

**Tracy Strong, “Genealogy, Will to Power,  
and the Problem of a Past”**  
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

**Problem:** How can we both acknowledge our past and get beyond it, not be crushed by it?

Nietzsche in *Use and Misuse of History for Life* (quoted in Strong, p. 94)

- use a “stern discipline” to implant a “new habit” in ourselves, give selves a second nature to replace the first
- this is a kind of attempt to give oneself a new past

*How is giving ourselves a second nature a matter of trying to give ourselves a new past?*

- Heidegger’s notion of time: time is a hamster wheel; past is reformed by how we move forward, keep going over what we’ve already done and make something new
- we tend to look at past in lens of present context; how we change who we are now influences how we see our past
  
- we understand the world in a particular way that is historically created; we can’t get out of that, Foucault emphasizes; Nietzsche suggests we can break out of that but it’s questionable whether we can
  
- genealogy: can’t look at the world from an objective viewpoint, we always understand it from a particular value system
- different from history in that way: genealogy more about how different value systems have been created

Strong: how might we be able to give ourselves a second nature, a new past?

- It has happened before: *Genealogy* shows that one “form of life replaced another,” and suggests that “yet a new second nature might replace that which has become our first nature” (97)
- Can we do this through “human volition”? (94)—N suggests that the will to power can possibly “will backwards” (95)
- So can the will to power give us a new nature?

**Will to power in GM II**

- involves “injury, assault, exploitation, destruction” (II.11)
- “subduing and becoming master” (II.12)
- form-giving, giving new interpretations, new directions (II.12)

**Will to power, acc to Strong (95-96)**

- continual movement, never finished or satisfied
- continual overcoming of obstacles

-- involves form-giving, interpreting, becoming master by using “oneself as the lens through which the observed is seen” (96)

But if we are caught by the past this means we just keep giving the same forms to things over and over (96)

-- How might the will to power also allow us to break from the past in some way?

### **Strong wills and weak wills**

Nobles have strong wills:

-- create values for themselves out of who they are (98)

-- character is destiny for them (100)

-- “nonslave morality is ... to do *what is one’s own*, no matter what the expectations” of others (100)

Slaves have weak wills

-- sense of self as “good” requires a negation of an opposition of something else as “evil”

-- require selves and everyone else to live up to ideals that they experience as imposed from outside themselves—as objective and universally valid

-- require that everyone have a reason for acting that comes from that common framework (99)

Slaves do not have selves of their own, their actions are not really their own (100)

*Why?*

**How can we achieve a new second nature to replace the first?** How can we get beyond our past as having slavely selves?

By becoming sovereign individuals, Strong suggests (101)

Sovereign individual, for Strong

-- keeps promises not b/c has some reason to do so that refers outside the self

-- doesn’t view fulfilling promise as a choice one could make or not

-- rather, because promise is an expression of the self in a deep way, “a declaration of what I am” (101)

-- this person keeps their promises “no matter what befalls” (102)

The sovereign individual “has earned the right and capacity to say what s/he is” (101)

The sovereign individual is not caught by the past, not stuck in slave morality

-- though is a product of its past; made possible *by* mechanisms out of which also developed slave morality

But how might the sovereign individual be a product of the will to power, in the sense that the will to power can give us a new, second nature (as she suggests on pp. 94-95)?

### ***In-class discussion of this question (and others)***

Sovereign individual has mastery over fate, mastery over self; a will to power that is not negative like slave morality, but more positive in Nietzsche’s eyes

Will to power is a continual becoming; not a process that ever finishes, always wants to go forward.

Slave morality does not go forward, rules they follow are always the same

-- but how does this fit with the idea of keeping a promise because I'm consistent over time?

Why would sovereign individuals even promise things to others? Why do they owe anything to others at all? In Tr III, the strong ones drift apart from each other while the slavely moral stick together

-- would those who are strong stick mostly to those like them, though, so they'd only make promises to people like them?

-- SI should not make promises so far into the future that they can't be sure they can keep because they may change. Promising is a declared intention of action and SI has power and agency to do keep to that intention. It's not so much a contract view of promising such that one promises to do something for another person.

-- not a matter of owing anything to others, not a relationship between two people, but fulfilling an intention; one can also make a promise to oneself in this sense.

Christina, added later: I'm still not sure how Strong means to argue that becoming sovereign individuals can be an expression of the will to power giving us a second nature. I see that it gives us a second nature, but how is becoming a sovereign individual an expression or product of using our WTP?

-- this is related to another question:

How can we become sovereign individuals? What sort of "new, stern discipline" might be needed?

Jeremy's question from last week is relevant: Can we just do this on our own as an individual achievement, or do we have to wait for social/cultural circumstances to make it possible?