

Second Essay

Guilt, Bad Conscience, and Related Matters

1

To breed an animal that *is entitled to make promises* — is that not precisely the paradoxical task nature has set itself where human beings are concerned? Isn't that the real problem of human beings? . . . The fact that this problem has to a great extent been solved must seem all the more astonishing to a person who knows how to appreciate fully the power which works against this promise-making, namely *forgetfulness*. Forgetfulness is not merely a *vis interiae* [*a force of inertia*], as superficial people think. Is it much rather an active capability to repress, something positive in the strongest sense, to which we can ascribe the fact that while we are digesting what we alone live through and experience and absorb into ourselves (we could call the process mental ingestion [*Einverseelung*]), we are conscious of what is going on as little as we are with the entire thousand-fold process which our bodily nourishment goes through (so-called physical ingestion [*Einverleibung*]). The doors and windows of consciousness are shut temporarily; they remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle with which the underworld of our functional organs keeps working for and against one another; a little stillness, a little *tabula rasa* [*blank slate*] of the consciousness, so that there will again be room for something new, above all, for the nobler functions and officials, for ruling, thinking ahead, determining what to do (for our organism is arranged as an oligarchy) — that is, as I said, the use of active forgetfulness, a porter at the door, so to speak, a maintainer of psychic order, quiet, etiquette. From that we can see at once how, if forgetfulness were not present, there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hoping, no pride, no *present*. The man in whom this repression apparatus is harmed and not working properly we can compare to a dyspeptic (and not just compare) — he is “finished” with nothing. . . .

Now, this particular animal, which is necessarily forgetful, in which forgetfulness is present as a force, as a form of *strong* health, has had an opposing capability bred into it, a memory, with the help of which, in certain cases, forgetfulness will cease to function — that is, for those cases where promises are to be made. This is in no way a merely passive inability ever to be rid of an impression once it has been etched into the mind, nor is it merely indigestion over a word one has pledged at a particular time and which one can no longer be over and done with. No, it's an active *wish* not to be free of the matter again, an ongoing and continuing desire for what one willed at a particular time, a real *memory of one's will*, so that between the original “I will,” “I will do,” and the actual discharge of the will, its *action*, a world of strange new things, circumstances, even acts of the will can be interposed without a second thought and not break this long chain of the will.

But how much all that presupposes! In order to organize the future in this manner, human beings must have first learned to separate necessary events from chance events, to think in terms of cause and effect, to see distant events as if they were present, to anticipate them, to

set goals and the means to reach them with certainty, to develop a capability for figures and calculations in general — and for that to occur, a human being must *necessarily* have first himself become *something one could predict, something bound by regular rules*, even in the way he imagined himself to himself, so that finally he is able to act like someone who makes promises—he can make himself into a pledge *for the future*!

2

Precisely that development is the long history of the origin of *responsibility*. That task of breeding an animal which is permitted to make promises contains within it, as we have already grasped, as a condition and prerequisite, the more precise task of first *making* a human being necessarily uniform to some extent, one among others like him, regular and consequently predictable. The immense task involved in this, what I have called the “morality of custom” (cf. *Daybreak* 9, 14, 16) — the essential work of a man on his own self in the longest-lasting age of the human race, his entire *pre-historical* work, derives its meaning, its grand justification, from the following point, no matter how much hardship, tyranny, monotony and idiocy it also manifested: with the help of the morality of custom and the social strait jacket, the human being *was made* truly predictable.

Let’s position ourselves, by contrast, at the end of this immense process, in the place where the tree at last yields its fruit, where society and the morality of custom finally bring to light *the end for which* they were simply the means: then we find, as the ripest fruit on that tree, the *sovereign individual*, something which resembles only itself, which has broken loose again from the morality of custom, the autonomous individual beyond morality (for “autonomous” and “moral” are mutually exclusive terms), in short, the human being who possesses his own independent and enduring will, who is *entitled to make promises* — and in him a consciousness quivering in every muscle, proud of *what* has finally been achieved and become a living embodiment in him, a real consciousness of power and freedom, a feeling of completion for human beings generally.

This man who has become free, who really *is entitled* to make promises, this master of *free* will, this sovereign — how is he not realize the superiority he enjoys over everything which is not permitted to make a promise and make pledges on its own behalf, knowing how much trust, how much fear, and how much respect he creates — he “*is worthy*” of all three —and how, with this mastery over himself, he has necessarily been given in addition mastery over his circumstances, over nature, and over all less reliable creatures with a shorter will?

The “free” man, the owner of an enduring unbreakable will, by possessing this, also acquires his own *standard of value*: he looks out from himself at others and confers respect or contempt. And just as it will be necessary for him to honour those like him, the strong and dependable (who *are entitled* to make promises) — in other words, everyone who makes promises like a sovereign, seriously, rarely, and slowly, who is sparing with his trust, who *honours* another when he does trust, who gives his word as something reliable, because he knows he is strong enough to remain upright even when opposed by misfortune, even when

“opposed by fate” — in just the same way it will be necessary for him to keep his foot ready to kick the scrawny unreliable men, who make promises without being entitled to, and to hold his cane ready for the liar, who breaks his word in the very moment it comes out of his mouth. The proud knowledge of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, of this power over oneself and destiny, has become internalized into the deepest parts of him and grown instinctual, has become an instinct, a dominating instinct: — what will he call it, this dominating instinct, assuming that he finds he needs a word for it? There’s no doubt: the sovereign man calls this instinct his *conscience*. . .

3

His conscience? . . . To begin with, we can conjecture that the idea “conscience,” which we are encountering here in its highest, almost perplexing form, already has a long history and changing developmental process behind it. To be entitled to pledge one’s word, and to do it with pride, and also *to be permitted to say “Yes”* to oneself — that is a ripe fruit, as I have mentioned, but it is also a *late* fruit: — for what a long stretch of time this fruit must have hung tart and sour on the tree! And for an even much longer time it was impossible to see any such fruit — no one could have promised it would appear, even if everything about the tree was certainly getting ready for it and growing in that very direction! —

“How does one create a memory for the human animal? How does one stamp something like that into this partly dull, partly flickering, momentary understanding, this living embodiment of forgetfulness, so that it stays current?” . . . This ancient problem, as you can imagine, was not resolved right away with tender answers and methods. Indeed, there is perhaps nothing more fearful and more terrible in the entire pre-history of human beings than the *technique for developing his memory*. “We burn something in so that it remains in the memory. Only something which never ceases *to cause pain* remains in the memory” — that is a leading principle of the most ancient (unfortunately also the longest) psychology on earth. We might even say that everywhere on earth nowadays where there is still solemnity, seriousness, mystery, and gloomy colours in the lives of men and people, something of that terror *continues its work*, the fear with which in earlier times everywhere on earth people made promises, pledged their word, made a vow. The past, the longest, deepest, most severe past, breathes on us and surfaces in us when we become “solemn.”

When the human being considered it necessary to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, martyrs, and sacrifices, the most terrible sacrifices and pledges (among them the sacrifice of the first born), the most repulsive self-mutilations (for example, castration), the cruellest forms of ritual in all the religious cults (and all religions are in their deepest foundations systems of cruelty) — all that originates in that instinct which discovered in pain the most powerful means of helping to develop the memory.

In a certain sense all asceticism belongs here: a couple of ideas are to be made indissoluble, omnipresent, unforgettable, “fixed,” in order to hypnotize the entire nervous and intellectual

system through these “fixed ideas” — and the ascetic procedures and forms of life are the means whereby these ideas are freed from jostling around with all the other ideas, in order to make them “unforgettable.” The worse humanity’s “memory” was, the more terrible its customs have always appeared. The harshness of the laws of punishment in particular provide a standard for measuring how much trouble people went to in order to triumph over forgetfulness and to maintain a *present awareness* of a few primitive demands of social living together for this slave of momentary feelings and desires.

We Germans certainly do not think of ourselves as an especially cruel and hard-hearted people, even less as particularly careless people who live only in the present. But just take a look at our old penal code in order to understand how much trouble it takes on this earth to breed a “People of Thinkers” (by that I mean *the* European people among whom today we still find a maximum of trust, seriousness, tastelessness, and practicality, and who, with these characteristics, have a right to breed all sorts of European mandarins). These Germans have used terrible means to make themselves a memory in order to attain mastery over their vulgar basic instincts and their brutal crudity: think of the old German punishments, for example, stoning (— the legend even lets the mill stone fall on the head of the guilty person), breaking on the wheel (the most characteristic invention and specialty of the German genius in the realm of punishment!), impaling on a stake, ripping people apart or stamping them to death with horses (“quartering”), boiling the criminal in oil or wine (still done in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), the well-loved practice of flaying (“cutting flesh off in strips”), carving flesh out of the chest, and probably covering the offender with honey and leaving him to the flies in the burning sun.

With the help of such images and procedures people finally retained five or six “I will not’s” in the memory, and so far as these precepts were concerned they gave *their word* in order to live with the advantages of society—and it’s true! With the assistance of this sort of memory people finally came to “reason”! — Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over emotions, this whole gloomy business called reflection, all these privileges and showpieces of human beings: how expensive they were! How much blood and horror is at the bottom of all “good things”! . . .

4

But then how did that other “gloomy business,” the consciousness of guilt, the whole “bad conscience” come into the world? — And with this we turn back to our genealogists of morality. I’ll say it once more — or have I not said anything about it yet? — they are useless. With their own merely “modern” experience extending through only a brief period [*fünf Spannen lange*], with no knowledge of and no desire to know the past, even less a historical instinct, a “second sight” — something necessary at this very point — they nonetheless pursue the history of morality. That must justifiably produce results which have a less than tenuous relationship to the truth.

Have these genealogists of morality up to now allowed themselves to dream, even remotely, that, for instance, that major moral principle “guilt” [*Schuld*] derived its origin from the very materialistic idea “debt” [*Schulden*]? Or that punishment developed as a *repayment*, completely without reference to any assumption about freedom or lack of freedom of the will? — and did so, by contrast, to the point where it always first required a *high* degree of human development so that the animal “man” began to make those much more primitive distinctions between “intentional,” “negligent,” “accidental,” “responsible,” and their opposites and bring them to bear when meting out punishment?

That idea, nowadays so trite, apparently so natural, so unavoidable, which has even had to serve as the explanation how the feeling of justice in general came into existence on earth, “The criminal deserves punishment *because* he could have acted otherwise,” this idea is, in fact, an extremely late achievement, indeed, a sophisticated form of human judgment and decision making. Anyone who moves this idea back to the beginnings is sticking his coarse fingers inappropriately into the psychology of older humanity.

For the most extensive period of human history, punishment was certainly *not* meted out *because* people held the instigator of evil responsible for his actions, and thus it was *not* assumed that only the guilty party should be punished: — it was much more as it still is now when parents punish their children out of anger over some harm they have suffered, anger vented on the perpetrator — but anger restrained and modified through the idea that every injury has some *equivalent* and that compensation for it could, in fact, be paid out, even if that is through the *pain* of the perpetrator.

Where did this primitive, deeply rooted, and perhaps by now ineradicable idea derive its power, the idea of an equivalence between punishment and pain? I have already given away the answer: in the contractual relationship between *creditor* and *debtor*, which is, in general, as ancient as the idea of “legal subject” and which, for its part, refers back to the basic forms of buying, selling, bartering, trading, and exchanging goods.

5

It’s true that recalling this contractual relationship arouses, as we might initially expect from what I have observed above, all sorts of suspicion of and opposition to older humanity, which established or allowed it. It’s precisely at this point that people *make promises*. At this very point the pertinent issue is to *create* a memory for the person who makes a promise, so that precisely here, we can surmise, there will exist a place for harshness, cruelty, and pain.

In order to inspire trust in his promise to pay back, in order to give his promise a guarantee of its seriousness and sanctity, in order to impress on his own conscience the idea of paying back as a duty, an obligation, the debtor, by virtue of a contract, pledges to the creditor, in the event that he does not pay, something else that he still “owns,” something else over which he still exercises power, for example, his body or his woman or his freedom or even his life (or, under certain religious conditions, even his blessedness, the salvation of his soul,

finally even his peace in the grave, as was the case in Egypt, where the dead body of the debtor even in the tomb found no peace from the creditor — and among the Egyptians, in particular, such peace certainly mattered). That means that the creditor could inflict all kinds of ignominy and torture on the body of the debtor, for instance, slice off the body as much as seemed appropriate for the size of the debt: — and this point of view early on and everywhere gave rise to precise, sometimes horrific estimates going into the smallest detail, *legally* established estimates about individual limbs and body parts. I consider it already a step forward, as evidence of a freer conception of the law, something which calculates more grandly, a *more Roman* idea of justice, when Rome's Twelve Tables of Laws decreed it was all the same, no matter how much or how little the creditor cut off in such cases: “*let it not be thought a crime if they cut off more or less.*”*

Let us clarify for ourselves the logic of this whole method of compensation — it is weird enough. The equivalency is given in this way: instead of an advantage making up directly for the harm (hence, instead of compensation in gold, land, possessions of some sort or another), the creditor is given a kind of *pleasure* as repayment and compensation — the pleasure of being allowed to discharge his power on a powerless person without having to think about it, the delight in “*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire*” [*doing wrong for the pleasure of doing it*], the enjoyment of violation. This enjoyment is more highly prized the lower and baser the creditor stands in the social order, and it can easily seem to him a delicious mouthful, in fact, a foretaste of a higher rank. By means of the “punishment” of the debtor, the creditor participates in a *right belonging to the masters*. Finally he also for once comes to the lofty feeling of despising a being as someone “beneath him,” as someone he is entitled to mistreat — or at least, in the event that the real force of punishment, of executing punishment, has already been transferred to the “authorities,” the feeling of *seeing* the debtor despised and mistreated. The compensation thus consist of an order for and a right to cruelty.

6

In *this* area, that is, in the laws of obligation, the world of the moral concepts “guilt,” “conscience,” “duty,” and “sanctity of obligation” have their origin — its beginning, like the beginning of everything great on earth, was watered thoroughly and for a long time with blood. And can we not add that this world deep down has never again been completely free of a certain smell of blood and torture — (not even with old Kant whose categorical imperative stinks of cruelty)? In addition, here that weird knot linking the ideas of “guilt and suffering,” which perhaps has become impossible to undo, was first knit together. Let me pose the question once more: to what extent can suffering be a compensation for “debts”? To the extent that *making* someone suffer provides the highest degree of pleasure, to the extent that the person hurt by the debt, in exchange for the injury as well as for the distress caused by the injury, got an extraordinary offsetting pleasure: *creating* suffering — a real *celebration*, something that, as I've said, was valued all the more, the greater it contradicted the rank and social position of the creditor.

I have been speculating here, for it's difficult to see through to the foundations of such subterranean things, quite apart from the fact that it's embarrassing. And anyone who crudely throws into the middle of all this the idea of "revenge" has buried and dimmed his insights rather than illuminated them (— revenge itself, in fact, simply takes us back to the same problem: "How can making someone suffer give us a feeling of satisfaction?").

It seems to me that the delicacy and even more the *Tartufferie* [*hypocrisy*] of tame house pets (I mean modern man, I mean us) resist imagining with all our power how much *cruelty* contributes to the great celebratory joy of older humanity, as, in fact, an ingredient mixed into almost all their enjoyments and, from another perspective, how naive, how innocent, their need for cruelty appears, how they fundamentally think of its particular "disinterested malice" (or to use Spinoza's words, the *sympathia malevolens* [*malevolent sympathy*]) as a *normal* human characteristic: — and hence as something to which their conscience says a heartfelt Yes!*. A more deeply penetrating eye might still notice, even today, enough of this most ancient and most fundamental celebratory human joy. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, 229 (even earlier in *Daybreak*, 18, 77, 113), I pointed a cautious finger at the constantly growing spiritualization and "deification" of cruelty, which runs through the entire history of higher culture (and, in a significant sense, even constitutes that culture). In any case, it's not so long ago that people wouldn't think of an aristocratic wedding and folk festival in the grandest style without executions, tortures, or something like an *auto-da-fé* [*burning at the stake*], and similarly no noble household lacked creatures on whom people could vent their malice and cruel taunts without a second thought (— remember, say, Don Quixote at the court of the duchess; today we read all of *Don Quixote* with a bitter taste on the tongue; it's almost an ordeal. In so doing, we would become very foreign, very obscure to the author and his contemporaries — they read it with a fully clear conscience as the most cheerful of books. They almost died laughing at it).

Watching suffering makes people feel good, creating suffering makes them feel even better — that's a harsh principle, but an old, powerful, and human, all-too-human major principle, which, by the way, even the apes might perhaps agree with as well. For people say that, in thinking up bizarre cruelties, the apes already anticipate a great many human actions and are, as it were, an "audition." Without cruelty there is no celebration: that's what the oldest and longest human history teaches us — and with punishment, too, there is so much *celebration!*

With these ideas, by the way, I have no desire whatsoever to give our pessimists grist for their discordant mills grating with weariness of life. On the contrary, I want to state very clearly that in that period when human beings had not yet become ashamed of their cruelty, life on earth was happier than it is today, now that we have our pessimists. The darkening of heaven over men's heads has always increased alarmingly in proportion to the growth of human beings' shame *before human beings*. The tired, pessimistic look, the mistrust of the riddle

of life, the icy denial stemming from disgust with life — these are not the signs of the *wickedest* eras of human beings. It's much more the case that they first come to light as the swamp plants they are when the swamp to which they belong is there — I mean the sickly mollycoddling and moralizing, thanks to which the animal “man” finally learns to feel shame about all his instincts. On his way to becoming an “angel” (not to use a harsher word here), man cultivated for himself that upset stomach and that furry tongue which not only made the joy and innocence of the animal repulsive but also made life itself distasteful: — so that now and then he stands there before himself, holds his nose, and with Pope Innocent III disapproves and makes a catalogue of his nastiness (“conceived in filth, disgustingly nourished in his mother's body, developed out of evil material stuff, stinking horribly, a secretion of spit, urine, and excrement”).*

Now, when suffering always has to march out as the first among the arguments *against* existence, as its most serious question mark, it's good for us to remember the times when people judged things the other way around, because they couldn't do without *making* people suffer and saw a first-class magic in it, a really tempting enticement *for* living. Perhaps, and let me say this as a consolation for the delicate, at that time pain did not yet hurt as much as it does nowadays. That at least that could be the conclusion of a doctor who had treated a Negro (taking the latter as a representative of pre-historical man) for a bad case of inner inflammation, which drives the European, even one with the best constitution, almost to despair but which does *not* have the same effect on the Negro. (The graph of the human sensitivity to pain seems in fact to sink down remarkably and almost immediately after one has moved beyond the first ten thousand or ten million of the top members of the higher culture. And I personally have no doubt that, in comparison with one painful night of a single hysterical well-educated female, the total suffering of all animals which up to now have been interrogated by the knife in search of scientific answers is simply not worth considering).

Perhaps it is even permissible to concede the possibility that that pleasure in cruelty does not really need to have died out. It would only require a certain sublimation and subtlety, in proportion to the way pain hurts more nowadays; in other words, it would have to appear translated into the imaginative and spiritual and embellished with nothing but names so unobjectionable that they arouse no suspicion in even the most delicate hypocritical conscience (“tragic pity” is one such name; another is “*les nostalgies de la croix*” [*nostalgia for the cross*]).

What truly enrages people about suffering is not the suffering itself, but the meaninglessness of suffering. But neither for the Christian, who has interpreted into suffering an entire secret machinery for salvation, nor for the naive men of older times, who understood how to interpret all suffering in relation to the spectator or to the person inflicting the suffering, was there generally any such *meaningless* suffering.

In order for the hidden, undiscovered, unwitnessed suffering to be removed from the world and for people to be able to deny it honestly, they were then almost compelled to invent gods and intermediate beings at all levels, high and low — briefly put, something that also roamed in hidden places, that also looked into the darkness, and that would not readily permit an interesting painful spectacle to escape its attention. For with the help of such inventions life then understood and has always understood how to justify itself by a trick, how to justify its “evil.” Nowadays perhaps it requires other helpful inventions for that purpose (for example, life as riddle, life as a problem of knowledge). “Every evil a glimpse of which edifies a god is justified”: that’s how the pre-historical logic of feeling rang out — and was that really confined only to pre-history? The gods conceived of as friends of *cruel* spectacle — oh, how widely this primitive idea still rises up even within our European humanity! We might well seek advice from, say, Calvin and Luther on this point.

At any rate it is certain that even the *Greeks* knew of no more acceptable snack to offer their gods to make them happy than the joys of cruelty. With what sort of expression, do you think, did Homer allow his gods to look down on the fates of men? What final sense was there basically in the Trojan War and similar tragic terrors? We cannot entertain the slightest doubts about this: they were intended as *celebrations* for the gods: and, to the extent that the poet is in these matters more “godlike” than other men, as festivals for the poets as well. . . .

Later the Greek moral philosophers in the same way imagined the eyes of god no differently, still looking down on the moral struggles, on heroism and the self-mutilation of the virtuous: the “Hercules of duty” was on a stage, and he knew he was there. Without someone watching, virtue for this race of actors was something entirely inconceivable. Surely such a daring and fateful philosophical invention, first made for Europe at that time, the invention of the “free will,” of the absolutely spontaneous nature of human beings in matters of good and evil, was created above all to justify the idea that the interest of gods in men, in human virtue, *could never run out*? On this earthly stage there was never to be any lack of really new things, really unheard of suspense, complications, catastrophes. A world conceived of as perfectly deterministic would have been predictable to the gods and therefore also soon boring for them — reason enough for these *friends of the gods*, the philosophers, not to ascribe such a deterministic world to their gods! All of ancient humanity is full of sensitive consideration for “the spectator,” for a truly public, truly visible world, which did not know how to imagine happiness without dramatic performances and festivals. And, as I have already said, in great *punishment* there is also so much celebration! . . .

8

To resume the path of our enquiry, the feeling of guilt, of personal obligation has, as we saw, its origin in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is, in the relationship between seller and buyer, creditor and debtor. Here for the first time one person moved up against another person, here a person *measured himself* against a person. We have found no civilization still at such a low level that something of this relationship is not already

perceptible. To set prices, to measure values, to think up equivalencies, to exchange things — that preoccupied man's very first thinking to such a degree that in a certain sense it's what thinking *itself* is. Here the oldest form of astuteness was bred; here, too, we can assume are the first beginnings of man's pride, his feeling of pre-eminence in relation to other animals. Perhaps our word “man” [*Mensch*] (*manas*) continues to express directly something of *this* feeling of the self: the human being describes himself as a being which assesses values, which values and measures, as the “inherently calculating animal.” Selling and buying, together with their psychological attributes, are even older than the beginnings of any form of social organizations and groupings; out of the most rudimentary form of personal legal rights the budding feeling of exchange, contract, guilt, law, duty, and compensation was instead first *transferred* to the crudest and earliest social structures (in their relationships with similar social structures), along with the habit of comparing power with power, of measuring, of calculating. The eye was now adjusted to this perspective, and with that awkward consistency characteristic of thinking in more ancient human beings, hard to get started but then inexorably moving forward in the same direction, people soon reached the great generalization: “Each thing has its price, *everything* can be paid off” — the oldest and most naive moral principle of *justice*, the beginning of all “good nature,” all “fairness,” all “good will,” all “objectivity” on earth.

Justice at this first stage is good will among those approximately equal in power to come to terms with each other, to “come to an agreement” again with each other by compensation — and in relation to those less powerful, to *compel* them to arrive at some settlement among themselves. —

9

Always measured by the standard of pre-history (a pre-history which, by the way, is present at all times or is capable of returning), the community also stands in relation to its members in that important basic relationship of the creditor to his debtor. People live in a community. They enjoy the advantages of a community (and what advantages they are! Nowadays we sometimes underestimate them); they live protected, cared for, in peace and trust, without worries concerning certain injuries and enmities from which the man *outside* the community, the “man without peace,” is excluded — a German understands what “misery” [*Elend*] or *Llend* [*other country*] originally means — and how people pledged themselves to and entered into obligations with the community bearing in mind precisely these injuries and enmities. What will happen with *an exception* to this case? The community, the defrauded creditor, will see that it gets paid as well as it can — on that people can rely.

The issue here is least of all the immediate damage which the offender has caused. Setting this to one side, the lawbreaker [*Verbrecher*] is above all a “breaker” [*Brecher*], a breaker of contracts and a breaker of his word *against the totality*, with respect to all the good features and advantages of the communal life in which, up to that point, he has had a share. The lawbreaker is a debtor who does not merely not pay back the benefits and advances given to

him, but who even attacks his creditor. So from this point on not only does he forfeit, as is reasonable, all these good things and benefits — but he is also now reminded *what these good things are all about*. The anger of the injured creditor, the community, gives him back again to the wild outlawed condition, from which he was earlier protected. It pushes him away from itself — and now every form of hostility can vent itself on him. At this stage of cultural behaviour “punishment” is simply the copy, the *mimus*, of the normal conduct towards the hated, disarmed enemy who has been thrown down, who has forfeited not only all legal rights and protection but also all mercy; hence it is a case of the rights of war and the victory celebration of *vae victis* [*woe to the conquered*] in all its ruthlessness and cruelty: — which accounts for the fact that war itself (including the warlike cult of sacrifice) has given us all the *forms* in which punishment has appeared in history.

10

As it acquires more power, a community no longer considers the crimes of the single individual so serious, because it no longer is entitled to consider him as dangerous and unsettling for the existence of the totality as much as it did before. The wrongdoer is no longer “outlawed” and thrown out, and the common anger is no longer permitted to vent itself on him without restraint to the same extent as earlier — instead the wrongdoer from now on is carefully protected by the community against this anger, especially from that of the immediately injured person, and is taken into protective custody. The compromise with the anger of those particularly affected by the wrong doing, and thus the effort to localize the case and to avert a wider or even a general participation and unrest, the attempts to find equivalents and to settle the whole business (the *compositio*), above all the desire, appearing with ever-increasing clarity, to consider every crime as, in some sense or other, *capable of being paid off*, and thus, at least to a certain extent, to *separate* the criminal and his crime from each other — those are the characteristics stamped more and more clearly on the further development of criminal law.

If the power and the self-confidence of a community keep growing, the criminal law also grows constantly milder. Every weakening and deeper jeopardizing of the community brings its harsher forms of criminal law to light once again. The “creditor” has always become proportionally more humane as he has become richer. Finally the *amount* of his wealth even becomes measured by how much damage he can sustain without suffering from it. It would not be impossible to imagine a society with a *consciousness of its own power* which allowed itself the most privileged luxury which it can have — letting its criminals *go without punishment*. “Why should I really bother about my parasites?” it could then say. “May they live and prosper; for that I am still sufficiently strong!” . . . Justice, which started with “Everything is capable of being paid for; everything must be paid off” ends at that point, by shutting its eyes and letting the person incapable of payment go free — it ends, as every good thing on earth ends, *by doing away with itself*. This self-negation of justice: we know what a beautiful name it calls itself — *mercy*. It goes without saying that mercy remains the privilege of the most powerful man, or even better, his beyond the law.

A critical word here about a recently published attempt to find the origin of justice in a completely different place — that is, in resentment. But first a word in the ear of the psychologists, provided that they have any desire to study resentment itself up close for once: this plant grows most beautifully nowadays among anarchists and anti-Semites; in addition, it blooms, as it always has, in hidden places, like the violet, although it has a different fragrance. And since like always has to emerge necessarily from like, it is not surprising to see attempts coming forward again from just such circles, as they have already done many times before — see above, Section 14 [*First Essay*] — to sanctify *revenge* under the name of *justice* — as if justice were basically only a further development of a feeling of being injured — and to bring belated honour to reactive emotions generally, all of them, using the idea of revenge.

With this last point I personally take the least offence. It even seems to me a *service*, so far as the entire biological problem is concerned (in connection with which the worth of those emotions has been underestimated up to now). The only thing I am calling attention to is the fact that it is the very spirit of resentment out of which this new emphasis on scientific fairness grows (which favours hate, envy, resentment, suspicion, rancour, and revenge). This “scientific fairness,” that is, ceases immediately and gives way to tones of mortal enmity and prejudice as soon as it deals with another group of emotions which, it strikes me, have a much higher biological worth than those reactive ones and which therefore have earned the right to be *scientifically* assessed and respected first — namely, the truly *active* emotions, like desire for mastery, acquisitiveness, and so on (E. Dühring, *The Value of Life: A Course in Philosophy*, the whole book really).* So much against this tendency in general.

But in connection with Dühring’s single principle that we must seek the homeland of justice in the land of the reactive feeling, we must, for love of the truth, rudely turn this around by setting out a different principle: the *last* territory to be conquered by the spirit of justice is the land of the reactive emotions! If it is truly the case that the just man remains just even towards someone who has injured him (and not merely cold, moderate, strange, indifferent: being just is always a *positive* attitude), if under the sudden attack of personal injury, ridicule, and suspicion, the gaze of the lofty, clear objectivity of the just and *judging* eye, as profound as it is benevolent, does not itself grow dark, well, that’s a piece of perfection and the highest mastery on earth — even something that it would be wise for people not to expect here; in any event, they should not *believe* in it too easily. It’s certainly true that, on average, among the most just people themselves even a small dose of hostility, malice, and insinuation is enough to make them see red and chase fairness *out of* their eyes. The active, aggressive, over-reaching human being is still placed a hundred steps closer to justice than the reactive person. For him it is simply not necessary in the slightest to estimate an object falsely and with bias, the way the reactive man does and must do. Thus, as a matter of fact, at all times the aggressive human being, as the stronger, braver, more noble man, has had on his side a *better* conscience as well as a *more independent* eye; by contrast, we can already guess

who generally has the invention of “bad conscience” on his conscience — the man of ressentiment!

Finally, let’s look around in history: up to now in what area has the whole implementation of law in general as well as the essential need for law been at home on earth? Could it be in the area of the reactive human beings? That is entirely wrong. It is much more the case that it’s been at home with the active, strong, spontaneous, and aggressive men. Historically considered, the law on earth — let me say this to the annoyance of the above-mentioned agitator (who once even confessed about himself “The doctrine of revenge runs through all my work and efforts as the red thread of justice”) — represents that very struggle *against* the reactive feelings, the war with them on the part of active and aggressive powers, which have partly used up their strength to put a halt to or to restrain the excess of reactive pathos and to compel some settlement with it. Wherever justice is practised, wherever justice is upheld, we see a stronger power in relation to a weaker power standing beneath it (whether with groups or individuals), seeking ways to bring an end among the latter to the senseless rage of ressentiment, partly by dragging the object of ressentiment out of the hands of revenge, partly by setting in the place of revenge a battle against the enemies of peace and order, partly by coming up with compensation, proposing it, under certain circumstances making it compulsory, partly by establishing certain equivalents for injuries as a norm, into which from now on ressentiment is directed once and for all.

The most decisive factor, however, which the highest power carries out and sets in place against the superior numbers of the feelings of hostility and animosity — something that power always does as soon as it is somehow strong enough to do it — is to set up *law*, the imperative explanation of those things which, in its own eyes, are generally considered allowed and legal and things which are considered forbidden and illegal, while after the establishment of the law, the authorities treat attacks and arbitrary acts of individuals or entire groups as an outrage against the law, as rebellion against the highest power itself, and they steer the feeling of those beneath them away from the immediate damage caused by such outrages and thus, in the long run, achieve the reverse of what all revenge desires, which sees only the viewpoint of the injured party and considers only that valid. From now on, the eye becomes trained to evaluate actions always *impersonally*, even the eye of the harmed party itself (although this would be the very last thing to occur, as I have remarked earlier). — Consequently, only with the setting up of the law is there a “just” and “unjust” (and *not*, as Dühring will have it, from the time of the injurious action).

To talk of just and unjust *in themselves* has no sense whatsoever; it’s obvious that in themselves harming, oppressing, exploiting, destroying cannot be “unjust,” inasmuch as life *essentially* works that way, that is, in its basic functions it harms, oppresses, exploits, and destroys, and cannot be conceived at all without this character. We have to acknowledge something even more disturbing: the fact that from the highest biological standpoint, conditions of justice must always be only *exceptional conditions*, partial restrictions on the basic will to live, which is set on power; they are subordinate to the total purpose of this will as

individual means, that is, as means to create *larger* units of power. A legal system conceived of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle of power complexes, but as a means *against* all struggles in general, something along the lines of Dühring's communist cliché in which each will must be considered as equal to every will, that would be a principle *hostile to life*, a destroyer and dissolver of human beings, an assassination attempt on the future of human beings, a sign of exhaustion, a secret path to nothingness. —

12

Here one more word concerning the origin and purpose of punishment — two problems which are separate or should be separate. Unfortunately people normally throw them together into one. How do the previous genealogists of morality deal with this issue? Naively — the way they have always worked. They find some “purpose” or other for punishment, for example, revenge or deterrence, then in a simple way set this purpose at the beginning as the *causa fiendi* [*creative cause*] of punishment and — they're finished. The “purpose in law,” however, is the very last idea we should use in the history of the emergence of law. It is much rather the case that for all forms of history there is no more important principle than that one which we reach with such difficulty but which we also really *should reach* — namely that what causes a particular thing to arise and the final utility of that thing, its actual use and arrangement in a system of purposes, are separate *toto coelo* [*by all the heavens, i.e., absolutely*] from each other, that something existing, which has somehow come to its present state, will again and again be interpreted by the higher power over it from a new perspective, appropriated in a new way, reorganized for and redirected to new uses, that all events in the organic world involve *overpowering, acquiring mastery* and that, in turn, all overpowering and acquiring mastery involve a new interpretation, a readjustment, in which the “sense” and “purpose” up to then must necessarily be obscured or entirely erased.

No matter how well we have understood the *usefulness* of some physiological organ or other (or a legal institution, a social custom, a political practice, some style in the arts or in a religious cult), we have still not, in that process, grasped anything about its origin — no matter how uncomfortable and unpleasant this may sound in elderly ears. From time immemorial people have believed that in demonstrable purposes, in the usefulness of a thing, a form, or an institution, they could also understand the reason it came into existence — the eye as something made to see, the hand as something made to grasp. So people also imagined punishment as invented to punish. But all purposes, all uses, are only *signs* that a will to power has become master over something with less power and has stamped on it its own meaning of some function, and the entire history of a “thing,” an organ, a practice can by this process be seen as a continuing chain of signs of constantly new interpretations and adjustments, whose causes do not even need to be connected to each other — in some circumstances they rather follow and take over from each other by chance.

Consequently, the “development” of a thing, a practice, or an organ has nothing to do with its *progressus* [*progress*] towards a single goal, even less is it the logical and shortest *progressus*

[*progress*] reached with the least expenditure of power and resources — but rather the sequence of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of overpowering which take place on that thing, together with the resistance which arises against that overpowering each time, the transformations of form which have been attempted for the purpose of defence and reaction, as well as the results of successful countermeasures. Form is fluid; the “meaning,” however, is even more so. . . . Even within each individual organism things are no different: with every essential growth in the totality, the “meaning” of the individual organs also shifts — in certain circumstances its partial destruction, a reduction of its numbers (for example, through the destruction of intermediate structures) can be a sign of growing power and perfection.

What I wanted to say is this: the partial *loss of utility*, decline, and degeneration, the loss of meaning, and purposiveness, in short, death, also belong to the conditions of a real *progressus* [*progress*], which always appears in the form of a will and a way to a *greater power* and always establishes itself at the expense of a huge number of smaller powers. The size of a “step forward” can even *be estimated* by a measure of everything that had to be sacrificed to it. The humanity as mass sacrificed for the benefit of a single *stronger* species of man — that *would be* a step forward

I emphasize this major point of view about historical methodology all the more since it basically runs counter to the very instinct which presently rules and to contemporary taste, which would rather still go along with the absolute contingency, even the mechanical meaninglessness, of all events rather than with the theory of a *will to power* playing itself out in everything that happens. The democratic idiosyncrasy of being hostile to everything which rules and wants to rule, the modern *hatred of rulers* [*Misarchismus*] (to make up a bad word for a bad thing) has gradually transformed itself into and dressed itself up as something spiritual, of the highest spirituality, to such an extent that nowadays step by step it is already infiltrating the strictest, apparently most objective scientific research, and *is allowed* to infiltrate it. Indeed, it seems to me already to have attained mastery over all of physiology and the understanding of life, to their detriment, as is obvious, because it has conjured away from them their fundamental concept, that of real *activity*. By contrast, under the pressure of this idiosyncrasy we push “adaptation” into the foreground, that is, a second-order activity, a mere re-activity; in fact, people have defined life itself as an always purposeful inner adaptation to external circumstances (Herbert Spencer). But that simply misjudges the essence of life, its *will to power*. That overlooks the first priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, over-reaching, re-interpreting, re-directing, and shaping powers, after whose effects the “adaptation” then follows. Thus, the governing role of the highest functions in an organism itself, the ones in which the will for living appear active and creative, are denied. People should remember the criticism Huxley directed at Spencer for his “administrative nihilism.” But the issue here concerns much *more* than “administration.” . . .*

Returning to the business at hand, that is, to *punishment*, we have to differentiate between two aspects of it: first its relative *duration*, the way it is carried out, the action, the “drama,” a certain strict sequence of procedures and, on the other hand, its *fluidity*, the meaning, the purpose, the expectation linked to the implementation of such procedures. In this matter, we can here assume, without further comment, *per analogium* [by analogy], in accordance with the major viewpoints about the historical method we have just established, that the procedure itself will be somewhat older and earlier than its use as a punishment, that the latter was only first *injected* and interpreted into the procedure (which had been present for a long time but was a custom with a different meaning), in short, that it was *not* what our naive genealogists of morality and law up to now have assumed, who collectively imagined that the procedure *was invented* for the purpose of punishment, just as people earlier thought that the hand was invented for the purpose of grasping.

Now, so far as that other element in punishment is concerned, the fluid element, its “meaning,” in a very late cultural state (for example in contemporary Europe) the idea of “punishment” actually presents not simply one meaning but a whole synthesis of “meanings.” The history of punishment up to now, in general, the history of its use for different purposes, finally crystallizes into a sort of unity, which is difficult to untangle, difficult to analyze, and, it must be stressed, totally *incapable of definition*. (Today it is impossible to say clearly *why* we really punish; all ideas in which an entire process is semiotically summarized elude definition. Only something which has no history is capable of being defined).

At an earlier stage, by contrast, that synthesis of “meanings” still appears easier to untangle, as well as even easier to adjust. We can still see how in every individual case the elements in the synthesis alter their valence and rearrange themselves accordingly, so that soon this or that element steps forward and dominates at the expense of the rest; indeed, under certain circumstances one element (say, the purpose of deterrence) appears to rise above all the other elements.

In order to give at least an idea of how uncertain, how belated, how accidental “the meaning” of punishment is and how one and the same procedure can be used, interpreted, or adjusted for fundamentally different purposes, let me offer here an example which presented itself to me on the basis of relatively little random material: punishment as a way of rendering someone harmless, as a prevention from further harm; punishment as compensation for the damage to the person injured, in some form or other (also in the form of emotional compensation); punishment as isolation of some upset to an even balance in order to avert a wider outbreak of the disturbance; punishment as way of inspiring fear of those who determine and carry out punishment; punishment as a sort of compensation for the advantages which the law breaker has enjoyed up until that time (for example, when he is made useful as a slave working in the mines); punishment as a cutting out of a degenerate element (in some circumstances an entire branch, as in Chinese law, and thus a means to keep the race pure or to sustain a social type); punishment as festival, that is, as the violation and humiliation of some enemy one has finally thrown down; punishment as a way of making a conscience, whether for the man who suffers the punishment — so-called “reform” — or whether for those who witness the punishment being carried out; punishment as

the payment of an honorarium, set as a condition by those in power, which protects the wrong doer from the excesses of revenge; punishment as a compromise with the natural condition of revenge, insofar as the latter is still upheld and assumed as a privilege by powerful families; punishment as a declaration of war and a war measure against an enemy to peace, law, order, and authority, which people fight with the very measures war makes available, as something dangerous to the community, as a breach of contract with respect to its conditions, as a rebel, traitor, and breaker of the peace.

14

Of course, this list is not complete. Obviously punishment is overloaded with all sorts of useful purposes, all the more reason why people can infer from it an *alleged* utility, which in the popular consciousness at least is considered its most essential one —faith in punishment, which nowadays for several reasons is getting shaky, still finds its most powerful support in precisely that. Punishment is supposed to be valuable in waking the *feeling of guilt* in the guilty party. In punishment people are looking for the actual instrument for that psychic reaction called “bad conscience,” “pangs of conscience.” But in doing this, people are misappropriating reality and psychology, even for today, and how much more for the longest history of man, his prehistory!

Real pangs of conscience are something extremely rare, especially among criminals and prisoners. Prisons and penitentiaries are *not* breeding grounds in which this species of gnawing worm particularly likes to thrive: — on that point all conscientious observers agree, in many cases delivering such a judgment with sufficient unwillingness, going against their own desires. In general, punishment makes people hard and cold. It concentrates. It sharpens the feeling of estrangement; it strengthens powers of resistance. If it comes about that punishment shatters a man’s energy and brings on a wretched prostration and self-abasement, such a consequence is surely even less pleasant than the typical result of punishment, characteristically a dry, gloomy seriousness.

However, if we consider those millennia *before* the history of humanity, without a second thought we can conclude that the very development of a feeling of guilt was most powerfully *hindered* by punishment — at least with respect to the victims onto whom this force of punishment was vented. For let us not underestimate just how much the criminal is prevented by the very sight of judicial and executive procedures themselves from sensing that his act, the nature of his action, is something *inherently* reprehensible, for he sees exactly the same kind of actions committed in the service of justice, then applauded and practised in good conscience, like espionage, lying, bribery, entrapment, the whole tricky and sly art of the police and prosecution, as it manifests itself in the various kinds of punishment — the robbery, oppression, abuse, imprisonment, torture, murder, all done, moreover, as a matter of principle, without even any emotional involvement as an excuse — all these actions are in no way rejected or condemned *in themselves* by his judges, but only in particular respects when used for certain purposes.

“Bad conscience,” this most creepy and most interesting plant among our earthly vegetation, did *not* grow in this soil — in fact, for the longest period in the past *nothing* about dealing with a “guilty party” penetrated the consciousness of judges or even those doing the punishing. By contrast, they were dealing with someone who had caused harm, with an irresponsible piece of fate. And even the man on whom punishment later fell, once again like a piece of fate, experienced in that no “inner pain,” other than what might have come from the sudden arrival of something unpredictable, a terrible natural event, a falling, crushing boulder against which there is no way to fight any more.

15

At one point Spinoza became aware of this issue in an incriminating way (something which irritates his interpreters, like Kuno Fischer, who really *go to great lengths* to misunderstand him on this matter), when one afternoon, he came up against some memory or other (who knows what?) and pondered the question about what, as far as he was concerned, was left of the celebrated *morsus conscientiae* [*the bite of conscience*] — for him, the man who had expelled good and evil into human fantasies and had irascibly defended the honour of his “free” God against those blasphemers who claimed that in everything God worked *sub ratione boni* [*with good reason*] (“but that means that God would be subordinate to Fate, a claim which, in truth, would be the greatest of all contradictions”). For Spinoza the world had gone back again into that state of innocence in which it had existed before the invention of bad conscience. So with that what, then, had become of the *morsus conscientiae*?

“The opposite of *gaudium* [*joy*],” Spinoza finally told himself “is sorrow, accompanied by the image of something over and done with which happened contrary to all expectation” (*Ethics* III, Proposition XVIII, Schol. I. II). In a manner *no different from Spinoza’s*, those instigating evil who incurred punishment have for thousands of years felt, so far as their “crime” is concerned, “Something has unexpectedly gone awry here,” *not* “I should not have done that” — they submitted to their punishment as people submit to a sickness or some bad luck or death, with that brave fatalism free of revolt which, for example, even today gives the Russians an advantage over us westerners in coping with life.

If back then there was some criticism of the act, such criticism came from prudence: without question we must seek the essential *effect* of punishment above all in an increase of prudence, in an extension of memory, in a will to go to work from now on more carefully, more mistrustfully, more secretly, with the awareness that we are in many things definitely too weak, in a kind of improved ability to judge ourselves.

In general, what can be achieved through punishment, in human beings and animals, is an increase in fear, a honing of prudence, control over desires. In the process, punishment *tames* human beings, but it does not make them “better” — people could with more justification assert the opposite. (Popular wisdom says “Injury makes people prudent,” but to the extent that it makes them prudent, it also makes them bad. Fortunately, often enough it makes people stupid.)

At this point, I can no longer avoid setting out, in an initial, provisional statement, my own hypothesis about the origin of “bad conscience.” It is not easy to get people to attend to it, and it requires them to consider it at length, to guard it, and to sleep on it. I consider bad conscience the profound illness which human beings had to come down with under the pressure of that most fundamental of all the changes which they ever experienced — that change when they finally found themselves locked within the confines of society and peace. Just like the things water animals must have gone through when they were forced either to become land animals or to die off, so events must have played themselves out with this half-beast so happily adapted to the wilderness, war, wandering around, adventure — suddenly all its instincts were devalued and “disengaged.”

From this point on, these animals were to go on foot and “carry themselves”; whereas previously they had been supported by the water. A terrible heaviness weighed them down. In performing the simplest things they felt ungainly. In dealing with this new unknown world, they no longer had their old leaders, the ruling unconscious drives which guided them safely — these unfortunate creatures were reduced to thinking, inferring, calculating, bringing together cause and effect, reduced to their “consciousness,” their most impoverished and error-prone organ! I believe that never on earth has there been such a feeling of misery, such a leaden discomfort — while at the same time those old instincts had not all of a sudden stopped imposing their demands! Only it was difficult and seldom possible to do their bidding. For the most part, they had to find new and, as it were, underground satisfactions for themselves.

All instincts which are not discharged to the outside *are turned back inside* — this is what I call the *internalization* [*Verinnerlichung*] of man. From this first grows in man what people later call his “soul.” The entire inner world, originally as thin as if stretched between two layers of skin, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, width, and height, to the extent that what a person discharged out into the world was *obstructed*. Those frightening fortifications with which the organization of the state protected itself against the old instincts for freedom — punishments belong above all to these fortifications — brought it about that all those instincts of the wild, free, roaming man turned themselves backwards, *against man himself*. Enmity, cruelty, joy in pursuit, in attack, in change, in destruction — all those turned themselves against the possessors of such instincts. *That* is the origin of “bad conscience.”

The man who because of a lack of external enemies and opposition was forced into an oppressive narrowness and regularity of custom impatiently tore himself apart, persecuted himself, gnawed away at himself, grew upset, and did himself damage — this animal which scraped itself raw against the bars of its cage, which people want to “tame,” this impoverished creature, consumed with longing for the wild, which had to create out of its own self an adventure, a torture chamber, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness — this fool, this yearning and puzzled prisoner, became the inventor of “bad conscience.” But with him was introduced the greatest and weirdest illness, from which humanity up to the present

time has not recovered, the suffering of man *from man, from himself*, a consequence of the forcible separation from his animal past, a leap and, so to speak, a fall into new situations and living conditions, a declaration of war against the old instincts, on which, up to that point, his power, joy, and ability to inspire fear had been based.

Let us at once add that, on the other hand, the fact that there was on earth an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, meant there was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and *full of the future*, that with it the picture of the earth was fundamentally changed. In fact, it required divine spectators to appreciate the dramatic performance which then began and whose conclusion is by no means yet in sight — a spectacle too fine, too wonderful, too paradoxical, to be allowed to play itself out senselessly and unobserved on some ridiculous star or other! Since then man has been included *among* the most unexpected and most thrillingly lucky rolls of the dice in the game played by Heraclitus' "great child," whether he's called Zeus or chance.* For himself he arouses a certain interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if something is announcing itself with him, something is preparing itself, as if the human being were not the goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise . . .

17

Inherent in this hypothesis about the origin of bad conscience is, firstly, the assumption that the change was not gradual or voluntary and did not manifest itself as an organic growth into new conditions, but as a break, a leap, something forced, an irrefutable disaster, against which there was no struggle nor even any resentment. Secondly, however, it assumes that the adaptation of a populace hitherto unchecked and shapeless into a fixed form, just as it was initiated by an act of violence, was carried to its conclusion by nothing but acts of violence — that consequently the oldest "State" emerged as a terrible tyranny, as an oppressive and inconsiderate machinery, and continued working until such raw materials of people and half-animals finally were not only thoroughly kneaded and submissive but also *given a shape*.

I used the word "State": it is self-evident who is meant by that term — some pack of blond predatory animals, a race of conquerors and masters, which, organized for war and with the power to organize, without thinking about it, sets its terrifying paws on a subordinate population which may perhaps be vast in numbers but is still without any form, is still wandering about. That is, in fact, the way the "State" begins on earth. I believe that fantasy has been done away with which sees the beginning of the state in a "contract." The man who can command, who is by nature a "master," who comes forward with violence in his actions and gestures — what has he to do with making contracts! We do not negotiate with such beings. They come like fate, without cause, reason, consideration, or pretext. They are present as lightning is present, too fearsome, too sudden, too convincing, too "different" even to become merely hated. Their work is the instinctive creation of forms, the imposition of forms. They are the most involuntary and most unconscious artists in existence: — where

they appear something new is soon present, a power structure which *lives*, something in which the parts and functions are demarcated and coordinated, in which there is, in general, no place for anything which does not first derive its “meaning” from its relationship to the totality.

These men, these born organizers, have no idea what guilt, responsibility, and consideration are. In them that fearsome egotism of the artist is in charge, which stares out like bronze and knows how to justify itself for all time in the “work,” just as a mother does in her child. *They* are not the ones in whom “bad conscience” grew — that point is obvious from the outset. But this hateful plant would not have grown *without them*. It would have failed if an immense amount of freedom had not been driven from the world under the pressure of their hammer blows, their artistic violence, or at least had not been driven from sight and, as it were, made *latent*. This powerful *instinct for freedom*, once made latent — we already understand how — this instinct for freedom driven back, repressed, imprisoned inside, and finally still able to discharge and direct itself only against itself — that and that alone is what *bad conscience* is in its beginning.

18

We need to be careful not to entertain a low opinion of this entire phenomenon simply because it is from the start nasty and painful. In fact, it is basically the same active force which is at work on a grander scale in those artists of power and organizers and which builds states. Here it is inner, smaller, more mean spirited, directing itself backwards, into “the labyrinth of the breast,” to use Goethe’s words, and it creates bad conscience for itself and builds negative ideals, just that *instinct for freedom* (to use my own language, the will to power). Only the material on which the shaping and violating nature of this force directs itself here is simply man himself, his entire old animal self — and *not*, as in that greater and more striking phenomenon, on *another* man or on *other* men.

This furtive violation of the self, this artistic cruelty, this pleasure in giving a shape to oneself as a tough, resisting, suffering material, to burn into it a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a denial, this weird and horribly pleasurable work of a soul willingly divided against itself, which makes itself suffer for the pleasure of creating suffering, all this *active* “bad conscience,” as the essential womb of ideal and imaginative events, finally brought to light — we have already guessed — also an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation and perhaps for the first time the idea of the beautiful in general. . . . For what would be “beautiful,” if its opposite had not yet come to an awareness of itself, if ugliness had not already said to itself, “I am ugly”? . . .

At least, after this hint the paradox will be less puzzling, the extent to which in contradictory ideas, like *selflessness*, *self-denial*, *self-sacrifice*, an ideal can be indicated, something beautiful. And beyond that, one thing we do know — I have no doubt about it — namely, the nature of the *pleasure* which the selfless, self-denying, self-sacrificing person experiences from the beginning: this pleasure belongs to cruelty.

So much for the moment on the origin of the “unegoistic” as something of *moral* worth and on the demarcation of the soil out of which this value has grown: only bad conscience, only the will to abuse the self, provides the condition for the *value* of the unegoistic.

19

Bad conscience is a sickness — there’s no doubt about that — but a sickness the way pregnancy is a sickness. Let’s look for the conditions in which this illness has arrived at its most terrible and most sublime peak: — in this way we’ll see what really brought about its entry into the world at the start. But that requires a lot of endurance — and we must first go back once more to an earlier point of view.

The relationship in civil law between the debtor and his creditor, which I have reviewed extensively already, has been interpreted once again in an extremely remarkable and dubious historical manner into a relationship which we modern men are perhaps least capable of understanding, namely, into the relationship between *those people presently alive* and their *ancestors*.

Within the original tribal cooperatives — we’re talking about primeval times — the living generation always acknowledged a legal obligation to the previous generations, and especially to the earliest one which had founded the tribe (and this was in no way merely a sentimental obligation: the latter is something we could even reasonably claim was, in general, absent for the longest period of the human race). Here the reigning conviction is that the tribe *exists* at all only because of the sacrifices and achievements of its ancestors — and that people have to *pay them back* with sacrifices and achievements. In this people recognize a *debt* which keeps steadily growing because these ancestors in their continuing existence as powerful spirits do not stop giving the tribe new advantages and lending them their power. Do they do this gratuitously? But there is no “gratuitously” for those raw and “spiritually destitute” ages.

What can people give back to them? Sacrifices (at first as nourishment understood very crudely), festivals, chapels, signs of honour, above all, obedience — for all customs, as work of one’s ancestors, are also their statutes and commands. Do people ever give them enough? This suspicion remains and grows. From time to time it forcefully requires a huge wholesale redemption, something immense as a repayment to the “creditor” (the notorious sacrifice of the first born, for example, blood, human blood in any case).

The *fear* of ancestors and their power, the awareness of one’s debt to them, according to this kind of logic, necessarily increases directly in proportion to the increase in the power of the tribe itself, as the tribe finds itself constantly more victorious, more independent, more honoured, and more feared. It’s not the other way around! Every step towards the decline of the tribe, all conditions of misery, all indications of degeneration, of approaching dissolution, rather lead to a constant *diminution* of the fear of the spirit of its founder and give a constantly smaller image of his wisdom, providence, and powerful presence.

If we think this crude form of logic through to its conclusion, then the ancestors of the *most powerful* tribes must, because of the fantasy of increasing fear, finally have grown into something immense and have been pushed back into the darkness of a divine mystery, something beyond the powers of imagination, so that finally the ancestor is necessarily transfigured into a *god*. Here perhaps lies even the origin of the gods, thus an origin out of *fear*! . . . And the man to whom it seems obligatory to add “But also out of piety” could hardly claim to be right for the longest period of the human race, for his *primaeval* age. Of course, he would be all the more correct for the *middle* period, in which the noble tribes developed — those who in fact paid back to their founders, their ancestors (heroes, gods), with interest, all the characteristics which in the meantime had become manifest in themselves, the *noble* qualities. Later we will have another look at the process by which the gods were ennobled and exalted (which is naturally not at all the same thing as their becoming “holy”). But now, for the moment, let’s follow the path of this whole development of the consciousness of guilt to its conclusion.

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As history teaches us, the consciousness of being in debt to the gods did not in any way come to an end after the downfall of the organization of the “community” based on blood relationships. Just as humanity inherited the ideas of “good and bad” from the nobility of the tribe (together with its fundamental psychological tendency to set up orders of rank), in the same way people also inherited, as well as the divinities of the tribe and of the extended family, the pressure of as yet unpaid debts and the desire to be relieved of them. (The transition is made with those numerous slave and indentured populations which adapted themselves to the divine cults of their masters, whether through compulsion or through obsequiousness and mimicry; from them this inheritance then overflowed in all directions). The feeling of being indebted to the gods did not stop growing for several thousands of years, always, in fact, in direct proportion to the extent to which the idea of god and the feeling for god grew on earth and were carried to the heights. (The entire history of ethnic fighting, victory, reconciliation, mergers, everything which comes before the final rank ordering of all the elements of a people in every great racial synthesis, is mirrored in the tangled genealogies of its gods, in the sagas of their fights, victories, and reconciliations. The progress towards universal empires is always also the progress toward universal divinities. In addition, despotism, with its overthrow of the independent nobility always builds the way to some variety of monotheism).

The arrival of the Christian god, as the greatest [*Maximal*] god which has yet been reached, thus brought about the maximum feeling of indebtedness on earth. Assuming that we have gradually set out in the *reverse* direction, we can infer with no small probability that, given the inexorable decline of faith in the Christian god, even now there may already be a considerable decline in the human consciousness of guilt. Indeed, we cannot dismiss the idea that the complete and final victory of atheism could release humanity from this entire feeling of being indebted to its origin, its *causa prima* [*prime cause*]. Atheism and a kind of *second innocence* belong together. —

So much for a brief and rough preface concerning the connection between the ideas “guilt” and “obligation” with religious assumptions. Up to this point I have deliberately set aside the actual moralizing of these ideas (the repression of them into the conscience, or more precisely, the complex interaction of the *bad* conscience with the idea of god). At the end of the previous section I even talked as if there were no such thing as this moralizing and thus as if those ideas were now necessarily coming to an end after the collapse of their presuppositions, the faith in our “creditor,” in God. But to a terrifying extent the facts indicate something different.

The moralizing of the ideas of debt and duty, with their repression into the *bad* conscience, actually gave rise to the attempt to *reverse* the direction of the development I have just described, or at least to bring its motion to a halt. Now, in a fit of pessimism, the prospect of a final installment *must* once and for all be denied; now, our gaze *must* bounce and ricochet back despairingly off an iron impossibility, now those ideas of “debt” and “duty” *must* turn back. But against *whom*?

There can be no doubt: first of all against the “debtor,” in whom from this point on bad conscience sets itself firmly, gnaws away, spreads out, and, like a polyp, grows wide and deep to such an extent that finally, with the impossibility of discharging the debt people also come up with the notion that it is impossible to remove the penance, the idea that it cannot be paid off (“*eternal* punishment”): — finally however, those ideas of “debt” and “duty” turn back even against the “creditor.” People should, in this matter, now think about the *causa prima* [*first cause*] of humanity, about the beginning of the human race, about their ancestor who from now on is loaded down with a curse (“Adam,” “original sin,” “no freedom of the will,”) or about nature from whose womb human beings arose and into which the principle of evil is now inserted (“the demonizing of nature”) or about existence in general, which remains something *inherently without value* (nihilistic turning away from existence, longing for nothingness, or a desire for its “opposite,” in an alternate state of being, Buddhism and things like that) — until all of a sudden we confront the paradoxical and horrifying expedient with which a martyred humanity found temporary relief, that stroke of genius of *Christianity*: God sacrificing himself for the guilt of human beings, God paying himself back with himself, God as the only one who can redeem man from what for human beings has become impossible to redeem — the creditor sacrificing himself for the debtor, out of *love* (can people believe that?), out of love for his debtor! . . .

You will already have guessed *what* really went on with all this and *under* all this: that will to self-torment, that repressed cruelty of animal man pushed inward and forced back into himself, imprisoned in the “state” to make him tame, who invented bad conscience in order to lacerate himself, after the *more natural* discharge of this will to inflict pain had been blocked — this man of bad conscience seized upon religious assumptions to drive his self-torment

into its most horrifying hardship and ferocity. Guilt towards *God*: this idea becomes his instrument of torture.

In “God” he seizes on the ultimate contrast he is capable of discovering to his real and indissoluble animal instincts. He interprets these animal instincts themselves as a crime against God (as enmity, rebellion, revolt against the “master,” the “father,” the original ancestor and beginning of the world). He grows tense with the contradiction of “God” and “devil.” He hurls from himself every “No” which he says to himself, to nature, naturalness, the factual reality [*Tatsächlichkeit*] of his being as a “Yes,” as something existing, as living, as real, as God, as the blessedness of God, as God the Judge, as God the Hangman, as something beyond him, as eternity, as perpetual torment, as hell, as punishment and guilt beyond measure.

In this spiritual cruelty there is a kind of insanity of the will, which simply has no equal: a man’s *will* finding him so guilty and reprehensible that there is no atonement, his *will* to imagine himself punished, but in such a way that the punishment could never be adequate for his crime, his *will* to infect and poison the most fundamental basis of things with the problem of punishment and guilt in order to cut himself off once and for all from any exit out of this labyrinth of “fixed ideas,” his *will* to erect an ideal — that of the “holy God” — in order to be tangibly certain of his own absolute worthlessness when confronted with it. O this insane, sad beast man! What ideas it has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* breaks from it as soon as it is prevented, if only a little, from being a *beast in deed*! . . .

All this is excessively interesting, but there’s also a black, gloomy, unnerving sadness about it, so that man must forcefully hold himself back from gazing too long into these abysses. Here we have *illness* — no doubt about that — the most terrifying illness that has raged in human beings up to now: — and anyone who can still hear (but nowadays people no longer have the ear for that! —) how in this night of torment and insanity the cry of *love* has resounded, the cry of the most yearning delight, of redemption through *love*, turns away, seized by an invincible horror. . . In human beings there is so much that is terrible! . . . The world has already been a lunatic asylum for too long! . . .

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These remarks should be sufficient, once and for all, concerning the origin of the “holy God.” — The fact that conceiving gods does not necessarily, *in itself*, have to lead to this degraded imagination, that’s something we could not excuse ourselves from recalling for a moment, the point that there are *more uplifting* ways to use the invention of the gods than for this human self-crucifixion and self-laceration, in which Europe in the last millennia has become an expert — fortunately that’s something we can still infer with every glance we cast at the *Greek gods*, these reflections of nobler men, more rulers of themselves, in whom the *animal* in man felt himself deified and did *not* tear himself apart, did *not* rage against himself!

These Greeks for the longest time used their gods for the very purpose of keeping that “bad conscience” at a distance, in order to be permitted to continue enjoying their psychic freedom. Hence, their understanding was the opposite of how Christianity used its God. In this matter the Greeks went *a very long way*, these splendid and lion-hearted Greeks, with their child-like minds. And no lesser authority than that of Homer’s Zeus himself now and then lets them understand that they are making things too easy for themselves. “It’s strange,” he says at one point in relation to the case of Aegisthus, a *very* bad case —

It’s strange how these mortal creatures complain about the gods!

Evil comes only from us, they claim, but they themselves

Stupidly make themselves miserable, even contrary to fate.*

But at the same time we hear and see that even this Olympian spectator and judge is far from being irritated and from thinking them evil because of this: “How *foolish* they are,” he thinks in relation to the bad deeds of mortal men — and even the Greeks of the strongest and bravest times *conceded* that much about themselves — the “foolishness,” “stupidity,” a little “disturbance in the head” were the basis for many bad and fateful things — foolishness, *not* sin! Do you understand that? . . . But even this disturbance in the head was a problem, “Indeed, how is this even possible? Where could this have really come from in heads like the ones *we* have, we men of noble descent, happy, successful, from the best society, noble, and virtuous?” — for hundreds of years the aristocratic Greek posed this question to himself in relation to every horror or outrage incomprehensible to him which had defiled one of his peers. “Some *god* must have deluded him,” he finally said, shaking his head . . . This solution is *typical* of the Greeks . . . In this way, the gods then served to justify men to a certain extent, even in bad things. They served as the origins of evil — at that time the gods took upon themselves, not punishment, but, what is *nobler*, the guilt. . .

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— I’ll conclude with three question marks — that’s clear enough. You may perhaps ask me, “Is an ideal actually being built up here or shattered?” . . . But have you ever really asked yourself enough how high a price has been paid on earth for the construction of *every* ideal? How much reality had to be constantly vilified and misunderstood for that to happen, how many lies had to be consecrated, how many consciences corrupted, how much “god” had to be sacrificed every time? In order to enable a shrine to be built, *a shrine must be destroyed*: that is the law — show me the case where it has not been fulfilled! . . .

We modern men, we are the inheritors of thousands of years of vivisection of the conscience and self-inflicted animal torture. That’s what we have had the longest practice doing, that is perhaps our artistry; in any case, it’s something we have refined, the corruption of our taste. For too long man has looked at his natural inclinations with an “evil eye,” so that finally in him they have become twinned with “bad conscience.” An attempt to reverse this might, *in itself*, be possible — but who is strong enough for it, that is, to link as siblings bad conscience and the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations for what lies beyond,

those things which go against our senses, against our instincts, against nature, against animals — in short, the earlier ideals, all the ideals which are hostile to life, ideals of those who vilify the world?

To whom can we turn to today with *such* hopes and demands? . . . In this we would have precisely the *good* people against us, as well, of course, as the comfortable, the complacent, the vain, the enthusiastic, the tired. . . . But what is more deeply offensive, what cuts us off so fundamentally, as letting them take some note of the severity and loftiness with which we deal with ourselves? And, by contrast, how obliging, how friendly all the world is in relation to us, as soon as we act as all the world does and “let ourselves go” just like all the world! . . .

To attain the goal I’m talking about requires a *different* sort of spirit from those which are likely to exist at this particular time: spirits empowered by war and victory, for whom conquest, adventure, danger, and even pain have become a need. That would require getting acclimatized to keen, high air, winter wanderings, to ice and mountains in every sense. That would require even a kind of sublime maliciousness, an ultimate self-conscious willfulness of knowledge, which comes with great health. Simply and seriously put, that would require just this *great health*! . . . Is this even possible today? . . .