

# Concerning the psychological type of the redeemer: Nietzsche on the methods of philosophy

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## Abstract

In section 24 of *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche notes a problem namely “the *origin* of Christianity.” He offers two propositions toward its solution: the first is that “Christianity can only be understood on the soil where it grew:” and the second is that “the psychological type of the Galilean is still recognizable, but it had to assume a completely degenerate form (simultaneously mutilated and full of alien features) before it came to be used as a *redeemer* of humanity” (A 24). Significantly this passage suggests that the origins of Christianity rest on a reinterpretation of the type of the redeemer. This paper seeks to clarify the nature of such a modification and to identify some of its key ramifications. After clarifying the type, the paper argues that the type, thus understood, serves as a link between the texts *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *The Antichrist* and, as such, reveals the connection between Nietzsche’s genealogical methods and the wider project of reevaluation. Though this reading is not the standard interpretive strategy, the paper argues that it is the strategy that Nietzsche himself recommends.

Nietzsche has, he makes plain, “psychological antennae” (EH “Wise” 8); “ears even behind his ears,” such that in his presence “the very things that want to keep quiet are *made to speak out*...” (TI “Foreword”). Indeed, in his autobiography, he asks: “What philosopher before me was a *psychologist*?” and answers: “Psychology did not exist until I appeared” (EH “Destiny” 6). The claim here, which he suggests may already be obvious to his “good readers,” is: “that a psychologist without equal is speaking in [his] writings” (EH “Books” 5). So, if Nietzsche’s self-descriptions are apt, and if it is the case, as he has it in *Beyond Good and Evil*, that “psychology is again the path to the most

fundamental problems” (BGE 23) then we ought to distinguish the two issues: namely the route, which is “psychology,” and its destination: those “fundamental problems” (BGE 23).<sup>1</sup>

We can begin with a helpful passage from *The Antichrist* in which the two issues appear together. There, in section 24, Nietzsche notes a problem, one which arguably animates much of his thinking, namely “the origin of Christianity” and suggests two propositions toward its solution. The first of these propositions is that “Christianity can only be understood on the soil where it grew,” while the second is that “the psychological type of the Galilean is still recognizable, but it had to assume a completely degenerate form (simultaneously mutilated and full of alien features) before it came to be used as a redeemer of humanity” (A 24). What is significant about this passage is the idea that the origins of Christianity lie in the reinterpretation of the type of the redeemer. The object of this paper is to clarify the nature of such modifications and to identify some of their ramifications.

To achieve such ends and to properly characterize this type, some scene-setting is in order. I do this by developing Ernest Renan's psycho-biographical account of Jesus as exemplifying the traits of genius and hero. I then reconstruct Nietzsche's objection to the picture Renan paints on account of it constituting a “sort of psychological thoughtlessness” (A 29). In section two, I turn to Nietzsche's positive account by establishing that such a type is exemplified by his capacity to forge a way of life, a mode of behavior, that is born of physio-psychological need. Yet, as I clarify in the third and final part of the paper, the task here is not merely one of exegesis. Indeed, my overarching aim is to determine what this type tells us about some of Nietzsche's broader philosophical and methodological concerns.

There are a number of interpretive options available here. Indeed, some have argued that when Nietzsche queries: “Can we conceive of this type any more? Has it been ‘passed down?’” he is gesturing toward a reading that runs something like this: the psychological type of the redeemer is best understood as an exemplar of a person who has succeeded in becoming what he is (A 29). So, what has been “passed down” is a form of life, and what is at stake are Nietzsche's views about a certain, perhaps admirable, mode of agency—about the very nature of self-creation (cf. Ridley, 2005).<sup>2</sup> I shall argue that there is something deeper and more instructive about the type and that it makes Nietzsche's methodological approach to those fundamental problems clearer. I suggest that the type serves as a link between the texts, *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *The Antichrist*, and helps to reveal the connection between the practice of genealogical investigation and the project of reevaluation.<sup>3</sup> Though this reading is not the standard interpretive trajectory, it is the one Nietzsche himself advocates (A 24, A 45).<sup>4</sup> As such, in the final section, I elucidate this claim and establish its plausibility. However, it is worth noting right at the outset that whatever we think of its import, one central claim in this paper will still hold regardless: in capturing and clarifying Nietzsche's type of the redeemer, we will, at the very least, arrive at a clearer understanding of those “fundamental problems” (BGE 23).

## 1 | ON THE REDEEMER-TYPE: OR, NIETZSCHE CONTRA RENAN

Before discussing Nietzsche's objections to Ernest Renan's reconstruction of the redeemer-type, I wish to make a brief terminological note: whereas “the crucified” [*den Gekreuzigten*] (EH “Destiny” 9) is Nietzsche's name for the reinterpretation of the life of Jesus of Nazareth (A 27) put to use by “the Christianity of Paul” [als Christenthum des Paulus] (A 24, cf., A 39, A 42), “the type of the redeemer” [Typus des Erlösers] (A 24, A 29, A 31, A 32, A 41, A 42) or “the type of the Galilean” [Typus des Galiläers] (A 24), by contrast, are used by Nietzsche to make plainer the particular form of life enjoyed by Jesus of Nazareth (A 27, GM I 8). What I seek to clarify is Nietzsche's account of the psychology of “the type of the redeemer” [Typus des Erlösers] (A 24). Understanding this psychological type [Typus des Erlösers, Typus des Galiläers] requires an account of how this particular person regulated tension, how this individual responded to vulnerabilities, and how this human being reacted to overwhelming suffering. Indeed “in spite of themselves” Nietzsche thinks “the Gospels...provide information about the psychological type of the redeemer” [der psychologische Typus des Erlösers] (A 29) and, as such, this form of life, the mode enjoyed by the historical Jesus, Nietzsche contends, is still “recognizable” to us (A 24).

These terminological and clarificatory points further suggest that there is a connection between typology and psychology, which prompts the obvious question: what, on Nietzsche's view, is the relation between typology and psychology? We can answer by recalling a helpful passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche writes: "All psychology so far has been stuck in moral prejudices and fears: it has not ventured into the depths. [Instead we must] grasp psychology as morphology and the *doctrine of the development of the will to power*" (BGE 23). From this we gather that psychologists (especially those who seek to offer moral genealogies, cf. GM I 2–3; II 12) err by failing to be curious about the origins of moral concepts and instead reify contemporary usages. Psychological inquires must therefore dig deeply to uncover what might undergird such moral prejudices. This excavation entails, for Nietzsche, an investigation into the ways in which people express will to power, how they overcome resistance (BGE 23).<sup>5</sup> So in putting the two together and in applying these points to the psychology of the redeemer-type, what we are after is an account that digs beneath the surface and shows how this world-historical individual responds to challenges.

### 1.1 | Nietzsche Contra (Nietzsche's) Renan<sup>6</sup>

The best way to begin the analysis is to look in more detail at why, on Nietzsche's view, Renan's account of how the redeemer-type reacts to challenges, to moments of helplessness, badly fails. When confronted with resistances, it is Renan's contention, at least, as Nietzsche reconstructs it, that the historical Jesus reacts as would a "genius" or a "hero" (A 29). Why? Because, Nietzsche answers, the "Gospels" lay bare, no doubt "in spite of themselves" (A 29), "the psychological type of the Galilean" (A 24). Hence Renan's reconstruction is inaccurate on psychological grounds: Renan misunderstands the Gospels because he misunderstands the psychological type of the redeemer that they lay bare (A 29).

To see this more distinctly, let me explore Nietzsche's objection to the description of the redeemer-type as exemplifying heroic behavior. If isolated, such conduct requires the presence of conflict and, if that is the case, then some form of contest or struggle is also present. Indeed, in the absence of these prerequisites, the behavior type, whatever else it might be, is simply not heroic. And, in assuming such conflict and struggle, it should come as no surprise that the notion of "hero" is, for Nietzsche, the most "unevangelic" concept. The reason is that the historical Jesus, according to Nietzsche and contra Renan, represents "the polar opposite of struggle, of any feeling of doing-battle" (A 29). So, for Nietzsche, the redeemer-type "knows blessedness in peace, in gentleness, in an *inability* to be an enemy" and, as such, renounces the very conditions that would make heroic deeds possible (A 29). Hence, for Nietzsche, the designator "hero" pulls against "the most profound saying of the Gospels" namely "resist not evil" (A 29).

What then of that former concept of "genius"? (A 29) Nietzsche argues that Renan mistakenly imports a characteristic that "had no meaning whatever in the world Jesus lived in" (A 29).<sup>7</sup> One reason for this is that the description "genius" mischaracterizes the inclinations and aversions of the historical Jesus. A "genius," on Nietzsche's view, suspends an instinct for self-preservation (TI "Skirmishes" 44) and, as we have seen, the redeemer-type is protected by such an instinct (A 29). To shape the second reason, it is worth noting that in the place of Renan's concept of "genius," and with a nod to Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche tells us that a "quite different word," namely that of "idiot," is much closer to the mark (A 29).<sup>8</sup> Attending to the Greek etymological origins of the term, *idiotes*, what we notice is someone who is private, someone who keeps to themselves, a non-participant in public matters, rather than a person of the polis, someone who engages in such affairs (cf. Stellino, 2015, 116; Shapiro, 2019, 243). The redeemer-type is an idiot in this original regard: he "repelled every type of word, formula, law, faith, or dogma. He spoke only of what was inside him most deeply" (A 32). Indeed, as a private person, engaged in a world of his own, the historical Jesus "positioned [himself] outside of all religion, all cults, all history, all natural sciences, all experience of the world, all knowledge, all politics" (A 32). For this reason, we can see why the redeemer-type, on Nietzsche's view, can be no genius (A 32). A genius engages on these interpersonal, sociopolitical fronts. Hence, as was the case with Renan's

descriptor “hero” the designator “genius” also pulls against “the world that the Gospels introduce to us” (A 31). In sum, “hero” and “genius” fail to properly account for the psychological type of the redeemer (A 29).

There are of course, and this is another of Nietzsche’s main points, deeply personal, psychologically protective, reasons for the redeemer-type’s inward turn. Overwhelmed by suffering, the redeemer-type protects himself by withdrawing into his idiosyncratic psychic life (A 29–37). Indeed, Nietzsche holds that the historical Jesus “recoils,” he withdraws from the world into “a world that has become completely ‘internal,’ a ‘true’ world, an ‘eternal world’” (A 29). My task now is to reconstruct Nietzsche’s account of these constitutive psychological features.

## 2 | ON THE REDEEMER-TYPE

To be interested in the psychology of the redeemer-type is to be interested in how this person responds to challenges (BGE 23). It is, put it another way, to be curious about what happens when this type is confronted with an obstacle: how does he respond to distress or regulate tension? (A 24).

A Nietzschean response can be constructed. This requires that we differentiate between three aspects of Nietzsche’s account: (1) the circumstances in which the redeemer-type experiences vulnerability. That is, what situations give rise to the type’s feelings of distress? (2) We ought to account for “the type of the Galilean[’s]” [Typus des Galiläers] psychological responses to such situations (A 24). That is, how does the redeemer-type protect himself when feeling especially vulnerable? And (3) what end or ends do those protective measures serve?

On Nietzsche’s view “the type of the Galilean” [Typus des Galiläers] (A 24) suffers from a physiological condition “where the *sense of touch* is pathologically over-sensitive” (A 29). As such, and to answer our first question, any “contact,” any “boundary,” any “hostility,” any “touch” prompts the redeemer-type to feel distress (A 30). To highlight but one example, Nietzsche contends that situations in which the type “need[s]-to-be-reluctant,” or needs to stand in opposition to something, requires proximity. Any such closeness, as may already be supposed, elicits “unbearable *pain*” (A 30).

If it is plausible, and I think it is, that the redeemer-type’s “physiological *habitus*” (A 29) gives rise to feelings of distress, then we can move to addressing our second question: how does the redeemer-type protect himself?<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche’s answer is clear: withdrawal (A 29). What the Gospels preserve, what they hand down, according to Nietzsche, is the psychology of the redeemer, particularly how he reacts to vulnerability: when overwhelmed he retreats. It is Nietzsche’s view that the “most profound saying of the Gospels”—namely “resist not evil” or that there is “blessedness in peace, in gentleness, in an *inability* to be an enemy”—exposes precisely this defensive structure (A 29).

Further, and this brings us to the third question, in Nietzsche’s picture these protective measures, these retreats from contact and social situations, engender a “new *practice*” and a “*different way of acting*” (A 33). Part of the answer lies in specifying the practices, which, when put simply involve a “*not-doing much*” (A 39). Nietzsche thereby characterizes the practices, and the attending way of life, negatively, as refraining from objecting, blaming, resisting, defending, or even becoming angry (A 33, 35).

Thus far, our descriptions of these practices have followed Nietzsche’s lead insofar as they have focused on the negative constitutive features of such practices. The other part of our answer, however, lies in the meanings that attend to the practices and the ways of being they engender. In not offering resistance, to take but one example, the historical Jesus experiences, in Nietzsche’s picture, “inner [feelings of] pleasure and self-affirmations” (A 32). Far from serving purely self-protective functions, these practices produce relief, even pride. Nietzsche ties the interpretive threads together in this way:

[The historical Jesus has] the profound instinct for how we must *live* to feel as if we are “in heaven,” to feel as if we are “eternal,” given that we do not feel *remotely* as if we are “in heaven” when we behave in any other way: this and this alone is the psychological reality of “redemption” (A 33).

I take this to mean that the psychological reality of “redemption” is the feeling of relief. Relief that is born of a set of practices and their attending way of life. And such counsel wins Nietzsche's qualified admiration (A 32).

This last point brings us to a crucial issue: what is at stake in having understood the psychology of this world-historical individual?

### 3 | ON THE VALUE OF THE TYPE

In taking up this question, it is commonplace for commentators to argue that the type's importance is to be found in what it reveals to us about self-creation, specifically about how given a set of physiological conditions and psychological responses, one can forge a worthwhile form of life (Conway, 1997; Murphy, 2001, 124; Santaniello, 1994, 120–121; Welshon, 2004, 41–42). And, in a clear way, as I show in Section 3.1, Nietzsche can be plausibly read in this way. However, as I argue in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, there is a distinct limitation to this account, namely that Nietzsche roots his argument elsewhere: in reflections on how the type becomes an archetype, “a redeemer of humanity” (A 24; GM I 8) and in his own investigative practices, the methods and aims of genealogy (A 24, A 45). Though my reading is not the standard one, it is the one Nietzsche himself recommends (A 24, A 45). Furthermore, as I will show, this strongly suggests that the genealogical mode of investigation remains in view and in use beyond the writings of 1887.

#### 3.1 | The redeemer-type as exemplar

As I suggested a moment ago, many commentators take the importance of the type to lie in what it tells us about exemplary modes of life. In particular, such an argument goes, the redeemer-type offers us a picture of an exemplary form of self-creation. As Conway describes it:

An exemplary human being...embodies a concrete way of life, a set of situated practices that not only demonstrate the perfectibility of the human soul, but also remind (some) others of the powers and perfections within themselves. One such exemplar, Nietzsche suggests, is the (pre-Pauline) Jesus, which bodied forth a “deep instinct for how one must live...a new way of life, not a new faith” (AC 33) (1997, 10).

Viewed in this way, the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was able to fashion a distinctive set of practices from idiosyncratic physiological realities wins Nietzsche's admiration.

Further shape can be given to arguments of this order if we attend to those that Nietzsche offers as exemplars during this period of writing: Caesar (*TI* “Skirmishes” 38), Goethe (*TI* “Skirmishes” 49), and perhaps even Napoleon (*GM* I 16, *TI* “Skirmishes” 44). Caesar, as the “most magnificent type,” possesses a set of “merciless and terrible instincts” that, for a set of localized sociopolitical and historical reasons, he simply *must* put to use (*TI* “Skirmishes” 38). In the face of great danger it is through Caesar's capacity to put such instincts to work toward the overcoming of resistances that his exemplary form of freedom is evident. Instincts that are uniquely coupled with a new mode of life are what make Caesar an exemplary type.

In returning to the redeemer-type, we can draw a similar sketch: those aspects that are necessary, those instincts that, as Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, “could not be removed” (*GS* 290) are the type's physiological reality, his “physiological *habitus*” (A 29). The redeemer-type could have reacted to these physiological constraints, to his “extreme over-sensitivity and capacity for suffering,” in any number of different ways: through denial, through evasion into metaphysical illusion, through resignation, or even through *ressentiment*, complete with its thirst for revenge (A 30). However, to take but one example, with a “superiority over every feeling of *ressentiment*” (A 40) the redeemer-type

overcomes acute distress by retreating, by withdrawing into “an experience of the heart” (A 34). He creates a form of life, as a set of practices, that is uniquely suitable to these constraints and makes possible his “inner pleasure and self-affirmations” (A 32). For these reasons, Jesus of Nazareth wins Nietzsche’s tempered respect and is, on Nietzsche’s view, a “free spirit” provided that we use the term “somewhat loosely” (A 32). For these reasons, too, we can see why commentators have located the value of this type in demonstrating an achievement: the self-creation of exemplary human being.

That said, however appealing it might be to read Nietzsche as addressing the issue of self-creation and exemplary agency, it nevertheless obscures his broader interests. Rather than confining his attention, Nietzsche is interested in, among other things, in demonstrating how the redeemer-type is “retroactively enhanced with features” such that the redeemer-type can be put to work in Pauline Christianity (A 31). In following up on how the redeemer-type is reinterpreted and transformed into an archetype, in noting how the type’s idiosyncratic psychological needs and responses are reinterpreted and utilized toward altogether different ends, we will start to see key elements of the genealogical mode of investigation emerge.

### 3.2 | The redeemer-type, genealogical methods, and historical inquires

As *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *The Antichrist* are both presented by Nietzsche as historical inquires (GM P 6–7; GM I 2; GM II 12–14; A 39), we might conclude, as many commentators have, that to undertake a genealogical investigation is simply to do history (Nehamas, 1985, 246; Geuss, 1994, 285). Cast in this way the genealogical form of inquiry is a naturalistic philosophical approach that serves a clear critical function: to uncover historical contingency of the type, which can undermine or even debunk its dominant meaning “as a redeemer of humanity” (A 24; cf. GM P 5–6; BGE 230; A 14). In what follows I will show that by attending to the redeemer-type, we can indeed distinguish a key dimension of the historical form of the genealogical mode of inquiry and demonstrate Nietzsche’s continued use of this form of inquiry in *The Antichrist*. Even still, as I show at the end of this section, offering a genealogy of the redeemer-type requires that we include the actual psychological accounts Nietzsche develops concerning the origins of Christian morality. This strongly suggests, or so I will argue, rather than purely historical studies, Nietzsche’s genealogical inquiries make use of both history and psychology to marshal their critiques.

The most important passage for our purposes, the one in which Nietzsche presents his historical methods, runs as follows:

[T]he cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie words apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all event in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any pervious “meanings” and “purposes” are necessarily obscured or even obliterated (GM II 12).

Here, Nietzsche conceives of historical inquiry as attending, ever so assiduously, to reinterpretations of both meanings and purposes. The account Nietzsche offers in *The Antichrist* makes use of this method and shows us how the redeemer-type was indeed reinterpreted and “retroactively enhanced with features” (A 31).

As Nietzsche conceives of it, the “true history of Christianity” (A 39) makes clearer how the redeemer-type was “coarsened [by] the first disciples” (A 31). Coarsening, in this passage and on Nietzsche’s view, refers to rendering the type intelligible by imposing upon it understandable forms, or, as Nietzsche writes, the first disciples “had to translate it into their own crudeness in order to make heads or tails of it, —the type did not exist for them until they reduced it to familiar forms” (A 31). The effect of this imposition of familiar form is a central feature of worship more generally: “all great...worship...effaces the initial, often embarrassingly foreign, features

and idiosyncrasies from the object of worship—*it does not even see them*” (A 31). Christianity, then, is the reinterpretation of redeemer-type's unique way of life, one that splits off the incomprehensible and idiosyncratic to render the unintelligible understandable in form.

We have in view Nietzsche's historical methods as they lay bare the process of interpretation and reinterpretation. But we must not lose sight of that which is being interpreted and reinterpreted. Which is to say, we must get back into view the procedures, modes of behavior, and existing practices. For, on Nietzsche's view, those ways of being or acting are the objects of assigned meanings and purposes (GM II 12). In a significant and helpful passage for our purposes, one from *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche specifies that “we have to distinguish between two aspects: one is its relative *permanence*, the custom, the act, the ‘drama,’ a certain strict set of procedures, the other is its *fluidity*, its meaning [*Sinn*], purpose and expectation, which is linked to the carrying out of such procedures” (GM II 13). Nietzsche's point is that ways of being or modes of behavior are relatively stable, whereas the meanings that attend those forms of life fluctuate.

Returning to the redeemer-type, we can specify his ways of being, his customs, his modes of behavior. Recall that we agreed in a previous section that his practices were found in “*not-doing much*” in refraining from opposing, accusing, attacking, defending, or even becoming angry (A 39). Further, we can also note, as Nietzsche does, the ways in which his particular form of life took on a host of meanings. It is worth quoting the crucial passage at some length:

Jesus had done away with the very idea of “guilt,” — he denied that there was any gap between God and man, he *lived* this unity of God as man as *his* “glad tidings”...— From now on, a number of different things started seeping into the type of the redeemer: the doctrine of judgment and return, the doctrine of death as a sacrifice and the doctrine of the *resurrection*; and at this point the whole idea of “blessedness,” the solitary reality of the evangel, vanishes with a wave of the hand—and all for the sake of a state *after death*! (AC 41)

The key points for our purposes are these: first, “the evangel[is]” form of life and modes of behavior are aptly suited to his physio-psychological needs: he “*live[s]* this unity of God as man as *his* ‘glad tidings’” (A 41). Second, these existing practices—such as “*not offering any resistance*” (A 35)—remain even as, and this is the third point, the meanings that attend those ways of being shift away from a unique and idiosyncratic way of coping in this world to a Pauline form of relief found in an earthly moralizing of guilt and in a sententious transcendent “*state after death*” (A 41).

On view is a “bi-partite structure (of ‘form of life’ on the one hand and ‘interpretation’ on the other)” that is an essential feature of Nietzsche's genealogical-historical investigation on the origins of Christianity (Geuss, 1994, 280). This two-part structure makes clearer “a way of life” and the “bestow[ing] on this [form of] life...an *interpretation* that makes it appear illuminated by the highest value so that that life style becomes something for which one fights and under certain circumstances sacrifices one's life” (GS 353). With Paul's reevaluation of the life of Jesus we notice that “seeping into the type of the redeemer” are new “meanings” — “the doctrine of judgment and return, the doctrine of death as a sacrifice and the doctrine of the *resurrection*,” (A 41)—which are reinterpretations of that which remains “relatively *enduring*” the “procedures,” (GM II 13) the modes of life, the already existing practices understood as forms of withdrawal (A 30–31). Thus, attending to the genealogical methods as they apply to the specific case of the psychological type of the redeemer explains *how* this type had to “assume a completely degenerate form (simultaneously mutilated and full of alien features) before it came to be used as a *redeemer* of humanity” (A 24). It also lays bare the two-part structure of reevaluation.

This final point is crucial yet often misunderstood. Indeed, the process of reinterpretation is often equated with falsification: “tradition,” as some commentators have maintained, “strongly distorted the real psychophysiological nature of the Nazarene and handed down a false image” (Stellino, 2015, 109–110, cf. Geuss, 1994, 279–280). In bearing in mind the bi-partite structure just elucidated, it is clear that the form of life—those existing practices—remains relatively intact even as the tradition offers up a different way of understanding those modes

of behavior. Hence, far from handing down a false image, we can see that the psycho-physiological nature, understood as the redeemer-type's inability to resist, is preserved. We can also see that the meanings that attend those ways of being are transformed. Indeed, on Nietzsche's view, the Gospels preserve the psycho-physiological type of the redeemer and Nietzsche's own genealogical-historical inquiry exposes this fact (A 28–29; A 39).

Here, however, an objection shows itself: genealogy, as a mode of investigation, seems, so the argument might go, to have more to do with history than with psychology. History, it could be said, serves an essential role in Nietzsche's critique of morality, psychology ostensibly less so (e.g., GM P 6). This, I think, is a false dichotomy. One reason is that psychology, on Nietzsche's view, is understood as morphology (BGE 23), which aims to show how forms of life stand in relation to one another and to study those developments. As such, psychology, on Nietzsche's view, is a necessarily historical enterprise (BGE 45). Even so, this objection retains some force. The concern gets at the legitimate worry that we may have unduly tipped the balance in favor of the historical.

In addition, given Nietzsche's focus on the psychological type of the redeemer, there must be more in view than tracing historical contingency—the idea that our values are inevitable outgrowth of essential characteristics—but the products of historically contingent interpretations and reinterpretations. One reason is that it is not sufficient to show that the psycho-physiological nature of the historical Jesus was put to use by the tradition to undermine the current value of that type “as a redeemer of humanity” (A 24; cf. GS 345). Under similar historical shifts, the type could, so the argument might go, have garnered for itself another source of legitimacy. For this reason, the historical account may be insufficient to motivate a critique.

As with the historical strand, it is significant that Nietzsche presents both *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *The Antichrist* as psychological studies (EH “Genealogy”; A 28–29). As such, we must also bring back into view, as I do in the next section, Nietzsche as a psychologist of morals who is interested in *why* these shifts in value occur by illuminating the psychological needs that such transformation address (cf. BGE 12, 23, 47, 222, 269; GM II 11, III 19–20; EH “Destiny” 6, “Books” 5–6). This will offer a more complete view of how the historical and the psychological are not in competition with one another but work cooperatively together.

### 3.3 | The redeemer-type, genealogical methods, and the psychology of morals

As I have argued, the historical-genealogical account that Nietzsche offers demonstrates that our conceptual schemes, our “systems of purposes,” have a two-part structure (GM II 12). And, as we have seen, Nietzsche's genealogical analysis of the “conceptual transformation” of the redeemer-type is further evidence of this structure showing that experiences—existing practices, modes of behavior—are organized and rendered meaningful by systems of evaluation or purposes (GM II 12–14). If compelling, Nietzsche's genealogical analysis may indeed make it much harder to rationally accept “as given, as factual, as beyond all question” (GM P 6) the type's dominant value “as a redeemer of humanity” (A 24).

Still as “every psychologist knows,” and as Nietzsche helpfully reminds us in *The Antichrist*, “taking something to be true...is a trivial matter of fifth-rate importance compared to the value of the instincts” (A 39; cf. GS 345; BGE 4). This means that even if a particular conceptual scheme is no longer rationally justified, it may nevertheless be valuable insofar as it addresses and meets certain psychological or instinctual needs. In what follows, I turn to the type of the redeemer, as well as to the Pauline reevaluation of that form of life, to refract the affective needs that these conceptual transformations serve. Through this view, I contend that we can also glimpse some important implications for understanding Nietzsche's reevaluative project more generally.

Thus far, our analysis of the type of the redeemer has shown that “conceptual transformation” responds to certain psychological needs (GM I 4; cf. A 29–31). As such, we would do well to further clarify the core motivational affect—*ressentiment*, envy, hatred, powerlessness—that explains shifts in value. One answer, the one offered by Geuss, is this:



Paul is a central figure in the slave revolt which lies in the main line of development of modern western morality; Jesus, on the other hand, was, for Nietzsche, only very marginally associated with the genesis of “our” morality. Both arise out of the deepest and most sublime hatred that ever was on earth, but each transforms this hatred in a completely different direction: Paul into a form of guilt-ridden, moralizing asceticism, and Jesus by becoming virtually a “free spirit” *avant la lettre*, a man incapable of negating or refuting (A 32) with no conception of sin, guilt, or punishment (A 33) (Geuss, 1994, 284).

The significance of this interpretation for our purposes lies in where we locate the motivational force behind reevaluation. Is there good reason to claim “Christianity ‘arises’ out of hatred and envy,” as Geuss has it (Geuss, 1981, 44), or are we better off supposing that its origins are to be found in extreme vulnerability—pathological oversensitivity to feelings of powerlessness—as I will claim that Nietzsche does? (A 29–30, *EH* “Wise” 6).

The relevant passage in which Nietzsche's views emerge most clearly is when he holds that the redeemer-type's “instinct of hatred of reality” is “a consequence of an extreme oversensitivity and capacity for suffering” (A 30). Nietzsche is, in other words, arguing that hatred is a reactive response to the experiences of “extreme oversensitivity,” of powerlessness in the face of suffering (A 30). The redeemer's characteristic withdrawal, his flight from and aversion to all contact, offers relief from and is in direct response to “unbearable *pain*” (A 30). Thus, what motivates the redeemer-type's adoption of an idiosyncratic set of practices, a rather unique way of life, is the longing to alleviate the painful feelings of helplessness and powerlessness (A 30). “Hatred for every reality” is then best viewed as a result, or, as Nietzsche has it, an “ultimate consequence” (A 29) of that extreme vulnerability, “extreme oversensitivity” to feelings of powerlessness (A 30).

Even as we may wish to grant that in place of hatred, the redeemer-type is motivated by feelings of vulnerability and the longings to alleviate the pain, one may nevertheless want to maintain that Pauline reevaluation of that form of life is fueled by “the deepest and most sublime hatred that ever was on earth” (Geuss, 1994, 284). Nietzsche, of course, occasionally invites this view: “Paul,” Nietzsche finds “epitomizes a type that is the antithesis of the ‘bringer of glad tidings,’ the genius of hatred, in the vision of hatred, in the merciless logic of hatred” (A 42). Hence, on such a view, Pauline reinterpretation is indeed born of that “most sublime hatred” (Geuss, 1994, 284).

As tempting as such a view might be, there are good reasons to claim that the longing to alleviate feelings of powerlessness may indeed be the motivation behind Paul's reevaluation of the redeemer's form of life. Nietzsche claims that “what [*Paul*] needed was *power*” (A 42) or, more precisely, that Paul's “intractable lust for power reveals itself as an anticipatory revelling in *divine glories*” (D 68). Hence, Paul is motivated by the need to maintain or reestablish a sense of efficacy (A 2).

Key to this interpretation, I think, is Nietzsche's sketch in *Daybreak* of the psychological type of Paul, which has the following form: an inability to live up to, to realize, to “fulfil the [Jewish] law” elicits Paul's feelings of shame and inferiority (D 68). By devaluing the law that “cannot be overcome” Paul alleviates those painful feelings, of failure, shame, frustration, and impotence (D 68). Further, through such devaluation, the source of pain is displaced: Paul is no longer to blame for his inability to overcome or fulfill the law, rather, the cause of such pain is the law itself, which is, of course, devalued as “*unreasonable*” (D 68). This “perfect revenge” (D 68), as Nietzsche describes it, is Paul's devaluation of the law and the reevaluation of practices of the historical Jesus. This serves clear psychological ends: it removes “all [feelings of] shame, all [feelings of] subordination” and restores Paul's feeling of proficiency (D 68).

The main difference between the redeemer-type and of the type of Paul, as Nietzsche reconstructs them, is not to be found in the motivation for adopting certain practices or conceptual schemes—both are motivated to overcome feelings of powerlessness. On this view, then, Christian morality is a response to vulnerability, particularly to feelings of powerlessness (D 68; GS 359; GM I 7; GM I 10; GM I 13–14; GM III 14). Clearly, much more could be said about

this issue, especially as it harbors vast implications for how we are to understand the slave revolt in morals as presented in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. I will defer this discussion for another time.<sup>10</sup>

For now, though, we can notice that the main differences between the types must therefore be instinctual (A 39): in response to distress, the redeemer-type takes flight and withdraws (A 29–31); the Pauline longs to right a wrong, seeks revenge, and fights (D 68; cf. A 45).<sup>11</sup> Each response serves the same psychological end: to alleviate a feeling of powerlessness and restore a sense of efficacy, a feeling of power. Even as these disparate reactions both aim to redress a narcissistic injury, they require wholly distinct ex post facto rationalizations, explanations, and modes of evaluation: the redeemer-type finds relief from suffering in earthly and inward solitude (A 32), while the Pauline alleviates such feelings through a moralizing condemnation of “the law” (A 43; cf. A 42; A 47).

This interpretation, if plausible, yields two important and interconnected desiderata: (1) our conceptual schemes are ex post facto rationalizations of rather specific psychological needs; (2) a failure to properly attend to such rationalizations leads to “psychological self-misunderstanding” (A 39).

The second point can be best elucidated by pointing to another passage from *The Antichrist* where Nietzsche claims that the “imaginary psychology” of Christianity is responsible for the “complete failure to understand oneself” (A 15). Nietzsche's concern, more specifically, is that the Christian conceptual scheme offers:

interpretations of pleasant and unpleasant general sensations—for instance, the states of *nervus sympathicus* [those flight or fight responses]—using the sign language of religious-moral idiosyncrasy, — “repentance,” “the pangs of conscience,” “temptation by the devil,” “the presence of God” (A 15).

The “pangs of conscience” (A 15), to highlight but one example, are rationalizations that give meaning to ordinary instinctual inclinations and aversions. Such “falsification in *psychologics*” thereby obscures the direct experiences of those instinctual leanings and feelings (e.g., it is not pain or pleasure that you feel but, to highlight another example, “the presence of God” (A 15)). Furthermore, the “imaginary psychology” of Christianity covers over the actual history of those conceptual notions—e.g., “repentance,” “the pangs of conscience,” “temptation by the devil,” “the presence of God”—in the instincts (TI “Errors” 7; cf. D 34, 35; GS 57). This further explains why Nietzsche claims that:

“Christians,” the people who have been called Christian for two thousand years, are just a psychological self-misunderstanding. Examined more closely and in spite of all “belief” they have been governed only by instincts ... “belief” has just been a cloak, a cover, a *curtain* behind which the instincts play their game—, a shrewd *blindness* about the dominance of *certain* instincts (A 39)

Nietzsche contends that those who are described as “Christian” on the basis of a set of beliefs are embroiled in a self-misunderstanding. His reasons are twofold: (1) humans, if Nietzsche's account is plausible, are instinctually motivated. To say that one is *motivated* by a belief is to reverse the proper explanatory ordering and to put the cart before the horse, if you will: conceptual schemes, and their attending beliefs, are ex post facto rationalizations of certain instincts. (2) To say that belief makes one “Christian” functions to further obscure the psychological needs that these beliefs serve. The obfuscation, distortion, or even omission of those psychological and instinctual needs can, it seems plain, lead to self-understanding.

This analysis shows, I hope, that Nietzsche's genealogical accounts draw on both psychology and history, and as such are considerably complex: Pauline Christianity is a reinterpretation of a form of life that was itself an instinctual response or way of coping with overwhelming affect. It would be an error, I think, to conclude from this that in the psychological type of the redeemer we have found something “final or original”—a bedrock of some sort (D 35). Rather, and supposing Nietzsche's analysis and my reconstruction of it are compelling, the conclusion that we ought to draw is that the type of the redeemer is also so situated: his affective responses, his “feelings (inclinations and aversions),” are derived from and responses to particular social mores, coupled with his attempts to overcome feelings of powerlessness (D 35). As such, Nietzsche's genealogical investigations are psychological and historical through and through.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper, I suggested that clarifying the psychological type of the redeemer will put us in a better position to understand some of Nietzsche's broader philosophical methods and objectives. Integral to what I hope to have shown is the bi-partite structure of genealogical inquiries that make plainer varying forms of life and the systems of meanings that attend them. But further, I also sought to clarify that such conceptual schemes, systems of evaluation, attend to and redress feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, which means that they are inherently historical and psychological inquiries.

By way of conclusion, let me draw out one final implication. We know that Nietzsche concludes his autobiography in the following way: "Have I been understood? *Dionysus versus the crucified*" (*EH* "Destiny" 9). We know further that "the crucified" is Nietzsche's way of denoting the Pauline mode of Christianity. What this paper makes even clearer, I hope, is just what a formidable opponent Nietzsche has set himself. Pauline Christianity, as I have shown, offers a way of giving meaning to vulnerability, precarity, as well as to the acute suffering that attends such feeling of helplessness. It offers, to put it another way, a rather compelling answer to the question of the meaning of our suffering (*GM* III 18). Whether Nietzsche's alternatives are up to the job is a subject for another time. What is clear from this analysis, however, is that Nietzsche's concern with the meaning of suffering, particularly as a response to powerlessness and vulnerability, is very much central to his agenda and extends well beyond the writing of *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

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### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> What Nietzsche might mean by "again" is, of course, contested in the secondary literature (e.g., Pippin, 2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Nietzsche is, indeed, very clear that this form of life is still possible today: (*A* 39).
- <sup>3</sup> As *GM* P 2 attests, Nietzsche sees his work from *Human, All-Too-Human* onwards as making use of genealogical methods. As such, this paper seeks to make a plausible case that Nietzsche continues to use modes of investigation beyond 1887.
- <sup>4</sup> A notable exception to this is Jaggard (2013).
- <sup>5</sup> I take the will to power to comprise a psychological thesis concerning human motivation. This means that humans are motivated not by "self-preservation" but "growth and expansion" (*GS* 349). There is a debate in the secondary literature as to whether one's motivations point them toward generic or specific ends, whether will to power is a first or second-order motivational force, and whether will to power is a capacity or a state (Dunkle, 2020; Katsafanas, 2011, 2013; Reginster, 2013, 2019; Soll, 2012, 2015). I wish to remain agnostic on those issues and simply make the following claim, on which there is broad textual and scholarly agreement: the will to power takes as its motivation to overcome resistances—to meet a perfectly matched obstacle, "apply your whole strength, suppleness, and skill," and to prevail, to grow, or to expand (*EH* "Wise" 7; see also *A* 6; *A* 17 *GM* III 7).
- <sup>6</sup> I focus in on Nietzsche's Renan because attending to Renan's account on its own terms (Renan, 1898) would take us too far afield from the significant psychological points Nietzsche wishes to raise. For more on the cogency of Nietzsche's reconstruction of Renan's *Life of Jesus*, see Jensen, 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> Nietzsche himself uses the term "genius" in a way that is extended and narrowed to describe St. Paul (*A* 42).
- <sup>8</sup> For particularly rich treatments of Dostoyevsky as one source of Nietzsche's account of the redeemer-type, see Paolo Stellino's *Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky*, (2015, esp. 107–117).
- <sup>9</sup> Even as Nietzsche distinguishes a "physiological investigation and interpretation" of morality, "every thou shalt," from a "psychological one" (*GM* I 17), we can see plainly here that rather than offering a physiological or a psychological account of the redeemer-type, Nietzsche makes use of both. Indeed, and here I agree with Stellino, that in Nietzsche's late philosophy "physiology and psychology are...two sides of the main coin" (2015, 113).
- <sup>10</sup> We have seen, for example, that moral judgments, on Nietzsche's view, satisfy psychological needs. So, though I broadly agree with Reginster that "genealogical inquiries typically uncover at the root of moral judgments states such as 'anger,' 'hatred,' 'envy,' the 'feeling of impotence,' and most importantly 'ressentiment'" (Reginster, 2021, 23) my analysis of the

redeemer-type and of the type of Paul, suggests that “abnormal vulnerability” [die krankhafte Verletzlichkeit] undergirds anger, hatred, envy and resentment (EH “Wise” 6). A number of interpretive issues remain open then, one of which is, if re-evaluation is motivated to alleviate helplessness and powerlessness, why are such reevaluations not more prevalent?

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche is silent on the issue of whether such a fight is real or imagined.

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