

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* - Essay Two

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Essay Two: "Guilt," "Bad Conscience"

1. Breeding an animal with the right to make promises; the problem of forgetting as an active faculty: the protection of consciousness from unconscious processes of experience and absorption. This active forgetting is necessary to make room for new experiences and for happiness in the presence. The man who cannot forget cannot be happy, bcs he dwells on past slights which leads to brooding about future revenge. [Deleuze here compares N and Freud on forgetting, cness, and the uncns in topographical terms: sensitive membranes and so forth.] [N elsewhere talks about forgetting as the repression of difference in making concepts.] Man must breed a memory in the case of promising, making himself calculable, regular, necessary.

2. The origin [*Herkunft*] of responsibility is the making of men regular [note the production process: the plasticity of "man"]. This is a prehistoric labor of culture as such, of the "morality of custom," which involves severity, tyranny, stupidity, and idiocy. ["Prehistoric" does not mean "before" but rather "out of history." Deleuze p. 133 shows that this prehistory is the generic training of obedience to law as such, in principle separate from the arbitrary content of positive laws.] The fruit of this prehistoric [generic] process is the "sovereign individual": autonomous and with right to make promises, conscious of what has preceded him [the prehistoric labor of overcoming forgetfulness]. The awareness of his responsibility is what the sovereign individual calls "conscience." [NB: do not confuse the sovereign individual of Essay Two with the noble warrior of Essay One.] [Very important theme for post-structuralism: consciousness as cultural product produced by work on the body.]

3. How did culture produce the sovereign individual? Through a "fearful mnemotechnics": only pain can overcome forgetfulness. This is the origin of asceticism [see Essay Three for the "ascetic ideal"]. Asceticism here means self-working. Clue is ancient punishments. An important quote: "Ah, reason, seriousness ... at the bottom of al 'good things.'"

4. Previous genealogists have missed two important factors: The origin of the [moral, psychological] notion of guilt in "very material" concept of debt. The independence of punishment from notions of free will, which come much later in history. [Free will involves the slave morality disreption of force from what it can do and the creation of the illusion of the subject: 1.13] Punishment was for the most part of history only the venting of anger at the cause of an offense. But this venting is held in check by the notion of equivalence: that pain caused by an offense can be paid back by pain dealt out in punishment. The origin of this equivalence is the contract between creditor and debtor. [Note the tracing back of psychology to political economy. DG use circulation of debts as way to critique "exchangist" anthropologies in *Anti-Oedipus*.]

5. The payback for the pain of an offense is the pleasure caused by the infliction of pain on another. The pleasure is greater the lower the creditor is in social hierarchy. The pleasure can come merely from watching the infliction of pain. [N here sets up mercy as the privilege of the strong, the self-overcoming of justice. We also see how the question of thanatography might be more troubling than that of pornography.]

6. Morality traced back to legal codes organizing political economy. N underlines that this is a conjecture, and that it is painful to investigate here [again contrary to the nostalgia thesis]. Revenge is not an appropriate investigative concept here [revenge is part of *ressentiment*, a much later specific cultural

moment; creditor / debtor relations and the pleasure in causing pain are part of the “prehistoric” or generic training of consciousness in man.] Cruelty as festival. Spiritualization of cruelty in higher culture.

7. Earlier days were more cheerful when cruelty was festive. This insight is no grounds for contemporary pessimism, which is the shame at man, the result of a “morbid softening and moralization.” Today some use suffering as an argument against existence, but in the past it was a seduction to life. The problem these people feel is the senselessness of suffering. One solution is to have the gods be friends of cruel spectacles [the Trojan War as festival of the gods]. Modern notions of “free will” are precisely to keep God interested in the “drama of salvation” and hence save Him from the boredom of a deterministic universe. [another slap at Kant.]

8. Rendering equivalent as thinking as such [cf. forgetfulness as repression of difference in formation of general concepts: this is also N’s critique of what he sees as “Darwinism”: the triumph of the herd, the molar.] This primitive creditor / debtor economic thought is prior to any social organization. In equivalence is the beginning of justice: equal powers reach an understanding of equivalence in offense / punishment, and compel lesser powers to quit squabbling and reach a settlement.

9. “Prehistoric” equivalence / justice here defined by N as everywhere present [an “abstract machine” to use DG’s term]. Thus community is to citizen as creditor to debtor. Punishment is then a reminder of what credit the community has extended the citizen in terms of protection, peace, etc. An law-breaker is then thrown outside the community; now hostility can be vented upon him as upon an enemy defeated in war.

10. The more powerful the community, the less seriously it takes offenses. The more powerful community now protects its law-breakers from mob violence and from revenge and insists that it is the agent that will determine equivalence / justice. To treat acts as dischargeable and hence to separate the criminal from the crime: the mark of the strong community. The endpoint: a community so strong and conscious of its strength that it lets its parasites go unpunished. The self-overcoming of justice in mercy.

11. Repudiation of attempts to find origin of justice in resentment (which today is found flourishing in the anti-Semites and anarchists). Contrasting biological value of reactive and active affects. Contra Dühring, the triumph of justice is the overcoming of revenge: objectivity even to those who have harmed you: this is contemporary mastery. Law is the struggle against reaction and revenge: the active impose boundaries and limits on the thirst for revenge of the weak and reactive by a) protecting the criminal; b) by making justice the struggle against the enemies of peace, not the search for revenge; c) by imposing settlements; d) by elevating equivalents into norms; e) most importantly, by instituting law, so that violence against persons is now an offense against the sovereign power. All this leads to the impersonal evaluation of crime, the opposite of revenge.

Essence of life is will to power [to creativity through change and self-overcoming; as Deleuze insists, we cannot see the will to power as the will of an unchanging subject that wants the power it lacks: this is precisely the slave’s view of things], so law is exceptional condition: the partial restriction of individual wills to power in order to create a greater unit of power, the community. Law is a means in the struggle between powers [forms of life: the active struggle against the reactive by imposing justice as a form for their reactive forces], it is not aimed, nihilistically, at the preventing of struggle [which would be the prevention of creation and change].

12. The principle of functional indeterminacy is the key to genealogy. That is, current function is no clue to origin [the mistake of the “English psychologists”], since the history of anything is the history of its being seized by greater forces and put to a new task, a new function, which obliterates the previous function. Thus any final cause (that the purpose of a thing dictates its origin) is an illusion. Purposes and functions are only signs of being used by a will to power; the history of a thing is arbitrary and contingent. This is even the case with organs within an organism: degeneration and death are the conditions of progress. The doctrine of will to power is foreign to contemporary herd tastes, which would rather see the mechanistic senselessness of events than acknowledge will to power. The current emphasis on “adaptation” and “survival” mistakes a reactivity, an afterthought, for the primacy of form-giving forces. Survival adaptations are secondary to endogenous creativity of form. [All this is involved with the

discussions of mechanisms of variation and selection in evolutionary biology. Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life*, is the key reference.]

NOTE ON WILL TO POWER: Deleuze insists will is not the property of a subject, nor does it seek a power that it lacks. [The subject is the illusion fostered by resentment so the weak can feel virtuous; lack is what traps desire.] Power is the relation of forces to each other. The will is just the event of a certain configuring of forces. Just as forces can be active or reactive, power can be affirmative or negative. Just as forces must be interpreted {put to use by stronger forces, power must be evaluated. Its lowest, negative form is the priestly seeking to dominate others {the slaves they organize and also the real target, the defeated noble warriors} by organizing the reactive forces of *ressentiment* and bad conscience and thereby organizing the herd. Because priests organize the slave revolt, their "mastery" is slavish to the core, devoted to the defeat of their rivals, the noble warriors. The highest form of will to power, by contrast, is affirmation of self- overcoming creativity, the giving of new form to active forces.

NOTE ON WILL TO POWER AS BIOLOGICAL THEORY: some remarks from my review of *Viroid Life* [*Parallax* 8 (July-September 1998), 156-58.]: Despite what one might have expected, Ansell Pearson shows that "Nietzsche's position 'contra' Darwin is flawed ... what is decisive is the critical perspective Darwin's thinking on natural selection brings to bear on Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie*, [which] rests on an untenable anthropomorphization of nature, life, and evolution" (86). ... Nietzsche's contribution to biological thought should come from his emphasis on endogenous, "form-creating" forces, an emphasis-- taken up in contemporary complexity theory--which counters Darwinism's overestimation of utility in meeting the survival challenge of exogenous forces. Nietzsche falters in his desire to avoid anthropomorphism, however, Ansell Pearson charges, in his biologizing formulation of will-to-power as a "basic organic function" (*Beyond Good and Evil*), which is then used, in Ansell Pearson's phrase, "to legitimize an aristocratic radicalism" (106). This move of Nietzsche amounts to nothing more and nothing less than that for which he criticizes the Darwinians: projecting social forces onto nature, and then reading back off of that "nature" a social and political philosophy! The key remedy, Ansell Pearson states, is to produce a non-anthropomorphic reading of will-to-power so as to "map non-human becomings of life" (109). Ansell Pearson approaches this task first through a critique of Heidegger's readings of Nietzsche that seek to outlaw reflection on Nietzsche's biology, and then with a call for a "technics of excess, in which the inventiveness of evolution would be seen to exceed a utilitarian calculation, so making possible the becoming of more complex, non-linear, and 'machinic' models of evolution" (114).

13. Applying the genealogical category of functional indeterminacy to punishment, N writes that the custom endures but the meaning, the purpose, is fluid. Bodies have been beaten and tortured long before the function of "punishment" was given as interpretation of those actions. Meanings [functions] are in fact hopelessly concentrated in anything with a long history; only that without history is definable. Long list of different functions of punishment.

14. Punishment is thus overdetermined by all sorts of functions, all sorts of uses. In fact, the one thing we can be sure punishment does not do is awaken a feeling of guilt in the one punished, which is supposed to be its essential contemporary function. Punishment doesn't make you feel guilty, but toughens you up or destroys your vitality. Actually, punishment prevents guilt, as the punished one cannot see violence, lying, theft, etc as such as reprehensible, since the state is in the process of dealing out violence to him, after having bribed, cajoled, threatened the witnesses! Actually, the punished one doesn't feel guilty, but unlucky.

15. Punishment mostly served to increase prudence, not guilt. It tames man, rather than making him "better."

16. What then is the origin of bad conscience, the feeling of guilt? The enclosure of man in the walls of society and peace. Unable to rely on instinct, they had to rely on their weakest organ, consciousness. When instincts are not discharged outward, they are internalized. This internalization of instinct is the origin of bad conscience. This new internalized man is a new thing on earth, something which needs the creation of divine spectators.

17. Two presuppositions of this hypothesis. A) it was a sudden break. B) the “state” as imposition of form on the raw material of the population [note the hylomorphism] is the sudden act of the noble warriors who install a terrible tyrannical machine. The state-builders as commanders do not form a contract with the people, but are artists molding them, organ-izing them [organon = tool], rendering them functional parts of a greater whole, giving them a Sinn [meaning, direction: providing a vector of force]. Bad conscience does not develop in these artists, but they provide the necessary condition for it by providing a social organization that restricts the action of the masses and hence internalizes their instincts.

18. The creation of the bad conscience is the same creative force, but on the small scale of the internal soul. The will to power vents itself not on an external population, but on the internalized ancient animal instincts of man now trapped in society. The active bad conscience, the joy of making one’s own self suffer, is the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena. This is a hint towards how self-denial can become an ideal [the ascetic ideal examined in Essay Three].

19. To see the high point of bad conscience we have to go back the creditor / debtor relation, seen as the obligation to ancestors. Fear of ancestors increases as power of tribe increases. Thus the most powerful tribes have ancestors that become gods. Piety only with the noble tribes.

20. [Fascinating note by N linking political history with reflection in genealogies of the gods: despotism triumphing over independent nobility prepares the way for monotheism: a great twist on the providential history of Augustus for Christianity! Christ the King indeed!]. The guilty feeling of indebtedness to the divine reaches its height with the Christian God. Thus with the advent of the reverse course [the death of God], the feeling of guilt should decrease as well. Atheism and second innocence.

21. Up to now N has ignored the moralization of the concept of guilt and bad conscience. Thus we won’t be free of bad conscience so easily; it won’t die just with the death of God. The moralization of bad conscience is an attempt to prevent the discharge of guilt by turning the indebtedness back against the debtor so that the irredeemable debt gives rise to the idea of the irredeemable penance, to eternal punishment. But they are also turned back on the creditor: our ancestor, Adam, is guilty too – of original sin, as is nature, or existence – now considered worthless, until finally we see the masterstroke: God himself sacrifices himself for our guilt, rendering it infinite: how can you repay someone who freely took your guilt on himself and punished himself for you, out of love?

22. Thus self-torture [bad conscience as the will to hurt yourself now that in society you can’t freely hurt others] reaches its highest peak: projection onto God of the antithesis of animal instincts so that he feels guilty for his own animal instincts as rebellion before this perfect, loving God. Here we see the will to feel guilty beyond repair; this is the bestiality of thought that erupts when man cannot be a beast in deed. All this is sad and terrible, especially the connection of this will to guilt with love.

23. Hence the “holy God.” But there are other uses for gods: consider the Greek gods, the reflections of noble and autocratic men, the deification of the animal in man. These gods served the Greeks as warding off the bad conscience. [Principle of functional indeterminacy applied to the gods.] The Greek gods thought men foolish, not evil. In fact they served a true noble purpose: as the origin of evil in men through madness they took on themselves not the punishment for man [which would only insure infinite guilt and eternal punishment] but the guilt.

24. The present situation and hopes for the future.

25. But only Zarathustra the godless can speak of this future man.