

**Week 6: Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On The Genealogy of Morality***

Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality* is an extremely challenging text, and in several ways. Nietzsche is one of the most difficult – and misread – authors you will meet. His style is unusual, and his ideas are extremely complex. But more than this, Nietzsche’s writings are supposed to challenge you, and a great many of the things you currently take for granted. If you don’t feel challenged – intellectually and personally – you are missing the point.

We must tread carefully in this area. Much of the scholarship will be unhelpful at this early stage, but I’ve tried to indicate some useful things below. And you have the unenviable task of trying to say how Nietzsche’s writings might have applications for modern politics. Although there is a minor academic industry devoted to this, it is far from clear what it can amount to. You will have to think laterally, and for yourselves.

* The primary reading is the ‘Preface’, ‘Treatise 1’ and ‘Treatise 2’ of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. The Faculty recommends that you use the Cambridge Blue Book edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson. But pretty much any edition is fine. If you are feeling adventurous, try and read ‘Treatise 3’ as well, though you can usefully disregard the early sections (which are concerned with Nietzsche’s on-going and traumatic entanglement with Richard Wagner).

As usual, concentrate on the primary text. Regarding secondary reading, I recommend the following:

- A good place to start is Giles Fraser’s online mini-series ‘How to Believe: Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, on The Guardian website. Although this material is basic, and Fraser’s replies to Nietzsche are somewhat insubstantial, this gives you a sensible first orientation. But do not think you can rely on this alone. Online here: [http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/oct/27/religion-atheism](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/oct/27/religion-atheism)

- Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapter 23, pp. 460-84 especially.


- Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapters 1-8, but especially 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8.

Part 1 - Paper 1: The Modern State and its Alternatives


* Finally, suggested essay questions.

- What, if anything, is the political significance of the bad conscience?

- Is Nietzsche right that watching suffer feels good, but making suffer feels better? If so, what might that tell us about modern politics?

- What is the significance of the slave revolt in morality?

- If all values are manufactured, what does that mean for the future of politics?

- If God is dead, what should we do with His legacy?

- If we are the last men (and women), is democracy doomed?