Contingency and Necessity in the Genealogy of Morality

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I. Introduction

Michael Forster, in his 2011 study of the historical emergence of the genealogical method of inquiry, performs a "genealogy of genealogy."[1] In contrast to other commentators who take Nietzsche's method of genealogy to be informed by the likes of Paul Rée and David Hume,[2] Forster traces the historical emergence of genealogy back to J. G. Herder and G. W. F. Hegel.

Forster's genealogy of Nietzsche's method bears much insight and demonstrates that there are important differences in the various approaches to the genealogical method of inquiry.[3] For example, as Forster notes, the sort of genealogy that Hegel conducts in *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* (1798–1800) and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) features a methodological framework and argumentative perspective that involves both a strict and logical development of events. According to Forster, Hegel picks up this method from Herder. As Forster notes, Herder, in

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1. Michael Forster, "Genealogy," *American Dialectic* 1, no. 2 (2011): 230–50.
2. Forster claims that David Couzens Hoy and Christopher Janaway are examples of commentators who trace Nietzsche's genealogy to sources such as Hume or Rée, and cites David Couzens Hoy, "Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's* Genealogy of Morals, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1994); and Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's* Genealogy, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).
3. Examples of the various approaches include work by Herder, Hegel, Rée, Stendhal, Nietzsche, and Foucault.

his *Attempt at a History of Lyrical Poetry* (unpublished, 1766), clearly describes his "genetic" methodology:[4]

> [I]t is not only delightful to track down the origin of the objects that we want to understand with some measure of completeness but also necessary. Obviously, we lose with it a large part of the history, and how greatly does the history not serve toward explaining this whole? And moreover, the most important part of the history, from which afterwards everything is derived; for just as the tree can be traced back to its root, so likewise the bloom of an art to its origin. The origin contains within itself the entire nature of its product, just as the whole plant with all its parts lies hidden in the seed; and I will not be able to derive from the *later* condition the degree of illumination that makes my explanation *genetic*.[5]

Critical here is the notion that an "origin contains within itself the entire nature of its product."[6] A genealogy in such spirit would look for mono-originary sources for the object of its investigation. Forster points out that Herder would later revise this methodological position, in the *Fragments on Recent German Literature* (1768), by emphasizing that "a *single* condition in which people saw everything inevitably yielded nothing more than *onesided* observations, divided and incomplete judgments," thereby allowing for the possibility of multiple origins.[7] Not only does Herder allow for this possibility, but he stresses that genealogists should from the beginning of their analyses look for multiple origins or conditions.

Yet Forster does not mention that in the *Fragments* Herder also remarks upon the *chance* nature of historical development. This addition to Herder's methodological positioning is of course fully compatible with the project as described in the *Attempt*, yet it does nevertheless significantly re-situate the genealogy's nature:

> Most things in the world are produced, developed, raised, and torn down by a chance, and not by purposeful efforts, and where now do I mean to get to with my conjectures in a magical land of accident where everything exempts itself most abruptly from the laws of intention and

4. Forster notes that while Herder describes his method as "genetic," his mentor Hamann mentions the "genealogy of a concept" in *Crusades of a Philologist* (1762).

5. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, et al. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877), 32:85–87; cited and trans. in Forster, "Genealogy," p. 233.

6. This notion is typically understood to be the "genetic fallacy."

7. Ibid., 2:62; trans. in Forster, "Genealogy," p. 234.

purposefulness, where everything, and the most valuable things, falls to the hands of the god of chance.... Series of causes cooperated, against and after one another; cog gripped cog, one motive against another, one thing suppressed another without plan or rule, the throws changed fierily and quickly, chance had almost exhausted its bad lots before better ones fell.[8]

This sort of genealogy—i.e., one that offers an explanation or interpretation while also carefully conceding that causality and development are (to at least some degree) attributable to random events—resonates with a Foucauldian vision of genealogy that features a loose, disorderly progression from the power dynamics of one event to the next.[9] Foucault writes that:

Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.[10]

These examinations of the genealogical methods of Herder and Foucault raise a question with the entire project. Following both authors, if the historical events that a genealogy describes are linked through accident and chance, then what role do our explanations or interpretations play? Recall that Foucault, for his part, wanted to distance his method from originary investigation. After all, for one moment placing to the side the so-called genetic fallacy, if events are only loosely causally linked, then in what sense could "origins" exist? If developments are born of chance, how is it that one could be reasonably sure that any "origin" lacked precedent in an even *earlier* origin?

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8. Ibid., 2:64–65; trans. in Forster, "Genealogy," p. 235.
9. An example of Foucauldian genealogy is found in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). This work is generally held to be the first work of Foucault's genealogical period, with all previous work belonging to an "archaeological" period.
10. Michel Foucault, *Memory, Counter-memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977), p. 146.

These questions, and their divorce from Foucault's genealogy, demonstrate that a genealogy is philosophically useful in a manner independent of origins. As Robert Guay notes in a recent essay on genealogy's philosophical function, Nietzsche explicitly dismisses the simple association of value and origin as sickly.[11] Yet, if one restricts or dismisses the involvement of origins in the *philosophical* activity of the genealogical project, what then is it that a genealogy is *doing*?

This problem affects Nietzsche's genealogy insofar as one goal of the project—to enact "a *critique* of moral values"—operates through developmental progress rather than originary investigation. An origin, assuming one is conceivable, can be read as the starting point from which genealogical work may begin. The work itself will be focused in the relationship of individual events and their associated concepts. Thus a solution to the question of genealogy's utility, to the extent that the question affects Nietzsche's genealogy, will require an engagement with the contextualized status of conceptual development.

Are our values, as the products of these developments, to be understood as contingent eventualities, or do we come to them out of necessity? Are we forced to choose?

In this essay I explore the nature of the necessity of historical development in Nietzsche's genealogy of Judeo-Christian moral values.[12] I argue that the progression of moral stages in Nietzsche's study is ordered in such a way that the failure of each stage is logically and structurally necessary, that each failure structures the resultant system or paradigm, but that the historical manifestation of moral paradigms coinciding with predicted or projected theoretical structures is contingent upon a multitude of other historical factors. Therefore, the systematic internal failures of moral stages allow for, but do not cause, successive events.[13]

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11. Robert Guay, "The Philosophical Function of Genealogy," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), p. 355.

12. It must be pointed out that Nietzsche is committed to the position that concepts like contingency and necessity are human constructs. The distinction nevertheless remains useful in understanding the *Genealogy*.

13. By "allow for" I mean that the systematic internal failures of moral stages establish the possibility of the occurrence of successive moral paradigms. I will raise a distinction between this establishment of possibility and strict causality.

II. Nietzsche

Given that there are differences in genealogical methodologies, one naturally wonders what sort of genealogy Nietzsche carries out in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887). For while Forster traces the historical emergence of genealogy to Herder, he does not equate the approach of Herder with the method as enacted by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy*.[14] Though Herder and Foucault ostensibly write genealogies in the spirit of chance historical development, Nietzsche's version warrants a more complex treatment of the status of chance, especially given that there is disagreement concerning the character of Nietzsche's genealogical method. For example, Raymond Geuss argues that "there is nothing necessary" about any of it.[15] Geuss takes this to be the case since Nietzsche's views look to be irreconcilable with underlying metaphysical structures. Robert Guay, on the other hand, counters that:

> Nietzsche claimed not only that nihilism is our current condition, but that we have arrived here out of necessity. In fact, the entire route that genealogy traces is, according to Nietzsche, a necessary one: there was no decisive point, no crucial missteps, no alternate paths.[16]

Guay emphasizes that the necessity that the *Genealogy* evokes has to do with "meaning" rather than "mechanism or logic." He is on the right track here, pointing out that the necessity that Geuss worries about does not mark a problem for Nietzsche. After all, Nietzsche, in the preface to the *Genealogy*, points out that our values and thoughts are as inevitable for us as is the fruit for a tree.[17]

Yet Guay then describes the implications of necessity in Nietzsche's project in terms that evoke Aristotle: "If someone is of a particular culture, or has a particular character, she is not merely *very* likely to act in certain ways; she acts in certain ways *because* of who she is."[18] This may be right,

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14. In fact, Forster mentions in a footnote that Nietzsche perspectivally undertakes genealogy as does Foucault. He sees a distinction, then, between the method of these two authors and the older method of Herder.

15. Raymond Geuss, "Nietzsche and Morality," *European Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1977): 11.

16. Guay, "The Philosophical Function of Genealogy," p. 364.

17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 4.

18. Ibid., pp. 366–67.

but there is a better way of describing the role of necessity and contingency in the *Genealogy*: anything could have happened (contingency), but only certain things did happen, and these things that did happen are necessary. It is fitting that this description echoes Herder's own assessment of genealogy:

> Now if one sketches according to a philosophical heuristics plans concerning how a thing could have arisen, should have arisen, one makes a fool of oneself with all one's a priori fundamental principles! Not how language should have arisen, could have arisen, but how it arose—that is the question![19]

Nevertheless, chance marks a tricky issue for Nietzsche because in *Daybreak* he very openly questions the "fable" of demarcated spheres of purposive willing and chance occurrence.[20] What this means, though, is that his genealogy will situate itself conceptually somewhere *in between* the two poles of chance and necessity. Each moral stage in his genealogy necessarily fails at least partly in virtue of structure. Each failure in turn generates the structure of the successive moral stage. These moral stages are interlinked to a number of factors in addition to prior systematic self-contradictions. The "necessary" component of Nietzsche's genealogy is internal conceptual failure within individual paradigms or phases, but the development of paradigms is empirically contingent upon human agency and a social sphere.

The necessity in the genealogy must not be interpreted in too strict of a sense, which is the mistake that Geuss makes. This concept of necessity is precisely that which Nietzsche admonishes as fable. However, at the same time, one may not attribute all of the moral developments that the genealogy describes to the play of random forces. While we may speculate upon the structure of immanent moral systems, the genesis of any given moral system is contingent upon the force of social history itself, and, in fact, not merely engendered through the necessity of conceptual failure.

It is imperative, therefore, that one identifies the components of necessity in Nietzsche's genealogy to be persistent and deep conceptual problems

19. Herder, *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, 2:62–65; cited and trans. in Forster, "Genealogy," p. 235.

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), § 130, pp. 80–82.

with the consistency of moral statements and their basis in linguistic constructs, since these components provide structure to genealogical analysis. However, while the genealogy is philosophically useful for its alternative approach to the contingency-necessity dichotomy, it remains imperative that readers of the *Genealogy* still distinguish necessary components from other, contingent aspects of moral development, such as the movement of history itself as it is enacted by humans and society, while at the same time keeping in mind that Nietzsche is highly skeptical of contingency and necessity.[21]

III. The Necessity of Conceptual Failure

In the first section of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche explicitly explains that in order for humans to have control of their futures, they must:

> first have learnt to distinguish between what happens by accident and what by design, to think causally, to view the future as the present and anticipate it, to grasp with certainty what is end and what is means, in all, to be able to calculate, compute—and before he can do this, man himself will really have to become *reliable*, *regular*, *necessary*, even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable for his own *future*![22]

In this remark, Nietzsche offers to his readers the way in which they are to read the genealogy. If, in order to hold mastery over our own lives, it is necessary that we understand both the differences and the identity between contingent and necessary occurrences, and if the genealogy, as a path to mastery, is itself an account of historical developments concerning our systems of morality, then the genealogy must feature aspects of contingency and necessity. I argue that the contingent aspects of Nietzsche's genealogy are the behaviors of humans and social groups, while the necessary aspects are the internal self-failures of moral concepts.

If the development of the moral paradigms evaluated within the genealogy is a matter of strict and pure necessity, then it is not clear that the

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21. Alasdair MacIntyre notes the importance of social evaluation for a moral genealogist in his "Genealogies and Subversions," in Schacht, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, p. 290.

22. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 39.

genealogy has any way of helping us reconsider our own relationships to morality. After all, if each moral worldview is the result of necessary causation, then there is nothing to be done differently, and there is no alternative way in which events could have transpired. Since a moral system is present out of necessity, then, humans should adhere to the principle of *amor fati*: they should love what is necessary, and accept it, understanding that all turns out for the best. As Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth!"[23] Of course, such a strictly necessary understanding of the *Genealogy* clearly undermines the aforementioned advice that Nietzsche gives his readers in the text itself. Therefore, the concept of *amor fati* must be balanced with Nietzsche's understanding of the complicated relationship between contingency and necessity, determinism and libertarianism.

Similarly, if the conceptual failure of moral paradigms is purely contingent, then readers of the *Genealogy* would stand nothing to gain over their futures in reading an account of the coincidental failure of previous moral paradigms. Indeed, it is difficult for one to fathom a reading of the genealogy by way of which a current moral worldview could be criticized with the knowledge that we have only arrived at such a worldview by chance alone. After all, if we are not in the least responsible for our current moral values, then how can we adopt a critical stance toward them?

It is imperative that we precisely consider the contingent status of certain components of the genealogy's moral developments. If, as I have outlined in my introduction as well as in the previous paragraph, we take it that a present moral paradigm is to be accounted for not only in terms of genesis from internal failure but also in terms of contingent historical events, then any present moral paradigm in the genealogy (as Nietzsche presents it and I later expand it) will be reliant upon a component of necessity as well as a component (or components) of contingency. Therefore, it is never the case that any of the moral worldviews that we deal with in the Nietzschean project is "only" a product of chance.

Furthermore, a solely contingent series of developments would entirely undermine the project of the genealogy to the extent that a historical

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23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), § 276, p. 223.

explanation that made appeal to disorderly progression would leave no space for moral beings to reevaluate their own positions. Hence, within a solely contingent framework (devoid of structural necessity), no matter the nature of one's present moral worldview, there would always be the possibility that, through chance, the possible revolutionary worldview of tomorrow could radically revise normativity. With such a possibility, the genealogy would itself hold no philosophical importance.

Examining the nature of moral developments in Nietzsche's *Genealogy* illustrates the sense in which necessary structure and contingent action each equally effect a progression. Take, for example, the development of the nihilistic moral ideal out of the ascetic moral ideal. The ascendance of the ascetic ideal, as a side effect of the human's suffering from and self-blame for the problem of life's meaning, is necessarily self-contradictory: the will to truth destroys itself. This is what Robert Pippin calls the ascetic ideal's "relentless inner logic."[24] Ascetic morality's inherent absolutism therefore yields nihilism out of necessity, while still being contingent insofar as any other moral paradigm could have been the case. Herder may not have appreciated the contingent side of these affairs, but without such a conditional nature, what people actually *do* with ideas of morality is left entirely by the wayside. Morals require people to hold them, to abide by them, and to apply them—even if these morals contain self-undermining logical bases. Now, Nietzsche clearly raises the question of the normativity of ideas and values in the preface to the *Genealogy*, wherein he indicates that before one may adopt a value, one must assess the value of the value itself. The question, then, of which values to adopt—a matter of contingency, dependent upon processes of mind—relates closely to the questioning of the conceptual structure and development of values themselves.

The problem of necessity in the *Genealogy* is that as people remained in the Judeo-Christian moral framework and chose to follow the moral paradigms therein, the constituent values were self-problematizing. Yet there remained nevertheless the role of the moral adherent in a position of contingency: to proceed with the new value that the present value produced in its self-failure, or to turn back in a critical way to the present

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24. Robert Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), p. 259.

value itself. This latter choice is that taken, in admittedly nuanced ways, by Kant, Herder, Nietzsche, and Foucault.

So given the room to carry on or to critique, the development and lineage of a moral framework could have ended abruptly at any point.[25] Moral beings—e.g., people who hold an ascetic moral worldview—are required in order for a moral ideal to have any power and come into prominence. What's more, the ideas of morality could spread only through social interaction and communication; these values did not spread through an independent, sudden realization by millions of individual persons. Regardless of the theoretical value of the ascetic ideal, it cannot be denied that ideals require people to hold them, to spread them, and to abide by them.[26] However, the self-deterministic nature of moral ideals is sometimes misread in the *Genealogy*. Robert Guay, for example, describes the genealogy in terms of destructive and independent authority enacted by values alone. He confuses the theoretical destruction and authority of ideals with an empirical situation that must give rise to the ideals and values, as well as their development. Further discussion of the function of the genealogy, following Guay's own analysis, may demonstrate that there is more to Nietzsche's project than conceptual description alone.

IV. Genealogical Functions

If we understand Nietzsche to utilize the genealogical method for its philosophical usefulness and explanatory power, and if the genealogy of morality is designed to return to us some degree of control over our commitment (or dismissal) of morality, then it seems unlikely that a purely "postmodernist" interpretation of the developments contained in Nietzsche's genealogy could fit within such a framework of utility. In his 2006 examination of the philosophical work done by Nietzsche's genealogy, Guay points out that the method features both formal and functional characteristics that bestow it with relevance for a philosophical evaluation of morality.[27] His functional characteristics are particularly insightful in demonstrating that purposiveness lies behind Nietzsche's genealogy.

25. This is why the genealogical method of historical evaluation cannot be used to predict future moral models, which do not yet correspond to observable behaviors exhibited by people: whether a concept features a "relentless inner logic" or not, it must be the concept (or value) of *someone*.

26. Guay, "The Philosophical Function of Genealogy," p. 265.

27. Ibid.

According to Guay, the genealogy of morality:

> Fn_1 is a critical activity to scrutinize and find fault with defective viewpoints,
>
> Fn_2 affords self-knowledge to humanity,
>
> Fn_3 and enables us to assess the value of values.[28]

One is hard-pressed to come up with ways by which the genealogy could perform any of these functions if the historical developments that are the objects of its analysis were only contingently or disorderly linked. Such is the position of Geuss, which has been identified as incompatible with Nietzsche's own account of his project.

In order to counterbalance the purely random reading of the *Genealogy,* one should add the following trait to Guay's list. The genealogy of morality:

> Fn_4 identifies conceptual systems and their cogency, through interpretive and logical analysis, as the systems occur within particular historical contexts.

This functional trait holds textual support found in the very first essay of the *Genealogy*, in which Nietzsche criticizes the failure of previous "historians of morality" to possess a proper "historical spirit."[29] Guay notes that each of his functional characteristics are well-founded through a more-or-less straightforward reading of Nietzsche's own writing on the nature of his work. For example, Nietzsche identifies the destruction of old values as his critical project in *Ecce Homo*,[30] and he implies that genealogy is the locus of humanity's knowledge of itself, observable in the preface to the *Genealogy*.[31] Nietzsche also indicates that general value assessment is enabled through genealogy.[32] The first three

28. Ibid., p. 356. The particular formulation of the functional characteristics that I present is my own interpretation of Guay's argument; in other words, this excerpt is not a direct citation from his study.

29. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Essay, § 6, p. 12.

30. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Beyond Good and Evil," § 1, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 134.

31. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface, § 1, p. 3.

32. Ibid., Preface, § 6, p. 8.

functional characteristics are therefore complemented by the addition of the fourth.

To reiterate for maximal emphasis given the aims of this study, if we take the genealogy to expose defective viewpoints, establish self-knowledge, and revalue values only by virtue of its contextual-conceptual method, then it is not at all clear how the description of contingent his-torical developments could call into question any given moral worldview. Indeed, to the extent that the genealogy operates by illuminating the internal failures of previous moral systems, and in so doing establishes the shortcomings of present and prior moralities, the genealogical method cannot feature coincidental failures because such failures would not be internal or directional, and would not result from internal conceptual self-defeat. In other words, contingently failing moral paradigms could not be attributable to conceptual constitution, and would be very much at odds with the necessity of logical, internal self-defeat.

Directional, systematic failures are precisely those that Nietzsche clearly sought to expose:

> What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism*. This history can be related even now, for necessity itself is at work here. . . . For some time now, our whole European culture has been mov-ing toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.[33]

Adapted from Nietzsche's notebooks of 1887–89, this excerpt from the preface of the posthumously published (and controversial) *The Will to Power* (1968) is telling in two ways. First, this passage indicates that Nietzsche strictly interprets the conceptual structures within the genealogy as ordered out of necessity. Second, it indicates that through the causally necessary relationship of one historical stage to another, he is able to iden-tify the present moral stage of his time: nihilism.

This second point raises a key reminder within the present discussion of the understanding of necessity in the genealogy. The problem is that if each moral stage conceptually fails through self-contradiction, and these self-contradictory, systematic failures are understood to be necessary, then

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33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hol-lingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 3.

it seems that it should be possible to carry the genealogical method into the future in such a way that the likely structure of concepts, but not the manifestation of moral stages, is thinkable.[34] Since Nietzsche indicates that through a genealogical investigation it is possible to identify "what is coming" even if the nihilistic stage is the current stage, it must not be assumed that nihilism marks a final stage.[35] Some commentators, such as Guay, have occasionally taken this to be the case.[36]

In fact, Nietzsche refers to the nihilistic "will to nothingness" as something to be overcome: the strong must "have no need of extreme dogmas" and conceive of humanity "with a significant reduction in [its] value without thereby becoming small and weak."[37] Perhaps most importantly, it is imperative that nihilism is not read as a post-moral or anti-moral stage, but rather as a moral stage in its own right.[38] Indeed, nihilism is *not* Nietzsche's ideal, although Christian apologists as well as secular commentators have at times been prone to ascribe to Nietzsche such a worldview.[39]

Ultimately the present extent and depth of nihilism marks no difficulty for the point to be made. While the genealogical method is a method of historical philosophy, Nietzsche nevertheless ostensibly uses the genealogy

34. At the very least, the immediately impending moral stage should be discernible. Nietzsche clearly took this to be the case.

35. There is no scholarly consensus on whether nihilism is already here or is impending. At times Nietzsche characterizes Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will as a "will to nothingness," while at other times he refers to the "will to nothingness" as something as of yet incomplete. Heidegger remarked that "no one will still deny today that nihilism is . . . 'the normal state' of man" (Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being,* trans. William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958], p. 47).

36. Guay, "The Philosophical Function of Genealogy," p. 364.

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On European Nihilism," § 15, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, trans. Duncan Large (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), p. 389.

38. After all, does not a "will to nothingness" constitute a moral system by way of which one can do as they please? Within such a framework, any action is as attractive and justifiable as any other. Therefore, pity would be a suitable behavior; yet Nietzsche very clearly condemns pity (and other actions), and hence condones neither an ascetic morality, a nihilistic morality, *nor*, most importantly, an outright lack of direction. Actions evocative of a "will to life" but free from the scope of established, dominant, and self-defeating moralities would presumably be attractive to Nietzsche's sensibility.

39. I plan to follow this study with an examination of the sense in which overcoming nihilism by way of turning to a relativistic worldview could be read as commensurable with the project of overcoming outlined in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It seems to me that, *prima facie*, there is support for arguing this relation of relativism to the overman as compatible or entirely contradictory.

as a tool to predict events that have, at least, not *fully* come to fruition, for it is clear that Nietzsche at the very least takes nihilism to be incomplete (if not already fully enacted). Recall that for a reading of the genealogical method to navigate the tension between contingency and necessity, interpretive evaluations must be tied to empirical events. According to such a reading, Nietzsche must have thought that nihilism was (perhaps to a debatable extent) active at the time of the publication of the *Genealogy*.

V. The Contingency of Enactment

It is remarkable that some commentators and readers of the *Genealogy* have observed strict causal necessity in control of the developments of moral history to the extent that Nietzsche begins his historical evaluation, in the first essay, with the identification of the slave revolt as a contingent event that depended upon social events enacted by humans.[40] As Raymond Geuss points out, one of the contingent events from which the entire moral development springs forth is the division of a ruling group into warrior and priest partitions.[41] When carefully considered, the empirical events described in the *Genealogy* are difficult for the conscientious reader to misinterpret as the results of pure conceptual contradictions.

After all, it is by no means necessary that humans always act in accordance with the strict laws of logic. Insofar as humans are able to accept or to ignore—to champion or to condemn—ways of looking at and living in the world, there is nothing empirically "necessary" about developments in moral worldviews. However, some commentators misguidedly read the implications of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* in precisely this way. For example, Guay asserts that:

> Nietzsche claimed not only that nihilism is our contemporary condition, but that we have arrived here out of *necessity*. In fact, the entire route that genealogy traces is, according to Nietzsche, a necessary one: there was no decisive point, no crucial missteps, no alternate paths.[42]

The problem with a reading such as this is that the structure of conceptual systems, as necessarily related to one another, is confused with the force of history itself. Throughout this essay I have made a point in demonstrating

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40. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Section 1, §§ 6, 7, and 9, p. 3.
41. Geuss, "Nietzsche and Morality," p. 11.
42. Guay, "The Philosophical Function of Genealogy," p. 364.

that humans themselves, as required for values, cannot be removed from any full understanding of the genealogical project. Furthermore, the rigid struggle between contingency and necessity must be exchanged in favor of a symbiotic relationship between the two. Without such a relationship, the genealogy achieves little of philosophical value.

Some might object that this takes the explanatory power away from the genealogical method of philosophically evaluating history. This is not the case: Genealogy is philosophically relevant for explaining an empirically occurring moral paradigm insofar as the structure of the paradigm is conceptually related to prior models. Genealogy lacks the power, though, to remove from humanity the force of affect and worldly experience. The belief or lack of belief in morality is not a purely conceptual matter, nor is it purely a matter of necessity; humans act in accordance with their feelings as they make moral decisions. Feelings are, for Nietzsche, informed by conceptual worldviews, but the relationship between the two warrants the devoted focus of another essay.

In this paper I have argued that there *is* something necessary in the *Genealogy*: it is the structural scope of possibilities in which any given moral paradigm could subsist. I have also argued that there is something contingent in the genealogy: the place at which a person situates her or himself within the scope of possibilities. In order to take from the *Genealogy* Nietzsche's goal for his readers, that is, accountability for the future, one must acknowledge both the necessity and contingency in moral developments, which Nietzsche himself strongly urges all to do. Only then may we move toward living life-affirming existences, and only then may we truly take up the project of creating new values.