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History, Nature, and the “Genetic Fallacy” in *The Antichrist’s* Revaluation of Values

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Nietzsche’s later writings about morality depict a historical shift in our moral value system—a reevaluation or, more loosely but naturally translated, a “turnaround” in our values. The outline is familiar to readers of GM and *The Antichrist*: contemporary, Western, “Christian” morality is not the only moral code, nor was its dominance inevitable. Instead, it is, in important respects, atypical: it arose from an unusual set of (purportedly) historical circumstances, which placed pressures on a particular group (or groups) of people. Nietzsche’s very descriptions of this historical shift are also intended to play some part in working against its consequences, that is, against Christian values (GM P; A 1–3). That is, the right kind of account of that first turnaround in values will itself play a part in liberating us from contemporary morality’s grip. It will therefore contribute in some way to a further turnaround, another reevaluation of values, which in *The Antichrist* is broadly conceived of as a turning-back-around—a re-turn to how things were in the first place, albeit with some differences (A 9; A 59).

The idea that history-writing could aid in performing such a function leaves a great deal open and we can point to two standard objections. First, there is a factual problem: some of Nietzsche’s readers may not be convinced that there was such a historical event, nor anything sufficiently resembling it. If he depends upon a plausible historical account to make his argument, and if his historical account is implausible, then his argument suffers accordingly.

Second, there is the well-known “genetic fallacy”: we might fail to see how a perfectly accurate historical account could alter, undermine, or even have any bearing on our current moral outlook—how, in the words of Alexander Nehamas’s classic study, it “is objectionable simply because it has an objectionable origin” (1985: 107). It is still customary, in discussing this topic,

to point to those places in which Nietzsche is alleged to show a clear awareness of the genetic fallacy (especially GS 345; see also BGE 2, KSA 11: 26 [161], pp. 189-90; KSA 12: 2[131], p. 132; 2[189], p. 160).¹ Since he knows that origin does not undermine value (so most commentators tell us), he cannot be interpreted as arguing that origin undermines value. In fact, I will argue against reading GS 345 as Nietzsche's acknowledgment of a genetic fallacy of this kind—it is no such thing, and what he argues there is more complex and more interesting. But the general critical agreement that there is such a fallacy, and that Nietzsche acknowledged it, has been sufficient to motivate further interpretative moves.

Faced with these two objections, a number of interpretative options are available. Any move to downplay the functional role of history in Nietzsche's critique will obviously protect against both of them: if the history is not that important, then the fact that it is shaky in terms of accuracy, and the fact (if it is one) that history cannot actually be critical, do not matter to Nietzsche. GM is often described as some variant of "more psychology than history" (Solomon 1994: 96-97). There is some evidence that Nietzsche does not *exclusively* rely on history in his critique of morality: one passage in GM suggests that historical critique is but one tool among many. Still, other passages give it a more central role.² The interpretative disadvantage to a purely psychological reading is that one thereby loses a sense of why Nietzsche presents his account as historical *at all*: GM and *The Antichrist* are both histories, and GM I ends by advocating a research program with the help of historians and philologists. Surely there is some room between essential and superfluous?

For those who want to keep the historical element central to the critique, a prominent interpretation is to suggest that he is engaged in a form of internal criticism: he is criticizing Christian morality using its own criteria. Here, again, there looks to be some protection against both of our initial problems: all Nietzsche needs is for his opponent to *believe* his historical account, and for it to be unacceptable by *her* criteria. Again, there is supporting evidence for a variety of versions. One candidate might be taking pleasure in cruelty, which Nietzsche takes as both a key factor in the widespread appeal of Christian morality and objectionable by that morality's own standards: Christians will find this objectionable, but Christian morality (on Nietzsche's account) depends upon it, both in its origins and in the present day (GM II 7, 18).³ A second candidate might be the "internal," Christian commitment to truth, which Nietzsche posits in GM: if Christian morality depends on false or unreliable beliefs, and these are exposed in Nietzsche's writings, then the Christian is refuted or shaken up by his own

standard. *The Antichrist* 24 suggests that some of Nietzsche's targets falsely believe that Christianity is fundamentally different from Judaism, when in fact it is not and, later on, Nietzsche claims that Christianity cannot tolerate scientific insight (A 47-48). Finally, the Christian might simply think, much as Schopenhauer did, that morality is self-evident, intuitive, and accessible to all people at all times, independent of context or circumstance. To such a person, the very fact that something like morality could be, to invent an ugly term, "genealogable"—that a plausible genealogy could be given for it, which described it as following on from the sorts of contingent historical events and psychological mechanisms that Nietzsche describes—is already to undermine it (TI "Reason" 1). An inaccurate or sketchy genealogy of morality might nonetheless convince the Christian that morality is genealogable, hence not the kind of thing she thought it was.

How effective we take this internal criticism to be may well depend on whom we take Nietzsche's opponent to be. Some of the philosophical literature tends to assume that Nietzsche, and therefore any appropriate interpretation of him, attempts to refute, with argumentation, an intellectually able Christian interlocutor (Kail 2011). In response to the three internal criticisms given above, such an opponent might be willing, respectively, to acknowledge her own cruelty and therefore immorality, to insist on her moral views in spite of the false beliefs or unreliable processes which gave rise to them, or to argue that morality is genealogable but still, as it happens, independently justified. There is more to be said about the internal criticism, both as an interpretation of Nietzsche and as a response to the genetic fallacy. However, I do not intend to pursue it further, primarily because, on my interpretation, Nietzsche is *not* offering an internal criticism, at least not in a straightforward sense. Still, we should note that, at least regarding *The Antichrist*, this is the text in which Nietzsche writes that "nobody is free to become a Christian or not to do so; one is not 'converted' to Christianity—one must be sufficiently sick for it" (A 51). It is odd to imagine that the correct principle of *interpretation* for the author of these words, in his battle against Christianity, would be to search for the best argument for defeating a philosophically sophisticated Christian opponent. We are free to search for a best argument if we are so inclined, but it will not necessarily be Nietzsche's own, nor will our standards necessarily be his.⁴

The aim, here, is to present the best case for an interpretation which, while remaining faithful to Nietzsche's texts, shows how Nietzsche would have answered the two problems raised at the start: the factual problem and the genetic fallacy. We can do this without downplaying history's role. And we

can do it without an appeal to "internal criticism." The aim is not, however, to get Nietzsche out of trouble at all costs. Indeed, I will argue that nonstandard versions of both of these initial problems do indeed plague Nietzsche's project. The best way to begin this analysis is to look in more detail at how Nietzsche makes use of history in his account of the turnaround in values, especially in *The Antichrist* 24–26.

1 A turnaround in values: The origins of Judaism

Questions about the relationship between Nietzsche's historical account and its critical import are typically answered with respect to GM: it is the focus of all the discussions cited thus far. But looking at *The Antichrist* has advantages. The most obvious one, with respect to Nietzsche's central description of the historical reevaluation of values, relates to what I called the "factual problem": *The Antichrist* 24–26's account of the reevaluation at the core of the Judeo-Christian religion is the most detailed and also the most historically plausible, both to his contemporaries and to us. The cause is Nietzsche's intensive reading of Julius Wellhausen's recently published works on the history of Israel, which took place between GM and *The Antichrist*.⁵ These works are known to have had a major influence on Nietzsche's thought.⁶ Whereas GM perhaps vaguely gestures at the Jews living under the Romans as a source of the reevaluation (e.g., GM I 16) and may have drawn on earlier, Greek sources, such as Theognis (Geuss, 2011: 12–23), *The Antichrist* specifically locates the significant change much earlier, in the historical events which led to the formation of the Jewish religion itself. One can perhaps say, of GM, that "the evidence, if it can be called that, consists in a few scattered etymologies that can . . . neither explain nor demonstrate his interpretation" (Jensen 2013: 170), or that its history is "not properly localized to times, places, or individuals" (Janaway 2007: 11).

But this will not do for *The Antichrist*, which, to be sure, does not *provide* the evidence by raking over the historical literature, but which, we shall see, makes decent use of it. Since so many questions have been raised about the relationship between history and critique in his work, Nietzsche's "best" historical account would seem a natural place to look. As reevaluation story depends, for its sources, on good, contemporary scholarship, which is still highly respected to this day. This scholarly work, although well established in the philological literature on Nietzsche, is still relatively unknown or underexplored, especially

in the Anglophone, philosophical literature. This makes it easier, and more appealing, to downplay or explain away the historical element.⁷ But a closer examination of As turnaround, together with another look at Nietzsche's alleged acknowledgment of the genetic fallacy, will also give us insight into how he might have responded to the genetic fallacy charge. To begin with, then, we look at the historical context of the turnaround in values.

2 Wellhausen's critical history

Julius Wellhausen's approach to origins of Judaism is one that would have been familiar to Nietzsche from his own professional training: he treats the Hebrew Bible as a collection of man-made texts, asking questions about how and why these texts were altered over time, invoking knowledge of the original languages and the social and historical contexts in which they were used. Often, the results of this patient scholarship come into direct conflict with the traditional wisdom regarding the text, the events themselves or, in the case of sacred documents, the religious practices which claim to draw on them. Nineteenth-century German philology was a small world: Wellhausen was a former colleague and friend of Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Nietzsche's former adversary. Wilamowitz was trying, as he saw it, to make similar advances with Homer's texts to the ones that Wellhausen had made with his investigations into the origins of Judaism (Momigliano 1982: 49–64).

What were these advances? We begin with what might be called the "traditional" Judeo-Christian founding narrative. The Israelites are enslaved in Egypt; through Moses, God brings them out of Egypt. Then, the key moment occurs: God passes to Moses a set of laws which form the basis of the Jewish religion. Armed with these fixed laws, Moses leads his people to their new land, where they eventually take political control. The central text of Judaism, the Torah or Pentateuch (for Christians, the first five books of the Old Testament), is traditionally said to be written by Moses and its narrative continues up to the end of his life. (Hence, on the traditional account, Moses narrates his own death at Deuteronomy 34.) Therefore, the central text, and the laws it prescribes, are firmly in place prior to anything which occurs once the Israelites take military and political control of the land, and long before they lose it. What happens next, which includes the activities of the early kings like Saul, David, and Solomon, occurs after the basic formation of the Jewish religion. The Israelites divide into

a Northern and a Southern Kingdom (which includes Jerusalem). The Northern Kingdom is defeated by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom is defeated by the Babylonians, whereupon a significant part of the population is taken into exile. Finally, upon the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians, a significant portion of the exiles return to Jerusalem.

By the time that Nietzsche was reading contemporary critical analysis of the Hebrew Bible, this traditional narrative was untenable as a historical account. For example, in crucial passages in the biblical narratives, Saul, David, Solomon, and those around them are depicted as operating with no knowledge of certain passages of the Torah.⁸ Moreover, the Torah showed traces of distinct source documents which had been edited together. Several kinds of evidence pointed in that direction. There were doubled narratives, suggesting that there were originally two different versions of the same story in circulation. There were contradictions or tensions within a given text. Another well-known sign was the fact that the god of the Hebrew Bible is given different names in different places—"Yahweh" and "Elohim," among others—some of which are associated with particular and differing styles or theological agendas. Careful studies of this evidence led scholars to label, characterize, and provisionally date what we might call different "layers" of the Torah. Wellhausen thought that the earliest text was "J," a source which calls god "Yahweh" (German: *Yahweh*, hence the "J"). In J, for example, God is described anthropomorphically: he shuts the door of the ark, once Noah has entered it (Gen. 7:16). *The Antichrist* different source speaks of "Elohim," not Yahweh, and suggests a less anthropomorphic god: it became known as "E." These texts were thought to have been combined and edited into a text known as "JE."

A third and later source was known as "D" because it is closely associated with the book of Deuteronomy. Two points about D are significant for our purposes. First, Nietzsche draws on a credible but now-contested theory about the composition of D in 2 Kings 22-23.⁹ Since the details do not concern us, we can summarize it as follows: D was forged for political and religious purposes—a trick played by King Josiah on his gullible people. The second point is D's use of conditionality. D, unlike JE, seeks to impress on the reader that the people of Israel's presence in the land of Canaan is not automatic or necessary: on the contrary, they are there *conditionally*, in virtue of keeping to a deal with God. The rival contemporary view was altogether different: when a people who worship a particular god (Yahweh) are defeated by a people who worship a different god (Ashur), it is because Ashur is better than Yahweh. On D's new view, however,

when Yahweh-worshippers are defeated by Ashur-worshippers, *Yahweh* is still in charge of historical events: the Ashur-worshippers are a punishment *from Yahweh*. For critical-historical readers, therefore, there were reasons to suppose that D was written in response to defeat, and as a way of holding on to a belief in the power of Yahweh. Since Josiah's reforms in the Southern Kingdom took place after the total defeat of the more powerful Northern Kingdom, it was not unreasonable to view D's outlook as a response to this catastrophic event: Yahweh had sent the Assyrians to punish the Northern Kingdom for its disobedience; the Southern Kingdom had better obey.

This theological shift may appear to be of relatively minor significance, but it is, on Wellhausen's reading, of crucial importance for the history of morality. Take D's interpretation of the defeat of the Yahweh-worshippers by the Ashur-worshippers. What is Ashur's involvement now? Obviously, Ashur and the other Assyrian gods are not in charge of things: they are in no position to oppose Yahweh's decision to send Ashur's people in as a punishment to Yahweh's people. So Yahweh is at least stronger than Ashur. Perhaps there is no Ashur at all? In other words, the outlook of D paves the way for monotheism and, with it, for a single moral code which applies to all peoples at all times. The suggestion is not that this is all invented, all at once, in D, nor that this is what its first authors had in mind. But Nietzsche's sources for *The Antichrist* 24-26 are already pointing out the significance of the Deuteronomistic viewpoint for the history of religion and morality: it is a shift away from a god who, like others, defends a people and a place, toward a god who generally punishes the bad and rewards the good, where good and bad can now begin to be understood as ranging across all groups of peoples, all times and places. The connection between monotheism and the transformation of values should be emphasized, since it was salient to Nietzsche. The move from many gods to one god is not merely an insignificant shift in the number of gods one happens to believe in, as it might be if one went from believing in eighteen gods to believing in seventeen. Where there are two or more gods, they may conflict, expressing different and perhaps equally valid moral codes. When, for example, Aphrodite cheats on her husband, Hephaestus, with Ares, the god of war, Hephaestus traps them in hidden chains and invites the gods to witness their shame. In Homer's description, some gods have sympathy with Hephaestus, while others wish only that they could take Ares's place with Aphrodite. In a monotheistic context, this disparity of divine responses is no longer available. A single god, having no peers, faces no opposition, knows no restrictions, need not experience lust or

other socially complex feelings, and can more easily be seen to be the legislator of a single, unchallenged system of right and wrong: thou shalt not commit adultery.

The fourth source is "P," the "priestly code," which is characterized by a remote and impersonal deity, such as the one who features in Genesis 1, calmly creating the world in a series of days (as opposed to the more anthropomorphic god, who goes for a walk in Gen. 3:8, and is thought not to be from P). This source is "priestly" because it is most concerned with law, ritual, lists of genealogies, and the precise details of pious worship. P establishes the connection between stories of Abraham and Moses and the rituals, laws, and festivals which relate to them: circumcision is imposed on Abraham; Passover is celebrated on departing Egypt. P, for Wellhausen, is uninterested in kings, not requiring them for the appropriate worship of god. Indeed, all the major religious institutions are, according to P, set up prior to the establishment of political organizations in the land of Israel. Another characteristic of P is its presence at the beginning and end of main passages, which suggested to some scholars that whoever was writing P was also editing and perhaps altering the other sources—this was one of the reasons why P was thought to be the latest source. One can also imagine that a religion which existed independently of monarchical power would be well suited to those either in exile in Babylon, or returning to Jerusalem under the Persians, since there was no longer a Yahweh-worshipping king. But one could also date the sources using the sorts of arguments that Nietzsche knew from his philological training: if a passage in Deuteronomy appears to have knowledge of JE material in (what is now) Exodus, but no knowledge of the P material in (what is now) Exodus, then that might be evidence that P came after D.

One could therefore go back to earlier Israelite attitudes by trying to extricate J and E, noting the differences in outlook. Moreover, one could trace what happened to these earlier views by looking at the changes made in D, and then P. D and P can both be taken as responses, in different ways, to the lessening and then eradication of political power on the part of the Israelites, at least of a military kind. D's Yahweh can survive his people's defeat: he is powerful even, perhaps especially, when they *lose* in battle, because he himself has sent the armies against them. P's Yahweh has little interest in military victory or defeat: he can be worshipped before, and, implicitly, after his people have a land in their own name. Nonetheless, P and D are different: D is much concerned with good kingship; P is hardly concerned with kingship at all, treating priests as the highest authority.¹⁰

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3 Nietzsche's retelling

This is some of the detail that is helpful to have in place when looking at *The Antichrist* 24–26. The condensed story Nietzsche tells is as follows:

1. First, we find the correct, natural relation: Yahweh protects Israel, giving military victory and agricultural prosperity. Morality under these conditions is "the expression of a condition under which a nation lives and grows . . . , a nation's deepest instinct of life."
2. After military defeat: Yahweh is the god of justice, but no longer "an expression of national self-confidence: now only a god bound by conditions." "Priestly agitators" interpret "all good fortune as a reward, all misfortune as punishment for disobedience."
3. With this, there enters the "moral world-order," in other words the idea that (i) there is one morality which governs the world and (ii) all fortune and misfortune are really divine reward and punishment for obedience and disobedience, respectively.
4. Hence, the priests rework the history of Israel into the form of a story of obedience and disobedience and they present a forged book as having been present at the start of this history. This forged book has the further feature: (iii) divine reward is bestowed on those who obey the full detail of the laws that the priests give to them.

This is not, of course, the end of the story in *The Antichrist*. The Jewish religion may open the way up for universal values, but (Nietzsche thinks) it retains one important element of the first, anti-universal, "correct" relation between the human and the divine: the Jews are still the chosen people in relation to other peoples—in that sense, at least, Yahweh is still their god more than he is the god of their neighbors, and in some sense he therefore favors them above others (A 27). This is to change with Christian universalism, according to which god belongs equally to all people and Jesus is the redeemer of mankind as a whole. Nonetheless, the history of Israel presents the crucial turning point.

4 A provisional response to the factual problem

The material up to this point has been of direct relevance to the first, "factual" problem. Here, one should not give the impression that everything Nietzsche

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claims is unproblematically true. First, it is not as though Wellhausen has remained unchallenged in the intervening years.¹¹ Second, Nietzsche uses sources other than Wellhausen in other parts of *The Antichrist*; in some cases, these sources (and his use of them) become much less respectable. A striking example is his source for the discussion of the Laws of Manu, about which, to say the least, he ought to have known better and which, in any case, he misrepresents ("Improvers" 3: A 55–57).¹² Third, Nietzsche does not leave Wellhausen's claims unaltered. Put simply, he wants to make the priests the villains, presenting them as more powerful and more deliberate. To achieve this, he blurs the analysis of D and P: the Deuteronomist interpretation of history, with its emphasis on conditionality (i.e., only if you obey god will he favor you), is blended with the priestly emphasis on highly detailed regulations. To be sure, the Deuteronomist history emphasizes obedience, but it is not so much obedience to highly detailed priestly laws governing the minutiae of everyday life, as general obedience to Yahweh. The forgery of D under Josiah seems to become, in *The Antichrist* 26, the forgery of the self-serving rules of the priests (i.e., P, or perhaps the Torah as a whole).¹³ In a limited sense, it is true to say that "when we look at Wellhausen's account, we see that Nietzsche followed it closely."¹⁴ However, this should not be taken to suggest that Nietzsche did not falsify or distort it to suit his needs.

Ultimately, though, I want to suggest that, *prima facie*, A's account of the Israelites does not fall at the first, factual hurdle, at least in important respects. A significant shift in moral thought does appear to have taken place around the time that Nietzsche specifies—or, at least, there is a perfectly respectable argument to be made along these lines. In some sense, it is likely *true* that the Hebrew Bible, and the Jewish traditions which rest in part upon it, bear signs of significant modification in the light of certain priestly interests and concerns, *true* that the move to monotheism, with emphasis on reward and punishment, was an unintended response to defeat and disempowerment, and *true* that monotheism entails a transformation of values. Finally, we know that Nietzsche was aware of the evidence for all of this and, no doubt, he possessed the skills to appreciate it. Wellhausen's account, to which Nietzsche is indebted, presents the move toward a universalist ethic as a detailed series of local solutions to local problems. To read *The Antichrist* 24–26 without any of the background information, or by focusing exclusively on GM, one could easily imagine that this is all Nietzsche's fantasy. Such a conclusion would certainly be unfair. In scope and in method, I am suggesting, what Nietzsche found in Wellhausen was nothing other than a plausible and well-argued genealogy of morality.

5 A provisional response to the genetic fallacy

The factual context of Nietzsche's history only sharpens our focus on the second problem, namely the genetic fallacy. Granted that A's historical account is plausible to some minimal degree, just what exactly does Nietzsche take this to offer in terms of a critique? Wellhausen, after all, was a Christian universalist—the historical record obviously didn't produce in *him* the response Nietzsche might have liked. To help answer the question, we can look in more detail at Nietzsche's supposed acknowledgment of the genetic fallacy in GS 345, the place where (we are often told) he shows a clear awareness of the issue.

It will be helpful to distinguish two different claims that Nietzsche might be making. First, that "*nothing* about the history [of morality] could have direct bearing on its value" (Geuss 1999: 20, emphasis added). Second, that the history of morality *does not necessarily* have any bearing on its value. Nietzsche only ever claims the second one. And that is fortunate, because he thinks the first one is false, as he makes clear in GS 345.¹⁵ Nietzsche has something specific in mind here and we should examine it, because it will help us to get clearer about what he is up to. Take GS 345's analogy with medicine. In my own terms, Nietzsche's point is as follows: Suppose we want to know whether or not a pill works. I can believe what I like about the pill, such as that it is a magic pill given to me by my fairy godmother: it will still cure me, or not, independently of such thoughts (for the purposes of the analogy, we are ignoring the placebo effect). But *bad* historians of morality (Nietzsche says) have supposed that, by showing me that it was not a magic pill given to me by my fairy godmother, they have shown that the pill *doesn't work*. To adapt some of his other remarks, we could add that if it turns out that the pill was developed through cruel, immoral, or exploitative means, that would also have no impact on its effectiveness.

Does this mean that *nothing* about history bears on morality's value? (This was the first claim, above.) No, that isn't what is meant at all. Let us continue the analogy. Suppose I point to a historical fact indicating that the pill *doesn't work*: a mistake was made in the analysis of the study, which in fact shows that the pill is no better than nothing, or the scientific study of its effectiveness was entirely fabricated by the researchers. It would be absurd to reply: "You are making the mistake of thinking that the pill's history bears upon the study of its effectiveness" or "You are making the mistake of thinking that pointing to the pill's objectionable origin amounts to a critique." I am not making a mistake: we are trying to find out if it is effective and I am providing (historical)

evidence that it is not. You might reply that the pill I am holding either works or it does not, regardless of the studies that were carried out on it. But Nietzsche wants to “*examine*” the effectiveness of morality: that is, of the pill (GS 345, my emphasis). If we want to *know* whether or not the pill is effective, we cannot be uninterested in the relevant historical evidence.

When Nietzsche writes that “a morality could even have grown out of an error, and the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value,” his point is therefore that being right or wrong about how a medicine (morality) is effective (valuable) *might not* impact an examination of its effectiveness (value)—as with the fairy godmother belief. On the other hand, being right or wrong about *whether* a medicine (morality) is effective (valuable) is the *very point* of an examination of its effectiveness (value)—the historical fact about the misreported or fabricated study certainly touches on that. It would be open to Nietzsche’s opponent to say, in reply, that morality is nothing like medicine, that nothing we could tell someone about the history of her values ought to touch upon the values themselves, that to think otherwise would be to commit the genetic fallacy. But my point is merely that such a person would be *disagreeing* with Nietzsche at just the point where Nietzsche is supposed, by critics, to be acknowledging the genetic fallacy: for him, that is like saying that nothing you tell me about the history of the pill in my hand ought to change my belief that it is effective.

Once we have understood Nietzsche’s real point, a more pressing question arises: What is the equivalent of the pill’s “effectiveness,” when we are talking about morals, not medicine? What makes a value system valuable? The answer, bluntly, is whether or not the value system is “natural,” by which Nietzsche means something like life-promoting or, equivalently for our purposes, power-increasing (KSA 12: 2 [190], p. 161). A central feature of *The Antichrist* 24–26 was alluded to at the start of this discussion, but has since remained in the background. Nietzsche describes the shift that occurs in the history of Israel not merely as momentous, but as a “falsification of all nature” (A 24), as “a typical history of the *denaturalizing* of all natural values” (A 25, Nietzsche’s emphasis); the priest “disvalues, *dissanctifies* nature” (A 26, Nietzsche’s emphasis). Throughout his description, then, Nietzsche emphasizes that what is happening under the guidance of the priests is unnatural or anti-natural, whereas, of course, the original relationship between Yahweh and his people is natural.

The claim that contemporary morality is “anti-natural,” together with the claim that being anti-natural is *bad*, forms the basis of (the later) Nietzsche’s

critique of that morality. Since this fact is not standardly acknowledged in the literature, it would be worth saying another word in its defense. Nietzsche’s later philosophy, from about 1886 onward, is characterized by a new focus on nature as a measure of value and, in particular, on contemporary Christian morality as being contrary to the natural way of things (e.g., A 15–16, 24–26, A 39, As “Gesetz” (KSA 6, p. 254); TI “Morality”; GM I 16, II 22–24, III 3, 12; GS 344; BGE 51, 55; KSA 6, p. 431; 12, pp. 330, 476–77, 541–42, 546, 571–72; 13, pp. 320–24, 380, 402, 523, 599–600, 611–12; WTP 246). We can see that this is new, for Nietzsche, because in some of the writings from his middle period we are told that nature gives us no moral guidance in one direction or another (e.g., GS 301). We, or at least some of us, on this middle view, are the authors of our own values, which cannot be found by investigating the natural world or our place within it. Without signaling or even acknowledging any special change of heart, Nietzsche nonetheless appears to undergo one, at least by the time we get to GM. The hope for GM, *The Antichrist*, and other late texts is that we might see a return to natural values. Clearly, the “will to power,” when taken as a natural principle of some kind, is intended to play a part in this critique, and Nietzsche can also simply speak of what “Life” is working to achieve through living things.¹⁶

What is the significance of this for our understanding of the role of history? Initially, at least, it might look as if he needs no appeal to history whatsoever: once we have determined what is “natural,” and once we have determined that contemporary morality is anti-natural, and supposing we prefer what is natural, we have everything we need to put pressure on contemporary values. Why would we bother with history? The answer to this question echoes the medical analogy at work in his supposed acknowledgment of the genetic fallacy: Just as a medical study of a drug would be relevant historical information in determining whether or not it is effective, so a historical study of how *natural* a morality is will tell us how valuable it is. We can expect a historical account—we could better call it a natural-historical account—to tell us what our natural values are and how they operate. But in the present, anti-natural context, in which what is “natural” has become obscure to us, the historical account can also help to combat an obvious set of objections or concerns, which might prevent an interlocutor from accepting Nietzsche’s line. If Christian morality is “anti-natural,” then why do we have it? Why have we had it for so long? Why does it *feel* natural to us? How could something so contrary to nature even come to pass? Of course, if we had already agreed that Christian morality is anti-natural, then perhaps there would be no need for such a history (and arguably Nietzsche assumes this is the case in

11 "Morality"). But in general, Nietzsche takes it as his task to explain that and how things went wrong (i.e., anti-natural): "Why did life, physiological well-constitutedness everywhere succumb? Why was there no philosophy of Yes, religion of Yes? . . . Is man therefore an exception in the history of life?" (KSA 13: 14[137], p. 321). As answer to the second question is that there was a religion of Yes, prior to Judeo-Christian innovations. As for the third: it is not "man" but the *Israelites*, in response to their defeat, who were the exception in the history of life. It was they who spearheaded a shift away from nature. We will return to the first question shortly. For now, the central point is this: in showing us how nature (or "life," or the will to power) operates, Nietzsche is giving us a history which, within his theoretical framework, *directly* criticizes our values.

6 A revised factual problem

I have said that, with regard to the factual problem, it is plausible to say that a major shift in values occurs in the history of the *Israelites*. But, as we can now see, what Nietzsche really needs for the purposes of his critique is the further claim that this was a shift from the natural to the anti-natural. Wellhausen, too, considers the resulting Jewish religion as something unnatural, compared with earlier, natural, *Israelite* religion: "The history of the ancient *Israelites* shows us nothing more prominently than the uncommon freshness and naturalness of their impulses" (Wellhausen 1883: 437). But, later on, the Jewish conception of holiness functions to "separate the Jew from the man," so that the divine is conceived in *opposition* to the natural (Wellhausen 1884: 86). The following are various different senses of "natural" operating in Wellhausen's discussion. The historical development represents a counter-natural shift, given in parentheses.

1. Local and familial worship are associated with mealtimes and integrated into daily life. (Josiah's reforms attempt to abolish local worship in favor of centralization at Jerusalem, hence removing the spiritual from daily life.) (Wellhausen, 1883: 28, 79-85, 449-50.)
2. Worship is simple, joyous, and spontaneous. (P opposes spontaneity and is repeatedly characterized as pedantic and monotonous. Anachronistically, P "micromanages" daily life according to an independent, detailed, external, and incomprehensible set of codes.) (Wellhausen 1883: 99-108.)
3. Religion relates to agriculture: festivals relate directly, for example, to harvest or springtime (Wellhausen 1883: 79). (Festivals become linked to

supposedly historical events, not natural/agricultural cycles. Moreover, Wellhausen sees the Jews moving from agriculture to trade, hence further distancing themselves from the land.)¹⁷

4. God is bound up with family, a specific geographical location and the nation at war.¹⁸ (P's authors have no knowledge of war (Wellhausen 1883: 378). For P, the political entity already exists, and religion is a separate community within this pre-given entity. The Jewish "nation" has now become artificial, lacking all "natural conditions" (Wellhausen 1884: 88). P

is abstract, remote, geographically nonspecific.) (Wellhausen 1883: 354.)

5. God moves within an enchanted nature. (P's Genesis creation story has god as remote and man as having dominion over a mechanical, disenchanting nature, which clearly differs from J's account.) (Wellhausen 1883: 321-24, 331-32.)

6. A god's relation to and support for his people is immediate and unconditional. (D favors conditionality; justice now comes first, ahead of the protection of Israel. P's god is remote, unintuitive, and incomprehensible. The divine order transcends the ordinary life of the people in order to repress it.) (Wellhausen 1883: 442-43, 447-48, and Wellhausen 1884: 97-98.)

7. Broadly, then, we can see that what Nietzsche takes from Wellhausen is not merely a change of values, but a detailed account of a (supposed) shift from nature to anti-nature. To the opponent who asks why anti-natural values could feel intuitively right or even natural to us, Nietzsche has an answer: "On a soil falsified in this way, where all nature, all natural value, all *reality* had the profoundest instincts of the ruling classes against it, there arose *Christianity*." (A 27)

While Nietzsche is trying to work with Wellhausen's themes, Nietzsche and Wellhausen only partially agree on what counts as natural. At a sufficient remove, one might imagine each of Wellhausen's denaturalizing moves as describing a shift away from power residing in the individual or the group as a whole and toward power residing in the priesthood. Those who are not part of the priesthood have less and less of a say in their own affairs. Indeed, some of Wellhausen's categories, such as (4), fit neatly with Nietzsche's power story. As for (3), agriculture may be associated with growth and prosperity. Nietzsche also attempts to integrate some of the more explicitly religious elements: in *The Antichrist* 16, "natural" sacrifice is understood to be an expression of gratitude to the god who has made a people powerful and strong—this is the god as "will to power," as the god of *this* nation

(as opposed to the different god of another nation), and as a god who knows how to help his people succeed through both good and what would now be called "evil" acts. Conversely, the "anti-natural castration of a god" occurs when the people, as a result of military defeat, turn to a good, universal divinity. A trickier comparison would be the relation of nature to the state: Nietzsche is generally much more suspicious of national or state interests, but in *The Antichrist* 24–26 he follows Wellhausen in treating the state as "natural." Overall, Nietzsche's "state" is characterized by internecine struggle in a way that Wellhausen's is not. But the main difference lies in their aims: Wellhausen is ultimately trying to establish Jesus and Christianity (correctly understood) as a form of spiritual reconciliation between nature and universal morality, with love of one's neighbor as natural Wellhausen (1883: 86–102). For Nietzsche, of course, love of the other is typically a problematic, anti-natural ideal.

There is no special reason to think that Julius Wellhausen was right about the "natural" in itself, so any disagreement between him and Nietzsche may ultimately be of philological rather than philosophical interest. But the brief comparison serves to highlight a weak point in Nietzsche's approach and a return of a different version of the factual problem. To agree that there was a shift toward priestly interests is not to agree that there was an *anti-natural* shift; yet Nietzsche needs to establish the latter for his critical purposes. Perhaps any description of what is "natural" is liable to tell us more about the prejudices of the describer than it does about nature, and Wellhausen, as our list indicates, looks to be a case in point.¹⁹ But the revised worry is not that the historical events described by Nietzsche did not take place: it is that a historical account *could* not provide the sorts of natural "facts" Nietzsche needs.

7 A revised genetic fallacy

My revised factual problem amounts to an external objection to Nietzsche: bluntly, we would be disagreeing with him about whether there are values to be found in nature, and illustrated in human history; to which we ought to commit ourselves. A more pressing criticism from his point of view would be an internal one, showing that he cannot succeed even if there are natural values. I now turn to an objection of that kind, which may profitably be understood as a revised version of the genetic fallacy—a version of the genetic fallacy, that is, that would actually have concerned Nietzsche on his own terms.

I indicated earlier that, in my view, Nietzsche's histories are not best understood as a form of internal criticism. We can now see why: at its most fundamental level, that is, the internal/external question does not arise on Nietzsche's understanding of what he is doing. His central claim is that we are all governed by natural values, and therefore any appeal to them is an appeal to values we share: the *real* values, as it were, are real precisely because they are never external to a living creature. Nietzsche's attack on his opponent, we might say, relies on an "always already" move: the opponent is always already committed to natural values, simply in order to be alive. In that sense, the criticism is indeed "internal." But, of course, the opponent is not (at least initially) *aware* of these values, and therefore Nietzsche is not merely working with the opponent's explicit claims. Part of the project of history-writing is to make some opponents aware of the natural values which already operate through them, even—perhaps precisely—in those who have anti-natural values.

To see the problem, though, we can turn to a question of Nietzsche's, quoted earlier: "Why did life, physiological well-constitutedness everywhere succumb?" On the one hand, it is clear Nietzsche wants to say that the priests are anti-natural, and it is on that basis that we are supposed to object to them. (A "Gesetz" (KSA 6, p. 254)): life really did succumb, and that is the problem. On the other hand, Nietzsche's "always already" argument is meant precisely to show that life or nature did not succumb: even those involved in the anti-natural shift were always already working to nature's values. Hence, he wants to say that the Israelite priests are acting naturally (roughly, in a power-seeking manner) all along. By making Yahweh responsible for military downfall, the "Jewish people" make themselves "stronger than any party of life" (A 24), which is to say: stronger than those expressing an *explicitly* natural morality.

In essence, Nietzsche is left with a dilemma. If an anti-natural morality like Christianity really is, deep down, a form of *natural* morality, then there is nothing wrong with it by Nietzsche's (or what he would call "nature's") standards. But if anti-natural morality is *not* as successful as natural morality at fulfilling nature's goals—which he seems to want to argue—then perhaps we are not, not straightforwardly, always already committed to these goals. If we are not, Nietzsche has lost his quasi-internal critical grip on his reader.

Perhaps it is for this reason that Nietzsche suggests, toward the end of *The Antichrist*, that there are such things as Christian "instincts," and that we have these instincts within us (A 59; see, too, the epilogue to CW). Here, he is trying to make anti-natural behavior "instinctive" or natural. But it is not clear how this

can help him. The obvious conclusion from the existence of anti-natural instincts would be that his descriptive claim about nature controlling our values is false: *we moderns* are no longer fully or deeply committed to what "life" wants—we are not always already natural. Elsewhere in *The Antichrist*, the Christian priest is called a "parasite" for "devaluing nature" (A 38). Unwittingly, Nietzsche highlights the problem. A parasite does what is natural to it: it does not devalue nature. My point is not (merely) that Nietzsche contradicts himself: it is that he has to. If the Israelite priests and those who follow them are not fully nature-governed in their actions, then Nietzsche's descriptive account of nature is false. But if they *are* fully nature-governed, then he has no grounds to criticize them for being insufficiently naturally moral. It is telling that, in his praise of the "Manu" laws, Nietzsche admires an explicitly natural, priestly form of domination (A 57).

We have seen that Nietzsche does not recognize the genetic fallacy, at least as standardly presented by critics, in that he thinks that history can be critical. As his medical analogy suggested, history is relevant just where it tells us something relevant: is the medicine/morality effective/naturally valuable? The mistake of the other historians was to take a criticism of the *beliefs* of the Christian as a criticism of their morality's effectiveness. The problem, I am suggesting, is that Nietzsche does the very same, by his standards. It is true, for him, that the Christian *expresses* false, anti-natural beliefs, such as that it is good (or even possible) to be ascetic. But it is *not* true that the Christian's actions are, deep down, anti-natural. Nietzsche's criticisms, like those of his rival historians, end up missing the point.

Notes

- 1 For some examples of this custom, see Loeb 1995: 125–41. On Loeb's own reading, see below. For a sample of subsequent instances, see for example, Kail 2011: 223; Geuss 1999: 20; and Shaw 2010: 89.
- 2 Compare GM P 5 with GM P 6. See Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.
- 3 "Internal" readings include Geuss 1999 and; Conway 1994. I stress cruelty as a present-day motivation because some commentators prefer to present the "immoral" original motives as no longer operational, hence making the "internal" reading less plausible than in fact it is. (Cf. Kail 2011: 222, where he discusses various internal readings.)
- 4 On the question of charitable interpretation, see Stern 2016: 287–302.
- 5 Wellhausen 1883; and Wellhausen 1884. For Nietzsche's notes on Wellhausen, see KSA 13: 11(377): 169–74.
- 6 See Brobjer 1997: 663–93; Sommer 2013: 126–42; and Jaggard 2013: 344–62. While Nietzsche may have been aware of some of Wellhausen's work as early as 1885, it seems that his intensive study of Wellhausen began in 1887.
- 7 A notable exception to this is Jaggard (2013) who provides a very helpful introduction to Nietzsche's relation to Wellhausen. Yorl mentions Wellhausen as a possible source, but his tendency to draw from Nietzsche's corpus as a unified whole obscures Wellhausen's relatively late influence and the resultant changes in Nietzsche's thought (1994: 214–36).
- 8 For example, compare I Smn. 8–9 with Deut. 17:14–20. For discussion, see Nicholson 2002: 5.
- 9 For contemporary criticism of this theory, see Römer 2015: 191–95.
- 10 Of the many simplifications in my necessarily restricted exposition, this one cannot go without comment: J, E, P, and D were never thought to be monolithic texts, each composed and completed at a particular place and time, and then simply cut and pasted together by the last person who got his or her hands on them. In each case, they contain signs of older layers stretching further back. For a sense of the nuance of Wellhausen's analysis (often simplified by his commentators) and that of his critics, see Nicholson 2002.
- 11 See generally Nicholson 2002, and especially 95–160.
- 12 Sommer 2012: 367–69.
- 13 For discussion, see Sommer 2012: 140 and Jaggard 2013: 350.
- 14 Jaggard 2013: 349. Generally, Jaggard's helpful outline does not explore Nietzsche's departures from Wellhausen.
- 15 The other supposed acknowledgments of the genetic fallacy, listed above, also reveal a Nietzsche who makes the second but not the first claim: revealing the shameful origin of some morality does not *itself* amount to critique, he says. It does not follow that *nothing* in the history of those values could be critical. Loeb (1995) has argued against this dominant trend on similar lines, and my discussion is partially indebted to his. However, Loeb views Nietzsche as arguing from a "noble" perspective, which always locates value via descent. I will argue, however, that Nietzsche's key criterion here is not *noble descent* (for which I find little evidence), but what is *naturally valuable* (for which there is a great deal of evidence).
- 16 Although I do not have the space to discuss this issue here, it seems worth making explicit the implication that (late) Nietzsche does indeed claim an objective standard of valuation, namely in "life" or "nature" (as he understands them). It has seemed, to some commentators, that this is incompatible with his "devastating critique of objective validity" (see Conway 1994: 319, 323). In the late Nietzsche, the best evidence for this "devastating critique" appears to be TI "Improvers" 1. I

- take Nietzsche's remarks there merely to indicate that moralities must be judged in terms of their symptoms *in relation to hidden natural values*: Are they symptoms of underlying natural or anti-natural modes? It does not follow that the natural or objective values themselves do not exist.
- 17 Wellhausen, 105. See also the "denaturalisation of festivals in the Priestly Code" (Wellhausen, 105; also pp. 449–50).
- 18 Wellhausen 1883: 254–56, 436–37, and Wellhausen 1884: 10.
- 19 For discussion of Wellhausen's prejudices, see Knight 1982: 21–36 and Silberman 1982: 74–82.

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