

When Genealogy Is Called For

A methodological choice faces those who decide to reverse-engineer the point of a conceptual practice: should they turn directly to its present manifestation and try to discern the point of the practice in the often overwhelmingly complex and history-laden tangle of our actual ways of going on? Or should they work towards the point of the practice indirectly, via a fictionalizing and historicizing genealogy that begins with the point of simpler forms of our actual practice? And are there cases for which pragmatic genealogy is uniquely suited, so that this choice of method could be grounded in the features of the practice in question?

It is tempting to think that the genealogical approach is never truly called for, and that a more direct approach is always at least as good if not better because of its greater methodological perspicuity. Indeed, that view seems conclusively vindicated now that Miranda Fricker, once herself a proponent of pragmatic genealogy (2007), has moved to a non-genealogical form of reverse-engineering which she describes ‘as a more straightforward and transparent way of achieving the very same explanatory pay-off’ (forthcoming, 4) that pragmatic genealogies purport to deliver.

What motivates Fricker’s move towards a non-genealogical sibling of pragmatic genealogy is the hope of reaping its explanatory pay-off without having to resort to its singular mixture of historicizing and fictionalizing. This mixture has indeed proved off-putting, and many have failed to see much of a point in giving this kind of genealogy (E. Fricker 2015; Hannon 2019, 52–3). Even those sympathetic to genealogy have tended either to endorse the historicizing while seeing no point in the fictionalizing (Dutilh Novaes 2015; Hacking 2005, 168; Humeres 2018; Koopman 2009; 2013, 71; Papineau 2019; Rorty 2002), or to endorse the fictionalizing while seeing no real need for the historicizing (Blackburn 2013b; Craig 2007; Pettit 2018, ch. 1; Price 2011; Weinberg 2006; M. Williams 2013).

Hence Fricker’s attempt to offer a way around these worries: she proposes an interpretation of pragmatic genealogy on which its genealogical dimension is really a metaphor for explanatory priority, so that pragmatic genealogy can be viewed as an extravagant way of describing and ordering our actual practice (Fricker 1998, 2010b, 2016b, forthcoming). We can then safely dispense with the genealogical dimension: we can focus directly on a paradigm case—on a real instance of our present practice which we are willing to regard as displaying its most basic point—and try to make sense of other forms of the practice as derivatives of the paradigm case. This is Fricker’s method of *paradigm-based*

explanation. In her paradigm-based explanation of blame, for example, the paradigm case is *Communicative Blame*: *A* wrongs *B* and *B* tells *A* with feeling that *A* is at fault. The point of this, according to Fricker, is to align *A*'s and *B*'s moral sensibilities (2016b, 167). She then seeks to derive from this an understanding of other types of blame, such as self-blame or blame of absent third parties, by showing how they serve the same overarching point in different ways—all without fictionalizing or historicizing.

By dispensing with the genealogical dimension while claiming to deliver the very same pay-off, Fricker of course renders acute the question of what, beyond colour and vividness, genealogies can add, and whether they are ever preferable to paradigm-based explanations. Why should philosophers interested in identifying the points of our current conceptual practices take the detour through genealogical fictionalizing and historicizing if the same pay-off can be achieved more directly? If even former practitioners of the method are jumping ship, why bother with pragmatic genealogy? This is a crucial question for the method of pragmatic genealogy, and one that the pragmatic genealogists themselves have failed to address in sufficient depth.

Accordingly, my aim in this chapter is to show when and why, if we want to understand our conceptual practices in terms of their point, we have reason to use pragmatic genealogy as I propose to understand it. I begin by developing a taxonomy of four increasingly complex forms of reverse-engineering which allows us to make sense of genealogical fictionalizing and historicizing as genuine and well-motivated *elaborations* of paradigm-based explanation. I then argue that it would be a mistake to replace pragmatic genealogies with paradigm-based explanations across the board, because pragmatic genealogy is called for in two kinds of cases: when dealing with *self-effacingly functional* practices, paradigm-based explanation gets a grip, but misses important aspects that pragmatic genealogy is better suited to capturing; and when dealing with *historically inflected* practices that lack a paradigm case or an obvious connection to generic human needs, paradigm-based explanation fails to get a grip altogether; by achieving a grip even here and helping us achieve a comprehensive view of what our practices do for us, pragmatic genealogy proves a valuable addition to our methodological repertoire.

3.1 Fictionalizing and Historicizing

Pragmatic genealogy is best understood as a genuine elaboration rather than a circuitous presentation of paradigm-based explanation. It goes beyond paradigm-based explanation in two respects: (a) it constructs *models*, in particular fictional prototypes of our practices; and (b) it introduces a *dynamic dimension* to help us understand how one gets from these prototypes to the practices we actually have. These are the two senses in which pragmatic genealogy can rightly be said to

fictionalize and historicize. But what exactly do we mean by ‘fictionalizing’ and ‘historicizing’?

The fictionalizing of pragmatic genealogy is nothing mysterious; as I suggested in Chapter 1, it is best interpreted as the fictionalizing of model-building, which is to say that pragmatic genealogies diverge from reality only in that they involve one or several forms of idealization: ‘Aristotelian’ idealization by abstraction, i.e. the stripping away of non-essential features (Cartwright 1989); ‘Galilean’ idealization by distortion, i.e. the operation with assumptions known to be false (McMullin 1985); or the mixture of both which is known as ‘caricature’ (Frigg and Hartmann 2017). But the beauty of models lies in their power to provide us with a better understanding of their target system despite and even because of these abstractions and distortions. Various ways of accounting for this power have been proposed.¹ One such account, presented in terms that are particularly useful for our purposes by Alexander Prescott-Couch (2017, manuscript-b), holds that models isolate the *dependence structure* of a target system from the noise in the system in order to facilitate understanding of and practical engagement with that system. As Prescott-Couch argues, models of natural phenomena paradigmatically aim to display *causal* dependences while cutting out causal interferences in order to facilitate prediction and manipulation; models of arguments or views, by contrast, paradigmatically aim to display *rational* dependences between different propositions while cutting out mistakes and confusions in order to help us understand, communicate, and deliberate with others.

The dynamic models of pragmatic genealogies, I suggest, paradigmatically aim to display *instrumental* dependences: the ways in which conceptual practices are instrumental to the satisfaction of concept-users’ needs. Idealization is of value here already because considering simplified prototypes of our practices in an uncluttered state of nature helps us break through the veil of familiarity to gain a sense of the more generic human purposes they serve. Idealization also cuts out noise, such as infelicitous conditions in which practices are temporarily prevented from serving a point. And once we add more historically situated needs to the model to do justice to the complex history of which our practices are the product, idealization helps us maintain a good overview by displaying the successive layers of practical significance in a neat and organized manner. This in turn informs our practical engagement with our practices: it motivates their cultivation if and when they prove worth having, and their abandonment if and when they prove pointless or worse.

Pragmatic genealogies proceed in two steps, with the first involving idealization, the second de-idealization: first, render plausible a hypothesis about why creatures like us would go in for an idealized, prototypical model of the practice

¹ See Weisberg (2013) for an overview.

we actually have—the ‘proto-practice’; second, explain how we got from the proto-practice to the practice we actually have—the ‘target practice’. The first step involves coming up with a hypothesis about the original point of the proto-practice and constructing a model offering a perspicuous representation of the proto-practice’s instrumental relation to the needs of creatures like us. The model does this by showing how, already at this level of abstraction, the interplay of certain needs in that schematic environment generates a basic problem to which the proto-practice forms a salient solution. While there is some feedback between the processes of hypothesis formation and model construction—playing around with the model can suggest hypotheses and narrow down the search space—the hypothesis about the original point can initially seem fairly arbitrary. But this is not a problem, because it is the task of the subsequent genealogy to retroactively vindicate the initial hypothesis by demonstrating its fruitfulness and predictive and explanatory power.² The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Optionally, the pragmatic genealogy can also outline the *mechanism* by which the proto-practice might arise without presupposing possession of the relevant concepts in the originators: it might show how the proto-practice can be expected to emerge quite naturally, without much foresight or understanding on the part of those involved.

The pragmatic genealogist must then identify in what respects, if any, the proto-practice still differs from the target practice we actually have, for it is reaching something like the practice we know that provides what in the theory of models is called the *external validation* of the model (Kusch 2013). The second part of the genealogy must thus explain how one gets from the proto-practice to the target practice. To this end, the model must be de-idealized in the direction of our cultural situation by (a) describing the proto-practice’s *primary elaboration*, i.e. its development driven by the practical pressures internal to the model, such as the foreseeable problems that the original solution offered by the proto-practice will bring in its wake; and (b) describing the proto-practice’s *secondary elaboration*, i.e. its development driven by increasingly socio-historically local needs and the new problems that come with them. Both the primary and the secondary elaboration can be additive rather than substitutive, so that as needs are added, the proto-practice develops new forms alongside the old.³ This helps account for the internal diversity and the criss-crossing relations of family-resemblance in the practice. In Hume’s felicitous phrase, it presents the practice as having been ‘warp’d into as many different forms’ (*T*, 3.2.5.14) as our needs require.

Insofar as the dynamic models of a pragmatic genealogy successively incorporate ever more socio-historically local needs, they move beyond the categorical

² Hannon (2019, ch. 5) compellingly defends Craig against the arbitrariness objection as raised by Rysiew (2012) and Gerken (2017, §9.2.b).

³ See Kusch (2009b, 2013) for an account of Craig’s genealogy along these lines.

divide between *hypothetical* and *historical* genealogy:⁴ they constitute a hybrid form that is still clearly an idealized model rather than a description of actual history, but that also genuinely historicizes the target practice by exhibiting it as the product of a complex historical accumulation of needs. The model is a receptacle for the insights of more orthodox historiography. But the model displays these insights in a format that is tailored to the purposes of philosophy. History informs the dynamic models of pragmatic genealogy so that these can in turn inform philosophical reflection and evaluation.

Finally, the charge that genealogy adds nothing but vividness itself already grants something important, namely that by combining fictionalizing and historicizing to lend its model the form of a genealogical narrative, the method does indeed add vividness. Doubly so, in fact: because it is a *narrative*, and because it is a narrative about how something is *made* or *constructed*. It is a pedagogical platitude that we understand an idea more easily and achieve a deeper and firmer intuitive grasp of its implications when it is couched in terms of a narrative rather than a list of abstract propositions. That effect is further magnified when the narrative is genealogical—when it is substantially about how human beings get from a stage in which some cultural phenomenon is absent to a stage in which it is present.⁵ Genealogies do not just offer diagnoses of what something now does or what its function is. They get there via the story of *how something is made*, and there is a long tradition in philosophy of maintaining that what we understand best is what we understand how to make.⁶ Nietzsche revives a version of this thought when he claims that genealogy can make sense of what is hard to analyse and impossible to define, as does Craig when he suggests that a narrative of conceptual synthesis can succeed where conceptual analysis failed.⁷

With this understanding of fictionalizing and historicizing in place, we can articulate a typology distinguishing four types of reverse-engineering that brings out just how pragmatic genealogy forms an elaboration of paradigm-based explanation:

⁴ The divide is particularly clearly articulated in Gardiner (2015).

⁵ Williams (2002, 20) defines genealogy as being about the genesis of cultural as opposed to natural phenomena, and as we shall see in Chapter 4, Hume's genealogical explanations grow out of his distinction between artificial and natural virtues. Even if we resist the claim that genealogies necessarily concern cultural phenomena, it is certainly a typical feature of them.

⁶ Hobbes takes that line, for example, to argue for our privileged epistemic relation to geometric figures and social conventions: it is only what we made that we can know a priori or demonstrably, but once we realize that 'we make the commonwealth ourselves', as Hobbes put it, it can be seen to follow that 'civil philosophy is demonstrable' (1839, VII, 184); see Pettit (2008, 19–22). Fichte tries to exploit this idea to develop a scientific method for philosophy—the method of construction (Schmid forthcoming). But perhaps the most influential expression of this idea is Vico's principle that *verum et factum convertuntur*—the true and the made are convertible; see Berlin (2013, 39–57).

⁷ See Nietzsche (*GM*, II, §13) and Craig (1993), especially the chapter entitled: 'Analysis? No, thanks'.

- (1) *paradigm-based explanation*: identify an actual paradigm case of conceptual practice X, hypothesize its point, identify the needs it answers to, and use this instrumental relation to certain needs to elucidate practice X. (1) is exemplified by Fricker's account of blame (2016b).
- (2) *prototype-based explanation*: construct a model of target practice X, hypothesize the point of this proto-practice, identify the needs it answers to within the model, and use the model to identify analogous and dis-analogous instrumental relations in target practice X. (2) has the character of Wittgensteinian explanations in terms of fictional objects of comparison whose similarities and dissimilarities to our practices are meant to elucidate them.⁸
- (3) *generic pragmatic genealogy*: on the basis of an initial hypothesis about the original point of target practice X, construct a dynamic model showing why creatures like us would go in for a prototypical version of the target practice by identifying maximally generic needs generating a basic problem to which the proto-practice forms a salient solution; then consider the proto-practice's elaboration in response to further generic needs anticipatable from within the model; the closer this brings us to some generic form of the target practice, the better the genealogist's claim to having identified its practical origins and what it does for us. (3) is exemplified by Craig's genealogy of the concept of knowledge (1990).
- (4) *pragmatic genealogy tailored to a socio-historical situation*: on the basis of an initial hypothesis about the original point of target practice X, construct a dynamic model showing why creatures like us would go in for a prototypical version of the target practice by identifying maximally generic needs generating a basic problem to which the proto-practice forms a salient solution; consider the proto-practice's elaboration in response to further generic needs anticipatable from within the model; then incorporate into the model increasingly socio-historically local needs which history tells us arose, and consider the proto-practice's elaboration in response to these more local needs; the closer this brings us to our local form of the target practice, the better the genealogist's claim to having identified its practical origins and what it does for us now and around here. (4) is exemplified by Williams's genealogy of truthfulness (2002)

⁸ 'Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language—as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language' (2009, §130). And also: 'It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of words' (2009, §5).

and by his construction of a political concept of freedom tailored to our needs (2005c).⁹

Using this typology, the guiding concern of this chapter can then be re-described as being to understand when and why the move from (1) to either (3) or (4) is called for.

The answer I develop in the remainder of this chapter is that pragmatic genealogy proves its worth in two kinds of cases: when practices exhibit *self-effacing functionality*, and when they are so *historically inflected* that they lack a paradigm case or an obvious connection to generic needs. I shall argue that in the first kind of case, paradigm-based explanation gets a grip, but pragmatic genealogy proves the more powerful tool because it can add some insights that paradigm-based explanation misses; and in the second kind of case, only pragmatic genealogy gets a grip, thus earning its keep in the methodological repertoire.

3.2 Self-Effacing Functionality

Getting at the point of things is a powerful way of making sense of them, as attested by the pervasive interest in functional accounts shown and encountered by a wide array of disciplines. Yet functional accounts can seem to be at odds with our understanding of the phenomena they claim to illuminate, and there is an equally pervasive suspicion that we distort phenomena by forcing them into a functional mould. The result is often a stand-off between those who are impressed by the functionality of our practices and those who would defend them against what they perceive as undue reductionism. In its most extreme form, this stand-off opposes the *pure functionalist*, who insists that a practice can and should be exhaustively understood in terms of its subservience to our needs, to the *anti-functional*, who insists that these functional considerations are neither here nor there—the motivations for engaging in the practice are non-instrumental, and once we have spelled out what these are, there is nothing more to be said.

In virtue of its *hypothetical* and *dynamic* elements that distinguish it from the *actualist* and *static* approach of paradigm-based explanation, pragmatic genealogy is able to achieve a better grip on an important type of practice that gives rise to this stand-off between pure functionalists and anti-functionalists: practices exhibiting self-effacing functionality.

⁹ For a related taxonomy, see Gardiner (2015). Gardiner's 'practical explication' corresponds to my (1), while her 'hypothetical genealogical teleology' corresponds to my (3). The present taxonomy differs from hers in two respects: it adds (2) as an intermediate type of reverse-engineering; and it adds (4) as a kind of hybrid between historical and hypothetical genealogy, which, on Gardiner's taxonomy, are distinct enterprises.

What does it mean for functionality to be effaced? Let us approach this question by setting out from a practice whose functionality is not effaced, but in plain view: the practice of queuing. Functionality plainly comes in at three levels: (a) the practice is functional *from a social point of view* in that it is instrumental to the satisfaction of collective needs and interests—it solves a coordination problem arising from the serial distribution of goods, namely the problem of determining the order in which people are served; (b) its functionality is central to people's *motivation* in engaging in it—it is also functional *from the individual point of view* and this provides an instrumental reason to queue; and (c) its functionality contributes to *explaining* why people engage in it. As a result, the claim that queuing is a means of achieving peaceful coordination raises no eyebrows, because it seems adequate at every level.

Now suppose that new, non-instrumental motivations to queue arose: motivations to queue not as a means to an end, but just because that is the kind of action it is. If these motivations were sufficiently widely internalized and reproduced, they might come to sustain the practice on their own. The practice would still be functional, but its functionality would recede into the background. In such cases, there is functionality, but the functionality *just ain't in the head* (to use Hilary Putnam's phrase). Participants in the practice are only dimly aware of it, if at all. This is what it is for functionality to be *effaced*—a term that helpfully ranges from being visible, but not as the primary motivation, to having dropped out of sight altogether. To understand *self-effacing* functionality, it then only remains to distinguish it from *contingently* effaced and from *necessarily* effaced functionality.

Where functionality is *contingently effaced*, participants are not primarily motivated by awareness of functionality, but contingently so—it is an accident of history that new motivations for engaging in the practice now loom larger in the participants' minds. If the participants were to be reminded of what the practice does, awareness of the practice's functionality would be fully compatible with confident engagement in the practice. Think of locally functional eating habits that adventitiously came to be primarily sustained by religious motives while losing nothing of their functionality.

Where functionality is *necessarily effaced*, participants are not primarily motivated by awareness of the functionality, and such awareness is radically incompatible with confident engagement in the practice: once the participants realize what the practice does, their commitment to it is instantly undermined. Think of the cases familiar from Critical Theory, where a practice only benefits a narrow class of people while being detrimental to the majority.

Where functionality is *self-effacing*, it is a functional requirement on the practice's functionality that participants not be primarily motivated by awareness of that functionality, but when they acquire awareness of it, this awareness is fully compatible with—and may indeed encourage—confident engagement in the practice on any reasonable conception of it. This last qualification is required

because one's conception of what the practice must look like to merit confident engagement may be so demanding as to exclude its performing such mundane offices as the satisfaction of human needs if it is to be worthy of respect. (Then there will be a tension between one's confident engagement in the practice and awareness of its functionality; but this may be taken to speak against holding so demanding a conception rather than against engaging in the practice.) A self-effacingly functional practice is thus functional, but only insofar as it is sustained by motives that are autonomous, i.e. not conditional on the practice's functionality in any given case. The practice must outrun its functionality in order to be functional. When this condition is met, the functionality of the practice will tend to show up, if at all, only as a secondary consideration among the contents of the participants' deliberation. But this, crucially, will be so for purely functional reasons, and not because the function is objectionable to the participants. The functionality is not just *effaced*, but *self-effacing*.

An example of a self-effacingly functional practice is *loyalty* to a group or cause: it is functional (let us assume) in that it stabilizes cooperative behaviour in ways that ultimately benefit most participants; but our motives in being loyal are not conditional on its fulfilling that function, and it is only because they are unconditional in this way that loyalty can fulfil its function. If loyalty is understood in purely instrumental terms, it will be mere window-dressing where it aligns with individual interest, and irrelevant where it does not: where the interests of the individual anyway align with the interests of the group, loyalty is functionally redundant; where they diverge, loyalty thus understood will not bring the individual to forfeit personal gain for the sake of the group and pull his or her weight in the cooperative venture; free-riding will be more attractive. And since the same is true for every individual in the group, the benefits of loyalty will be lost altogether. Hence, loyalty is unable to make a useful difference so long as it is understood in purely instrumental terms. To be functional at all, it must be more than just functional.

Self-effacing functionality is interestingly different from the two other forms of effaced functionality. It is not *contingently* effaced functionality, because there are good functional *reasons* why the functionality is effaced. At the same time, it is not *necessarily* effaced either, because the functionality can fully come back into view upon reflection without destabilizing the practice. Keeping one eye cocked on the functionality of the practice may even help sustain it. And if our confidence in a practice is wavering, highlighting the practice's functionality does not further weaken our confidence, but rather strengthens it by showing it to be *reasonable* confidence as opposed to the mere confidence of bigotry or fetishism.¹⁰

¹⁰ The contrast between reasonable confidence and the confidence of bigotry is drawn in passing by Williams (2010). But see Fricker (2000), Hall (2014), and Queloz and Cueni (forthcoming) for further discussion.

More precisely, a practice exhibits self-effacing functionality if it meets the following conditions:

- (1) *Functionality*: the practice is functional, i.e. it makes a useful difference to the lives of those who engage in it.
- (2) *Autonomy*: the practice is sustained by motives that are not conditional on its functionality in a given case.
- (3) *Dependence*: the practice can be functional only insofar as it satisfies (2), i.e. it would be unstable, redundant, or otherwise ineffective if sustained merely by motives conditional on functionality in a given case.
- (4) *Explanatory connection*: the practice fulfils (2) because of (3), i.e. there is an explanatory connection between its autonomy and its dependence on autonomy.

We can call this special structure that is constitutive of self-effacing functionality the FADE structure (Functionality, Autonomy, Dependence, and the Explanatory connection between the latter two). In a practice exhibiting FADE, functionality will indeed fade from view. It will either be overshadowed by autonomous motives carrying more authority than instrumental considerations or it will be completely absent from the participants' consciousness. The FADE structure explains why this is so.

Why is pragmatic genealogy more adept at handling this kind of structure than paradigm-based explanation? After all, paradigm-based explanation *can* get a grip on self-effacingly functional practices. It is no objection to paradigm-based explanation that it is—in Strawson's (1974, 25) phrase—*one-eyed* in its focus on the practice's instrumental aspects. Sometimes we need to close one eye in order to achieve focus—to look beyond motivations to the overall point of the practice. This does not bar us from acknowledging that the participants' motives for engaging in the practice are of a non-instrumental nature.

But because paradigm-based explanation limits itself to taking an actualist and static view of our practice, it is more likely to miss the *functional connection* between the instrumental and the non-instrumental aspects of the practice, which explains *why* functionality is effaced. Paradigm-based explanation can discern functionality in a practice in which the participants are not motivated by functionality, and it can ask whether this is because awareness of the practice's function would be incompatible with engagement in it; but where the function is not obviously objectionable, the method does not by itself lead one to distinguish self-effacing from contingently effaced functionality.

Indeed, if we are very strict about the idea that paradigm-based explanation is concerned only with the actual, it cannot draw that distinction. The pressures on functionality to efface itself cannot be observed from actual practices alone. It takes some counterfactual thinking to see that *if* the practice were *not* sustained by

non-instrumental motives, the practice *would* be unstable. And it is only once we see this that we understand the *connection* between the functional and non-functional aspects of the practice: that we cannot abandon the non-functional aspects of the practice without also abandoning its functional aspects. Recognizing this involves contemplating a hypothetical, purely instrumentally motivated prototype and understanding the functional requirements on it to become non-instrumentally motivated.

By contrast, pragmatic genealogy allows us to understand *why* the functionality of the practice is effaced. We can construct a model of the target practice in which the functionality of the practice is entirely transparent—not only to us, the consumers of the model, but also to the agents *in* the model—and acts as the primary motivation to engage in the practice. By considering such a model, we can determine whether purely instrumental motivations would suffice to stabilize the practice. If not, this indicates that we are dealing with a self-effacingly functional practice, and that the *pure* functionality of the model is necessarily fictional: in reality, non-instrumental motivations are required to sustain the practice.

Pragmatic genealogy thus enables us to grasp why an actual configuration is as it is by constructing a fictional counterpart lacking some feature and seeing why this feature would be bound to develop. Even when it does not describe how the practice actually developed,¹¹ it can show that the non-instrumental understanding of the practice by the participants is a *counterfactually robust* feature of the practice. These modal insights into how it is impossible, possible, or necessary for creatures with certain needs to live yield dividends on two fronts. On the one hand, they have implications concerning whether it would be possible to pare away the non-instrumental aspects of a functional practice once we have identified its point. If the non-instrumental motivations are functional responses to the instability of the purely functional proto-practice, it would be misguided to eliminate them. On the other hand, the modal insights provided by pragmatic genealogy can bolster our sense of a practice's necessity and thereby defend the way we go on against what Amia Srinivasan (2011, 2019, manuscript) calls *genealogical anxiety*: the worry that the origins of our practices will turn out to be a source of discredit, or the more general worry that they will prove rationally contingent in being the result of forces that fail to vindicate them against possible alternatives, and hence fail to provide reasons why we should prefer this way of going on over possible rivals.

In sum, pragmatic genealogy deals fairly even-handedly with the stand-off between pure functionalists and anti-functionalists. Its treatment of self-effacing functionality allows function-first approaches to get a grip even in areas that are not obviously receptive to them: although self-effacingly functional practices

¹¹ See Queloz (2020) and Pettit (1996, 2000) for further discussion of how functional explanations can be informative even when they do not explain how something actually came about.

include non-instrumental aspects, *this fact itself* is shown to have a functionalist rationale: we reap the benefits of something like loyalty only if we are bloody-minded about it rather than benefit-minded.¹² But that same treatment also brings out the poverty of pure functionalism: an account that assumed that loyalty was functional but insisted on understanding it only in terms of instrumental motivations would be at a loss to explain its functionality. For the same reason, it would be unwise to suggest that we pare away the non-instrumental aspects of a self-effacingly functional practice once we discern its point. To put a new gloss on an old quip: ‘Of course pragmatism is true; the trouble is that it doesn’t work’.¹³

3.3 Nietzsche’s Challenge: Historical Inflection and Local Needs

We now turn to the second kind of case in which pragmatic genealogy proves a valuable addition to our repertoire. Here a methodological remark of Nietzsche’s provides a useful entry-point. It is well known that Nietzsche takes a dim view of philosophers’ historical sense. But in the *Genealogy*, he rebukes the ‘English genealogists’ specifically for thinking ahistorically in assuming that there is an *instrumental connection* between our practices and timeless human needs.¹⁴ Both we and our practices change, and philosophers will be led astray if they ignore the history that lies between the ‘Darwinian beast’ and the ‘modern milquetoast’.¹⁵ This amounts to a challenge—call it *Nietzsche’s challenge*—for reverse-engineering. We might try and reverse-engineer the point of practices in an experimental spirit, to see how far we get on the assumption that the connection obtains. But Nietzsche’s challenge is that the connection may well *not* obtain, because we or our practices have changed, and then reverse-engineering becomes—in more than one sense—pointless.

By putting a spotlight on the possibility of historical change, Nietzsche’s challenge throws two features of reverse-engineering into relief. As long as it is understood as operating only with generic needs, two conditions must be fulfilled for reverse-engineering to work:

- (i) The practice at issue must bear some instrumental relation to certain generic human needs—call this the *Generic Needs Condition*;
- (ii) A paradigm case of the practice must be available that exhibits this relation—call this the *Paradigm Case Condition*.

¹² A phrase coined by Williams (2002, 59).

¹³ The quip is attributed to Sidney Morgenbesser (Williams 2002, 285n14).

¹⁴ Nietzsche (*GM*, P, §4, I, §2, II, §§12–13). Nietzsche’s relation to ‘English’ genealogy is a topic of Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Nietzsche (*GM*, P, §7).

Nietzsche's challenge puts pressure on both conditions, since a great deal of change at the level either of our practices or of our needs may well result in practices fulfilling neither the *Generic Needs Condition* nor the *Paradigm Case Condition*. Consequently, my aim in this section is to show how approaches seeking to reverse-engineer the functions of our conceptual practices can deal with Nietzsche's challenge, and how pragmatic genealogy in particular helps us do so. I shall first discuss the case in which the *Generic Needs Condition* is fulfilled while the *Paradigm Case Condition* is not; then the case in which it is uncertain even whether the *Generic Needs Condition* is fulfilled; and, lastly, the case in which neither condition is fulfilled.

3.3.1 Constructing Paradigm Cases

Consider the case in which the *Generic Needs Condition* is fulfilled while the *Paradigm Case Condition* is not: a practice still bears some instrumental relation to generic human needs, but it lacks a paradigm case exhibiting that relation. The problem for reverse-engineering is then not that the connection between the practice and generic needs is severed by historical change. The *Generic Needs Condition* still holds. But the function once discharged by a single practice may now be jointly discharged by a constellation of different practices into which the original practice has differentiated or by which it was replaced.¹⁶ Or the problem may be that the *Generic Needs Condition* holds all too well—such a multiplicity of functions may have been layered into a practice that a paradigm case becomes difficult to identify. Where repurposing only 'obscure' previous functions, as Nietzsche puts it (*GM*, II, §12), practices can accumulate a rich historical deposit. There may then not be such a thing as *the* current point of a practice, because repeated alteration and repurposing have layered such a multitude of functions into the practice that neither a paradigm case nor an overall point can be recovered from the resulting mess. A good example—Nietzsche's own—is the practice of punishment:

the previous history of punishment in general, the history of its exploitation for the most diverse purposes, finally crystallizes into a kind of unity that is difficult to dissolve, difficult to analyze and—one must emphasize—is completely and utterly *undefinable*. (Today it is impossible to say for sure *why* we actually punish: all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically summarized elude definition; only that which has no history is definable.) (*GM*, II, §13)

¹⁶ A possibility that Williams pointed out in an interview about *Truth and Truthfulness*, where he noted that virtues can not only be reinforced but also replaced by institutions (Baker 2002). The function originally discharged by some virtue might then still be discharged, but the virtue itself would no longer be needed.

If we look back to the various functions a practice has discharged, we can discern ‘how the elements of the synthesis change their valence and rearrange themselves accordingly, so that now this, now that element comes to the fore and dominates at the expense of the remaining ones, indeed in some cases one element (say the purpose of deterrence) seems to cancel out all the rest of the elements’ (*GM*, II, §13). But when a practice’s function only *seems* to cancel out previous functions, a complex and internally diverse deposit can form which defies not only analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, but also elucidation by means of a paradigm case exhibiting its core function. Nietzsche goes on to list eleven other functions layered up in the practice. ‘Punishment’, he concludes, ‘is overladen with functions of all kinds’ (*GM*, II, §14). In dealing with practices of this sort, paradigm-based explanation will either fail to get a grip on the practice or distort it by projecting a functional uniformity onto it which it does not possess.

Might one not try to capture the multiplicity of functions in a practice through multiple paradigm-based explanations? But where no single paradigm case stands out, identifying several only compounds the problem and must quickly become controversial and even arbitrary. Even if it can be done, it raises the question how the various functionality ascriptions relate to each other: which are competing hypotheses, and which are complementary? And how exactly do the complementary ones relate to each other? The concept of knowledge is another example of a conceptual practice that has invited multiple hypotheses concerning its function. Apart from Craig’s contention that it serves to flag good informants and the numerous elaborations of that hypothesis (Greco and Hedden 2016; Hannon 2013, 2015, 2019; Henderson 2011; Kusch and McKenna 2018; McKenna 2014, 2015), its function has been thought to be to signal that inquiry is at an end (Kappel 2010; Kelp 2011; Rysiew 2012), to identify propositions we can treat as reasons for acting (McGrath 2015), to provide assurance (Lawlor 2013), to distinguish between blameless and blameworthy behaviour (Beebe 2012), or to honour the subject of knowledge attributions (Kusch 2009b).¹⁷ What is missing is some kind of *master model* that indicates and integrates compatible functional hypotheses, giving us a controlled way of deciding which are basic and which are after-thoughts.

Does pragmatic genealogy fare any better? On the interpretation defended by Fricker, it does not.¹⁸ What makes the two methods equivalent on Fricker’s view is that she interprets pragmatic genealogies as not only starting out from a prototype, but as maintaining also that the prototype is really the core of our actual practice: ‘The key is to see that . . . what is claimed about the State of Nature—for instance, that it contains a concept or practice with such and such features—is

¹⁷ See Kusch and McKenna (2020, 1062), Gerken (2017, chs. 3 and 9), and the essays in Greco and Henderson (2015) for an overview.

¹⁸ See Fricker (1998, 2010b, 2016b, forthcoming).

really a claim about what is basic (or “core”) in our actual concept or practice’ (Fricker forthcoming, 7).¹⁹ On this interpretation, the two methods stand on an equal footing, because the *temporal* priority articulated by pragmatic genealogies is a metaphor for *explanatory* priority within our actual practice. The time axis of such genealogies serves as an expository device, organizing internally diverse practices by isolating explanatorily basic features and successively bringing further, increasingly complex but recognizably derivative features into view. This interpretation licenses collapsing temporally extended genealogies into non-temporal explanations as long as there is some other way of highlighting the explanatorily basic—which is precisely the task shouldered by Fricker’s paradigm cases.

Fricker’s interpretation combines two ideas to form what, in Chapter 1, we called the *actualist* interpretation of pragmatic genealogy: (a) the narrative movement in such a genealogy does not represent a temporal movement from our conjectured hominin past to the present, and is therefore far removed from the influential conception of genealogy as ‘history, correctly practised’; (b) the primitive form of a practice considered in the state of nature actually stands for a paradigm case of our actual practice, and hence the genealogical derivation of the less basic from the more basic can be safely collapsed into a description of our actual practice.

This interpretation of pragmatic genealogy undeniably has much going for it. By reading genealogy as involving neither an inference from fiction to reality nor one from past to present, it alleviates worries about how fictional state-of-nature stories can tell us anything about reality, and it deflects the charge of the genetic fallacy, i.e. the alleged mistake of deducing claims about the present features of something from claims about its genesis (a charge I return to in Chapter 9). The main drawback of this actualist interpretation, however, is that it makes pragmatic genealogy just as vulnerable to Nietzsche’s challenge as paradigm-based explanation: both, on this reading, move from one element in our practice that they present as explanatorily and practically basic to other elements that they present as derivative. This means that they both depend on there being, in our actual practice, a paradigmatic core form which is functional given generic human needs and which can give us an explanatory and critical grip on the practice. On the actualist interpretation, paradigm-based explanation and pragmatic genealogy stand and fall together.

But if, as I have suggested, we interpret pragmatic genealogy as *hypothetical* and *dynamic* rather than as actualist and static, it *does* fare better than paradigm-based explanation when paradigm cases are missing. We can join Fricker in maintaining (a), that the narrative movement in a genealogy does not represent a temporal

¹⁹ See also Fricker (2008, 47).

movement from our conjectured hominin past to the present, while denying (b), that it is a movement from paradigmatic to non-paradigmatic forms of our actual practices. Understanding genealogy instead as a movement from a strongly idealized model of a practice to a less idealized model of it—as a movement of de-idealization in the direction of our actual cultural situation—has the advantage that it does not depend on a paradigmatic form of the practice being extant: where history has failed to provide us with a paradigmatic form of the practice highlighting its functional relation to generic needs, pragmatic genealogy can *construct* one. We can organize and elucidate the complex amalgam that is our target practice using a simplified proto-practice. And we can then also model how we might have gotten here from there, where ‘there’ does not refer to some datable moment of emergence, but to an abstractly characterized basic predicament of which our present situation is a socio-historically local manifestation.

On this *dynamic model* interpretation, a pragmatic genealogy can serve as a master model that helps us *place* and *relate* the various further developments and acquired functions of the practice ‘in a philosophical and historical space’ (Williams 2005c, 76); not the three-dimensional space of our current practice, as the actualist interpretation has it, but the four-dimensional space along the quasi-historical time axis of the dynamic model. The genealogical model helps us situate, contextualize, and account for each of the different functions a practice acquired in different contexts, thereby imposing a form of order on the irreducibly varied synthesis that Nietzsche describes. The measure of the quality of that model will be its ability to make sense of the internal diversity of the practice and of the multiplicity of functions laid up in it.

Genealogy helps us identify, relate, and place the generic and local needs to which our conceptual practices answer. If one were specifically and *exclusively* interested in whether a practice serves some particular and highly local need, one would not need genealogy. But the pragmatic genealogist’s ambition is to offer us a framework in which to situate and think about the dizzying variety of needs that have gone into shaping our concepts, and given this ambition, it makes sense to determine, in a peirastic or experimental spirit, whether we can illuminatingly start with generic predicaments that any creatures like us would be likely to face, even if we expect any such predicament to have in fact undergone a complex historical elaboration. Otherwise, we risk missing the most basic and invisible because all too familiar points served by some of our concepts. As Wittgenstein remarks, the ‘aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity’ (2009, §129). There are many important things that our ideas do for us which are buried deep within the historical deposit of our thinking. Pragmatic genealogies can help us excavate these old but no less important functions laid up in our ideas. That is where it is useful to ask: ‘Of what is this thinking an enriched version?’ (Heal 2017, 124). Contemplating a simple prototype and its point for creatures that are too indeterminate to feel

familiar can help us ‘penetrate the blinding veil of ease and obviousness’ that hides the workings of our own concepts from us.²⁰ Then, however, the pragmatic genealogist inquires into why these concepts were driven to *develop beyond* their most generic form by progressively adding ever more local needs into the picture. Adding these less generic practical pressures corresponds to enriching anthropological reflection with a posteriori socio-historical knowledge about more specific practical exigencies that certain concept-users came to face. We enrich our model of the most basic predicament to which a given concept answers with our knowledge of more local problems.

An important consequence of this interpretation of pragmatic genealogy is that making sense of a target practice using a proto-practice does not commit us to the further claim that the proto-practice is now extant as the *core* of the target practice. Craig (2007, 191), admittedly, seems to think both that his concept of proto-knowledge sheds light on the concept of knowledge *and* that it forms the core of our actual conceptual practice, but this has been deemed an unnecessary weakness in his account (Kusch 2011). Williams also sometimes uses the imagery of a core and its historical variations (2005c, 76; 2014g, 407), but whether he would be prepared to point to any actual instance of our practice of truthfulness as its core is less than clear; the core imagery seems to refer to what is central to his *explanation* rather than to the actual practice. The important point for our purposes, however, is that on the dynamic model interpretation, we can coherently maintain all of the following claims: first, that given certain highly generic needs that humans have anyway, they will need to see a certain function discharged, and we can illuminatingly construct a prototype of what a practice discharging it might look like; second, that this function is being discharged by our current practices; and third, that there is no one core form of our practice that directly corresponds to the prototype and conspicuously discharges that function. Just because some prototypical form of the practice is explanatorily basic does not mean that it is, or has ever been, extant.

The idiom of core and periphery or historical variation can be misleading in that regard, as it encourages thinking of the evolution of our conceptual practices on the model of a *snowball*: as the original core practice rolls down the slopes of history, it accumulates additional layers, but the core is still there by the time it ends up at our feet.²¹ This is an improvement on the ‘English genealogists’ that Nietzsche rebukes for simply *equating* the current function of our practices with their original function. But we can take the injunction to think historically about functions a step further. Just as a snowball may encounter an obstacle that leads it to break up into pieces rolling down different paths and growing into different new shapes, a practice may differentiate into a *family of related practices* in

²⁰ The phrase is Austin’s (1961, 128).

²¹ The analogy hails from Kusch (2011, 19), who calls this the ‘avalanche model’ of genealogy.

response to a differentiation in the needs of concept-users. Between them, the practices may still *jointly* discharge the original function; but there may now be nothing that deserves being called the ‘core’.

Whether or not such ‘core’ or paradigm cases are available cannot be determined a priori, and the value of paradigm-based explanation is best appreciated if we understand it as an attempt to find out: we hypothesize a candidate paradigm case in order to *see* whether a plausible paradigm case is available. But if not, I have been arguing, all is not lost for the reverse-engineering project. We can fall back on pragmatic genealogy and construct a prototype together with an account of why our actual practice differs from it.

3.3.2 The Roots of Continuity

So far, we have assumed that the *Generic Needs Condition* obtains: that the practices at issue still partly bear an instrumental relation to generic human needs. But why, once we are mindful of the wide array of contingencies and reinterpretations of which our practices are the product, should we remain confident that this is so? Nietzsche’s challenge reminds us that we must be wary of the philosopher’s foible of mistaking a failure of imagination for an insight into necessity.

Here also pragmatic genealogy proves a valuable addition to our toolkit. A pragmatic genealogy can be seen as an *argumentative chain* underscoring the assumption that a practice is a functional solution to some predicament we are bound to face on a continuous basis. It can reveal complicated instrumental relations between our practices and our needs even where we do not know they are there, and where the blank assertion that they obtain would not by itself be enough to convince.

The developmental narrative of a pragmatic genealogy can be thought of as a derivation of needs from needs: humans have a need for *A*, hence a need for *B*, . . . , hence a need for *X*, where *X* is the prototypical form of the target practice. This gives pragmatic genealogy an edge over approaches that merely point out how a practice is functional relative to one particular set of needs—how blame serves a need for moral alignment, say, or how talk of probabilities serves a need to communicate and adjust our confidence in the occurrence of events. In the genealogical mode, we can present these fairly sophisticated needs as growing out of more primitive needs, and these out of even more primitive ones, until we reach what our audience is most likely to be willing to regard as uncontroversial needs—needs that are uncontroversially the genuine article (and not merely interests masquerading as needs) and that human beings uncontroversially have anyway. This enables us to derive needs we are *not* disposed to think we continuously have (e.g. a practical need to value accuracy and sincerity intrinsically) from

needs we *are* disposed to think we continuously have (e.g. a practical need for information and cooperation). When a function is being ascribed to something we did not necessarily expect to be functional at all, tracing out a chain of practical demands linking these high-flown abstracta to mundane concerns can make us more comfortable with the idea that these are functional responses to enduring challenges. Few will balk at the suggestion that our practice of thinking in terms of the concept *water* answers to enduring human needs; but the suggestion that concepts like *truth*, *knowledge*, or *justice* do the same may sound at first rather like the Panglossian claim that the bridge of the nose is there to rest glasses on. Pragmatic genealogy can help alleviate these worries by deriving needs we did not know we had from needs we knew we had, thereby revealing even the seemingly transient to be rooted in enduring human concerns. In this sense, the state of nature can act as a representation of the *roots of continuity* in the demands we face.²²

Of course, the enduring presence of a need for something does not yet suffice to secure its emergence. Nor is it always sufficient for a single individual to realize that a practice would constitute a solution to a problem, for that solution may be inaccessible through individual instrumental reasoning—for instance, because it requires solving a coordination problem, or because it involves the essentially social process of constructing an intrinsic value.²³ But the genealogical perspective also allows us to show that the needed practice *could in fact have arisen* without implausible saltations. Genealogical explanation can add to our understanding by sketching mechanisms through which such obstacles might be overcome.

A pragmatic genealogy can thus do more to earn its conclusion than a non-genealogical ascription of functionality. If we accept, first, that the generic needs that operate as premises in the story are needs we share in some form; second, that the derivation of less primitive needs is valid; and third, that there are ways in which these might have driven us to develop certain practices in response, then we shall have been given a *reason* to expect there to be, in our actual cultural situation, some practice, or perhaps a constellation of practices, that is instrumental to the satisfaction of generic needs—and therefore a reason to think that the *Generic Needs Condition* obtains.

3.3.3 Incorporating Local Needs

The deepest engagement with Nietzsche's challenge, finally, is required when both the *Generic Needs Condition* and the *Paradigm Case Condition* cease to obtain. This will be the case to the extent to which practices are local outgrowths of

²² I return to this line of thought in Chapter 9.

²³ Williams (2000, 156n6).

history that do not bear illuminating relations to generic human needs. Must reverse-engineering, and in particular pragmatic genealogy, lose all explanatory force once the connection to generic needs gives out, or can it still provide illumination even then?

It can—by augmenting our understanding of our practices, insofar as they fail to be amenable to elucidation by generic needs, with an understanding in terms of their point given *local* needs. We can ask what our practices do for *us* in particular, in contrast to other human beings that have lived.

It is tempting to think that local needs lie beyond the ken of reverse-engineering, because as a survey of the pragmatic genealogical tradition will show, pragmatic genealogists tend to make a point of grounding their explanations in highly generic and humanly basic needs. Does this imply a methodological restriction to universal or generic needs? Craig explicitly denies this:

Any society that has a well-developed language . . . consists of creatures that have reached a considerable degree of mental complexity. Any number of different sorts of need may, for all we know to the contrary, follow in the wake of this complexity; so there is no a priori reason to think that we are tied by methodological principles to considering only needs of the very basic kind that I have actually tried to restrict myself to. (1990, 4)

Understanding our conceptual practices as tools responding to our needs should not commit us to understanding them only in terms of generic needs. Such a focus on the needs we have anyway to the exclusion of needs we acquired or lost in the course of history would again be vulnerable to the Nietzschean charge of ahistorical thinking. It would make the method's explanatory basis unnecessarily narrow, thus either restricting the method's explanatory scope or rendering the method reductive if one insisted on explaining everything in terms of that narrow basis: to view all our conceptual practices as tools helping us cope with needs we have anyway would be to fall into the kind of reductive naturalism that assumes, as Robert Brandom (2011, 140) puts it, that we could safely dismiss Romantic poetry by asking what it has ever done for our biological fitness.

Rightly understood, pragmatic genealogies are not methodologically restricted to reverse-engineering the point of practices in light of universal or generic needs. They invite us to start off with the most general needs we can find that still bear an illuminating relation to the practice under investigation, but there is no reason why they cannot get a grip on socio-historically local practices by relating them to local needs. This is a strategy that is also open to paradigm-based explanation. But there are two respects in which the method of pragmatic genealogy proves particularly apt at dealing with local needs.

First, while paradigm-based explanation only relates current practices to current needs, pragmatic genealogy can exploit the fact that the connection between

needs and practices also holds dynamically: it additionally relates *changes* in conceptual practices to *changes* in needs. This equips it to answer Nietzsche's challenge by incorporating historical change into its dynamic model and explaining why ideas underwent further elaboration at certain junctures in history. Pragmatic genealogy thereby becomes able to explain both why we have an idea at all, in some form or other, and why we have it in the specific form it now has around here. Of course, *what* needs we find ourselves with will to some extent only be causally intelligible as the result of contingent historical change. But conceptual practices that answer to contingent needs are no less necessary for that. Insofar as the needs we contingently have generate real problems that necessitate solutions, the conceptual practices providing those solutions will be necessary for us. Given certain needs, however local, certain conceptual practices could not viably be different. They provide necessary solutions to contingent problems.

Second, pragmatic genealogy can offer what we might call a *comprehensive view* of a conceptual practice's relation to needs: one that brings out *both* the respects in which it serves generic needs and the respects in which it serves increasingly local needs while also *placing* and *relating* these aspects of the practice in its dynamic model, thereby situating them in a historical and philosophical space. It situates them in a historical space insofar as it shows which aspects of the practice are the product of highly general facts about us, and which are the product of more particular historical circumstances. And it situates them in a philosophical space insofar as it shows their relative importance and ineluctability. Do they answer to needs we can critically endorse? Are these needs we cannot but have, or are they needs we can eradicate by changing our circumstances? As Colin Koopman has pointed out in connection with Deweyan pragmatism and Foucauldian genealogy, pragmatist inquiry tends to uncritically take as given the problems to which it sees practices as answering; by thematizing the genesis of the problems themselves, genealogy can redress that deficit (2011, 537). The same is true of pragmatic genealogy: by tracing problems to the needs from which they arise and situating these needs along a genealogical dimension, we move from a merely technical stance bent on problem-solving to a more critical stance capable of assessing whether these are problems we should be trying to solve.

The value of such a comprehensive view is that it safeguards us from two ways in which our view of a conceptual practice can be unhelpfully simplistic: by understanding the practice exclusively as a response to generic needs when it also answers to local needs; or by understanding it exclusively as a response to local needs when it also answers to generic needs. Both kinds of simplifications should be avoided, because we ideally want to understand all the respects in which a practice answers to needs—for explanatory purposes, of course, but quite particularly also for critical or revisionary purposes. If we fixate on generic needs that make a practice seem well worth having, we run the risk of missing the respects in which its local form also serves local needs that may be

problematic, and to that extent give us reason to alter or abandon the practice. Conversely, when we find that a practice serves local needs we find problematic, and to that extent have reason to alter or abandon the practice, this insight had better go along with a grasp of the extent to which the practice also serves generic needs of a very basic and easily overlooked sort, because this will show us how we should not go about tampering with our conceptual practices by alerting us to what we stand to lose.

Pragmatic genealogy, then, does much to help us meet Nietzsche's challenge. First, whereas paradigm-based explanation depends on practices including a suitably paradigmatic core form that is conspicuously subservient to human needs, pragmatic genealogy can construct a proto-practice. Second, pragmatic genealogy need not blithely assume that generic human needs are still informative, but can offer an extensive argument for this which might also reveal instrumental relations between our practices and our needs that we did not know were there. And third, insofar as Nietzsche's challenge undermines attempts to elucidate our practices in light of generic needs, pragmatic genealogy can still get a grip by drawing on local needs. In light of Nietzsche's challenge, paradigm-based explanation thus turns out not to be enough, which means that the fictionalizing and historicizing of genealogy cannot entirely be dispensed with. We need pragmatic genealogy, and we need to conceive of it not as a baroque form of paradigm-based explanation, but as a genuine elaboration of it that expands the repertoire of the reverse-engineer with dynamic models capable of situating generic and local needs in a historical and philosophical space.

While this chapter has focused on how pragmatic genealogy can add something to Fricker's approach, I believe that many of the considerations advanced here go wider. I suggested in Chapter 2 that Cambridge pragmatists like Blackburn and Price sometimes talk of offering 'genealogies'—of explaining 'how it came about' that we go in for such things as moral and modal discourse. But they draw no very sharp distinction between giving a paradigm-based explanation and giving a pragmatic genealogy.²⁴ Consequently, they leave unanswered the question of when and why a Cambridge pragmatist should opt for a genealogical as opposed to a non-genealogical approach. If the considerations advanced in this chapter have any truth to them, there is much to encourage the thought that here, too, past explanatory successes might be retained and new ones achieved by enriching one's repertoire with the dynamic models of pragmatic genealogy. Pragmatic genealogy can help us explain why certain practices outgrow their own functionality, and it can help us achieve a grip even on practices that do not revolve around neatly functional core cases. This is but a small part of what we need to

²⁴ Blackburn (2002a, 103; 2013b, 75); Price (2011, 12, 17–19, 29, 231; but see 320 for a brief discussion of contingency).

be able to do if we are to make sense not just of generic humanoids wielding purely functional tools, but of ourselves.

Having achieved a clear, if abstract, understanding of the method and its rationale, we can now turn to the history of philosophy to flesh out that understanding with concrete examples of the method. Chapter 4 locates the roots of the tradition of pragmatic genealogy in the eighteenth century, and more particularly in David Hume's treatment of ideas as remedies to inconveniences.