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THE EMOTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF MORALS

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The Genealogy of Morals

Where do moral values come from? This question is not asked often enough. Philosophers are generally more interested in normative questions, rather than descriptive questions. The question of where our values come from is deemed irrelevant. Those who inquire into the origins of morality are sometimes accused of committing a genetic fallacy. The origin of a belief or value has no bearing, it is said, on its truth. I think this assumption needs to be reconsidered. Normative theories are often designed to encompass present-day intuitions. If those intuitions have ignoble origins, then perhaps they should not guide normative projects. This is a central theme in Nietzsche's critique of morality. Nietzsche sought to destabilize our values by exposing their past. As a constructive sentimentalist, I think morality is created by us, and, as a relativist, I think different societies create different moralities under different historical conditions. In this chapter, I examine that process.

I have two goals. I want to show that the genealogical method can be used effectively to investigate the origin of values. Doing so helps confirm that some moral convictions are products of social history. Nietzsche's own historical analyses were speculative, inflammatory, and probably deeply mistaken. More plausible genealogies have been proposed by anthropologists and historians. I consider some examples. My second goal is to determine whether genealogy can be used to support skepticism about current moral values. Nietzsche certainly used genealogy in this way, but I think his skepticism is overstated. Nietzsche also advocated the view that we should replace historically derived values with values that are more natural. I assess this aspect of his program in chapter 7, when I consider evolutionary ethics.

6.1 NIETZSCHE ON GENEALOGY

In nineteenth-century Germany, history was all the rage, and it is no surprise that German philosophers began emphasizing historical themes in their work. Nietzsche's interest in historical theme appears throughout his work and culminates in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). To understand morality, Nietzsche argues, we must look into the origin of moral values. The project was not unprecedented. Nietzsche was influenced by the work of his close friend Paul Rée, who had

published a book on *The Origin of the Moral Sensations* (1877). Rée's ideas were a blend of British moral philosophy, especially Hobbes and Mill, and Darwinian evolution. Nietzsche refers to Rée as a British psychologist in the *Genealogy*, despite the fact that Rée was a Pomeranian Jew who had never lived in England. According to Rée, moral terms, such as "good" and "bad," began as labels for positive and negative outcomes. More specifically, the terms refer to what is good and bad for the survival of the species. Eventually, through association and habit, those terms come to refer to the actions that cause positive and negative outcomes, rather than the outcomes themselves. We begin to think of cruelty as bad, for example, rather than recognizing that it is really the effects of cruelty that counted as bad in the original sense of the term.

Nietzsche rejected Rée's account, and devised a just-so story of his own. Like Rée, Nietzsche begins with an analysis of what one might call "natural good" and "natural bad"—the kind of good and bad that would be favored by human nature, unadulterated by history and culture. Rée had been convinced that Darwinian principles favored behavior that benefits others. Forecasting modern evolutionary ethicists, he regarded egoistic interests as compatible with selfless concern for others. Nietzsche thought that Darwinian principles lead to a less sanguine picture of natural good and bad. It is equally in our nature to seek power and to dominate those who are weaker. Nietzsche believed that these natural goods were enshrined in the morality of ancient Rome. Some of the values that Rée emphasized, including self-sacrifice, were not natural at all, according to Nietzsche. They were, instead, results of a power struggle in the ancient world.

In Rome, Christians were oppressed. They lived in poverty, and they resented their Roman oppressors (Nietzsche uses the French word, *ressentiment*, which also conveys feelings of hatred). To cope with their predicament, Christians began to demonize the values of their oppressors. They condemned power and domination, as well as wealth, freedom, and health. They called these things evil. They also began to regard their own dejected state as good, and made a virtue of poverty, weakness, and sickness. These values—celebrated in the Sermon on the Mount—were revolutionary. They reversed the Roman ideals, transforming Roman good into evil, and Roman bad into good. Nietzsche called this a slave revolt in morality. When Christians came to power, their moral system took a long and enduring hold. Nietzsche thought the values of nineteenth-century Europe were vestiges of early Christian resentment. He imagined a new dawn in which free-spirited Europeans would reinstate values of the kind that were celebrated in Rome. In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche constructs a utopian vision in which in which the weak "drop off" and the strong assert their will to power (Nietzsche, 1885: 30, 58).

Nietzsche's moral philosophy is unsettling. His invective against Christianity is overwrought, his apotheosis of "aristocratic" values is offensive, and his invocation of the "blond beast" portends the rise of National Socialism in

Germany. In actuality, Nietzsche despised the anti-Semites of his day, and he would have been repelled by the herd mentality of Hitler's executioners. Indeed, Nazi morality is amenable to a Nietzschean critique. The Nazis were driven by resentment of Europe after the treaty of Versailles, and their anti-Semitism was probably an outgrowth of conversion tactics used by the early Church. St Paul tried to attract pagan converts by ruling that Christians did not need to follow Jewish Law, and St John tried to demonize Jews by blaming them for the crucifixion. The shift from Jewish customs led to a demonization of unconverted Jews in the Christian world, and the smear campaign made them into scapegoats during times of adversity. The result was two millennia of crusades, inquisitions, and pogroms. Nietzsche would have condemned the Nazis for appropriating a form of bigotry that was really a vestige of a bygone power struggle and mistaking it for scientific truth. Unfortunately, the Nazis mistakenly revered Nietzsche (along with Plato) as an ideological father of their political movement. This sometimes distracts from the philosophically interesting features of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*.

The most important lessons from Nietzsche can be summarized as follows. First, the values that we currently cherish have a history. Second, that history may not be pretty. It may not reflect a rational progression toward ideas that are truer or more beneficial. Instead, this history of morals, like history in general, often involves power struggles and questionable psychological motives (greed, resentment, xenophobia—to name a few). Third, our blindness to this history gives us a false sense of security in our values. We take our moral outlook to be unimpeachable. Fourth, we can do better. We can change morality radically, and adopt a system of values that has advantages over the values we were enculturated to accept. Nietzsche is not a moral nihilist. He thinks we need a new morality—a new system of norms.

Nietzsche's optimism about moral progress is built on two presuppositions. The first is that, when we discover the historicity of our values, we will have reason and ability to reject them. Second, Nietzsche thinks we can replace historically constructed values with values that are, in some sense, natural. I will assess this idea in chapter 7.

I will argue that Nietzsche is right about the historicity of morals, but that both his pessimism about existing values and his optimism about future values are misplaced.

6.2 NIETZSCHE NATURALIZED

6.2.1 Nietzsche on Christianity

Nietzsche's account of the origin of Christian values is highly speculative and probably mistaken. For example, Christian asceticism, which is an expression

of the view that poverty is a virtue, may have its roots in ancient philosophical traditions in Greece, such as Stoicism and Cynicism, as well as ancient religious movements. There were ascetic cults in ancient Egypt, and Gnosticism, which probably emerged shortly before the dawn of Christianity, was a highly influential movement that urged chastity and the renunciation of the body. Gnosticism is believed to have had its origins in Persia, and it is unlikely that its asceticism derived from Roman oppression (Meeks, 1993).

The Christian preoccupation with charity may have had its origins in Jewish law (see, for example, Deuteronomy 15:11). Jews may have emphasized charity as the result of oppression, but there is no reason to think resentment or the apotheosis of poverty was a contributing factor. Aside from a few isolated sects, ancient Jews were not ascetics, and charity is a very sensible strategy for coping with oppression. From a game-theoretic point of view, sharing resources among members of a closely knit group can strengthen the group as a whole. This is a simpler explanation than Nietzsche's proposal about resentment.

These considerations lead me to conclude that the early Christians were not led to their moral outlook through resentment. Their ideology was appropriated from previously existing views. Of course, Nietzsche was aware that charity and ascetic movements predated Christianity. He might nevertheless argue that resentment led the early Christians to appropriate these values, rather than others. The impoverished Christians may have identified with the ascetics and they may have seen the Jewish concern for the needy as a mark of distinction from their Roman oppressors. The difficulty with this hypothesis is that early Christians may not have been impoverished. Stark (1996) argues convincingly that the movement was driven largely by the middle class and even the affluent.

Stark (1996) observes that new religious movements tend to be spread by financially secure individuals who have become disenchanted with their prior faith. Records suggest that many of the early converts were financially secure, and some were even members of the senatorial class in Rome. They were not victims of poverty or oppression. In any case, poverty and resentment cannot explain how Christianity spread. Christianity grew at an enormous speed in its first three centuries, probably at a rate of 40 percent per decade. People had been oppressed throughout the Roman Empire, but no religion of the oppressed ever displaced the pagan faith of the state. Stark thinks that oppression had little to do with it. Several other factors seem more plausible. First, Stark (1996) notes that there were two major plagues in the first centuries of Christianity, which decimated a large percentage of the Roman population. This could have led to disenchantment with Roman religion. Christianity offered a source of comfort by emphasizing life in the sweet hereafter. Moreover, Christian practices of caring for the needy (inherited from Judaism) may have resulted in greater survival rates during outbreaks of disease. That could have increased the Christian population and won over new converts.

Another important factor, Stark argues, is that Christianity offered better prospects for women than paganism. Pagan women were often married off by the time they were twelve, and there was little to protect them against male philandering and divorce. Christian women married older, and neither divorce nor philandering was permitted. So women were more secure. In addition, Christianity prohibited abortion, which at the time was highly dangerous to women and often imposed by men, and it also prohibited infanticide, which was a common method of killing unwanted female babies in Rome. The result is that women would have been attracted to Christianity, and once converted they would be much more likely to keep female offspring. This is very significant because women play a disproportionate role in the spread of religion. If Christian women married pagan men, they may have succeeded in converting those men or in raising their children as Christians. Stark shows that women were allowed to play ecclesiastical roles in the early Church, and he speculates that this added a further attraction to women and a further means by which women could spread the faith.

If Stark's account is on the right track, then Christianity spread largely because it empowered disaffected middle-class women. It was not a case of impoverished oppressed people turning their weaknesses into virtues. Rather, it was a case of financially comfortable people adopting a system of values that allowed for greater power and liberty. Hardly a slave revolt in morality. Once Christianity became the State religion, prospects for women seem to have diminished within the Church. For example, women could no longer serve in important ecclesiastical roles. We can safely assume that this transition in power, from middle-class women to male domination, was not driven by the destitute. The men who took over were the middle-class husbands of the women who spread Christianity, and members of Rome's ruling elite.

Even if Nietzsche's genealogy of Christian values is mistaken, the basic tenets of his approach can be defended. Moral values have undoubtedly been influenced by historical factors, and those factors are not always rational or noble. We should regard every moral value as a cultural artifact with a history just waiting to be discovered. Rather than speculating about the history of morals, we can call on the resources of social science. Of special value is historical anthropology. Anthropologists often engage in something resembling Nietzschean genealogy, but they support their origin stories with data. I will illustrate with some case studies. But first I will make a few remarks about the mechanisms of cultural transmission.

Nietzsche placed emphasis on power struggles and psychological factors: revolution and resentment. Resentment is not a *general* principle of cultural transmission, and, as I have just suggested, it may not have been especially important in the Christian revolution in morality. The idea of a power struggle is more general. But power struggles do not shed light on why values are passed on from generation to generation. Also, some values emerge slowly over time. It

would be useful to begin with a more general framework for thinking about the genealogy of morals, before focusing on factors that may have been operative in particular cases.

6.2.2 Cultural Transmission

I will adopt the view that cultural transmission is a function of fitness (for related ideas, see especially Boyd and Richerson, 1985; Sperber, 1996). We need to identify factors that make cultural products especially suitable for spreading and being passed on. I will focus on three factors. These are not necessarily the only factors contributing to cultural transmission, but they are probably among the most effective. The probability that an evaluative belief will be culturally transmitted increases when:

- (i) It yields material benefit to its believers or to the members of a culture who are in a position to indoctrinate others;
- (ii) it is situated in a narrative context that is easy to learn because, e.g., it integrates with existing beliefs about the nature of the world or captures the imagination; or
- (iii) it has emotional appeal, due to the intrinsic content of the belief or accompanying practices, such as emotional conditioning or emotionally intense religious rituals.

I will refer to these as material, narrative, and affective factors respectively. Each increases fitness in a different way. Material factors are most closely related to the idea of fitness that is used in evolutionary biology. A cultural element that has material benefits can increase prospects for survival and procreation. A materially beneficial belief can lead to an increase in the population size of people who hold that belief. Technological and medical knowledge are obvious examples. Cultures pass on knowledge of how to farm and how to treat wounds. But values can also have material costs and benefits. Consider two cases outside the moral domain. The desire for gold has played an important role in the geographic expansion of European society; it motivated European colonization of the New World and expansion across the North American frontier. This was good for the colonizers and bad for the indigenous people who were killed or displaced. In sharp contrast, the desire for silk may have contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. Rome racked up a huge trade deficit with China, which made it more difficult to finance military conquests.

By narrative factors, I mean to refer to the rich, cohesive, verbal contexts in which values are sometimes presented. Narratives can take many forms: they can be histories (as in the case of the Judeo-Christian Bible), scientific theories (as in the pseudoscientific justification of racism), moral tales, or myths. There are a number of reasons why narratives can facilitate value transmission. First,

people are better at memorizing stories than random lists of sentences (e.g., Black and Bern, 1981). Second, narratives can contain surprising elements that capture attention and enhance memory. Boyer and Ramble (2001) found that subjects in France, Gabon, and Nepal were all better at recalling stories in which physical expectations are violated (e.g., a being who can walk through walls) than stories in which nothing supernatural happens. Boyer and Ramble conclude that transmission of religious beliefs is facilitated when those beliefs are presented in counter-intuitive stories. Moral values are often conveyed through myths with supernatural elements, and this probably increases the chances that the values will be shared with others. Third, myths and stories are captivating to children, which leads to deeper processing and higher probability of recall and repetition. Fourth, narratives may facilitate information integration. By situating a value in a complex story, it may become linked to a large set of beliefs, including religious systems, cosmologies, and scientific theories. If a value is linked to broader belief systems, then it may be difficult to give up. Belief revision is a holistic process. To abandon a value grounded in a belief system may require abandoning large parts of that system, which would be epistemologically prohibitive. Fifth, narratives may contribute to the internalization of values by providing a resource for identity construction. People tend to think of themselves in terms of cohesive storylines, which may include autobiographical information as well as information about the historical past. It may be easier to adopt a set of values as mine if, for example, they are presented as having been discovered or given to my people, in the distant past. In each of these ways, narratives increase the probability of retention over time.

Affective factors facilitate memory as well. Emotions increase attention, and attention increases memory (e.g., MacKay et al. 2004). Emotions can also function as rewards. Positive affect is awarding, and a cultural element that induces positive emotions is, therefore, transmittable. Even negative emotions can increase transmission. For example, if rule violations are punished, fear of punishment can increase rule conformity, and this effect can be spread across generations. Moral emotions, such as guilt, can achieve the same effect. Moral sentiments are powerful tools for cultural transmission, because they assign emotional sanctions to rule violations, no matter who violated the rule (self or other; stranger or kin). In a very clever empirical study, Nichols (2002) demonstrates that emotionally implemented norms have greater potential for social transmission. Nichols compiled a list of rules listed in Erasmus's (1530) highly influential etiquette manual, *On Good Manners for Boys*. He then asked one coder to indicate which of these rules involves a prohibition against something that would naturally induce disgust (e.g., norms involving bodily fluids). Another coder was asked to indicate which of Erasmus's rules are still operative today. These two measures turned out to be highly correlated. Norms regulating behaviors that cause disgust are especially likely to endure.

The factors that effect cultural transmission often work in concert. Myths and rituals can be exciting, and sharing beliefs can promote feelings of affiliation and

solidarity. Solidarity can increase material benefits by increasing cooperation, and material benefits can increase positive affect. A single belief is often bolstered by multiple factors. Consider the Christian idea of Heaven. This belief fits into a coherent cosmology that makes sense of worldly suffering, and it carries an emotional reward through hope. As suggested above, the optimistic message may have been attractive during times of plague, and it may have made people more likely to offer assistance to those in need, rather than taking flight. This, in turn, may have increased survival prospects. So belief in Heaven may be narratively compelling, emotionally seductive, and materially beneficial.

I invoked the notion of fitness in listing factors that contribute to cultural transmission. “Fitness” is a Darwinian term (introduced by Erasmus Darwin, and made famous by Charles). It suggests an analogy between cultural transmission and natural selection. Some authors have tried to get a lot of mileage out of this analogy. They argue that cultural elements (beliefs, practices, institutions, artifacts, etc.) are transmitted in much the way that genes are transmitted. Dawkins (1976) introduced the term “meme” to refer to such elements. Like genes, memes arise through mutations in previously existing cultures, they are replicated, and their capacity to spread depends on their fitness. Nevertheless, I hesitate to call this an evolutionary model of belief transmission.

There are some important contrasts between genes and alleged memes (see Sperber, 2000; Boyd and Richerson, 2001). First, unlike biological evolution by natural selection, beliefs are not necessarily formed by anything like random mutation. They may be formed intentionally. Second, it’s not clear that the notion of replication applies. Belief transmission is not a matter of perfect mechanical copying. Beliefs are often transmitted intentionally. Change in beliefs can be intentional and abrupt. So there is great room for discontinuity in the ebb and flow of ideas. Third, cultural transmission is often horizontal as well as vertical. Cultural elements can be spread to individuals in the same generation. Genetic transmission is characteristically vertical (viral transmission of genes is an exception). Fourth, there is no obvious equivalent to the distinction between genotype and phenotype in cultural transmission. In biological evolution, genes work in concert with the environment to create phenotypical traits. Culturally transmitted evaluative beliefs are not necessarily the mechanisms by which anything else is produced. They are not underlying causes of more superficial traits. Dennett (1995) suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story* have different semantic phenotypes and the same underlying semantic genotype (or “memotype”), but the analogy is far from perfect. Shakespeare’s play has been faithfully reproduced (through umpteen printings), and subsequent authors have had to interact with the text in order to mimic it. Thus, one might just as well say that the play is like a genotype and the plot is like a phenotype.

For these reasons, evolutionary analogies should not be taken too far. Talk of memes is not especially helpful. It is important, however, to notice loose parallels between biological evolution and cultural transmission. The spread of

cultural entities depends, in some sense, on success. Cultural entities must be transferable and they are especially likely to spread if they are materially beneficial or psychologically seductive. Beliefs that are accessible, exciting, or profitable have an advantage over those that are arcane, dull, or destructive. Likewise for institutions and practices. We should acknowledge the role of fitness in cultural transmission, without pushing the analogy to genetic transmission much further. In discussing the fitness of evaluative attitudes, I do not want to take on the theoretical baggage of memetics. I mean only to say that we can make sense of why certain attitudes come about, why they stay, and why others tend to disappear.

Given this framework, we can now gain some perspective on Nietzsche's explanatory constructs. Resentment is an affective factor, and, as such, it may be conducive to cultural transmission. If Nietzsche was right that the early Christians resented the Romans, this would help to explain the spread of Christianity. I suspect that other emotions, as well as narrative and material factors, were more important (see below). Nietzsche also mentions power struggles. These are not mentioned on my list of factors, because they are mechanisms of change, rather than factors of transmission. That said, I do think Nietzsche is right to highlight a link between power and morality. Several reasons may be cited.

First of all, those with power are in an especially privileged position when it comes to cultural transmission. There is a widespread "prestige bias": we are more likely to imitate people who are powerful or successful. Powerful people are salient, and we imitate them as a cognitively inexpensive way to increase prospects for our own success (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001). Second, people with power have control over institutions used in cultural transmission. The powerful control religious institutions, for example, and these are the source of locally entrenched cosmologies. Third, there is a sense in which all culturally transmitted beliefs *constitute* a form of power. Cultural beliefs play a major role in structuring our societies and organizing our lives. This is a Nietzschean point, but it has been brought out most forcefully by Foucault, who equates knowledge with power (see especially, Foucault, 1977). I will not dwell on these themes, but they will be in the background. My approach to genealogy may differ from Nietzsche's in emphasis, but the parallels would not be difficult to extrapolate.

6.2.3 Why Do People Eat Each Other?

To illustrate the naturalized genealogical method, I will focus on two examples: cannibalism and marriage. The analyses that I review are controversial, but they help to establish a broad methodological point: the history of human values can be empirically investigated. Nietzsche can be naturalized.

Let's begin with attitudes toward cannibalism. Few practices fill us with as much horror. Cannibalism is not just wrong, in our eyes; it is monstrous.

But this attitude has not always been the norm. In chapter 5, I remarked that cannibalism may be the default human practice. Before the emergence of modern societies, which are organized into states, cannibalism may have been quite widespread. Cannibal practices have been recorded, up until quite recently, in pre-state societies all over the globe. In Africa, examples of societies thought to have practiced cannibalism include the Mangbetu, Abadja, and the Mayi-Mayi tribes of contemporary Congo. In North America examples include the Iroquois, Huron, Algonkian, Kwakiutl, and, perhaps, the Anasazi. Documented examples in South America include the Akamara, Guaiaca, Tupinamba, Panoans, and Yanomamö. There have been tribes in Papua New Guinea known to practice cannibalism, including the Fore, Baroi, Bimin-Kuskusmin, and Doboduras. In Polynesia, the Fiji islanders are believed to have been cannibals. In New Zealand, the Maori are reputed to have a history of cannibalism. Peggy Reeves Sanday (1986) estimates that cannibalism is quite common. In a representative sample of over 100 well-studied societies, spanning a time range of almost 4,000 years, she found that 34 percent engaged in cannibal practices.

Some skeptics have argued that tales of cannibalism in foreign lands are just sailors' stories designed to dehumanize members of other cultures (Arens, 1979). While I agree that some tales of cannibalism must be regarded with suspicion, skepticism about cannibalism is more insulting to other cultures than its denial; the urge to deny the existence of cannibalism stems from our own hegemonic conviction that cannibalism is unthinkable horrible. The evidence that cannibalism has been widely practiced is extremely strong. There are convergent eye-witness accounts from multiple, credible sources, including testimony from practitioners (Harris, 1985). There is also physical evidence: including human blood traces found on temple floors, charred human bones in cooking pots, human bones found cut in the same way as animal bones that were used for food, and human tissue found in human excrement (DeGusta, 1999; Turner and Turner, 1999; Marlar et al., 2000; Walker 2001). A bit more controversially, there is evidence that people across the globe have a gene that evolved to protect us against health risks associated with eating members of our own species (Mead et al., 2003). With extensive evidence from testimony and corroborating physical evidence, skepticism about cannibalism seems unfounded. I think we must come to terms with the fact that cannibalism was widespread, and we must explain that astonishing fact.

Cannibalism is documented to have taken different forms. Some societies have practiced mortuary endocannibalism, or eating of dead kin. But many other societies have practiced warfare exocannibalism, in which members of other social groups are eaten after being killed in battle. Mortuary cannibalism may be relatively easy to explain. Consuming the body of an ancestor may be a way to cope with the trauma of loss. It is a way to extend the life of the dead symbolically and transfer their vital powers. Mortuary cannibalism is also a way of coping

with the problem of dealing with dead bodies. It eliminates potentially hazardous waste. But what about warfare cannibalism?

Marvin Harris (1985: ch. 10) offers a compellingly simple explanation in terms of costs and benefits. Let's suppose that two neighboring tribes get into a violent conflict with a nearby tribe over resources. One tribe wins the battle. Several members of the other tribe are killed, and several others are captured. Consider the dead first. The victors could leave the dead behind, or they could eat them. The second option often makes sense. To leave the bodies behind is wasteful—it reaps no benefits. Human flesh is nutritious. If the victors had to travel a distance to the location of the battle, they could carve up the flesh of the victims for the return journey or they could have a restorative victory feast on the battlefield. Either option is better than simply leaving edible meat behind. Now what about the captives? Here there are three options. They could let the captives go, allowing them to seek revenge at a later date. The victors could also enslave their captives, but then they would have to feed them and prevent them from rebelling. The benefits of keeping slaves outweigh the costs only when slaves can be used to produce significant revenue through farming or other chores. If the victors do not have advanced agriculture, slavery is a bad idea. Finally, they can kill the captives. This is the best option for non-agrarian societies, and, once the captives have been killed, the victors are faced with the initial choice: consume the dead or leave them to rot. Consumption is, again, the sensible choice. Moreover, the victors can march the captives back to their village and avoid the labor of carrying their bodies. They can kill them in the village and share the meat with villagers who were unable to participate in the battle. This makes economic sense. It may also make strategic sense. If a group of people is known to be cannibals, neighboring groups may be more reluctant to engage them in warfare. This is especially true if the cannibal victims are sacrificed in a painful and ostentatious way. It is not unusual for cannibal societies to torture their victims and to establish elaborate rituals around the consumption of flesh.

Harris's account of why people engage in cannibalism makes key predictions. It predicts that societies will be likely to engage in cannibalism if they are sufficiently organized to engage in warfare, have independent motives for going to war, and have insufficient infrastructure to benefit from taking slaves. The chiefdoms stand a good chance of being cannibalistic, especially if there are resource limitations and competition. States, however, are unlikely to be cannibalistic. States usually have agriculture, so they can benefit from having slaves. More importantly, states are sufficiently well organized to have systems for collecting taxes or tribute over large geographical areas. Once a society arrives at this point of development, there is little incentive to wage war with neighboring peoples. Neighbors can be taxed in return for protection or other resources. As long as neighbors are too weak to wage war against the state, it is more cost-effective to tax them than to conquer and eat them. Taxpayers yield more benefit than cadavers. Of course, neighbors are unlikely to be compliant if they think there is a high risk that

they will eventually be conquered and eaten. So Harris's account predicts that cannibalism will not only diminish with the emergence of the state; cannibalism will actually be condemned. Indeed, it will become taboo. Otherwise people might give into their temptation to eat their neighbors. Harris argues that the taboo against people eating is like the taboo against eating horsemeat. Historically, horses were more useful as tools of war, than as food. To eat a horse was to threaten national security. This might be forgotten in a fit of hunger, of course, so societies that relied on horses for warfare established taboos to discourage capricious consumption of horsemeat. Likewise, for advanced societies, people in neighboring villages are more useful as taxpayers than as meals. By making people-eating taboo, societies added an emotional sanction against those who might otherwise give in to their murderous culinary temptations.

The hypothesis that cannibalism disappears with the emergence of the state is well supported by the anthropological record (see Sanday, 1986). There is, however, one glaring counterexample: the Aztecs. The Aztecs (who called themselves Mexica or Tenochca) had a highly organized state with powerful political alliances, and a capacity to collect tribute and trade with neighbors. These are just the kind of features that should have diminished the probability of cannibalism. Yet the Aztecs had the most extensive cannibal practices on record. This flies in the face of Harris's hypothesis. To solve the puzzle, Harris calls on the work of Michael Harner (1977). Harner chalks Aztec cannibalism up to nutrition. Unlike many other organized states, the Aztecs did not have well-developed agriculture. They grew corn, beans, tomatoes, peppers, and other foods, but they did not have plows or beasts of burden. They may also have had limited access to foods with high amounts of protein and fat. They got protein from eating insects, reptiles, waterfowl, and spirulina, but they had no domesticated animals. The Aztecs also endured long periods of drought and famine. Under these conditions, tidbits of human flesh may have been a welcome dietary supplement. Animal flesh was certainly considered a valuable award to the Aztecs, and human flesh, procured fortuitously in battles with neighboring territories, would have been a shame to waste. Enslaving captives after battles didn't make economic sense, because, without high-yield farming techniques, the costs of keeping slaves outweighed the benefits. Harner does not suppose that the Aztecs consumed enough human flesh to make a major nutritional difference, but he does suppose that the Aztecs had little incentive to eliminate cannibalism.

Critics of Harner and Harris argue that the Aztec diet was sufficiently rich to make cannibalism superfluous (Ortiz de Montellano, 1978; Sahlins, 1978, Garn, 1979). They also note that the victims of Aztec sacrifice were eaten by nobles, successful warriors, and their families. There was no distribution of human flesh to the masses. Moreover, victims were eaten during harvesting times, when festivals were held and when there was enough food supply to support battles. Victims were not eaten during times of great scarcity. These objections, strictly speaking, do not undermine the nutrition hypothesis, because Harner and Harris

do not claim that cannibalism was necessary. They simply claim that the benefits may have outweighed the costs. But critics can weigh in with a more serious complaint. If cannibalism were just a matter of getting meat, why would it be so ritualized? Why didn't the Aztecs simply hunt humans like game meat and consume flesh without ceremony?

One answer to this question can be reconstructed from Harris's materialist account. Perhaps elaborate sacrificial rituals were designed to terrify people who were not loyal to the Aztec empire. Harris predicts that empires will not engage in cannibalism because they can collect tribute from conquered people, but some people may resist conquest. If the Aztecs lacked the military resources to police neighboring territories, then they could have promoted loyalty by threat of brutal sacrifice. Ingham (1984) argues that this is a likely possibility because the Aztecs had no good means of transportation, other than walking. Sending warriors to the distant villages would have been much more costly than scaring their inhabitants into submission through spectacularly brutal rituals.

This political domination account is plausible, but incomplete. It implies that sacrifice was no more than a show of power. This explains the function of sacrifice, but not the psychology. There is no reason to think that the Aztecs who participated in ritual sacrifice construed their practices in such strategic terms. It is much more likely that sacrifice was assigned religious significance.

Aztec mythology is awash in blood (Sanday, 1986; Carrasco, 1999). One myth tells of a monster goddess named Tlaltecuhltli, who was ripped in half by two other gods, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. Half of her body became the heavens and half became the Earth. Tlaltecuhltli was thought to provide nourishment on Earth only if fed a steady diet of human hearts. Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca were said to be at constant war with each other, and their battles had led to the creation and destruction of four suns. Each sun corresponds to an era in time, and each ended in cataclysm. The Aztecs believed they were living in the age of the fifth sun, which would also end in disaster. The fifth age was created when a minor god threw himself into a fire and became a fifth sun, named Tonatiuh. At first, Tonatiuh could not move across the sky, but then many other gods immolated themselves, and that gave him the power to move. Each night, however, he would be destroyed, and then recreated in the morning. Tonatiuh's head appears in the center of the Aztec calendar stone, with a protruding tongue in the shape of a sacrificial obsidian knife. The Aztecs believed that people came to life in the fifth era when Quetzalcoatl spilled his blood on the bones of people who had lived in earlier eras. Another major figure in the Aztec pantheon was the war god, Huitzilopochtli, who was sometimes regarded as a manifestation of Tonatiuh. Huitzilopochtli was created when his mother Coatlicue was impregnated by a ball of feathers that fell from the sky. Coatlicue had 400 prior children who felt dishonored by their mother's miraculous pregnancy, and they set out to kill her. When they attacked, Huitzilopochtli burst from his mother's womb and destroyed them all.

These myths have a common theme. All involve gods destroying gods, and cycles of revenge. But, more importantly, Aztec mythology promoted a sense of extreme vulnerability: there is an ongoing battle of divine forces, which will ultimately destroy the world. The Aztecs evidently believed that sacrifices were necessary to ward off inevitable doom. Sahllins (1978) and Sanday (1986) argue that cannibalism must be understood as part of this elaborate narrative structure.

The nutritional and political analyses of cannibalism do nothing to illuminate its religious significance. The nutritional analysis is probably best regarded as an account of how sacrifice emerged in the first place, but not why it stuck around. The Aztecs began as a poor, nomadic tribe that engaged in military conflicts with other groups. Cannibalism may have begun in this pre-state stage for nutritional reasons. But Harris and Harner do not explain how it became ritualized. One possibility has to do with the psychology of warfare. Warfare is emotionally charged, and warriors must go through training and psychological conditioning. Heightened emotions, repeated activities, and life-and-death situations, are the wellspring of religious ritual (Burkert, 1983). After a military victory, nomadic ancestors of the Aztecs would have likely felt relief, joy, and gratitude. If captives were taken for consumption, they would likely be eaten in the context of a victory celebration, which is, in itself, a kind of ritual. Such a celebration would mark the group's success in having escaped destruction through military success. Aztec cosmology probably emerged under these conditions. Rituals associated with victory were probably given mythic significance.

Once myths and rituals are created, they can take on a life of their own. Ritually killing a war captive is an intense, emotionally charged experience. Rituals that have a high level of emotional or sensory intensity are likely to be remembered and repeated (Whitehouse, 2000; McCauley and Lawson, 2002). Over time, the pagantry of Aztec sacrifice increased. Priests, sometimes clad in human skins, would hold up the hearts of their victims and then roll their bodies down the steps of great pyramids. The myths surrounding sacrifice probably increased the probability of cultural transmission. Aztec religion fuelled great anxiety about the future—*anxiety backed up by periodic droughts, hurricanes, and other natural disasters*. Ritual cannibalism was said to forestall doom. This, together with the political benefits, helps to explain why the practice endured past the period in which it could have yielded a significant nutritional advantage.

The Aztec religion is, in some respects, the opposite of Christianity. The gods were often regarded as enemies, rather than friends, and pleasing the gods was a way to ward off disaster, not a way to enter paradise. In both religions, humans were thought to be beneficiaries of a divine sacrifice, but, for the Aztecs, that favor needed to be repaid with human sacrifice, and, for Christians, human sacrifice was prohibited. In other words, Aztec religion preaches a message of anxiety whereas Christianity often preaches a message of hope. Both hope and anxiety are effective tools for transmission.

In discussing the Aztecs, I have invoked the factors of cultural transmission that I outlined above. First, I invoked material factors. Aztec cannibalism probably emerged because it was nutritionally cost-effective. The Aztecs were warring nomads before they achieved statehood, and cannibalism may be the default practice for societies with that profile. Cannibalism remained in place after the transition to statehood because it conferred political benefits, and the Aztecs lacked the kind of agriculture that would have rendered it cost-effective to keep war prisoners as long-term slaves. But these material factors may not have been explicitly recognized by the Aztec people. The Aztecs probably didn't regard cannibalism as merely an efficient way to scare conquered villages into paying tribute. It's more likely that the Aztecs interpreted their ritual practice in its cosmological context, and these religious beliefs together with the intense emotions evoked by lavish cannibal rituals were probably the primary means by which the practice was passed on from generation to generation. Cannibalism was sustained by an anxiety-inducing set of religious beliefs and emotionally evocative rituals. This cocktail of material factors, religious beliefs, and emotion is a potent force in the formation, transmission, and maintenance of values.

6.2.4 Marriage and the Christian Church

The case of cannibalism illustrates the viability of an empirically grounded genealogical program. We can make informed speculations about the factors that have led to the emergence, success, and ultimate disappearance of specific moral values. I want to shift from cannibalism to kinship. Cannibalism is an alien moral value. We no longer find it permissible. Indeed, cannibalism has been so successfully suppressed that it rarely occurs, and thoughts about cannibalism do not play an active regulative role in our lives. Kinship is different. Our lives are structured around operative norms governing familiar relations. The genealogy of kinship can be used to shed light on values that are central to our everyday practices. To illustrate, I want to consider the genealogy of modern Western values pertaining to marriage. Westerners believe that marriage should be monogamous. Polygamy is not only illegal in the West; it is considered immoral. Westerners also oppose marriage between kin, even beyond the immediate family. Marriage to a first cousin is regarded with disgust. Westerners also believe that marriage should be consensual: it should be based on love rather than pre-arranged.

These values are not universal. Monogamy is much less common than polygamy, in fact, and its global spread has been fairly recent. In a representative sample of 186 culturally independent societies, Murdock (1981) found that only 27, under 15 percent, are monogamous. A handful of polyandrous societies can be found in cross-cultural surveys (a woman can have multiple husbands), but the vast majority are polygynous (a man can have multiple wives). The distribution of these kinship systems is not random. Polyandry has arisen in environments with very scarce resources, such as the arid, mountainous lands of

Tibet and Nepal. The people of Tibet and Nepal traditionally practiced fraternal polyandry: a woman would marry all the brothers in a family. This system has certain advantages (Goldstein, 1987). Suppose, as is the case, that women in Nepal have on average three male children. If three brothers marry one woman, and that woman has three male children, and those three males marry one woman who has three male children, then the population will remain constant. If instead, each male child married a different woman, then male population size would grow exponentially. Exponential growth is fine in territories where there is room to expand, but less viable in the Himalayas. If it's difficult to set up a new household elsewhere, families will be under pressure to divide their estate among all heirs. If each family in Nepal has a farm that is passed down to male heirs, and all male offspring marry the same woman, then the family farm will remain intact rather than being divided into smaller parts with each generation. Males will have a strong incentive to remain in one household, because they will benefit from a more substantial inheritance, giving them greater comfort, freedom, and status. In sum, in an inhospitable climate where farmable land is limited, polyandry can be highly adaptive.

In most settings, however, polygyny has been the dominant form of marriage. That is not to say that most people across the world have engaged in polygyny; only that polygyny has been permissible in most societies. The convergence of three factors may be especially important in explaining the prevalence of polygyny (Grossbard-Schechtman, 1984; see also White and Burton, 1988): First, in many societies, there are few wage opportunities for women; in such societies, women cannot compete in the open marketplace and they depend on male wage earners. Second, in many societies, women and their children can participate in profitable domestic labor, including farming; in such societies, there is an economic advantage to having several women in a house. Third, in many societies there is considerable social stratification, so some men are much wealthier than others; in such societies, multiple women could survive on the income of one wealthy man. In short, if women depend on men and are profitable to men, and some men can support several wives, then polygyny is especially likely. These three factors have been extremely common through world history, which may help explain why polygyny has been so widespread. Polygyny was the norm in the ancient world. In ancient Greek, Egyptian, and Jewish society, wealthy men could have multiple wives. Solomon reportedly had 700 women in his harem (1 Kings, 11:3). Today, polygyny is less common in the West, but it remains widespread in the Third World.

Cousin-marriage is also quite common in certain parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Bittles (1990) estimates that 20 percent of the world population lives in societies that promote or allow cousin-marriage. Cousin-marriage was allowed in Athenian Greece, in late Roman society, and in Judea (Thompson, 1967; Treggiari 1993; Goody, 1983). In the Old Testament, for example, Jacob is married to his mother's brother's

two daughters (Genesis 29:10–30). Cousin-marriage has certain advantages, the most obvious of which is that it allows extended families to consolidate wealth.

Another feature of marriage that varies cross-culturally is consent. For us, consensual marriage is a highly moralized ideal, but it is far from universal. In many societies, marriages are arranged. This was true in ancient Rome and ancient Israel, and it remains true in parts of India, Japan, China, and in many African societies. There are obvious reasons why families might want a hand in choosing who their offspring marry. Love is often blind, and young couples may be drawn together by factors other than long-term economic advantage. When families arrange a marriage, they can select partners that will secure beneficial alliances, and prevent downward mobility.

The most striking fact about this cross-cultural comparison is that modern Western attitudes toward marriage seem to have emerged from societies with very different values. There is little precedent for modern values in Rome and Judea. This suggests that modern values were not inherited from a previous tradition; rather, they were invented. But why? There are various possible explanations. Consider a theory of monogamy that was proposed by Richard Alexander (1987). He argues that polygamy was outlawed as a way to avoid in-group conflict. In polygynous societies, there is fierce competition for women, because, if one man has multiple wives and gender ratios are equal, then some men will be condemned to a life of bachelorhood. This can lead to violent conflict, and imposed monogamy diminishes male–male violence by giving men more equal opportunity on the marriage market. It should also be noted that monogamy reduces conflicts between co-wives, and conflicts between children over inheritance, because monogamous marriages yield fewer children than polygynous marriages. Monogamy diminishes violence. Sanderson (2001) has surveyed evidence consistent with Alexander’s hypothesis. He notes that monogamous societies are larger, wealthier, and more internally peaceful, suggesting that monogamy laws may have permitted societies to flourish and grow. Only 10 percent of pre-state societies have imposed monogamy versus 46 percent of large states.

Alexander’s theory of monogamy is intuitively plausible, and it may help to explain why monogamy has become so widespread, but it is not the only available explanation. It is important to bear in mind that different explanations may be operative in different cases, and it is important to consider each case individually before settling on a theory of how a social institution emerged in any particular culture. Jack Goody (1983) advances a provocative hypothesis about how monogamy got off the ground in the West. Pre-Christian European peoples usually tolerated polygyny, or equivalently, they allowed men to have concubines whose offspring could inherit wealth. The Romans were officially monogamous, but they allowed a man to have a concubine if his wife was infertile. The Romans also allowed couples to divorce and remarry, which amounts to “serial polygamy,”

because people could have multiple spouses over the lifespan. Remarriage was even required during some periods in late Roman history. The monogamous system minimized conflicts over inheritance, because it kept family sizes down and eliminated competition between co-wives. But toleration for divorce and remarriage meant that a man who had no heirs with his first wife could leave her and try to have children with another. Things changed, Goody argues, with the rise of Christianity. Polygyny and consanguinity (marriage to close relatives) were banned by the Church in the fourth century, after Constantine's conversion. Arranged marriages were discouraged by the Church, and bans were introduced on marriage among clergy, divorce, and widow-inheritance (wherein widows would marry close relatives of their deceased husbands). The Church also condemned recreational sex and adoption. It took some time for many of these rules to take hold as the influence of the Church expanded through Europe, but they ultimately led to a significant transformation in attitudes toward marriage. On the face of it the new rules do not have much in common, but closer examination reveals a startling fact. All of them work to reduce family size and increase heirlessness, and heirlessness, Goody argued, was profitable for the Church.

In a polygynous marriage, there are multiple wives, and thus more offspring who can inherit wealth. The prohibition of polygyny led to a great decrease in the number of heirs. The ban on adoption made it impossible to compensate for that decrease. Prohibitions against consanguinity, including cousin-marriage, decreased easy access to spouses and prevented families from consolidating wealth. Familial wealth consolidation was further limited by the ban on arranged marriage. Strategic kinship ties were broken, and individuals were forced to find their own partners. The ban on divorce prevented couples from re-marrying and having more offspring (serial polygamy), and restrictions on widow marriage had a similar effect. The ban on recreational sex meant there were fewer accidental pregnancies, and hence fewer offspring. The net result was that many families ended up with no heirs. With high rates of mortality and no treatments for infertility, monogamous couples could easily end up heirless. Goody estimates that heirlessness may have been as high as 20 percent during some periods. When a family had no heirs, the estate was inherited by the Church. Because clergy could not marry, property going to the Church had no way of being filtered back out to the non-clerical population. It's not clear from Goody's analysis whether all of this was a strategy devised by Church leaders or a coincidence, but it is clear that the Church benefited enormously from increased heirlessness. With these policies in place, the Church became one of the largest landowners in Europe. Starting with no property, the early Church eventually came to possess some 25 percent of all Gaul.

Goody's hypothesis is controversial (see, e.g., Verdon, 1988), but it isn't crazy. It shows how attitudes toward marriage might have emerged. Like Harris and Harner on cannibalism, Goody emphasizes material factors. Strict rules on who

could get married led to direct benefits. But there is a difference. In the case of cannibalism, benefits were accrued by the cannibals. In the case of marriage laws, benefits were accrued by the Church, on Goody's hypothesis, not necessarily by the individuals who were married. This is a historically stable scenario, however, because the Church is a primary purveyor of values. Values that benefit the Church are likely to be spread and sustained, because the Church plays a central role in moral education. But Goody's hypothesis faces a challenging question. Why would people have bought into the Church's marriage reforms if those reforms effectively reduced their capacity to accumulate wealth? The answer may involve the means of transmission. Christian attitudes toward kinship were spread through interpretations of biblical texts. Jesus' teaching and the story of the Fall put the values into a narrative context, and the rhetoric of sin and impurity helped to make illicit unions emotionally repellent.

The general shift in attitudes toward sexuality was heavily influenced by St Augustine and St Paul. After a debauched youth, Augustine came to believe that sex should be used only for procreation. He based this on ancient Greek philosophical traditions that tie moral goodness to natural functions. Sex has the function of procreation, so misuses of sex are unnatural. If something is unnatural, it is wrong. St Paul taught that all sex was sinful, because devotion should be reserved for God. Monogamy was the best thing next to celibacy, because it reduced sex to a minimum. By tying sex to sin, Augustine and Paul gave marriage restrictions a foundation in theology and natural law. By labeling certain sexual acts as unnatural, Church leaders may have been able to tap into parishioners' biological dispositions to disgust. Disgust obeys a logic of contamination. If sex is construed as dirty, then sex with multiple partners can be seen as a way to spread impurity. By cultivating squeamish attitudes toward sexuality, Church leaders could have more easily transmitted norms against polygamy, divorce, and remarriage.

Disgust may also have been exploited in advancing prohibitions against consanguineous marriages. People are often repelled by the idea of incest, and, therefore, any union that is labeled as incestuous may be regarded as repellent. Cousin-marriage was commonplace in the ancient world, but the medieval Church banned cousin-marriage up to the seventh degree. To this day, people enculturated in the West are uncomfortable with cousin-marriage, and the dominant reaction seems to be disgust.

More positive emotions may have factored into the transmission of consensual marriage. Early Church leaders encouraged people to make marriage decisions on the basis of love. This gave people greater autonomy and a very significant emotional payoff. The idea of consensual marriage resonates with the individualistic ideals that emerged in the course of Western history. The Church traditionally construes individuals as free, and Christian eschatology is based on the idea that one could gain access to heaven by making the right choices in life. Arranged marriage is ideologically difficult to fit into that picture.

In sum, the early Church may have implemented its revolutionary changes in kinship customs by embedding them in a compelling belief system with strong emotional content. These suggestions are sketchy and highly speculative. An adequate genealogical analysis would systematically examine the rhetoric used to disseminate marriage laws in the early centuries of the Church. But the main point should be clear. Radical changes in attitudes toward marriage may have been transmitted through a combination of material, narrative, and affective factors. Preachers and parishioners were probably oblivious to the economic impact of revised marriage laws, but emotional and philosophical attitudes can be traced by examining historical documents. Naturalized genealogists can use such records (just as naturalized epistemologists use psychological research) as empirical data in developing theories of how each of our moral values emerged.

6.3 GENEALOGY AS CRITIQUE

These case studies in the history of morals are instructive. They show that moral values can be viewed historically. For every moral value that we possess, there is a story to tell about how we came to possess it. In chapter 7, I will explore the possibility that these stories sometimes have a biological dimension. The examples discussed in this chapter owe more to cultural development. In some cases, new moral values emerge quickly, and in others transformation is slower. As Nietzsche suggested, the rise of Christianity may have been rapid enough to call a revolution. The disappearance of cannibalism may have been comparatively slow in some societies. If Harris is right, cannibalism tended to disappear as chiefdoms shifted over to sophisticated forms of agriculture and evolved into states. In these cases, human sacrifice and cannibal practices may have gradually been replaced by animal sacrifices, and, ultimately, symbolic “sacrifices,” including everything from the burning of effigies and totems to the Christian Eucharist. Aztec cannibalism ended quickly because the Spanish conquistadors decimated the Aztec Empire in a single generation. This power shift, and subsequent efforts by missionaries, promoted relatively rapid change in Mesoamerica, but indigenous societies often managed to retain vestiges of their traditional ways as they converted to the belief systems of their conquerors.

Such historical dynamics are certainly interesting in their own right. They teach us something about why we believe what we do, and why others have different beliefs. But one can justifiably wonder whether they have any philosophical ramifications. What do they prove about the status of morality? Nietzsche believed that genealogical analysis could be used to criticize morals. By exposing the history of Christian values, in particular, he sought to erode their credibility. In this section, I want to ask whether such skeptical conclusions are warranted.

Let’s begin by considering a strong version of the claim that historicity undermines morality. By “historicity,” I mean to refer to values that emerged

as a consequence of historical events, rather than through a process of, say, direct moral intuition, revelation, or rational deduction of normative principles. With respect to such values, one might be tempted to endorse the following genealogical principle:

(G1) If a belief in a moral value emerged as a consequence of historical events, then the moral value is false.

For the purposes of this discussion, I will be thinking of moral values as evaluative propositions, of the form “ ϕ -ing is morally bad” or “ ϕ -ing is morally good.” Thus, (G1) says that beliefs about what’s good and bad can be discredited simply in virtue of the fact that they arose through historical, rather than, say, rational processes. I doubt that Nietzsche or anyone else would defend anything like this. (G1) commits a straightforward genetic fallacy: it is a mistake to treat a defect in how a proposition came to be believed as direct evidence against that proposition. Suppose I win the lottery by selecting numbers that correspond to the birthdays of my friends and family. This method of guessing has no bearing on the mechanisms that determine the winning numbers (e.g., a contraption that randomly spits out numbered spheres). But my guess is nevertheless accurate.

Here one might be tempted to argue that there is an important disanalogy between the lottery case and the case of morals. In the lottery case, there is a mind-independent mechanism by which numbers are selected. The mechanism does not depend on how we form beliefs about which numbers will win. But in the case of morals, I have argued that truth depends on us. The truth of a moral value is linked, in that sense, to the method of belief fixation. The gap between fact and belief is very narrow in the moral domain. This distinguishes the moral case from the lottery case, but it does not make (G1) defensible. If truth depends on us, then historical facts about how we came to take a moral value as true also establish that the value is true. Genealogical analyses could only undermine the truth of a moral value if they revealed that we don’t really believe what we profess to believe. If Nietzsche had established that Christians don’t really believe that charity is good, he would have been able to refute that moral value within Christian culture. This was not his intention. The genealogical method tends to take moral beliefs as a fixed point, and then explain their origins.

We need a weaker principle. Perhaps we should abandon the focus on truth, and switch to something more epistemological in character:

(G2) If a belief in a moral value emerged as a consequence of historical events, then that belief is unwarranted.

This is an improvement. It seems to avoid the genetic fallacy. The way a belief is obtained can bear on whether a belief is justified. For example, medieval doctors believed that many plants had healing powers, and they often assumed that a

plant was especially able to heal the body part that it most resembled. A gourd, for example, might be used to treat a swollen limb. That belief is unwarranted because it's based on a false premise. But suppose that a particular kind of gourd, by chance, can reduce swelling to some degree, and suppose that, over time, that gourd continues to be used medicinally, while others are not, in virtue of its past success. The belief that the gourd can heal came about in a bad way, but it stuck around for good reason, and is now endorsed with warrant. This kind of example shows that a belief might be initially unwarranted because of how it came about, but warranted later on, because of, for example, its success in guiding behavior. Ignoble origins are, to that extent, compatible with warrant.

(G2) faces another objection as well. I have argued that moral concepts refer to response-dependent properties. It follows that moral judgments (at least those that express grounding norms) are self-justifying. If I make a judgment that something is wrong, and that judgment is made under epistemic conditions in which I have accurately accessed my long-term memory and discovered a sentiment of disapprobation toward that thing, then my belief is warranted because *WRONG* refers to that toward which I have such a sentiment. If this account is right, it applies even if my response-dispositions are set up as a consequence of historical events. Warrant is cheap if constructive sentimentalism is true.

In response, one might concede that moral judgments are always warranted when made under good epistemic conditions, while insisting that they should be abandoned. When warrant is cheap, warrant may be insufficient to support conviction. By analogy, suppose you like a particular genre of music simply in virtue of having listened to it during formative years of your youth. Now, it's trivially warranted for you to say that this music is likeable to you. The fact that it brings you pleasure makes it the case that it's likeable, even if that pleasure is the result of a contingent biographical fact that has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualities of the music. You might decide that your preference should be abandoned, because it is the product of inculcation, and you might take steps to alter your musical taste. Applied to the moral domain, this suggests the following principle:

(G3) If a belief in a moral value emerged as a consequence of historical events, then that belief *should be abandoned*.

(G3) is weaker than the preceding principles, because it does not make claims about truth or warrant. But it is no more defensible. Historicity can motivate us to revise values, but it need not. Returning to the music example, the fact that our preferences are influenced by prior exposure is not sufficient grounds for revision. The very fact that you like certain music now, no matter what the cause, is, all other things being equal, a perfectly good reason to listen to it. The aesthetic analogue of (G3) implies that every acquired taste should be abandoned. Imagine

if someone told you that you should stop eating chocolate simply because your preference for chocolate is a contingent consequence of your biography. That's an odd policy in the aesthetic domain and equally odd, one might think, in the domain of moral values.

One might try to defend (G3) by arguing that morality differs from music in crucial respects. For one thing, we do not recognize that our moral values are historical. Discovering their origins reveals that we have been mistaken about them. Even if this is true, I don't see why it matters. Suppose I believe that I like jazz because it has certain intrinsic qualities, but, in reality, I like jazz because I listened to it during formative years of my life. If I discover that my preference results from this biographical fact, it does not seem to follow that I have a reason to give up my taste for jazz. For that to follow, there would need to be a further premise according to which love of jazz was worthwhile only if had a purely objective basis. This premise is hard to support. It is also hard to support in the moral case. A value may be worth retaining because it is entrenched and difficult to change, because it is useful, or simply because I value it.

It's tempting to try to salvage (G3) by drawing a distinction between two kinds of origins. Some values come about through events that are innocuous, and others come about through events that we find contemptible in hindsight. For example, some values may be driven by unseemly motives such as greed or resentment, and some might be imposed on us by others who have more power. Nietzsche wanted to undermine Christian values by proving that they were reactionary. If we can show that a value is not only historical, but that its origins are ignoble, then perhaps that is a reason for dropping the value. Thus:

(G4) If a belief in a moral value emerged as a consequence of ignoble historical events, then that belief should be abandoned.

This is beginning to sound more Nietzschean, but it is not very satisfying. "Ignoble" is an evaluative term. Nietzsche sometimes said that there is an objective moral standpoint from which we can evaluate the history of Christian morals—the natural standpoint of those free spirits who openly embrace the will to power. This is an aspect of Nietzsche's program that we would do well to drop. In the next chapter, I will raise doubts about a transcendental natural stance. If the word "ignoble" cannot be applied objectively, then it too may be a product of history. If historicity is a ground for skepticism, then we should be skeptical of attempts to undermine moral values by saying that they have morally dubious histories. By introducing a moral term (G4) might be self-defeating.

One might try to save (G4) by arguing that it can be used to diagnose the hypocrisy of moralizers. Perhaps Nietzsche wants Christians to realize that their values derive from factors that are despicable by their own standards. If a moral system arose in a way that the system itself demands that we condemn, then the system may undermine its own foundations. Perhaps. But the apologist for the

moral system in question could simply reply that the road to heaven is paved with bad intentions. The ends justify the means. (G4) is just another instance of the genetic fallacy.

At this point, a faithful Nietzschean may make a very different move. When Nietzsche talks about the ignoble origins of Christianity, he is not merely making a point about the past. He thinks that the questionable motives that led to the Christian revolution in ethics also sustain Christian values in the present. Contemporary defenders of those values are driven by resentment. If that is right, then contemporary moralizers can be labeled hypocrites, and, by their own standards, hypocrisy is a bad thing. On this interpretation, skepticism does not rest on historicity as such. Rather genealogical analysis is designed to reveal something about the psychological foundations of contemporary morals (cf. Gemes, 2006). We should give up Christian values because they are sustained by emotions that we consider a bad basis for values. It is okay to like chocolate because it is pleasurable, but bad to like it because you resent chocolate-haters. This is an evaluative judgment of course, but it is a judgment that the person who presently likes chocolate would be willing to make. If you can convince the chocolate lover that chocolate loving is reactionary, that might prompt efforts to overcome the love of chocolate. Here, I think, we come closest to the strategy underlying Nietzsche's genealogical program. For him, diachronic methods are a tool for doing synchronic psychology. Genealogy is a ladder to be kicked away.

I think this approach to genealogy is too limited. For one thing, I doubt very much that Christians are (or were) motivated by *ressentiment*. We do not need fancy psychodynamic machinery to explain why people have the values that they do. Cultural conditioning is enough. Emotions play a role in this, but their contribution may be much simpler than it is on Nietzsche's model. We learn moral values through emotional training, and the values that are most easily spread are the ones that are most amendable to such techniques. I argued above that Christian norms against polygyny were easy to transmit, in part, because it is easy to promote disgust when it comes to bodily interactions. The idea of plural sexual contact can make one feel a bit queasy if one frames it in terms of impurity, contamination, and violations against nature. If the history of polygyny reveals anything about contemporary psychology, it shows that some people find polygyny disgusting. Accusing people of basing their moral values on disgust is very different from accusing people of basing their moral values on resentment. The former accusation wouldn't necessarily lead people to change their morals. A dedicated monogamist might even retort that polygyny is wrong precisely because it's disgusting. Putting this differently, Nietzsche assumes that we will experience cognitive dissonance when we discover the emotions that undergird our moral values; but I see no reason to think that will be the case.

Thus, genealogy will not always reveal hidden psychological motives that would embarrass those who moralize. But genealogy can embarrass moralizers in another

way. If you told opponents of polygyny that their preference for monogamy came about through a real-estate grab by the early Church, that might give them pause. This revelation is not a sufficient reason for dropping the move against polygyny—perhaps there are good reasons to favor monogamy—but it does motivate a reassessment. Some moral values spread because they benefit those who hold them. Others spread because they benefit a powerful institution that has a privileged role in influencing local morality. When we discover that one of our values falls into the second category, rather than the first, we have reason to ask whether the value is worth maintaining. This suggests the following principle:

(G5) If a belief in a moral value emerged as a consequence of ignoble historical events, then we should *consider* abandoning that belief.

In talking of cases where the history is ignoble, I am imagining cases where the dissemination of a value did not hinge on any obvious benefit (moral or otherwise) to the moralizer. In these cases, we can justifiably ask whether the value is doing anything beneficial for us in the present. A negative answer to this is not a sufficient reason for dropping the value. Moral values can be maintained even if they do not have any payoffs. Some moral values may even be costly for some people. But in cases where no benefits are discovered, reassessment becomes appropriate. In some cases we may discover that a value is doing more harm than good, and, in these cases, moral change becomes desirable.

(G5) depicts genealogy as a critical tool, though perhaps a blunter tool than Nietzsche's hammer. Values are not necessarily vitiated by their historicity, but historical analyses give us a tool for assessing whether our values serve functions that we still care about. In discussing (G2), I said that warrant comes cheap for moral values, because they refer to response-dependent properties. There I was talking about evidential warrant: factors that support the truth of a belief. I believe that ϕ -ing is bad in virtue of having a sentiment of disapprobation toward ϕ -ing; such sentiments are truth-makers for moral claims, so the very fact that I believe that ϕ -ing is bad supports the conclusion that ϕ -ing is bad in my value system. But warrant can also be instrumental (Sinnott-Armstrong, 1996). I may find a value that I have to be useful in some way. It may serve a function that I care about. I have argued that moral values often emerge because of some role that they played in the past. That role may matter to me, or it may not. Genealogical analysis provides a tool for seeing what function values have played, and that can be helpful in determining whether our moral values are helping or hindering us in pursuit of our non-moral ends.

Let's consider some examples. I suggested that the cannibalism taboo arose because we developed ways to use our neighbors as taxpayers rather than food. We should probably keep this taboo in place. To allow cannibalism, even in cases where people die of natural causes, might lead to a slippery slope. The rule would be easy to exploit, the potential for corruption would be great, and

the payoff would be negligible. Moreover, our opposition to cannibalism has become constitutive of our identity as “civilized.” It is the result of our attaining that status. To lift the taboo would potentially alter identity in a way that would have unforeseen negative consequences. Since the cannibalism taboo does not cause serious harm or otherwise conflict with values that we cherish, there is little reason to abandon it. In any case, the historical reasons underlying that taboo remain in place today. We are still better off taxing our neighbors than eating them.

Contrast this with monogamy. Suppose our transition from polygyny really was a conspiracy of the early Church. Should we stop valuing monogamy? That’s a difficult question. We know that giving up monogamy would have costs. Our social systems and institutions have been structured around monogamy, and systems that are not monogamous often have features that we disvalue on other grounds. Polygamous societies are usually polygynous, and polygyny hinges on a double-standard that discriminates against women. Furthermore, monogamy is fulfilling to those who value it (compare: jazz is enjoyable to those who like it). Perhaps that is the result of social conditioning, but so too is taste in music, fashion preferences, affection for sports, the languages we speak, and much else. If we were conditioned to appreciate monogamy for dubitable reasons, it does not *follow* that monogamy is a bad institution. If we cannot find anything horribly wrong with monogamy, and we happen to value it, we might as well continue valuing it. On the other hand, we might not want to require monogamy by law, because some people may have the desire and ability to live in non-exploitative polygamous relationships. It is generally assumed in our culture that polygamy is categorically wrong. Indeed, some people argue against gay marriage on the grounds that allowing homosexual unions would initiate a slippery slope and lead to the legalization of polygamy. It’s not obvious to me that either of these marriage types should be prohibited. The fact that monogamy and prohibitions on gay marriage are both products of history is not a sufficient reason to give up either for those who still value them, but, if these marriage norms no longer serve any function that we care about, then we should not impose them on others. For an interesting genealogy of attitudes toward gay marriage, see Boswell (1994).

The conclusion is even more obvious if we turn to cousin-marriage. To many of us, cousin-marriage sounds repellant. We think it is morally wrong and, in some sense, unnatural. But now we discover that cousin-marriage is common, and our own disdain for it is an artifact of history. That fact leads us to reassess our moral condemnation of cousin-marriage. In the centuries since it was banned, *post hoc* arguments have emerged for thinking cousin-marriage is wrong. We are taught that children of cousins are likely to have birth defects. This belief turns out to be false (Bennett et al., 2002). It is an urban legend marshaled in favor of a moral agenda. And, in any case, risk of birth defects does not make it morally wrong to marry someone. Therefore, there is no strong reason to maintain norms against cousin-marriage. We may also decide that there are good

reasons to favor cousin-marriage. Perhaps cousins are more likely to share things in common and to forge stable relationships. If so, we should be receptive to a value change.

Let's conclude with a more controversial example: abortion. I noted above that abortion was condemned by the early Christian Church. This position may have been inherited from Judaism. Ancient Jews had two good reasons to oppose abortion: abortion was very risky to women in ancient times, and prohibiting abortion increased fertility, which is a virtue for a small religious community in constant risk of extinction. The Church later relaxed its anti-abortion stance. Augustine reverted to the Aristotelian view that the undeveloped fetus could not support a soul. Abortion was considered wrong only after quickening, the time when the mother feels the first movement in her womb. Augustine's position on abortion became Church Canon Law, reversing the earlier view that all abortion is wrong. One possible reason for the change is that, by the fifth century, the Church had a stake in reducing the number of heirs born to any family. This remained the official position of the Church for centuries. In 1588, Pope Sixtus V banned abortion briefly but Pope Gregory XIV repealed the ban three years later. The anti-abortion stance regained some popularity in the seventeenth century, but it was not until the nineteenth century, however, that the official doctrine of the Church turned against abortion. In 1869, Pope Pius IX added a ban on abortion to Church Canon Law, and that has been the official position of the Roman Catholic Church ever since. There is scant biblical support for this position, so cynics cite ulterior motives. One conjecture, entertained by abortion rights activists, is that the Church banned abortion to increase the size of the French army. The population in France was dwindling, and Emperor Napoleon III wanted to increase birth rates in his Catholic nation. Napoleon III publicly recognized the infallibility of the Pope in the same year as the abortion ban. Another conspiratorial hypothesis is that the Church began to oppose abortion again in order to keep women in their traditional roles. The ban coincided with the rise of the women's suffrage movement. Critics of women's suffrage often argued that women were ill-equipped to vote because the demands of motherhood kept them away from work and school, and promoted dangerous tendencies toward pacifism. The Vatican banned abortion in the same year that England gave women the right to vote in local elections—a right that was unprecedented in Western Europe.

I will not try to assess these historical analyses here. I am skeptical about the claim that the anti-abortion stance was simply a ploy against women's suffrage; Italy didn't give women the right to vote until 1925. I am also skeptical about the claim that abortion was banned to augment the French army; Pope Pius IX might not have regarded that end as advantageous to Rome and, in any case, it's incredibly presumptuous to assume that he would have changed Canon Law under political pressure. Moreover, the idea that life begins at conception had been popular for 200 years.

Rather than answering the thorny question about why the Church banned abortion, I want to consider a hypothetical question. Imagine a person, call her Smith, who opposes abortion because it is the doctrine of the Church. Now imagine that Smith comes to believe that the abortion ban was actually introduced as a deliberate tool in a campaign against women's suffrage. On learning this, would Smith instantly change her mind about abortion? Probably not. Values are difficult to change. But Smith *should* reassess her position. If Smith believed that abortion was wrong *because* it was a violation of an authoritative interpretation of holy texts, and now the authority of that interpretation is cast into doubt by the discovery of ulterior motives, then Smith's reason for opposing abortion has been discredited. She will have to rely on other reasons or treat opposition to abortion as a foundational grounding norm.

Genealogy is a powerful critical tool, because it forces us to see held convictions in a new light. We tend to think fairly superficially about our moral values. We take our values to be obvious or received truths. We regard immoral behavior as unnatural. When we adopt a historical stance we alter our epistemic stance toward values. In ordinary discourse, we either take moral values as foundational, hence immune to interrogation, or as justified by appeal to values that are foundational. When we offer justifications they are typically circular, thin, or formulaic. Any trained philosopher could devise credible arguments for either side of a moral debate. Perhaps one side always has the better argument in the end, but it is incredibly unlikely that every moralizer is in possession of knockdown arguments for each of her moral convictions.

When we view morals historically, we put aside questions of justification and engage in a form of auto-anthropology. We do not ask, "Why should I believe P?", but rather, "Why do I believe P?" Nietzsche's heretical suggestion is that the latter descriptive question can have some bearing on the apparently normative question. If the moral convictions tend to rest on foundational intuitions or half-baked justifications then asking the question "Why should I believe P" is an invitation to self-deception. We tend to fall back on pat answers. The question "Why do I believe P" can expose those cases where we have come to a moral conviction in the absence of decent reasons. I submit that this is the *usual* condition. In many cases, our cherished moral values emerged under conditions that no longer apply. Genealogy can be used to critically reassess these values. In some cases, however, moral values will withstand genealogical critique. Some of our values have managed to be passed on to us because they are helpful or successful. This is a possibility that Nietzsche does not fully appreciate. His pessimism is overblown. But Nietzsche is right to think that some of our moral values have questionable histories. Some get passed on, not because they work, but because they serve those who are in a position to disseminate values. When we encounter cases like this, we face a challenging choice. We can retain the value in question or we can try to overcome it. Overcoming values is not trivial task, as we will see in chapter 8.

In this chapter, I had two goals. I wanted to illustrate the genealogical method. If moral values are sentimentally constructed and culturally relative, then there must be an explanation of how we came to have each of our values. Genealogy is a method of uncovering such explanations. My second goal was to assess the implications of genealogy. Nietzsche thinks that genealogy can be used to promote skepticism about cherished moral values. I argued that he is overly pessimistic, but I agree that genealogy helps us determine when a value is especially suitable for reassessment. I said very little here about how that reassessment is supposed to take place. From what vantage point can we decide whether a value is worth keeping? Nietzsche can be read as supposing that there is a transcendental position from which we can assess morality and choose new values. He implies that we can base morality on human nature. Herein lies Nietzsche's optimism. In chapter 7, I will raise serious doubts about this, and, in chapter 8, I will defend an alternative approach. The interim moral is that genealogy is an under-utilized tool for moral critique. Nietzsche's pessimism about current morality and his optimism about natural morality are both exaggerated, but he is certainly right to think that historical analyses can be valuable in moral revision.