

Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals?*

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My title-question typically arises in response to Nietzsche's famous prefatory demand for "a critique of moral values": "*the value of these values is itself to be called into question for the first time*—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they grew, under which they evolved and changed" (GM P:6).¹ Alexander Nehamas, having quoted this sentence, sets out to "determine if and how the investigation of the descent (*Herkunft*) of moral values can affect our own evaluation of the moral point of view."² Granting Nietzsche's identification of the moral point of view with altruism or selflessness, he comments as follows upon Nietzsche's claim "that this connection [between goodness and altruism] is the specific creation of the slave revolt in morality":

Now Nietzsche's view of the origin of our current values, even if it is correct, does not show that we should not identify goodness with altruism or utility. Nothing is objectionable simply because it has an objectionable origin. Had Nietzsche made this argument he would indeed have been, as he sometimes seems to be, guilty of falling into the genetic fallacy, which amounts to confusing the origin of something with its nature or value. But Nietzsche is quite aware that such an argument is unacceptable: he himself exposes it in section 345 of *The Gay Science* ... His argument, as we shall see, is in any case more subtle and more complicated.³

In this passage Nehamas summarizes a prevalent strategy for countering the charge of a genetic fallacy in Nietzsche's genealogy of morality: In fact, (1) Nietzsche does not claim that his genealogical results prove the disvalue of altruistic values; of course, (2) if Nietzsche had claimed this, he would have to admit committing the genetic fallacy; but, (3) Nietzsche himself

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* [=KSA], ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), Vol. 5; *On The Genealogy of Morals* [=GM] tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* [=BWN], ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968). With minor alterations, I have followed the translations cited in these notes..

2 *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 107.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

exposes the unacceptability of such an argument.⁴ In what follows, I will argue that each of these claims is false, and that the approach they embody is therefore misguided. Instead, I will suggest, although we must concede that Nietzsche does make the less subtle and complicated argument in question, he is thereby in a position to reply that the genetic-fallacy charge begs the question of value he claims to pose for the first time.⁴

I

To begin with, Nehamas' implicit suggestion that Nietzsche does not intend to make the kind of argument he criticizes seems sufficiently refuted by the prefatory demand he quotes. For here Nietzsche obviously announces his intention to evaluate—or more precisely, since he writes of a “critique” and “calling into question,” to *devalue*—moral values on the basis of their origins. Or, we might look instead at Nietzsche's preliminary scorn for the utilitarian genealogy of “an evaluation of which the higher man has hitherto been proud”: “This pride *should* be humbled, this evaluation devalued: is that achieved?” (GM I:2). In any case, Nehamas' doubt *that* Nietzsche makes this argument probably stems from a more plausible puzzlement as to *how* he makes it. Although this question is never explicitly addressed in the *Genealogy*, I believe we can answer it by looking closely at two aspects of Nietzsche's terminology there.

The first of these, noted by Michel Foucault, is Nietzsche's new emphasis in *Genealogy* on the notion of “descent” (*Herkunft, Abkunft*) as the kind of “origin” (*Ursprung*) that is relevant to an evaluation of moral values.⁵ This terminological shift is meant to appeal, I think, to the aristocratic or noble “mode of valuation” [*Werthungsweise*] Nietzsche outlines in the first essay of the *Genealogy*. According to this standard, questions of value or legitimacy are always decided by an inquiry into family pedigree, lineage, or heredity. Thus, Nietzsche points for instance to the ancient Greek emphasis on the goodness of the “well-born” (*Wohlgeborenen*), the “highborn” (*edelbürtig*) (GM I:10), and those of “noble descent” (*edlen Abkunft*) (GM II:23)—as contrasted with the badness of the ill-born, the low-born, and those of common descent. Metaphorically, therefore, and in order to determine their value from an aristocratic point of view, Nietzsche investigates the descent of moral values considered as offspring or progeny of their creators. Having discovered their ignoble origins, he concludes that altruistic values are “bad” in the aris-

4 Besides Nehamas' commentary, I find this strategy in Frithjof Bergmann, “Nietzsche's Critique of Morality,” *Reading Nietzsche* [=RN], eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); George Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); and Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). I also find this approach represented in the following essays, all collected in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* [=NGM], ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): Daniel W. Conway, “Genealogy and Critical Method”; David Couzens Hoy, “Nietzsche, Hume and the Genealogical Method”; and Robert C. Solomon, “One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*: Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*.”

5 “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 76-100; cited by Nehamas, pp. 245, n. 1. However, Foucault does not emphasize Nietzsche's aristocratically-evaluative employment of the notion, and I argue below that this employment in fact contradicts Foucault's interpretation.

tocratic sense—that is, base, pitiable and contemptible.⁶

The second relevant aspect of Nietzsche's terminology is his use of the term "genealogy" (*Genealogie*)—a use which, unlike that of the terms "*Herkunft*" and "*Abkunft*," is unprecedented in his earlier writings.⁷ In the works Nietzsche lists as anticipating his conclusions in the *Genealogy*, he writes instead of the "history" (*Historie, Geschichte*) of morality and values. Again, I think we may see Nietzsche's new term as coined to indicate the evaluative dimension of his project. Literally, of course, a "genealogy" is a kind of "history" of family pedigrees, and it is used to determine the legitimacy or value of a person by tracing his line of descent. Although Nietzsche does not explain this precise connotation, a review of his correspondence during the planning, composition, and completion of the *Genealogy* shows his overlapping concern with replying, in a "*genealogischen Notiz*," to the archive director C.A. Hugo Burkhardt's query for a "*Familiengeschichte*" that would determine whether Nietzsche's grandmother was the "Muthgen" mentioned in Goethe's diaries.⁸ That Nietzsche regarded the information he supplied from an aristocratic point of view is supported by its incorporation in his later autobiographical account of descent from nobility (EH I:3).⁹ Metaphorically applied to altruistic values, therefore, Nietzsche's notion of genealogy is meant to suggest the history of plebeian ancestry that proves their disvalue from an aristocratic standpoint.

I would like to propose, then, that in selecting and emphasizing the aristocratically evaluative terms "*Herkunft*" and "*Genealogie*," Nietzsche was indicating precisely how he meant to argue from the origin of altruistic values to their disvalue. Given Nietzsche's advocacy of first-order aristocratic evaluation throughout the *Genealogy*, we should not be surprised to see its metaphorical extension built into his demand for a critique of moral values.¹⁰ Indeed, Nehamas himself reminds us of Nietzsche's positive attitude toward the noble mode of valuation. As proof of this, he cites Nietzsche's query at the end of the first essay of *Genealogy* as to whether flaring

6 For Nietzsche's argument regarding the plebeian descent of altruistic values, see GM I:9,10, 13, 14, 16, and GM II:22. For his characterization of aristocratic disvalue, see GM I:10. See also Section 260, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse, KSA 5; Beyond Good and Evil* [=BGE], tr. Walter Kaufmann in BWN.

7 Nor did Nietzsche inherit this use from Paul Rée, who wrote instead of his "*naturwissenschaftliche Methode des Vergleichs und der genetischen Entwicklung*," in *Die Entstehung des Gewissens* (Berlin: Carl Duncker, 1885), pp. 6, 32.

8 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe* [=KSB], ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), Vol. 8, pp. 108-113, 127; *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969), pp. 269-70. Cf. also Curt Paul Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Biographie* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), Vol. 2, p. 538.

9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo* [=EH], disputed Section in KSA 14, pp. 472-73; tr. Walter Kaufmann in BWN. For an earlier version of this account, see his April 10, 1888 letter to Georg Brandes (KSB 8, p. 288; Middleton, p. 293).

10 For Nietzsche's advocacy, see his well-known December 2, 1887 approval of Georg Brandes' description of his way of thinking as "aristocratic radicalism" (KSB 8, pp. 206, 213, 243; Middleton, p. 279). Commentators who have recently emphasized this advocacy have not, however, noted its extension to Nietzsche's second-order methodology. Cf. Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), and Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

up the ancient fire is not precisely that which should be desired, willed and promoted with all one's might (GM I:7). And against Walter Kaufmann's contention that "Nietzsche's own ethic is beyond both master and slave morality," Nehamas cites Nietzsche's concluding line of that same essay: "[I]t has long been sufficiently clear what I *will*, what I will precisely with that dangerous slogan that is written on the trunk of my last book: '*Beyond Good and Evil*' ... At least this does *not* mean 'Beyond Good and Bad.'" (GM I:17). From this Nehamas infers that for Nietzsche "to be beyond good and evil cannot therefore be to leave behind the mode of valuation that characterizes the barbarian nobles"; and he concludes that "Nietzsche accepts the mode of valuation that characterizes the nobles of *On the Genealogy of Morals*."¹¹ Perhaps, however, Nehamas' failure to conceptualize Nietzsche's second-order aristocratic argument is due to his perception of its fallaciousness, and it is to this issue I turn next.¹²

II

Supposing for the sake of argument that the text of the *Genealogy* forces us to give up (1), are we then obliged to hold (2)? Is Nietzsche bound to acknowledge a genetic fallacy in his genealogical devaluation of altruistic morality? Let me begin by noting why the answer may be regarded as relevant not only to our assessment of Nietzsche's genealogy of morality, but also of the genetic fallacy itself. It would be easy to infer from Nehamas' presentation that the attribution of genetic fallacy is a perennial one, rooted in the study of logical fallacies, and developed quite independently of Nietzsche's project. Surprisingly, it is none of these things. In the first place, the only sense in which this charge may be said to belong to the discipline of logic is the successful role that it played in the late nineteenth-century effort to institute a depsychologized conception of logic.¹³ Second, although the warning against confusing origin and value has its roots in that period's revolt against historicism and psychologism, the actual phrase "genetic fallacy" was not coined until 1914.¹⁴ Finally, and most importantly, the phrase did not become an influential term

11 Nehamas, p. 206. In the discussion that follows, Nehamas qualifies this conclusion while at the same time addressing the objection that, because "the nobles belong to an era that has passed once and for all" (p. 217), Nietzsche cannot be read as suggesting our *return* to the ancient nobles: "Though Nietzsche may not want us to go back to the specific *instance* of the type the nobles manifest, he may still want us to go back to the *type* itself" (p. 254, n. 8).

12 Nehamas also fails to link his awareness of Nietzsche's aristocratic values to his claim that Nietzsche's literal usage of the terms "genealogy" and "descent" is meant to emphasize the background values that essentially condition "the specific path traced through what are actually indefinitely complex family interconnections" (p. 101). See Note 23 below.

13 This effort was spearheaded by Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, tr. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), which was in turn influenced by Hermann Lotze, Gottlob Frege's criticism, and the contemporaneous debate regarding "historicism". Cf. Hans D. Sluga, *Gottlob Frege* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 39-41, 53-56. In my dissertation, "The Anglo-American Revision of Kant's Epistemology" (University of California at Berkeley, 1991), I trace the charge of psychologism back further to John Stuart Mill's objections to William Whewell's version of Kant's epistemology. Cf. also John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 164-66.

14 Morris R. Cohen, "History *Versus* Value," *Journal of Philosophy* 11 (December, 1914): 710, n. 36; reprinted in Cohen, *Reason and Nature* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1931), p. 379. Cf. also Morris R. Cohen and

of art until 1938, when it was introduced to characterize what was widely regarded as an epistemological mistake of the newly formed discipline, “sociology of knowledge” [*Wissenssoziologie*].¹⁵ But it was in fact the sociological aspect of Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality that inspired the founders of this latter discipline in their thinking about the relation between origin and value.¹⁶ In sum, the charge of a genetic fallacy was deployed very recently, outside of logic proper, and at least in part to combat the influence of Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality.¹⁷ Although these historical points do not absolve Nietzsche of the charge, they do serve to suggest its disguised or forgotten partisan nature. Next I want to outline a Nietzschean response, based on the same contended sociological aspect, that attributes to this charge a more debilitating bias.

The key to this response lies, I believe, in Nietzsche’s brief account as to why his “fundamental insight” into moral genealogy was arrived at so late. It was the fault, he writes, of “the retarding influence exercised by the democratic prejudice in the modern world toward all questions of descent”—a prejudice he associates with “the *plebeianism* of the modern spirit” (GM I:4). By thus noting the opposition of modern democracy or plebeianism to questions of descent, Nietzsche is pointing again to the aristocratically evaluative sense of the term “descent.” Certainly, this sense of the term is at stake in Nietzsche’s fundamental insight itself, according to which literal human descent is an ancestral concept of the antithesis “good and bad.” But the context of Nietzsche’s remark shows that he thinks this sense is also involved in his question regarding the metaphorical descent of the concept “good”—a question that begins moral genealogy, and is instantiated by the etymological question that led to his fundamental insight. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s response to the genetic-fallacy charge against this second-order question would be that it is prejudiced by what he calls “the morality of the common man” (GM I: 9)—that is, by a plebeian mode of valuation, born out of a revolt against nobility, and concerned especially to deny the latter’s typical inference from heredity to value.

In thus alleging socio-political bias behind the genetic-fallacy charge, Nietzsche would be aiming of course to expose the pretense of logic suggested by the term “fallacy.”¹⁸ This ideo-

Ernest Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), pp. 388-90.

15 Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge: an Answer to Relativism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 19-20, 76-78; cf. also his essay, “Historicism,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: MacMillan, 1967). Influenced by Cohen, Mandelbaum uses the phrase “genetic fallacy” to identify the inference from origin to validity made by Karl Mannheim in *Ideology and Utopia*, tr. L. Wirth and E. Shils (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936), pp. 24-33, 266-273, 292-94. Although Mannheim himself does not use the (German version of the) phrase, he is sensitive to this potential charge because it has already been raised in 1929 by Max Scheler, under the label “sociologism,” as an extension of Husserl’s attack on “psychologism” (Mandelbaum, pp. 149-150). I am grateful to William Beardsley for drawing my attention to these sources.

16 Mannheim, pp. 25, 310. Max Scheler, “Ressentiment,” in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert C. Solomon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 243-57.

17 Compare this account with Margaret Crouch, “A Limited Defense of the Genetic Fallacy,” *Metaphilosophy* 24 (July 1993): 227-240.

18 Schacht is also motivated by the threat of the “genetic fallacy” to stress the ways in which Nietzsche’s “genealogical subversions” fall short of “logically” rigorous refutations (pp. 124-130, 139, 351-54).

logical strategy is indicated by his *Genealogy* analysis of the counterfeiting, even self-deceiving, machinations required for a successful “slave revolt in morality.”¹⁹ But it is perhaps best supported by his well-known discussion of the problem of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*.²⁰ For Nietzsche is concerned there to trace Socrates’ use of dialectic back to his plebeian descent and consequent *ressentiment* against Athenian nobility. According to Nietzsche, Socrates’ syllogisms are his weapon of revolt, and the means by which plebs come to the top. But Socrates himself, as represented by Plato in the early dialogues, takes great dialectical pains to refute the view that goodness is dependent on birth or ancestry. It is plausible, therefore, that Nietzsche would have regarded the charge of a genetic “fallacy” as one more dialectical tool for consolidating the revaluation of aristocratic values begun by Socrates.

Challenged in this way to support their mere assertion of fallacy, and denied their implicit appeal to logic, Nehamas and others would probably press their charge against Nietzsche’s project as follows. Surely, they would argue, there is no democratic bias behind the claim that the value of our *current* altruistic morality cannot be determined by investigating its *origins*. For even conceding any allegation of its original baseness, the passage of time since then has allowed for the kind of change that might have improved its value. George Morgan summarizes this argument, and even attributes it to Nietzsche himself, when he writes: “[Nietzsche] asserts with special emphasis that a genetic account of morality is not the same as an evaluation of it: its present worth is quite distinct from that of its beginnings.”²¹ Similarly, Nehamas, having defined the genetic fallacy as “confusing the origin of something with its *nature* or value,” describes the view that an institution’s origin can by itself explain its *nature* as a “correlative idea” of the mistaken view “that institutions regularly arise in the form in which we now know them.” Citing Nietzsche’s discussion of the history of punishment (GM II:12-14), Nehamas explains why Nietzsche denies the latter view:

Earlier modes of valuation ... were appropriated, reversed, reinterpreted, and transposed in order to fabricate the general system according to which most lives today are ordered. The worst assumption a genealogist can make is to think that the present purpose and significance of these operations, their end product, was the factor that

19 See GM I: 7-9, 13-15.

20 *Götzen-Dämmerung*, KSA 6, II; [=TI], tr. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking, 1982).

21 Although he does not use the phrase “genetic fallacy,” Morgan offers this rationale as early as 1941 in the first edition of his commentary, p. 144. Both Bergmann (RN, p. 31) and Conway (NGM, p. 328) provide this account of why the genetic fallacy is a fallacy, but Conway does not attribute it to Nietzsche. Yirmiyahu Yovel, in “Nietzsche, the Jews and *Ressentiment*” (NGM, pp. 214-36), argues more specifically that Nietzsche’s genealogical hypotheses are “psycho-cultural-existential” and therefore do not concern literal biological and historical heredity. From this he infers Nietzsche’s view that genealogical traits manifested in early life can be overcome through the evolution and adaptation of new depth-preferences and positions. Against this interpretation, see the remarks from *Beyond Good and Evil* below, as well as Nietzsche’s announcement that “every table of goods, every ‘thou shalt’ known to history or ethnology, requires first of all a *physiological* elucidation and interpretation, rather than a psychological one” (GM I:17n).

brought them about in the beginning.²²

Clearly, then, this appeal to Nietzsche's own methodological principle is supposed to explain why the genetic fallacy is a fallacy: that is, why a thing's origin can never by itself explain its nature *or value*. This is why Nehamas writes that "Nietzsche's view of the *origin* of our *current* values, even if it is correct, does not show that we should not identify goodness with altruism."

From Nietzsche's standpoint, however, this explanation would still be obviously influenced by the modern democratic prejudice toward all questions of descent—this time, toward the further aristocratic judgment that people cannot change over time and are therefore unable to transcend their origins. Nietzsche himself endorses this judgment in the section of *Beyond Good and Evil* devoted to the question, "What is Noble?"²³ "It is simply not possible that a human being should *not* have in his body the qualities and preferences of his parents and ancestors: whatever appearances may suggest to the contrary" (BGE 264).²⁴ It is only a modern (self-)deception, he writes further, to believe that the original baseness conferred by lowly birth can be improved through education and culture: "In our very popular, that is to say plebeian age, 'education' and 'culture' *must* be essentially the art of deceiving—of deceiving about descent, the inherited plebs in body and soul. ... 'Plebs' *usque recurret*" (BGE 264).²⁵ Translated, therefore, to his *Genealogy* view of altruistic morality as a two thousand year-old victorious slave revolt born in Judea, Nietzsche's aristocratic determinism leads him to reject the claim attributed to him above that this morality can transcend its roots and appreciate (GM I:7-9).²⁶ This is why he writes, for instance, of the recurring plebeian *ressentiment* in the life-history of the value "good and evil":

22 Nehamas, pp. 112-113. Morgan cites the same passages, p. 144, n. 16. Solomon may also have this discussion of punishment in mind when he writes that "Nietzsche himself argues against the genetic fallacy in the *Genealogy*" (NGM, p. 124, n. 4).

23 In highlighting the aristocratic background values that condition Nietzsche's use of the terms "genealogy" and "descent," these remarks also serve to refute Nehamas' Wittgensteinian explication of this use (pp. 100-105). Indeed, Nietzsche would have perhaps regarded this kind of explication as itself a legacy of the modern plebeian deception about descent.

24 Following Kaufmann, this remark is typically cited as indisputable evidence of Nietzsche's Lamarckian belief in the heritability of acquired traits (cf. Schacht, p. 335). But this interpretation assumes precisely what Nietzsche is concerned to deny in this remark—that the parents and ancestors *acquired* their heritable qualities and preferences. Properly understood, therefore, Nietzsche's remark demonstrates his disputable aristocratic innatism, but not a disputable Lamarckism.

25 Although also cited as evidence of Nietzsche's Lamarckism, this remark suggests rather his view that such a doctrine—in claiming the heritability of educationally and culturally acquired traits—is itself part of the modern art of deceiving about plebeian descent. This suggestion is supported by Nietzsche's inclusion of Lamarckism among the misguided modern English plebeian views espoused by Darwin and his followers. See Note 46 below, and Nietzsche's three unpublished anti-Darwin notes in *Nachgelassene Fragmente: 1885-1887*, KSA 12, 7[25] and KSA 13, 14[123], 14[133]; *The Will to Power [=WP]*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), 647, 684-85. Cf. also Werner Stegmaier, "Darwin, Darwinismus, Nietzsche, zum Problem der Evolution," *Nietzsche-Studien* 16 (1987): pp. 274-75.

26 Cf. also GM I:13 for Nietzsche's deterministic view of noble strength and plebeian weakness. On this view, it is also part of the plebeian deception that nobility is "free" to lose its hereditary value, and thus "accountable" for it as well.

There was, to be sure, in the Renaissance an uncanny and glittering reawakening of the classical ideal, of the noble mode of evaluating all things ... but Judea immediately triumphed again, thanks to that thoroughly plebeian (German and English) *ressentiment* movement called the Reformation ... In an even more decisive and profound sense Judea triumphed once again over the classical ideal with the French Revolution: the last political nobility that existed in Europe, that of the *French* seventeenth and eighteenth century, collapsed beneath the popular instincts of *ressentiment* ... (GM I:16)

Nor will it help, finally, to cite Nietzsche's own methodological principle on behalf of this attribution. For a closer look shows that this appeal depends upon an important, and common, misinterpretation.²⁷ Nietzsche does not write that a genealogist should never project the *current* or *present* purposes of something back into its origin, but that he should never project back *any* of its purposes at all.²⁸ The reason, he explains, is that something must already exist, having somehow come into being, in order to be given even its first purpose.²⁹ Certainly, as Nehamas accurately reports, Nietzsche thinks all such imposed goals (meanings, functions, utilities) are fluid because they are then constantly being appropriated, reversed, reinterpreted, and transposed. But that is precisely why he warns that the genealogist should search instead for the relatively enduring origin that antedates and lies outside the entire sphere of that thing's purposes.³⁰ Applying this principle to the institution of altruistic morality, Nietzsche concludes that no set of imposed purposes can ever change or erase its devaluing plebeian descent.³¹ According to Nietzsche, it is

27 See also Bergmann, RN, p. 31; Foucault, p. 83; Morgan, p. 144.

28 “[T]he cause of the genesis of a thing and its eventual utility, its factual application and arrangement in a system of purposes, lie *toto coelo* outside each other” (GM II:12). As his argument in the next clause indicates, Nietzsche's term, “eventual” [*schliessliche*], is not meant to contrast a thing's *originating* and current utility, but rather to suggest the succession of utilities imposed upon a thing *following* its origin. Thus, whereas Nehamas and others interpret Nietzsche to mean that a thing's *current* utility does not imply the *same* originating utility, he in fact means that it does not imply *any* originating utility.

29 “[E]twas Vorhandenes, irgendwie Zu-Stande-Gekommenes immer wieder ... zu einem neuen Nutzen umgebildet und umgerichtet wird” (GM II:12). Nietzsche's aristocratic innatism is itself supported by this methodological argument: a human being, or morality, must have already come into being with certain innate traits in order to acquire any further traits. The Lamarckian doctrine therefore illegitimately projects the acquired traits of the parents and ancestors back into their heritable descent.

30 Applying his methodological schema to the subject punishment, Nietzsche identifies the “procedure” as the thing that “has long existed [*längst vorhandene*]” before being given its latest employment and is therefore “enduring” relative to its fluid purposes. It follows that not only the thing, but the origin of the thing—its “invention”—is “something older, earlier” than the thing's employment (GM II:13). I believe this warning contradicts Solomon's suggestion (NGM, pp. 95-98) as to why Nietzsche did not in fact make the kind of argument that he agrees would be an instance of the genetic fallacy. Following Scheler, Solomon suggests that Nietzsche's genealogy of morals “is really more psychology than history” (but see Note 21 above); and that therefore Nietzsche's genealogical hypothesis about *ressentiment* is meant to exhibit, not the origin of morality, but rather its intentional structure or content.

31 As incorporated into Nietzsche's moral genealogy, this principle may be regarded as a second-order translation of the disdain for utility he sees built into the aristocratic mode of valuation: “... what had they [the nobles] to do with utility! The viewpoint of utility is as foreign and inappropriate as it could possibly be in the face of such a burning eruption of the highest rank-ordering, rank-defining value judgments” (GM I:2).

only by conflating descent and utility that previous historians have projected back teleological change and thereby deceived themselves regarding the possibility of a genealogical change in altruistic morality.

III

I turn lastly to (3), the claim that Nietzsche himself exposes as unacceptable the argument that altruistic morality is objectionable simply because it has an objectionable origin. In support of this claim, Nehamas cites David Hoy's suggestion that Nietzsche mentions "the methodological problem of the genetic fallacy" in the following remark from Section 345 of *The Gay Science*:³² "A morality could even have grown *out* of an error: even with this insight the problem of its value would not once be touched."³³ Richard Schacht, who also cites this remark, adds Nietzsche's parenthetical observation a little earlier in the Section that "a history of the origin of these [moral] feelings and valuations" is "something other than a critique of them."³⁴ What this means, according to Schacht, is that Nietzsche's "revaluation of values only begins, and does not end, with inquiry into their genealogy"³⁵—a reading he supports with the following contemporaneous *Nachlass* remark:

The question regarding the descent of our valuations and tables of good absolutely does not coincide with their critique, as is so often believed: even though the insight into some *puđenda origo* certainly brings with it the feeling of a diminution in value of the thing that originated thus and prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude against it.³⁶

Passages like these, Schacht explains, show why Nietzsche's prefatory demand in the *Genealogy* does not commit the genetic fallacy: a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which moral values grew is not supposed to settle, but only prepare the way for their cri-

32 Nehamas' other citation, from Section 44 of *Daybreak* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröte*, KSA 3; tr. R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982]), is neither specific enough nor late enough to count as evidence of Nietzsche's views regarding the genetic fallacy in the *Genealogy*. Also cited by Morgan, p. 144, n. 16.

33 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in KSA 3; [=GS], tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Cited by Hoy, NGM, p. 267, n. 4; Nehamas, p. 246, n. 5. According to Hoy, however, Nietzsche does not seem to be aware of the problem of the genetic fallacy in the *Genealogy* because he there intends genealogy "to come up with a definite valuation of the traditional moral virtues and principles" (NGM, p. 252).

34 Schacht, p. 424; also cited by Morgan, p. 144, n. 16.

35 Schacht, p. 352. Cf. also his recent "Of Morals and *Menschen*," where he writes of "Nietzsche's repeated insistence that the value of something is by no means settled by a knowledge of how it originated"; and that instead it is "above all *by their fruits*— and not merely *by their roots*" that Nietzsche would have us know morals (NGM, pp. 428-432).

36 KSA 12, 2[189]; WP 254. Cited by Schacht, pp. 352-54; also cited to this end by Morgan, p. 144, n. 16.

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tique.³⁷ As confirmation, Schacht notes Nietzsche's dismissive prefatory comment that his real concern, the value of morality, "was something much more important than [his] own or someone else's hypothesizing about the origin of morality" (GM P:5).³⁸

Although I agree with these commentators that the evidence assembled above concerns the genetic fallacy, I think it proves instead Nietzsche's complete unawareness of this "methodological problem." The reason is that in all these passages Nietzsche is reproaching previous thinkers for having investigated the origin of morality in such a way that the problem of its value would never really be touched. Specifically, he charges, previous histories of the origin of morality were not critical because morality was precisely that upon which everyone agreed. "It is evident," he writes at the start of *Gay Science* 345,

that up to now morality was no problem at all; rather, precisely that on which after all mistrust, discord, and contradiction one agreed with one another, the hallowed place of peace where thinkers rested, breathed, revived even from themselves. I see nobody who dared a *critique* of moral value-judgments. ... I have scarcely detected a few meager preliminary efforts to bring forth a *history of the origin* of these feelings and valuations (which is something other than a critique of them ...)

In the later remark cited by Hoy, Nietzsche is concerned to refute the supposition of the more refined among the English historians of morality that, because they have *criticized* the origin of morality (as erroneous), they have thereby criticized the morality itself—that is, its value. But they have not, Nietzsche argues, because

they themselves still stand quite unsuspectingly under the command of a particular morality and serve, without knowing it, as its shield-bearers and followers; for example, by sharing that popular superstition of Christian Europe which is still always so guilelessly repeated, that what is characteristic of moral action is selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice, or sympathy, pity.³⁹

The point of the remark cited by Hoy, therefore, is not to deny the devaluative relevance of *any* critical insight into the origin of morality, but only of that critical insight influenced by an unsuspected allegiance to the (altruistic) morality under investigation.⁴⁰

Although the commentators above fail to notice it, Nietzsche returns to develop the point

37 Schacht, pp. 351-52, 421; cf. also pp. 124-30, 349-54, 423-26. In a similar vein, Conway argues that Nietzsche's genealogy of morals does not commit the genetic fallacy once we regard it as merely "enabling" an "extra-genealogical" critical method that he identifies as "immanent symptomatology" (NGM, pp. 328-331).

38 Schacht, pp. 421, 425.

39 Cf. also KSA 12, 2[163], 2[203].

40 Cf. Nietzsche's contemporaneous *Nachlass* observation that "utilitarianism (socialism, democracy) criticizes the descent of moral valuations, *but has faith in them*" (KSA 12, 2[165]).

of the *Gay Science* remark at the start of the *Genealogy*.⁴¹ Having listed “error” as the last item in the primary derivation of English historians of morality, Nietzsche explains that by this he means the hypothesis that, ultimately, unegoistic actions were erroneously thought to be something good in themselves (GM I:2).⁴² In thus refining his suggestion that past historians claimed an insight into the growth of morality out of an error, Nietzsche also supports his earlier allegation of prejudice. For it is obvious, he writes now, that this “insight,” despite its ostensibly critical mention of “error,” is part of an overall theory meant to link the origin of the word ‘good’ “from the start and by necessity to ‘unegoistic’ actions” (GM I:2). And such a theory, he charges, is an unhistorical, superstitious fabrication designed simply to support “an evaluation of which the higher man has hitherto been proud as though it were a kind of prerogative of man as such” (GM I:2). By contrast, he claims, his own fundamental insight into the growth of morality is part of a true, documented and confirmable history of morality that is “intended solely for the sake of” criticizing its value.⁴³ In a parenthetical aside, Nietzsche explains that this is more exactly what he means by writing that his real concern, the value of morality, was something much more important than his own or someone else’s hypothesizing about the origin of morality (GM P:5).

When Nietzsche remarks in the *Nachlass*, therefore, that the question regarding the descent of our valuations does not coincide with their critique, he has in mind precisely those previous English historians of morality who supposed that they had criticized the valuations simply because they had criticized their origin. This is proved by his characterization of the answer as an insight into some *pudefenda origo* (“shameful origin”). For Nietzsche returns to this characterization in the *Genealogy* when he describes the English psychologists’ typical answers of “habit” and “forgetfulness” as insights into the evolution of morality out of some *partie honteuse* (“shameful part”) of our inner world (GM I:1). Implied in the *Nachlass* remark, then, is

41 Although Nietzsche began writing the Fifth book of *Gay Science* in October 1886, he did not return his last corrections, and declare his work on it at an end, until June 1, 1887—shortly before he began writing the *Genealogy* on July 10, 1887. See Nietzsche’s letters to H. Köselitz (a.k.a. Peter Gast) on February 13 and August 8, 1887; and to E.W. Fritsch on June 1, 1887 (KSB 8, pp. 23, 81, 123).

42 Paul Rée offered this genealogical hypothesis in *Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen* (Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1877), pp. 17-20, 61-63. But it was Nietzsche himself, in *Human, All Too Human*, who emphasized the “erroneous” aspect of this final genealogical stage: “Soon, however, one forgets the descent of these designations and fancies that the quality ‘good’ or ‘evil’ is inherent in the actions themselves, irrespective of their consequences: with the same error as that by which language designates the stone itself as hard, the tree itself as green—that is to say, by taking for cause that which is effect.” (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, KSA 2, 39; tr. R. J. Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986]). Nietzsche concludes the passage with the claim: “One has thereby attained to the knowledge that the history of moral sensations is the history of an error, the error of accountability: which rests on the error of freedom of will.” Cf. Brendan Donnellan, “Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée: Cooperation and Conflict,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43 (Oct. 1982): 605-06, who overlooks however the crucial omission of any reference to “unegoistic” actions in Nietzsche’s version of the genealogical hypothesis.

43 Here, then, Nietzsche extends his aristocratic claim of plebeian (self-)deception about questions of literal human-descent to questions of metaphorical value-descent. For his argument that aristocratic valuation incorporates a contrast between the truthful noble character and the lying common man, see BGE 260, GM I:5, TI II:5. For his own second-order aristocratic contrast between the fair and just eye of the noble mode of valuation, on the one hand, and the false and prejudiced eye of the plebeian mode of valuation, on the other, see GM I:10, 11 and GM II:11.

Nietzsche's view that this kind of answer, though certainly bringing with it a feeling of diminished value, falls short of a critique because it is part of a theory that is unwittingly designed to promote the value of altruistic morality.⁴⁴ But this account contradicts Schacht's assumption that Nietzsche is here describing his own genealogical question and answer. Instead, as his gratitude and respect in *Genealogy* demonstrate, Nietzsche means that the genealogical value-diminution of previous thinkers has prepared the way for his own genealogical critique. From this it follows that Nietzsche is not indicating any further extra-genealogical stage of revaluation that will help his prefatory demand avoid the charge of genetic fallacy: his knowledge of the circumstances out of which moral values grew *is* supposed to settle and end their critique.⁴⁵

Properly interpreted, therefore, the evidence considered above not only fails to support (3), but offers additional reasons for rejecting (1) and (2). For in these passages Nietzsche urges other moral historians to abandon their unwitting allegiance to altruistic morality in order that their genealogical results should genuinely prove its disvalue. Against the charge that this recommendation commits the genetic fallacy, I believe Nietzsche would now elaborate his earlier response to include the suggestion that this charge is itself guided by an unconscious desire to safeguard altruistic morality from a genuine revaluation. This elaboration is supported by Nietzsche's focus on English historians of morality, together with his claim in *Genealogy* that the plebeianism of the modern spirit "is of English descent" and has its "native soil" in England (GM I:4). Here Nietzsche implies, that is, that the influence of modern English plebeian ideas (especially Darwin's) helps to explain the unwitting bias of previous genealogists (especially Rée) towards the plebeian-descended altruistic morality.⁴⁶ But Nietzsche need not appeal to his genealogical hypothesis regarding the birth of altruistic values out of a plebeian revolt against nobility. According to this minimal counter-charge, those who find a genetic fallacy in his demand for a critique are, without

44 In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche mentions the English psychologists' unconscious hostility towards Christianity, thus suggesting the feeling of diminished value that their insight into some *partie honteuse* is meant to bring with it (GM I:1).

45 This is supported by the next *Nachlass* remark incorporated into *Will to Power* 254, where Nietzsche explains how answering *his* genealogical questions, "For whom?" and "Who interprets?", *will* critically determine what our valuations are worth (KSA 12, 2[190]; cf. also GM P:3,6 and GM I:17n). Although Schacht agrees that this remark outlines Nietzsche's final, and truly critical, "normative-valuational" stage, I believe he misinterprets Nietzsche's interest in the value-*originators* whose life-conditions the values signify and favor as a (naturalistic) *teleological* or *utilitarian* interest (pp. 354-56, 380-84, 407-411, 422-23; Note 35 above). See for example Nietzsche's 1888 *Nachlass* remark: "Formerly one said of every morality: 'by their fruits you should know them'; I say of every morality: it is a fruit by which I know the *soil* out of which it grew" (KSA 13, 14[76]/WP 257).

46 For Nietzsche's view of the origin of the plebeianism of modern ideas in England, especially Darwin, see BGE 253; for his view of Darwin's projection into nature of Malthus and his own English plebeian descent, see GS 349 and TI IX:14; for his charge that Darwin conflated origin and utility, see WP 647 and GM II:12 (cf. by contrast, Nehamas, p. 245, n. 19; also Stegmaier, pp. 271-272); for his view of Darwin's influence on the biased moral genealogy of Paul Rée, see GM P:7. These views all help to explain why Darwin's *The Descent of Man* ([Murray, 1871]; *Die Abstammung des Menschen*, tr. J. Victor Carus [Stuttgart, 1871]), although containing chapters on the evolution of "moral sense" and the "genealogy" of man, was in fact not the inspiration for Nietzsche's new emphasis on the "descent" and "genealogy" of morality. Instead, the latter should be regarded as deployed on behalf of his aristocratic critique of Darwin's evolutionary genealogy of morality.

knowing it, simply assuming the second-order value they are challenged to prove.

IV

Supposing I have indeed refuted (1), (2), and (3), let me conclude with some general remarks on the failed interpretive approach embodied in these claims. This approach begins with the attempt to determine why Nietzsche thinks a revaluation of moral values requires their genealogy. Nehamas' conclusion, widely shared by others, is that Nietzsche's genealogy demonstrates how moral values are contingently created by specific types of people with specific purposes at specific times and places—thereby subverting their pretension to being necessary, natural, impartial, timeless, universal.⁴⁷ From this conclusion, however, it follows that Nietzsche's genealogy of moral values cannot be intended to prove their disvalue.⁴⁸ For such a proof would require ignoring, as Nehamas writes, “the specific historical and genealogical tangles that produce the contingent structures we mistakenly consider given, solid, and extending without change into the future as well as into the past.”⁴⁹ Since, that is, Nietzsche's genealogy shows that moral values are “subject to history and to change, to appropriation and manipulation by particular groups with particular interests at different times,” it would be a genetic fallacy to suppose that the *current* value of these values is somehow determined by their *origin*.⁵⁰ Indeed, Nietzsche himself exposes this fallacy in the assumption of his rival genealogists that “we can determine what such institutions really aim at, what they really are, and what they always have been by tracing them to their origins.”⁵¹ Accordingly, although Nehamas sets out to explain why Nietzsche investigates the descent of moral values in order to call their value into question, his account commits him to the view that any such investigation is for Nietzsche strictly irrelevant to their evaluation. Thus interpreted, Nietzsche himself fits the *Gay Science* characterization of previous moral genealogists who criticized the origin of morality without criticizing morality itself.

My own approach, by contrast, began with the determination that Nietzsche's genealogy of moral values presupposes a metaphorical extension of the noble mode of valuation according to which value is always inferred from descent. Given his hypothesis regarding the plebeian descent of moral values, Nietzsche claims his genealogy proves that they are “bad” in the aristocratic sense. Further, Nietzsche's aristocratic determinism persuades him that these values remain base because their vulgar origins cannot be changed. From Socrates to Judea to the Reformation to the French Revolution to English Darwinism, Nietzsche finds a recurrence of

47 Cf. Keith-Ansell Pearson's Introduction to the new edition and translation in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, tr. Carol Diethe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. xii, xx-xxi.

48 As against Foucault's inference from the same conclusion: “This is undoubtedly why every origin of morality from the moment it stops being pious—and *Herkunft* can never be—has value as critique” (p. 81).

49 Nehamas, p. 110.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

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the plebeian *ressentiment* that gave birth to the moral values they hold in common. With this in mind, Nietzsche reprimands previous moral genealogists—unconsciously influenced by modern English plebeianism—for having invented alternative, and changeable, origins that were meant to safeguard moral values from aristocratic criticism. According to Nietzsche, this plebeian falsification flowed out of their plebeian focus on the utilitarian aspect of moral values, together with their projection of this fluid aspect back into the origin of moral values. Nehamas, however—in not allowing Nietzsche to recognize any other aspect to moral values than that which is imposed, accidental, particular, changeable, and multiple—misunderstands, and consequently conflates, Nietzsche’s systematic separation of origin and purpose.⁵² It follows that he is unable to explain how Nietzsche finds in the genealogical aspect of moral values a relatively given, essential, universal, invariant, and unitary determinant of their value.⁵³

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52 Thus, having cited Nietzsche’s separation of origin and purpose in his discussion of punishment, Nehamas writes: “Nothing about a thing, Nietzsche concludes, need remain constant ... Since both its form and purpose are constantly changing, punishment is constituted by the very history of those forms and practices, those purposes and meanings, that can be seen to belong to a single institution” (*Ibid.*, pp. 102-103).

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