laws (see, for example, Sophocles' *Antigone*). (iv) Plato and his tradition do in fact experience and conceive morality as standing in opposition to desires, and as enjoined by a sort of authority, namely that of reason. The bottom line here is probably that there is indeed an important contrast to be drawn between the normal form of Judeo-Christian-Kantian morality and that of pagan Greek and Roman morality, for which Hegel's characterization at least constitutes a good first approximation, but that it ultimately needs to be drawn in a more nuanced way that allows for significant variations, especially on the pagan Greek and Roman side.

this conception of moral obligation "positivity"). Second, to modern secular Europeans it appears as self-prescribed categorical imperatives, as in Kant's moral philosophy (which equates this sort of morality with freedom).[8]

Hegel's genealogy of this whole distinctive form of morality locates its roots in slavery and other types of social oppression in the ancient world. According to his account, early Judaism with its Ten Commandments constituted the first stage. In *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* he argues that early Judaism's experience and conception of morality as slavish obedience to the commands of God was caused by the Jewish people's prior experience of real slavery, and hence of the need to obey the commands of human rulers, in Egypt, which had psychologically habituated them to such a mode of existence:

> The man who freed his people [that is, Moses] also became its lawgiver; which could only mean that he who freed it from one yoke imposed on it another. A passive nation that gave itself laws would be a self-contradiction.[9]

In *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* Hegel describes a second stage in the process. He implies that the Jewish people's

[8] Hegel's account here strikingly resembles G.E.M. Anscombe's account in "Modern Moral Philosophy" (reprinted in *Human Life, Action, and Ethics: Essays by G.E.M. Anscombe, St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 4 2005, eds. M. Geach and L. Gormally [Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic Publishing]). According to Anscombe too there is a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, the form that moral obligation has among the pagan Greeks (Aristotle is her main example) and, on the other hand, the form that it has in the Judeo-Christian tradition and its modern secular descendant (our distinctive sort of "ought"). However, whereas Hegel's account identifies the latter form as fundamentally one of commands or imperatives, Anscombe rather associates it with the verdicts of a legal authority; and unlike Hegel, she claims that its modern secular version, because it has now done away with any literal assumption of such an authority (that is, God), has become strictly meaningless. It seems to me arguable that in both of these respects Hegel's account is actually superior to Anscombe's.

[9] G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 1:282-83.

continually renewed experience of slavery and social oppression throughout its ancient history kept this experience and conception of morality alive, until in late antiquity a strong increase in slavery and social oppression among the Greeks and Romans made *them* susceptible to this experience and conception of morality as well.[10]

Finally, in *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* Hegel describes a third stage in the process: the modern, and in particular Kantian, experience and conception of morality as self-prescribed categorical imperatives is merely a secularized variant of that older experience and conception of morality as divine commands which originally arose out of slavery and social oppression, and thus presupposes and reflects the same conditions. In *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* Kant had claimed that there was little difference between a person who obeyed a secular authority and a person who obeyed divine commandments, but a huge difference between either of these and the person who acted out of respect for the moral law prescribed by his own reason. However, in *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* Hegel caustically replies to Kant that between the former two and the latter "the difference is not that the former make themselves bondsmen whereas the latter is free, but that the former has his lord outside himself whereas the latter carries his lord in himself, but is his own bondsman."[11]

In short, the Judeo-Christian tradition sublimated real slavery and social oppression into an imaginary enslavement under God, and the secular spirit of modernity then further sublimated this into an imagined enslavement under one's own reason.

Notice that this—surely, very plausible—Hegelian explanation of the form of modern morality contains all of the elements of a *typical* genealogy that I mentioned earlier: in addition to the two features

[10] See especially ibid., 1:202 and following.
[11] Ibid., 1:323.

that are essential to any genealogy, it also includes an explanation in terms of social oppression and the identification of a sort of self-contradiction (namely, in modern Kantian morality, which in effect represents *oppression* as *freedom*).

III

Nietzsche's genealogies are sometimes rather historically dubious.[12] But at least one of them seems to me extraordinarily insightful: his famous thesis in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1 and elsewhere that Christianity's distinctive moral values, together with their modern secular descendants (especially as represented by modern democracy, socialism, etcetera), can to a great extent be explained as the result of a hatred and resentment [*Ressentiment*] that Jewish and other victims of Greek and Roman oppression in late antiquity felt against their Greek and Roman oppressors, and which motivated them to invert the latter's values.

This Nietzschean thesis concerning the *content* of Christian and modern secular morality harmonizes strikingly well with Hegel's

[12] Two examples: In *The Will to Power*, #135 Nietzsche traces the belief in gods back to an alleged need in human beings to explain their own more unusual psychological conditions; and in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 2 he traces our feeling of moral guilt [*Schuld*] back to the creditor-debtor relationship. These genealogies are not *completely* baseless: the first reflects a genuine feature of Homeric religion, which does in fact often interpret surprising psychological conditions as the actions of a god (for example, in *Iliad*, bk. 1 Achilles' uncharacteristic hesitation about attacking Agamemnon in the course of their quarrel is interpreted as an intervention by the goddess Athena); and the second rests on the double sense of the German word *Schuld* [guilt/debt]. But they still seem rather weak. For example, the former explanation involves a dubious generalization from the case of Homeric religion to religion in general, and even within Homeric religion explaining unusual human psychological conditions is only one of many explanatory roles that the gods play; while the latter explanation confronts the awkward fact that the concept of guilt does not always in modern European languages share an etymological link with the concept of debt (for example, in French the word for guilt is *culpabilité*).

explanation of its tyrannical or imperatival *form*, complementing it impressively. Still, it seems to me that the historical strength of Nietzsche's thesis has not been well appreciated.[13] So I would like here to try to give some sense of that strength. In order to do so, I shall offer a free reconstruction of Nietzsche's position rather than a close interpretation of it.

The main grounds that support Nietzsche's thesis can be summarized roughly as follows: (1) Palestine was conquered by the Greek imperialist Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. and subsequently ruled by his Greek successors for over a century. By 63 B.C. the Romans had taken over this rule. As a result, by the time of Christ, Palestine was thickly settled with *poleis*, or cities, whose inhabitants were largely Greeks, and was in addition ruled by the Romans. The native Jewish population was therefore oppressed by both Greeks and Romans. Under these circumstances it almost goes without saying that the native Jewish population must have harbored deep hatred and resentment against the Greeks and Romans. Accordingly, such attitudes are in fact reflected pervasively in the New Testament. For example, Jesus at one point compares Jews and Greeks as respectively children and dogs (Mark, 7:27). And as Nietzsche himself notes in this connection, the *Revelation of St. John the Divine* is a bitterly anti-Roman tract.

(2) As can also be seen from many other historical cases besides

[13] For example, J.J. Prinz in his insightful book *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) underestimates its strength because he focuses on too late a phase of Nietzsche's account: Christians in the Roman Empire generally, rather than Jews in Greek- and Roman-occupied Palestine in particular (216-19).

The tendency to overlook the historical strength of Nietzsche's thesis is probably in part due to the fact that Nietzsche's own statements of it often seem to flirt with some very obnoxious right-wing and anti-semitic ideas. I do not believe that he is quite as innocent of such ideas as some apologists, such as Walter Kaufmann, have argued. But I take it that the thesis is completely detachable from them, and I shall present it in such detachment here.

this one, (perceived) oppression and the resentment to which it gives rise often cause the oppressed to invert the values of their oppressors. For example, the Marquis de Sade's imprisonment by his society, and his resulting resentment toward it, led him to invert its values systematically in his writings. And closer to home, today's "rappers" in the U.S.A. often similarly give vent to a resentment they feel against a society they perceive to be oppressive by inverting its values.

(3) Accordingly, the values of the New Testament constitute a systematic inversion of the values that had predominated in Greek and Roman society since at least the time of Homer (a few Greek and Roman intelligentsia, such as tragedians and philosophers, excepted). Let me try to illustrate this crucial fact in terms of seven areas of value. (i) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired honor [*timê*] and renown [*kleos*], but had despised people who lacked them. By contrast, for the New Testament: "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil," but "Woe unto you, when men shall speak well of you" (Luke, 6:22, 26). (ii) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired the warlike and the brave but despised the weak. By contrast, for the New Testament: "Blessed are the peacemakers"; "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are the meek" (Matthew, 5:9, 3-5). (iii) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired the politically powerful but despised the politically weak. By contrast, for the New Testament: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted"; "The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called doers of good [*euergetai*]. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be

as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that does serve" (Luke, 14:11, 22:25-26). (iv) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired the rich and despised the poor. By contrast, for the New Testament: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"; "Blessed be ye poor . . . Blessed are ye that hunger," but "Woe unto you that are rich! . . . Woe unto you that are full!"; "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew, 6:19-20; Luke, 6:20-25, 18:25). (v) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired the man who took revenge on those who transgressed against him but despised the man who failed to do so (think of the central plots of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for example). By contrast, for the New Testament: "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other" (Luke, 6:27-29). (vi) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired those who were adept at deception and lying (for example, Odysseus) but had tended to despise those who lacked this skill. By contrast, the New Testament opposes to the Roman Pontius Pilate's cynical question "What is truth?" Jesus's description of himself as a witness to the truth (John, 18:37-38); and for the New Testament, we "have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians, 4:2). (vii) Homer, and in his train the predominant Greek and Roman tradition, had admired the achievement of bodily pleasure, for example sexual pleasure, but had despised the failure to achieve it

(think, for example, of the lament of Achilles' disembodied shade in the *Odyssey* that he would rather be the serf of a poor man on earth than king over all in Hades). By contrast, for the New Testament: "To be carnally minded is death; . . . the carnal mind is enmity against God . . . ; they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans, 8:6-8).

(4) That this striking systematic inversion of Greek and Roman values really was largely motivated by hatred and resentment against the ruling Greeks and Romans (rather than, say, being coincidental or stemming from other motives), is confirmed by many passages of the New Testament. For example, in the passage recently quoted concerning "the kings of the gentiles," the reference is to the rulers of the Greeks and Romans, and the passage's repudiation of the Greeks' and Romans' praise of their rulers as "doers of good [*euergetai*]" contains an allusion to Alexander the Great's successor Ptolemy *Euergetês*, who was the first Greek ruler of Palestine out of Egypt. Again, the passage "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" contains an allusion to, and sharp repudiation of, the Greek poet Pindar, one of the greatest literary champions of wealth as a positive value (for example, in his second Olympian Ode), who had written: "Gold is a child of Zeus; neither moth nor rust devoureth it."[14] Again, and more generally, as Nietzsche himself points out in this connection, the New Testament contains the following revealing statement: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and . . . the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty . . . And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea,

[14] *The Odes of Pindar*, ed. Sir J. Sandys (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and London: Heinemann, 1978), 613, no. 222 (243).

and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians, 1:27-28). Finally, and perhaps most revealingly of all, consider the stunningly simple reason that Jesus gives for rejecting certain values in the following passage: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? *For after all these things do the gentiles seek* [that is, the Greeks and Romans]" (Matthew, 6:31-32).

(5) Nietzsche's explanation admittedly requires certain qualifications. In particular, some strands of Greek and Roman literature and philosophy, including the great tragedians and Socrates in the fifth century B.C., had already begun a similar inversion of the values in question much earlier.[15] And older phases of Judaism had anticipated some of the new values involved as well.[16] However, Nietzsche *himself* makes such qualifications—for example, concerning Socrates (and Plato) in *Twilight of the Idols* (1888).[17] And they are in fact perfectly compatible with Nietzsche's central explanation—especially given that his method of genealogy

[15] In fact, anticipations of all seven of the recently listed value-inversions can be found in fifth-century tragedy and Socrates/Plato. For example, ad (i) (honor and renown), see Sophocles' *Antigone* and Plato's *Apology*, 29e; ad (ii) (warlikeness and bravery), see Sophocles' *Ajax*, Plato's *Phaedo*, 66b-c, and possibly Plato's *Crito*, 49a-d; ad (iii) (political power), see Sophocles' *Antigone* and Plato's *Apology*, 31c-d, 36b; ad (iv) (wealth), see Euripides' *Electra* and Plato's *Apology*, 19c-d, 23b-c, 29d-e, 30a-b, etcetera; ad (v) (revenge), see Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Plato's *Crito*, 49a-d; ad (vi) (deception and lying), see Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Plato's *Apology*, 17b-18a, 29e, etcetera; and ad (vii) (bodily pleasure), see Sophocles' *Antigone*, Plato's *Apology*, 30a-b, and Plato's *Phaedo*, 64d-67a.

[16] For example, there are already proscriptions of deception and lying in *Leviticus* and elsewhere.

[17] See *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden*, eds. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Munich: Deutsches Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 6:67-73, 155-57. On the other hand, Nietzsche's attempt to extend the general spirit of his central explanation in terms of social resentment [*Ressentiment*] to Socrates, namely on the grounds that Socrates was a relatively poor Athenian among aristocrats, is not very plausible. For there is little evidence in the ancient sources that his relatively low social position led him to feel such resentment, and much evidence that it did not.

as a matter of principle allows, and indeed insists, that *multiple* explanantia are usually involved.[18]

In short, Nietzsche's explanation of the *content* of Christian and modern secular morality in terms of social oppression that occurred in late antiquity and the hatred and resentment that it caused seems convincing.

Notice that, like Hegel's genealogy of the *form* of the same tradition's morality, this Nietzschean genealogy of its *content* well illustrates the four-part model of a *typical* genealogy: It dispels illusions of the universality and indispensability of our modern moral values and brings out their distinctive character by means of contrasts (indeed, it achieves these things in a very dramatic way). It shows both that our modern morality developed via various transformations out of an origin prior to which it was absent (rather than, say, having always been present or having emerged fully formed at some point) and also what that development has been. It explains the emergence of our modern morality in terms of social oppression. And it identifies a sort of self-contradiction in our modern morality (especially between the hatred and resentment that originally motivated it and its explicit commitment to love and forgiveness).

IV

I would like now to propose a third genealogy of a central aspect of our modern morality that again conforms to the model of a *typical* genealogy. Here it is a question, not of our modern morality's form

[18] See especially *On the Genealogy of Morals*, whose whole account well illustrates this principle. Nietzsche's commitment to this principle has been rightly emphasized by Foucault in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" and by R. Geuss in "Nietzsche and Genealogy," in his *Morality, Culture, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

or content, but of its *scope*.

It is a fundamental feature of our modern morality that it ascribes certain moral rights or claims to human beings *as such*. Whether one is a modern Judeo-Christian, secular Kantian, utilitarian, or whatever, such an assumption will almost certainly be part of one's moral worldview. But this assumption was not always the commonplace that it is today. Plato's works do not often deal with the question of the scope of morality explicitly (which can easily give rise to a comfortable illusion that he and his Socrates must share our modern assumption). But in *Republic*, book 5 he does deal with it, and what he tells us is roughly the following: where one's fellow-citizens are concerned, one must indeed treat them respectfully, in particular one must not use violence against them; where the citizens of other Greek states are concerned, one may wage war against them, but only with considerable restrictions, for example one may neither lay waste their farms nor kill their noncombatants; but where the non-Greeks, the *barbaroi*, are concerned, one may treat them just as one pleases.[19]

How did our sharply contrary modern conception of the scope of morality arise? Consider, first, its *intellectual* origins: The ideal that came to epitomize this conception in the ancient world was that of the *kosmou politês* [literally, citizen of the cosmos; cosmopolitan]. This ideal originated with the Cynics in the 4th century B.C., but may initially have carried little more than the negative meaning of a Socratic rejection of communal politics rather than the positive meaning of a commitment to the moral dignity of all (good) human

[19] This sort of position probably already lies behind, and explains as only apparent, a certain striking prima facie inconsistency in Socrates' ethical stance in the early dialogues: on the one hand, Socrates insists in the *Crito* that one must never injure anyone under any circumstances; yet, on the other hand, in the *Apology* he seems inordinately proud of his own war record, that is, his record of injuring people on the battlefield.

beings regardless of community.[20] Be that as it may, it was clearly the later champions of the same ideal, the Stoics, who were mainly responsible for taking the intellectual step in question here. The man who founded the Stoic school in 301 B.C., Zeno (334-262 B.C.), himself wrote a *Republic*, which was evidently intended as a reply to Plato's *Republic*, and in particular to book 5. Unfortunately, Zeno's work is lost. But Plutarch reports on it as follows:

> The much admired *Republic* of Zeno . . . aims at this main point: that our domestic institutions should not be based on states [*poleis*] or communities [*dêmous*] . . . but that we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and community members.[21]

Zeno's ideal was subsequently perpetuated by the Stoics into Roman times (for example, it recurs during the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. in the Stoics Epictetus,[22] Seneca,[23] Hierocles,[24] and Marcus Aurelius[25]), and evidently made a deep impression on the broader culture of the period.

So much for the *intellectual* origins of our modern assumption. But if one asks what *socio-political* conditions favored its original emergence and spread one encounters an exquisite irony. For it evidently arose mainly out of the *imperialism* of Alexander the Great and his Greek successors (as Plutarch puts it: behind Zeno's dream lay Alexander's reality),[26] and then the *imperialism* of the Romans. For such imperialism made the question of how one should treat, not only members of one's own community, but also conquered

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[20] Compare W.W. Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 19 (1933), 4-5.
[21] A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2:423.
[22] Epictetus, *Discourses*, II.10, 3-4.
[23] Seneca, *On Leisure*, IV.1.
[24] Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2:347-48.
[25] Marcus Aurelius, *Tôn eis hauton*, III.11; VI.44.
[26] Plutarch, *De fortuna Alexandri*, 329b. Alexander died in 323 B.C.; Zeno founded Stoicism in 301 B.C.

others unavoidable and pressing, and produced cosmopolitanism as the answer that seemed best suited to a smoothly functioning empire (which is not necessarily to say that the imperialists involved were always insincere when they championed this answer).

Consider, for example, the Roman historian Dio Cassius's account of the prudential advice that Maecenas gave to the emperor Augustus concerning how best to run the empire, and which the latter actually followed: look for "allies and assistants," persuade "those subjects under your rule that you are not treating them as slaves," but that you are ensuring that they share benefits and authority, that "they live as it were in a single city."[27]

Indeed, one can even pursue this birth of cosmopolitanism out of the spirit of imperialism (as it were) back to Alexander the Great himself. Certainly, one should be skeptical of W.W. Tarn's somewhat naive picture of Alexander as an outright moral cosmopolitan.[28] But nor does A.B. Bosworth's sharply contrary picture of him as simply a bloody conqueror and ruthless *Realpolitiker* seem satisfactory.[29] The truth seems rather to lie

[27] Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, LII.19. Concerning Augustus's actual implementation of such a policy of cosmopolitanism in the empire, compare Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," 12-13.

[28] W.W. Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind"; *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), vols. 1 and 2. On the other hand, not *all* of Tarn's case is naive by any means. For example, his refutation of the widespread idea that later authors merely projected Stoic ideals back onto Alexander remains broadly convincing (consider, for example, his important point at "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," 20-25 that cosmopolitan ideals appear in certain Macedonia-related intellectuals after Alexander but *before* the Stoics, especially Theophrastus and Alexarchus).

[29] A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Bosworth's relentless, unqualified cynicism is itself a sort of naivety. Are rulers today often so psychologically one-dimensional? And if not, why assume that they were in the ancient world? Also, we surely know that Alexander was not beyond the reach of higher ideals because of such things as his religious commitments, his love and imitation of great literature (especially Homer and Euripides), and his deep love of Hephaistion.

somewhere in the middle (albeit perhaps closer to the latter than to the former). For what one seems to see in the case of Alexander is how precisely the realpolitical motives of a ruthless and cunning imperialist could lead to cosmopolitan modes of behavior and speech, and probably thereby (through a well-known psychological mechanism: roughly, the emergence from repeated behavioral patterns of corresponding psychological dispositions) also to genuinely cosmopolitan attitudes. Recall in this connection, for example, his honorable treatment of the female relatives of the Persian king Darius after the latter's flight; his retention of native satraps in the East; his incorporation of Persian soldiers into his own army; his adoption of Eastern modes of dress; his marriages with Eastern princesses; his arrangement of similar marriages between his soldiers and Eastern women; his reliably reported statement that "god [is] a common father of all mankind";[30] and his prayer (at a banquet he held for both Macedonians and Persians in a spirit of reconciliation after the Macedonians had mutinied at Opis) that "there be agreement and sharing of rule between Macedonians and Persians."[31]

Plutarch has sometimes been thought to be naive on this subject in a manner similar to Tarn. But it seems to me that Plutarch is actually quite realistic and perceptive about the emergence of Alexander's cosmopolitan practices and attitudes out of what were originally realpolitical motives: Plutarch suggests that when Alexander first put on barbarian dress in Parthia he did so "from a desire to adapt himself to the native customs, believing that community of race and custom goes far toward softening the hearts of men"; and that "he adapted his own mode of life still more to the

[30] Plutarch, *Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), VII, "Alexander," xxvii.
[31] Arrian, *History of Alexander and Indica*, VII.ii.9. (Compare Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," 31.)

customs of the country, and tried to bring these into closer agreement with Macedonian customs, thinking that by a mixture and community of practice which produced good will, rather than by force, his authority would be kept secure while he was far away."[32]

Finally, notice that this genealogy of the *scope* of our modern morality once again well exemplifies the fourfold model of a *typical* genealogy—not only incorporating the two features that are essential to any genealogy but also the two additional features of social oppression and a sort of self-contradiction.

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So much by way of sketching three genealogies of the form, the content, and the scope of our modern morality which seem to me broadly convincing. All three exemplify the fourfold model of a *typical* genealogy: they show that a modern psychological outlook or practice is not universal or indispensable, and also, in light of contrasts, what its distinctive character is; they show that and how it arose and developed over time; they trace it back to social oppression; and they reveal a sort of self-contradiction in it.

So far in this and its companion article I have considered genealogy mainly in its primary function as a contribution to our *understanding* of modern psychological phenomena. But these three examples inevitably prompt a question that I have for the most part bracketed up to this point: the question of the relevance of such genealogies to the *evaluation* of the phenomena involved. I would therefore like now in conclusion to address that question briefly.

The early Hegel and Nietzsche in their two genealogies of the form and the content of modern morality clearly had *critical*

[32] Plutarch, *Lives*, VII, "Alexander," xlv-xlvii.

intentions: their genealogies were supposed to cast the relevant aspects of our modern moral worldview in a negative light. One can easily imagine such a critical project being extended to my genealogy of the *scope* of modern morality as well.

However, it might well seem that a quite different reaction to such genealogies is in fact more appropriate (especially if one starts out inclined to be more sympathetic to the relevant aspects of modern morality than Hegel and Nietzsche are, as I do). The reaction in question—basically an elaborated form of the traditional objection that such critical genealogies involve a "genetic fallacy"—might be put roughly as follows:

> Such genealogies in fact carry no such negative implications at all. (Indeed, even Nietzsche in his more thoughtful moments concedes as much. For example, he writes in *The Gay Science*: "Even if a morality had grown *out of* an error, the realization of this fact would not yet as much as touch the problem of its value."[33]) For such genealogies do not show that the original underlying motives that they identify—a slavish submissiveness to commands; social hatred and resentment; or an interest in imperial domination—were ever internal to the very identity of the aspects of morality in question, for example to their very semantic content. Moreover, even if they *did*, criticisms of *modern* versions of those aspects in the manner of Hegel and Nietzsche would still be misguided. In this connection, it may be illuminating to compare such genealogies with etymologies. (Since, as we have seen, etymologies sometimes play an important role in genealogies, especially for Nietzsche, this comparison will not only serve as an analogy, but may also bring out an additional prima facie problem facing some genealogies.) The current meaning of a word is determined by the current rules of its use, and these sometimes only stand in a very loose, or perhaps in certain cases even no, relation to the word's etymological origin. To infer from that origin to the current meaning would therefore often be to commit a serious error. For example, when Heidegger interprets Plato's words for his forms, *eidos* and *idea*, in the light of their etymological origin in the verb *horô* (aorist: *eidon*), to *see*, and Homer's corresponding original use of the word *eidos* in the sense of a visible appearance, and consequently ascribes to Plato a *visual* conception of knowledge and its objects, he commits an error. For the use of these words had undergone a sharp and unpredictable change between the time of Homer and the time of Plato, in that they had come to be used by philosophers in the fifth century B.C. as names for elements,

[33] *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke*, 3:579. Compare *The Will to Power*, #254.

> which were mostly conceived to be *invisible* (as A.E. Taylor convincingly demonstrates in *Varia Socratica*). And Plato's *Phaedo* shows that he perpetuates this changed conception, since he there not only himself identifies particular such elements as *eidê* and *ideai* (in particular, the hot and the cold), but also precisely emphasizes the invisibility of the forms. Similarly, even if there *had* originally been essential, for example semantic, links between the two sides, it would still be an error to infer from the origin of the form, the content, and the scope of our modern morality in motives of a slavish submissiveness to commands, social hatred and resentment, and an interest in imperial domination respectively to a continuation of those motives behind the relevant aspects of our modern morality. Nietzsche himself rightly emphasizes in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that the function of an outlook or practice may change drastically, and even repeatedly, over the course of its history (his main example is the practice of punishment).[34] And at least in the case of the birth of the content of our modern morality out of social hatred and resentment such a change actually seems obvious on reflection. For how could hatred and resentment of social oppressors possibly have persisted as the central motive behind that content after Christianity and its morality had become the ideology of the *rulers* of society (in other words, at the latest with the emperor Constantine)? No, the self-prescribed imperatives of our modern secular morality are *not* evidence of our slavishness but rather do represent a sort of freedom, our modern values of love and forgiveness do *not* normally conceal contrary underlying motives of hatred and resentment, and our modern cosmopolitan attitude is normally *anything but* imperialistic. Indeed, rather than seeing such distasteful ancient motives as tainting the modern moral outlook to whose development they contributed causally, it would be more reasonable to see their causal contribution to it as in retrospect a sort of "silver lining" to the otherwise dark cloud that they themselves constituted.

Thus, roughly, the alternative reaction.

Up to a point this alternative reaction seems to me justified. In particular, it seems justified in its implication that such genealogies fail to show that the old motives are *essential* components of our modern morality, and therefore fail to show that we have any good reason to abandon it. Nonetheless, this alternative reaction strikes me as much too simplistic and optimistic.

The analogy with etymology is instructive in this connection. It

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[34] *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke*, 5:313-16. This point has also been made forcefully by modern anthropologists, especially F. Boas and B. Malinowski. For Malinowski it even motivated a strict exclusion of history from the analysis of a modern society.

is indeed true that the visual no longer plays a role in Plato's theory of knowledge and its objects at a *literal* level. However, it continues to play a huge role in the *metaphors* by means of which he attempts to explain the theory, for example the *Republic*'s metaphors of the Cave and the Sun. To this extent the visual etymology of the words *eidos* and *idea* remains alive, and moreover threatens at any moment to interfere in the theory in deep and confusing ways. A rather similar situation obtains, it seems to me, in connection with the three genealogies that have been sketched above: It is true that the categorical imperatival form of modern secular morality represents a genuine increment in freedom (a fact that was recognized not only by Kant but also in a certain, and perhaps more attractive, way by Nietzsche, who, while he certainly attributed to the ascetic ideal significant negative effects, also attributed to it a great increase in human powers and potentials). However, this categorical imperatival form of modern secular morality threatens at any moment to degenerate into a sort of enslavement again—as it did, for example, in the case of the Nazi Adolf Eichmann, who apparently interpreted Kantian duty as a sort of subordination to political power. Again, it is true that Christian and modern secular values such as love and forgiveness are often embraced in a pure form. However, as Nietzsche himself emphasized, over the course of the history of Christianity and its secular descendants the old motive of hatred and resentment against perceived oppressors has repeatedly undergone a sort of (let us say) resurrection—for example, in the Protestant Reformation. Moreover, a broader tendency to hatred and resentment has made an even more frequent reappearance. Accordingly, even such a sympathetic expert on the history of Christianity as the theologian Schleiermacher drew attention in *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* to Christianity's extraordinary propensity for intolerance. And its

blood-soaked history—from the murderous battles between Christian sects in ancient Alexandria to the Crusades to the Spanish Inquisition to the Thirty Years' War to the witch craze of the seventeenth century to more recent Christian adventures in Bosnia and the Middle East—provides ample confirmation of this. Finally, it is true that the cosmopolitanism championed by modern morality is often espoused in a pure and innocent form. However, it also constantly threatens to degenerate once again into an instrument of imperialism. For example, John Stuart Mill (moral philosopher but also employee of the East India Company) developed in its name a justification for colonizing, and indeed even waging war on, non-European peoples.[35] And many Americans and Europeans today use an alleged or real cosmopolitan concern for democracy or the interests of women in the Middle East as a sort of pretext for imperialist interference in that part of the world.

It would be very interesting to explore the *mechanism* through which these sorts of atavism occur. Doing so really lies beyond the scope of this article, but here are two suggestions. One part of it probably lies in a sort of natural suitedness of the ideas in question to the pernicious motives involved—as evidenced by the fact that the former first emerged historically in response to the latter. Another part of it probably lies in the circumstance that later champions of these ideas are often still in emulating intellectual contact with the earlier texts and cultural contexts in which they first emerged, and thereby absorb not only the ideas themselves but also the motives that originally underlay them.

In short, the optimistic view according to which the three aspects of our modern morality in question have now been quite freed from their dark past is only half right: They *can* occur in such a pure form, and indeed they often do. But they also harbor a constant potential

[35] See especially J.S. Mill, "A Few Words on Non-Intervention" (1859).

for, or even tendency to, atavism, the resurgence of the grim motives of the past, a potential which is moreover often realized. Someone who subscribes to our modern morality (as I do) therefore incurs a sort of perpetual obligation to be on guard against, and to resist, this danger.[36]

[36] This conclusion is not far removed in spirit from certain strands in the genealogical thought of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Foucault. For instance, Hegel insists that the negative always plays a role in the positive (for example, in the preface of the *Phenomenology* and in the *Philosophy of Right*'s famous image of reason as the rose in the cross of the present). Similarly, Nietzsche's assessment of the ascetic ideal in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and elsewhere is ambivalent: both negative and positive. And for Foucault the genealogist's task is to represent modern institutions not simply as pernicious, but rather as "dangerous": "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous" (*Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, 256).

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