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Nietzsche as a Critic of Genealogical Debunking: Making Room for Naturalism without Subversion

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This paper argues that Nietzsche is a critic of just the kind of genealogical debunking he is popularly associated with. We begin by showing that interpretations of Nietzsche which see him as engaging in genealogical debunking turn him into an advocate of nihilism, for on his own premises, any truthful genealogical inquiry into our values is going to uncover what most of his contemporaries deem objectionable origins and thus license global genealogical debunking. To escape nihilism and make room for naturalism without indiscriminate subversion, we then argue, Nietzsche targets the way of thinking about values that permits genealogical debunking: far from trying to subvert values simply by uncovering their origins, Nietzsche is actively criticising genealogical debunking thus understood. Finally, we draw out the consequences of our reading for Nietzsche's positive vision.

Running counter to the popular view of Nietzsche as the archetypal genealogical debunker who criticises values by revealing their objectionable origins, this paper argues that even in the *GM*, there is an important respect in which Nietzsche is a critic of genealogical debunking. This contrasts with three common reactions to the book. The first is to embrace Nietzsche's project, understood as the attempt to criticise by revealing objectionable origins.[1] The second is to dis-

[1] See, e.g., Hoy (2009), who understands genealogy as "a philosophical method of analysis of how certain cognitive structures, moral categories, or social practices have come into being historically in ways that are contrary to the ordinary understanding of them" (223). Geuss (1994) reads the GM as an internal critique of Christian morality. Ridley (1998) takes a similar line, but views the critique as directed at a wider audience than just Christians. See also Owen (2003, 2007). Loeb (1995) reads it as a critique hinging on Nietzsche's aristocratic values condemning base origins.

miss Nietzsche's project, so understood, because it falls prey to the genetic fallacy.[2] The third is to dismiss the impression that Nietzsche is concerned with genealogical debunking at all: while it may *look* like Nietzsche is criticising by uncovering objectionable origins, he is really doing something else—evaluating our present values by their tendency to promote human flourishing,[3] perhaps, or belabouring our sentiments through powerful rhetoric.[4] In contrast to all three reactions, we want to vindicate both the impression that the *GM* is concerned with genealogical debunking *and* Nietzsche's project. We maintain that his project, correctly understood, is concerned with genealogical debunking, but in order to criticise it. Far from criticising values by revealing their objectionable origins, Nietzsche criticises those whose conceptions of values make those origins seem objectionable and license genealogical debunking.[5]

What leads Nietzsche to criticise genealogical debunking, on our view, is the need to overcome a problem that must *precede* the differential evaluation of individual values: the problem of making room for a naturalism that is not indiscriminately subversive. This is a problem

[2] Koopman (2013, 20, 87) and Kim (1990). Solomon (1994), Hoy (1994), Conway (1994), and, in a different way, Finken (2012) are also critical of fallacious elements in Nietzsche's thought.

[3] May (1999) reads it as an evaluation of values by the standard of life-enhancement; see also Guay (2006). Leiter (2002) reads it as a form of ideology critique designed to liberate great individuals from stifling "herd morality."

[4] Janaway (2007). Hatab (2008), Owen (2003, 2007, 2008), and Conway (1997) also stress the role of rhetoric as opposed to argument. Reginster (2006, 292n34) now denies that Nietzsche offers a new form of critique in the GM.

[5] By foregrounding this particular aspect of Nietzsche's thought, we of course do not mean to deny that there is also a considerable extent to which Nietzsche is concerned to differentially evaluate and (in some cases) undermine the authority of particular values. But it is a standard view among commentators that it is not the uncovering of origins itself which does the undermining (see, e.g., Leiter 2002, 139-44). We mean to complement rather than to upend this standard view by highlighting the respect in which Nietzsche is in fact critical of such genealogical debunking.

that arises on any reading of Nietzsche on which he seeks to understand values naturalistically without doing away with all values—a position which, for the purposes of this paper (Nietzsche's own usage of these terms is another matter), we might label *naturalism* without *nihilism*.[6] The problem is compounded by Nietzsche's conviction that inquiry into origins will reveal even the most valued things to be not only merely natural at root, but also inextricably entangled with things considered bad or shameful: cruelty, suffering, blood, and horror. For if all things considered good come from things considered bad or shameful, how can we avoid the conclusion that *any* truthful naturalistic inquiry into where our values come from is going to prove subversive, and ultimately entrain nihilism? Before Nietzsche can engage in naturalistic explanation and evaluate or rank our values according to their tendency to promote life, therefore, he needs to make room for naturalism without indiscriminate subversion.

Nietzsche sometimes sounds as if one simply has to be cut from same cloth as him to cheerfully accept what his contemporaries consider subversive origins (*GM* 2.7).[7] This can seem like mere chest-thumping on Nietzsche's part, an expression of his idiosyncratic evaluative commitments. But we show that Nietzsche in fact offers an *argument* to the effect that, in the kind of world he takes us to live in, *anyone* has reason not to be so indiscriminately susceptible to genealog-

[6] Our use of the term "nihilism" foregrounds what Bernard Reginster calls the "nihilism of disorientation" (2006, 8): the complete lack of normative guidance that results from thinking that nothing really matters because nothing has objective value. For further discussion of what Nietzsche means by "nihilism," see Reginster (2006, ch. 1) and Gemes (2008). Our understanding of Nietzsche's naturalism follows Kail (2009): we take Nietzsche to advocate a non-reductive, explanatory naturalism which combines a substantive commitment to the idea that humans are part of nature with a methodological commitment to rejecting a priori routes to knowledge.

[7] See Janaway (2017a, 2017b).

ical debunking. This, we agree with Maudemarie Clark, is "Nietzsche's ultimate problem with morality" (2015, 61): it expresses a broader conception of value as something *pure* that must be "separated out from the normal 'muck' of human life" (2015, 60).

As Clark also indicates, and as the current popularity of genealogical debunking arguments brings home, it is by no means clear that this is a problem we have overcome.[8] In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, for instance, Bernard Williams reiterates Nietzsche's critique of this "deeply rooted and still powerful misconception" (Williams 2011, 218) of values and their place in human life:

> In truth, almost all worthwhile human life lies between the extremes that morality puts before us. It starkly emphasises a series of contrasts: between force and reason, persuasion and rational conviction, shame and guilt, dislike and disapproval, mere rejection and blame. The attitude that leads it to emphasise all these contrasts can be labeled its *purity*, [. . .] its insistence on abstracting the moral consciousness from other kinds of emotional reaction or social influence. (Williams 2011, 216)

What Williams describes here is a conception of values on which the truly—i.e. morally—valuable is expected to lie "beyond any empirical determination" (Williams 2011, 217) in a way that renders it difficult to fathom how it could fit into the natural world. Clark argues that Nietzsche blames just such a conception of values for engendering nihilism: it is what makes people think that if purity is not to be found, nothing has meaning or value. As a result, it becomes hard to see how there can be room for non-subversive naturalistic inquiry into the origins of our values.

[8] We have in mind the debates over whether beliefs can be debunked by showing that one's acceptance of them is orthogonal to their truth. See, e.g., Srinivasan (2015), Mogensen (2016), and DiPaolo and Simpson (2016). Although space constraints prohibit elaboration, we take the argument we ascribe to Nietzsche to be directly relevant to the contemporary debate.

Our guiding idea is that what makes room for naturalism without subversion is not a particular set of values, but a different way of thinking *about* values. This is the conception of values that forms the final stage in the process of emancipation from an enchanted view of the world initiated by the "Death of God," i.e. the fact that "belief in God [. . .] has become unbelievable" (*GS* 343). We argue that while Nietzsche starts with the now widely shared premise that God is dead, he derives from it the far less widely shared conclusion that once one goes *far enough* in accepting the Death of God, the origins of one's values, formerly perceived as destabilising, *cease* to be destabilising. Although Nietzsche himself does not put it this way, the point is best introduced in terms of a schematic depiction of a thought process that leads one through three stages of atheism. *Stage* one atheists react to the Death of God simply by subtracting certain metaphysical beliefs from the set of their beliefs while retaining their Christian moral values largely unchanged. *Stage two* atheists realise the deeper ramifications of the Death of God: without these metaphysical assumptions, the sorts of origins necessary for values to be authoritative cease to be available, and upon reflection, all values are seen to be susceptible to genealogical debunking. The correct inference to draw from the Death of God is thus that nothing has value—nihilism. *Stage three* atheists go one step further: they realise that the commitments licensing the inference from the Death of God to nihilism still express a metaphysical perspective on values. By relinquishing these commitments, stage three atheists free themselves from the corrosive grip of genealogical debunking and become able to affirm their values in the face of their origins. The third stage thus issues in a critique of genealogical debunking as a nihilism-engendering residue of the enchanted world.

Our argument in this paper falls into three parts. In §1, we argue that given Nietzsche's own premises, reading him as a genealogical

debunker turns him into an advocate of nihilism, for any truthful genealogical inquiry into our values is going to uncover what most of his contemporaries deem objectionable origins—local will turn into global debunking, subverting our values across the board. To escape this threat of nihilism, we argue in §2, Nietzsche targets genealogical debunking itself. The *GM* criticises a particular way of thinking *about* values, because that is what renders any evaluative outlook susceptible to dissolve into nihilism. In §3, we draw out the consequences of our reading for Nietzsche's positive vision.

1. From Local to Global Genealogical Debunking

Any reading of the *GM* is going to be guided by assumptions about Nietzsche's convictions and aims. Two such assumptions in the recent literature have been the following: (a) Nietzsche is engaged in *naturalistic explanations* of how values might have arisen without metaphysical interference out of the rest of nature; (b) Nietzsche is engaged in a rationally articulated *critique* of certain values, but he is not a nihilist who denies that anything has value. These assumptions are widely made and have been extensively argued for, so we will take them on board without rehearsing the arguments.[9]

Given these assumptions, a natural way to approach the *GM* is to look for a link between those two aspects of the book—to identify a sense in which naturalistic genealogical explanation undermines its object without leaving us with no values at all. But if one locates the critical force in the genealogical explanation itself, this sits rather uneasily with two further assumptions that can safely be made about Nietzsche: (c) Nietzsche believes that what is now evaluated-as-bad,

[9] See Clark (1998), Leiter (2002), Janaway (2007), and Owen (2007, 2008) for comprehensive overviews.

such as cruelty, suffering, blood, and horror, is pervasive and something that one is nearly bound to come across once one inquires deeply enough into the origins of things that are evaluated-as-good;[10] (d) he does not take origins to be capable of subversion *by themselves*. Let us examine each assumption.

(c) *Awareness of the Pervasiveness of Suffering, Cruelty, Blood, and Horror*: Nietzsche repeatedly voices a strong awareness of the fact that inquiry into the origins of what most of his contemporaries regard as "good" things will reveal them to be inextricably entangled with things that these same contemporaries regard as "bad," such as suffering, cruelty, blood, and horror:

> 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"! (*GM* 2.3)

An example of what Nietzsche might have in mind is the role of slavery in facilitating the birth of philosophical reflection.[11] This and comparable passages (*GM* 3.9; *eKGWB* 1873, 29[172]; *EH* "Untimely" 1; *UM* 2.1; *D* 49) lead Williams to note Nietzsche's "hypersensitivity to suffering" (2012, 143) and refusal to forget that suffering was necessary to achieving things that are now greatly valued. "All good things were once bad things" (*GM* 3.9), Nietzsche writes, and as Williams argues, this is one of Nietzsche's "fundamental tenets" (2012, 143), which, before it becomes a principle of interpretation in the hermeneutics of suspicion, presents itself to Nietzsche first and foremost as a *fact*. But we need to ask: what *kind* of fact is this? Does it express Nietzsche's *own* value-commitments, or does it describe the relation between the

[10] How exactly "origins" is to be understood will be addressed in the next section.
[11] See Engels (1987, 168) and Williams (1993, 111–17).

value-commitments *of his contemporaries* and the world? "Good" and "bad" *for whom*?

In *GM* 2.7, Nietzsche makes it very clear that in highlighting the pervasiveness of suffering, cruelty, blood, and horror, his intention is *not* to give grist to the "mills of life-weariness" of those he calls "the pessimists," who take suffering, cruelty, blood, and horror to be "bad" or "shameful," and thus to encourage life-denial. On the contrary, Nietzsche emphasises that the fact that such origins are perceived as "shameful" is the result of fairly recent cultural developments; his thoughts, he says,

> are meant expressly to show that back then, when humanity was not yet ashamed of its cruelty, life on earth was more lighthearted than it is now that there are pessimists. The darkening of the heavens over man has always increased proportionally as man has grown ashamed *of man*. (*GM* 2.7)

It is a central idea in the *GM*, then, that what one perceives as "bad" or "shameful" origins—as *pudenda origo* (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[189])—is a function of one's evaluative commitments. While Nietzsche's contemporaries tend to perceive suffering, cruelty, blood, and horror as always bad or shameful, we also find in history the "reverse judgement" of those things as a "seductive lure *to* life."[12] Nietzsche's claim that all good things come from or were once bad things should therefore not be heard as voicing Nietzsche's *own* evaluations, but rather as describing how the findings of truthful genealogical inquiry will appear *to his contemporaries*. When Nietzsche speaks of bad or shameful origins, he does not mean that they are bad or shameful in *his* eyes. We can mark this distinction between Nietzsche's *endorsement* of evaluations and his *description* of how the findings of genealogy will be evaluated by others thus: the point is not that they *are* bad or shameful, but that they are

[12] See Janaway (2017a, 2017b).

evaluated-as-bad-or-shameful, where this does not carry an evaluative commitment on Nietzsche's part. "All good things were once bad things" should be taken to mean: all things-now-evaluated-as-good were once things-now-evaluated-as-bad.

This may appear to strengthen the connection between (a) and (b), between naturalism and critique—not only is Nietzsche engaged in naturalistic explanations, he is also committed to such explanations looking fairly awful to his contemporaries: in the kind of world we live in, they are bound to reveal what will be perceived as "tainted" origins. But as we shall now see, Nietzsche's own conclusion is rather that uncovering such origins does not necessarily yield a critique.

(d) *Origins in Themselves Cannot Subvert*: Nietzsche repeatedly denies that something's having such-and-such origins *ipso facto* constitutes a ground for its indictment. Two years before the publication of the *GM*, he writes: "inquiry into the origin of our evaluations [. . .] is in no way identical with a critique of them" (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[189]). And in Book Five of the *GS*, which appeared in the same year as the *GM*, he points out:

> The mistake of the more subtle among [the historians of morality] is that they uncover and criticize the possibly foolish opinions of a people about their morality [. . .] and then think they have criticized the morality itself. [. . .] A morality could even have grown out of an error, and the realization of this fact would not so much as touch the problem of its value. (*GS* 345)

Origins are not incriminating in themselves. What criticism Nietzsche offers of certain values hinges on their *practical value* as forces promoting the "enjoyment," "ennobling," "knowledge," and "development" of life (*eKGWB* 1886, 7[6]):

> One could have proven ever so unflattering things about the origins of moral valuations: now that these forces are *here*, they can be used

> and have their *value* as forces. Just as a regime [Herrschaft] can originate in deceit and violence: its value lies in the fact that it *is* a regime.—Unless all the force of moral valuations were dependent on the legitimacy of its origins or more generally on a certain belief *about their origins*: in which case the *force of the belief in the value* would be lost if the mistake were discovered. (*eKGWB* 1884, 26[161])

On Nietzsche's view of things, according to which there is blood and horror at the basis of all things-now-evaluated-as-good, the question is not whether our values have origins evaluated-as-shameful, but whether we can *live* with the blood and horror. Far from animating his own critique, the subversive inference from origins to critique is part of what Nietzsche criticises:

> *Origin* and *critique* of moral valuations. These two things do *not* coincide, as is facilely supposed (this belief is itself already the *result* of a moral judgment to the effect that "something that has come to be in such and such a way is worth little because its origin is immoral"). (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[131])

The origins that genealogical inquiry will tend to reveal are subversive only in conjunction with a *further* belief licensing the inference from origin to condemnation. This further belief is itself an ethical attitude, a second-order commitment to a certain way of thinking *about* values which can be put into question.

We can now see that readings on which Nietzsche takes origins to be in themselves capable of subversion face two problems. The first is that the scope of the critique is too broad. Given (c), all values would be undermined, which results in a nihilism violating (b). The second problem is that this would have Nietzsche commit the genetic fallacy, which is implausible in light of the four passages where Nietzsche rejects the idea that origins are subversive in themselves—it conflicts with (d).

This has led some to argue that while it may look like Nietzsche is deriving critique from explanation, he is really doing something less argumentative, such as attempting to alter our affects through powerful rhetoric (Janaway 2007). But this reaction conflicts with the assumption expressed in (b), that Nietzsche is presenting a rationally articulated critique.

Insofar as we want to hold on to the idea that there is a genealogical argument in the *GM* that does not target values *tout court* and avoids the genetic fallacy, one might argue that it takes the form of a narrower, *internal* critique—that Nietzsche is pinpointing contradictions *within* the evaluative commitments of the genealogy's addressees. This cashes out the thought that what origins are perceived as shameful is a function of one's outlook. Hence, genealogy can have subversive effects *if the addressee's values claim authority for themselves in terms which the revelation of their true origins can undermine*. Such internal readings can take several forms. Nietzsche might be viewed as deriving subversive conclusions about values from their

(1) shameful *historical* origins: values *V* historically arose out of motives perceived as shameful, such as hatred, *ressentiment* and cruelty;

(2) shameful *psychological* origins: values *V* now are psychologically rooted in and expressions of motives perceived as shameful, such as hatred, *ressentiment* and cruelty;[13]

(3) *functional* origins: values *V* originate as functional responses to basic needs, as tools for the satisfaction of further ends and ultimately of the will to power;[14]

[13] See, e.g., Geuss (1981), Reginster (1997).
[14] See Richardson (2004) and Guay (2006).

(4) *contingent* origins: values V are the product of various historical contingencies which fail to justify them against possible rivals—they are not inevitable or definitively desirable, but rationally contingent;[15,16]

All four forms of internal critique exhibit what is perceived as "higher" as originating in what is perceived as "lower." This argumentative structure is a form of *local genealogical debunking*:

Local Genealogical Debunking:

P1 Genealogical explanation of certain values V reveals them to have origins O.

P2 Values V claim authority for themselves in terms that are incompatible with their having origins O.

P3 If values V claim authority for themselves in terms that are incompatible with their having origins O, and they in fact have origins O, then values V should be abandoned.

C1 Genealogical explanation shows that values V should be abandoned.

Readings along the lines of (1)–(4) take Nietzsche to show that certain—Christian—values have origins that are incompatible with the way Christianity understands itself and claims authority for itself, so that by Christianity's *own lights*, we should give it up.

But the problem with these readings is that they fail to contain the subversive force of genealogical inquiry and thus run afoul of

[15] Here our argument connects with debates over whether beliefs can be debunked by showing that one's acceptance of them is orthogonal to their truth. Exploring this connection would require more space than we can give it here, but our argument can profitably be read with these debates in mind. See Srinivasan (2015), Mogensen (2016), and DiPaolo and Simpson (2016).

[16] See Nehamas (1985, ch. 4).

assumption (b), that Nietzsche is not a nihilist. This is because the commitments on which the subversive force hinges are not specific to Christianity. This is obscured by talk of internal contradictions within Christianity. But the commitments on which *local genealogical debunking* hinges are not *first-order* commitments *to* specifically Christian values, but much broader *second-order* commitments *about* values: commitments specifying what origins *bona fide* values can properly possess. On reading (1), the relevant second-order commitment is that higher values have similarly high historical origins. On reading (2), it is that our present values must be expressive of high-minded motives. On reading (3), it is that moral reasons for action are genuinely distinct from, and not derivative of, instrumental reasons for action. On reading (4), it is that morality is pure of contingency, luck, and forces beyond voluntary control.

This suggests that the relevant second-order commitment is nothing other than Nietzsche's recurrent concern—the *ascetic conception of values* enshrined in the ascetic ideal:

> *Ascetic Conception of Values* (ACV): the highly valued must have higher origins; it must be pure, free of any connection with contingency, animal urges, human needs, self-interest, or power struggles.

In *BGE*, the companion piece to the *GM*, Nietzsche discusses the ACV under the heading of "the metaphysicians' basic faith, *the faith in the opposition of values*" (*BGE* 2).[17] This is the conviction that "[t]hings of the highest value must have another, separate origin *of their own*,—they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, from this mad chaos of confusion and desire" (*BGE* 2)—what Clark calls "the normal 'muck' of human life" (2015, 60). To be truly valuable, the higher must itself have higher origins (*BGE* 230). It must

[17] Clark (1990, 177) also argues that the faith in the opposition of values finds its way into the GM under the heading of the ascetic ideal.

not have grown out of the merely natural, and *a fortiori* not out of what is perceived as shameful. On Nietzsche's view, it is to provide appropriately pure origins that philosophers developed the realm of forms, the mind of God, or the noumenal world—all of them served as timeless homes to higher things, relative to which the lower world of "life, nature, and history" (*GS* 344) could be demoted to the status of a mere appearance (*TI* "Reason" 1). Instead of trying to explain how the higher might have emerged from the normal muck of things, "metaphysical philosophy has hitherto surmounted this difficulty by denying that the one originates in the other" (*HAH* 1). This "type of valuation," Nietzsche says of philosophers, "lies behind all their logical procedures" (*BGE* 2). It is "just their way of showing respect: the highest should *not* grow out of the lowest, it should *not* grow at all [. . .]. It is an objection for something to come from something else, it casts doubt on its value" (*TI* "Reason" 4).

The key idea here is that *in treating the revelation of a value's shameful origins as debunking it, we are undertaking a particular kind of second-order value commitment*. In Nietzsche's terms, the coincidence of genealogy and critique is "itself already the *result* of a moral judgment to the effect that 'something that has come to be in such and such a way is worth little because its origin is immoral'" (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[131]). To undertake this second-order value commitment is to endorse (i) the inference from something's having a high value to its having high origins, and (ii) its contrapositive, the inference from its failing to have high origins (by having merely natural origins or even origins perceived as shameful) to its failing to have a high value. For one who endorses this pattern of reasoning, any connection of the higher with the normal muck of things contaminates the purity of the higher. A value's claim on us will be vindicated only if the value possesses a suitably pure pedigree; should a value be found to have origins that

are perceived as lowly or shameful, its authority will be undermined. It will be unmasked as a mere illusion of value.

But in a world in which all things-now-evaluated-as-good come from things-now-evaluated-as-bad-or-shameful, the ACV endangers values across the board—not only those we live by, but also any foreseeable alternatives. This is a threat which those stuck in *stage one* atheism have yet to realise:

> The event [the Death of God] is far too great, too distant, too remote from the multitude's capacity for comprehension even for the tidings of it to be thought of as having arrived as yet. Much less may one suppose that many people know as yet *what* this event really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it: for example, the whole of our European morality. (*GS* 343)

Nietzsche, recognising that his contemporaries—like George Eliot (*TI* "Untimely" 5)—remain stage one atheists who accept the Death of God while holding on to Christian values, nevertheless considers the transition to *stage two* inevitable in the long run: combined with the conviction that genealogy will unearth natural origins and a large dose of blood and horror, the idea that the higher must remain pure of any association with such things inexorably entrains the conclusion that all first-order value commitments must be abandoned—it leads to *global genealogical debunking*:

Global Genealogical Debunking:

P1 Genealogy is bound to reveal our values to have origins *O*.
P2 All our values claim authority for themselves in terms that are incompatible with their having origins *O*.

P3 If all our values claim authority for themselves in terms that are incompatible with their having origins *O*, and they in fact have origins *O*, then all our values should be abandoned.

C1 Genealogy is bound to show that all our values should be abandoned.

Attempts to narrow the scope of Nietzsche's critique by interpreting it as internal fail, because Nietzsche presents these values as problematic according to a standard, the ACV, that is far more general. This subverts values across the board, depriving us not only of Christian values, but also of alternatives.

2. Nietzsche's Real Target: The Ascetic Conception of Values

Starting out from the question of how to derive critique from genealogical explanation, we ended up with the question of how genealogical explanation can *fail* to be critical. What renders Christian values susceptible to genealogical debunking is not in fact specific to them, but turns out to be a broader commitment endangering our values across the board: the ACV. On this conception, our values resist being understood in naturalistic terms. The only way to sustain first-order value commitments is to foster ignorance of their true origins with myths, illusions and lies. But here a further idea comes into play, namely the commitment to *truthfulness* which both Nietzsche and the outlook he examines share in some form.[18] Truthfulness fuels a concern to eschew myths, illusions and lies. It encourages reflection and demands that one render one's situation transparent to oneself through various forms of inquiry, including genealogical inquiry.

[18] For the claim that truthfulness is part of the ascetic ideal, see GM 3.24, 27. For the claim that it is among Nietzsche's own commitments, see GM 1.1; AC 50; eKGWB 1886, 5[71].

The resulting combination of (i) a first-order commitment to truthfulness, (ii) a world in which everything has a tainted and contingent history, and (iii) a second-order commitment to the ACV is unstable. Because of (i), we are led to move beyond comforting myths and to inquire into the real origins of our values; because of (ii), these origins will turn out to be what is deemed lowly; and because of (iii), this finding will have a destabilising effect. This issues in a situation in which we can neither go on believing in the revelation stories and origin myths in terms of which our values claim authority for themselves, nor go on respecting their claim on us in light of what we know about their actual origins.

Our aim in this section is to show how, in the *GM*, Nietzsche proposes to get out of this bind by rejecting (iii), the ACV, to make room for a truthful naturalism that is not subversive. Nietzsche's hope is that, by engaging us in genealogical reflection, he can impress upon us that something is wrong with the ACV.

The uneasy combination of (i), (ii), and (iii), Nietzsche thinks, is the characteristic predicament of modernity.[19] One is driven to abandon comforting myths and illusions, but finds little solace in the truths replacing them. One "forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities—but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it*" (*eKGWB* 1887, 11[99]). This process of abandonment without replacement entrains the dissolution of one's entire evaluative outlook:

> This antagonism—not to esteem what we know, and not to be allowed any longer to esteem the lies we should like to tell ourselves—results in a process of dissolution. (*eKGWB* 1886, 5[71])

[19] EH "Beyond" 2; Williams (2000).

This process of dissolution issues in nihilism, understood as the view that nothing has any value or meaning (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[127]). The truthful disenchantment of the world is not only "to a high degree ascetic," but also "to a still higher degree *nihilistic*": it drains the world of value and meaning until, like an "isolated arctic traveller," one is left with nothing but lifeless "winter landscapes": "Here there is snow, here life has become silent; the last crowings heard here are 'To what end?,' 'In vain!,' '*Nada*!'—here nothing more prospers or grows [. . .]" (*GM* 3.26). It is in this sense that nihilism is the "necessary consequence of hitherto existing valuations," and "the danger of dangers" (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[100]). When viewed truthfully through the ACV, the world seems to leave no room for values.

The question is which path out of this nihilism-engendering triad Nietzsche advocates. There has been much discussion of Nietzsche's attitude towards (i), the commitment to truthfulness and its relation to illusion and art—but while he criticises forms of truthfulness which encourage the pursuit of truth at the expense of life, he is not usually taken to give up on truthfulness altogether.[20] (i) thus remains in place, and whether (ii) obtains is largely not up to us. This leaves the question whether we can overcome (iii), the ACV. We argue that this is the path Nietzsche recommends.

Nietzsche's thought is that the nihilist does not go *far enough* in recognising contingency. Nihilism stems from the idea that purity from contingency is what we would really like to have, because that is what makes the recognition that the world does not offer this kind of purity look like a disappointment. Against this, Nietzsche points out that the recognition that the world is more contingent than the ACV can allow is a step away from one's values, but not yet from an ascetic

[20] Anderson (2005), Gemes (1992, 2006), Harper (2015), Jenkins (2012, 2016), Owen (2003, 2007), Reginster (2013), Schacht (2013).

conception of them; there is a further step to be taken, and it is only then that we abandon the ascetic ideal, of which the ACV is the most tenacious element: it is what generates the *very idea that something is lacking*.

This is the conclusion reached by Nietzsche after spending the third treatise of the *GM* inquiring into the underlying meaning of the ascetic ideal. In the final section, he declares: "Precisely *this* is what the ascetic ideal means: that something *was lacking*, that an enormous *void* surrounded man" (*GM* 3.28). To fully abandon the ascetic ideal is to abandon this idea as well—to adopt a perspective from which the world's being more of a muck and mire than the ACV can allow is no longer experienced as form of *privation*. If we take the leap into the void, it is seen not to be a void at all.

Nietzsche thus concludes that nihilism is a consequence of a particularly well-concealed asceticism—it is a *counterfactual asceticism*, just as it is counterfactual religiosity to conclude that if God does not exist, everything is permitted.[21] To endorse this inference is to think that, were it *not* the case that everything was permitted, this would *have* to be because there was a God—which is still a religious idea. By the same token, it is still a form of asceticism to conclude that if the sort of purity demanded by the ACV is not available because all values have originated in a natural world pervaded by suffering, then nothing has value. To think that the origins available on a naturalised conception of the world leave no room for values is to remain committed to the ascetic ideal: it is to hold on to an ascetic conception of what kind of world values require to gain a foothold. This is why the ascetic ideal eventually expresses itself in a will to nothingness. Its will to truth leads from the disenchantment of the world via a demanding

[21] See Williams's critique of "counterfactual scientism" (2006, 187).

conception of what counts as something—in the sense of something *valuable*—to the conclusion that we are left with nothing. It involves the idea that if anything were to have value, it would have to do so on the terms of the ascetic conception, and this is still an ascetic idea—one we must relinquish in order to perceive values that emerged out of the normal muck of things as genuine values.

Nietzsche's fundamental problem with the outlook of his contemporaries, then, is that it is prone to dissolve into nihilism due to the ascetic ideal, which combines an injunction to be truthful with the ACV. This combination issues in dissolution, because it makes it increasingly clear that the kind of purity demanded by the ACV is unavailable while blinding one to available alternatives. Hence Nietzsche's conclusion that the ascetic ideal is "*the true doom* in the history of European health" (*GM* 3.21).

Throughout his work from 1878 onwards, but under a variety of names, Nietzsche rejects the ACV and the reasoning it licenses, calling it a "mistake in reasoning" (*HAH* 1; see also *D* 49; *GS* 344; *BGE* 2; *TI* "Reason" 4, 5).[22] He encourages us to "doubt right here at the threshold, where it is needed most" (*BGE* 2). Genealogies are indeed subversive by the ascetic's standards, but while the ascetic takes this as a reason to give up the object of the genealogy, Nietzsche takes it as a reason to give up the standard. He is a critic of genealogical debunking arguments—in particular of their premise that if values turn out to have origins of the kind perceived as lowly or shameful, which Nietzsche thinks they are bound to have, they should be abandoned:

Critique of Genealogical Debunking:

[22] A more fine-grained analysis than we have room for here might of course bring into focus various differences between the ideas we lump together as the ACV.

P1 Our values claim authority for themselves in terms that include a second-order commitment to the idea that *bona fide* values must not have origins of the kind perceived as lowly or shameful.

P2 On a naturalistic view of the world on which it is pervaded by blood and horror, all values will turn out to have origins of the kind perceived as lowly or shameful, thus permitting *Genealogical Debunking*.

P3 If values claim authority for themselves in terms that permit *Genealogical Debunking*, then commitments permitting *Genealogical Debunking* should be abandoned.

C1 Therefore, the commitment to the idea that *bona fide* values must not have origins of the kind perceived as lowly or shameful should be abandoned.

The text standardly treated as the prime instance of genealogical debunking thus turns out to be part of a critique of the reasoning underlying genealogical debunking.

But if there is this deeper critique afoot in the *GM*, why does so much of the *GM* describe the origins of particular first-order values? The answer is that there are two distinct levels in the *GM*: a first-order critique of values and a second-order critique of the way we think about values. Our point is that the first-order critique, which has been the focus of commentators, presupposes and only makes sense against the background of the second-order critique. It is only once we have relinquished the ACV that there is room for naturalistic explanation to be anything other than subversive, and that genuine reevaluation becomes possible. Otherwise, any naturalistic explanation will seem to blacken its object. The difference between natural origins suggesting that a value promotes life and natural origins suggesting that it is harmful to life will merely be a difference between two shades of black.

But once we abandon the ascetic conception, a greater range of contrasts between natural origins becomes available: some genealogical explanations will still be subversive by suggesting dysfunctionality: they might be harmful by being repressive of our drives and injurious to our health;[23] by insufficiently tailored to different types; and by constraining individual potential.[24] But others will be vindicatory by suggesting functionality. Abandoning the ACV is a necessary—though not a sufficient—condition for naturalistic explanation not to be subversive, and Nietzsche is to be credited with perceiving this more clearly than his fellow naturalists. He points the way to naturalism without subversion.

3. Nietzsche's Vision: Reflective Stability and the Pessimism of Strength

Nietzsche thus sees that ACV as forcing a choice upon us: either we deceive ourselves about the world's true shape by idealising it with myths and illusions, or we see it for what it is and embrace nihilism. His way out of this bind, we have argued, is to reject the ACV. This reading of what Nietzsche opposes offers some indication of what he advocates instead. In this final section, we draw out the consequences of our reading for Nietzsche's positive vision.

If they are to escape the choice between untruthfulness and nihilism, healthy individuals are going to need an outlook that is stable under reflection. They are going to have to satisfy three conditions: (i) living truthfully; (ii) holding a non-ascetic conception of values; (iii) having the psychological strength required to bear the truth about

[23] For Nietzsche's notion of health, see Gemes (2013) and Huddleston (2017).

[24] See Gemes (2013), Leiter (2002), May (1999, 73), Clark (2015, 43), and Guay (2006, 357).

their outlook—to affirm it in the face of its true history. (i) is clear enough, so let us focus on (ii) and (iii).

In the *UM*, Nietzsche describes how uncovering origins could be life-denying by alienating one from what one values; but the *GM* takes a further step, exploring the thought that what effect genealogy has on our values is a function of whether we take their authority to depend on their having certain origins. This leads Nietzsche to the conclusion that achieving a life-affirming outlook—an outlook that enables one to know life for what it is and still say "yes" to it—must involve one's coming to think and live by ideas that are *stable under reflection*, including reflection about where they come from and what their coming to be ours involved. That an evaluative outlook should be stable under truthful reflection is necessary if the holders of the outlook are to live truthfully without being driven into nihilism.

A key threat to this reflective stability is the ACV licensing the inference from origins to subversion. But as Nietzsche points out, the inference that "something that has come to be in such and such a way is worth little because its origin is immoral" itself involves a "moral judgement" (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[131]). A moral judgement, for Nietzsche, is not a logical truth, but an *interpretation*, an *Auslegung*, which is itself a symptom of certain physiological conditions.[25] If an evaluative outlook leads to instability and nihilism, it cannot be symptomatic of *healthy* physiological conditions. A healthy outlook needs to be reflectively stable, and in the world Nietzsche takes us to live in, any stable outlook needs to allow the affirmation of values with natural and not altogether suffering-free origins. Taking such origins to fuel genealogical debunking arguments then turns out to be unhealthy: it expresses endorsement of a pattern of reasoning which

[25] See eKGWB 1885, 2[90]; BGE 187; TI "Morality" 5.

Nietzsche criticises as unstable and ultimately nihilism-engendering. Hence requirement (ii) on healthy individuals: that they should have a non-ascetic conception of value.

Merely conceiving of values differently is not yet enough, however, to ensure that one will be able to affirm one's values when confronted with the origins that Nietzsche expects them to have. One also needs the *psychological strength* to bear whatever it is that inquiry into the history of our values might bring to light. This is requirement (iii), which is not a matter of principles or how we think of things, but a matter of strength of character. Unlike principles, such strength comes in degrees. The measure of one's strength will be how much truth about one's values one can incorporate into one's view of them while still affirming them.[26] For Nietzsche, such truth is bound to involve a great deal of "harsh, ugly, unpleasant" (*GM* 1.1) truth. It will reveal the history of our values to involve suffering, for instance. But for Nietzsche, the problem is not purposeful suffering, which one endures for a reason, but *senseless* suffering, incurred as a result of bad luck, uncertainty, or sudden downturns (*GM* 2.7, 3.28). The real problem is the *contingency* of suffering. This is why Nietzsche defines "evil" as "chance, uncertainty, and the sudden" (*eKGWB* 1887, 10[21]). Fear of the consequences of these contingent forces is what generates the need either to give contingency the form of necessity by finding reasons for suffering or to demote the contingent realm of life, nature, and history to the rank of mere appearance. In its Schopenhauerian form, the pessimistic awareness of this state of things leads to the *negation* of life, the "death-wish" (*eKGWB* 1885, 2[100]). Yet in the form advocated

[26] In the GM, Nietzsche talks about the ability to digest the past (3.16), the strength to endure the truth about humankind and to bear a true biography (3.19–20). In EH, he notes that he takes the real standard of value to be how much truth a spirit dares and endures (P, 3).

by Nietzsche, that same pessimistic awareness issues in the *affirmation* of life. The former might be labelled the *pessimism of weakness*; the latter Nietzsche himself calls the *pessimism of strength*.[27] He introduces it in the 1886 preface to the *Birth of Tragedy* (BT "Self-Criticism" 1) and expands on it in his notebooks: "Let us dwell a moment," he writes, "on this symptom of the *highest* culture—I call it the *pessimism of strength*" (*eKGWB* 1887, 10[21]). It is the state in which mankind fearlessly accepts contingency—in which it no longer feels the need to rationalise the world or to deny its reality (*eKGWB* 1887, 10[21]). On the very grounds that formerly motivated life-denial, mankind manages to *affirm* life: "the sense of security and belief in law and calculability enter consciousness in the form of satiety and disgust—while the delight in chance, the uncertain and sudden becomes titillating" (*eKGWB* 1887, 10[21]).[28] To exhibit pessimism of strength with relation to our values and their history is to balance awareness of their contingency with their unwavering affirmation. It is to treat the values we actually find, with the origins they actually have, as genuine values. This, as Bernard Williams emphasises in one of his more Nietzschean passages, is

> . . . [not] a picture that is a product of despair, a mere second-best for a world in which the criteria of true objectivity and ethical truth-seeking have proved hard to find. To recognise how we are placed in this respect is, if anything, an affirmation of strength. (1995, 148)

[27] On the affirmation of life, see Reginster (2006). On Nietzsche's relation to Schopenhauer, see Janaway (1998). On the pessimism of strength, see Soll (1988), Owen (2007, 18), and Williams (2012; 2014, ch. 37).

[28] There is a puzzle in Nietzsche scholarship about why Nietzsche says that one should affirm life on the grounds that formerly motivated life-denial (Came 2013, 210). If one takes suffering to be what motivates denial, this generates the sadistic ideal that one should affirm life because of suffering. Our reading, on the other hand, yields the claim that one should affirm life because of the titillating delight one takes in chance, uncertainty, and the sudden.

One consequence of this reading is that we can sensibly raise the question whether we can retain secular descendants of Christian values—*provided* they help us to live and do not hamper flourishing—if we give up the ACV and bear the truth about them. *Prima facie*, Nietzsche does not seem to think so: he argues in *TI* that "Christian morality [. . .] stands or falls along with belief in God" ("Untimely" 5). Such passages may seem to constitute an obstacle to our reading. But the key is to recognise that there are *two distinct ways* of feeling one's attachment to one's values to be unthreatened by the Death of God: one may be an atheist stuck at stage one, who fails to see the ramifications of the Death of God; *or* one may be an atheist at stage three, who has thoroughly overcome the ascetic perspective on values. When Nietzsche castigates the likes of George Eliot, he is objecting to the failure of his contemporaries to recognise the instability of stage one atheism. But one should not conclude from this that Nietzsche advocates coming to rest at stage two. He also criticises people who remain at stage two, where the Death of God is acknowledged to lead to nihilism. For Nietzsche, this is "a way of remaining and staying stuck in precisely those Christian and ascetic moral perspectives in which one had *renounced faith* along with the faith in God" (*GS* 357). Nietzsche thus criticises both stage one and stage two atheists, but only to push through to stage three.

Stage three atheists hold second-order commitments that no longer license global genealogical debunking. They are able to contemplate the possibility of their values having the origins Nietzsche attributes to them in the *GM* without feeling that their commitment to these values would be compromised. They no longer experience the lack of higher origins *as* a lack. They are confident in their values no matter their origins, much as—in Foucault's words—a "real science is able to accept even the shameful, dirty stories of its beginning" (1988, 15).

Indeed, reading Nietzsche's *GM*, such stage three atheists would have trouble identifying the critical import of the story. Arguably, time has shown that it is possible to emancipate ourselves from the ACV while retaining secular descendants of Christian values, and the trouble that contemporary readers have in seeing a non-fallacious critical import in Nietzsche's *GM* is just an expression of this fact.

A key contrast for Nietzsche, then, is between those who view the origins revealed by genealogical inquiry as a threat to their values and shun truthful genealogical inquiry, and those who feel capable of affirming their values in the face of these origins and embrace genealogical inquiry—between those who "like to put questions of ori¬gins and beginnings out of [their] mind," and those who display a "contrary inclination" (*HAH* 1). The same contrast reappears at the beginning of *BGE*, where Nietzsche says that "we must await the arrival of a new breed of philosophers, ones whose taste and inclination are somehow the reverse of those we have seen so far" (2). This new breed with reverse tastes, we have suggested, consists of individuals who have freed themselves of the ascetic perspective and display a pessimism of strength to the extent that they can discern and affirm things of value even in a world in which these turn out to have links to the normal muck of life. This, Nietzsche thinks, is what a disenchanted world in which everything is in some way tied up with contingency and suffering demands of us. And once we meet these demands, genealogical inquiry ceases to appear uniformly subversive. Then—and only then—the familiar Nietzschean project comes into view, of differentiating between values according to whether they have helped us to live.

Conclusion

For Nietzsche, genealogical debunking is in the first instance a problem. Because our values have traditionally been understood in terms that render them incompatible with the origins genealogy is likely to bring to light, genealogical inquiry must issue in nihilism. By contrast to "English genealogists" (*GM* P 4) in the vein of Hume, Darwin, and Rée, who optimistically assume that genealogical explanations will strengthen our confidence in our values by revealing their utility, Nietzsche's darker outlook leads him to recognise that there is a prior task for the naturalist: in a world in which all things-evaluated-as-good come from things-evaluated-as-bad and values anyway resist naturalistic explanation, one first needs to make room for naturalism without subversion.

Such a reading combines two traditionally opposed views of Nietzsche, the postmodern view of him as concerned with the destabilising force of history, and the naturalist view of him as concerned with making sense of values in non-metaphysical terms. Nietzsche *is* concerned with the critical force of history, but as an *obstacle* to naturalistic self-understanding. The image of Nietzsche as a genealogical debunker has to be turned on its head.

This paper has focused on the idea that bringing into view the differences between values presupposes ridding oneself of second-order ideas that level out these differences. Nietzsche shows us that for the project of the piecemeal evaluation of values against the background of their history to come clearly into focus, we must first purge our conception of values of the last remnants of asceticism. But given that this project has yet to come clearly into focus, and given that debates over how values fit into the natural world rage on, there is a real question whether we have fully done so.

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