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Response Essay 3 – Reading: On the Genealogy of Morality

“What compels one to this, however, this unconditional will to truth, is the belief in the ascetic ideal itself, even if as its unconscious imperative—do not deceive yourself about this,—it is the belief in a metaphysical value, a value in itself of truth as it is established and guaranteed by that ideal alone (it stands and falls with that ideal). There is, strictly speaking, absolutely no science ‘without presuppositions,’ the thought of such a science is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a ‘belief’ must always be there first so that science can derive a direction from it, a meaning, a boundary, a method, a right to existence… ‘the truthful one, in that audacious and ultimate sense presupposed by the belief in science, thus affirms another world than that of life, nature, and history; and insofar as he affirms this ‘other world,’ what? must he not, precisely in so doing, negate its counterpart, this world, our world? … It is still a metaphysical belief on which our belief in science rests…’” (Nietzsche 109-110).

Here, Nietzsche is explaining how the will to truth and science are tied to beliefs, even if unconscious, in the ascetic ideal – this being a metaphysical belief that the truth is valuable in of itself. He says that to practice science requires certain assumptions as some “philosophy” or “belief” are required to direct and justify its existence. Because of these necessary assumptions which are fundamentally metaphysical, Nietzsche says that those who possess the will to truth are in self-denial, making them characteristic practitioners of the ascetic ideal, in that they are focused, through their commitment to the truth, in some “other world” than that of lived experience. He argues affirming this “other world” undermines the affirmation one has for their own life.

Has Nietzsche, with this analysis, prevented himself from justifying the will to power in any sort of objective or metaphysical terms? For example, he can no longer argue (if being consistent) that the will to power is objectively the ideal source of meaning to suffering compared to other potential sources, e.g. the ascetic ideal and its will to nothingness. Can he no longer argue that there is any objective value in the will to power? This may have never been his intention, but if he argues so, then he is affirming some other metaphysical world rather than the one in which he physically exists which would be contrary to his philosophy. Although he makes a compelling argument, I am skeptical that the will to truth is self-denying like he says because better understanding the world in which one exists (and even just the pursuit of this) evidently appears to be a self-affirming endeavor in life. My view seems to differ from Nietzsche’s because there is a disparity in how we value the physical and metaphysical: Nietzsche believes the physical world is the whole of what is to be experienced and any belief in something beyond that is nonsensical whereas I believe that both together are what consists of a world which is to be experienced.