

*The New Cambridge Companion to*  
**NIETZSCHE**

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Edited by  
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## 9 Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*: Moral Injury and Transformation

Christa Davis Acampora

Until relatively recently, it was widely believed that humans were the only animals who engaged in behaviours and the deliberative reasoning that could be described as *moral*. Indeed, philosophers, theologians, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have variously argued that *morality* is what distinguishes human beings from all other animals, many claiming that the development of morality represents a kind of perfection of human existence. Nietzsche takes a different stance. While he marvels at the enormous creativity evident in the development of human moral psychology and its products in the development of human culture, he also discloses some injurious features of morality and the ways in which it is intertwined with various forms of violence and cruelty. Nowhere is this ambivalent appraisal of morality more evident in Nietzsche's works than in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*.<sup>1</sup>

A popular view of Nietzsche regards him as an advocate of bald expressions of power, but he is better understood as someone who *investigates* – rather than *celebrates* – power. He is keenly interested in how power manifests and shapes different cultural forms. One such form that preoccupies him throughout virtually all of his writings is morality. Nietzsche observes that there are *varieties* of morality – or, *moralities* – and that what we now know as morality, even in its general sense, has evolved: it has a history, a genealogy. That suggests a peculiar form of development: growth. It also suggests the possibility of a future that might be related but which could be very different from what we know today. Part of Nietzsche's enduring legacy as a philosopher of morality is his presentation of morality's developments along with the meta-ethical vantage point he scouts as he enquires into the *value* of values.

The notion of a genealogical account suggests multiple dimensions. Of course, a genealogy suggests a *historical* development, and Nietzsche offers accounts of morality's historical evolution. But, as explained below, his effort in this respect is not especially strong or effective. If that is all that we expect – or all that he was attempting to do – then we should be unsatisfied. Nietzsche's historical examples do not seem to map neatly onto real events, and if they are supposed to be actual historical examples, then his analysis betrays little nuance or sophistication and a great deal of prejudice, including views that smack of the very racism and fascism that eventually had catastrophic expressions in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> If Nietzsche's genealogy is supposed to take the form of a historical account, we might regard it as at best naïve and, even worse, dangerous.

In addition to this – or instead of it, depending on what one thinks Nietzsche was ultimately doing – Nietzsche's genealogical accounts attune us to *evolutionary* inclinations, presenting views about *how humans evolved* so as to be, or become, moral animals, and how the acquisition of morality might be regarded as a tool of sorts that human beings have used to shape and create various forms of human culture. In this respect, Nietzsche's approach to morality is a forerunner to contemporary evolutionary psychology except that Nietzsche is more inclined to point to historical social and cultural pressures rather than biological ones as the precipitants of development and change.

Further, Nietzsche is responding to his contemporaries who, in his view, were looking to evolutionary accounts for explanations for the development of specific, individual moral values and ideals.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche tests out some ideas about the development of the phenomenon of morality itself, but not for its capacity to preserve or conserve human life (the group or the species) but rather as a development out of other systems of value. In this way, Nietzsche offers an account of morality that is genealogical in the sense of being attuned to evolution, but unlike some other evolutionary psychologists, he does not take this perspective for individual values, and he does not necessarily

consider the *phenomenon of morality as such* as a species-specific preservation mechanism. Nietzsche presents morality, as we now know it in an ordinary sense, as not only representing an enhancement of human existence but also as having been *injurious*. Indeed, he suggests that some of the very features we commonly regard as ennobling have been, in fact, harmful and might well put us at further risk.

Before examining that account, we might call to mind two more features of what a genealogical approach could draw us to consider: these are apt extensions of our ordinary sense of matters genealogical, namely, family relations and resemblances and inheritances. These dimensions play a role in how Nietzsche considers the history of morality and our future possibilities.

Nietzsche's inquiry into the genealogy of morality highlights how moral concepts grow together. In emphasising this, he considers relations that moral concepts have *to each other* as well as to concepts that are not necessarily (or obviously) moral. This is evident not only in his etymological excursus on the word *good* (*bonus*) in the *Genealogy* but also in his considerations of how concepts that characterise various social and political relationships get interpreted and applied abstractly in a process he describes as *spiritualisation*. For example, as to be discussed, Nietzsche considers how debt relations get extended into the spiritual realm insofar as debts to ancestors transform into debts to gods. When such concepts are applied in a new domain, they may not be simply artful metaphorical applications but might also import a variety of related notions, including forms of payment and repayment, credit, currency, etc.<sup>4</sup>

A genealogical inquiry need not be concerned only with the past. In tracing a line, or lines of descent, one also gains perspective on various inheritances that are evident in the present and sets prospects for the future. This can disclose something about ourselves that we hadn't previously known. The *Genealogy* opens with the line, 'we are unknown to ourselves ...' and the various lines of inheritance sketched in the text might disclose dimensions of ourselves about



which we might not yet be aware. What this reveals might strike us as both ennobling and ghastly.<sup>5</sup>

Something that can be difficult to grasp is that the story Nietzsche tells is a *human* story, or at least a story that is supposed to be *true* to certain features of what might be regarded as the development of Western civilisation.<sup>6</sup> He focuses on what can be claimed as a shared or common ancestry that informs us about masterful and slavish dimensions of human existence more generally rather than sets of particular peoples. In discovery, perhaps, of new resources, one comes to gain perspective on future possibilities. Nietzsche repeatedly draws his reader to that perspective under the name of 'Zarathustra' and 'the man of the future'. Just how the human (or overhuman) future relates to the past and the present is part of Nietzsche's concern, and he challenges, or at least makes more complex, the notion of what *natural* evolution entails.

Overall, Nietzsche's inquiry might be summarised with the following conclusion: *Differing axes of values lead to differing forms of evaluation and estimation, and these inform and facilitate the expression of differing forms of life.* The value of our values is indexed to the forms of life those values support and make possible.<sup>7</sup> When we take account of those considerations, new possibilities might arise. Does Nietzsche give us a good argument or a bad one?<sup>8</sup> And, what value, if any, do these ideas have for us now? From the perspective of the history of philosophy, Nietzsche provides us with some novel and worthwhile meta-ethical views about the development of value systems. His analyses of the integrity of these systems and their key concepts focus readers' attention on the *value of values* – that is, the value had in holding (and acting upon) certain values and the forms of life those values make available to us. From this perspective, he provides a useful framework for characterising distinctive forms of moral harm and possible transformation. Further development of these ideas can advance our understanding of moral phenomena more generally and the breadth of moral experience, and might suggest the central role morality plays in our sense of who we are.

## CONFLICTING VALUES, CONFLICTING WORLDVIEWS

In the third section of his preface, Nietzsche indicates the two central questions that guide his investigations: (1) 'under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil?'; and (2) 'what value do they themselves possess?' The first question is a transformation of the so-called problem of evil, but instead of looking for the source of evil 'behind the world' he considers how the judgment of evil, specifically, and as distinguished from the value of what is 'bad', emerges. The second question leads to consideration of the ends toward which the concept of evil and other moral valuations are utilised. It considers *the economy of human interests and wants* that accounts for the use of such judgments and the forms of life they make possible.

A primary example of the relationship between values and forms of life is illustrated in what Nietzsche calls a 'deadly contradiction', a battle between 'the two opposing values "good and bad", "good and evil"'. In this context, his aim is to elucidate the many factors that influence the kinds of values contemporary human beings hold and how those values might be subjected to a creative reorientation. Thus, he begins the *Genealogy* by imagining a vastly simpler situation in which the effects of conflicting worldviews are easier to ascertain. He caricatures what he calls 'noble' and 'slavish' values and isolates them in a remote past. Nietzsche makes very few attempts to justify his genealogy as historical fact – a few convenient etymologies and strained interpretations of historical events are offered so as to make his account *just relatable enough* to be useful for appropriation.

For some context, we can consider how the conflict of values presented in the *Genealogy* is related to another conflict depicted in the last book of *The Gay Science*. There, Nietzsche describes two general views of the world: 'those who suffer from the *over-fullness of life*' and 'those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life*' (GS 370). Both employ and rely upon an understanding of the world as a site of suffering against which everything is engaged in struggle. Art and philosophy, he claims, are attempts to remedy the pains of these

struggles. What distinguishes these different worldviews are the conditions of those who suffer: 'The first hold a tragic view; they yearn for tragic insight. The second 'seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anesthesia, and madness' (GS 370). These differing views lead to incongruous values and conceptions of estimable human behaviour.

Those suffering from life's *impoverishment* crave 'mildness, peacefulness, and goodness in thought as well as deed'; they desire a god who provides alleviations for their sufferings – 'a god for the sick, a healer and saviour' – as well as logic, 'the conceptual understandability of existence – for logic calms and gives confidence' (GS 370). Those suffering from *overfullness* regard 'what is evil, absurd, and ugly seems, as it were, permissible, owing to an excess of procreating, fertilising energies that can still turn any desert into lush farmland' (GS 370). When these worldviews meet, they clash and result in a tremendous struggle.

#### THE EVIL ENEMY, RESENTIMENT AND THE GOOD

In the *Genealogy*, the differing systems of value Nietzsche observes revolve around differing axes: the noble opposes the good with the bad, the slavish opposes what is good with what is evil. The noble 'seeks [his] opposite only so as to affirm [him]self more gratefully and triumphantly'; but the slave is vengeful – he judges so that he can exact revenge for his own impotence. His 'happiness is rest, peace . . . slackening of tension and relaxing of limbs, in short passivity'. The noble 'desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and very much to honor', but the slave 'has conceived "the evil enemy", "the Evil One", and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a "good one" – himself!' (GM I:10).

In addition to having differing poles of opposition, these value systems have different inclinations toward opposition and adversity. Originally, on Nietzsche's account, what was valued was achievement

in struggle, victory over adversity. Nietzsche argues that the nobles' judgments 'presupposed a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with that which serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity' (GM I:7). Because it lacks the strength requisite for victory in physical struggles such as war, 'the priestly-noble mode of valuation' resorts to developing non-physical strength and exacts 'spiritual revenge' (GM I:7). It is motivated by an incredible hatred that 'grows ... to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred' (GM I:7), resulting in a powerful spirit of vengeance through which revenge and *ressentiment* are expressed.<sup>9</sup>

This is an important twist: it is not only that noble and slavish moralities differ in terms of one pole of their axes of evaluation, namely *bad* instead of *evil*. The positive poles of evaluation – *good* in both instances – are only superficially the same, because both *what* is good and *how* it is determined or distinguished differ. One sense of good issues from that feeling of 'overflowing health' (GM I:7); the other sense of good is derived negatively and reactively, namely in terms of *not* being like those designated as evil.

Where the French word *ressentiment* appears in most English translations of Nietzsche's works, it is because Nietzsche himself used that word, which is left untranslated. *Ressentiment* obviously resembles the English word *resentment*. While resentment is typically a reactive disposition toward a perceived injustice or inequity, *ressentiment* is a more general, overarching orientation. As Nietzsche applies this term in the *Genealogy*, he highlights how *ressentiment*, while motivating particular reactions against others, also informs a mode of valuing more generally, one that ultimately seeks revenge against what otherwise poses as excellence and well-being. In Nietzsche's parlance, the term is also linked with a way of deriving apparently positive values from what is regarded as negative. So, instead of asserting that they are, in fact, inherently superior to their masters, the slavish begin with the position that the masters are *evil* and they establish goodness as *whatever is opposite* to what is

masterful. This overall way of generating values is an expression of *ressentiment* for Nietzsche, and it represents a certain kind of self-deception. *Ressentiment* does not simply motivate certain forms of action against the master but also informs all aspects of slavish existence.<sup>10</sup>

For further context, we can look again to *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche claims that in distinguishing values he asks in each case whether it is 'hunger or superabundance that has here become creative'. He argues that no actions are intrinsically creative or destructive; even the urge to destroy is ambivalent: 'The desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, "Dionysian")'. And yet that same desire can spring from 'hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged'. In these cases, people act destructively because they 'must destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them' (GS 370). Returning to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche claims, the 'decisive mark of a "higher nature", a more spiritual nature' may be discerned in those who are a battleground upon which the opposing valuations of the spiritually impoverished and the spiritually overrich (the slavish and the noble) are in genuine conflict, and where the battle is not yet decided (GM I:16).

It is significant that spiritual health (richness) and sickness (or impoverishment), noble and slavish, are not absolutes for Nietzsche. As the passage just cited suggests, 'being a battleground' of these values – and thus, partaking of both slavish and noble – is the mark of a 'higher nature'.<sup>11</sup> Although it is tempting to read the *Genealogy* as inciting us to despise slavish morality and realise – at least for the few who are presumably so constituted – one's 'inner noble', such a conclusion is problematic. Nietzsche does not condemn everything he sees in the slave revolt. In fact, he claims the slave revolt effected a remarkable change in development: '[O]n the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, ... man first became *an interesting animal*, ... only here did the human soul in

a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*' (GM I:6). The slave revolt in morality made human beings the interesting animals they are. Hence, Nietzsche is not arguing that we *ought* to (or even *could*) go back to whatever we were before (nobles or slaves). The *Genealogy* depicts a human inheritance that includes this ingenuity as our birth-right and not simply the decadent features Nietzsche associates with Christian morality.

#### WAYS OF BEING AN ENEMY: MORAL INGENUITY AND RISK

As mentioned above, Nietzsche links the 'birth' of the 'evil enemy' with the dehumanising effects of morality's development. Right away, we might notice that the processes of dehumanisation work in both directions: A demonised, evil enemy is stripped of its humanity; it poses an existential threat. In isolating and distinguishing the features of one's enemy and targeting them for extinction, one extinguishes or denies important (*human*) features of oneself. Taking on a mortal enemy in this way potentially exposes one to great risks and not just because such enemies might respond with lethal force. In Nietzsche, we find that worthy enemies *distinguish* while evil enemies *define* those who affirm them.

Differing forms of opposition and conflict arise from larger fields of relations that distinguish *who or what one is fighting* and *what one is fighting for*. The kind of enemy one has suggests *what is to be done* in surmounting or defeating it. Put in simplistic terms, consider the difference it makes whether one considers one's enemy inferior or misguided. In opposing an enemy of this sort, one might seek to rehabilitate or educate it – ultimately, at least in the terms of the assessment of the enemy, *to improve* or, at least, redirect it. By contrast, if the enemy is regarded as a threat to one's very existence, then *diminishing* the enemy's capabilities is a primary objective. And, depending on what it is that is so threatening in this enemy, neutralising to the point of *extinguishing* them might appear as the only way to resolve the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Nietzsche writes about this at length in GM I:11, where he describes different kinds of relationships with enemies and how these are connected, generally, with different constitutions. A key distinction revolves around the extent to which the enemy is regarded as an existential threat or opportunity:

To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long – that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mould, to recuperate and to forget (a good example of this in modern times is Mirabeau, who had no memory for insults and vile actions done him and was unable to forgive simply because he – forgot). Such a man shakes off with a *single* shrug many vermin that eat deep into others; here alone genuine 'love of one's enemies' is possible – supposing it to be possible at all on earth. How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies! – and such reverence is a bridge to love. – For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and *very much* to honor! In contrast to this, picture 'the enemy' as the man of *ressentiment* conceives him – and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived 'the evil enemy', '*the Evil One*', and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a 'good one' – himself!

For Nietzsche, the philosophical cost of maintaining the concept of the *evil enemy* is high. It is motivated by 'unsatisfied hatred' and springs from various forms of self-loathing. It is part of Nietzsche's depiction of the evolution of morality that it advances an *ideal* of internalising the dynamic of enemisation (producing an enemy) that characterises external relations. In this way, the advent of the *evil enemy* put humankind on the path toward nihilism precisely because it shuts down the very creativity that, on Nietzsche's account, gave birth to evil in the first place (i.e., the contestation of values and terms

of valuation that allowed for the creation of something outside the boundaries drawn by the prior, more naïve good/bad distinction).

An axis of good and evil allows no room for negotiation, no possibility for compromise, no hope for progress toward a reconciliation. It asserts that nothing can legitimately make a claim on it; it will refuse to recognise any claims to limiting it. Marking off something as 'evil' produces impenetrable barriers that close us off from the possibility of coming together to negotiate new ways of being together that would allow us to envision a future we would want as ours. And with that, we have the demolition of any possible basis for community or meaningful, significant relations to others. A moral framework marked by poles of good and evil is, on Nietzsche's terms, *itself* injurious. It is destructive for all who uphold it and not merely for those who are singled out as evil within it. These concerns are part of Nietzsche's case against (Platonised, Christianised) morality as we currently know it.

#### THE SUBJECT OF MORALITY

True to a strategy Nietzsche often employs in the *Genealogy*, it turns out that the very same developments that harm us or expose us to risk also make us who we are. So, as we saw in discussion of the first essay of the *Genealogy*, the revaluation of values that is responsible for the invention of evil and, ultimately, the near total suppression of noble values and modes of evaluation, is, at the same time, the birth of culture. This represents what might be regarded as an overall advance in human existence, the development of new possibilities, even though Nietzsche thinks its specific products – the evaluative scheme and forms of life it nurtures – exhibit symptoms of decline. Nietzsche retells this story in the second essay when he examines the conditions of specifically *moral* existence in its more advanced and religious expressions. In the third essay of the *Genealogy*, as we shall consider in the section below, Nietzsche ponders whether the highly effective mechanism of value creation in this evaluative system, namely, what he calls 'the ascetic ideal', might be harnessed for future



transformation, providing an antidote or remedy for a set of values that he thinks diminishes life.

Nietzsche opens his second essay with a depiction of key features of the modern moral subject, the mental organisation or psychology that is necessary for moral existence, including memory, will and intention. These features are essential to the system of responsibility, culpability and accountability that forms the basis of much of modern moral life. As Nietzsche tells the story, this development of human existence, which we often associate with goodness, justice, and perhaps equanimity, is, paradoxically, soaked in 'blood and cruelty' (GM II:3).

Nietzsche elaborates how the moral conception of guilt (*Schuld*) arises out of a system of debt and obligations (*Schulden*) in which pain and suffering acquire value in the context of their use as currency in creditor/debtor relations. He considers how the origin of justice – as accounting, reckoning and settling – is linked with the idea that everything has a price, whereas we now think of justice as distinct from the realm of commerce (GM II:8). In a brief review of penal codes stretching through early Christian writing, Nietzsche observes that punishment emerges as a system through which the pain of a debtor (or lawbreaker) is exchanged as compensatory pleasure, 'the pleasure of [one] being allowed to vent his power freely upon one who is powerless' (GM II:5) such that there is an 'uncanny intertwining of the ideas 'guilt' and 'suffering' (GM II:6). In this way, a crude economic system (of debts and debtors) provides a template for a sophisticated moral system of obligations and responsibilities.

In the second essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche links punishment with acts of valuation, and he describes memory as an attempt to make those valuations last, rendering the punished powerless and stifling resistance. But Nietzsche claims that punishment can also have an opposite effect: 'it sharpens the feeling of alienation; it strengthens the power of resistance' (GM II:14). By linking Christianity to the creditor/debtor relationship, Nietzsche strives to show how Christianity destructively employs cruelty, punishment,

and guilt as mechanisms for exerting its control. It demands its believers assume the position of debtor, and it requires them to punish themselves on behalf of their creditor. Misery then becomes a sign of being worthy of the debt, of being chosen by God to suffer in that relationship. All human suffering is interpreted as a form of payment and recompense for a debt that never can be paid.

What Nietzsche refers to as the 'truly *grand* politics of revenge' was accomplished in the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus: the sacrifice of God for himself. Christianity thereby brought about temporary relief from the suffering of guilt, but it created a monstrous new debt. This exchange of relief from one type of debt to another is the 'dangerous bait' that Nietzsche thinks has essentially devoured the space of morals insofar as it defines the currency of western morality.

Remembrance – of one's own guilt, unworthiness, shame before the deity who committed the ultimate sacrifice – is the origin of conscience, which demands a kind of self-mortification. 'Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction – all this turned against the possessors of such instinct: that is the origin of the "bad conscience"' (GM II:16). Human beings invented bad conscience to hurt themselves even more, to vent their desires to hurt others once they were bound by a moral system that inhibited and forbid such external expressions. 'Guilt before God: this thought becomes an instrument of torture to him' (GM II:22). In that case, worthiness depends upon the ability to injure and harm themselves, to apply the payment of self-maltreatment to their irreconcilable accounts with God. It is the effort expended in their attempts to make the impossible repayment that determines their value.

To appreciate how central this system is in Nietzsche's reflections on morality and just what he means when he discusses *die Moral*, we might look to his *Beyond Good and Evil* 32, where Nietzsche distinguishes a pre-moral worldview from what is specifically *moral*. In earlier times, 'the value or disvalue of an action was derived from its consequences . . . [t]he action itself was considered as little as its origin', whereas now 'it is no longer the consequences but

the origin of an action that one allows to decide its value'. That 'origin' is construed as *intention* – 'The intention as the whole origin and prehistory of an action: almost to the present day this prejudice dominated moral praise, blame, judgment, and philosophy on earth'. When Nietzsche talks about the 'overcoming of morality', he is concerned to get beyond 'the morality of intentions', 'a prejudice' that supposes there is a 'doer behind the deed' (GM I:13). But this conception of agency is one Nietzsche finds suspect, and its attendant conception of morality might be superseded in a *post-moral* future.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche does not provide much in the way of a positive account of what such a future might hold, although he does scout its broad outlines and details *what it is not*.

The notion of the evil enemy returns in the second essay in the context of Nietzsche's description of the development of the conception of justice in which the lawbreaker comes to be viewed as one who breaks the social contract and thereby harms the community. In this case, the outlaw is meant to experience 'the wrath of the disappointed creditor, the community, [it] throws him back again into the savage and outlaw state against which he has hitherto been protected' (GM II: 9). This involves withholding the benefits and promises of the community, including protection against injury and hostile acts.

Nietzsche claims that the weaker a community is, the more sensitive it becomes to potential lawbreakers and the more eager it is to punish and do so with severity. By contrast, communities that are confident in their strength and power are more inclined to evince mercy and demonstrate their immunity to suffering. Nietzsche observes that very different systems of justice arise from *a feeling of being aggrieved*, injured (as in the case of *ressentiment*) and the *feeling of being powerful* (*Gefühle des Verletzt-seins* versus *Machtgefühl*). This is because *ressentiment* does not really want justice (in the sense of full repayment or discharging of debts), it wants to retain or preserve indefinitely (if not infinitely) the feeling of being indebted. Indeed, it secures its power by maintaining debt, *extending indebtedness*. For

Nietzsche, the bad conscience<sup>14</sup> is a way of holding on to injury, retaining it, essentially amplifying it.

Morality, as Nietzsche presents it here, is injurious in its retention and reproduction of injury, *aggrievement*. Morality as we now know it, Nietzsche claims, has this general orientation: it preserves, sustains and intensifies injuries in a variety of ways rather than addressing them. And this is a key difference in systems of punishment: discharging debts using pain as a form of currency, and perpetuating debts through the use of spiritual or psychological pain because suffering itself has become valuable.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Nietzsche links the development of morality, particularly Christianised morality, as 'psychical cruelty . . . the *will* of humanity to find itself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for' (GM II:22).

If, on Nietzsche's terms, morality *injures*, *induces* pain, then how might we recover? One strategy is evident in the *Genealogy* itself and in multiple other works that Nietzsche writes: we can examine the development of morality to better grasp how it works, how it orients certain forms of life. Such observations might hone our abilities to inquire into the *value of our values*, not only in order to understand them better but also to potentially realise opportunities to transform them. Nietzsche's discussion of the ascetic ideal brings this into sharper focus.

#### THE ASCETIC IDEAL

Slavish morality, Nietzsche claims, exemplifies a dynamic of relations in which the weaker exert control over those stronger by means of spiritual – rather than physical – force. It was the priests who initiated what Nietzsche calls the 'slave revolt in morality', which began when '*ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge' (GM I:10). At the pinnacle of what became that moral system stands the ascetic ideal, the focus of the third essay of the *Genealogy*.

Nietzsche observes that art, philosophy, science and religion each employ ascetic ideals as means for cultivating the exemplars of their type. Ascetic ideals give meaning to human existence and suffering even though they do not eradicate that suffering. In fact, ascetic ideals may actually perpetuate or promote suffering, or at least suffering of a certain kind, in order to generate or intensify the kind of meaning they advance. Nietzsche writes, 'Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does not repudiate suffering as such; he desires it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far – and the ascetic ideal offered man meaning!' (GM III:28).

Ascetic ideals provide touchstones for value insofar as they are indexed to what is to be esteemed and eschewed. They provide a variety of interpretations of the suffering of life that make pain satisfying, but they can bring with them an even greater suffering that is 'deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive' (GM III:28). Nietzsche reviews how the ascetic ideal has been used as a spiritual weapon (GM III:11) as in the case of Christian morality's use of guilt, which requires that we recognise ourselves as the source of human pain. Nietzsche claims this is essentially a kind of hatred of what is human (GM III:28).

The priestly ascetic ideal makes itself an enemy of life utilising a dynamic that resembles the notion of the *evil enemy* discussed above. It denigrates physiological thriving, physical beauty and exuberant health: 'pleasure is felt and sought in ill-constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice' (GM III:11). But a life organised in this way becomes a paradox: It takes its self as an opponent and is bent on its own destruction. It is a 'discord that wants to be discordant, that enjoys itself in this suffering and even grows more self-confident and triumphant the more its own presupposition, its physiological capacity for life decreases' (GM III:11). To succeed in this mission represents the 'ultimate agony'.

Nietzsche acknowledges an ironic aspect of the motivations and consequences of the ascetic ideal. He recognises that ascetic ideals can serve protective functions for a life in decline, struggling for existence: 'life wrestles in it and through it with death and against death; the ascetic ideal is an artifice for the preservation of life' (GM III:13). The ascetic priest gives expression to a 'desire to be different, to be in a different place', but the power of that desire and the power it acquires in its expression serve to enhance what is here, to satisfy a human craving to exercise power. Consequently, Nietzsche concludes, the 'ascetic priest, the apparent enemy of life, this denier – precisely he is among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life' (GM III:13).

It is important to note that Nietzsche links the birth of contemplation, essentially, the origins of philosophy,<sup>16</sup> to the same set of instincts and mechanism for creating meaning and value: 'The earliest philosophers knew how to endow their existence and appearance with a meaning, a basis and background, through which others might come to fear them: more closely considered, they did so from an even more fundamental need, namely, so as to fear and reverence themselves. For they found all the value judgments within them turned against them, they had to fight down every kind of suspicion and resistance against "the philosopher in them." As men of frightful ages, they did this by using frightful means: cruelty toward themselves, inventive self-castigation – this was the principal means these power-hungry hermits and innovators of ideas required to overcome the gods and tradition in themselves, so as to be able to believe in their own innovations'. For Nietzsche, this strategy is effective for acquiring 'a feeling of power' that can be used to fuel extraordinary creativity, yet his historical examples also suggest that 'whoever has at some time built a "new heaven" has found the power to do so only in his own hell' (GM III:10). This may be why he observes that, 'the bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as a pregnancy is an illness' (GM II:19).

Nietzsche's most urgent complaint against the religious ascetic ideal is the way he believes it perpetuates spiritual decay and decline. The ascetic priest relieves suffering by anaesthetising his followers so as to *diminish* the 'feeling of life': he encourages mechanical activity, devises distracting petty pleasures, provides the grounds for a false sense of security in the organisation of the herd, and generates a superficial sense of power through participation in a prosperous, 'chosen' community – all of which work to distract the individual from his own self-doubt and insecurity (GM III:18). Nietzsche claims that the ascetic priest has 'pressed into his service indiscriminately the whole pack of savage hounds [for example, "anger, fear, voluptuousness, revenge, hope, triumph, despair, cruelty"] in man and let loose now this one and now that, always with the same end in view: to awaken men from their slow melancholy, to hunt away, if only for a time, their dull pain and lingering misery' (GM III:20). The priest, Nietzsche writes, 'combats only the suffering itself, the discomfiture of the sufferer, not its cause, not the real sickness: this must be our fundamental objection to priestly medication' (GM III:17).

This dynamic depletes the spiritual resources necessary for combating other sources of suffering. That is, priestly remedies for human suffering amount to spiritual narcotics that both deaden the pains of life and are offered as the way to realise the highest form of life. Nietzsche observes: 'sufferers and those profoundly depressed will count this as the supreme good, as the value of values; they are bound to accord it a positive value, to experience it as the positive as such' (GM III:17). Moreover, these incredible tensions – the damming up of feeling and its eventual orgiastic release – cause further damage and make one sicker than before. Nietzsche claims 'this kind of cure for pain is, by modern standards, "guilty" for the violent physiological revenge taken by such excesses' (GM III:20). The genuine struggle, the one that truly determines value for the ascetic ideal is one that destructively opposes itself – its value increases as it makes progress toward annihilating itself.<sup>17</sup>

However, much as the invention of slavish morality and the evil enemy nevertheless marked something positive in the development of human existence, Nietzsche claims in the third essay of the *Genealogy* that the priestly ascetic ideal, which produced Christianised morality, also satisfied a critical need. It provided a powerful answer to the question – *why do I suffer?* (GM III:28) and thereby offered a sense of meaning for human existence. Although injurious because of the values it promotes in denigrating human existence, the form of morality Nietzsche describes still served a positive function of staving off nihilistic despair in those unable to find meaning in human suffering and therefore unable to endure a purposeless existence. This is a peculiar kind of victory, a freakish new festival that this new interpretation of existence advanced: it ‘brought fresh suffering with it, deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive suffering’ (GM III:28).

But if we reject this particular interpretation of life or find the form and basis of its affirmation perverse or antithetical to human flourishing, what might replace it? What are some necessary conditions for its replacement? Nietzsche spent the rest of his intellectual life trying to articulate those questions and to begin formulating some answers. Given the scarcity of accounts of his positive alternatives, we might be tempted to claim that Nietzsche himself was not fully ready to offer a reply, and he might agree. He does not provide a new prescription for human flourishing, although up until the end of his philosophically productive life, he maintained an interest in writing a *revaluation of values*. Nevertheless, he does make some assertions regarding the character of affirmative modes of human valuation, as we have seen above, and he identifies some useful (negative) comparisons that may help his readers anticipate different forms of life.

In the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* that was cited above about *intention* as the locus of value in our current conception of morality, Nietzsche also gestures to a post-moral (*aussermoralische*) future. Again, there is no formula and the details are unspecified and unknown, but where he discusses it in BGE 32, he suggests that it



would result from a 'reversal' of this perspective and 'fundamental shift in values'. This is not to say that we would affirm the *opposite or opposing* values to those that we currently hold. If we look at what is reversed, we see that Nietzsche imagines it to have something to do with realising an array of values in which intention no longer serves as fulcrum of value, one in which 'the decisive value of an action lies precisely in what is *unintentional* in it'. In this case, 'the intention is merely a sign and symptom that still requires interpretation – moreover, a sign that means too much and therefore, taken by itself alone, almost nothing'. Just *what* Nietzsche has in mind here is unclear, but if we recall the earlier discussion about the distinction between values that radiate from an axis of good and bad versus those tied to an axis of good and evil, a major difference was the form or forms of life each supported. A way of living is much broader and entails far more than a series of intentions – executed poorly or well – and there is much in it that may be unconscious or *beneath the surface* as Nietzsche suggests about the perspective that might be available after or beyond the morality of intentions.<sup>18</sup>

#### MORAL INJURY AND TRANSFORMATION

If it should turn out to be the case that – as we know it – *morality injures*, what can one do about it?<sup>19</sup> As suggested above, Nietzsche's solution is not simply to shrug it off, or relegate moral existence to lesser, weaker types. This is so, again, because, on Nietzsche's account, the development of morality is intrinsically connected with culture, human creativity, and what have been, at least so far, peak human possibilities. It is also indelibly inscribed in our psychology and physiology.

The dynamic of relations that is evident in the conception of the evil enemy, the *mortal enemy*, crystallises what is injurious about morality overall. Moving past it, becoming capable of mercy and forgiveness in the particular way Nietzsche described, as discussed above, is part of how he anticipates what we might call

*moral transformation* beyond the evaluative axis of Good and Evil and its logic of absolute enemies.

There is yet another way Nietzsche appears to regard morality as injurious: the refinement of the subject of morality, that is, the development of the moral psychology that supports what we now know as morality's signature features, promotes cruelty and celebrates violence; it is rooted in hatred of key aspects of human existence. Nietzsche thinks this is both *inhuman* and *inhumane* – pushed to an extreme, it destabilises life affirmation.

Finally, as presented above, Nietzsche thinks that morality, in its primary manifestations today, is injurious insofar as it diminishes value production overall, because it harms our relations, undermines community, and impoverishes our sense of well-being by instituting a catalogue and calculus of debts. Morality is thereby injurious because it alienates us from other forms of relations to ourselves and each other. These considerations will bear on any possible transformation beyond morality that one might seek.

Nietzsche has no formula for moral transformation or, in his own words, moving or developing beyond an axis of values defined by the poles of good and evil and the moral system it organises. But it does seem that he provides certain indications of what might promote such an aim. One facet of this entails inquiry into moral concepts and the extra-moral political and philosophical pressures that fuel their advancement and expression in our customary morality – or, the moral norms that shape our ordinary social and communal relations. In this case, 'political' refers not to any particular form of politics or partisan ideology but rather to organisations and machinations of power more generally. And this is a project to which his *Genealogy* might contribute. So, for example, in the first essay, Nietzsche considers how the revaluation of values that produces the concept of *evil* is politically motivated: a socially (and presumably materially) weaker group sought revenge and (successfully) strove for a new form of domination when it shifted the terms of evaluation and the grounds on which that was exercised. This

reevaluation ultimately proved successful as its proponents became superior by defining new terms of success and a new plane in which to claim it. In shifting the relevant domain of the struggle from the physical to the spiritual, they produced a spiritual world and forms of subjectivity that relate to, rely upon and manifest it. Nietzsche regards the subjects ultimately produced in this new system as bearing greater risk, weaker and more prone to spiritual (and even physical) decay than their noble warrior predecessors. However, it is for these very same reasons that they also possess greater possibilities, perhaps eclipsing those of our ancestors.

Nietzsche presents the noble and slavish forms of valuation as supported by distinctly different arrays of concepts and associated values. So, for example, he presents rank ordering as contrasted with the system of accounting debts, a pathos of distance that separates one and one's community from others as contrasted with a desire for revenge that pulls one toward engaging what one abhors, a sense of nobility contrasted with a sense of guilt. These support different affective orientations and different conceptions and expressions of power, different ways of pursuing and wielding creative power, which Nietzsche thinks has ontological weightiness. These lead to and support very different ways of life.

Nietzsche describes his nobles as having a self-conception linked with a 'protracted and domineering fundamental *total feeling*' (GM I:2; emphasis mine). They 'felt themselves to be men of higher rank' (GM I:5). As Nietzsche sketches his own account of the development of explicitly *moral* concepts out of a prior *esthlos* (or *ethos*, a way of living a good life), this comes to signify one who *is*. This 'typical character trait' comes to stand for a sense of what is good. It is linked with power, but not just power conceived in terms of power over others. Rather, it serves as an existential orientation – *that one exists*, one is real, one is capable of consequential, meaningful action. How does this person relate to others and live in a community? This kind of location or index of human existence is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for an ethical life. And, although Nietzsche does

not provide a robust account of an ethical life that is shared with others beyond the morality of intention, the orientation suggested above is also crucial for hope in a possible future on both a personal, individual level and as part of a community. That others are similarly connected with reality, that they too are engaged and involved – this provides the basis of trust.<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, then, since Nietzsche is sometimes characterised as an enemy of morality, there are also resources in his works for drawing out a fuller moral psychological picture that might provide us with some orientation for mitigating at least some of the injurious features of morality as we commonly construe it. Something that is clear from Nietzsche's account in the *Genealogy* is that he believes moral transformation is crucial for realising these richer possibilities.

#### NOTES

1. Nietzsche's title uses the German *Moral*. He discusses *morality as such* in addition to particular moral values. See Acampora (2006: 1–8). For translations of Nietzsche's works, I generally utilise Kaufmann's rendition of *GM* and *GS*, however, where noted, I have modified these in cases in which the German original suggests other choices.
2. Nietzsche's discussions of Jews and Jewish history are considered in detail in Yovel (1998).
3. Many of Nietzsche's contemporaries thought moral beliefs and sentiments could be understood in terms of a systematic development aiming at a kind of perfection. Others held out hope that the motives of morality could be understood so as to both predict and correct human behaviour. Thus, there were many *histories* of morals, works on the *science* of morality, and there were numerous *studies* and *theories* of moral beliefs. Foucault, perhaps, makes the most of Nietzsche's designation of his book as a *genealogy*. For context and contemporary relevance, see Prinz (2016). On Nietzsche and Darwinism, see Richardson (2004).
4. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) are kindred spirits in their examination of conceptual development and application.
5. This theme of dual inheritances is commonly found in Nietzsche's writings, stretching from his first work to his last. For discussion of similar

- themes in BGE, see Acampora and Ansell Pearson (2011), especially chapter 10.
6. Even the qualification here of *Western* is somewhat misleading for Nietzsche will claim that what is European is an outgrowth (and not an advancement) of the Asian and that as an outgrowth of what is African. See *The Case of Wagner* 2.
  7. In this chapter, I repeatedly turn to the idea of a *form* rather than *type* or *way* of life. Leiter (2015) finds *types* in Nietzsche's text and discusses them as fixed. Nehamas (1985) emphasises ways of living that may be artfully shaped. As I see it, a form of life incorporates many aspects of living that are durable and resistant to change, and it is broader than what we might consciously take on as a project or goal. There may be some resonances (and most certainly differences) between Nietzsche's views and Wittgenstein's on *forms of life*, but it is not my intention to summon or develop those ideas here.
  8. On picture arguments, see Pippin (2010).
  9. Of all the battles in which Nietzsche takes interest, this is the most fundamental for him. See also A 61.
  10. On *ressentiment* as a form of valuation that relies upon self-deception see Reginster (1998). On the relevance of Nietzsche's observations for understanding self-deception and consciousness, see Poellner (2004).
  11. On the potentially enriching dimensions of what is slavish, see Neuhaus (2014).
  12. There is much discussion in political theory concerning how different ways of characterising opposition (e.g., as enemy or as adversary) effect different relations.
  13. I discuss this in greater detail in Acampora (2013a) and Acampora (2013b), chapters 4 and 5.
  14. On development of the bad conscience, see Risse (2001).
  15. Janaway (2007) provides extensive discussion of Nietzsche's views of suffering as they relate to the development of morality.
  16. See Clark (2017) for discussion of the ascetic ideal for philosophers.
  17. Elsewhere Nietzsche writes: 'the concepts "beyond", "Last Judgment", "immortality of the soul", and "soul" itself are instruments of torture, systems of cruelties by which the priest became master, remained master' (A 38).
  18. See Nehamas (forthcoming).

19. In this chapter, I use the expression *moral injury* to refer to the injurious nature of morality, at least on Nietzsche's account, but there are literatures of moral injury that identify and describe injuries to a person's sense of morality or moral identity. Although I do not address this here, I think Nietzsche might regard this sense of moral injury as *symptomatic* of some of the injurious features of morality he identifies.
20. These two conditions, hope and trust, have been discussed at length by philosophers interested in moral repair (e.g., Walker 2006), although the aim in this case is to *restore* the moral order rather than transcend it.