

GRAEBER AND NIETZSCHE

For Graeber, Nietzsche in GM is either mistaken in attributing State social relations to the pre-State era, or he is consciously doing that in order to reveal to his readers the genealogy of their morals. Far from offering an alternative to calculating *homo economicus*, N is showing what happens if you assume HE as original social relations.

Graeber has a technical sense of "debt" as a temporary inequality which can be cancelled with no permanent bond remaining past the point of payment, vs "obligation" as that which bonds folks together in cycles w/ no expectation of cancellation. So G is right that if N is pushing a technical sense of debt back to pre-State society he has no real anthropological basis. but of course it's not clear N is trying to be anthropological about anything; the subtitle of GM after all is "A Polemic." would N really try to get to the truth of anthropological description of pre-State folks in a piece that ends with an analysis of the will to truth? etc. so we shift to the rhetorical situation in which N places himself: he's writing to 19th C folks (or is he? all the "untimely" stuff would have to go here) trying to get them to see their morality differently. if he has to do some projecting and inventing, so what?

Graeber says that Nietzsche projects modern bourgeois atomization onto pre-historic social relations. So that debt and making equal is the foundation of social relations, which doesn't fit the anthropology. Nomadic foragers and even all "human economies" function by gifts producing bonds; the point is to continue the bond via the exchange of gifts, not to equal out debts and then part ways.

But what if Nietzsche locates debt and equality at the birth of civilization? That is, the moment of the construction of States that "overcode" forager bands and introduce cash and extend wergild equivalence into all social relations?

TWO "SOCIAL CONTRACTS," SECURITY-BASED (HOBBS) AND COMMERCIAL-BASED (SMITH).

HOBBS and securitarian sociality. The state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." It's not really completely atomized; it's more like warlordism: gangs with temporary and purely utility-based allegiance.

Three ways to think state of nature in Hobbes: 1) naïve reading; 2) critical reading; 3) liberal reading.

- 1) Naïve reading. SN is a straightforward description of past: this is what it was really like in pre-State societies. Assumes widespread war as inter-group relations. (Compare Pinker; Bowles and Gintis; see Ferguson in Fry volume).

Notes on David Graeber, *Debt*

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- 2) Critical reading. SN is a retrojection: that is, projection onto past of social conditions of English Civil War; that is, projection of breakdown of State society onto pre-State past.
- 3) Liberal reading. SN is thought experiment designed to locate limits of legitimate state power relative to rights-bearing individuals.

SMITH and commercial sociality. Men are endowed with a "natural propensity to truck and barter." The idea is that economics progresses from barter to cash to credit. If the idea is that barter precedes state society, then G has anthropological claims that that is not true. So it's same issue as with N. Is S making a naïve historical claim? Is there a critical reading of S as retrojection? Is there a thought experiment reading of "natural propensity to truck and barter"?

The naïve reading of S: problems with pre-state barter necessitate coinage, which state will provide; problems with private commercial contract enforcement necessitate state formation as arbiter / enforcer.

Graeber takes up 2) the critical reading: S is retrojecting a myth based on assumptions of State commercial society: man as homo economicus, calculating man. Note that N also retrojects calculating man, equivalence-making as "the very form of thought."

What is the "thought experiment" reading of S's story?