Article

Knowing Ourselves: Nietzsche, the Practice of Genealogy, and the Overcoming of Self-Estrangement

Allison Merrick

Department of Philosophy, California State University, San Marcos, CA 92096, USA; amerrick@csusm.edu

Abstract: By centering Nietzsche's philosophical methods, notably the practice of genealogy, this article addresses how our moral values developed, and how, while they once worked to address certain needs, these values now may perpetuate our self-misunderstandings. In conversation first with Nehamas and Geuss, and then with Reginster, I reconstruct the two dominant conceptions of the practice of genealogy in Nietzsche Studies. I argue that when history is plainly in view, authors have a tendency to remove necessity and psychology from the picture; when necessity and psychology are sharply in focus, commentators are likely to lose sight of history. In keeping all dimensions in the picture, I argue that we obtain a richer and more textured account of the genealogical mode of inquiry. Moreover, I demonstrate that as a psycho-historical mode of inquiry, the normative force of genealogy is immanent to the system of evaluation that is under consideration, which gives Nietzsche's version of the philosophical practice of genealogy an advantage over more contemporary accounts.

Keywords: critique; genealogy; history; Nietzsche; psychology

1. Introduction

Much has been made of the genealogical mode of inquiry: it has been heralded as a cogent methodological alternative to "First Philosophy" (Koopman 2014, p. 261); it has been marshaled in efforts to combat a number of our most urgent social issues, including racism, sexism, and ableism (Brown 2001; Scott 2006; Tremain 2017; McWhorter 2009; Engles 2015); and it has been utilized to clarify how our most vexed philosophical concepts may be said to function (Williams 2002; Bourbeau 2018; Schechter 2018; Erlenbusch-Anderson 2018; Koopman 2019). Given that this form of philosophical inquiry has the potential to exercise considerable force, we would do well to clarify and specify precisely how it functions as well as lay bare some of the key aims of this mode of philosophical activity.

This article seeks to achieve that end by turning to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (Appendix A). I do so not because he was the first to adopt these philosophical methods, but, rather, because we find a cogent set of methodological guidelines that can be put to use to further certain philosophical ends (*GM* P 4 cf. Forster 2011; Hoy 1994; Prinz 2016). Otherwise put, historical, psychological, and critical insights are marshaled as the means by which Nietzsche makes clearer that we, unknowingly perhaps, are obscure to ourselves. Understood in this way, I will show that in Nietzsche's work, at least, genealogy is a philosophical activity that can aid us in the overcoming of self-estrangement. To offer some shape to these claims, and rather than offering a chronological account of the methods as they develop, I will focus on the writings of the late 1880s. My reason is that Nietzsche claims he proceeded "ineptly" in his earlier works because he "lacked [his] own language for [his] own things" (*GM* P 4). Only once the mature account of the methods is in view is it theoretically possible to reveal Nietzsche's developmental arc. As such my aims differ from those of Queloz (2017); Owen (2003); and Nehamas (1994) each of whom offer developmental accounts of Nietzsche's genealogical method. That is, as Nehamas has it, they seek to track "a genealogy of genealogy itself" (Nehamas 1994, p. 269).

With these two caveats in place, the structure of this article is as follows: first, in Section 2 and in conversation with Nehamas and Geuss, and then Reginster, I present

reconstructions of the two dominant conceptions of the practice of genealogy in Nietzsche Studies. I demonstrate that when historical contingency is in view, commentators have a tendency to overlook psychological necessity. Equally so, I show that when the functional necessity of a certain form of morality appears in the foreground, interpreters often lose sight of history. Charting an interpretive course between the Scylla and Charybdis of these two tendencies, I demonstrate that sailing too close to either side has its perils. Next, in Section 3, I offer an account of the genealogical mode of inquiry that avoids these hazards and thereby offers us some richer vistas. In Section 3.1, I highlight one such example, that of the original nobles, as presented in the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. What I show is that the values that the original nobles use to make sense of themselves emerge from within certain sociopolitical and historical circumstances and attend to very specific psychological needs. Plainly, then, the following questions are critical: what sociopolitical and historical factors gave rise to our values? Do those values, our current moral system of evaluation, indeed continue to serve our needs? Finally, I conclude by making plain some implications of this view and by noting some advantages of Nietzsche's version of genealogical methods over more contemporary accounts.

2. Nietzsche and the Practice of Genealogy

Commentators have often placed any difficulties in specifying genealogical methods at the foot of Nietzsche himself, finding in his work, for example, a "vagueness about methodological procedures" (Erlenbusch-Anderson and Nigh 2020, p. 11). Others have followed the interpretive track a bit further, holding that Nietzsche "refrained from providing anything approximating a set of methodological guidelines" (Schrift 1990, p. 144; cf. Ridley 1998, pp. 152–53). Both, however, it seems to me, miss the mark. The reason, I think, is that in the hands of Nietzsche, at least, this mode of philosophical inquiry runs the opposite risk: that of being procedurally overdetermined. Put differently, as I will show below, Nietzsche offers us three criteria that govern his genealogical method of analysis. Simply laying bare the criteria does not, of course, settle a wide range of interpretive issues. What it does achieve, however, is to properly situate the actual contest in Nietzsche Studies: it is not a vagueness or lack of specificity that is at issue, but rather an overabundance. To see how and why this is the case, let me first provide some textual evidence for the criteria.

First, amidst his retrospective analysis, Nietzsche contends that *On the Genealogy of Morality* contains "three decisive preliminary studies by a psychologist" (*EH* "Genealogy"). Such an emphasis, however, is also to be found in the text itself wherein Nietzsche admonishes previous genealogists of morality for the obvious "psychological absurdity" of their accounts of the origins of morality (*GM* I 3; *GM* III 20). Therefore, assuming, of course, that Nietzsche himself is a reliable guide, any cogent reconstruction of the genealogical mode of inquiry must account for why it is a psychologist that undertakes the task, what the nature of that domain includes, and why Nietzsche's account is, at least and at a bare minimum, psychologically tenable.

Next, interpreters must address the historical criterion, as Nietzsche insists that within the cover of the text *On the Genealogy of Morality*, we find an account of moral life as it "can be documented, which can actually be confirmed and has actually existed" (*GM* P 7). As such, the genealogist of morality is interested, Nietzsche continues, in "the whole, long, hard-to-decipher hieroglyphic script of man's moral past!" (*GM* P 7). In addition, Nietzsche criticizes previous attempts to elucidate the origins of our moral frameworks for lacking a certain "historical spirit" (*GM* I 2), directing our attention instead toward the "real *history of morality*" (*GM* P 7). Furthermore, Nietzsche charges that contemporary historiographers are, unknowingly perhaps, beholden to the trappings of traditional morality, so that their histories serve merely to prop up and support rather than to properly investigate its origins (*GM* III 26). As such, an account of genealogy as a philosophical activity must explain why Nietzsche makes use of a particular mode of history, understood as his "major point of historical method" (*GM* II 12; cf. *GM* P 5-6; *GM* 1-3; *GM* II 11, 13; *GM* III 26).

Finally, let us consider the critical criterion. "We need", Nietzsche makes plain in the Preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined*—and so we need to know about the conditions and circumstances under which the values grew up, developed and changed (morality as result, as symptom, as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, remedy, stimulant, inhibition, poison), since we have neither had this knowledge up till now nor even desired it (*GM* P 6).

Three points are worth making here: first, and plainly enough, genealogical investigations can enable or positively contribute to "the *critique*" of a certain form of morality (*GM* P 6). This is evidence of the critical criterion, which suggests that we must explain how Nietzsche's historical accounts may, indeed, constitute a critique of traditional morality.

Second, there is a connection between said critique and the historical "conditions and circumstances under which [our moral values] grew up" (*GM* P 6). Indeed, such an undertaking, which makes use of history, requires a far broader survey, as Nietzsche has it in the following section:

The vast, distant and hidden land of morality—of morality as it really existed and was really lived—has to be journeyed through with quite new questions and as it were with new eyes: and surely that means virtually *discovering* this land for the first time? (*GM* P 7)

Charting morality, "as it really existed and was really lived", opens up new vistas and vantage points (*GM* P 7). One view that emerges, and this is my third point, is that moral values were psychologically organized in certain ways: "as symptom, as mask, as sickness . . . as remedy, stimulant" (*GM* P 6). What we are interested in, it seems to me, is not history for history's sake, but in how such monumental shifts in moral outlook shaped certain modes of subjectivity. Yet further: does that insight impact our view of ourselves? Does it engender a re-evaluation of morality? Better put: might exposing that "distant and hidden land of morality" change the way that we relate to and psychologically organize our moral values? (*GM* P 7). Do we, too, need morality as a "stimulant", or are we using morality as a "mask", so to speak? Thus, we have established that there are at least three, non-exclusive elements of this methodological procedure.

Supposing that the textual evidence I have provided is sufficiently compelling and such a conclusion is warranted, one concern, then, is that these criteria can readily pull us in competing, if not contradictory, directions. For example, in isolating the first two criteria we might worry that any individual, psychological insights might not do well in explaining larger social and historical shifts (Williams 2002, pp. 37–38). Open is the question of how these two levels of analysis might work cogently together, the localized, individual, psychological, micro-shifts and the collective, shared, historical, macro-shifts. Or in taking the latter two criteria, for instance, we might note that simply uncovering the history of morality, or any other cultural practice, does not in itself result in critique (cf. *GS* 345). How, then, might the historical insights and the critical forces come together in a non-fallacious way?

Given the foregoing, the interpretive task is even clearer: we must explain how the psychological and the historical insights are, or at least could be, marshaled to enable a critique of a certain form of morality. As such, I will clarify two dominant ways in which this task has been taken up in Nietzsche Studies. In Section 2.1, I will analyze the view that the genealogical inquiry is best taken as a mode of historiography that reveals the contingency of our moral concepts (Geuss 1994, 2002; Nehamas 1985) before, in Section 2.2, exploring the contention that Nietzsche's genealogical inquiries are best taken as functional or pragmatic investigations that make perfectly clear the usefulness of certain systems of morality, which might be otherwise obscured by an overabundance of historical details (Reginster 2006, 2020). Along the way, I show that though each account is impressive in explaining a certain feature of this philosophical activity, they nevertheless remain, at best, incomplete insofar as they fail to properly account for each of our three interpretive criteria.

2.1. The Practice of Genealogy Uncovers the Contingency of Our Moral Values

On this standard reading, Nietzsche makes use of the practice of genealogy to demonstrate that our current values are the product of historical contingency. The best-known version of this reading is that of Raymond Geuss, who, following Alexander Nehamas' lead, holds that "for Nietzsche 'genealogy' is not some particular kind of method or special approach, rather it 'simply is history correctly practiced'. So 'Why do genealogy' means 'Why do history?'" (Geuss 1994, p. 17; cf. Foucault 1977; Nehamas 1985, p. 246, fn.1; Migotti 1998, pp. 767–71; Jensen 2013). Here, we have an important interpretive desideratum: if to practice genealogy is to practice history, then the historical criterion has plainly been met.

This does not by itself, of course, specify the historical processes that the activity of genealogy exhibits nor the ends to which it is meant to serve. There is still an open question as to what such a historical account entails and whether such an account can be mobilized to target a critique. The answer, on this view, is that Nietzsche makes use of history to reveal the utter contingency of our Western moral concepts. That is, for Geuss, "the principal targets of [genealogy rightly practiced] are the apparently self-evident assumptions of a given form of life and the (supposedly) natural or inevitable and unchangeable character of given identities" (Geuss 2002, p. 211). In this way, and for this reason, understanding the historical evolution of a certain form of morality undermines any pretense that it may have to some timeless or essential nature (Nehamas 1985, p. 112; Geuss 1994, p. 182; 2002, pp. 211–12).

To see how this might be the case, suppose one holds the view that the "good" always denotes selfless conduct and that this is its unconditionally binding, essential characteristic. If it can be shown that the "good" once picked out social position rather than altruistic behavior, for example, then one might have a reason to forgo or otherwise give up an evaluative stance that is justified by appeals to its essence (cf. *BGE* 260; *GM* I 2). In this way, on this account, and according to Nehamas, "genealogy has direct practical consequences because, by demonstrating the contingent character of the institutions that traditional history exhibits as unchanging it creates the possibility of altering them" (Nehamas 1985, p. 112). As historical–genealogical arguments reveal "an overwhelming contingency" of our moral concepts, they at once undermine and thereby aid in the critical destabilizing of that certain form of morality (Geuss 1994, p. 277; 2002, p. 212). Provided Nietzsche's historical account is sufficiently plausible, this strategy shows us one way in which the critical criterion and the historical criterion could both be satisfied. The historical origins of morality betray its continency and, if those origins are taken to be otherwise, "as given, as factual, as beyond all question", say, then, this may contribute to the critique of morality (*GM* P 6). Hence, on such a view, genealogy reveals historical contingency which may undermine or destabilize the view that morality is exempt from such change.

Despite such success, this interpretive stance nevertheless faces a couple of challenges. First, one might agree with the historical insight, namely, that a set of accidental or otherwise contingent forces led to the widespread adoption of, to retain our example, the equation of altruism with the good. However, that historical insight is not sufficient to undermine the current value of selflessness. Altruistic acts may have also, over the course of time, garnered for themselves another source of legitimacy (cf. Poellner 2015). For this reason, the historical account may be insufficient to motivate a critique.

Second, we might do well to notice that this interpretation is, at best, incomplete, as it does not satisfy the psychological criterion. That particular criterion is often underappreciated. To offer an explanation for why that might be the case, let us recall that at the core of this interpretation rests the notion of historical contingency, the idea that Nietzsche's genealogical inquiries seek to explain inter alia "why we persuaded ourselves that these practices were necessary and universal rather than arbitrary and contingent" (Hoy 2008, p. 282; cf. Nehamas 1985, p. 112; Geuss 1994, p. 277; Bevir 2008, pp. 263–75; Hatab 2011, p. 195; Leiter 2002). Such contingency might be viewed in one of two ways: a stronger claim, which suggests that historical contingency means that history has no principle of organization (Bevir 2015, p. 231); or a weaker claim that is meant to simply highlight

that interpretations, modifications, or transformations of moral practices are themselves arbitrary (Bevir 2015, p. 231). Both, nevertheless, would be misrepresentations of Nietzsche's view. The former, though rightly capturing Nietzsche's rejection of progressive, teleological accounts of historical explanation, nevertheless fails to recognize the role that the will to power plays as an organizing principle of historical change (*GM* II 12). The latter is problematic because it is crucial to recognize—as Nietzsche does—that interpretations are born of psychological needs or interests (*GM* III 12). For example, he tells us that the slave revolt in morals finds its origins, amongst other things, in the slaves' "longing for freedom" (*BGE* 26) or in their "instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation" (*GM* I 13). Hence, arguably a cogent account of the historical shifts must also explain how such transformations function to address these very specific psychological needs.

At this stage of the argument, one might worry that my concern about the absence of psychology in these contingency accounts of the practice of genealogy is either overblown or otherwise seriously misleading. That is, one might argue that the contingent histories these accounts seek to trace include psychological states or phenomena typically understood as our drives, desires, affects, inclinations, aversions, and attitudes. Therefore, one might conclude that the contingent genealogical accounts include the psychological developments of these psychological states. Nietzsche traces, one might contend, how our feelings and beliefs that form our moral frameworks change over time.

Though it may be the case that these contingency views of the practice of genealogy do indeed take as their objects of inquiry these psychological states, such as our drives, I think that the worry runs two levels of explanation together. On the one hand, you have the properties that I noted, and on the other, a metapsychological position that explains such phenomena. For example, on Freud's view, you have the drives as well as the models, the topographical and the structural that explain mental conflict. The latter, of course, are instances of Freud's metapsychological views.

If that distinction is indeed plausible, then my main objection to the contingency accounts is that they are silent on this broader, and more interesting, I think, metapsychological front. Otherwise put, I think we need an answer to the question: what are the central organizing principles of experience, for Nietzsche? To have it again, my main concern is that the contingency accounts of the practice of genealogy are silent, I contend, on that question.

2.2. The Practice of Genealogy as the Pragmatic Uncovering of Functions

One way of responding to and addressing the proceeding problems is to pay special attention to the current impacts of morality. Does traditional morality with its abiding commitment to altruism, for example, engender flourishing or does it function in ways that can thwart the excellence of certain people? (Leiter 2002, p. 133). In motivating the issue in this way, morality is vetted and evaluated in purely functional terms, particularly in terms of "the effects the prevalence of a certain moral code has on culture here and now" (Reginster 2006, p. 199). Notice, on this view, as Nietzsche's genealogical accounts show how pervasive the effects of morality are "here and now", we are concurrently offered the means by which present-day morality may be evaluated (Reginster 2006, p. 199).

As such, this view bypasses the first charge that dogged the previous interpretive strategy that we considered. The reason is that even if traditional morality acquired an independent authority, one not grounded in an account of morality's sordid history, this form of morality may nevertheless still be subjected to critique on the grounds that it currently works or functions to undermine the "'health' or 'prosperity' of the agents that hold and live by [it]" (Reginster 2020, p. 10). To put the point another way, a culture, arguably like ours, in which altruism prevails, for instance, may be objected to because it "eliminates the conditions for the realization of human excellence" (Leiter 2002, p. 129). Yet, how might this be achieved? Let us to consider this in more detail.

On this view, Nietzsche's genealogical method of analysis is a thoroughly *pragmatic* enterprise. In readily combining a fictional tale with historical documentation, Nietzsche's

genealogies aim to make plainer the generic human needs that moral judgments are "designed to meet" (Reginster 2020, p. 11). Such a method for inquiry works by bring[ing] to light a certain plausible causal mechanism: in conditions of type A, a practice of type B will serve to meet natural human needs of type C. The purpose of abstraction from particular historical circumstances is precisely that it allows us to see functional structures that might otherwise remain obscured by the morass of contingent historical details (Reginster 2020, p. 11).

To see how this might be the case, let us suppose, as Reginster does, that "the function of what Nietzsche calls 'slave moralities' is to alleviate the 'feeling of impotence' of individuals overwhelmed by the resistance the world opposes to the gratification of their desires" (Reginster 2020, p. 12). Understood schematically, the lived experience of sociopolitical oppression, let us say, engenders a practice of self-denial, abstinence perhaps, of one form or another, which serves the function of relieving feelings of helplessness or weakness brought about by those sociopolitical circumstances. A causal mechanism emerges from such an elucidation: namely, *that* our moral judgments function to satisfy certain needs.

Accounting for the practice of genealogy in this way, as the uncovering and underscoring of the generic functions of moral judgments, at once meets each of our interpretive criteria. We can rather swiftly identify just how: first, in appealing to specific historical circumstances to glean the generic conditions that may help to explain how our moral judgments or practices function speaks to the historical criterion. Furthermore, any such functional explanation rests on how well it works to meet the psychological needs of the people who hold and live by said moral judgments. This explains why a psychologist undertakes the study and, furthermore, creates some critical evaluative space. The idea that traditional morality *has* functions, that it works to meet the needs or address certain problems may come as a surprise to some of Nietzsche's readers. If that is right, such readers might become suspicious of those values, asking themselves a version of the functional and pragmatic question: how useful are my moral judgments? Or perhaps such a reader might ask a version of the question Nietzsche himself poses in the Preface: "have [these values] hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity" (*GM* P 3).

These interpretive upshots notwithstanding, I have some misgivings. First, these functionalist accounts of genealogy as philosophical methodology, even though they can be diverse in their detail, share the commitment to the idea that Nietzsche's genealogical investigations are, at best, of limited critical importance. Indeed they "may be entirely superfluous" to any critique of morality (Reginster 2006, p. 200; cf. Janaway 2007; Leiter 2002, p. 177; Kail 2011; Queloz 2017; Srinivasan 2019). The same is true, of course, of the historical criterion. The functionalist accounts maintain that Nietzsche is, again at best, "combin[ing] functional narrative with a smattering of historical documentation" (Reginster 2020, p. 10). The main trouble, for me, is exegetical. That is, Nietzsche is committed to the stronger view, namely that documenting the "real history" is an *essential* feature of his genealogical accounts, which do more than simply prepare the way for a critique (*GM* P 2–3; *GM* P 5–6; *GM* I 2–3; *GM* II 4; *GM* III 26).

However, even if we grant the supposition that Nietzsche may have overstated the case in presenting the historical and critical criteria, there are nevertheless deeper problems in placing the crux of the interpretive weight on the notion of functionality of moral judgments (cf. Gemes 2006, pp. 204–5). First, traditional morality serves a multiplicity of functions, which makes it difficult to hang the object of Nietzsche's genealogical investigations as laying bare any *one* function (*GM* II 12). Nietzsche makes this point clear in a discussion of the practice of punishing. Why we punish is not reducible to any particular purpose or function, say, "to awaken a feeling of guilt" (*GM* II 14) or to "render harmless" the criminal (*GM* II 13). Rather the function of "punishment is overdetermined by utilities of all kinds" (*GM* II 14). The same is true of traditional morality. Far from being able "to discern the function of a moral practice" (Reginster 2020, p. 10) or state that "the function of what Nietzsche calls 'slave moralities' is to alleviate the 'felling of impotence' of individuals overwhelmed by the resistance the world opposes to the gratification of

their desires" (Reginster 2020, p. 12), the utility of slave morality is "overdetermined" (*GM* II 14). Functions abound, it is certainly the case, as Reginster has it, that slave morality serves to ward off feelings of helplessness (*GM* I 13); it can also satisfy that "longing for freedom" (*BGE* 26), needs for "self-preservation and self-affirmation" (*GM* I 13), or perhaps even more generally, as Nietzsche has it in the Preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, this mode of morality might operate "as symptom, as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also . . . as cause, remedy, stimulant, inhibition, poison" (*GM* P 6).

Second, this interpretive strategy overlooks how Nietzsche's accounts of functionality go beyond the purely operational or surface level. What Nietzsche is interested in, it seems to me, is giving a functional explanation of function itself. Expressed less gnomically, the disparate needs that morality addresses, such as redressing the feeling of impotence or as expressions of an instinct for self-aggrandizement, are "*signs* that a will to power has become master of something less diverse and imposed upon it the character of function" (*GM* II 12). To put it another way, the disparate and perhaps discordant functions a practice is made to serve alert us to an important methodological point about the process: Nietzsche explains not just *that* varying utilities give way to one another, but *how* they do so.

To clarify this point, we may do well to notice as Christopher Janaway argues, for example, that: "genealogy is an attempt to explain our having those beliefs and feelings that constitute our moral values in the here and now, by tracing their causal origins to generic psychological states—typically drives, affects, inclinations, and aversions—that we can reconstruct as having existed in certain types of human beings in the real past, and as having caused our present attitudes through the mediations and interpretations and conceptual innovations made by successive developments of culture" (Janaway 2007, p. 12). As I hope is clear from the foregoing, I am in broad agreement that Nietzsche's genealogical investigations are interested in these psychological states. Yet, I suggest, in building on such an account that Nietzsche also brings a metapsychological principle to bear, the will to power, that helps to explain such shifts in our moral values.

Third and finally, though an obvious virtue of this interpretive strategy is that it centers the role that traditional morality plays in responding to and addressing various psychological needs, this view might nevertheless tempt us into an error in reasoning. Consider, for example, the suggestion that: these effects [e.g., controlling and neutering the instincts of 'higher men'] explain the emergence and continued grip of bourgeois morality; it is thus the hidden function of modern morality to oppress 'higher men'—a function that can only be uncovered through an examination of how that morality emerged, developed, and ascended to dominance (Srinivasan 2019, p. 141).

To attribute this view to Nietzsche is to raise, in a very serious way, the worry that Nietzsche himself levels against those naïve psychologists, the "English psychologists" in the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (*GM* I 3). The functional usefulness of a practice, says Nietzsche, is not forgotten nor is it hidden. Rather, Nietzsche's point is that such oppression would serve as a daily and perpetual reminder of itself (*GM* I 3).

In sum, as we have seen, each of the standard reconstructions helps us to appreciate key features of the genealogical method: the contingency interpretation shows us how history plays a necessary role in enabling a critique of traditional morality, whereas the functionality view captures the necessary psychological needs that attend certain modes of life. In what follows, I develop an interpretation that retains these advantages even as it overcomes some of their shortcomings.

3. The Practice of Genealogy and the Overcoming of Self-Estrangement

I argue that Nietzsche's genealogical analysis aims to engender the overcoming of states of self-estrangement, to help make us known to ourselves (*GM* P 1; cf. Gemes 2006) Psychology and history are both necessary to achieve this end, I claim, but only when they show up together might they suffice to motivate a critique of traditional morality. This section develops and supports this new interpretation by first offering a more determinate depiction of what psychology is, for Nietzsche. Properly characterizing the domain of

psychology will demonstrate why genealogical analysis must be historical through and through. What emerges is an account of how psychic structures are the products of resistances that had to be overcome (*BGE* 12: *BGE* 198, 200, 225, 228). Open then is the question of what purposes those ways of living serve for us. Let me explain.

Nietzsche describes the domain of "psychology" as morphology and the *doctrine of the development of the will to power* (*BGE* 23). Already we can make four important points: first, the morphologist is, plainly enough, interested in actually existing, real structures and forms of life. Second, the form of psychology Nietzsche envisages is comparative. That is, to discern a certain way of being, one must be able to distinguish it from other modes of life. Third, Nietzsche's formulation of psychology offers a metapsychological organizing principle that explains psychic developments and their shifts: the will to power. Indeed, and for the purposes of this paper, contra Mark Alfano, I take the will to power to be crucially important (cf. Alfano 2019). Furthermore, I will broadly follow Reginster's characterization of will to power—namely, as the will to the overcoming of resistance (Reginster 2006, pp. 131–32). In addition, and this is the fourth point, rather than being exhaustively concerned with intrapsychic processes, psychology so understood is relational as the will to power tracks resistances that had to be overcome. As such, the mode of psychology is interested in the historical and sociopolitical conditions under which certain psychic structures are produced (*BGE* 12).

It may be helpful to draw out a couple of implications for the practice of genealogy from laying emphasis on psychology so understood. In contrast to the contingency view of the genealogical mode of inquiry, we see that historical changes in valuation are not purely arbitrary—markers of some kind of "overwhelming contingency" (Geuss 1994, p. 277). Rather, shifts in moral value are "signs", if you like, "that the will to power has become master over something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of function" (*GM* II 12). The will to power, so understood, is a metapsychological principle that attends *any* re-evaluation in value (Merrick 2018).

In addition, Nietzsche's view is that the utilities or the functions of our moral judgments are the results of a historical process "of subduing, plus the resistances they encounter, the attempts at transformation for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful counteractions" (*GM* II 12). As such, rather than developing a quasi-historical or fictional account, Nietzsche is chiefly concerned with the psychosocial and historical processes that give rise to particular functions or ways of life. Hence, an exhaustive focus on utility, on genealogy as a purely pragmatic enterprise, runs the risk of overlooking that developmental, historical or sociopolitical arc by underappreciating the role of the will to power and overstressing the role of functional explanations.

3.1. On the Original Nobles

Let me offer an example. The concept of "goodness" functions, Nietzsche says, like "signposts" that point us towards "the history of the evolution of moral concepts" (*GM* II 17; cf. *GM* I 4–5). One such marker is how the judgment "good" evolved for the original nobles. However, before reconstructing that transformation, let me first say a word about the category of the original "noble".

The type, it is clear, readily trades on historical and sociopolitical positions as well as psychological or characterological classifications. Reginster describes the master–slave relationship in terms of these categories:

Nietzsche's use of the notions of "(noble) master" and "slave" is ambiguous. They are now sociopolitical categories, and now character types. The noble masters value political supremacy qua noble in the sociopolitical sense, but we will see that their valuing political power is not essential to their possessing a noble character. Nietzsche makes clear that nobility as a type of character is "the case that concerns us here" (*GM*, I 5; cf. 6). Accordingly, I will consider the categories of "noble" and "slave" in their sociopolitical sense as elements in the illustration of an essentially psychological view which makes use of the same notions to denote specific character types (Reginster 1997, p. 285).

I am in broad agreement with the claim that the designation "noble" is used by Nietzsche to refer to both social and psychological categories, but I think things are far less ambiguous than Reginster lets on. Indeed, the chronology laid bare in the First Essay makes plain the *initial* importance of hierarchical social categories. Indeed, it is such standing that leads to the formulation of the original nobles' psyche (cf. *GM* I 2; 4–6). It is, Nietzsche argues, an essential prerequisite for that other "more mysterious pathos" of distance, namely that of characterological or psychological distance and thereby of self-valuation. We should also not forget that downplaying this particular feature—Nietzsche claims it is, indeed, a "harsh" truth (*BGE* 257)—is risky, since doing so might very well be another incarnation of that "democratic bias" concerning matters of descent or of origins (*GM* I 4; cf. Loeb 1995). It is to overlook the actual history of our moral concepts. Of course, it is worth noting that over time, things become much more complicated as characterological types often become divorced from social class and standing (cf. *BGE* 260). My point, however, is that it is a mistake to relegate the historical and sociopolitical points as, I will show, Nietzsche's view of the psychology of types depends upon such an analysis.

In returning to the First Essay, we can see why this is the case. As is well known, in relation to the original nobles, Nietzsche considers the etymology of "good". Some of the key points along the way are that:

> In these words and roots which denote "good", we can often detect the main nuance which made the noble feel they were men of higher rank. True, in most cases they might give themselves names which simply show superiority of power (such as "the mighty", "the masters", "the commanders") or the most visible sign of this superiority, such as "the rich", "the propertied" . . . But the names also show a *typical character* trait: and this is what concerns us here. For example, they call themselves "the truthful" (*GM* I 5).

Three claims, I think, are worth drawing out in detail: First, the etymological evidence shows that the "good" of noble morality is initially linked with cultural and sociopolitical conditions. Such social arrangements engender "a pathos of distance and nobility" (*GM* I 2) that "grows", as Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, "out of ingrained differences between stations" (*BGE* 257). Accordingly, and this is the second claim, such hierarchical social structures create particular psychic organizations. The reason is that "differences between stations" (*BGE* 257) "made the noble *feel* they were men of higher rank" (*GM* I 5, emphasis added) as those social conditions generated the "predominant *feeling* of complete and fundamental superiority" (*GM* I 2, emphasis added). This provides the "general rule that [for the original nobles, at least] the concept of political superiority always resolves itself into a concept of psychological superiority" (*GM* I 6). Or, as Nietzsche puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "without this pathos, that other, more mysterious pathos could not have grown at all, that demand for new expansions of distance within the soul itself, the development of states that are increasingly high, rare, distant, tautly drawn" (*BGE* 257). Third, and finally, these psychic structures are often expressed in the "form of typical character traits"—such as honesty—for example, that the nobles "call themselves 'the truthful'" (*GM* I 5).

Though only a partial sketch of Nietzsche's accounts of the origins of those customary ways of being, what general conclusions might we draw from this about the practice of genealogy? One answer is that it demonstrates that genealogical analysis is psychology rightly practiced. Attending to the original nobles, namely their historical, sociopolitical positions, tells us something important about their psychic organizations and the value judgments they produce. In this case, Nietzsche's point is that the value judgments of the original nobles take shape not out of concern with utility, or with functionality (*GM* I 2), but as expressions of their feelings about themselves (*GM* I 5; *GM* I 6). That "good" takes on the "characteristic of a function" is evidence of an overcoming of a resistance, of the nobles' "form-giving force" that gave rise to a new interpretation (*GM* II 12). What this shows then is that genealogy as a method of inquiry entails the proper use of history and of psychology.

3.2. On Genealogy as Immanent Critique: Or, on Determining Our Thou Shalt

Supposing what I have said so far is at least plausible, what of the critical criterion? My answer is simple: Nietzsche's genealogical accounts enable an immanent critique of traditional morality. My view has its detractors. Therefore, let me shape my account by first addressing a concern that is often leveled against views such as mine.

As was clear in our discussion of the functionalist account of the practice of genealogy, many think that the narratives Nietzsche presents in *On the Genealogy of Morality* at best prepare the way for a critique. As such, some contend that "it is a mistake to view Nietzsche as offering a *sustained* critique—an examination of the value of values—within the pages of *GM* and a profound mistake to think there is some peculiarly *genealogical* critique" (Kail 2011, p. 221). One reason, often given in support of this view, is a claim Nietzsche himself makes in *The Gay Science*. There Nietzsche writes, "even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value" (*GS* 345). Here, it seems that the historical conditions that give rise to morality do not address the critical questions: What is their value? What ends are they made to serve? Do our values adequately meet those needs? Indeed, Nietzsche makes plain the shape of the methodological error in this way:

The mistake made by the more refined among them is that they uncover and criticize the perhaps foolish opinions of a people about their morality, or of humanity about all human morality—opinions about its origin, religious sanction, the superstition of free will and things of that sort—and then suppose that they have criticized the morality itself (*GS* 345).

Nietzsche here is perfectly clear: it is an error of method to think that simply uncovering a faulty reason for holding a belief is sufficient to invalidate morality as such. I think it is possible to agree with Nietzsche's methodological point in this passage and still hold that he is leveling an immanent critique of morality.

What Nietzsche is demonstrating, and what is significant for our purposes, is that history alone is not sufficient to marshal a critique. Historical analysis, on its own, is incomplete as it leaves the questions of psychological needs by the wayside: why do these values hold such sway? What psychological purposes do they, even as errors or mistakes, nevertheless serve? Questions that Nietzsche points us toward later in the very same passage:

> But the value of a command 'thou shalt' is still fundamentally different from and independent of such opinions about it and the weeds of error that may have overgrown it—just as certainly as the value of a medication for a sick person is completely independent of whether he thinks about medicine scientifically or the way old women do. Even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not so much as touch the problem of its value. Thus, nobody up to now has examined the *value* of that most famous of all medicine which is called morality; and the first step would be—for once to *question* it. Well then, precisely this is our task. (*GS* 345)

Nietzsche's philosophical task is to raise these questions of value: How does morality work to alleviate suffering? What do the functions that morality is asked to serve tell us about the conditions or the people who hold them? This goes beyond simply the uncovering of history, of error. It asks us to consider why certain people have been so committed to a mode of life, and it may even engender us to raise similar questions about our own commitments to traditional morality. Which is, of course, to raise, albeit in a rather acute way, the critical question—what is the *value* of that most famous of all medicine?—and in this way, the genealogical method satisfies the critical criterion (*GS* 345).

Nietzsche is leveling, I suggest, an immanent critique of morality (Merrick 2016, 2018). This means that he is not appealing to any outside evaluative standpoint to critique traditional morality. The question Nietzsche's genealogical accounts raise is the question of value: does morality meet the psychological needs it claims to? Here, we might argue, for instance, that traditional morality is problematic because even as it ostensibly promotes

certain forms of life, it rather works to undermine just those modes of life (Hussain 2011). Hence, if Nietzsche's reader is sufficiently taken with such concerns, that reader might begin to question their commitment to morality on these immanent grounds—so, too, with power (Katsafanas 2011) or autonomy (Fortier 2020). Instead of adopting any single evaluative criterion, as far as I can see, Nietzsche is rather opening up the critical question of how the "thou shalt" functions for each of us (*GS* 381). Are we in need of an external "thou shalt"? Might we need metaphysics, let us say, because it satisfies our own *demand for certainty*? (*GS* 347) That is, might it be the case that we need metaphysical explanations because we find uncertainty simply intolerable? (cf. *BGE* 21) Do we need to consider some other sources of the "thou shalt", "a god, prince, class, physician, father confessor, dogma, or party conscience" to evade our own lack of will? (*GS* 345) Or, perhaps, do we find ourselves reveling in "self-determination", strong enough "to take leave of all faith and wish for certainty"? (*GS* 347) That is, do we find ourselves sufficiently fortified to forge our own "thou shalt"?

Answering any of these questions would, I think, ease our estrangement from ourselves —and that is, as I have said, a crucial aim of Nietzsche's genealogical investigations (cf. Gemes 2006).

A detractor might, at this point, raise an objection: instead of doing away with any univocal immanent criterion, I have simply replaced the others with my own—the overcoming of self-estrangement. One way of responding to this objection is to recall that the "thou shalt" of morality, its commands, can meet so many psychological needs: it can satisfy a desire to hide; it can serve as an energizing or enervating force (*GM* P 6). As such, I think it is a mistake to think that overcoming self-alienation is always paramount and always achievable. Nietzsche tells us that relief from suffering (*GM* III 11; *GM* III 17) or the need to feel efficacious (*GM* III 28) may be, for certain people, even more pressing. Even as Nietzsche's genealogical accounts may indeed help to diminish the conditions of self-estrangement for some, as it meets their need to fully see themselves, others may need traditional morality, even for a time, more than they require being freed from those conditions of self-alienation (*GM* P 8; *BGE* 30; *BGE* 202; *EH* Preface 3).

4. Conclusions

My central claim in this paper is that it is possible to reconstruct an account of the practice of the genealogical method that satisfies each of Nietzsche's interpretive criteria. That is, as I have shown, Nietzsche raises the question of the value of morality by making use of psychology, rightly understood, which, as I have shown, is interested in the actually lived formations of modes of life. If what I have argued is correct and the reconstruction is plausible, we, by way of conclusion, can notice how Nietzsche's version may indeed differ and have an explanatory advantage over more contemporary uses. Though often underappreciated, centering the domain of psychology marks a point of distinction from other accounts of the genealogical mode of inquiry. Wendy Brown, for instance, emphasizes just this point:

> Though Foucault draws extensively from Nietzsche, he eliminates from genealogical work the constitutive place Nietzsche assigned to desire and ideals, and especially to their interplay in forming historically specific subjects and crafting history. Yet, Nietzsche's "psychology", which Foucault jettisons, is fundamental rather than incidental to Nietzsche's genealogy (Brown 2001, p. 99).

Whether the distinction between the two thinkers holds, or whether Foucault has good reason to jettison the role of psychology in the practice of genealogy are, of course, open questions. However, if the claims of this paper hold, then Nietzsche's use of psychology, rightly practiced, might be one way of distinguishing his formulation of this mode of analysis from more contemporary accounts.

In addition, it is no longer an abstruse position to maintain that Nietzsche's genealogical accounts carry a clear normative authority (Koopman 2013). I have established just how Nietzsche's accounts are up to the task of engendering an immanent critique. If we

are willing, and no doubt able, to take up the critical questions Nietzsche poses, if we find ourselves longing for self-knowledge, wishing perhaps to be less estranged from ourselves, then Nietzsche's genealogical mode of inquiry harbors all the normative force it needs to potentially show us something terribly important about ourselves.

Appendix A

I cite Nietzsche's texts using the standard English abbreviations of their titles: *BGE* is *Beyond Good and Evil*; *GM* is *On the Genealogy of Morality*; *GS* is *The Gay Science*; *EH* is *Ecce Homo*. The Arabic numerals following the abbreviations refer to section numbers whereas the Roman numerals refer to the essay.

References

Alfano, Mark. 2019. *Nietzsche's Moral Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bevir, Mark. 2008. What is Genealogy? *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2: 263–75. [CrossRef]

Bevir, Mark. 2015. Historicism and Critique. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 45: 227–45. [CrossRef]

Bourbeau, Philippe. 2018. *On Resilience: Genealogy, Logics, and World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2001. *Politics Out of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Engles, Jeremy. 2015. *The Politics of Resentment: A Genealogy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Erlenbusch-Anderson, Verena, and Amy Nigh. 2020. Genealogy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. [CrossRef]

Erlenbusch-Anderson, Verena. 2018. *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Forster, Michael. 2011. Genealogy. *American Dialectic* 1: 230–50.

Fortier, Jeremy. 2020. *The Challenge of Nietzsche: How to Approach his Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 139–64.

Gemes, Ken. 2006. We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves: The Key Message of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*. In *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*. Edited by Christa Davis Acampora. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 191–208.

Geuss, Raymond. 1994. Nietzsche and Genealogy. *European Journal of Philosophy* 2: 274–92. [CrossRef]

Geuss, Raymond. 2002. Genealogy as Critique. *European Journal of Philosophy* 10: 209–15. [CrossRef]

Hatab, Lawrence J. 2011. Why Would Master Morality Surrender its Power? In *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Simon May. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 193–213.

Hoy, David Couzens. 1994. Foucault: modern or postmodern? *Michel Foucault: Critical Assesments* 1: 281–301.

Hoy, David Couzens. 2008. Genealogy, Phenomenology, Critical Theory. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2: 276–94. [CrossRef]

Hussain, Nadeem J. Z. 2011. The Role of Life in Nietzsche's *Genealogy*. In *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Simon May. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 142–69.

Janaway, Christopher. 2007. *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jensen, Anthony. 2013. *Nietzsche's Philosophy of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kail, Peter. 2011. 'Genealogy' and the *Genealogy*. In *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Simon May. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 214–33.

Katsafanas, Paul. 2011. The Relevance of History for Moral Philosophy: A Study of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*. In *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Simon May. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 170–92.

Koopman, Colin. 2013. *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Koopman, Colin. 2014. Genealogy, Methodology, & Normativity Beyond Transcendentality: Replies to Amy Allen, Eduardo Mendieta, & Kevin Olson. *Foucault Studies* 18: 261–73.

Koopman, Colin. 2019. *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Leiter, Brian. 2002. *Nietzsche on Morality*. New York: Routledge.

Loeb, Paul. 1995. Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*? *International Studies in Philosophy* 27: 125–41. [CrossRef]

McWhorter, Ladelle. 2009. *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Merrick, Allison. 2016. Of Genealogy and Transcendent Critique. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 47: 228–37. [CrossRef]

Merrick, Allison. 2018. We Need a Critique of Moral Values: Regarding Genealogy and Normativity. In *The Nietzschean Mind*. Edited by Paul Katsafanas. London: Routledge, pp. 70–82.

Migotti, Mark. 1998. Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen: A Reading of the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 745–79. [CrossRef]

Nehamas, Alexander. 1985. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Nehamas, Alexander. 1994. The Genealogy of Genealogy: Interpretation in Nietzsche's Second *Untimely Meditation* and in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*. Edited by Richard Schacht. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Owen, David. 2003. Nietzsche, Re-evaluation and the Turn to Genealogy. *European Journal of Philosophy* 11: 249–72. [CrossRef]

Poellner, Peter. 2015. *Ressentiment* and the Possibility of Intentional Self-Deception. In *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*. Edited by P. J. E. Kail and Manuel Dries. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 189–211.

Prinz, Jesse. 2016. Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche's Methods Compared. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 47: 180–201. [CrossRef]

Queloz, Matthieu. 2017. Nietzsche's Pragmatic Genealogy of Justice. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25: 727–49. [CrossRef]

Reginster, Bernard. 1997. Nietzsche on ressentiment and valuation. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2: 281–305.

Reginster, Bernard. 2006. *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Reginster, Bernard. 2020. What is Nietzsche's Genealogical Critique of Morality? *Inquiry*. [CrossRef]

Ridley, Aaron. 1998. *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the Genealogy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Schechter, Ronald. 2018. *A Genealogy of Terror in Eighteenth-Century France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schrift, Alan. 1990. *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*. New York: Routledge.

Scott, Jacqueline. 2006. The Price of the Ticket: A Genealogy and Revaluation of Race. In *Critical Affinities: Nietzsche and African American Thought*. Edited by Jacqueline Scott and A. Todd Franklin. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 149–71.

Srinivasan, Amia. 2019. Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119: 127–56. [CrossRef]

Tremain, Shelley. 2017. *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Williams, Bernard. 2002. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.