

Formal Essay Assignment 2: Genealogies of My Morals: A Nietzschean Analysis

Assignment Overview

In Essay III of *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche argues that moral systems, especially those shaped by the ascetic ideal, do not simply tell us what is right or wrong. Rather, they interpret suffering, assign it meaning, and shape how we understand ourselves. This assignment is not about proving that your values are right or wrong.

It is about learning to analyze values as historical and psychological phenomena, similar to the way Nietzsche does it.

Some of your conclusions may feel uncomfortable. That's part of the exercise.

In this assignment, you will turn Nietzsche's method on yourself.

You will:

1. Identify a set of moral rules or values you live by (5-10)
2. Analyze their origins, functions, and psychological effects
3. Interpret them as part of a broader "moral system" that gives meaning to your life

Part 1: Articulating Your Moral Code (1–2 pages)

List **5–10 moral rules** that you personally try to live by.

These should be concrete and recognizable in your daily life. For example:

- "Always be honest, even when it's uncomfortable"
- "Put others' needs before your own"
- "Work hard and avoid laziness"
- "Don't judge others"
- "Be independent and self-reliant"

For each rule:

- Briefly explain what it means to you
- Give a short example of when it has guided your behavior

Part 2: Genealogical Analysis (3–4 pages)

Now analyze your moral rules **in the style of Nietzsche's Essay III**. This means you are not defending your values—you are *investigating* them.

Use the following guiding questions:

1. Origins

- Where might this value come from?
 - Family? Religion? School? Culture?
 - Did you choose it, or inherit it?
 - What kind of social or historical conditions might produce this value?
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2. Relation to Suffering

Nietzsche argues that moral systems give meaning to suffering.

- What kinds of suffering does this rule help you interpret or endure?
 - Does it justify sacrifice? make hardship feel meaningful? turn failure into something morally valuable?
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3. The Ascetic Ideal

The ascetic ideal values restraint, self-denial, humility, and discipline.

- Do your rules encourage self-control? guilt? self-sacrifice? suppression of desire?
 - Do they frame these as **good** or necessary?
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4. Psychological Effects

- How do these rules shape how you relate to yourself?
 - Do they produce pride? guilt? anxiety? motivation?
 - Do you ever feel like you are “failing” morally? What does that feel like?
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5. Hidden Functions

Nietzsche often asks: what does a moral system *do*, beyond what it claims?

- Do your values:

- help you feel in control?
 - give your life structure or purpose?
 - help you judge yourself or others?
 - make suffering more tolerable?
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6. Critical Reflection

Finally, step back:

- Do your moral rules **affirm your life**, or do they restrict it?
 - Do they come from strength, or from something like fear, pressure, or expectation?
 - Would Nietzsche see your moral system as:
 - life-affirming?
 - or shaped by something like resentment or the ascetic ideal?
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Part 3: Short Conclusion (1 paragraph)

Reflect on what you discovered:

- Did your understanding of your own values change?
 - Do you now see them as contingent (historically shaped) rather than universal?
 - Are there any you would revise, reject, or reaffirm?
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Requirements

- **Length:** 5–7 pages total
 - **Format:** MLA or APA
 - **Textual Support:**
 - Include at least **2–3 direct references** to Essay III of *Genealogy of Morals*
 - You may paraphrase or quote, but you must connect your analysis to Nietzsche's ideas
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Evaluation Criteria (Brief Rubric)

1. Clarity of Moral Rules (20%)

- Specific, concrete, and thoughtfully explained

2. Genealogical Depth (30%)

- Goes beyond surface-level explanation
- Engages origins, function, and meaning (not just description)

3. Engagement with Nietzsche (20%)

- Accurate and meaningful use of concepts like:
 - ascetic ideal
 - suffering
 - guilt
 - meaning-making

4. Critical Reflection (20%)

- Willingness to question one's own values
- Thoughtful, non-defensive analysis

5. Writing Quality (10%)

- Clear, organized, and properly formatted
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