

Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Etiology (On the Example of Free Will)

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I clarify a major affinity between Nietzsche and Spinoza that has been neglected in the literature—but that Nietzsche was aware of—namely a tendency to what I call *etiology*. Etiologies provide second-order explanations of some opponents’ first-order views, but not in order to decide first-order matters. The example I take up here is Nietzsche’s and Spinoza’s rejections of free will—and especially their etiologies concerning how we wrongly come to think that we may boast of such a capacity. In working through the former (i.e., their rejections of free will) in order to make my central metaphilosophical point regarding the latter (i.e., their accounts of why we generally affirm that we have free will), I shed important new light on Nietzsche’s relation to Spinoza. I also further our understanding of what role such second-order accounts play within each of their larger projects on their own terms.

“Übrigens ist mir alles verhaßt, was mich bloß belehrt.”

[In any case, I hate everything that merely instructs me.]

—Goethe to Schiller, December 19, 1798 (cited in UM II Foreword)¹

Introduction

GENEALOGY, and even something called ‘Nietzschean genealogy’ specifically, is sometimes associated with giving strongly evaluative second-order accounts of how we come to think about some first-

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1. I reference sections of Nietzsche’s works according to standard English abbreviations clarified in the bibliography, and in these cases make use of newer Cambridge translations for reasons of accessibility. Otherwise, I cite from the eKGWB=Digital Critical Edition by D’Iorio, which is based on and improves upon the earlier edition of the original by Colli and Montinari. BVN=Briefe von Nietzsche, and NF=Nachgelassene Fragmente; translations of these texts are my own. I reference Curley’s edition of Spinoza’s works in typical fashion, citing passages in the *Ethics* (E) by means of the following abbreviations: p-(roposition), s-(cholium), c-(orollary), pref-(ace), and app-(endix). I cite the five parts of E with Arabic numerals. When it appears immediately to the right of the part number, ‘d’ stands for ‘definition,’ and in any other case it refers to ‘demonstration.’ ‘Ep.’ stands for ‘letter.’ Where relevant, I also cite the volume and page numbers of Gebhardt’s edition of Spinoza’s works in the original (e.g. I/2).

order matters. In the philosophical context: because the origin of some view v is o (where origin o isn't the origin that it should be, were v true), v is false. Although I can't explore worries about this move here—nor other, more subtle notions of genealogy—such accounts are often taken to commit the genetic fallacy insofar as they present the apparent origins of v intending to question it at its core.

It has been debated whether or not Nietzsche is really interested in making genealogical arguments so understood.² But there is in any case another kind of account-giving that concerns origins but *isn't* meant to be evaluative in much of his thought—and Spinoza's. This kind of account-giving, which I call etiology,³ merely follows up in a second-order fashion to clarify why someone may have gone wrong in understanding some first-order matters. That is, the relatively modest form of account-giving I label etiology doesn't aim to tell us *that* we should think some way about some first-order issues, which first-order arguments are meant to clarify, but rather only intends to explain *how* we come

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2. I will briefly discuss the issue within the final section below, and meanwhile highlight the position recently developed by Queloz & Cueni (2019), according to which Nietzsche not only refrains from 'Nietzschean genealogy' but is in fact a critic of genealogical debunking. The present paper doesn't go this far, and yet it does point in this direction, speaking in favor of more careful consideration of the many second-order accounts in Nietzsche.
 3. One might expect the terminology of "error theory" to arise in this context, though I have only spoken of "genealogy" and "etiology" thus far. Indeed, "error theory" is sometimes, for instance in Gabriel (2016), meant to pick out the kind of second-order account-giving that I point to in Nietzsche and in Spinoza within this paper. In such cases, one means to refer to the practice of showing why a rejected first-order account of things comes to be thought acceptable, and I mean the same with "etiology." However, since the term "error theory" is most widely used in the context of metaethics, where it more strictly refers rather to the view that moral judgments are always false—in error—and since both Nietzsche and Spinoza may hold this view, we should instead speak of "etiology" here. Although Mackie (1977), the canonical defense of the error theory, is also interested in why we come to think otherwise, he uses "error theory" to refer simply to the view that there are no moral facts. See Mackie (1977, 35): "[T]he denial of objective values will have to be put forward [...] as an 'error theory,' a theory that although most people in making moral judgments implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false." For an exciting example of recent work in metaethics that expands on the error theory, indeed *without* emphasis on what I call etiology, see Streumer (2017).

to think what we ought to see is misguided.⁴

The following question quickly arises regarding etiology (or should). If it isn't meant to have such evaluative force—that is, if etiology doesn't tell us how we should think about first-order matters of concern—then why should one take any philosophical interest in it? I answer this and related questions that force a closer look this second-order move below. Initially, however, I give a sketch of the paper, and provide some context on Nietzsche's relationship to Spinoza, which I aim to clarify in a new way within this paper, namely with reference to etiology.

At Nietzsche's request, early in July of 1881, Franz Overbeck sent him a volume of Kuno Fischer's *History of Modern Philosophy* [henceforth GnP]. This became Nietzsche's main source on Spinoza's thought.⁵ Nietzsche's postcard to Overbeck a few weeks after receipt is well-known among commentators:

I am completely astounded, entirely delighted! I have a *precursor*, and what a precursor he is! I barely knew Spinoza; it was an 'instinctive act' that I reached for him *now*. Not only is his general tendency of making cognition the *mightiest affect* the same as mine, but furthermore I find myself in five primary aspects of his teaching. This most abnormal and lonely thinker is close to me on precisely *these* matters: he denies free will, ends, the ethical world order, the unegoistic, and evil. Though the disparities between us might be tremendous, these are largely the result of differences in era, culture, and science. *In summa*: my loneliness [*Einsamkeit*], which has all too often taken my breath away and made my blood rush as if I were high in the mountains, is at least now a two-togetherness [*Zweisamkeit*]. Fantastic (BVN-1881,135)!⁶

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4. I leave aside for now the possibility of something like an etiology of a view taken to be correct, partly because I intend to retain the negative, medical connotation of "etiology," which is most often associated with understanding the causes of disease.
 5. As recent work such as Wollenberg (2013, 621n14) rightly emphasizes, we have no evidence that Nietzsche ever read Spinoza directly, contra Wurzer (1975, 73). Instead, as shown in greatest detail by Scandella (2012), we have strong evidence that Nietzsche studied the second edition of GnP and gathered most of what he knew about Spinoza from there. I therefore utilize this text and particular edition, which engages in detail with Spinoza over hundreds of pages.
 6. I ask the reader to forgive the neologism ("two-togetherness"), which captures Nietzsche's

Although Nietzsche had been exposed to Spinoza's thought in detail as early as 1865,⁷ it's here that he most emphatically positions himself on Spinoza's side regarding fundamental issues in moral philosophy and beyond. In the first major steps of this paper (Section I), I clarify in particular why Nietzsche and Spinoza take a first-order position forcefully rejecting *that* we may boast of free will, understood as *the capacity for virtually all persons to produce decisions in an originary manner*.⁸ But in the next steps (Sections II and III), my aim is then to draw out a broader affinity on this basis, not explicit in the text of the postcard above. In this central part of the paper, I remain with the example of free will and argue that both Nietzsche and Spinoza additionally provide closely related second-order accounts of *how* the false first-order belief in free will comes to be thought true (Section II).⁹ My primary interest is then to propose that Nietzsche's and Spinoza's accounts bely a crucial metaphilosophical affinity that has gone unnoticed in the literature on Nietzsche and Spinoza (Section III), which has dealt with other matters like their related critiques of teleological thinking, or their comparable positive visions of freedom—i.e. their ideas about what freedom should really be taken to consist in—given explicit mention of these issues in the postcard.¹⁰ Bringing their shared tendency to etiology

recursive pun on one [*eins*] and two [*zwei*]. Compare the translation in Kaufmann ed. (1982, 92), which opts for “lonesomeness” and “twosomeness,” and in Sommer (2012, 157), which eliminates the play entirely.

7. See Rotter (2019, Anhang I) for an important first transcription of Nietzsche's several pages of notes from course lectures on Spinoza in Bonn.
8. Forster (2019, 375) very helpfully discusses other important features of the standard notion of free will of interest to both Nietzsche and Spinoza, but I reference here only the essential one. Several of these additional features of the standard notion of free will, for instance that everyone has moral responsibility, are likewise denied by Nietzsche and Spinoza, and therefore of interest in the present context. But these additional features can convincingly be seen as following from the idea that we are able to produce decisions in an originary manner.
9. Importantly, what brings us to the second order isn't the fact that we are talking about beliefs *at all*—otherwise, my claim that someone's belief is false (because *p*) could already reach the second order. Instead, what brings us to the second order, as I mean this, is that we are talking about beliefs *as* beliefs; we are primarily accounting for them themselves, rather than some matters at hand that the beliefs make a claim on.
10. On Nietzsche's and Spinoza's positive visions of freedom, see especially Rutherford (2011)

into view teaches us a great deal about Nietzsche's relationship to Spinoza, but it additionally sheds light on why each pursues on their own terms this kind of second-order explanation. Finally, I emphasize throughout the paper, but especially in its third section, that—unlike genealogy, as defined above—etiology can be seen as arriving only once the dust has settled, i.e. after views on first-order issues have been clarified, and so should be uncontroversially attractive.¹¹

With this outline of the paper and its aims, I proceed to deal with Nietzsche's and Spinoza's first-order critical accounts concerning free will. In examining these, I clarify Nietzsche's affinities with Spinoza on a particular first-order matter of concern (free will); but again, I do so in the service of my ultimate aim to point out that Nietzsche and Spinoza share a crucial inclination to develop second-order etiologies that are of great significance to each of their larger projects and arguably of enduring value.

I.1 Spinoza against free will

Spinoza's dismissal of free will is nothing if not harsh: those who claim the existence and efficacy of such a capacity defend an *ignorant position founded on ignorance*. Spinoza's most important line of attack relies rather straightforwardly

and Ioan (2017). On Nietzsche and Spinoza on freedom properly understood as well as teleology and other issues, see Yonover (forthcoming) in addition to the extended study by Wurzer (1975), which, despite its length, misses the affinity I point to in this paper. Likewise Wollenberg (2013, 630) suggestively claims that GM "reveals numerous traces" of Nietzsche's exposure to Fischer's account of Spinoza's philosophy in GnP "in both content and form," but Wollenberg only argues for the former, and says nothing of the latter. For further literature on Nietzsche's relationship to Spinoza, see Sommer (2012, 179n3).

11. An important debate has taken place in recent years within Anglophone epistemology regarding whether the origins of our beliefs may pose problems for these same beliefs. Some like Street (2006) have thought so, while others such as White (2010) have disagreed. I am indebted to their work, and more recent treatments of related issues such as Srinivisan (2015), which have helped me think through several systematic questions central to this paper—despite the fact that this literature primarily concerns genealogy and not etiology, as I define these terms, and so seems to emphasize other issues.

on his commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR).¹² According to the PSR, everything has its reason; or, as Spinoza puts it: “For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence” (E1p11d2; cf. also E1aa2-3). Spinoza’s determinism thus indicates that any state of affairs must have its causes and, in principle, be explicable. Additionally, since only substance, i.e. God, is strictly the cause of itself (E1p14c1), and it also causes everything else (E1p16c1), all things or modes of God can only be caused by something other than themselves to be the way they are.

Yet Spinoza goes a step further. Not only are things caused such that their causes must in turn must have their causes, and so on, but “[t]hings could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced” (E1p33). That is, Spinoza isn’t just a determinist, but a necessitarian; all modes (which have causes that are not themselves) have their causes in the only way that they can have them. Mere possibility is eliminated in that whatever is possible is also necessary.¹³ In going all the way to necessitarianism, Spinoza specifically rules out the scenario in which modes have their necessary causes that are not themselves *but* there is a multiplicity of paths that things can take and still be determined in the general manner just discussed. Spinoza clearly does reject this option, and it’s not hard to see why he has to reject any conception of free will afterwards.

From Spinoza’s perspective, Descartes had claimed it was self-evident that “there is freedom in our will,” and had thought that we can produce decisions in an originary manner; indeed even if Descartes’s views are ultimately more complex, he had once claimed that this was allegedly our “supreme perfection.”¹⁴ But the determinism that Spinoza claims, we are never in a position such that

12. On the PSR as the “key” to Spinoza, see Della Rocca (2008). On the PSR and Spinoza’s critique of free will, see Sleight et al. (2008). Della Rocca’s take on Spinoza making the PSR central has come under criticism, most notably by Garber (2015), but remains the strongest interpretive approach.

13. Although I can’t discuss the account further here, it’s worth noting that Spinoza develops here an *etiology* of the modal view according to which there is room for mere possibility. For Spinoza, “a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge” (E1p33s1). We consider it possible that something could have occurred otherwise when we don’t understand how it really occurred.

14. CSM I 205. Regarding these passages from the *Principles*, see Spinoza’s early work on that text, DPP1p15s | G I/174.

we could fully determine ourselves, because this would mean that we are substance (“God alone is a free cause,” E1p17c2), which is unique. And given Spinoza’s necessitarianism, there are no possibilities in any robust sense, for anything that’s truly possible is necessary; thus, we could never just as well choose this as that, producing a decision in an originary manner. The critique of free will on these terms is made most forcefully at the end of E2. Here, Spinoza’s negative account of freedom—his rejection of the *wrong* way to think about freedom—reaches its clearest articulation. “In the mind there is no absolute, or free, will, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity,” indeed necessarily (E2p48).¹⁵ (See NF-1881,11[193] for Nietzsche’s transcription of Fischer’s translation of this text, which he would have found in GnP 480.) Thus, freedom needs to be rethought. It isn’t to be detected where, at least according to Spinoza, Descartes had hoped.

That being said, we may still appear to have some experience of free will. This shall be clarified in Section II, but for Spinoza we can already conclude that said experience is misleading, given that the will can’t be an originary causal force in the world in the manner it would have to be in order to be a free will. Before examining the causes of our philosophical confusion in greater detail, I turn to Nietzsche’s first-order account.

I.2 Nietzsche against free will

Leiter (2007, 11f.) helpfully distinguishes the two levels on which Nietzsche’s critique of free will operates. On the first level, Nietzsche rejects the doctrine; on the second, he provides an account of ‘willing’ that helps us understand our misleading experience and the power of the idea of free will generally. In this section, I am only concerned with the first steps, where Nietzsche rejects free will, i.e. the notion that we can produce decisions in an originary manner.

Nietzsche accomplishes this initial task from two primary perspectives. First, while he certainly doesn’t develop an elaborate metaphysical system à

15. There need not be any inconsistency between Spinoza’s assertion that causation proceeds infinitely amongst finite beings and his stance cited above that substance is the cause of all things (after all, something must kick off an infinite chain); but I don’t have space to consider this matter further here.

la Spinoza, Nietzsche still likewise holds *naturalist commitments* that prohibit the sort of causality and modality needed to bolster any libertarian or even compatibilist view. The precise character of Nietzsche's naturalism has been debated (Janaway 2007, Ch. 3 and Leiter 2013), but it's known that Nietzsche is a critic of the idea that there is a transcendent world, and instead calls for us to "translate humanity back into nature" (BGE 230). This leads him to the view that any "person is necessary, a person is a piece of fate, a person belongs to the whole, a person only *is* in the context of the whole" (TI, "Errors," 8; compare HAH 106). Although Nietzsche certainly rejects Spinoza's nomological determinism (GS 109), and with the brilliant motto "*Chaos sive Natura*" that obviously revises Spinoza's "*Deus sive Natura*" (see NF-1882,21[3] or NF-1881,11[197], and E4p4d, respectively),¹⁶ Nietzsche also embraces another kind of determinism, according to which physiological facts rather than abstract laws of nature are decisive. Nietzsche's understanding of his contemporaries' scientific findings plays an important role here.

Second, Nietzsche's intensely negative verdict on what the notion of free will *does* for us may well be even more crucial in his rejection of it. Among other things, for Nietzsche this poisonous notion assists in assigning guilt (GM II 4 and TI, "Errors," 7) and helps in acquitting God (NF-1887, 10[150] speculates about Kant's "scandalous logic" that would get the "*ens perfectum*" off the hook). Most generally, it allows us to construe "weakness itself [...] as an *accomplishment*" (GM I 13). This leads Nietzsche to state with characteristic nonchalance that "the will does not do anything anymore, and so it does not explain anything anymore either—it just accompanies processes, but it can be

16. As I discuss in Yonover (forthcoming, §4), although Spinoza does strongly criticize any notion of God or nature anthropomorphized as a "prince" that issues commands with lawful force (e.g. TTP IV 27), nonetheless all things are "natural things, which follow the common laws of nature" (E3Pref | II/137). Meanwhile, Nietzsche seems to claim the difficult position that nature "follows a 'necessary' and 'calculable' course, although *not* because laws are dominant in it, but rather because laws are totally *absent*" (BGE, "Prejudices," 22). Yet, even if severe, this disagreement between Nietzsche and Spinoza is unimportant in the current context, and laws of nature are arguably superfluous when it comes to the sort of determination and necessity needed to reject free will anyways. All that's required is that we are caused in a determining manner, and necessarily just so; if we are, then whether or not our being caused in this way occurs with the regularity that a 'law' would demand of should, it seems, have no bearing on the matter (though this remains a topic of debate in contemporary literature).

absent as well” (TI, “Errors,” 3). For Nietzsche, it’s so clear free will must be rejected that it’s not even decisive whether or not the will determines, but in an unimportant sense since it is itself determined, *or* is simply uninvolved with our doings. (There is in any case evidence that Nietzsche favors the latter view, e.g. A 14.)

That is, Nietzsche has two sets of independent reasons to reject free will. These can be called roughly theoretical and roughly practical in emphasis. Though Nietzsche is arguably more explicit about the former,¹⁷ both play important roles. Thus, Nietzsche writes of our delusion in a powerful passage that’s helpful to reference in concluding this section:

We laugh at him who steps out of his room at the moment when the sun steps out of its room, and then says: “*I will* that the sun shall rise”; and at him who cannot stop a wheel, and says: “*I will* that it shall roll”; and at him who is thrown down in wrestling, and says: “here I lie, but *I will* lie here!” But, all laughter aside, are we ourselves ever acting any differently whenever we employ the expression “*I will*”? (D §124)

No—clearly, for Nietzsche, we aren’t any different. When we tell ourselves we may boast of free will, we tell ourselves a fairytale, and a life-denying one at that. But Nietzsche clearly doesn’t argue from ‘we tell ourselves a fairytale’ to ‘we don’t have free will’; instead, he makes the former claim on the basis of his first-order positions just summarized. As we transition back to Spinoza, I note a passage in one of his letters that prefigures Nietzsche above:

This is that famous human freedom everyone brags of having [...] So the infant believes that he freely wants milk; the angry boy that he wants

17. Thus, the fourth “great error” presented in TI is the error of free will that follows three other errors concerning *causality* (the errors of confusing cause and effect, false causality, and imaginary causes). And incidentally, Nietzsche’s drawing our attention to the first in this list is particularly Spinozistic. According to Spinoza, belief in divine teleology “turns nature completely upside down [...] [f]or what is really a cause, it considers an effect, and conversely” (E1App | G II/80). Nietzsche notes Spinoza’s critique of teleology at NF-1881,11[194], discussed especially in GnP 233-7; and Nietzsche convincingly pokes fun at Moses Mendelssohn for trying to interpret Spinoza ‘charitably’ on the matter at NF-1881,11[137], almost certainly after reading GnP 562.

vengeance; and the timid, flight. [...] Similarly, the madman [*delirans*], the chatterbox [*garrulus*], and a great many people of this kind believe they act from a free decision of the mind (Ep. 58 | G IV/266).

When Spinoza begins to discuss the fairytale that is free will, he of course does so on the basis of his argument against free will considered above in the present section. Throughout this section, we have seen why Nietzsche and Spinoza reject the idea *that* we might have free will, i.e. why they think they can consider such belief misguided; we must now consider, in the next section (II), why they think we tell ourselves this fairytale, i.e. their accounts of *how* we come to believe it. Though deeply misleading, the idea that we have free will is indeed also “most persuasive” historically (TI, “Errors,” §3).

But before I turn to such matters, I point to an additional, merely apparent issue. In some of his most important works, Nietzsche develops a scathing critique of free will, but then goes on to praise “free spirits,” “sovereign individuals,” and the like just pages later. This alleged tension has generated much discussion. How can Nietzsche speak so poorly of free will, and then turn around and admire the “free”? Although the current paper contributes to debates concerning Nietzsche on freedom insofar as it furthers our understanding of Nietzsche’s self-declared first-order affinity with Spinoza in rejecting free will, I can’t give an overview of the literature concerning conceptions of freedom dealt with by Nietzsche here, or weigh in in any substantial sense. I emphasize that I rely only on the uncontested view that both Nietzsche and Spinoza deny free will in any standard sense that would obtain for virtually all persons, securing their capacity to produce decisions in an ordinary manner. Clearly, this doesn’t mean that Nietzsche and Spinoza are uninterested in freedom *per se*—they are both *very* interested in a kind of freedom that departs from any notion of free will—and I don’t take a position concerning the harmony of Nietzsche’s (or Spinoza’s) negative and positive accounts of freedom.¹⁸

18. As already mentioned in my note 5 above, Rutherford (2011) is extremely helpful on what positive notion of freedom Nietzsche develops, indeed in relation to Spinoza (as well as certain Stoics). See also Yonover (forthcoming, §3). Kirwin (2018) further clarifies the distinction between Nietzsche’s negative critique of free will and his positive vision of freedom, albeit without reference to Spinoza. On Spinoza’s notion of freedom, see Della Rocca (2008, 187-192). In any case, I set aside Nietzsche’s and Spinoza’s positive visions, as this paper is concerned with the notion of freedom that Nietzsche and Spinoza dismiss, and

II.1 Spinoza on the true origins of a false doctrine

Up to this point I have aimed to clarify the reasons Nietzsche and Spinoza have for rejecting free will. I now turn to their accounts of the origins of this purportedly false and yet unquestionably captivating idea.

We have seen that Spinoza takes the doctrine of free will to be an ignorant one; it relies on faulty metaphysics. But as I have formulated things (Section I.1), Spinoza also goes a step further and holds that we have at hand an ignorant doctrine *founded on ignorance*. The second sense in which the doctrine of free will is associated with ignorance emerges from the etiology that Spinoza provides. Here Spinoza's goal is to account for the manner in which such a conviction arises in the first place. This move first appears in E1App.

Strictly speaking, the Appendix should follow the subject matter of E1, "On God"; but as Melamed (2017, 122) points out, "Spinoza cannot stop himself from noting the absurdity of the notion of free will"—an observation which could equally be made concerning Nietzsche. Spinoza somewhat anticipates the topic, which is most germane to E2 ("On the Nature and Origin of the Mind") and yet comes up for discussion throughout E for various reasons. E1App opens with Spinoza's thorough denunciation of anthropocentrism, particularly insofar as it spurs belief in divine providence, all of which Spinoza thinks is most likely to distract from the truth of his metaphysics. And in clarifying how humans come to be convinced of this key delusion—that they are at the top of an ontologically hierarchical world, in which they are fundamentally superior in some way, and which is directed by God to certain ends—Spinoza comes to explain why such creatures are thus generally under the false impression that they will freely:

Of course this is not the place to deduce these things from the nature of the human mind. It will be sufficient here if I take as a foundation what everyone

particularly how they make sense of belief in that notion given its dismissal. This shouldn't be taken to indicate that I deny Nietzsche and Spinoza have positive accounts of what freedom really consists in, nor also that either rules out, despite everything, a legitimate political use for the misguided belief in free will. I am grateful for an anonymous referee's encouraging me to emphasize these points.

must acknowledge: that all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that they all want to seek their own advantage, and are conscious of this appetite. [...] From these [commonly acknowledged states of affairs—JMY] it follows, first, that men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetite, and do not think, even in their dreams, of the causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, because they are ignorant of [those causes] (G II/78).

Spinoza readily concedes that we are conscious of our appetites—eventually he will define desire accordingly, as “appetite together with consciousness of the appetite” (E3p9s). But it’s just this consciousness that ultimately leads us astray. Because, on the one hand, we *are* conscious of our wanting, and because, on the other hand, we almost *never* know its true causes—we simply aren’t of such a nature that we easily acquire this complete knowledge¹⁹—we falsely attribute our ‘action’ to our thinking through our desires in a conscious manner. We understand our thoughts to add up to ‘deliberation’ rather than just passive awareness; thus, when we come to a ‘decision,’ we assume the causal force to emerge from this direction, i.e. from the considered volition, though properly speaking it doesn’t (or, the volition is *itself* caused by something else in a way that it shouldn’t be were it the kind of volition needed, i.e. the originator of a new chain of causes).²⁰ It’s in this sense that we “dream with open eyes” (E3p2s).²¹ Since we’re ignorant of the true causes of our desires, but—out of what I suggest we call a *folk* commitment to the PSR—nonetheless proceed to attribute a causal origin to them, we take what we are conscious of and explain things in these limited and incorrect terms.

Already here, this claim is quite strong; it’s very difficult to avoid the illusion of free will. But Spinoza later intensifies the claim, arguing that it’s *impossible* to dodge. The problem is that “men are conscious of their appetite and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined”; and “because this prejudice is innate [*innatum*] in all men, they are not so easily freed of it” (Ep. 58 | G IV/266). Such

19. I can’t account for Spinoza’s claim concerning our limited capabilities in this paper; but see the scholia to E2p40, which I discuss in Yonover (2018, 272f.).

20. As with Nietzsche, further determination of Spinoza’s views here falls outside the scope of the current paper.

21. Compare with Nietzsche’s reference to dreaming in TI, “Errors,” §4.

prejudice to ignorance is endemic to any thinking thing aware of its striving:

[C]onceive now, if you will, that while [a falling, previously struck] stone continues to move, it thinks, and knows that as far as it can, it strives to continue moving. Of course [...] it will believe that it is very free, and that it perseveres in motion for no other cause than because it wills to (Ep. 58 | G IV/266).

Given that his contemporaries are not prone to thinking the stone has free will, Spinoza's metaphor is commanding. The stone doesn't have free will, but it would think otherwise were it conscious of its persistence in its fall and unconscious of its necessary determination to that effect. Similarly, it's characteristic of the human being to be conscious of its determined strivings but also unable to explain many things. Insofar as we generally proceed to explicate things nonetheless, the necessary result is then *bad* explanation, according to Spinoza. Shortcuts abound as one aims to fill explanatory gaps in whatever manner possible. In the case of free will, one is conscious of something, and one attributes to that consciousness causality. Indeed, causality is clearly present in some form—things are happening, and necessarily caused to happen that way—yet not in the way one thinks. One's mental content isn't the originary source of one's doing. Alas, if the conditions that necessitate the genesis of the error of free will (namely consciousness paired with ignorance and, nonetheless, the urge to explain) are innate, then it can be worked on, vitally carrying us from delusion to illusion,²² but never completely resolved.

In transition to the next section, I emphasize that Spinoza thus avoids what Nietzsche argues is one of the major defects of most philosophizing. As Huddleston (2019, 145) puts this criticism, Nietzsche is troubled by the “single-minded concern with the timeless truths about what really is the case,” as most philosophy “repudiates, as unworthy of truly philosophical inquiry, this whole other range of interesting truths about *why* people come to believe what they do on these issues.” Clearly, Spinoza has a well-developed account of why we think we have free will even though we don't have it, and further consideration of the numerous other etiologies in Spinoza is overdue,²³ particularly because

22. Here I draw on a distinction made by Austin (1962, 22).

23. Until now, commentators have primarily considered Spinoza's etiological explanations of

we find him making this move from his earliest work onwards to his latest texts, e.g. from CM II 2 on durational conceptions of God to TP I 1 on why most political thought fails to get a grip on reality.²⁴

II.2 Nietzsche on the true origins of a false doctrine

Nietzsche develops a robust etiological account of the origins of our belief in the false doctrine of free will that supplements his first-order views as well. More explicitly than Spinoza, he points out that “most of our general feelings [...] excite our causal instinct [*Ursachentrieb*]: we want to have a reason for feeling this way or that—for feeling bad or feeling good” (TI, “Errors,” §4). Because of this desire, many thinkers aren’t satisfied going on without some (self-perceived) understanding of things. We are convinced that most things have their causes *but* we also think that we can come to know these without much effort. For Nietzsche as for Spinoza, this mistaken assumption leads us to repeatedly attribute causality in an unwarranted manner. For Nietzsche, we do so habitually such that memory begins to structure our understanding of the world:

Memory, which swings into action in such cases, unknown to us, brings up earlier states of the same kind, together with the causal interpretations associated with them—not their real causes (*ibid.*).

Prior ‘explanations’ become more and more readily available. After taking on a shortcut interpretation over a number of occasions, we can save even more time by recalling it when needed. The “causal instinct” that stimulates us to explain things ultimately leads to exponentially growing cognitive laziness.

But this is a coarse-grained account Nietzsche sets forth concerning bad

our misguided belief in free will and in final causes, respectively Melamed (2017), which I especially benefit from here, and Schmid (2011, 232f.), which speaks of a “genealogy” where I propose one might better talk about “etiology.”

24. With mention of Spinoza’s TP, it’s worth noting that Nietzsche planned a work whose title would follow Spinoza’s own, although references to the Latin are left out of some English translations of Nietzsche’s relevant notebook entries (see the original NF-1887,11[54] for Nietzsche’s “Preface” to an envisioned “*tractatus politicus*”).

explanation generally. In cases concerning us in particular, we especially turn to the notion of *free will*:

The faith, to be sure, that *such representations, such accompanying conscious processes, are the causes*, is also brought forth by memory. Thus originates a habitual acceptance of a particular causal interpretation, which, as a matter of fact, inhibits any investigation into the real causes—even precludes it (emphasis mine, *ibid.*).

The “conscious processes” at work here constitute our sense of what we are up to. Unbeknownst to us, however, this sense isn’t indicative of a ‘will’ which is ‘free,’ and is quite limited in scope. As Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, “the feeling of *will* suffices for someone to assume cause and effect,” and “it also suffices for someone to assume that they understand their relation” (GS §127; translation altered). But although this assumption is incorrect, we avoid great discomfort in making it. According to Nietzsche, “to derive something unknown from something familiar relieves,” since “with the unknown, one is confronted with danger”; thus “the first instinct is to abolish these painful states” (TI, “Errors,” §5). Nietzsche therefore sardonically states the “first principle” that “any explanation is better than none.” In summary:

[One] searches not only for some kind of explanation to serve as a cause, but for a particularly selected and preferred kind of explanation—that which has most quickly and most frequently abolished the feeling of the strange, new, and hitherto unexperienced: the *most habitual* explanations (*ibid.*).

The consequence of this cognitive idleness is that “one kind of positing of causes predominates more and more,” and in the cases we are currently interested in (regarding us), this turns out to be free will. In short, much as in Spinoza, we are conscious of at least some of what’s happening, but we are wrong to think that what’s happening is a result of our consciousness—to the contrary.

Importantly, this etiological account of the conviction that we may boast of free will is logically distinct from what is often understood to be Nietzsche’s genealogical account concerning the nefarious origin of this belief.²⁵ This

25. While it may sound odd to doubt whether Nietzsche develops a genealogy given that his

supposed genealogy, which could also be called a historical etiology if read as non-evaluative, has no direct counterpart in Spinoza, but also shows up in TI, which I have particularly drawn on in this section. Here Nietzsche argues that free will “is the foulest of all the artifices belonging to the theologians, aimed at making mankind ‘responsible’ in their sense, that is, *dependent upon them*” (TI, “Errors,” §7). According to Nietzsche’s etiology examined in detail within the present section, we ourselves, qua non-theologians of course, are at the root of the explanatory shortcut that results in this false doctrine. Yet now, in this case of the historical etiology or genealogy, others—if of our species—have hoisted it upon us. “[T]he doctrine of free will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is, because one wanted to impute guilt” within a certain paradigm (*ibid.*), although I can’t consider this claim here.

While the present section is focused on Nietzsche’s more psychological etiology of free will rather than this historical account—which may well be intended as a genealogy, or more likely offered as one to the naïve reader despite the fact that Nietzsche wouldn’t consider it to be so himself—I note that these two accounts in Nietzsche *can* fit right together even as I distinguish them. Insofar as we necessarily attempt to explain our doings and yet fail by any proper measure, we come to favor a way of understanding what we do that makes reference to a notion of free will (we might now call this the psychological etiology); additionally, insofar as “the theologians” were seeking power and were clever enough to know what would be effective, they turned to our susceptibility to the false doctrine of free will (perhaps the historical etiology, or, if evaluative, the genealogy). In short: Nietzsche’s priests saw this error of ours and exploited it—hence its particularly deep-seated and commanding nature by Nietzsche’s time. But clearly these two origin accounts also don’t *need* to come together, and we can easily take up one without taking up the other; furthermore, we

best-known work carries this term in its title, I don’t have the space to discuss this here. I do note, however, that Nietzsche develops even more than two accounts of the origins of the idea that we have free will. In addition to the etiology and the supposed genealogy that I mention above, Nietzsche also hints suggestively in GM II 7 at yet another proposal that deserves further commentary: “Wasn’t that philosophers’ invention, so audacious, so fateful, which was first devised for Europe back then—that of ‘free will,’ of the absolute spontaneity of man in good and evil—devised above all in order to create a right to the idea that the interest of the gods in man, in human virtue, *could never be exhausted?*” See also TI, “Reason,” 5.

need not decide on the normative stakes of Nietzsche's account featuring "the theologians" in order to discuss the psychological etiology.²⁶

To conclude this second section, I point out that the affinities between Spinoza's and Nietzsche's etiologies that I have focused on may well not be coincidental. My aim in this paper isn't to reveal influence, but to clarify an important and revealing affinity. Nonetheless, I still note first that Fischer—initially mentioned in the context of the effusive postcard that I cited in the Introduction—does a good job of presenting Spinoza's position in sections of his wide-ranging history of modern philosophy entitled "Freedom [of the will—JMY] as an example of error" and "Explanation of false cognition" (GnP 453, 458). Previous scholarship has missed the potential significance of these passages. I consider it likely that Nietzsche read them given their attractive titles, though definitive confirmation is impossible. Fischer writes:

When we fail to fully cognize a thing, there is something contained in the nature of this thing that we do *not* cognize. [...] So, for example, humans are well aware of their actions, but they are unaware of the determinate causes of these actions. Thus they assert that their actions have no determinate causes whatsoever; they hold themselves to be indeterminate and consider themselves free [...] Characteristically for Spinoza, he introduces human freedom [of the will—JMY] as the first example of error [...] Thus, Spinoza explains not only which view of things is false and erroneous, but also how this incorrect grasp of things arises out of the nature of the human spirit (ibid.).

Fischer's account is not only precise, but could have been highly stimulating for Nietzsche, who gathered most of his knowledge about Spinoza from Fischer's text and studied it on more than one occasion, excerpting from it extensively.

Second, I point to an additional historical reference that is still more decisive. In August 1881, Nietzsche ordered two of Otto Liebmann's works, including his 1880 *Analysis of Actuality: A Discussion of the Foundational*

26. Presumably, many might prefer to hold on to the psychological etiology while nixing the historical etiology or genealogy, given its apparently speculative nature and given that—if it's indeed a genealogy, as defined at the very beginning of this paper—it potentially features a controversial form of evaluation. In any case, see Forster (2019) for an important recent defense of Nietzsche's primary historical account of the belief in free will.

Problems of Philosophy. In this work, Liebmann (1880, 667) discusses explicitly—if briefly—Spinoza’s theory that

humans [incorrectly] hold their will to be free [and Spinoza compares this] to a stone that has been thrown which, suddenly coming to consciousness in flight, likewise would hold itself to be free, *because* the causes from which its course of flight proceed with necessity are unknown to it.

Was Nietzsche familiar with this passage that draws on Spinoza’s Ep. 58 (discussed in the previous section)? Indeed, according to Brobjer (2008, 152n105), Nietzsche left marks on the page and wrote in the margin “sehr gut.” This is straightforward evidence that Nietzsche was aware of Spinoza’s etiology of the belief in free will, and also appreciated it.²⁷

In short, Nietzsche has a Spinozistic tendency to thinking that we aren’t just “mired in error,” but are “drawn *necessarily* into” it (TI, “Socrates,” 5), and Nietzsche recognized at least one major case of Spinoza’s non-evaluative attempts to explain how, namely Spinoza’s etiology of belief in free will. Nietzsche is known for his emphasis on cases like “the movement of the sun, where our eye is a constant advocate for error,” but here—whether coincidentally or not—he’s on the same page as Spinoza, who notes that “when we look at the sun, we imagine it as about 200 feet away from us” (E2p35s). Humans consistently make mistakes, but these mistakes are consistently of interest to both Nietzsche and Spinoza.

III. The upshot

Some—even many—philosophers merely aim to reject, and don’t additionally try to develop detailed accounts (etiological or otherwise) of the positions to which they are opposed. Yet, as I have shown across the previous two sections, Nietzsche isn’t so unusual here that he could be called unique, as

27. To my knowledge, none of Nietzsche’s other sources on Spinoza, on which see Brobjer (2008, 159n116), deals with relevant matters. Höfding (1887) does interestingly discuss Spinoza from a psychological perspective, and specifically calls Spinoza a “psychologist” at 352, a page annotated by Nietzsche. But this happens in the context of discussions concerning the instability of the affects, i.e. discussions that are only tangentially related to the present one.

Spinoza prefigures Nietzsche in offering a highly comparable etiological account regarding free will, for instance. In other words, Nietzsche can enjoy a “togetherness” (*Zweisamkeit*) in this case as well, rather than suffering from “loneliness” (*Einsamkeit*).²⁸

I have demonstrated that Nietzsche’s and Spinoza’s arguments that belief in free will is mistaken (Section I), and their most compelling clarifications of how we come to hold such a mistaken belief (Section II), have several things in common and can be seen to safely remain at the first- and second-order level where we might like them to. Although Nietzsche and Spinoza don’t always make this easy to see insofar as they sometimes battle, or seem to battle, on both the first- and second-order fronts simultaneously, it should now be clear that their arguments clarified in Section I don’t at all depend on their proposals discussed in Section II. To the contrary, their proposals developed in Section II can be seen as following up on their views considered in Section I, verifying that we have at hand etiological accounts rather than genealogical ones, as I have defined these terms. In this final section, I now return in particular to the crucial question that I posed at the start of this paper. *Why* do Nietzsche and Spinoza both provide their second-order accounts, particularly given that they *aren’t* needed in order to show that (to stick with the example I’ve considered)

28. See the postcard quoted in my introduction. To be clear, I don’t mean to exclude with this claim other potential interlocutors for Nietzsche when it comes to etiology. Nietzsche may have shared relevant affinities with Hume, for instance, which Leiter (2015, 9) hints at, and which Hoy (1986) and especially Kail (2009) consider in some detail. Further work on Nietzsche and Rée is also needed. In short, a number of thinkers—especially those who can be considered naturalists—will offer etiological accounts of views that they find lacking. This is another reason why my distinction between genealogy and etiology is helpful; while I don’t claim that characterizing etiology as non-evaluative picks out a practice that has been entirely missed, I do claim that it picks out a practice that hasn’t adequately been distinguished, and that has played an important role in the history of philosophy. In any case, I suggest that few philosophers are so dedicated to *consistently* providing etiologies as Nietzsche and Spinoza—and I have established that Nietzsche was even enthusiastic about at least one of Spinoza’s accounts here, namely his etiology concerning free will. This makes reference to Spinoza in the context of Nietzsche most compelling. Additionally, regarding Hume, Nietzsche calls him and Locke superficial in contradistinction to several continental thinkers including Spinoza (NF-1885,36[32])—though this passage is admittedly tempered by NF-1887,9[3], wherein Nietzsche puts a similar claim in scare quotes and seems to distance himself from it by calling it a “German” evaluation.

the idea that we have free will ought to be rejected? In short, why go the extra mile to etiology?

As regarding the origins of their naturalisms, there are surely also differences of source when it comes to Nietzsche's and Spinoza's dual explanatory tendencies. I begin with Spinoza, who has only rarely been discussed from this perspective,²⁹ and propose that he is committed to providing first- as well as second-order accounts for both theoretical and practical reasons. These converge, but to initially consider the question from a strictly theoretical perspective: etiology can be seen as a straightforward result of *Spinoza's robust rationalist commitment to the PSR*—for as a good rationalist, one may be challenged to explain not only how things are and how they come to be, but also how we come to think about them as we do (rightly or wrongly). Spinoza's commitment to thoroughgoing intelligibility extends over each of these domains. Thus, if every fact has its explanation (PSR), and if someone is giving some account, then, even if their account is false, the fact of that account-giving itself will admit of explanation. If it's a fact that this explanation is there, obtaining, then it can then, at least in principle, also be explained. As a naturalist, Spinoza holds that “nature is always the same [... and thus] the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same” (E3Pref | G II/138).

Additionally, from a more practical perspective: etiology can be seen as furthering *Spinoza's ethical project*. Spinoza has a strong conception of human finitude and yet is pragmatic about this; he wants to meet us where we are, and in order to do so, he shouldn't only show us that we're wrong about something, if we are (and indeed, we often are).³⁰ He should ideally also show us how we went wrong, as this is plainly going to be a concern of ours in any case where we have really held some erroneous belief. As with comprehending the dynamics of the affects, where Spinoza acknowledges that “it will doubtless seem strange that I should undertake to treat men's vices and absurdities in the geometric style” (E3pref | G II/138), it might appear odd to investigate the origins of false philosophical positions themselves; but we make important epistemic progress

29. As I have already mentioned in my note 23, we currently lack in the literature on Spinoza an account of this consistent tendency, and meanwhile enjoy detailed analyses of only a limited number of discrete etiological accounts in Spinoza.

30. At the conclusion of his E, Spinoza notes that “nearly everyone” is missing out on salvation (E5p42s), which is intellectual in nature.

here and come to more secure convictions. Learning from our philosophical mistakes clearly leads us to a deeper form of understanding, which Spinoza holds to be our “absolute virtue” (E4p28d).

I now return to Nietzsche, who begins his most widely read text with the following magnificent claim: “We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers: and with good reason [*Grund*]” (GM Pref 1). As in the case of Spinoza, Nietzsche’s naturalism wherein necessity looms large (“and with good reason”) can similarly be seen as a theoretical inspiration for his tendency to explain the origins of our views. For Nietzsche, philosophy is by no means a special domain within the greater sphere of nature, such that the origins of philosophical positions would be untouchable by philosophical or even other kinds of explanation; it’s rather the case that philosophical positions are similar enough to any other phenomena, hence *Nietzsche’s view that the same tools will be useful across contexts*. Nietzsche’s naturalist thinking that will encourage us to give both first- and second-order accounts is especially evident in the following early passage:

[I]f one were all-knowing, one would be able to calculate every individual action, likewise every advance in knowledge, every *error*, every piece of wickedness. *The actor themselves, to be sure, is fixed in the illusion of free will; if for one moment the wheel of the world were to stand still, and there were an all-knowing, calculating intelligence there to make use of this pause, it could narrate the future of every creature to the remotest ages and describe every track along which this wheel had yet to roll. The actor’s deception regarding themselves, the assumption of free will, is itself part of the mechanism it would have to compute* (HAH 106; emphasis added, translation modified).

Why precisely should “the actor’s deception regarding themselves” be “part of the mechanism [that the all-knowing one] would have to compute”? Although, of course, Nietzsche doesn’t take himself to be in this ideal epistemic position—and although Nietzsche will go on to try to distance himself from Spinoza and allegedly reified mechanistic thinking in later works, as I emphasize in Yonover (forthcoming, §4)—the crucial idea here is that a thorough account of things will cover both first- and second-order matters, and in the same terms.

Like Spinoza, Nietzsche also provides both first- and second-order accounts for practical reasons as well. It’s not hard to imagine a potential reader’s response to Nietzsche’s rejection of free will. They might well say: ‘Fine, but how

do you explain my very strong intuition that I may rightfully boast of such a faculty?³¹ Nietzsche's account will be more powerful dialectically if he has at hand an answer (or two, or more) to this question. Nietzsche acknowledges this kind of advantage explicitly when it comes to what he calls "historical refutation" (D §95). According to Nietzsche in this passage, historical refutation allows us to carry out a "clean sweep," as we reject some idea by revealing its origins and—thereby—its value. This would of course fall under what I have called genealogy in this paper, and I have claimed that the latter differs substantially from etiology in that etiology isn't evaluative where genealogy is. But while the passage just cited does speak of rejecting some idea on the basis of its origins, which is clearly evaluative, it also importantly indicates that Nietzsche is alive to the power of second-order account-giving writ large, whether in the case of genealogy, etiology, or otherwise. While Nietzsche may maintain interest in many forms of account-giving, discussing these would extend beyond the scope of the current paper that is limited to his etiological tendencies, as I have noted. More careful work on Nietzsche's tendency to second-order account-giving is needed.³² Meanwhile, I summarize that, in addition to having naturalistic tendencies that will motivate etiological account-giving, Nietzsche is a philosophical opportunist, and thus he will turn to etiology (and more) in order to pragmatically further his ultimate project.

Recall that in the previous sections we have distinctly articulated Nietzsche's first- and second-order accounts regarding free will in that sequence (first and then second). The latter (showing how) clearly relies on the former (showing that), as only when the doctrine of free will has been shown to be worth rejecting can its misleading origins properly be established as misleading. But, for Nietzsche in the primary case we have considered, just revealing a view's origins doesn't show it to be worth rejecting, and since Nietzsche can avoid such controversy here despite his explicit interest in the dialectical possibilities of second-order account-giving, his own engagement in etiology clearly isn't

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31. Spinoza's correspondence reveals that he encountered such 'challenges' as well (e.g. Ep. 57). Still, I don't think it would be precise to say that a primary motivation for his providing not only first- but also a second-order accounts is dialectical. (Instead, again, it's a consequence of Spinoza's commitment to full-blown intelligibility, and it is part and parcel with his broader ethical aims in the *Ethics*.)
32. See especially Prescott-Couch (2015) as well as forthcoming work, despite the fact that he may find lacking my terminology of multiple 'orders.'

genetically fallacious (and to be clear: it would otherwise not be etiology, as I've defined the term). Thus, the most a careful interlocutor concerned about the genetic fallacy—wherein one, supposedly wrongly, infers the value of some view from its origins—can reasonably say to Nietzsche would be that offering an etiology is superfluous. Nietzsche would agree with this objection in a sense, insofar as he has numerous first-order reasons to reject free will, as shown in Section I.1 above. But Nietzsche would stress that second-order accounts are worth pursuing for other reasons, discussed throughout the present section. That is, the apprehensive interlocutor shouldn't worry that Nietzsche has committed the genetic fallacy insofar as he has provided an etiology—in fact, this interlocutor should rather worry that they themselves have made a mistake, insofar as they have understood a second-order account to potentially present evidence against a first-order view.

Perhaps it's because Spinoza's consistent tendency to provide second-order accounts of false views hasn't adequately been dealt with in the literature that there also hasn't been substantial confusion whereby Spinoza's etiologies are seen as prefiguring his critical rejections of some views, such that showing *how* seems mistakenly prior to showing *that*, or such that Spinoza would try to show *how* without actually showing *that* at all. Informal discussion of and even literature engaging with Nietzsche looks very different.³³ However, properly speaking, for Nietzsche the job of etiology is just to meet the demands of naturalism and access otherwise underutilized dialectical powers in order to, so to speak, strip the emperor of his clothes. This stripping isn't meant to show that the emperor is corrupt; Nietzsche shall have already done that on the first-order level anyways. Rather, said second-order stripping is meant to embarrass the emperor—and it seems likely enough that it will. Given that this latter step can sharpen the critique, if not for a small subset of observers that are gratuitously offended, Nietzsche seems to think, and assuming that one has already shown the emperor to be corrupt, why not go this further step? Although it may not convince the emperor, who will always hold on to his views if he's fully committed to doing so, it will certainly please the now-disbelieving standers by.

In other words, what Nietzsche shows at the second-order level above is how some false doctrine comes to be thought worth accepting, not that it

33. E.g. Kim (1990), Ausmus (1996), etc.

should be rejected; and his showing *how*—a consequence of his naturalism and dialectical interests—should be seen as supplementing his having shown *that*. Nietzsche often utilizes such second-order argumentation to dialectical ends, and does so on a principled basis (namely with arguments in hand against the relevant first-order doctrine, for instance the one claiming we have free will, and without putting the cart before the horse here), which has often been missed. Bringing this into view should also help us understand Nietzsche’s broader goals. It has been claimed that Nietzsche “refuses to try to convince people by somehow connecting to their way of thinking” (Horstmann in BGE xiii), but this is exactly wrong. Although Nietzsche is undoubtedly a polemical thinker—indeed, he may even be *the* polemical thinker—Janaway (2007) has helpfully clarified that this is in fact an attempt to ‘connect,’ and I emphasize that etiology has an important role to play in Nietzsche’s transformative project, too.

This result additionally stresses that etiology deserves renewed and more general attention. It isn’t so controversial as one might expect, but can rather strengthen and complete one’s account, sealing the deal, so to speak, in an appealing manner—among other things.³⁴ Nietzsche’s attraction to Spinoza has, at least partially, its origins in his recognizing as much and in his identifying

34. Dennett (2012) on the “mystery” of Chalmers is an interesting and rare contemporary case of etiology, but it’s important to note that etiology may have a less polemical role to play, too—both in the history of philosophy and today. Concerning the latter case, assume for instance individual A thinks they have shown that some view v is to be rejected (but they are wrong in thinking this). Assume also the following: individual A (1) is thoroughly convinced, as one should be, by this paper’s proposal that Nietzsche and Spinoza share a decisive etiological tendency; plus they also (2) now admire Nietzsche and Spinoza for their subtle arguments, which meet both theoretical and practical demands of their thinking; and so finally (3) think it’s important to show why v has, mistakenly, come to be thought worth accepting (though, again, individual A is mistaken in thinking that view v is to be rejected). What is likely to happen? Individual A must, technically, fail to find a compelling etiology of v from a critical perspective—because there isn’t one, because v is actually to be accepted. Although this may seem optimistic, a seriously failed attempt at etiology in the context of critique on the second-order level could rightly lead to revision on the first-order level, helpfully enabling individual A to check up on the soundness of their initial views, giving them reasons to think they need further reasons to hold their critical views. While lack of an etiology concerning a view opposed to one’s own clearly doesn’t falsify one’s view, I propose that requesting an etiology can nicely raise the explanatory bar and further the dialectic in a virtuous manner.

Spinoza's etiological tendency, though this has been missed until now. Thus, in exploring their metaphilosophical affinity, we shed light on the relationship between the two thinkers, but we also clarify aspects of Nietzsche's and Spinoza's thought individually as well.³⁵

35. I am grateful to a long list of interlocutors who have helped me think through this paper in myriad ways, but I must especially thank for their detailed feedback on earlier written versions of it Richard Bett, Michael Della Rocca, Marton Dornbach, Ken Gemes, Juan Carlos Gonzalez, Andrew Huddleston, Brian Leiter, Hao Liang, Katrin Pahl, Donald Rutherford, Martin Saar, Stephan Schmid, Elanor Taylor, and remarkable audiences at both the 2018 Hopkins-Yale Spinoza Workshop as well as a 2019 session of the London Nietzsche Circle.

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