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*On the Genealogy
of Morality*

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Second essay: 'Guilt', 'bad conscience' and related matters

I

To breed an animal with the prerogative to *promise* – is that not precisely the paradoxical task which nature has set herself with regard to humankind? is it not the real problem *of* humankind? . . . The fact that this problem has been solved to a large degree must seem all the more surprising to the person who can fully appreciate the opposing force, *forgetfulness*. Forgetfulness is not just a *vis inertiae*, as superficial people believe, but is rather an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word, to which we owe the fact that what we simply live through, experience, take in, no more enters our consciousness during digestion (one could call it spiritual ingestion) than does the thousand-fold process which takes place with our physical consumption of food, our so-called ingestion. To shut the doors and windows of consciousness for a while; not to be bothered by the noise and battle with which our underworld of serviceable organs work with and against each other; a little peace, a little *tabula rasa* of consciousness to make room for something new, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, predicting, pre-determining (our organism runs along oligarchic lines, you see) – that, as I said, is the benefit of active forgetfulness, like a doorkeeper or guardian of mental order, rest and etiquette: from which we can immediately see how there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, *immediacy*, without forgetfulness. The person in whom this apparatus of suppression is damaged, so that it stops working, can be compared (and not just compared –) to a dyspeptic; he cannot 'cope' with anything . . . And precisely

this necessarily forgetful animal, in whom forgetting is a strength, representing a form of *robust* health, has bred for himself a counter-device, memory, with the help of which forgetfulness can be suspended in certain cases, – namely in those cases where a promise is to be made: consequently, it is by no means merely a passive inability to be rid of an impression once it has made its impact, nor is it just indigestion caused by giving your word on some occasion and finding you cannot cope, instead it is an active *desire* not to let go, a desire to keep on desiring what has been, on some occasion, desired, really it is the *will's memory*: so that a world of strange new things, circumstances and even acts of will may be placed quite safely in between the original 'I will', 'I shall do' and the actual discharge of the will, its *act*, without breaking this long chain of the will. But what a lot of preconditions there are for this! In order to have that degree of control over the future, man must first have learnt to distinguish between what happens by accident and what by design, to think causally, to view the future as the present and anticipate it, to grasp with certainty what is end and what is means, in all, to be able to calculate, compute – and before he can do this, man himself will really have to become *reliable, regular, necessary*, even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable for his own *future*!

2

That is precisely what constitutes the long history of the origins of *responsibility*. That particular task of breeding an animal with the prerogative to promise includes, as we have already understood, as precondition and preparation, the more immediate task of first *making* man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, a peer amongst peers, orderly and consequently predictable. The immense amount of labour involved in what I have called the 'morality of custom' [see *Daybreak*, I, 9; 14; 16]⁴⁵, the actual labour of man on himself during the longest epoch of the human race, his whole *prehistoric* labour, is explained and justified on a grand scale, in spite of the hardness, tyranny, stupidity and idiocy it also contained, by this fact: with the help of the morality of custom and the social straitjacket, man was *made* truly predictable. Let us place ourselves, on the other hand, at the end of this immense process where the tree actually bears fruit, where society and its morality of custom finally reveal what they were simply *the*

⁴⁵ See below, supplementary material, pp. 133–7.

means to: we then find the *sovereign individual* as the ripest fruit on its tree, like only to itself, having freed itself from the morality of custom, an autonomous, supra-ethical individual (because ‘autonomous’ and ‘ethical’ are mutually exclusive), in short, we find a man with his own, independent, enduring will, whose *prerogative it is to promise* – and in him a proud consciousness quivering in every muscle of *what* he has finally achieved and incorporated, an actual awareness of power and freedom, a feeling that man in general has reached completion. This man who is now free, who actually *has* the *prerogative* to promise, this master of the *free* will, this sovereign – how could he remain ignorant of his superiority over everybody who does not have the prerogative to promise or answer to himself, how much trust, fear and respect he arouses – he ‘*merits*’ all three – and how could he, with his self-mastery, not realise that he has necessarily been given mastery over circumstances, over nature and over all creatures with a less enduring and reliable will? The ‘free’ man, the possessor of an enduring, unbreakable will, thus has his own *standard of value*: in the possession of such a will: viewing others from his own standpoint, he respects or despises; and just as he will necessarily respect his peers, the strong and the reliable (those with the prerogative to promise), – that is everyone who promises like a sovereign, ponderously, seldom, slowly, and is sparing with his trust, who *confers an honour* when he places his trust, who gives his word as something that can be relied on, because he is strong enough to remain upright in the face of mishap or even ‘in the face of fate’ –: so he will necessarily be ready to kick the febrile whippets who promise without that prerogative, and will save the rod for the liar who breaks his word in the very moment it passes his lips. The proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom and power over himself and his destiny, has penetrated him to his lowest depths and become an instinct, his dominant instinct: – what will he call his dominant instinct, assuming that he needs a word for it? No doubt about the answer: this sovereign human being calls it his *conscience* . . .

3

His conscience? . . . We can presume, in advance, that the concept ‘conscience’, which we meet here in its highest, almost disconcerting form, already has a long history and metamorphosis behind it. To be answerable to oneself, and proudly, too, and therefore *to have the prerogative to say ‘yes’* to oneself – is, as I said, a ripe fruit, but also a *late* fruit: –

how long must this fruit have hung, bitter and sour, on the tree! And for even longer there was nothing to see of this fruit, – nobody could have promised it would be there, although it is certain that everything about the tree was ready and growing towards it! – ‘How do you give a memory to the animal, man? How do you impress something upon this partly dull, partly idiotic, inattentive mind, this personification of forgetfulness, so that it will stick?’ . . . This age-old question was not resolved with gentle solutions and methods, as can be imagined; perhaps there is nothing more terrible and strange in man’s prehistory than his *technique of mnemonics*. ‘A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory: only something that continues *to hurt* stays in the memory’ – that is a proposition from the oldest (and unfortunately the longest-lived) psychology on earth. You almost want to add that wherever on earth you still find ceremonial, solemnity, mystery, gloomy shades in the lives of men and peoples, something of the dread with which everyone, everywhere, used to make promises, give pledges and commendation, is *still working*: the past, the most prolonged, deepest, hardest past, breathes on us and rises up in us when we become ‘solemn’. When man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices: the most horrifying sacrifices and forfeits (the sacrifice of the first-born belongs here), the most disgusting mutilations (for example, castration), the cruellest rituals of all religious cults (and all religions are, at their most fundamental, systems of cruelty) – all this has its origin in that particular instinct which discovered that pain was the most powerful aid to mnemonics. In a certain sense, the whole of asceticism belongs here: a few ideas have to be made ineradicable, ubiquitous, unforgettable, ‘fixed’, in order to hypnotize the whole nervous and intellectual system through these ‘fixed ideas’ – and ascetic procedures and lifestyles are a method of freeing those ideas from competition with all other ideas, of making them ‘unforgettable’. The worse man’s memory has been, the more dreadful his customs have appeared; in particular, the harshness of the penal law gives a measure of how much trouble it had in conquering forgetfulness, and *preserving* a few primitive requirements of social life in the minds of these slaves of the mood and desire of the moment. We Germans certainly do not regard ourselves as a particularly cruel or hard-hearted people, still less as particularly irresponsible and happy-go-lucky; but you only have to look at our old penal code in order to see how difficult it was on this earth to breed a ‘nation of thinkers’ (by which I mean: *the* nation in Europe that still contains the maximum of reliability, solemnity,

tastelessness and sobriety, qualities which give it the right to breed all sorts of European mandarin). These Germans made a memory for themselves with dreadful methods, in order to master their basic plebeian instincts and the brutal crudeness of the same: think of old German punishments such as stoning (– even the legend drops the millstone on the guilty person’s head), breaking on the wheel (a unique invention and speciality of German genius in the field of punishment!), impaling, ripping apart and trampling to death by horses (‘quartering’), boiling of the criminal in oil or wine (still in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), the popular flaying (‘cutting strips’), cutting out flesh from the breast; and, of course, coating the wrong-doer with honey and leaving him to the flies in the scorching sun. With the aid of such images and procedures, man was eventually able to retain five or six ‘I-don’t-want-to’s’ in his memory, in connection with which a *promise* had been given, in order to enjoy the advantages of society – and there you are! With the aid of this sort of memory, people finally came to ‘reason’! – Ah, reason, solemnity, mastering of emotions, this really dismal thing called reflection, all these privileges and splendours man has: what a price had to be paid for them! how much blood and horror lies at the basis of all ‘good things’! . . .

4

How, then, did that other ‘dismal thing’, the consciousness of guilt, the whole ‘bad conscience’, come into the world? – And with this we return to our genealogists of morality. I’ll say it again – or maybe I haven’t said it yet? – they are no good. No more than five spans of their own, merely ‘modern’ experience; no knowledge and no will to know the past; still less an instinct for history, a ‘second sight’ so necessary at this point – and yet they go in for the history of morality: of course, this must logically end in results that have a more than brittle relationship to the truth. Have these genealogists of morality up to now ever remotely dreamt that, for example, the main moral concept ‘*Schuld*’ (‘guilt’) descends from the very material concept of ‘*Schulden*’ (‘debts’)? Or that punishment, as *retribution*, evolved quite independently of any assumption about freedom or lack of freedom of the will? – and this to the point where a *high* degree of humanization had first to be achieved, so that the animal ‘man’ could begin to differentiate between those much more primitive nuances ‘intentional’, ‘negligent’, ‘accidental’, ‘of sound mind’ and their opposites, and take them into account when dealing out

punishment. That inescapable thought, which is now so cheap and apparently natural, and which has had to serve as an explanation of how the sense of justice came about at all on earth, ‘the criminal deserves to be punished *because* he could have acted otherwise’, is actually an extremely late and refined form of human judgment and inference; whoever thinks it dates back to the beginning is laying his coarse hands on the psychology of primitive man in the wrong way. Throughout most of human history, punishment has *not* been meted out *because* the miscreant was held responsible for his act, therefore it was *not* assumed that the guilty party alone should be punished: – but rather, as parents still punish their children, it was out of anger over some wrong that had been suffered, directed at the perpetrator, – but this anger was held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* which can be paid in compensation, if only through the *pain* of the person who injures. And where did this primeval, deeply-rooted and perhaps now ineradicable idea gain its power, this idea of an equivalence between injury and pain? I have already let it out: in the contractual relationship between *creditor* and *debtor*, which is as old as the very conception of a ‘legal subject’ and itself refers back to the basic forms of buying, selling, bartering, trade and traffic.

5

To be sure, thinking about these contractual relationships, as can be expected from what has gone before, arouses all kinds of suspicion and hostility towards the primitive men who created them or permitted them. Precisely here, *promises are made*; precisely here, the person making the promise has to have a memory *made* for him: precisely here, we may suppose, is a repository of hard, cruel, painful things. The debtor, in order to inspire confidence that the promise of repayment will be honoured, in order to give a guarantee of the solemnity and sanctity of his promise, and in order to etch the duty and obligation of repayment into his conscience, pawns something to the creditor by means of the contract in case he does not pay, something that he still ‘possesses’ and controls, for example, his body, or his wife, or his freedom, or his life (or, in certain religious circumstances, even his after-life, the salvation of his soul, finally, even his peace in the grave: as in Egypt, where the corpse of a debtor found no peace from the creditor even in the grave – and this peace meant a lot precisely to the Egyptians). But in particular, the creditor could inflict all

kinds of dishonour and torture on the body of the debtor, for example, cutting as much flesh off as seemed appropriate for the debt: – from this standpoint there were everywhere, early on, estimates which went into horrifyingly minute and fastidious detail, *legally* drawn up estimates for individual limbs and parts of the body. I regard it as definite progress and proof of a freer, more open-handed calculation, of a *more Roman* pricing of justice, when Rome's code of the Twelve Tables decreed that it did not matter how much or how little a creditor cut off in such a circumstance, '*si plus minusve secuerunt, ne fraude esto*'.⁴⁶ Let's be quite clear about the logic of this whole matter of compensation: it is strange enough. The equivalence is provided by the fact that instead of an advantage directly making up for the wrong (so, instead of compensation in money, land or possessions of any kind), a sort of *pleasure* is given to the creditor as repayment and compensation, – the pleasure of having the right to exercise power over the powerless without a thought, the pleasure '*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire*',⁴⁷ the enjoyment of violating: an enjoyment that is prized all the higher, the lower and baser the position of the creditor in the social scale, and which can easily seem a delicious titbit to him, even a foretaste of higher rank. Through punishment of the debtor, the creditor takes part in the *rights of the masters*: at last he, too, shares the elevated feeling of being in a position to despise and maltreat someone as an 'inferior' – or at least, when the actual power of punishment, of exacting punishment, is already transferred to the 'authorities', of *seeing* the debtor despised and maltreated. So, then, compensation is made up of a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty. –

6

In *this* sphere of legal obligations, then, the moral conceptual world of 'debt', 'conscience', 'duty', 'sacred duty', has its breeding ground – all began with a thorough and prolonged bloodletting, like the beginning of all great things on earth. And may we not add that this world has really never quite lost a certain odour of blood and torture? (not even with old Kant: the categorical imperative smells of cruelty . . .). In the same way, it was here that the uncanny and perhaps inextricable link-up between the

⁴⁶ 'If they have cut off more or less, let that not be considered a crime.' This is from the Third Table, section 6. Modern editions read a slightly different text here with 'se' (= sine) for 'ne': 'If they have cut off more or less, let it be honestly done.'

⁴⁷ P. Mérimée, *Lettres à une inconnue* (Paris, 1874), I. 8: 'To do evil for the pleasure of doing it'.

ideas of ‘debt and suffering’ was first crocheted together. I ask again: to what extent can suffering be a compensation for ‘debts’? To the degree that *to make* someone suffer is pleasure in its highest form, and to the degree that the injured party received an extraordinary counter-pleasure in exchange for the injury and distress caused by the injury: to *make* someone suffer, – a true *feast*, something that, as I mentioned, rose in price the more it contrasted with the rank and social position of the creditor. I say all this in speculation: because such subterranean things are difficult to fathom out, besides being embarrassing; and anyone who clumsily tries to interject the concept ‘revenge’ has merely obscured and darkened his own insight, rather than clarified it (– revenge itself just leads us back to the same problem: ‘how can it be gratifying to make someone suffer?’). It seems to me that the delicacy and even more the tartuffery of tame house-pets (meaning modern man, meaning us) revolts against a truly forceful realization of the degree to which *cruelty* is part of the festive joy of the ancients and, indeed, is an ingredient in nearly every pleasure they have; on the other hand, how naïve and innocent their need for cruelty appears, and how fundamental is that ‘disinterested malice’ (or, to use Spinoza’s words, the *sympathia malevolens*) they assume is a *normal* human attribute –: making it something to which conscience says a hearty ‘yes’! A more piercing eye would perhaps be able to detect, even now, plenty of these most primitive and basic festive joys of man; in *Beyond Good and Evil*, VII, section 229⁴⁸ (earlier in *Daybreak*, I, sections 18, 77, 113)⁴⁹ I pointed a wary finger at the ever-growing intellectualization and ‘deification’ of cruelty, which runs through the whole history of higher culture (and indeed, constitutes it in an important sense). At all events, not so long ago it was unthinkable to hold a royal wedding or full-scale festival for the people without executions, tortures or perhaps an *auto-da-fé*, similarly, no noble household was without creatures on whom people could discharge their malice and cruel taunts with impunity (– remember Don Quixote, for example, at the court of the Duchess:⁵⁰ today we read the whole of Don Quixote with a bitter taste in the mouth, it is almost an ordeal, which would make us seem very strange and incomprehensible to the author and his contemporaries, – they read it with a clear conscience as the funniest of books, it made them nearly laugh themselves to death). To see suffering does you good, to make suffer, better still – that

⁴⁸ See below, Supplementary material, pp. 153–4.

⁴⁹ See below, Supplementary material, pp. 137–9, pp. 140–1, pp. 143–4.

⁵⁰ *Don Quixote*, Book II, chs 31–7.

is a hard proposition, but an ancient, powerful, human-all-too-human proposition to which, by the way, even the apes might subscribe: as people say, in thinking up bizarre cruelties they anticipate and, as it were, act out a 'demonstration' of what man will do. No cruelty, no feast: that is what the oldest and longest period in human history teaches us – and punishment, too, has such very strong *festive* aspects! –

7

– By the way, these ideas certainly don't make me wish to help provide our pessimists with new grist for their discordant and creaking mills of disgust with life; on the contrary, I expressly want to place on record that at the time when mankind felt no shame towards its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is today, with its pessimists. The heavens darkened over man in direct proportion to the increase in his feeling shame *at being man*. The tired, pessimistic outlook, mistrust of life's riddle, the icy 'no' of nausea at life – these are not signs of the *wickedest* epoch of the human race: on the contrary, they come to light as the bog-plants they are only in their natural habitat, the bog, – I mean the sickly mollycoddling and sermonizing, by means of which the animal 'man' is finally taught to be ashamed of all his instincts. On the way to becoming an 'angel' (not to use a stronger word here), man has upset his stomach and developed a furry tongue so that he finds not only that the joy and innocence of animals is disgusting, but that life itself is distasteful: – so that every now and again, he is so repelled by himself that he holds his nose and disapprovingly recites a catalogue of his offensive features, with Pope Innocent the Third ('conception in filth, loathsome method of feeding in the womb, sinfulness of the raw material of man, terrible stench, secretion of saliva, urine and excrement').⁵¹ Now, when suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled *against* life, as its most questionable feature, it is salutary to remember the times when people made the opposite assessment, because they could not do without *making* people suffer and saw first-rate magic in it, a veritable seductive lure *to* life. Perhaps

⁵¹ This is not a quotation, but rather Nietzsche's own summary of the topics discussed in the first few sections of *De miseria humanae conditionis* (also known as *De contemptu mundi* and by various other titles). This short treatise, written in 1195 by Cardinal Lotario dei Segni (who in 1198 acceded to the Papacy as Innocent III) was extremely popular in the late Middle Ages, sizable chunks of it turning up, for instance, in *The Canterbury Tales* (particularly in the Man of Law's 'Prologue' and 'Tale').

pain – I say this to comfort the squeamish – did not hurt as much then as it does now; at least, a doctor would be justified in assuming this, if he had treated a Negro (taken as a representative for primeval man) for serious internal inflammations which would drive the European with the stoutest constitution to distraction; – they do *not* do that to Negroes. (The curve of human capacity for pain actually does seem to sink dramatically and almost precipitously beyond the first ten thousand or ten million of the cultural élite; and for myself, I do not doubt that in comparison with one night of pain endured by a single, hysterical blue stocking, the total suffering of all the animals who have been interrogated by the knife in scientific research is as nothing.) Perhaps I can even be allowed to admit the possibility that pleasure in cruelty does not really need to have died out: perhaps, just as pain today hurts more, it needed, in this connection, some kind of sublimation and subtilization, it had to be transformed into the imaginative and spiritual, and adorned with such inoffensive names that they do not arouse the suspicion of even the most delicate hypocritical conscience ('tragic pity' is one such name, another is '*les nostalgies de la croix*'). What actually arouses indignation over suffering is not the suffering itself, but the senselessness of suffering: but neither for the Christian, who saw in suffering a whole, hidden machinery of salvation, nor for naïve man in ancient times, who saw all suffering in relation to spectators or to instigators of suffering, was there any such *senseless* suffering. In order to rid the world of concealed, undiscovered, unseen suffering and deny it in all honesty, people were then practically obliged to invent gods and intermediate beings at every level, in short, something that also roamed round in obscurity, which could see in the dark and which would not miss out on an interesting spectacle of pain so easily. With the aid of such inventions, life then played the trick it has always known how to play, of justifying itself, justifying its 'evil'; nowadays it might need rather different inventions to help it (for example, life as a riddle, life as a problem of knowledge). 'All evil is justified if a god takes pleasure in it': so ran the primitive logic of feeling – and was this logic really restricted to primitive times? The gods viewed as the friends of *cruel* spectacles – how deeply this primeval concept still penetrates into our European civilization! Maybe we should consult Calvin and Luther on the matter. At all events, the *Greeks* could certainly think of offering their gods no more acceptable a side-dish to their happiness than the joys of cruelty. So how do you think Homer made his gods look down on the fortunes of men? What final, fundamental meaning did the Trojan War

and similar tragic atrocities have? We can be in no doubt: they were intended to be *festivals* for the gods: and, to the extent that the poet has a more 'god-like' nature in these matters, probably festivals for the poets, too . . . It was no different when later Greek moral philosophers thought that the eyes of the gods still looked down on moral struggles, on the heroism and self-inflicted torture of the virtuous: the 'Heracles of duty' was on stage and knew it; unwitnessed virtue was something inconceivable for this nation of actors. Might it not be the case that that extremely foolhardy and fateful philosophical invention, first devised for Europe, of the 'free will', of man's absolute freedom [*Spontaneität*] to do good or evil, was chiefly thought up to justify the idea that the interest of the gods in man, in man's virtue, *could never be exhausted*? On the stage of this earth there would never be any lack of real novelty, real unheard-of suspense, intrigues, catastrophes: a world planned on completely deterministic lines would have been predictable and therefore soon boring for the gods, – sufficient reason for these *friends of the gods*, the philosophers, not to impute a deterministic world of that sort to their gods! Everybody in antiquity is full of tender consideration for 'the spectator', people in antiquity form an essentially public, essentially visible world, incapable of conceiving of happiness without spectacles and feasts. – And, as already stated, severe *punishment*, too, has very strong festive features! . . .

8

The feeling of guilt, of personal obligation, to pursue our train of inquiry again, originated, as we saw, in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is, in the relationship of buyer and seller, creditor and debtor: here person met person for the first time, and *measured himself* person against person. No form of civilization has been discovered which is so low that it did not display something of this relationship. Fixing prices, setting values, working out equivalents, exchanging – this preoccupied man's first thoughts to such a degree that in a certain sense it *constitutes* thought: the most primitive kind of cunning was bred here, as was also, presumably, the first appearance of human pride, man's sense of superiority over other animals. Perhaps our word 'man' (*manas*) expresses something of *this* first sensation of self-confidence: man designated himself as the being who measures values, who values and measures, as the 'calculating animal as such'. Buying and selling, with their psychological trappings, are older even than the beginnings of any social

form of organization or association: it is much more the case that the germinating sensation of barter, contract, debt, right, duty, compensation was simply *transferred* from the most rudimentary form of the legal rights of persons to the most crude and elementary social units (in their relations with similar units), together with the habit of comparing power with power, of measuring, of calculating. Now the eye was focused in this direction in any case: and with the ponderous consistency characteristic of the ancients' way of thinking, which, though difficult to get started, never deviated once it was moving, man soon arrived at the great generalization: 'Every thing has its price: *everything* can be compensated for' – the oldest, most naïve canon of morals relating to *justice*, the beginning of all 'good naturedness', 'equity', all 'good will', all 'objectivity' on earth. Justice at this first level is the good will, between those who are roughly equal, to come to terms with each other, to 'come to an understanding' again by means of a settlement – and, in connection with those who are less powerful, to *force* them to reach a settlement amongst themselves. –

9

Still measuring with the standard of prehistoric times (a prehistory which, by the way, exists at all times or could possibly re-occur): the community has the same basic relationship to its members as the creditor to the debtor. You live in a community, you enjoy the benefits of a community (oh, what benefits! sometimes we underestimate them today), you live a sheltered, protected life in peace and trust, without any worry of suffering certain kinds of harm and hostility to which the man *outside*, the 'man without peace', is exposed – a German understands what 'misery', *êlend*,⁵² originally means –, you make pledges and take on obligations to the community with just that harm and hostility in mind. What happens *if you do not*? The community, the cheated creditor, will make you pay up as best it can, you can be sure of that. The immediate damage done by the offender is what we are talking about least: quite apart from this, the law-breaker is a 'breaker', somebody who has broken his contract and his word *to the whole*, in connection with all the valued features and amenities of communal life that he has shared up till now. The lawbreaker is a debtor who not only fails to repay the benefits and advances granted to him, but also actually assaults the creditor: so, from now on, as is fair, he is not only

⁵² literally 'other country' i.e. banishment, exile.

deprived of all these valued benefits, – he is now also reminded *how important these benefits are*. The anger of the injured creditor, the community, makes him return to the savage and outlawed state from which he was sheltered hitherto: he is cast out – and now any kind of hostile act can be perpetrated on him. ‘Punishment’ at this level of civilization is simply a copy, a *mimus*, of normal behaviour towards a hated, disarmed enemy who has been defeated, and who has not only forfeited all rights and safeguards, but all mercy as well; in fact, the rules of war and the victory celebration of *vae victis*!⁵³ in all their mercilessness and cruelty: – which explains the fact that war itself (including the warlike cult of the sacrificial victim) has given us all *forms* in which punishment manifests itself in history.

IO

As a community grows in power, it ceases to take the offence of the individual quite so seriously, because these do not seem to be as dangerous and destabilizing for the survival of the whole as they did earlier: the wrongdoer is no longer ‘deprived of peace’ and cast out, nor can the general public vent their anger on him with the same lack of constraint, – instead the wrongdoer is carefully shielded by the community from this anger, especially from that of the immediate injured party, and given protection. A compromise with the anger of those immediately affected by the wrongdoing; and therefore an attempt to localize the matter and head off further or more widespread participation and unrest; attempts to work out equivalents and settle the matter (the *compositio*); above all, the will, manifesting itself ever more distinctly, to treat every offence as being something that *can be paid off*, so that, at least to a certain degree, the wrongdoer is *isolated* from his deed – these are the characteristics imprinted more and more clearly into penal law in its further development. As the power and self-confidence of a community grows, its penal law becomes more lenient; if the former is weakened or endangered, harsher forms of the latter will re-emerge. The ‘creditor’ always becomes more humane as his wealth increases; finally, the *amount* of his wealth determines how much injury he can sustain without suffering from it. It is not impossible to imagine society *so conscious of its power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury available to it, – that of letting its

⁵³ ‘Woe to the vanquished’ (Livy v. 48).

malefactors go *unpunished*. ‘What do I care about my parasites’, it could say, ‘let them live and flourish: I am strong enough for all that!’ . . . Justice, which began by saying ‘Everything can be paid off, everything must be paid off’, ends by turning a blind eye and letting off those unable to pay, – it ends, like every good thing on earth, by *sublimating itself*. The self-sublimation of justice: we know what a nice name it gives itself – *mercy*; it remains, of course, the prerogative of the most powerful man, better still, his way of being beyond the law.

II

– Now a derogatory mention of recent attempts to seek the origin of justice elsewhere, – namely in *ressentiment*. A word in the ear of the psychologists, assuming they are inclined to study *ressentiment* close up for once: this plant thrives best amongst anarchists and anti-Semites today, so it flowers like it always has done, in secret, like a violet but with a different scent. And just as like always gives rise to like, it will come as no surprise to find attempts coming once more from these circles, as so often before – see section 14 [Essay I] above, – to sanctify *revenge* with the term *justice* – as though justice were fundamentally simply a further development of the feeling of having been wronged – and belatedly to legitimize with revenge emotional *reactions* in general, one and all. The latter is something with which I least take issue: with regard to the whole biological problem (where the value of these emotions has been underestimated up till now), I even view it as *a merit*. All I want to point out is the fact that this new nuance of scientific balance (which favours hatred, envy, resentment, suspicion, *rancune* and revenge) stems from the spirit of *ressentiment* itself. This ‘scientific fairness’ immediately halts and takes on aspects of a deadly animosity and prejudice the minute it has to deal with a different set of emotions, which, to my mind, are of much greater biological value than those of reaction and therefore truly deserve to be *scientifically* valued, highly valued: namely the actual *active* emotions such as lust for mastery, greed and the like. (E. Dühring, *The Value of Life. A Course in Philosophy*; basically, all of it.) So much for my general objections to this tendency; but concerning Dühring’s specific proposition that the seat of justice is found in the territory of reactive sentiment, for the sake of accuracy we must unceremoniously replace this with another proposition: the *last* territory to be conquered by the spirit of justice is that of reactive sentiment! If it actually happens that the just man remains

just even towards someone who has wronged him (and not just cold, moderate, remote and indifferent: to be just is always a *positive* attitude), if the just and *judging* eye, gazing with a lofty, clear objectivity both penetrating and merciful, is not dimmed even in the face of personal injury, of scorn and suspicion, well, that is a piece of perfection, the highest form of mastery to be had on earth, – and even something that we would be wise not to expect and should certainly find difficult to *believe*. Certainly, on average, even a small dose of aggression, malice or insinuation is enough to make the most upright man see red and drive moderation *out of* his sight. The active, aggressive, over-reaching man is still a hundred paces nearer to justice than the man who reacts; he simply does not need to place a false and prejudiced interpretation on the object of his attention, like the man who reacts does, has to do. In fact, this explains why the aggressive person, as the stronger, more courageous, nobler man, has always had a *clearer* eye, a *better* conscience on his side: on the other hand it is easy to guess who has the invention of ‘bad conscience’ on his conscience, – the man of *ressentiment*! Finally, just cast your eye around in history: in what sphere, up till now, has the whole treatment of justice, and the actual need for justice, resided? With men who react, perhaps? Not in the least: but with the active, the strong, the spontaneous and the aggressive. Historically speaking, justice on earth represents – I say this to the annoyance of the above-mentioned agitator (who himself once confessed: ‘The doctrine of revenge has woven its way though all my work and activities as the red thread of justice’)⁵⁴ – the battle, then, *against* reactive sentiment, the war waged against the same on the part of active and aggressive forces, which have partly expended their strength in trying to put a stop to the spread of reactive pathos, to keep it in check and within bounds, and to force a compromise with it. Everywhere that justice is practised and maintained, the stronger power can be seen looking for means of putting an end to the senseless ravages of *ressentiment* amongst those inferior to it (whether groups or individuals), partly by lifting the object of *ressentiment* out of the hands of revenge, partly by substituting, for revenge, a struggle against the enemies of peace and order, partly by working out compensation, suggesting, sometimes enforcing it, and partly by promoting certain equivalences for wrongs into a norm which *ressentiment*, from now on, has to take into account. The most decisive thing, however, that the higher authorities can invent and enforce against

⁵⁴ E. Dühring, *Sache, Leben, und Feinde* (Karlsruhe, Leipzig, 1882), p. 293.

the even stronger power of hostile and spiteful feelings – and they do it as soon as they are strong enough – is the setting up of a *legal system*, the imperative declaration of what counts as permissible in their eyes, as just, and what counts as forbidden, unjust: once the legal code is in place, by treating offence and arbitrary actions against the individual or groups as a crime, as violation of the law, as insurrection against the higher authorities themselves, they distract attention from the damage done by such violations, and ultimately achieve the opposite of what revenge sets out to do, which just sees and regards as valid the injured party's point of view –: from then on the eye is trained for an evermore *impersonal* interpretation of the action, even the eye of the injured party (although, as stated, this happens last). – Therefore 'just' and 'unjust' only start from the moment when a legal system is set up (and *not*, as Dühring says, from the moment when the injury is done.) To talk of 'just' and 'unjust' *as such* is meaningless, an act of injury, violence, exploitation or destruction cannot be 'unjust' *as such*, because life functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics. One has to admit to oneself something even more unpalatable: that viewed from the highest biological standpoint, states of legality can never be anything but *exceptional states*, as partial restrictions of the true will to life, which seeks power and to whose overall purpose they subordinate themselves as individual measures, that is to say, as a means of creating greater units of power. A system of law conceived as sovereign and general, not as a means for use in the fight between units of power but as a means *against* fighting in general, rather like Dühring's communistic slogan that every will should regard every other will as its equal, this would be a principle *hostile to life*, an attempt to assassinate the future of man, a sign of fatigue and a secret path to nothingness. –

12

Now another word on the origin and purpose of punishment – two problems which are separate, or ought to be: unfortunately people usually throw them together. How have the moral genealogists reacted so far in this matter? Naively, as is their wont –: they highlight some 'purpose' in punishment, for example, revenge or deterrence, then innocently place the purpose at the start, as *causa fiendi* of punishment, and – have finished. But 'purpose in law' is the last thing we should apply to the history of the

emergence of law: on the contrary, there is no more important proposition for every sort of history than that which we arrive at only with great effort but which we really *should* reach, – namely that the origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate; that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering*, *dominating*, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former ‘meaning’ [*Sinn*] and ‘purpose’ must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated. No matter how perfectly you have understood the *usefulness* of any physiological organ (or legal institution, social custom, political usage, art form or religious rite), you have not yet thereby grasped how it emerged: uncomfortable and unpleasant as this may sound to more elderly ears, – for people down the ages have believed that the obvious purpose of a thing, its utility, form and shape, are its reason for existence, the eye is made to see, the hand to grasp. So people think punishment has evolved for the purpose of punishing. But every purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function; and the whole history of a ‘thing’, an organ, a tradition can to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations, the causes of which need not be connected even amongst themselves, but rather sometimes just follow and replace one another at random. The ‘development’ of a thing, a tradition, an organ is therefore certainly not its *progressus* towards a goal, still less is it a logical *progressus*, taking the shortest route with least expenditure of energy and cost, – instead it is a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation exacted on the thing, added to this the resistances encountered every time, the attempted transformations for the purpose of defence and reaction, and the results, too, of successful countermeasures. The form is fluid, the ‘meaning’ [*Sinn*] even more so . . . It is no different inside any individual organism: every time the whole grows appreciably, the ‘meaning’ [*Sinn*] of the individual organs shifts, – sometimes the partial destruction of organs, the reduction in their number (for example, by the destruction of intermediary parts) can be a sign of increasing vigour and perfection. To speak plainly: even the partial *reduction in usefulness*, decay and

degeneration, loss of meaning [*Sinn*] and functional purpose, in short death, make up the conditions of true *progressus*: always appearing, as it does, in the form of the will and way to *greater power* and always emerging victorious at the cost of countless smaller forces. The amount of 'progress' can actually be *measured* according to how much has had to be sacrificed to it; man's sacrifice *en bloc* to the prosperity of one single *stronger* species of man – that *would be* progress . . . – I lay stress on this major point of historical method, especially as it runs counter to just that prevailing instinct and fashion which would much rather come to terms with absolute randomness, and even the mechanistic senselessness of all events, than the theory that a *power-will* is acted out in all that happens. The democratic idiosyncrasy of being against everything that dominates and wants to dominate, the modern *misarchism* (to coin a bad word for a bad thing) has gradually shaped and dressed itself up as intellectual, most intellectual, so much so that it already, today, little by little penetrates the strictest, seemingly most objective sciences, and is *allowed* to do so; indeed, I think it has already become master of the whole of physiology and biology, to their detriment, naturally, by spiriting away their basic concept, that of actual *activity*. On the other hand, the pressure of this idiosyncrasy forces 'adaptation' into the foreground, which is a second-rate activity, just a reactivity, indeed life itself has been defined as an increasingly efficient inner adaptation to external circumstances (Herbert Spencer). But this is to misunderstand the essence of life, its *will to power*, we overlook the prime importance that the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing and formative forces have, which 'adaptation' follows only when they have had their effect; in the organism itself, the dominant role of these highest functionaries, in whom the life-will is active and manifests itself, is denied. One recalls what Huxley reproached Spencer with, – his 'administrative nihilism': but we are dealing with *more* than 'administration' . . .

13

– To return to our topic, namely *punishment*, we have to distinguish between two of its aspects: one is its relative *permanence*, the custom, the act, the 'drama', a certain strict sequence of procedures, the other is its *fluidity*, its meaning [*Sinn*], purpose and expectation, which is linked to the carrying out of such procedures. And here, without further ado, I assume, *per analogiam*, according to the major point of historical method

just developed, that the procedure itself will be something older, pre-dating its use as punishment, that the latter was only *inserted* and interpreted into the procedure (which had existed for a long time though it was thought of in a different way), in short, that the matter is *not* to be understood in the way our naïve moral and legal genealogists assumed up till now, who all thought the procedure had been *invented* for the purpose of punishment, just as people used to think that the hand had been invented for the purpose of grasping. With regard to the other element in punishment, the fluid one, its ‘meaning’, the concept ‘punishment’ presents, at a very late stage of culture (for example, in Europe today), not just one meaning but a whole synthesis of ‘meanings’ [*Sinnen*]: the history of punishment up to now in general, the history of its use for a variety of purposes, finally crystallizes⁵⁵ in a kind of unity which is difficult to dissolve back into its elements, difficult to analyse and, this has to be stressed, is absolutely *undefinable*. (Today it is impossible to say precisely *why* people are actually punished: all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated defy definition; only something which has no history can be defined.) At an earlier stage, however, the synthesis of ‘meanings’ appeared much easier to undo and shift; we can still make out how, in every single case, the elements of the synthesis change valence and alter the order in which they occur so that now this, then that element stands out and dominates, to the detriment of the others, indeed, in some circumstances one element (for example, the purpose of deterrence) seems to overcome all the rest. To at least give an impression of how uncertain, belated and haphazard the ‘meaning’ of punishment is, and how one and the same procedure can be used, interpreted and adapted for fundamentally different projects: you have here a formula that suggested itself to me on the basis of relatively restricted and random material. Punishment as a means of rendering harmless, of preventing further harm. Punishment as payment of a debt to the creditor in any form (even one of emotional compensation). Punishment as a means of isolating a disturbance of balance, to prevent further spread of the disturbance. Punishment as a means of inspiring the fear of those who determine and execute punishment. Punishment as a sort of counter-balance to the privileges which the criminal has enjoyed up till now (for example, by using him as a slave in the mines). Punishment as a rooting-out of degenerate elements (sometimes a whole branch, as in Chinese law:

⁵⁵ Cf. Stendhal, *De l’amour*, chs 11 ff.

whereby it becomes a means of keeping the race pure or maintaining a social type). Punishment as a festival, in the form of violating and mocking an enemy, once he is finally conquered. Punishment as an *aide memoire*, either for the person suffering the punishment – so called ‘reform’, or for those who see it carried out. Punishment as payment of a fee stipulated by the power which protects the wrongdoer from the excesses of revenge. Punishment as a compromise with the natural state of revenge, in so far as the latter is still nurtured and claimed as a privilege by more powerful clans. Punishment as a declaration of war and a war measure against an enemy of peace, law, order, authority, who is fought as dangerous to the life of the community, in breach of the contract on which the community is founded, as a rebel, a traitor and breaker of the peace, with all the means war can provide. –

14

The list is certainly not complete; punishment can clearly be seen to be richly laden with benefits of all kinds. This provides all the more justification for us to deduct one *supposed* benefit that counts as its most characteristic in popular perception, – faith in punishment, which is shaky today for several reasons, has its strongest support in precisely this. Punishment is supposed to have the value of arousing the *feeling of guilt* in the guilty party; in it, people look for the actual *instrumentum* of the mental reflex which we call ‘bad conscience’ or ‘pang of conscience’. But by doing this, people are violating reality and psychology even as it is today: and much more so for the longest period in the history of mankind, its prehistory! The real pang of conscience, precisely amongst criminals and convicts, is something extremely rare, prisons and gaols are *not* nurseries where this type of gnawing pang chooses to thrive: – on this, all conscientious observers are agreed, in many cases reaching such a conclusion reluctantly and against their personal inclinations. On the whole, punishment makes men harder and colder, it concentrates, it sharpens the feeling of alienation; it strengthens the power to resist. If it does happen that a man’s vigour is broken, resulting in his wretched prostration and self-abasement, a result of this sort is certainly less edifying than the average effect of punishment: as characterised by a dry, morose solemnity. If we just think about those centuries *before* the history of mankind, we can safely conclude that the evolution of a feeling of guilt was most strongly *impeded* through punishment, – at any rate, with regard to the victims on

whom the primitive measures were carried out. Nor must we underestimate the degree to which the mere sight of the judicial executive procedures inhibits the criminal himself from experiencing his act, his mode of conduct, as reprehensible *as such*: because he sees the same kind of action practised in the service of justice and given approval, practised with a good conscience: like spying, duping, bribing, setting traps, the whole intricate and wily skills of the policeman and prosecutor, as well as the most thorough robbery, violence, slander, imprisonment, torture and murder, carried out without even having emotion as an excuse, all practices that are manifest in the various kinds of punishment, – none of which is seen by his judges as a depraved and condemned act *as such*, but only in certain respects and applications. ‘Bad conscience’, the most uncanny and most interesting plant of our earthly vegetation, did *not* grow in this soil, – in fact, for most of the time it did *not* enter the consciousness of those who judged and punished that they were dealing with a ‘guilty party’. Instead, it was a question of someone who had caused harm, an irresponsible piece of fate. He himself, the recipient of punishment, which again descended like a piece of fate, felt no ‘inner pain’ beyond what he would feel if something unforeseen suddenly happened, a terrible natural disaster, a boulder falling on him and crushing him, where resistance is futile.

15

Spinoza became aware of this in a way that made him show his true colours (to the annoyance of his critics, who systematically *attempt* to misunderstand him on this point, Kuno Fischer,⁵⁶ for example), when, one afternoon, rummaging around among who knows what memories, he turned his attention to the question of what actually remained for him, himself, of that famous *morsus conscientiae*⁵⁷ – he who had relegated good and evil to man’s imagination and angrily defended the honour of his ‘free’ God against the blasphemists who asserted that God operates everything *sub ratione boni*⁵⁸ (‘but that would mean that God is subject to fate and would really be the greatest of all absurdities’ –).⁵⁹ For Spinoza, the world had returned to that state of innocence in which it had lain before the invention of bad conscience: what had then become of *morsus*

⁵⁶ Cf. his *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (Heidelberg, 1865), 1.2.

⁵⁷ ‘bite of conscience’. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* III, Definitions XVI, XVII, XXVI.

⁵⁸ ‘to attain some good’.

⁵⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* Proposition II scholium 2.

conscientiae? ‘The opposite of *gaudium*’,⁶⁰ he finally said to himself, ‘– a sadness accompanied by the notion of a past event which turned out contrary to expectation.’ *Eth* iii, *Propos.* xviii *Schol.* i ii. For millennia, wrongdoers overtaken by punishment have felt *no different than Spinoza* with regard to their ‘offence’: ‘something has gone unexpectedly wrong here’, *not* ‘I ought not to have done that’ –, they submitted to punishment as you submit to illness or misfortune or death, with that brave, unrebelling fatalism that still gives the Russians, for example, an advantage over us Westerners in the way they handle life. If, in those days, there was any criticism of the deed, it came from intelligence, which practised criticism: we must certainly seek the actual *effect* of punishment primarily in the sharpening of intelligence, in a lengthening of the memory, in a will to be more cautious, less trusting, to go about things more circumspectly from now on, in the recognition that one was, once and for all, too weak for many things, in a sort of improvement of self-assessment. What can largely be achieved by punishment, in man or beast, is the increase of fear, the intensification of intelligence, the mastering of desires: punishment *tames* man in this way but does not make him ‘better’, – we would be more justified in asserting the opposite. (‘You can learn from your mistakes’ as the saying goes, but what you learn also makes you bad. Fortunately it often enough makes you stupid.)

16

At this point I can no longer avoid giving a first, preliminary expression to my own theory on the origin of ‘bad conscience’: it is not easy to get a hearing for this hypothesis and it needs to be pondered, watched and slept on. I look on bad conscience as a serious illness to which man was forced to succumb by the pressure of the most fundamental of all changes which he experienced, – that change whereby he finally found himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace. It must have been no different for these semi-animals, happily adapted to the wilderness, war, the wandering life and adventure than it was for the sea animals when they were forced to either become land animals or perish – at one go, all instincts were devalued and ‘suspended’. Now they had to walk on their feet and ‘carry themselves’, whereas they had been carried by the water up till then: a terrible heaviness bore down on them. They felt they were

⁶⁰ ‘gladness’.

clumsy at performing the simplest task, they did not have their familiar guide any more for this new, unknown world, those regulating impulses that unconsciously led them to safety – the poor things were reduced to relying on thinking, inference, calculation, and the connecting of cause with effect, that is, to relying on their ‘consciousness’, that most impoverished and error-prone organ! I do not think there has ever been such a feeling of misery on earth, such a leaden discomfort, – and meanwhile, the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their demands! But it was difficult and seldom possible to give in to them: they mainly had to seek new and as it were underground gratifications. All instincts which are not discharged outwardly *turn inwards* – this is what I call the *internalization* of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his ‘soul’. The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin, was expanded and extended itself and gained depth, breadth and height in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of man’s instincts was *obstructed*. Those terrible bulwarks with which state organizations protected themselves against the old instincts of freedom – punishments are a primary instance of this kind of bulkwark – had the result that all those instincts of the wild, free, roving man were turned backwards, *against man himself*. Animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying – all this was pitted against the person who had such instincts: *that* is the origin of ‘bad conscience’. Lacking external enemies and obstacles, and forced into the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, man impatiently ripped himself apart, persecuted himself, gnawed at himself, gave himself no peace and abused himself, this animal who battered himself raw on the bars of his cage and who is supposed to be ‘tamed’; man, full of emptiness and torn apart with homesickness for the desert, has had to create from within himself an adventure, a torture-chamber, an unsafe and hazardous wilderness – this fool, this prisoner consumed with longing and despair, became the inventor of ‘bad conscience’. With it, however, the worst and most insidious illness was introduced, one from which mankind has not yet recovered; man’s sickness of *man*, of *himself*: as the result of a forcible breach with his animal past, a simultaneous leap and fall into new situations and conditions of existence, a declaration of war against all the old instincts on which, up till then, his strength, pleasure and formidableness had been based. Let us immediately add that, on the other hand, the prospect of an animal soul turning against itself, taking a part against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard-of, puzzling,

contradictory and *momentous* [*Zukunftsvolles*] on earth that the whole character of the world changed in an essential way. Indeed, a divine audience was needed to appreciate the spectacle that began then, but the end of which is not yet in sight, – a spectacle too subtle, too wonderful, too paradoxical to be allowed to be played senselessly unobserved on some ridiculous planet! Since that time, man has been *included* among the most unexpected and exciting throws of dice played by Heraclitus' 'great child', call him Zeus or fate,⁶¹ – he arouses interest, tension, hope, almost certainty for himself, as though something were being announced through him, were being prepared, as though man were not an end but just a path, an episode, a bridge, a great promise . . .

17

The first assumption in my theory on the origin of bad conscience is that the alteration was not gradual and voluntary and did not represent an organic assimilation into new circumstances, but was a breach, a leap, a compulsion, an inescapable fate that nothing could ward off, which occasioned no struggle, not even any *ressentiment*. A second assumption, however, is that the shaping of a population, which had up till now been unrestrained and shapeless, into a fixed form, as happened at the beginning with an act of violence, could only be concluded with acts of violence, – that consequently the oldest 'state' emerged as a terrible tyranny, as a repressive and ruthless machinery, and continued working until the raw material of people and semi-animals had been finally not just kneaded and made compliant, but *shaped*. I used the word 'state': it is obvious who is meant by this – some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race, which, organized on a war footing, and with the power to organize, unscrupulously lays its dreadful paws on a populace which, though it might be vastly greater in number, is still shapeless and shifting. In this way, the 'state' began on earth: I think I have dispensed with the fantasy which has it begin with a 'contract'. Whoever can command, whoever is a 'master' by nature, whoever appears violent in deed and gesture – what is he going to care about contracts! Such beings cannot be reckoned with, they come like fate, without cause, reason, consideration or pretext, they appear just like lightning appears, too terrible, sudden, convincing and 'other' even to be hated. What they do is to create and

⁶¹ Heraclitus, Fragment 52.

imprint forms instinctively, they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are: – where they appear, soon something new arises, a structure of domination [*Herrschafts-Gebilde*] that *lives*, in which parts and functions are differentiated and related to one another, in which there is absolutely no room for anything that does not first acquire ‘meaning’ with regard to the whole. They do not know what guilt, responsibility, consideration are, these born organizers; they are ruled by that terrible inner artist’s egoism which has a brazen countenance and sees itself justified to all eternity by the ‘work’, like the mother in her child. *They* are not the ones in whom ‘bad conscience’ grew; that is obvious – but it would not have grown *without* them, this ugly growth would not be there if a huge amount of freedom had not been driven from the world, or at least driven from sight and, at the same time, made *latent* by the pressure of their hammer blows and artists’ violence. This *instinct of freedom*, forcibly made latent – we have already seen how – this instinct of freedom forced back, repressed, incarcerated within itself and finally able to discharge and unleash itself only against itself: that, and that alone, is *bad conscience* in its beginnings.

18

We must be wary of thinking disparagingly about this whole phenomenon because it is inherently ugly and painful. Fundamentally, it is the same active force as the one that is at work on a grand scale in those artists of violence and organizers, and that builds states, which here, internally, and on a smaller, pettier scale, turned backwards, in the ‘labyrinth of the breast’, as Goethe would say,⁶² creates bad conscience for itself, and builds negative ideals, it is that very *instinct for freedom* (put into my language: the will to power): except that the material on which the formative and rapacious nature of this force vents itself is precisely man himself, his whole animal old self – and *not*, as in that greater and more eye-catching phenomenon, the *other* man, the *other* men. This secret self-violation, this artist’s cruelty, this desire to give form to oneself as a piece of difficult, resisting, suffering matter, to brand it with a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a ‘no’, this uncanny, terrible but joyous labour of a soul voluntarily split within itself, which makes itself suffer out of the pleasure of making suffer, this whole *active* ‘bad conscience’ has finally – we have

⁶² In the last strophe of his poem ‘An den Mond’ (‘To the Moon’) (1778).

already guessed – as true womb of ideal and imaginative events, brought a wealth of novel, disconcerting beauty and affirmation to light, and perhaps for the first time, beauty *itself*. . . What would be ‘beautiful’, if the contrary to it had not first come to awareness of itself, if ugliness had not first said to itself: ‘I am ugly’? . . . At least, after this clue, one puzzle will be less puzzling, namely how an ideal, something beautiful, can be hinted at in self-contradictory concepts such as *selflessness*, *self-denial*, *self-sacrifice*, and furthermore, I do not doubt that we know one thing –, what kind of *pleasure* it is which, from the start, the selfless, the self-denying, the self-sacrificing feel: this pleasure belongs to cruelty. – So much, for the time being, on the descent of the ‘unegoistic’ as a *moral* value and on the delineation of the ground on which this value has grown: only bad conscience, only the will to self-violation provides the precondition for the *value* of the unegoistic. –

19

Bad conscience is a sickness, there is no point in denying it, but a sickness rather like pregnancy. Let us examine the conditions under which this sickness reached its most terrible and sublime peak: – we shall see what, with this, really entered the world. But we shall need a great deal of staying power, – and first we have to return to an earlier point. The relationship of a debtor to his creditor in civil law, about which I have written at length already, was for a second time transformed through interpretation, in a historically extremely strange and curious manner, into a relationship in which it is perhaps least comprehensible to us modern men: that is the relationship of the *present generation* to their *forebears*. Within the original tribal association – we are talking about primeval times – the living generation always acknowledged a legal obligation towards the earlier generation, and in particular towards the earliest, which founded the tribe (and this was not just a sentimental tie: this latter could, with good reason, be denied altogether for the longest period of the human race). There is a prevailing conviction that the tribe *exists* only because of the sacrifices and deeds of the forefathers, – and that these have to be *paid back* with sacrifices and deeds: people recognize an *indebtedness* [*Schuld*], which continually increases because these ancestors continue to exist as mighty spirits, giving the tribe new advantages and lending it some of their power. Do they do this for nothing, perhaps? But there is no ‘for nothing’ for those raw and ‘spiritually impoverished’ ages. What can

people give them in return? Sacrifices (originally as food in the crudest sense), feasts, chapels, tributes, above all, obedience – for all traditions are, as works of the ancestors, also their rules and orders –: do people ever give them enough? This suspicion remains and grows: from time to time it exacts a payment on a grand scale, something immense as a repayment to the ‘creditor’ (the infamous sacrifice of the first-born, for example, blood, human blood in any case). Following this line of thought, the *dread* of the ancestor and his power, the consciousness of debts towards him, increases inevitably, in direct proportion to the increase in power of the tribe itself, that is, in proportion as the tribe itself becomes ever more victorious, independent, honoured and feared. And not the other way round! Every step towards the weakening of the tribe, all unfortunate calamities, all signs of degeneration and imminent disintegration, always *lessen* rather than increase the dread of the spirit of its founder, and lead to an ever lower opinion of his sagacity, providence and powerful presence. If you think this sort of crude logic through to the end: it follows that through the hallucination of the growing dread itself, the ancestors of the *most powerful* tribes must have grown to an immense stature and must have been pushed into the obscurity of divine mystery and transcendence: – inevitably the ancestor himself is finally transfigured into a *god*. Perhaps we have here the actual origin of gods, an origin, then, in *fear!* . . . And whoever should deem fit to add: ‘but in piety, too!’ would have difficulty in justifying the claim for the longest period of the human race, pre-history. All the more so, however, would he be right, for the *middle* period in which the noble tribes developed: – who actually did repay, with interest, their founders, their ancestors (heroes, gods) with all the attributes which, in the meantime, had become manifest in themselves, the *noble* attributes. Later, we shall take another look at the way gods are ennobled and exalted (which is not at all to say they were ‘hallowed’): but let us, for the present, pursue the course of this whole development of the consciousness of guilt to its conclusion.

20

The awareness of having debts to gods did not, as history teaches, come to an end even after the decline of ‘communities’ organized on the principle of blood relationship; just as man inherited the concepts of ‘good and bad’ from the nobility of lineage (together with its psychological basic tendency to institute orders of rank), he also inherited, along with the

divinities of tribes and clans, the burden of unpaid debts and the longing for them to be settled. (Those large populations of slaves and serfs who adapted themselves to the divinity cults of their masters, whether through compulsion, submission or mimicry, form the transitional stage: from them, the inheritance overflows in every direction.) The feeling of indebtedness towards a deity continued to grow for several millennia, and indeed always in the same proportion as the concept of and feeling for God grew in the world and was carried aloft. (The whole history of ethnic battles, victories, reconciliations and mergers, and everything that precedes the eventual rank-ordering of the diverse elements of the population in every great racial synthesis, is mirrored in the genealogical chaos of their gods, in the legends of their battles, victories and reconciliations; the progression to universal empires is always the progress to universal deities at the same time: despotism, with its subjugation of the independent nobility, always prepares the way for some sort of monotheism as well.) The advent of the Christian God as the maximal god yet achieved, thus also brought about the appearance of the greatest feeling of indebtedness on earth. Assuming that we have now started in the *reverse* direction, we should be justified in deducing, with no little probability, that from the unstoppable decline in faith in the Christian God there is, even now, a considerable decline in the consciousness of human debt; indeed, the possibility cannot be rejected out of hand that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might release humanity from this whole feeling of being indebted towards its beginnings, its *causa prima*. Atheism and a sort of *second innocence* belong together. —

21

So much for a brief and rough preliminary outline of the connection between the concepts ‘debt/guilt’ and ‘duty’ and religious precepts: I have so far intentionally set aside the actual moralization of these concepts (the way they are pushed back into conscience; more precisely, the way *bad* conscience is woven together with the concept of God), and at the conclusion of the last section I actually spoke as though this moralization did not exist, consequently, as though these concepts would necessarily come to an end once the basic premise no longer applied, the credence we lend our ‘creditor’, God. The facts diverge from this in a terrible way. With the moralization of the concepts debt/guilt and duty and their relegation to *bad* conscience, we have, in reality, an attempt to *reverse*

the direction of the development I have described, or at least halt its movement: now the prospect for a once-and-for-all payment *is to be* foreclosed, out of pessimism, now our glance *is to* bounce and recoil disconsolately off an iron impossibility, now those concepts 'debt' and 'duty' *are to be* reversed – but against *whom*? It is indisputable: firstly against the 'debtor', in whom bad conscience now so firmly establishes itself, eating into him, broadening out and growing, like a polyp, so wide and deep that in the end, with the impossibility of paying back the debt, is conceived the impossibility of discharging the penance, the idea that it cannot be paid off ('eternal punishment'); ultimately, however, against the 'creditor', and here we should think of the *causa prima* of man, the beginning of the human race, of his ancestor who is now burdened with a curse ('Adam', 'original sin', 'the will in bondage'), or of nature, from whose womb man originated and to whom the principle of evil is imputed (diabolization of nature), or of existence in general, which is left standing as *inherently worthless* (a nihilistic turning-away from existence, the desire for nothingness or desire for the 'antithesis', to be other, Buddhism and such like) – until, all at once, we confront the paradoxical and horrifying expedient through which a martyred humanity has sought temporary relief, *Christianity's* stroke of genius: none other than God sacrificing himself for man's debt, none other than God paying himself back, God as the only one able to redeem man from what, to man himself, has become irredeemable – the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of love (would you credit it? –), out of *love* for his debtor! . . .

22

You will already have guessed *what* has really gone on with all this and *behind* all this: that will to torment oneself, that suppressed cruelty of animal man who has been frightened back into himself and given an inner life, incarcerated in the 'state' to be tamed, and has discovered bad conscience so that he can hurt himself, after the *more natural* outlet of this wish to hurt had been blocked, – this man of bad conscience has seized on religious presupposition in order to provide his self-torture with its most horrific hardness and sharpness. Debt towards *God*: this thought becomes an instrument of torture. In 'God' he seizes upon the ultimate antithesis he can find to his real and irredeemable animal instincts, he reinterprets these self-same animal instincts as debt/guilt before God (as animosity, insurrection, rebellion against the 'master', the 'father', the

primeval ancestor and beginning of the world), he pitches himself into the contradiction of 'God' and 'Devil', he emits every 'no' which he says to himself, nature, naturalness and the reality of his being as a 'yes', as existing, living, real, as God, as the holiness of God, as God-the-Judge, as God-the-Hangman, as the beyond, as eternity, as torture without end, as hell, as immeasurable punishment and guilt. We have here a sort of madness of the will showing itself in mental cruelty which is absolutely unparalleled: man's *will* to find himself guilty and condemned without hope of reprieve, his *will* to think of himself as punished, without the punishment ever being equivalent to the level of guilt, his *will* to infect and poison the fundamentals of things with the problem of punishment and guilt in order to cut himself off, once and for all, from the way out of this labyrinth of 'fixed ideas', this *will* to set up an ideal – that of a 'holy God' –, in order to be palpably convinced of his own absolute worthlessness in the face of this ideal. Alas for this crazy, pathetic beast man! What ideas he has, what perversity, what hysterical nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* immediately erupts, the moment he is prevented, if only gently, from being a *beast in deed*! . . . This is all almost excessively interesting, but there is also a black, gloomy, unnerving sadness to it as well, so that one has to force oneself to forgo peering for too long into these abysses. Here is *sickness*, without a doubt, the most terrible sickness ever to rage in man: – and whoever is still able to hear (but people have no ear for it nowadays! –) how the shout of *love* has rung out during this night of torture and absurdity, the shout of the most yearning rapture, of salvation through *love*, turns away, gripped by an unconquerable horror . . . There is so much in man that is horrifying! . . . The world has been a madhouse for too long! . . .

23

That should be enough, once and for all, about the descent of the 'holy God'. – That the conception of gods does not, as *such*, necessarily lead to that deterioration of the imagination which we had to think about for a moment, that there are *nobler* ways of making use of the invention of gods than man's self-crucifixion and self-abuse, ways in which Europe excelled during the last millennia, – this can fortunately be deduced from any glance at the *Greek gods*, these reflections of noble and proud men in whom the *animal* in man felt deified, did *not* tear itself apart and did *not* rage against itself! These Greeks, for most of the time, used their gods

expressly to keep 'bad conscience' at bay so that they could carry on enjoying their freedom of soul: therefore, the opposite of the way Christendom made use of its God. They went *very far* in this, these marvellous, lion-hearted children; and no less an authority than the Homeric Zeus gives them to understand that they are making it too easy for themselves. 'Strange!', he says on one occasion – he is talking about the case of Aegisthus, a *very* bad case –

*Strange how much the mortals complain about the gods! We alone cause evil, they claim, but they themselves, through folly, bring about their own distress, even contrary to fate!*⁶³

Yet we can immediately hear and see that even this Olympian observer and judge has no intention of bearing them a grudge for this and thinking ill of them: 'How foolish they are' is what he thinks when the mortals misbehave, – 'foolishness', 'stupidity', a little 'mental disturbance', this much even the Greeks of the strongest, bravest period *allowed* themselves as a reason for much that was bad or calamitous: – foolishness, *not* sin! you understand? . . . But even this mental disturbance was a problem – 'Yes, how is this possible? Where can this have actually come from with minds like *ours*, we men of high lineage, happy, well-endowed, high-born, noble and virtuous?' – for centuries, the noble Greek asked himself this in the face of any incomprehensible atrocity or crime with which one of his peers had sullied himself. 'A *god* must have confused him', he said to himself at last, shaking his head . . . This solution is *typical* for the Greeks . . . In this way, the gods served to justify man to a certain degree, even if he was in the wrong they served as causes of evil – they did not, at that time, take the punishment on themselves, but rather, as is *nobler*, the guilt . . .

24

– I shall conclude with three question marks, that much is plain. 'Is an ideal set up or destroyed here?' you might ask me . . . But have you ever asked yourselves properly how costly the setting up of *every* ideal on earth has been? How much reality always had to be vilified and misunderstood in the process, how many lies had to be sanctified, how much conscience had to be troubled, how much 'god' had to be sacrificed every time? If a

⁶³ *Odyssey* I. 32–4.

shrine is to be set up, a *shrine has to be destroyed*: that is the law – show me an example where this does not apply! . . . We moderns have inherited millennia of conscience-vivisection and animal-torture inflicted on ourselves: we have had most practice in it, are perhaps artists in the field, in any case it is our *raffinement* and the indulgence of our taste. For too long, man has viewed his natural inclinations with an ‘evil eye’, so that they finally came to be intertwined with ‘bad conscience’ in him. A reverse experiment should be possible *in principle* – but who has sufficient strength? – by this, I mean an intertwining of bad conscience with *perverse* inclinations, all those other-worldly aspirations, alien to the senses, the instincts, to nature, to animals, in short all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life and have defamed the world. To whom should we turn with *such* hopes and claims today? . . . We would have none other than the *good* men against us; and, as is fitting, the lazy, the complacent, the vain, the zealous, the tired . . . What is more deeply offensive to others and separates us more profoundly from them than allowing them to realize something of the severity and high-mindedness with which we treat ourselves? And again – how co-operative and pleasant everyone is towards us, as soon as we do as everyone else does and ‘let ourselves go’ like everyone else! . . . For that purpose, we would need *another* sort of spirit than those we are likely to encounter in this age: spirits who are strengthened by wars and victories, for whom conquest, adventure, danger and even pain have actually become a necessity; they would also need to be acclimatized to thinner air higher up, to winter treks, ice and mountains in every sense, they would need a sort of sublime nastiness [*Bosheit*] itself, a final, very self-assured wilfulness of insight which belongs to great health, in brief and unfortunately, they would need precisely this *great health*! . . . Is this at all possible today? . . . But some time, in a stronger age than this mouldy, self-doubting present day, he will have to come to us, the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit who is pushed out of any position ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’ by his surging strength again and again, whose solitude will be misunderstood by the people as though it were flight *from* reality –: whereas it is just his way of being absorbed, buried and immersed in reality so that from it, when he emerges into the light again, he can return with the *redemption* of this reality: redeem it from the curse which its ideal has placed on it up till now. This man of the future will redeem us, not just from the ideal held up till now, but also from those things *which had to arise from it*, from the great nausea, the will to nothingness, from nihilism, that stroke of

midday and of great decision that makes the will free again, which gives earth its purpose and man his hope again, this Antichrist and anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and of nothingness – *he must come one day . . .*

25

– But what am I saying? Enough! Enough! At this point just one thing is proper, silence: otherwise I shall be misappropriating something that belongs to another, younger man, one ‘with more future’, one stronger than me – something to which *Zarathustra* alone is entitled, *Zarathustra the Godless . . .*