

On the Genealogy of Morals (Zur Genealogie der Moral)
A Polemical Tract
by
Friedrich Nietzsche
Leipzig 1887

Second Essay

Section 8: Guilt, Bad Conscience, and Related Matters

To resume the path of our enquiry, the feeling of guilt, of personal obligation has, as we saw, its origin in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is, in the relationship between seller and buyer, creditor and debtor. Here for the first time one person moved up against another person, here an individual measured himself against another individual. We have found no civilization still at such a low level that something of this relationship is not already perceptible. To set prices, to measure values, to think up equivalencies, to exchange things—that preoccupied man's very first thinking to such a degree that in a certain sense it's what thinking itself is. Here the oldest form of astuteness was bred; here, too, we can assume are the first beginnings of man's pride, his feeling of pre-eminence in relation to other animals. Perhaps our word "man" (*manas*) continues to express directly something of this feeling of the self: the human being describes himself as a being which assesses values, which values and measures, as the "inherently calculating animal." Selling and buying, together with their psychological attributes, are even older than the beginnings of any form of social organizations and groupings; out of the most rudimentary form of personal legal rights the budding feeling of exchange, contract, guilt, law, duty, and compensation was instead first transferred to the crudest and earliest social structures (in their relationships with similar social structures), along with the habit of comparing power with power, of measuring, of calculating. The eye was now adjusted to this perspective, and with that awkward consistency characteristic of thinking in more ancient human beings, hard to get started but then inexorably moving forward in the same direction, people soon reached the great generalization: "Each thing has its price, everything can be paid off"—the oldest and most naive moral principle of justice, the beginning of all "good nature," all "fairness," all "good will," all "objectivity" on earth. Justice at this first stage is good will among those approximately equal in power to come to terms with each other, to "come to an agreement" again with each other by compensation—and in relation to those less powerful, to compel them to arrive at some settlement among themselves.—

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