

Brian Leiter (Chicago, USA) – *The Innocence of Becoming*

I offer an interpretation of Nietzsche's striking idea of "the innocence of becoming" (*die Unschuld des Werdens*), and offer a partial defense of its import, namely, that no one is ever morally responsible or guilty for what they do and that the so-called "reactive attitudes" are always misplaced. I focus primarily, though not exclusively, on the arguments as set out in *Twilight of the Idols*. First, there is Nietzsche's hypothesis, partly psychological and partly historical or anthropological, that the ideas of "free" action or free will, and of responsibility for actions freely chosen or willed, were introduced primarily in order to justify punishment ("[m]en were considered 'free' so that they might be judged and punished"). Call this the Genetic Thesis about Free Will. Second, there is Nietzsche's claim that the moral psychology, or "psychology of the will" as he calls it, that underlies this picture is, in fact, false — that, in fact, it is not true that every action is willed or that it reflects a purpose or that it originates in consciousness. Call these, in aggregate, the Descriptive Thesis about the Will. (Here I draw on earlier work.) Finally, there is articulation of a programmatic agenda, namely, to restore the "innocence of becoming" by getting rid of guilt and punishment based on guilt — not primarily because ascriptions of guilt and responsibility are false (though they are), but because a world understood as "innocent," one understood in terms of "natural" cause and effect, is a better world in which to live. I thus try to explain and defend Zarathustra's recommendation: "Enemy' you shall say, but not villain; 'sick' you shall say, but not 'scoundrel'; 'fool' you shall say, but not 'sinner'." Nietzsche's views are contrasted with those of important modern writers on these topics, including P.F. Strawson and Gary Watson.