**Master and Slave Moralities**

Nietzsche described himself in many ways (see lecture one). One of those was “immoralist”:

1. I am by far the most terrible human being who has ever existed; this does not mean that I will not be the most charitable. I know the joy of destruction to a degree proportionate to my strength for destruction, - In both cases I obey my Dionysian nature, which does not know how to separate doing no from saying yes. I am the first immoralist: which makes me the destroyer par excellence. –

(Ecce Homo, ‘Why I am a Destiny, §2)

Nietzsche was clearly a critic of morality. **But what is “morality”?**

Nietzsche claims to identify a number of characteristically moral principles:

*Altruism vs egoism*

Nietzsche often complains about moral culture’s commitment to ethical altruism, and its opposition to ethical egoism

1. ‘The apparently crazy idea that a man should esteem the actions he performs for another more highly than those he performs for himself, and that this other should likewise…has a meaning: namely, as the social instinct resting on the valuation that the single individual is of little account, but all individuals together are of very great account provided they constitute a community with a common feeling and a common conscience…My idea: goals are lacking and these must be *individuals*!’

(*The Will to Power* §269)

1. ‘The value of egoism depends on the physiological value of him who possesses it: it can be very valuable, it can be worthless and contemptible. Every individual may be regarded as representing the ascending or descending line of life. When one has decided which, one has thereby established a canon for the value of his egoism…’

(*Twilight of the Idols* Expeditions of an Untimely Man, §33)

For more see Bernard Reginster ‘Nietzsche on Selflessness and the Value of Altruism’ *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17.2, 2000

*Exclusivity*

Morality to accord exclusive status to its values; the moral standard is the most or the only important evaluative standard.

1. ‘*Morality in Europe these days is the morality of herd animals*: - and therefore, as we understand things, it is only one type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other (and especially *higher* ) moralities are or should be possible. But this morality fights tooth and nail against such a “possibility”…it stubbornly and ruthlessly declares “I am morality itself and nothing else is moral”

(*Beyond Good and Evil* §202)

*Agent neutrality*

Moral values are the same for everyone, what is right and good for one is right and good for all.

1. One more word against Kant as a moralist. A virtue needs to be our own invention, our own most personal need and self-defense: in any other sense, a virtue is just dangerous. …'Virtue', 'duty', 'goodness in itself', goodness that has been stamped with the character of the impersonal and universally valid - these are fantasies and manifestations of decline… The most basic laws of preservation and growth require the opposite: that everyone should invent his own virtues, his own categorical imperatives.

(*Antichrist* §11)

But Nietzsche’s most famous analysis of morality focuses not on its principles, but on how those principles were developed, and the purposes they were designed to fulfil. The analysis is his genealogy of morality.

**The creation of good and evil**

Nietzsche’s story runs as follows. “Good” did not always mean morally good. In pre-moral civilization concepts of good and bad tracked a range of non-moral qualities, depending on the society. Examples include: good = truthfulness; good = powerful; good = rich. There is a pattern to this: terms for good always identify a trait of the ruling class, and terms for bad traits that distinguish those excluded from that class.

1. … in these words and roots which denote 'good', we can often detect the main nuance which made the noble feel they were men of higher rank. True, in most cases they might give themselves names which simply show superiority of power (such as 'the mighty', 'the masters', 'the commanders') or the most visible sign of this superiority, such as 'the rich', 'the propertied' (that is the meaning of arya; and the equivalent in Iranian and Slavic). But the names also show a typical character trait: and this is what concerns us here. …

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay 1, §5)

Social hierarchy and stratification of classes generates *ressentiment* in the subordinate “slave” class. *Ressentiment* is the term Nietzsche uses to describe a pent-up frustration, felt in reaction to a disadvantage or hardship that one is forced to endure and has no way to eliminate.

A third social class gives the slaves a way of dealing with their *ressentiment*. This is the priestly class. The priests, Nietzsche maintains, are a clerical form of the ruling noble type. The priestly caste value purity, distinguishing good and bad in terms of pure and impure. This difference between the warrior-like nobles and the priests grow over time until it reaches an impasse, in which they vie for control and social power.

1. If the highest caste is at the same time the clerical caste and therefore chooses a title for its overall description which calls its priestly function to mind, this does not yet constitute an exception to the rule that the concept of political superiority always resolves itself into the concept of psychological superiority (although this may be the occasion giving rise to exceptions). This is an example of the first juxtaposition of 'pure' and 'impure' as signs of different estates; and later 'good' and 'bad' develop in a direction which no longer refers to social standing. In addition, people should be wary of taking these terms 'pure' and 'impure' too seriously, too far or even symbolically: all ancient man's concepts were originally understood - to a degree we can scarcely imagine - as crude, coarse, detached, narrow, direct and in particular unsymbolic. From the outset the 'pure man' was just a man who washed, avoided certain foods which cause skin complaints, did not sleep with the filthy women from the lower orders and had a horror of blood, - nothing more, not much more! And yet the very nature of an essentially priestly aristocracy shows how contradictory valuations could become dangerously internalized and sharpened, precisely in such an aristocracy at an early stage; and in fact clefts were finally driven between man and man which even an Achilles of free-thinking would shudder to cross. From the very beginning there has been something unhealthy about these priestly aristocracies and in the customs dominant there, which are turned away from action and are partly brooding and partly emotionally explosive, resulting in the almost inevitable bowel complaints and neurasthenia which have plagued the clergy down the ages; but as for the remedy they themselves found for their sickness, - surely one must say that its after­ effects have shown it to be a hundred times more dangerous than the disease it was meant to cure? …

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay 1, §6)

These circumstances precipitate a “slave revolt” in values. The slave revolt creates a new pair of values to rival the values of the prevailing noble values or “master morality”. These new values – those of “slave morality”- are **good and evil**.

Good and evil are effectively a reversal of the masters’ distinction between good and bad – what the masters have been calling good, the priests now call evil, and what the masters have been calling bad, the priests now call good.

**Problem:** Nietzsche’s rhetoric indicates he thinks very poorly of slave morality, and it seems to support his immoralism. But whence Nietzsche’s objection to slave morality, given:

1. both master and slave moralities are just inventions, and not factual;

For example:

1. There are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena . . .

(*Beyond Good and Evil*, §108)

1. You have heard me call for philosophers to place themselves beyond good and evil, to rise above the illusion of moral judgement. This call is the result of an insight that I was the first to formulate: *there are absolutely no moral facts*

(*Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Improving’ Humanity, §1)

(b) both master and slave moralities are efforts to establish dominance, and thus can both be seen as expressions of power.

**Solution:** the difference lies in what motivates the creation of master and slave moralities:

* Active/passive: master values are created freely and spontaneously, slave values are a reaction to external circumstances
* Pride/shame: master values express high self-esteem, slave values are an effort to hide away from shame
* Affirmation/negation: masters naively affirm life and existence, slaves resent life

(10) …Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside', 'other', 'non-self': and this 'no' is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance - this essential orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself- is a feature of ressentiment: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, - its action is basically a reaction. The opposite is the case with the noble method of valuation: this acts and grows spontaneously, seeking out its opposite only so that it can say 'yes' to itself even more thankfully and exultantly, - its negative concept 'low', 'common', 'bad' is only a pale contrast created after the event compared to its positive basic concept, saturated with life and passion, 'we the noble, the good, the beautiful and the happy!'…

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay 1, §10)

**When exactly does Nietzsche think all this happened?**

(more on genealogy in week 5. For now…)

Nietzsche does not (as is commonly suggested) identify the slave revolt in a single society or historical moment. It doesn’t seem to be dated.

And yet he also claims that the history of morality is (roughly?) coextensive with the history of Christianity

1. The truth of the first inquiry is the birth of Christianity: the birth of Christianity out of the spirit of ressentiment, not, as people may believe, out of the ‘spirit’—a countermovement by its very nature, the great rebellion against the dominion of noble values.

(Ecce Homo, ‘On the Genealogy of Morality’)

Is this a tension or contradiction? Not necessarily. It can be true both that slave morals do not pre-date Christianity, and that the slave revolt is not to be found at one specific historical moment.

A “historically flexible” reading: the slave revolt first happened with the advent of Christianity, but happens again at any moment when *ressentiment* becomes creative and people reinvent moral values for the purposes Nietzsche associates with the slave revolt.

Hence Nietzsche’s worries about the “slavish” instincts behind modern democracy, egalitarianism, the French revolution, feminism, and socialism.

Hence also the possibility – and danger – that Nietzsche’s analysis might apply not just historically, but also today.

**Additional reading relevant to this week’s lecture:**

* Maudemarie Clark, ‘Nietzsche’s Immoralism and the Concept of Morality’ in *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* Oxford University Press, 2015
* Philippa Foot, ‘Nietzsche’s Immoralism’ in *Moral Dilemmas: and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy* Oford University Press, 2002
* Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy,* Oxford University Press, 2007, chapter 6
* Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on ‘Morality’*, Oxford University Press, 1999, chapter three
* Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy,* University of Chicago Press, 2010,chapter four
* Bernard Williams ‘Nietzsche’s Minimalist Moral Psychology’ *European Journal of Philosophy* 1(1) 4-14 (1993)

**Next week: Moralism and guilt**

**Main relevant texts:**

*On the Genealogy of Morality* Essay 2

**Additional Admin**

1. Lecture schedule this term:

Week 1 – Nietzsche the immoralist

Week 2 – Suffering and tragedy

Week 3 – Master and slave moralities

Week 4 – Moralism and guilt

Week 5 – Genealogy

Week 6 – Freedom and fate

Week 7 – Will to power

Week 8 – Truth and perspectivism

1. Reading group: *The Gay Science*

Fridays 12-1pm, weeks 2 - 8

Faculty of Philosophy Graduate Common Room

Schedule:

24 Jan: The Gay Science, Book 1, sections 1-21  
31 Jan: The Gay Science, Book 1, sections 22-51  
7 Feb: The Gay Science, Book 2, sections 52-91  
14 Feb: The Gay Science, Book 2, sections 92-107  
21 Feb: The Gay Science, Book 3, sections 108-152  
28 Feb: The Gay Science, Book 4, sections 276-311  
6 Mar: The Gay Science, Book 4, sections 312-342

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