

Strangers to Ourselves: Nietzsche on The Will to Truth, The Scientific Spirit, Free Will, and Genuine Selfhood

1. Introduction¹

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* contains many striking claims. Perhaps most striking is the claim that the scientific spirit's will to truth is the last expression of the ascetic ideal. What could Nietzsche mean by this extraordinary claim? Before answering this question we need to identify the most general aim of the *Genealogy*. It is important to unravel Nietzsche's general aim because the polemical and rhetorical subtlety of the *Genealogy* often allows, indeed deliberately cajoles, the reader into comforting but mistaken notions of Nietzsche's objective. This typically leads to superficial interpretations of such fundamental claims as that the will to truth is an expression of the ascetic ideal. Only when we have recognised his ultimate polemical aim are we properly equipped to interpret the full meaning and force of such claims. However, because Nietzsche employs a strategy of deliberate misdirection, in order to properly understand his aim it is important to analyse his strategy for achieving it. In the first part of this essay (sections 2 and 3 below), after first expounding what I take to be Nietzsche's central strategy and aim in the *Genealogy*, I seek to elucidate some of his central claims about the will to truth. It is my general contention that the real target of Nietzsche's polemic only comes explicitly into view when he comes, in the third essay, to make his extraordinary claims about the will to truth and science. That target is us, his readers. Nietzsche argues that our will to truth actually functions as a tool to repress and split off part of our nature. The second part of the essay (sections 4 and 5 below) deals with Nietzsche's account of the sovereign individual and his related, novel, account of free will. Both these accounts hinge on the notion of the self as an integrated whole. It is argued that, in contrasting the integrated sovereign individual, who has genuine free will, and we splintered moderns, who are the mere playthings of a myriad of disparate influences, Nietzsche aims to unsettle us with uncanny suggestion that we have no genuine selves. For Nietzsche, we are strangers to ourselves not just in the sense that we lack knowledge about our deeper motivations, but in the more profound sense that we are estranged from ourselves in that we contain drives and affects that are split off from each other. Instead of a unified whole we moderns are but a jumbled congeries of competing drives. In the third part of this essay (section 6 below) it is shown that the invocation of the uncanny is actually a central strategy Nietzsche uses to bring home to us his disturbing message that we splintered moderns are strangers to ourselves.

¹ Quotations from, and references to, Nietzsche's works make use of the following abbreviations, 'UM' for *Untimely Meditations*, 'GS' for *The Gay Science*, 'TSZ' for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'BGE' for *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'GM' for *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'EH' for *Ecce Homo*, 'A' for *The Antichrist*, 'TI' for *Twilight of the Idols*, 'WP' for *The Will to Power*, 'KSA' for *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, 'D' for *Daybreak*, and 'HAH' for *Human, All Too Human*. Full bibliographic references for these works and other texts mentioned below are given at the end of this essay.

Part I

2. A Strategy of Misdirection

In the first section of his preface to the *Genealogy* Nietzsche tells his readers, that we are “strangers to ourselves”. This beautiful and uncanny phrase is an echo of the very first line of the preface;

We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers: and for a good reason.

Of course, in his typical elliptical fashion, Nietzsche does not tell us what that good reason is.² Indeed, the whole theme of our being strangers to ourselves is quickly and quietly dropped. Nietzsche, in the second section of the preface, brings up what is ostensibly the focus of the *Genealogy*, the question of the origins of our morality – as Nietzsche says, “that is what this polemic is about” [GM, Preface, 2]. Certainly the first essay, with its main theme of the triumph of Judeo-Christian slave morality over the Greek/Roman master morality, seems to bear out the claim that his polemic is about the origins of morality.³ And, to take us further from the opening claim that we are strangers to ourselves, Nietzsche suggests in the first essay, and explicitly emphasizes in the second, that showing the origins of something tells us little if anything about its current purpose and value.

But if that is so, then, how can Nietzsche’s aim be to show us that we are strangers to ourselves? How can the *Genealogy* be about who we are, when it is telling us mainly about our ancestors? To see the solution to the problem we must realise that the *Genealogy*, like so many of Nietzsche’s

² Nietzsche does tell us “We have never sought ourselves” [GM, Preface, 1]. But this is hardly an answer to the question of why we are unknown to ourselves. Since we are knowers who enquire persistently about practically everything, it merely raises the question of why have we not sought ourselves.

³ Notoriously, the first essay of the *Genealogy* leaves the reader in some confusion about who exactly are the bearers of master morality referred to in the text. In much of the text, especially the early sections, it seems Nietzsche has the Greeks in mind. His first explicit mention of a particular nobility is that of Greek nobility in section 5, and his characterisation in section 10 of the nobles, as self-affirming and merely condescendingly pitying to the slaves, is presented solely with reference to Greek nobility. Section 11, which stresses the recklessness and life affirming nature of the nobles, contains references to Pericles, the Athenians, Hesiod, and Homer. Indeed, Romans only get sustained mention in section 16, the penultimate section of the first essay. By contrast, the Jewish slaves of resentment, who are presumably more connected to the Romans than the Greeks, are given substantial mention as early as section 7. The early juxtaposition between Jewish slaves and Greek masters is confusing since, of course, it was the Romans who were eventually, on Nietzsche’s account, conquered by the Jews through their conversion to Christianity. This is captured in Nietzsche’s phrase, “Judea against Rome”; Jewish slave morality directly triumphed over Roman master morality, not Greek master morality. This unheralded, confusing displacement of the reference of ‘nobles’ from Greeks to Romans is deliberate and serves a strategic purpose as argued in section 6 below.

texts, divides into a manifest and a latent content. Nietzsche cannot afford to be too explicit about that latent content because it is challenging and terrifying, striking at the very centre of our self-conception. Like a clever psychoanalyst, he knows that a direct approach will merely awaken the patient's/reader's defences and provoke a reflex denial and a refusal to countenance his message. Moreover, Nietzsche believes that mere intellectual knowledge can often work against deeper forms of realization that are necessary for genuine change. Nietzsche, educated by Schopenhauer, regarded consciousness as being a rather shallow phenomenon, almost to the point of dismissing it as epiphenomenal. Prefiguring Freud, he claimed that for ideas to be truly effective they must work on us at a level below consciousness. Thus, in the *Genealogy*, he chooses to approach his aim obliquely. He starts at some distance from us, with our ancestors and even suggests that his examination of them does not have direct and immediate consequences for us. But, in fact, Nietzsche is talking about us, first indirectly and later directly. He is telling us deeply disturbing and momentous truth about ourselves, though we may not at first recognise that we are the subjects who are being damned in his polemic. That such indirection is the method of the *Genealogy* is something Nietzsche himself claims in *Ecco Homo*:

Every time a beginning that is calculated to mislead Gradually ... very disagreeable truths are heard grumbling in the distance. [EH, *Genealogy of Morals A Polemic*]

We are for Nietzsche strangers to ourselves for the very good reason that to face who we are is a challenge requiring momentous courage, a challenge which, properly undertaken, should precipitate a shattering struggle. But, as Nietzsche warns us in the very first section of the preface of the *Genealogy*, such challenges provoke strong resistances:

In such matters we are never really "with it": we just don't have our heart there – or even our ear.

Though, he suggests that when his true message is registered,

we will rub our ears *afterwards* and ask completely amazed, completely disconcerted, "What did we actually experience just now?" still more: "who *are* we actually?" [Nietzsche's italics]

The italics here are very telling. The emphasis on 'afterwards' is an indication of Nietzsche's belief that only after his message has slowly snuck through our defences will we recognise what the *Genealogy* is really about. The emphasis on 'are' is an indication that the *Genealogy* is ultimately about who we are and not, as it might first appear, about who our ancestors were.⁴

3. Truth and the Ascetic Ideal

⁴ The question of how seriously Nietzsche takes the various historical analyses offered in the *Genealogy* is dealt with in greater detail in section 6 below.

What then is the kernel of Nietzsche's message that might lead us to question who we really are? Basically, the *Genealogy* teaches that our much prized morality, in particular, our evaluations of good and evil (essay I), our concept of conscience (essay II), and our commitment to truth (essay III) are all expressions of impotence and sublimated hostility. In order to get his readers to appreciate this message, Nietzsche engages his readers' interest by using history as a means for creating a distance between his ostensive subject, the origins of morality, and his real subject, the sickness in our current morality. It is in section 23 of the third essay that we find ourselves for the first time more directly addressed. Having exposed the historical roots of our sense of morality, and sense of conscience, characterising these as handymen to the life denying ascetic ideal, Nietzsche there asks if there is not a new counter-ideal in the modern ideal of truth, objectivity and science.⁵ Here he is directly engaging his readers who identify themselves as adhering to this modern ideal, which they take as being fundamentally opposed to the religiously motivated ascetic ideal. Secular readers, inspired by Enlightenment ideals, have little resistance to recognising that the religious founders of Judaeo-Christian morality were in fact inspired by hatred and envy. They see themselves as being far removed from that religious mentality. This provides the comforting "pathos of distance" that allows the first and second essay to do their work on the reader. But in section 23 Nietzsche provides what he hopes will be a moment of self-recognition when he responds to his question about the existence of a counter-ideal by claiming that the will to truth, the will to objectivity, is not the means by which we have escaped the religious world and its associated ascetic ideal. Rather, it is, in fact, the last and most complete expression of that ideal. This is the moment when we are meant to rub our ears! How is it that we who have thrown off the crutches of superstition and religious obscurantism, who have committed ourselves to embrace the truth at any cost, and thus relinquished the comforting myth of a world to come, can be accused of participating in the ascetic ideal? As Nietzsche himself says, it is our very love of truth that has allowed us to realise the falsity behind the ascetic ideal, the hollowness of religious claims [cf. GM, III, 27]. Now he relies on our love of truth to force us to recognise the true meaning of that very love. Here Nietzsche is thinking primarily as a psychologist and is looking at the latent meaning of our commitment to truth. That commitment, he maintains, stems from the same motivation that fuelled commitment to religious ascetic values, namely, fear of life and feelings of impotence.

The religious person attempts to remove himself from the torments of this world, a world that largely resists his desires, by telling himself that what happens in this life is ultimately unimportant. He tells himself that what matters is what is in his soul, which will determine his real, eternal, life in the world to come. The modern scholar similarly removes himself from life by

⁵ In this text where Nietzsche talks of 'Wissenschaft' I talk of 'science'. However it is important to recall that for the German speakers of the 19th century, and indeed for Germans speakers of today, Wissenschaft does not simply refer to what we call the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) such as physics, chemistry and biology, but also to the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaft) such as philology and philosophy and even formal sciences such as Mathematics and Geometry. We do better, then, to think of the practitioners of Wissenschaften as scholars than as scientists.

telling himself that what is of ultimate value is not acting in this world, not what he does, but in understanding the world, in what he knows. Both the religious ascetic and the ascetic scholar believe “the truth will set you free”. Nietzsche has realized that here to be free means to be free of the pull of this world, the tumult of earthly passions and desires. Just as the ascetic ideal demands suppression of the passions, so the scholar’s emphasis on objectivity and truth demands “the emotions cooled” [GM III, 25]. Where the religious take revenge upon the world by denying that it is of ultimate importance, the scholar revenges himself by saying that passive understanding is of greater value than “mere” action. The Enlightener values reasons and reasonable belief and is suspicious of passions and unreasoned desire. But life, at least genuine life, ultimately is a world of passions and desires. Thus, claims Nietzsche, (the pursuit of) science can act as a means of withdrawal from the world:

Science as a means of self-anaesthetisation: *are you acquainted with that?* [Genealogy III, 24 – italics Nietzsche’s]

Indeed, Nietzsche had in earlier works already claimed that such repression of passions, as exhibited in the scholar, is part of a death drive. In *The Gay Science*, in a passage that Nietzsche explicitly directs us to in section 28 of the third essay of the *Genealogy*, he characterises the will not to be deceived as something that might be

a principle hostile to life and destructive - “Will to truth” – that can be a hidden will to death. [GS 344]

In the same place he tell us

those who are truthful in the audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than the world of life, nature, and history. [Nietzsche’s italics]

These thoughts Nietzsche first fully thematized in his early work the *Untimely Meditations*. There, in the second essay, “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life”, he characterises “the scholar, the man of science” as one who “stands aside from life so as to know it unobstructedly” [UM, II 10]. Focusing on the use of history, Nietzsche contrasts his demand that we use history for “life and action” with the scholar’s use of history for the ends of “easy withdrawal from life and action” [UM, II, Foreword]. Nietzsche pictures “the historical virtuoso of the present day” as “a passive sounding board” whose tone and message “lulls us and makes us tame spectators” [UM, II, 6]. It is the desire to stand aside from life that links the scholar and the priest as practitioners of the ascetic ideal. In the “Advantages and Disadvantages” essay Nietzsche uses metaphors of mirroring, castration and impotence to capture the passivity of the scholar, and, in particular, the historian. These metaphors Nietzsche repeats throughout his corpus in order to emphasise the same point. In the “On the Advantages and Disadvantages” essay he ask the rhetorical question

[o]r is it selflessness when the historical man lets himself be blown into an objective mirror? [UM, II, 8, my translation]

In the same essay Nietzsche asserts that the scholar's ideal of pure objectivity would characterise "a race of eunuchs". [UM II 5]⁶

In *Beyond Good and Evil* [207] Nietzsche again captures the element of passivity and otherworldliness behind the exorbitant overvaluation of truth and objectivity by referring to "the objective person....the *ideal* scholar" as

a mirror: he is accustomed to submitting before whatever wants to be known, without any other pleasure than that found in knowing and "mirroring".

Later, in the same section, he refers to the scholar as a "mirror soul, eternally smoothing itself out". These are themes that are also repeated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the sections "Of Immaculate Perception" and "Of Scholars". In the first of these sections Zarathustra characterizes those who seek 'pure knowledge' as hypocrites, on the grounds that while they are men of earthly lusts they have "been persuaded to contempt of the earthly". Again, Nietzsche has recourse to the metaphors of passive mirroring, when he expresses the voice of those seekers of pure knowledge as follows:

For me the highest thing would be to gaze at life without desire ... I desire nothing of things, except that I may lie down before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes.

He also repeats the metaphors of impotence and castration in that same section when those who seek pure knowledge are told,

[t]ruly you do not love the earth as creators, begettersBut now your emasculated leering wants to be called 'contemplation'!

The metaphor of the scholar as mirror is also used in the *Genealogy*. There, in describing modern historiography, which he characterises as being "to a high degree ascetic" and "to a still higher degree nihilistic", Nietzsche says modern historiography's "[n]oblest claim is that it is a mirror" [GM, III, 26].⁷ In the same section there are multiple metaphors of castration and

⁶ The third essay of *Genealogy*, may, to some degree, be seen as a reprise of "On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life". In both essays Nietzsche questions the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself, and points out that this mentality betrays a fear of life. However a significant difference is that the *Genealogy* contains much greater psychological insight into the motivation and mindset behind this pursuit. Also it is much more sophisticated in the means it employs to get the reader to appreciate this point. It is possible that by the time of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche had come to see that his untimely message of the hollowness at the core of our current culture needed to be delivered in a much more subtle way if it was to make an impression on his complacent, self-satisfied, audience.

⁷ Chris Janaway has helpfully pointed out that Nietzsche's repeated negative references to passive mirroring when characterising the will to truth and objectivity are probably a deliberate reference to, and in contrast with, Schopenhauer who favourably spoke of the intellect "abolishing all possibility of suffering" [WWR, II, 368] when it renounces all interest and becomes "the clear mirror of the world" [WWR, II, 380]. It is presumably Nietzsche's early struggles with Schopenhauer that first alerted him

impotence. For instance, Nietzsche, with a side reference to the famous historian Renan, characterises certain “objective” “armchair” “contemplatives” in terms of their

cowardly contemplativeness, the lecherous eunuchry, in the face of history, the making eyes as ascetic ideas, the justice-Tartuffery of impotence! [GM, III, 26]

The core of Nietzsche’s objection to both the ascetic ideal and its last incarnation, the will to truth, as exhibited most extremely in the scholar, is that they both are a symptom of, and caused by, an “aversion to life” [GM III, 28]. The world is a hostile place that resists most or our desires - this is a thesis Nietzsche shares with Freud and Schopenhauer.⁸ Most people, weak people, in the face of this resistance become scared of the world. They seek to turn away from it. The religious turn away by saying this world does not count, what counts is the world to come. The scholars turn away by saying that acting in the world is less valuable than standing back from the world, contemplating, understanding, and knowing it. As Nietzsche’s Zathathrustra puts it, “they want to be mere spectators” [TSZ, Of Scholars]. Both take, and try to justify, an essentially passive stance towards the world. They are passive because they are weak and scared, but they dress their passivity up as a virtue and a choice. Nietzsche values the (pre-Socratic) Greeks because they understood that life is essentially, and inevitably, painful, but they still had the strength to affirm it and act decisively, even horribly - think of Medea’s terrible revenge in the face of Creon’s dispossession of her.⁹ The Christian and modern men, in particular scholars, still are fundamentally obsessed with escaping the pain of this life, “*the absence of suffering* – this may count as the highest good” for them, hence their valorisation of passivity [GM, III, 17].¹⁰

to the possibility that intellectual contemplation can function as a means for attempting escape from this painful world of becoming.

⁸ It might be thought that there is a fundamental difference between the resistance suffered by slaves and that faced by Nietzsche’s audience. The latter of course belong to a dominant successful society. While there are differences, the key point is that that success is now the success of a *herd animal* who has still repressed many of his individual desires to pursue an alleged common good. This is not to say that Nietzsche was against all repression. Rather much like Freud, he favoured sublimation where the repressed desires are allowed to express themselves productively, albeit directed to new ends than those they originally sought. Cf. author’s article [Reference omitted to facilitate blind reviewing] and section 4. below.

⁹ This is a central theme in *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example, see sections 7-9. In that work, still under the influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner, Nietzsche takes art, in particular tragedy, as providing the Greeks with the means to affirm life despite suffering. As this influence waned art came to play a much less significant part in his account of the life affirming spirit of the Greeks. Thus in the first essay of the *Genealogy*, where the Greeks are clearly configured as life-affirming, there is no appearance of art as their means of affirmation.

¹⁰ In section sections 13-22 of the third essay of the *Genealogy* the ostensible subject is the ascetic ideal as personified by the ascetic priest. In these sections the ascetic priest is characterized as the sick physician to a sick herd. He attempts to combat the “dominant feeling of listlessness ... *first*, by means that reduce the general feeling of life to its lowest point. If possible no willing at all, not another wish” [GM, III, 17]. However these sections also contain many references that go well beyond priests, including references to anti-Semites, to Nietzsche’s contemporary, the philosopher Eugen Dühring, to modern European “*Weltshmerz*”. These references already indicate that Nietzsche’s polemic against those who advocate passivity as a means of combating and avoiding the pains of life has a much wider target than just the priests. However, as argued above, it is only in section 23 that the full scope of his target comes clearly into view.

Since all doing inevitably involves (the risk of) pain they seek to avoid doing, hence their valorisation of being over becoming.¹¹ Nietzsche repeatedly uses the metaphors of mirroring, castration and impotence to viscerally bring home the degree of this passivity. He is a philosopher who, more than most, uses metaphor as a marker of significance. The repetition is also a clear marker of the importance Nietzsche attaches to this theme.¹²

Does the fact that Nietzsche attacks the will to truth because it is a manifestation of a passive attitude towards life, coupled with the fact that Nietzsche sees himself as the great advocate of life, entail that he condemns the will to truth unconditionally? That would be surprising for a philosopher who so often condemns the unconditional. Perhaps then his objection is to the elevation of truth to an end in itself. There is something to this but it misses the focus of Nietzsche's objection. When Nietzsche objects to a thing, for example religion or the will to truth, it is important to place that thing in its relevant context. The point here, one often made by Nietzsche himself, is that

¹¹ For Nietzsche, the scholar's valuing truth, like the religious persons valuing the world to come, is generally paired with a valorisation of being over becoming. Even if the scholar were to take his truth to be truth about the world of appearance this would not abrogate Nietzsche's point. Fundamentally, in Nietzsche's work, the being/becoming dichotomy aligns with the passive/active dichotomy. This explains his rather monotonous emphasis on being over becoming throughout his corpus, which is only broken in the *Gay Science* 370. There he lets on that a valorisation of becoming in certain contexts can actually be a manifestation of a rejection of life and a valorisation of being can in certain contexts be a manifestation of a healthy attitude to life.

¹² An interpretation with a different point of emphasis is advanced in Brian Leiter's generally excellent *Nietzsche on Morality*. Leiter does allow that the unconditional pursuit of truth can be life denying. However he recognises this mainly on the limited score that certain truths can be so terrible that the very knowledge of them can be a threat to life. Leiter does not recognise the full import of Nietzsche's claim that the very will to truth is a will to escape this life, and indeed refers to this aspect of the asceticism of science as "only a minor theme in Nietzsche's discussion" [Leiter, p. 265]. Besides the claim that certain truths "can be terrible, a threat to life" [ibid, p 267], Leiter claims the other major objection Nietzsche has to the overestimation of truth is that

it supposes falsely, that our knowledge could be "presuppositionless". More precisely, the will to truth is a will to non-perspectival truth... [p. 268]

Now a number of things seem to have gone wrong here. First, it seems strange that Nietzsche would get so worked up about a mere cognitive error, the mistake of taking one's truths as absolute, presuppositionless truths. Indeed, Leiter himself elsewhere points out that Nietzsche does not take such intellectual errors to be of great import. Recall Nietzsche's exhortation concerning Christianity morality that "it is not error qua error that horrifies me at this sight" (*EH*, *Why I am a Destiny*, 7). For Nietzsche the problem with the ascetic ideal, science, and indeed the will to truth, is not that they presuppose faulty beliefs or metaphysics, but that they manifest an entire attitude and orientation of hatred towards life – "that one taught men to despise the very first instincts of life" [ibid]. More generally this kind of abstract intellectual mistake, taking one's truth as being without presuppositions, is not in itself of great concern to Nietzsche. As Leiter himself elsewhere notes, Nietzsche generally thinks our abstract intellectual life is epiphenomenal in the sense that it may reflect and be caused by our deeper motivations and passions but it does not really influence them, or indeed our actions. Second, and relatedly, if the scholar merely suffers from a false belief could he not then simply correct it by changing to the view that his theories do not reflect any absolute, presuppositionless truth? Indeed surely many scholars would resonate with the claim that truth is perspectival. Note the disparaging remark from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, quoted above, about the scholar's desire to mirror with one hundred eyes – this itself sounds more like perspectival than absolute knowledge. Finally, and ironically enough, given Leiter's hostility to Postmodernism, on Leiter's reading postmodernist scholars would be exempt from Nietzsche's critique of scholars since they clearly do not make the error of taking our knowledge to be without presuppositions.

something that is dangerous, unhealthy in a given context may well be beneficial in another. Nietzsche is always a local rather than a global thinker. He will not simply condemn, for instance, the will to truth but rather will condemn it within a given context. The point is what ends does it serve in a given context. In the context of Christianity and the modern scholarly spirit he sees the will to truth as serving the purpose of slandering life. But this still leaves room for him to recognise that in other contexts, or for given individuals within a specific context, the will to truth can be a manifestation of a robust health. Thus, he clearly does not regard Goethe's prodigious curiosity and will to truth as a negative phenomena. And surely in his own case his insight into human nature, though bought at a terrible personal cost, is not something he sees as a negative manifestation of the will to truth. It is a repeated theme in Nietzsche's corpus that the stronger a being is the more truth they can endure. It would be too facile to simply say that what separates Goethe and Nietzsche's positive manifestation of the will to truth from the Christian's or the scholar's is that they unlike the later, do not regard truth as an end in itself. Would a typical scholar, say a postmodernist of today, who agreed that truth was no ultimate end, be any less a target of Nietzsche's polemic? And would a Goethe like figure who did indeed take truth to be the ultimate value be a fit subject for Nietzsche's attack? The will to truth in itself is not the object of Nietzsche's attack. Rather it is the will to truth in its now prevalent context of the Christian and scholar's passive and negative orientation towards life that Nietzsche rejects.¹³

To understand the nature of Nietzsche's complaint against the will to truth in the context of its manifestation in modern men of science, and to contrast it with the healthier will to truth exhibited by rare individuals such as Goethe and Nietzsche himself, it is helpful to return to the second of his *Untimely Meditations*.

We saw how in the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche raises the objection that the modern scholar with his emphasis on objectivity becomes a merely passive mirror of the world about him. We further noted that the fact that Nietzsche so often repeats this theme attests to its importance. Another theme that Nietzsche repeats throughout the second of the *Untimely Meditations* is that the scholar, the modern man of science, falls "wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form" [UM, II, 4]¹⁴. It is for this reason that "our modern culture is not a living thing" [ibid.]. But what does this talk of inner and outer, content and form mean? Recall that Nietzsche's central objection to the scholar is that his knowledge is merely a personal, internal affair that does not express itself in outward action. The content of his knowledge does not express itself in outward forms. Inner and content for Nietzsche refers to man's internal world of thought, the outer and form refer to

¹³ While generally Nietzsche discusses the *vita contemplativa* in the context of its use as a negative life denying orientation (cf *Daybreak* 42-43), GS 310 shows that Nietzsche recognises that the *vita contemplativa* can in fact be the means to the highest form of creativity.

¹⁴ The emphasis on the inner/outer distinction though apparent enough in the Hollingdale translation of the *Untimely Meditations* is somewhat weakened by the fact that the German term 'Inneres' is sometimes translated as 'inner', occasionally as 'interior' and often as 'subjectivity'. These translations though perfectly legitimate, nevertheless, steer the reader way from recognition of the centrality of the inner/outer distinction to Nietzsche's thinking of the time.

the external world of action. Modern man's unbridled exhortation of the will to truth facilitates his emphasis on inner content to the exclusion of outer forms. Against this splitting Nietzsche recommends that a

higher unity in the nature of the soul of a people must again be created, that the breach between inner and outer must vanish. [ibid]

Now note, this unity is exactly the characteristic that Nietzsche so often extols in Goethe and claims to have finally arrived at himself. In them the will to truth does not express itself as a stepping back from the world in order to enter an otherworldly realm of ineffectual contemplation. Rather, it is an active part of their engagement with the world. Nietzsche and Goethe possess active rather than passive knowledge. Indeed Nietzsche's "Advantage and Disadvantages" paper, which is his most sustained attack on knowledge as a means to inactivity, begins with the following quotation from Goethe, which he tells us he fully concurs with:

In any case I hate everything that merely instructs me without augmenting or directly invigorating my activity [UT, II, Foreword]

The importance of the notion of unity for genuine person is a theme that we will return to shortly.

The notion of knowledge as a means of withdrawal rather than engagement with the world is given a remarkable and fascinating expression in a minor theme touched on, but never fully developed, in the *Genealogy*. There Nietzsche suggests that language itself, for both the religious ascetic and the ascetic scholar, functions as a substitute passive satisfaction for the inability to achieve direct active possession of reality. The contrast here is with a more active type (the master of the first essay) who merely uses brute force to take possession of what he desires. The more timid priests, slaves, and scholars, make do, not with direct possession of reality, but with possession of the names of things.¹⁵ More importantly, these "morbid cobweb-spinners", weave such a fanciful linguistic and conceptual framework around things that soon those things are lost sight of completely [TI, Reason in Philosophy, 4]. The world in which they are clearly impotent is eliminated (from view) in favour of a vast conceptual structure over which they exercise great mastery. In the first essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche gives a proto-theory of language acquisition that contrasts the crude language of the masters, where words are used merely as tags (we might say, their words carried denotation without connotation), with the sophisticated language of the slaves (where connotation becomes more important than denotation). Thus he characterizes the language of the masters in the following terms:

The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of

¹⁵ Nietzsche in several places directly canvases the idea that language and thought are means of appropriating reality, for example D 285, WP 423, WP584, GS 355. At other places he talks of language and contemplation as a means of creating a substitute reality, for example D 43, HAH I 11, and GS 354.

power on the part of the rulers: they say “this *is* this and this”, they seal every thing and event with a sound, as it were, take possession of it. [GM, I, 2, Nietzsche’s italics]

This notion of sealing with a sound, mere vocables, clearly suggests the emphasis on denotation over connotation, an emphasis that is heightened a few sections later:

all the concepts of ancient man were rather at first incredibly uncouth, coarse, external, narrow straightforward, and altogether *unsymbolical* in meaning to a degree that we can scarcely conceive. [GM, I, 6, Nietzsche’s italics]

This “external”, “unsymbolical”, language Nietzsche then contrasts with the language of aristocratic priests which has become “deepened, sharpened, and internalised”, with the conclusion that

[t]here is from the first something unhealthy in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling them which turn away from action...but it is only fair to add that it is on this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became an interesting animal, that only here did the human soul acquire depth and become evil – and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts! [ibid.]

The idea that language could ever be genuinely unsymbolical, and, in particular, the idea that the ancient Homeric Greeks were masters of a purely referential language is, of course, totally far fetched. Nietzsche, a knowledgeable admirer of ancient Greece, could in no way be seriously endorsing such a claim.¹⁶ We do better, then, to take this as a typically hyperbolic expression of a very reasonable thought, namely, the thought that the conceptual world is for the passive slave types basically a means for obliterating a reality that they resent, whereas for the active master types it is a means of working with, and celebrating, a reality over which they exercise great mastery.¹⁷ The religious straightforwardly obliterate this world by

¹⁶ Wilfred Sellars, for one, does in fact endorse the claim that for initiates into language, in particular children, language originally functions as non-conceptual naming – their initial language use consists in the utterance of meaningless vocables. However that goes on against a background where those vocables have their natural place in a full functioning conceptual framework wielded by their elders.

¹⁷ The interesting idea of the origins of the conceptual, as a substitute satisfaction for a reality that resists one’s desires, is something also suggested by Freud – the first entry into the conceptual being the fantasy of the breast, that fantasy being a substitute for the breast that at some point has been withheld from the baby by mother. Cf. S.E. Vol. 1, p.328 and Vol. V, p. 564. Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, is generally suspicious of the (conscious) mind and treats it as largely epiphenomenal. What he adds is that the development of mind is a fundamentally negative phenomenon, its development being the result of a failure to directly and instinctively navigate the world. Nietzsche’s thoughts on this topic are both profound and presumably erroneous. The chimera of a language affording direct, conceptually unmediated, contact with reality (Nietzsche’s seeming suggestion about the language of the Masters) is something that is a source of perennial confusion in philosophy, including, for instance, Derrida’s self-acknowledged pointless hand-wringing about the so-called “logocentric predicament”. The idea that the conceptual somehow represents a fall from some

belittling its importance in contrast to their fantasy construction of a world to come. The scholar belittles this world by valorising the possession of knowledge and representations of it over acting in it. Both these reactions are for Nietzsche essentially life-denying.

Of course, in the *Genealogy* and elsewhere, Nietzsche's primary example of the life-denier is the Christian. For him Nietzsche reserves his strongest rhetoric;

this entire fictional world has its roots in *hatred* of the natural (actuality!)...*But that explains everything*. Who alone has reason to *lie himself* out of actuality? He who *suffers* from it. But to suffer from it means to be an abortive reality. [A, 15 – Nietzsche's italics]

Yet we should recognise here a voice not unrelated to that with which Nietzsche chastises the scholar in the passages quoted above. This talk of abortive reality is of a piece with his rhetorical question in the *Untimely Meditations* concerning the current age of "universal education":

Are there still human beings, one then asks oneself, or perhaps only thinking- writing-, and speaking-machines. [UM, II, 5]

There are, indeed, vast differences in the way Nietzsche regards the scholar and the Christian. In the latter he sees only forces inimical to life. In the former and his objective spirit he sees much that is useful and for which we should be grateful [cf. BGE 207]. After all, it is the scholar, with his will to truth, who helps us see through the fabrications of religion. But for Nietzsche

[t]he objective man is an instrument ... he is no goal, no conclusion and sunrise. [BGE, 207]

His essential passivity toward the world means that

[w]hatever still remains in him of a "person" strikes him as accidental, often arbitrary, still more disturbing; to such an extent he has become a passageway and reflection of strange forms and events even to himself. [ibid.]

This enigmatic talk of being a passageway to strange forms and events, of the arbitrary and the accidental, hints at some profound sense of alienation. But what exactly this involves is not thematized in *Beyond Good and Evil*. To get a better understanding of what is at stake here we do well to return to the *Genealogy*.

mythical adamic position of grace of unmediated contact with reality is more worthy of psychological diagnosis, perhaps on Freudian lines suggested above, than of serious philosophical investigation.

Part II

4. Accidental, Arbitrary Moderns Vs. The Sovereign Individual

When Nietzsche says in the preface to the *Genealogy* that we are strangers to ourselves, that we are unknown to ourselves, it is tempting to take this estrangement as merely a matter of our lack of self-knowledge. But then we must ask the question why exactly this should be taken as a criticism? Surely it cannot be that we are under some obligation to know the full truth about ourselves; that kind of imperative looks suspiciously like a manifestation of the very will to truth that is the object of Nietzsche's critique in the third essay of the *Genealogy*. What is more, Nietzsche has often told of the need for self-deception. Indeed, Nietzsche in many places tells us that ignorance of one's deeper drives and motivations can often be healthy phenomenon. This thought goes hand in hand with his general dismissal of consciousness as a weak, irrelevant, even disruptive force. How can Nietzsche extol the virtues of knowledge of the self yet at otherwise praise ignorance of the self? Again, part of the answer is to be found in the different ends knowledge and ignorance can serve in different contexts. In the case of Wagner and himself he sees ignorance as something that helps a deeper unifying drive finally reach its full active expression.¹⁸ In the case of Christians and scholars, their ignorance merely serves to facilitate their passive attitudes and their splintering into weak fragmented personalities. This brings us to the deeper sense in which Nietzsche takes us to be strangers to ourselves. As the *Genealogy* unfolds, beyond our mere ignorance, a deeper, though related, estrangement is suggested, namely; that of having parts of ourselves that are split-off. These parts are split-off, not simply in the sense that we have no conscious access to them, but in the sense that we contain within us hidden affects and drives. These are separate movers that are not part of any integrated whole. Taken to the extreme, this notion of being strangers to ourselves actually threatens the very notion of a unified self. That is to say, we have strangers *within* ourselves, so that, in fact, our self is no genuine self. We are nothing more than a jumble of different voices/drives having no overall unity.¹⁹ Not wishing to directly threaten his audience with this frightening thought, Nietzsche brings this idea to his readers in very subtle ways.

In the first essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche playfully torments his audience with variations on this theme of being subverted from within. For instance, the claim that Christian morality is nothing but the inheritor of a Jewish slave morality based on resentment hints at the claim that his audience need not be worried about being "jewified" because, with their current morality, they are already as Jewish as they could be. The worry of being "jewified" was one that Germans of the 1880s were keenly aware of.

¹⁸ In reference to Wagner Cf. UM, II, 2 and in reference to Nietzsche Cf. EH, "Why I am So Clever", 9.

¹⁹ The Nietzschean theme that modern men are not genuine persons but mere jumbles of drives is one explored extensively in author's article [reference omitted to facilitate blind reviewing].

Where a typical (liberal) German audience of Nietzsche's time sees "The Jew" as a foreign external body that somehow needs to be cleansed and brought into the Christian-German world, Nietzsche is telling his audience that they themselves are in fact internally and fundamentally contaminated with Jewishness.²⁰ This is a direct threat to the Germans' sense of identity. The problem of German identity in the 19th century is hugely complex and not something to be seriously approached in detail in this essay. However, what is worth noting here is that, because there was no unified German state until late into the 19th century, and because the notion of a common German language was a known fiction, one of the main means of forging a German identity was by contrast to those who were clearly not Germans. Jews, in particular, were commonly denominated as the paradigm of the un-German. Nietzsche's claim that the Germans are already "jewified" brings home to his reader in an uncanny way his theme that they are strangers to themselves. It is presumably his sense of provocative playfulness that leads Nietzsche to suggest that the Jewish elders actually gathered as a cabal and consciously repudiated Christ. This, alleged Nietzsche, they did solely in order to make Christ's destructive Jewish slave message more appealing to the non-Jews:

Was it not part of the secret black art of truly grand politics of revenge.... that Israel must deny the real instrument of its revenge before the world as a mortal enemy and nail it to the cross so that "all the world", namely all the opponents of Israel, could unhesitatingly swallow just this bait?²¹
[GM, I, 8]

²⁰ This subversive theme is repeated in the *Antichrist* where Nietzsche says

The Christian, that *ultima ratio* of the lie, is the Jew once more – even *thrice* more [A, 44]

The (despicable) rhetoric of Verjudung (Jewification) – overly polite scholars often refer to it by the misleadingly benign title 'Judaization' - is something that current readers are largely unaware of. The background for this was the question, raised by the ongoing 19th century Jewish emancipation, of how the Jews were to be integrated into the modern state. Nietzsche belongs to a series of 19th century intellectuals who sought to turn this question on its head, asking, not how the Jews are to be emancipated from their inferior state, but, how we (Christians) are to be emancipated from the Jewishness that has now enslaved us. The claim that we are already thoroughly Jewish is the central claim of Marx's *On the Jewish Question* and Wagner's *Judaism in Music* – the later of which Nietzsche was clearly acquainted with. Both Marx and Wagner generally equate being jewified (verjudet) with materialism, Nietzsche equates it with acceptance of the morality of pity (slave morality).

²¹ Note, this is posed as a question, which may be taken to suggest that Nietzsche himself does not seriously endorse this conspiracy theory. The idea of a Jewish conspiracy against the Christian world is at least as old as the medieval blood libel that each year the elders of Israel convened to decide upon a young Christian child to be slaughtered and drained of blood to be used for making the Passover matzo. In the 19th century, after Napoleon convened the famous Sanhedrin of the Jews in 1806 in order to settle the question of Jewish emancipation and integration into the new Europe, new myths about Jewish conspiracies, including conspiracies of the bourse, arose with alarming regularity. While Nietzsche's little conspiracy joke about the Jews repudiating Christ in order to get the Christians to swallow the bait is perhaps relatively harmless, the contemporaneous publication of Wilhelm Marr's *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* [*The Victory of Jewry over Germanism*], and other conspiracy works, culminating in the Russian secret police's infamous conspiracy work *The Protocols of the elders of Zion*, were to have far more devastating effects. It is of no credit to Nietzsche, and indeed displays a knowing recklessness on his part, that he participated in the rhetoric of verjudung. That he intentionally tweaks his audience, giving a subversive twist to this usually

We have seen that in the first essay Nietzsche torments his audience with the thought that they are already infected with a Jewish voice, one that they themselves would take to be thoroughly foreign. In the second essay Nietzsche implicitly raises the question of whether such a thoroughly mixed being can be capable of genuine agency. This he does in a rather subtle way, by introducing a figure, the “sovereign individual” capable of genuine agency, and then implicitly contrasting this strong commanding figure with the weak will of the wisps of his day.

For Nietzsche genuine agency, including the right to make promises, is the expression of a unified whole. The second essay begins with the question:

To breed an animal with the right to make promises – is this not the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? is this not the real problem regarding man? [GM, II, 1]

The text might easily lead the unwary reader to think this is a task already accomplished, again leading the reader into a sense of complacent satisfaction. The sense that Nietzsche is talking of past events is heightened when, having first raised this question of nature’s task, he concentrates on the pre-history of man, and man’s first acquiring of deep memory – memory burnt in by punishment. The task of acquiring memory is one that has been clearly accomplished; it is something that his audience can proudly lay claim to. Nietzsche, after raising his question, immediately refers to the breeding of an animal with the right to make promises as a problem that “has been solved to a large extent”. This furthers the sense that the task is largely behind us. However, when a few pages later Nietzsche introduces “the end of this tremendous process” as the “sovereign individual”, his audience should at least have a suspicion glimmering of whether they themselves are this proud, noble, sounding individual or the “feeble windbags” he despises. Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual in hyperbolic tones clearly not applicable to ordinary individuals. He describes him as one

who has his own protracted will and the right to make promises and in him a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of what has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom... [and who] is bound to reserve a kick for the feeble windbags who promise without the right to do so [GM, II, 2]

It is typical of Nietzsche’s deliberate, and deliberately confusing, caginess, that it is not at first clear whether the sovereign individual is a creature already achieved or one yet to come. The very terms Nietzsche uses to describe the sovereign individual - “proud”, “quivering in every muscle”, “aware of his superiority”, “like only to himself”, “bound to honour his peers” - clearly hark back to the descriptions of the masters of the first essay. Since his audience are meant to identify themselves as the inheritors of slave

wholly negative rhetoric, by configuring the Jewish slave revolt as creative and as making man interesting, giving him depth, hardly mitigates this recklessness.

morality, it is clear that they cannot be identified with this sovereign individual, who, unlike them, has been “liberated from the morality of custom”, and who is “autonomous and supermoral”, a “lord of the free will”. The implicit message to his audience is that you are not sufficiently whole to have the right to make promises; you have no free will, but are merely tossed about willy-nilly by a jumble of competing drives, and, hence, you cannot stand surety for what you promise. You can give no guarantee that the ascendant drive at the time of your making a promise will be effective when the time comes to honour that promise.

5. Nietzsche on Free Will

In the sections of the second essay of the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche discusses the figure of the sovereign individual, his use of the Kantian terminology of free will and autonomy is in marked contrast to his generally negative use of that terminology. Nietzsche often disparages the notion of free will and autonomy. Thus he says in the *Anti-Christ*

In Christianity ... Nothing but imaginary causes ('God', 'soul', 'ego', 'spirit', 'free will' – or 'unfree will'). [A, 15]

In *Twilight of the Idols* he simply refers to “the error of free will” [TI, IV, 7]. However, in those passages where he disparages the notion of free will it is clear that what is at stake is the notion of a will autonomous from the causal order, an uncaused cause. It is free will in this “superlative, metaphysical sense” [BGE 21] that Nietzsche rejects. This still leaves room for a more imminent notion of free will. It is this kind of free will that Nietzsche presumably envisages for his sovereign individual who is

.... autonomous .. the man who has his own independent, protracted will
.... this master of a *free will* [GM, II, 2 – Nietzsche's italics].

One gets a sense of Nietzsche's account of free will, and its relation to the tradition, by contrasting it with that of David Hume. Hume, a compatibilist, famously argued that “liberty of spontaneity” (free will) is consistent with the denial of “liberty of indifference” (determinism).²² On Hume's account, one

²² Cf. *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Section 11. Note, I do not mean to suggest here that Nietzsche is best read as explicitly endorsing both the claim that all events are determined by prior events and the claim that free will is possible. Rather, he is a compatibilist in the sense that he does not take determinism to be incompatible with free will. As will become clear below, Nietzsche is best read as one who has implicitly realized that the issues involved in making sense of free will do not have a direct connection with determinism. I do believe Nietzsche is committed to the idea that some rare individuals act freely; as for determinism, I do not think he has any real commitment there. More generally, I think such metaphysical views were not within his philosophical provenance – he occasionally flirted and dabbled with such theses but did not give them sufficient reflection necessary for genuine commitment. More typically, he uses such metaphysical claims as occasional tools to help dislodge various ideas he takes to be harmful, for instance the moralist's obsessions about guilt and responsibility. Nietzsche is a Kulturkritiker and psychologist, perhaps even a moral philosopher, but a metaphysician he is not, nor did he care to be. The one exception to this claim is perhaps, his thought concerning the will to power.

acts freely where that action stems from one's character. Character for Hume is simply glossed as one's deeper dispositions. Here is not the place to canvass the various problems with Hume's notion of character. What is interesting for us is that Nietzsche may be seen as offering a similar account of free will, with the very important difference that he gives a much more robust account of character. To have a character is to have a stable, unified, and integrated, hierarchy of drives. This is a very demanding condition that most humans fail to meet:

In the present age human beings have in their bodies the heritage of multiple origins, that is opposite and not merely opposite drives and value standards that fight each other and rarely permit each other any rest. Such human beings of late cultures and refracted lights will on the average be weaker human beings. [BGE 200]

In the *Nachlass* from the period of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche explicitly draws the conclusion that

one should not at all assume that many humans are "people" the "person" is a relatively isolated fact. [KSA, 12, 491, my translation]

The sovereign individual, who has a unified, independent, protracted will counts as having a genuine character, being a person. Modern man, who is at the mercy of a menagerie of competing forces, internal and external, has no such character.²³

Why after so much denigration of the terminology of free will and autonomy does Nietzsche in the *Genealogy* employ it in a positive fashion? Presumably, as a subtle challenge to his readers. Rather than simply arousing his audiences' resistance with flat denials of free will and autonomy in the transcendental sense, Nietzsche uses that terminology in a positive, non-transcendental, manner in describing the sovereign individual. He then seeks to unsettle his audience with the uncanny idea that autonomy and free will are achievements of great difficulty, achievements which they themselves have by no means attained. While the thought that free will does not exist is disturbing, how much more so is the thought that free will does exist but one does not oneself possess it!

While Nietzsche may believe in free will, in a compatibilist sense, he clearly does not mean to endorse the notion that possession of a free will means the one who acts in a particular way could have done otherwise.²⁴ Now those who take the key issue concerning free will to be the question of moral responsibility, and the viability of appraisals of praise and blame, will claim that this is no genuine notion of free will. For them an action is free only if the agent could have done otherwise. But there is another way of

²³ For more on this see author's article. [Reference omitted for blind reviewing]

²⁴ In HAH, I, 105 Nietzsche explicitly says of both "he who is punished" and "he who is rewarded" that neither punishment nor reward are deserved because "he could not have acted otherwise". There are of course forms of compatibilism which allow that one might have done otherwise, but this is not a position evidenced in Nietzsche's text.

approaching the free will debate. This other way does not see the debate directly through the question of responsibility, but, rather, approaches it from the question of agency. Where one approach begins with the question “For what acts is one responsible?”, the other begins with the arguably profounder question “What is it to act in the first place, what is it to be a self capable of acting?”. Those who take the question of responsibility as paramount to the free will question, tend to write as if we already have a notion of self and action more or less firmly in place and are only raising the question of whether such selves are ever to be held responsible for their actions. The other approach seeks to problematize the very notions of self and action. This is part of the import of the famous dictum from the *Genealogy* that “the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed” [GM, I, 13]. Now Nietzsche does, of course, want to question our practices of praising and blaming, our practices of assigning responsibility. This is part of his ongoing battle against the dominant Judeo-Christian worldview in which responsibility, and, in particular, blame, are key notions. This aim does indeed account for many of his negative comments about free will. But ultimately the more profound Nietzsche wants to raise the question about what exactly it is to be a genuine self. Indeed his whole attack on the Judeo-Christian worldview is predicated on his belief that it is fundamentally inimical to the development of genuine selves.

To interpret Nietzsche as an opponent of free will is to emphasise a purely negative aspect, his hostility to Judaeo-Christian notions of responsibility. This undoubtedly is an important and oft repeated theme in Nietzsche’s work and hence is a defensible interpretation of Nietzsche. To interpret Nietzsche as giving a positive, albeit, arguably, revisionist account of free will is to emphasise a positive and wholly original aspect, his notion that under the right conditions genuine agency, a truly great achievement, is possible. Furthermore this interpretation helps us to properly appreciate the famous passage in *Gay Science* [125], where Nietzsche’s “madman” tells us that we must ourselves become Gods to be worthy of the deed of killing God. To become Gods is to be autonomous, self legislators who are not subservient to some external authority, be it a God, the *sumum bonum*, or an, allegedly, universal moral law. This interpretation allows us to see a Nietzsche who has come to grips with a central problem of modern philosophy in a way that many of his predecessors, contemporaries, and even successors, have failed to do. If we take part of the central trajectory of modern philosophy to be the move from a religious to a secular worldview, we (should) see that giving up the metaphysics of God and soul raises a crucial problem about exactly what we are. The modern tradition offers a number of answers; we are in essence reasoners (Descartes, Kant)²⁵; we are bundles of sensations (Hume). None of these answers are particularly satisfactory. Nietzsche offers an interesting and rather original alternative. He claims that in a sense we do not exist.²⁶ This is not a version of that kind of academic,

²⁵ Of course, Descartes and Kant were theists. Nevertheless, the intellectual trajectory of their work, whether intended or not, was inevitably towards a secular worldview.

²⁶ The Hume of the Appendix to his *Treatise* came to realise that the account of the self given in the *Treatise* rendered the self non-existent (Cf. Hume, 1978, p.p. 635-636). However this for Hume was an unintended and unacceptable consequence of his philosophy. For Nietzsche our failure to achieve

philosophic, scepticism that brings philosophy into deserved disrepute. The existence of human bodies, like the existence of the so-called external world is not something Nietzsche would ever dream of really denying. What Nietzsche questions is whether there are genuine *selves* inhabiting these bodies. In place of empiricist or rationalist accounts of the self, Nietzsche offers, what might be called, a naturalist-aestheticist account: To have a genuine self is to have an enduring co-ordinated hierarchy of drives. Most humans fail to have such a hierarchy; hence they are not sovereign individuals. Rather they are a jumble of drives with no coherent order. Hence they are not genuine individuals or, we might say, selves.

Nietzsche's various attacks on the Kantian notions of autonomy and free will have two main objectives. The negative objective is to show that the notion of a will that transcends the causal order is intellectually unacceptable – a point that is hardly unique to Nietzsche. The positive, and more profound and original, objective is to offer his readers the challenging notion that genuine autonomy, and hence existence as an individual and self, is possible for some. This challenge should awaken his readers to the profoundly disturbing possibility that they themselves are not fully persons.

Part III

6. Nietzsche and the Uncanny

In section 10 of the third essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche again invokes the notion of free will. There he suggests a contrast between philosophers as they have occurred so far, “world-negating, hostile towards life, not believing in the senses,” with a possible successor who, presumably unlike his predecessors, has sufficient “will of the spirit, *freedom of will*” [GM, III, 10, Nietzsche's italics]. In this passage, like the earlier ones concerning the sovereign individual and free will, Nietzsche leaves the reader in some doubt as to whether he is talking about something already achieved or yet to be achieved. In both these cases Nietzsche creates a kind of uncanny effect on the reader. The uncanny here is operating in Freud's sense of something that is disturbingly both familiar and unfamiliar.²⁷

genuine selfhood, and the possibility, for at least a select few, of overcoming that failure, is the very point of much of his philosophy.

²⁷ In his Essay, *The Uncanny*, Freud characterizes the uncanny as

something which is secretly familiar which has undergone repression and then returned from it. [S.E., p. 245]

In that essay Freud notes that psychoanalysis itself can be seen as a case of the uncanny [ibid. p. 243]. In fact, most readers of Freud's essay are struck by *its* very uncaniness. Given Freud's general attempt to suppress his huge intellectual debt to Nietzsche, and one suspects, especially to the *Genealogy*, one of the uncanniest aspects of Freud's essay is that it, like the first essay of the *Genealogy*, begins with an etymological investigation. The temptation to assume that this is a, disguised, perhaps even, unconscious expression of Freud's debt to Nietzsche, and especially the *Genealogy*, where the notion of the uncanny is both used and mentioned more than in any other of Nietzsche's text, is near overwhelming.

Let us first consider the case of the sovereign individual and then return to that of the philosopher.

The sovereign individual is, at first, seemingly familiar to his readers as modern man, the possessor of memory and the right to make promises. But Nietzsche's text, by characterising the sovereign individual in terms typically applied to the masters of the first essay, disturbingly suggests a gulf between the sovereign individual and modern man, the inheritor of slave morality. The sense of the uncanny comes not simply through the confusion about who exactly is the sovereign individual, but also by a certain play on temporality. Is Nietzsche talking about who we are in the present or is he talking about some envisaged successor?

The same questions of identity and temporality produce an uncanny effect when Nietzsche describes philosophers in section 10 of the third essay of the *Genealogy*. He begins with "the earliest philosophers";

to begin with the philosophic spirit always had to use as a mask and cocoon the *previously established* types of contemplative man ... a religious type. [Nietzsche's italics]

The reference to the earliest philosophers suggests some distance between modern philosophers of Nietzsche's era and the subjects of his descriptions. This suggestion is furthered when Nietzsche then says,

the ascetic priest provided *until modern times* the repulsive caterpillar form in which alone the philosopher could live and creep about. [emphasis mine]

Yet when Nietzsche then immediately asks the rhetorical question "Has this really *altered*?" [Nietzsche's italics], his reader is left with the uneasy feeling that perhaps the repulsive caterpillar form is not really a thing of the past.²⁸

These temporal shifts are important for creating an uncanny sense of dislocation in the *Genealogy*; what is far away often turns out to be quite close; and what is apparently already with us turns out to be yet to come. A notable example of such dislocation occurs in his characterisation of the "counteridealists" in section 24 of the third essay. These he accuses of

²⁸ Dario Galasso in his important forthcoming Ph.D thesis *Nietzsche: Asceticism, Philosophy, History*, argues convincingly that in sections 5-10 of the third essay, where Nietzsche discusses the meaning of the ascetic ideal for philosophers, there are various subtle temporal shifts and identity shifts at work. He notes that Nietzsche at times identifies the philosopher as a successor to the priest, continuing the ascetic ideal's negative valuation of life. At other times Nietzsche identifies the philosopher with a more positive version of asceticism. On the positive account withdrawal is merely the means to allow the philosopher space to form his own creations. Withdrawal here does not embody a rejection of life but a means of adding to life. The solution to this seeming contradictory account is that when Nietzsche is associating philosophy with the ascetic ideal in a negative way he is referring to philosophy as it has been so far practiced. When he gives the positive account of philosophical asceticism he is giving an account of philosophy as it should, and he hopes will one day be, practiced. That Nietzsche throughout the relevant sections of the third essay moves without much in the way of explicit signaling from reference to past philosophers to reference to philosophers of the future is part of a deliberate strategy of unsettling his readers.

unknowingly sharing the ideal they explicitly repudiate, the ascetic ideal, because “they still have faith in truth”. Interestingly, amongst these counteridealists he includes “pale atheists, antichrists, immoralists, nihilists”. Now these terms can be applied to Nietzsche himself, and, moreover, he himself has done so in various places. The rhetorical effect here is striking; Nietzsche by his insinuating conspiratorial tone has suggested that he and his reader have now seen things that others have completely missed, namely, the continued prevalence of the ascetic ideal. But then in implicitly accusing himself of still being involved with the ascetic ideal does that accusation not equally fall on his reader?

A similar uncanny effect marks Nietzsche’s claims about the Jews and slaves in the first essay. Jewish slaves would at first seem a very foreign people, especially for a 19th century German audience, a people who had very recently emerged as surprising victors in the Franco-Prussian war. But as the *Genealogy* progresses the distance between the psychological make-up of the Jewish slaves and modern man seems to progressively shrink so that the unfamiliar merges with the familiar, each taking on the traits of the other. The Jewish slave turns out to have conquered the whole Western world (not just France!), and modern European man turns out to have continued the Jewish slave’s hostility to the real world.

Nietzsche also has recourse to the notion of the uncanny in the *Genealogy* when characterising nihilism as “the uncanniest of monsters” [GM, III, 14]. While that particular passage merely heralds nihilism as a possibility, in his notebooks of the same period he is much more explicit,

Nihilism stands before us: whence comes this most uncanny of all guests? [KSA, 12, p.125 – my translation]

His immediate answer, in keeping with the general tenor of the *Genealogy*, is that it is the will to truth that, having destroyed the metaphysics that underpinned our values, is slowly bringing belated recognition that those values themselves now lack any coherent foundations. Thus we are inevitably being led to a void of values. But why does he call nihilism an uncanny guest and the uncanniest of monsters? I conjecture it is because he realises that for his audience nihilism is, on first approach, rather distant and unfamiliar, and yet in some deep, perhaps, as yet, unarticulated sense, profoundly close and familiar. It is unfamiliar to his audience because, valuing truth, objectivity, science, education, progress, and other Enlightenment ideals, they would regard themselves as having firm, deeply held values. It is somehow familiar because they would have an inchoate sense that the very demand central to the Enlightenment ideal, the demand that all assumptions must face the test of reason, is a test that consistently applied would put those, indeed, all values, into question. Nietzsche, like David Hume, realised that if we were to take seriously the Enlightenment ideal of making no assumptions and subjecting every belief, every value, to the test of pure reason, we would in fact be left with a total devastation of all beliefs and values. It is just this devastation that he predicts for Europe’s future – it is for Nietzsche the first step to a full appreciation of the death of God. A fundamental aim of the

Genealogy is to allow his audience a possible self-awareness that will inevitably hasten such an appreciation. This is not to say that Nietzsche sees nihilism as a goal in itself. However what he does believe is that Europe must first go through nihilism if it is to reach the possibilities of creating genuinely life-affirming values.²⁹

The theme of the uncanny and uncanny themes proliferate throughout the text of the *Genealogy*. In no other text of Nietzsche's is there anywhere near as many occurrences of the term 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*) and its cognates. The importance of this notion for appreciating Nietzsche's text is attested to by Nietzsche himself in the very first lines of the section in *Ecce Homo* dealing with the *Genealogy*. There Nietzsche characterises that work as follows:

Regarding expression, intention, and the art of surprise, the three inquiries, which constitute this *Genealogy*, are perhaps uncannier than anything else written so far. [EH, *Genealogy of Morals A Polemic*]

Indeed, the uncanny makes its first appearance in the *Genealogy* as early as section 5 of the preface. There Nietzsche gives, what may now, in retrospect, be seen as, a hint that his announced theme might not be his real theme. In section 4 of the preface he tells us that in *Human, All Too Human* he had already approached the subject that is, allegedly, central to the *Genealogy*, namely the question of the origins of morality. In section 5 he then tells us that even in that work he was really concerned with the value of our morality, rather than "my own or anyone else's hypothesizing about the origin of morality". In particular, he tells us that what he saw as "the *great* danger to humanity" was

the will turning against life, the last sickness gently and melancholically announcing itself: I understood the morality of compassion.... as the most uncanny symptom of our now uncanny European culture.

I would finally add that the concept of the uncanny helps us explain the function of the *Genealogy* as a history that is not really a history. Above I spoke of various temporal displacements that Nietzsche uses; the ancient Jewish slaves who reappear as modern Christians, even as modern truth loving atheists; the sovereign individual who appears first as something already achieved, then as a possible man of the future; the modern philosopher who has thrown off the mask of the religious type, but then is perhaps not so very distant from this caterpillar form. We also noted, in footnote 3 above, that in talking of the nobles in the first essay the text, without any forewarning, shifts from a frame of reference focused on ancient Greece to a frame of reference focused on ancient Rome. We also noted how Nietzsche bates his audience with the ridiculous suggestion of an imaginary ancient Jewish conspiracy. These and other factors, for instance, the absence of all the scholarly apparatus typical of a historical work (references, footnotes and the like), the very sweeping nature of Nietzsche's

²⁹ Cf. WTP 2 for his most succinct statement of the inevitability of nihilism.

various historical narratives, their lack of historical specificity, and the very fact that he subtitled his work a polemic, create the unsettling feeling that Nietzsche is, despite his explicit rubric of historical interest, not really, or, at least, primarily, telling us about the historical origins of our morality. Furthermore, the idea of Nietzsche being devoted to getting the history right solely for the sake of getting at the historical truth does not sit well with the central themes of the third essay, with its disparagement of the will to truth. Nor does it sit well with his animadversions about history and the scholars search for truth in his essay *The Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*. What he is interested in is certain psychological truths about who we are; he is fundamentally interested in making available to us the true meaning of his initial, seemingly passing, comment that we are strangers to ourselves. Nietzsche's genealogies use, perhaps, at times, fabulous, historical narratives to show the employment of different uses, meanings and interrelationships of various concepts over time. Crucially Nietzsche, following Hegel, believes that only by understanding the temporal layering of meanings can we really grasp the current import of our concepts. The very potted nature of his actual historical narratives and his various games of temporal displacement serve to let us eventually see that his text is not what it first appears, and claims, to be. It is not in fact a simple historical narrative, but rather a narrative of psychological development and discovery, culminating for the reader in section 23 of the third essay. There, after having been exposed to the disgusting nature of the ascetic ideal, the reader is shatteringly brought to see that he himself is the embodiment of that ideal, so that afterward he may "ask completely amazed, completely disconcerted, "What did we actually experience just now?" still more: "who *are* we actually?"³⁰

This interpretation of Nietzsche, as not primarily aiming for historical accuracy, helps explain an often-overlooked conundrum concerning the first essay of the *Genealogy*. In that essay Nietzsche paints a picture of the Greeks as healthy, active, and happy. This is the picture championed by the early romantics, for instance Goethe and Winkelmann. It is the image that captured the popular imagination of Germany throughout the 19th century.

³⁰ This is not to say that Nietzsche does not think that his historical narratives in their broad outline contain a good deal of truth. It is only to claim that historical truth is not his ultimate aim. He needs at least some initial plausibility to his narrative if it is to have the desired rhetorical effect on his readers, and truth in the broad sense is a suitable way to achieve that plausibility. The note at the end of the first essay of the *Genealogy* suggesting a "series of academic prize-essays" that might provide the kind of historical and philological detail his essay lacks, I take, to some degree, to be another instance of Nietzschean irony and baiting of his audience. Nietzsche had long since departed the academic world and made well known his general opinion of what he considered the often able but always pathetic *Fachleute* that inhabit that twilight realm. That said it should be noted that Nietzsche's relation to history is indeed more complicated than the above suggests. This is indicated in the preface of volume II of HAH where Nietzsche says

what I said against the historical sickness I said as one who had slowly and toilsomely learned to recover from it and was in no way prepared to give up 'history' thereafter because he had once suffered from it.

Nietzsche throughout his career maintained a resolutely Hegelian thinker in holding that the meaning, or, better, meanings, of a thing are mediated by its history.

Yet Nietzsche, in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, famously rejected this vision, claiming that the Greeks were profoundly pessimistic, realising that life is inevitably painful, at least until Socrates, an essentially slavish type, mendaciously convinced the Greeks that reason and the pursuit of truth could alleviate all that is wrong with the world. Why does Nietzsche revert to this more idyllic, conventional picture of the ancient Greeks? To understand this it helps to consider that Nietzsche in the *Genealogy* repeatedly preys upon the conventional characterisations of various historical types, for instance the conventional characterisation of the Jews as malicious, subterranean, overly cerebral, schemers. These nods to conventional representations are best understood as devices to draw his audiences in by playing to their prejudices. Of course, Nietzsche merely draws his audience in order to later surprise them with his eventual revelation that they themselves are the Jews (carriers of ascetic ideals) “even thrice more” [cf. the quotation from *The Antichrist* in footnote 16 above]. But the point to be noted here is that his wilful, simplistic, mischaracterization of the ancient Greeks makes little sense if we see him as aiming for historical accuracy. It is perfectly understandable if we see him as primarily manipulating his audience to a psychological insight.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche says “[t]hat a psychologist without equal speaks from my writings, is perhaps the first insight reached by a good reader” [*Ecce Homo, Why I Write Such Good Books*, 5]. This is one of Nietzsche’s few self-assessments which I take to be absolutely correct. In reading Nietzsche we should follow the implied advice of looking for psychological, rather than a philosophical, or historical, insights. The fundamental insight of the *Genealogy* is that with the change from the religious to the secular worldview we may have changed our beliefs about the nature of this world, we unlike the religious accept this as the one and only world, but we have still fundamentally clung to the same hostile attitude towards it. It is because we fail to engage with, in both a cognitive and deeper sense, the nature and the level of our resentment that we remain, so profoundly, strangers to ourselves. We should not simply keep the model of the psychologist in mind when trying to unravel the what of Nietzsche’s text but also in unravelling the how of it. By uncannily invoking the pathos of distance, and deliberately confusing the temporal scope of his claims, Nietzsche has found an ingenious, subterranean, method of getting his highly challenging and subversive message to slowly sink into his readers, without immediately provoking the defences a more direct approach would surely arouse.³¹

³¹ This piece has benefited greatly from input from [References omitted to facilitate blind reviewing]

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