

One Hundred Twenty-Two Years Later

Reassessing the Nietzsche-Darwin Relationship

DIRK R. JOHNSON

ABSTRACT: Nietzsche's perspective on Darwin and Darwinism has received increased scrutiny in recent years, a reflection of the fact that scholars have sensed that the Nietzsche-Darwin connection has not been adequately assessed and that their relationship might be more significant than has been previously assumed. Renewed interest in Nietzsche's alleged naturalism has also focused attention on that scientific paradigm, which best reflects the triumph of the naturalist perspective in the modern era, namely Darwinism. But while numerous studies have pointed to the overlap and shared concerns of both thinkers, no one has systematically interpreted Nietzsche's reception of Darwin as a fundamental antagonism, one that had emerged from an initial sympathy to the Darwinian approach in the early years and ended in a foundational critique. By examining Nietzsche in this way, one can appreciate Nietzsche's critique of Darwinism as one significant component of his larger assault on contemporary culture and decadence, which became his central concern in his final works.

Nietzsche's philosophy in his final years was premised on a fundamental anti-Darwinism.¹ This antagonism did not emerge suddenly; nor was it "wrong" about the fundamentals of Darwinian science.² It was the product of years of serious reflection on the philosophical underpinnings of modern science, in particular Darwinism. But how can so many prominent scholars seem to get this issue so wrong? I would like to suggest several possible reasons. The first one is that Nietzsche himself did not make his antagonism explicit. Though *GM* was meant as a polemical response to the Darwinists, it was written in such a way that one could fairly believe that he had composed it in their spirit and that it mirrored their convictions. Rather than seeing how the text undermined them, the "genealogists" could (and without significant stretch) believe that its methods vindicated them. Their assumption is understandable, particularly since Nietzsche's polemic was one of the first, at that time, to argue on the principles of "naturalism" and to reject the transcendental bases for morality. If one considers that Darwin's genealogical methods were still being developed,

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challenged, and contested, his approach was truly radical, and it seemed to take the side of scientific naturalism.

Second, commentators do not recognize the crucial connection and development between Nietzsche's gradually unfolding middle-period critique of the French *moralistes*, particularly on the basis of their altruism-egoism distinction, and his late-period challenge to the ascetic ideal (*GM* III).³ By randomly identifying "scientific" traces and superficial biological markers in his works (such as his references to instincts and drives,⁴ or decadence and degeneration), these readers ignore his more than ten-year *philosophical* investigation into the *moral* suppositions behind the biological discourse of his time. Both the theory of evolution and related terms ("adaptation," "self-preservation," "progress," "democracy," "utility," and "scarcity")⁵ were products of the same linguistic heritage. Furthermore, Nietzsche's anti-Christian pronouncements seemed to give voice to the Darwinists' own antireligious reservations—and it was clear that *GM* was, in part, directed against Christianity and the priesthood. For this reason, commentators such as Mathias Risse have foregrounded Nietzsche's attack against *Christian* morality, not his broader campaign against morality as such.⁶ And so, while scholars have little problem in establishing the work's anti-Christian animus, they infer that he must share that same anticlerical, antichurch bias with the Darwinists.

The latter position is conditioned by the success of Darwinian naturalism, which has placed the transcendental moral claims of Christianity and the methods of scientific naturalism at loggerheads ever since, presenting us in the modern era with only two possible alternatives to explain the "moral" phenomenon. Since Nietzsche clearly shared many of the "anti-metaphysical" assumptions of the "genealogists" and used significant features of their paradigm, he must have sympathized with their objectives. If one has to place him in one of two ideological camps, then it would seem logical that he belongs to the scientific naturalists.

But such a perspective fails to take into account Nietzsche's notion of the *agon*. According to Nietzsche's understanding of the agonistic principle, a strong will does not attack and discredit one platform from the firm grounding of another, but releases its brand of active energy by targeting a will, or group of wills, that has achieved momentary supremacy. The goal of this practice is not to replace the position with an alternative totalizing truth, but to enter into the competitive system of thought and subvert some of its foundational principles. Taking on an equal rival, and one that forces you to maximize your own active reserves, is a sign of respect and gratitude. Thereby the higher type reveals his active, aggressive instincts and seeks obstacles and goads to its higher will. In short, the agonistic spirit does not aspire to a straightforward rejection of its polemical rival (*EH* "Wise" 7).

As I have indicated, Nietzsche shares many of Darwin's key insights and agrees with some of his cardinal assumptions—including, though not limited

to, the natural origins of morality, the primacy of (human) will, and the notion of some form of natural struggle. At the same time, his seeming congruence on these questions does not necessitate overall theoretical agreement. From within Darwinism, Nietzsche could pinpoint weaknesses, inconsistencies, and the meta-physical vestiges of Christianity, and with his theory of active will he could win for himself a platform from which to attack the ascetic ideal—or, as Nietzsche himself characterizes his methodological approach in the preface to *GM*, “to replace the improbable with the more probable and in some circumstances to replace one error with another” (*GM* P:4). In the end, the task was not to vanquish “all obstacles in general but instead to conquer the ones where you can apply your whole strength, suppleness, and skill with weapons” (*EH* “Wise” 7).

Another common misconception is that Nietzsche’s philosophy also represents its own form of “totality,” that is, even if Nietzsche does not agree with Darwin on all questions, his philosophy does have common objectives. From this standpoint, one can argue that both thinkers were respectively “right”: Nietzsche does not even care to challenge Darwin but fashions a naturalistic philosophy that acknowledges and incorporates the scientific revolution initiated by Darwin. Seen in that light, Nietzsche’s philosophical project was then the first truly naturalized one—accepting man as a product of nature and attempting to rebuild modern philosophy, as well as modern ethics, on a post-Darwinian foundation. On such a reading, his insights do not seek to challenge Darwin in any significant way, but rather to develop his own philosophical system with a newly won anthropological awareness inspired by him. In the fashion of rendering upon Caesar what is Caesar’s, these perspectives guarantee Darwin his primacy in the scientific realm, while they then probe Nietzsche’s texts for the deeper implications of Darwin’s scientific discoveries for modern philosophy.

Allied to that position is a stubborn skepticism that Nietzsche’s philosophy could, with any degree of credibility, seriously call into question modern science, in particular Darwinism. The implication is that a post-Darwinian philosophy cannot hope to compete with the incontestable truths of modern science but must to some degree work as the handmaiden of science. The current divide in contemporary philosophy reflects this dilemma: while analytic philosophy disregards any efforts at philosophical speculation that diverge from the principles and methods of scientific induction, continental philosophers argue for the possibility of philosophical “truth” that can liberate itself from scientific expectations and methodology. However, even continental philosophers do not question that modern science has *its* claims to certain truths, while philosophy engages in a different form of truth searching.

But if one were to address the question in the terms in which Nietzsche expresses it at the dramatic finale of *GM* III, modern science has not yet found the position of an “unconditional, honest atheism,” for it has not yet questioned “its will to truth” (*GM* III:27). The implications of this position, then, would

not be to replace modern science with just another philosophical “truth” or to make certain that scientific truth-claims correlate with philosophy, but, instead, to argue for a new philosophical awareness—one in which the search for “truth,” the ultimate remnant of the millennia-old ascetic ideal as Nietzsche sees it, is no longer a constituent, defining element.⁷ Whether that search is concealed behind the mask of philosophy or that of science, it must be transcended. Indeed, Nietzsche’s higher type will distinguish itself by being a skeptic (“Zarathustra is a skeptic” [A 54]); it will recognize the symptoms of physiological weakness and degeneration that lie behind the siren-call of “truth”;⁸ and it will set its own values. These values will not correlate or overlap with the “truths” of modern science; they will transcend them, for higher types will regard “truth” itself as inimical to their understanding of great health and well-being. In fact, those “truths” will fall victim to the superior, affirmative will of the *Übermensch*.

But to understand this position, one must first grasp the full implication of Nietzsche’s foundational assault on the metaphysical enterprise and how he had arrived at that final antagonism. The reason that scholarship has not fully appreciated his subversion of the Darwinist model, in my opinion, is that it has not yet recognized how his particular understanding of the will to power pulls the rug from any form of totalizing system. By arguing that interpretations are premised on the constitution of individual wills, Nietzsche began to focus attention on the “nature” of the will. This approach brooked no exception. For him, the “human, all too human” became primary; and the scientific will too was dissected dispassionately, in an effort to reveal the nature of the instincts embodied in the natural scientists’ “will to truth.” But once he had determined that the *same* instinctual confusion and degeneration and the *same* spirit of nihilism and *décadence* inhabited the “scientific” will as it did other forms of asceticism, he had effectively reduced Darwinism, too, to a constellation of *Darwinist* wills, whose instinctual ambivalence was reflected in their sustained need for the comforting truth claims of science.

Up to this point, I have argued how Nietzsche’s developing perspectives subverted Darwin’s positions, culminating in his mature anti-Darwinism. But we now must come to the implications of his final position. Of course, there are many; but I will limit myself to a single one: What does my reading imply for the meaning and purpose of *GM*? If that polemical text is meant to implicate Darwinism, as I have argued, what does such a position suggest for the numerous readings that do not acknowledge an explicit antagonism? Nietzsche’s late texts, including *GM*, were intended as polemics. According to what Nietzsche himself retrospectively stated about his works written after *Z* and about his final polemical strategy: “After the yea-saying part of my task had been solved it was time for the no-saying, *no-doing* half: the revaluation of values so far, the great war,—summoning a day of decision” (*EH* “Books: BGE” 1). Nietzsche’s targets

were the triumphant cultural movements in modernity, more specifically, the wills to power behind those movements. His late texts were above all cultural polemics.

For Nietzsche, contemporary “culture” was not just an abstraction, a theoretical construct or an insignificant part of philosophizing; it was central, for “culture” represented the majority confluence of wills. Though those wills had a certain prehistory and were ongoing products of historical precedents (e.g., the phenomenon of enslaved wills in antiquity, the success of Christian metaphysics via the interpretative will to power of Paul, etc.), as his analysis in *GM* illustrates, these determining forces had already been ingrained into the will, had left their physiological stamp, so to speak, on the will, and had conditioned the instincts in a particular direction—namely, to reflect a denatured, ascetic instinctual hierarchization and interpretation. The historical triumph of the “moral” interpretation—first due to the expansionist will to power of Christian metaphysics, then through the infiltration of scholarship by the priesthood, and finally, the subsequent triumph of a competitive basis for ascetic learning under the guise of “objective science”—had led to a deeper ingraining of the ascetic ideal into the physiology of the human will. As a result, the current culture now reflected the widespread triumph of the ascetic ideal expressed through its numerous contemporary manifestations—either in the form of traditional Christian religion, modern “philosophy,” or secular science or in other transcendental speculative systems (*GM* III:23–27).

With this approach, Nietzsche eliminated the question, as no longer relevant, of whether certain perspectives better expressed the “truth”; instead, he became interested in the nature of the will that sought power *through* the “will to truth.” In the end, he reduced the issue to the following simple formula: was it a weak will, one that reflects instinctual decline, world-weariness, and resentment, the spirit of nihilism, and the ascetic rejection of the world; or was it a Dionysian will that constantly overcomes the spirit of pessimism and can say “yes” to life, even wishing for its eternal return and affirmation? Nietzsche diagnosed his age as one where the preponderant nay-saying forces of nihilism had finally triumphed over the rarer forms of higher spirits, whose institutional basis for a superior agonistic culture had been eroded by nihilist wills.

At the culmination of *GM* III, the finale of the text as a whole, Nietzsche comes to his ultimate, devastating conclusion: modern science has in no way overcome Christian asceticism, as it so confidently assumes;⁹ on the contrary, science is the last, and perhaps most stubborn, interpretative outpost of the ascetic ideal.¹⁰ Through various forms of “science,” ascetic wills have found an alternative guise to articulate their deep-rooted resentment against life. Indeed, modern science expresses one of the last stages of the ongoing “slave revolt” in morality, whose trajectory Nietzsche follows throughout *GM* to its current flourishing in the various nihilist manifestations of the modern era.

In that sense, *GM* and *A*, written just one year apart, represent two branches of a single overarching polemical strategy toward two powerful cultural trends—at times independent, at times intersecting. Whereas the polemics of *A* focus on the will to power behind a resurgent, politicized Christianity, newly tinged by shades of racial anti-Semitism, the polemical *GM* directs its attention to the nihilist forces behind a “scientific” perspective that equally threatened to undermine the promise of a Dionysian higher culture. In fact, the naturalist rhetoric of the “genealogists” had begun to color the ideological arsenal of *both* (on the surface) contradictory camps, so that each faction could instrumentalize Darwinist “truths” in its own interpretative spirit with the single goal of realizing its specific will to power.

Understood in this way, it becomes perhaps clearer now how *GM*, in terms of reception, could appeal to such a broad, eclectic ideological constituency, and how both contemporary factions could appropriate it as a seminal theoretical text in their own right. Whereas the work in its earliest reception attracted anti-Christian anti-Semites, who located theoretical arguments to fuel their vision of a naturalized master narrative of anti-Judaic hatred—arguments that now had the “advantage” of being grounded in the latest findings of unimpeachable biological science—it also spoke to a generation of scientifically minded anti-Christian “genealogists,” who demanded an alternative master narrative, a scientific one, of man’s moral evolution. Thus, *GM* specifically targets the emergence and spread of *ressentiment* forces in the contemporary culture at large—be it in the disembodied guise of a disinterested natural science or in the form of a revitalized Christianity, which—far from being marginalized or rendered historically superfluous by scientific “progress”—could adapt and articulate its message in the new voice of scientific biologism. Rather than prove that their Christian beliefs were mere superstition, the newly discovered biological “truths” could lend legitimacy, credibility, and urgency to long-nourished hatreds and suppressed eliminationist fantasies.

Of course, the irony of Nietzsche’s final polemical stance was that the nuances of his insights were not appreciated in the cultural climate of his time and his theories could then be appropriated by the very forces of *ressentiment*, whose subterranean will to power he sought to expose and against whom his texts were directed. To some extent, his fear of ideological misappropriation, which had already begun in his lifetime,¹¹ can explain the stridency and frustration characteristic of his final writings. But the stridency and prophetic tenor arose from an even deeper, more pessimistic reservoir. For his theories did not only expose the latent will to power behind various incarnations of the ascetic ideal. More important, he began to understand the procedural mechanism through which the contemporary culture would “en-act” *ressentiment*-driven will to power, but in the form of *interpretation*. The means of such articulation would no longer be through the direct and immediate release of reactive energy, but through the subtler means of theory.

Instead of eliminating man's animal nature or representing a "higher" stage of his moral development, the new scientific paradigm would actually lead to man's increased brutalization due to the forced internal suppression and interiorization of his once active, instinctual (i.e., animal) reserve. Forever denied an outlet for his outer-directed force, modern man would permanently dam up his assertive will to power,¹² and would look for other means to vent that instinctual energy, namely, through a theoretical, "logical" "justification" of once proscribed behavior. That shunted will would derive compensatory master narratives of revenge, domination, and elimination, which could both explain its tortured soul to itself and allow for the release of dangerously bottled-up reactive force.¹³

Thus, Nietzsche recognized that he stood at a fateful juncture in man's historical "development," one that in many ways represented a clear break from his past and that extended indefinitely into his "future." Having eliminated all possibilities for expressing active (and now) "immoral" energy (and therefore having eliminated the preparatory basis for a higher Dionysian culture), the "last man" had finalized the millennia-old "slave revolt" in morality, propelling the ascetic ideal in its various incarnations to its "world-historical" triumph. It was the ultimate victory of the "last man," and it required the *Übermensch* as its only possible redemption.

But now, triumphant modern man was left with himself and his own tortured soul. Unable to release *ressentiment*-laden reactive energy, he had to locate new targets, new outlets. His reactive resentment had to go even further underground, so to speak, leading to a plethora of theories that could both justify and slake his thirst for compensatory revenge and annihilation. He needed to fashion a host of new permissible enemies—for example, "inferiors," the "weak," the "backward," the "feeble-minded," the "class enemy," "the race enemy," the "system"¹⁴—which could allow him to theoretically justify and vent annihilationist and eliminationist energy—*anarchic* energy.¹⁵ For, according to Nietzsche, all will to power must be released in some outward form—be it in reactive, resentment-driven articulations or (in rarer cases) in the spirit of self-affirmation.

But because immediate, outwardly directed expressions of energy were prohibited and had to be rechanneled inward, theoretical systems were devised that could nourish the embers of unventilated reactive energy. The dawning new age on the horizon would no longer see open and honest conflict between individual strong types, according to the affirmative spirit of the ancient *agon*, but rather the phenomenon of confrontational, suppressed forces of resentment continuously seething and fulminating under the surface of "civilization," waiting for their moment to achieve numerical superiority.¹⁶ At that point, nothing could prevent them from acting out their long-suppressed resentment in the fulfillment of their *ressentiment*-driven master narratives of existence. For the only force capable of stemming the destructive tide of reactive energy was the "higher types"—that is, those who could intervene and prevent resentment forces from

achieving dominance and annihilating one another. However, the modern age had effectively eliminated this foundation for a higher culture, this avenue for higher types, leaving civilization in the hands of the anarchic forces of nihilism.

In conclusion, three underlying concerns animate the polemical spirit of *GM*. All three are consequences of Nietzsche's mature anti-Darwinism. First, Nietzsche feared that the emergence and spread of the "genealogical" perspective within scientific Darwinism had made it more difficult to realize the promise of a Dionysian culture. The world-historical success of the Darwinist paradigm pointed to the victory of "moral" forces in the culture at large, the decline of a "master morality," and the difficulty of forming a pocket of resistance within culture. *GM* was meant to offer that pocket. Second, Nietzsche feared that the theories of Darwin had already begun to stabilize into scientific "truths." *GM* was meant to challenge that pretence. Instead of the drive to "truth" or pure knowledge, Nietzsche revealed how the spirit of *ressentiment* lurked behind modern science's "will to truth." Behind the scientific quest he recognized nihilist wills, who would suffocate the possibility for a resurgent Dionysian culture:¹⁷ "Here there is snow, here life is silenced; the last crows here are called 'what for?,' 'in vain,' 'nada'—here nothing flourishes or grows any more" (*GM* III:26).

Finally, Nietzsche recognized that the complete triumph of nihilist wills in the modern age represented a greater potential danger to humanity than at any previous time. For while in earlier epochs, the forces of morality were always held in check by a natural, clearly visible rival—namely, the actual political expressions and institutions of a "master morality" (e.g., the vestiges of the ancient state within early Christianity;¹⁸ the noble classes within the Medieval period; the promise of a "higher type" in the Renaissance;¹⁹ and even, most recently, the brief triumph of Napoleonic elites over the senseless nationalism and political particularization of early modern Europe),²⁰ which had secured a certain balance of power between opposing counterforces—the complete disappearance of those residual "immoral" institutions within the modern era meant that a social or political corrective to the force of moral wills no longer existed.²¹ Those residual institutions had once served a beneficial purpose, even for their moral rivals: they had trained the latter to become more "clever," to hone their minds, and to hatch plans of overthrow over millennia of clandestine warfare. But now, without a more powerful rival to serve as a counterforce, everyone could potentially become the "immoral" target of particular wills to power,²² if such wills were to achieve supremacy, and no political entity could step in to prevent eliminationist fantasy from becoming nihilist reality.²³

At the same time, the millennia of pain and cruelty that man has inflicted on the instinctual self, pushing his outwardly directed impulses ever deeper into the physiological storehouse of the will, combined with the disappearance of the "immoral" rivals to the "master morality," has led to an increased spiritualization of *ressentiment*. Reactive wills now no longer have direct opposition to

their objectives and can pursue the “logic” of their systems with single-minded, relentless abandon. They could seek out, and temporarily unite with, other like-spirited types, who could help them realize their collective will to power and eliminate obstacles to the fulfillment of their reactive wills—all to seek out emotional redress for, and freedom from, the pain of internalized suffering, a suffering that could be (at least momentarily) assuaged only through the compensatory rush of “justified” pain, cruelty, and violence. But in the end, debilitated, they would awaken from their intoxication and would confront the consequences of their unleashed barbarism: “[T]he ascetic priest has insouciantly taken into service the whole pack of wild hounds in man, releasing now one, then another, always with the same purpose of waking man out of his long-drawn-out melancholy, of putting to flight, at least temporarily, his dull pain, his lingering misery, always with a religious interpretation and ‘justification’ as well. Every such excess of emotion has to be *paid* for afterwards, it goes without saying—it makes the sick person even sicker” (*GM* III:20).

For more than one hundred twenty-two years, *GM*’s purported proximity to Darwinist doctrines has led a whole host of modern interpreters to detect, at the very least, a sympathetic affinity between the philosophy of Nietzsche and Darwin’s science. The ideological spectrum has ranged widely—from unreflective early Social Darwinist readings and eugenicist interpretations, crude anti-Semitic and Wagnerian appropriations, and indiscriminate National Socialist amalgamations, to the current revival of interest in Nietzsche’s supposedly “naturalist” rhetoric or in the “ethical” implications of *GM*.²⁴ Despite discreet differences, none of these perspectives takes the polemically charged, culturally contingent, *anti*-Darwinian animus of the text at face value. Rather, they treat *GM* as a straightforward articulation (or in some cases, an “ironic distortion”) of the biologist-naturalist preoccupations of the age.²⁵ That is, they see Nietzsche operating in the broad shadow of Darwin, not as his spiritual antagonist. In the case of some of the earliest appropriations, in particular, this misunderstanding inspired his spiritual opponents from going so far as to co-opt and distort his message to reflect the exact opposite of his clearly articulated intentions—with disastrous consequences.

But the type of anti-Darwinian reading that I propose here suggests not only that one can not logically appropriate Nietzsche for such purposes, but, what is more, that Nietzsche prophetically exposes the will to power behind those cultural forces as well as the dangerous mechanism by which they will realize their reactive, nihilistic will to power through interpretation in the coming age of anarchy and barbarism. Understood in this way, Nietzsche remains to this day an uncomfortable reminder—in our age of social leveling and scientific nihilism—of the ever-lurking dangers of the spirit of *ressentiment*.

Hampden-Sydney College
drjohnson@hsc.edu

NOTES

1. For an elaboration of these arguments, see Dirk R. Johnson, *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

2. "Nietzsche's criticisms and amendments are wrong not about Darwin, but about the facts, as we now know them; on these points Darwin has been confirmed, and Nietzsche's doubts carry no weight" (John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 17).

3. Passages from the *Genealogy* are from Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

4. Richardson seeks, somewhat anachronistically, to project into Nietzsche's thought a systematic *theory* of instincts and drives, though Nietzsche never comes anywhere near to developing a consistent theory on this question (Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 6).

5. Gregory Moore, "Nietzsche and Evolutionary Theory," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 517–31, 530.

6. Mathias Risse, "The Second Treatise in *On the Genealogy of Morality*: Nietzsche on the Origin of the Bad Conscience," *European Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2001): 56. Maudemarie Clark also suggests that Nietzsche essentially opposes Christian morality, since "what we in the West, including those of us who do not accept or even reject Christianity, call 'morality' is *in fact* Christian morality" (Maudemarie Clark, introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, by Friedrich Nietzsche [Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1998], xx). And Daniel Conway uses the epithet "*Christian* morality" twenty times (!) when referring to his critique of morality, as though Nietzsche somehow had intended to spare morality *per se* from his indictment (Daniel Conway, "For Whom the Bell Tolls," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 35.1 [2008]: 88–105).

7. As Werner Stegmaier notes, "Es geht also nicht so sehr um Argumente, die zu bestätigen oder zu verwerfen wären, sondern um Distanzgewinn gegen 'die Moral' und ihr asketisches Ideal überhaupt" (Werner Stegmaier, "Die Bedeutung des Priesters für das asketische Ideal. Nietzsches 'Theorie' der Kultur Europas [III 11–22]," in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, ed. Otfried Höffe [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002], 160).

8. "Anyone who does not just understand the word 'Dionysian' but understands *himself* in the word 'Dionysian' does not need to refute Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer—he *smells the decay*" (EH "Books: BT" 2).

9. "[D]o we have, in [the last idealists], the sought-for *opponents* of ascetic ideals, the latter's *counter-idealists*? In fact, they *believe* themselves to be, these 'unbelievers' (because that is what they all are); that seems to be their last remnant of faith, to be opponents of this ideal, so serious are they on this score" (GM III:24).

10. "The opposite, as I said, is the case: [. . .] science today is a *hiding place* for all kinds of ill-humor, unbelief, gnawing worms, *despectio sui*, bad conscience—it is the *disquiet* of the *lack* of ideals itself, the suffering from a lack of great love, the discontent over *enforced* contentedness" (GM III:23).

11. See EH "Good Books" 1.

12. In GM II:21, Nietzsche argues that the "death of God" in the modern era has not reduced man's feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and the bad conscience, as one might anticipate, but has only pushed those sentiments ever deeper into the psychology of the human will, so that the "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 [guilt], is conceived the impossibility of discharging the penance, the idea that it cannot be paid off." Thus, while the Christian God had at least allowed for a (temporary) paying off of "debt/guilt" (*Schuld*), modern expressions of secularism and atheism have left man with the aftereffects of the Christian inheritance but with *no ability to pay off the demands of his bad conscience*: "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" (*GM* III:21). This process has now turned the internalized pain and suffering of the will into a permanent existential predicament.

13. "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!*" (*GM* II:22).

14. Nietzsche argues that modern man regards himself as the pinnacle of civilization, because he can feel himself to be at least *relatively* superior to the mass of "less-desirables" that permeate the lower ranks of society. This feeling of relative superiority also allows him to control their destiny: "the 'tame man,' who is incurably mediocre and unedifying, has already learnt to view himself as the pinnacle, the meaning of history, the 'higher man';—yes, the fact that he has a certain right to feel like that in so far as he feels distanced from the superabundance of failed, sickly, tired and exhausted people of whom today's Europe is beginning to reek, and in so far as he is at least *relatively successful*, at least still capable of living, at least saying 'yes' to life" (*GM* I:11, second emphasis mine). The modern theory of evolution conveniently offers such "higher men" a "scientific" explanation for their alleged success, i.e., their *relative* superiority over the broad mass of the less fortunate.

15. Stone shows how the notion of a "lethal chamber," where racially and physiologically "undesirables" could be eliminated, was prevalent in Edwardian England, particularly among eugenicists, possibly serving as the inspiration for the gas chambers of the Third Reich: "Here I want only to ask, since the field of eugenics was established in Britain, and was eagerly taken on board by German scientists, might it not also be the case that the notion of the 'lethal chamber,' which had existed in British literature on eugenics since the turn of the century, also fed into the fantasies which eventually led to the gas chambers" (Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002], 132).

16. In an ironic twist on Plato's allegory of the cave, Nietzsche plumbs the psychological depths of modern man in order to reveal the furnace of *ressentiment* in which modern "ideals" are fabricated:

No! Wait a moment! You haven't heard anything yet about the masterpieces of those black magicians who can turn anything black into whiteness, milk and innocence:—haven't you noticed their perfect *raffinement*, their boldest, subtlest, most ingenious and mendacious stunt? Pay attention! These cellar rats of revenge and hatred—what do they turn revenge and hatred into? Have you ever heard these words? Would you suspect, if you just went by what they said, that the men around you were nothing but men of *ressentiment*? . . .

—"I understand, I'll open my ears once more (oh! oh! oh! and *hold* my nose). Now, at last, I can hear what they have been saying so often: 'We good people—we *are the just*'—what they are demanding is not called retribution, but 'the triumph of *justice*'; what they hate is not their enemy, oh no!, they hate '*injustice*,' 'godlessness'; what they believe and hope for is not the prospect of revenge, the delirium of sweet revenge (—Homer earlier on dubbed it 'sweeter than honey'), but the victory of God, the *just* God, over the Godless; all that remains for them to love on earth are not their brothers in hate but their 'brothers in love,' as they say, all good and just people on earth.'" (*GM* I:14)

17. Another feature of this form of criticism was the ever-present danger of disgust (*Ekel*) and pity (*Mitleid*) with the realities of the modern era, which could tire, depress, and sap the energy, self-confidence, and morale of all fledgling "higher types," the only possible harbingers of a resurgent Dionysian culture (see *GM* I:12, *GM* II:24, and *GM* III:13).

18. "[T]he *imperium Romanum*, the most magnificent form of organization ever to be achieved under difficult conditions, compared to which everything before or after has just been

patched together, botched and dilettantish,—those holy anarchists made a ‘piety’ out of destroying ‘the world,’ which is to say the *imperium Romanum*, until every stone was overturned” (A 58).

19. “[T]he last *great* age, the age of the Renaissance, [. . .] a moment when a higher order of values, the noble, life-affirming values, the values that guarantee the future, had triumphed” (EH “Wagner” 2).

20. “Finally, when a *force majeure* of genius and will became visible on the bridge between two centuries of decadence, one strong enough to make Europe into a unity, a political and economic unity for the purpose of world governance, the Germans with their ‘Wars of Liberation’ cheated Europe out of the meaning, the miracle of meaning, in the existence of Napoleon” (EH “Wagner” 2).

21. Belief in the Christian God and the fear of his retribution were for centuries the main internal deterrents to the release of *ressentiment*-driven energy; but the decline of religious faith during the modern era means that there is no longer even an internal bulwark against eliminationist fantasies.

22. “Oh, how ready [the sickly] themselves are, in the last resort, to *make* others penitent, how they thirst to be *hangmen*! Amongst them we find plenty of vengeance-seekers disguised as judges, with the word justice continually in their mouth like poisonous spittle, pursing their lips and always at the ready to spit at anybody who does not look discontented and who cheerfully goes his own way” (GM III:14).

23. The existence of the “immoral” power structures of the masters had been the only institutional guarantee for the realization of earthly “justice” and the only bulwark against the forces of seething *ressentiment*: “Everywhere that justice is practiced 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” (GM II:11).

24. Brown argues that Nietzsche “appears to be a precursor” of Edward O. Wilson and his “biology of ethics” (Richard Brown, “Nihilism: ‘Thus Speaks Physiology,’” in *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism*, ed. B. Egedy, T. Darby, and B. Jones [Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1989], 136). Dennett goes so far as to call GM “one of the first and still subtlest of the Darwinian investigations of the evolution of ethics!” (Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995], 182).

25. Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–2.