**Moralism and guilt**

Familiar understanding of moralism: deploying moral values principally for the purpose of criticising others. We can accuse people of moralism in two ways:

*Moraliser*: a person more interested in the satisfaction of criticising others than the upholding of moral standards

*Moralist*: a person whose excessive attachment to moral values results in criticism that is intrinsically wrong, regardless of the motivations for the criticism

Wrong how?

1. Overdemanding puritanism, setting moral standards too high
2. **Moral dogmatism, refusing to allow anything that is remotely morally objectionable, including that which may be redeemed by its non-moral value**

This last kind of moralism is that which most often prompts Nietzsche’s immoralism

***Nietzsche’s critique of morality***

The problem with morality is that it thwarts or prevents things that have non-moral value, sometimes great non-moral value. But what exactly is it Nietzsche thinks we’re missing out on in modern moral culture? (A series of answers given in the literature surveyed briefly…)

*Denial of value pluralism*: perhaps the problem is simply that morality unjustifiably maintains that its value standard is the only value standard

(Something like this, although a bit more complicated than this, is suggested in Raymond Geuss, ‘Nietzsche and Morality’ *European Journal of Philosophy* 5(1) 1997)

But Nietzsche often goes much further than this. The problem is not that its meta-ethics excludes the theoretical space for other values. It is that *there are* things of value that morality holds back or destroy

*Denial of life*: Nietzsche sometimes invokes something he calls “life” as a value standard distinct from morality. Things that are either valuable for life or in accordance with this standard called life are thwarted by morality:

1. We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign. The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates, the type.

(Beyond Good and Evil, 4)

The importance of life lies not just in its preservation. Nietzsche associates the value of bare preservation of survival with, among other objects of his ire, socialism and utilitarianism (see e.g. *Beyond Good and Evil* 62).

Rather, life for Nietzsche is valuable when it develop, enhances, or overcomes:

1. ‘And life itself confided this secret to me: “Behold,” it said, “I am that which must always overcome itself. ” ’

(*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II, 12)

(See Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, (London: Routledge) chapter 6)

*Denial of human excellence*: very often Nietzsche complain that morality holds back great people, his so-called “higher types”.

1. “the requirement that there be a single morality for everyone is harmful precisely to the higher men; in short…there is an *order of rank* between people, and between moralities as well "

(*Beyond Good and Evil* 228)

1. “the religions that have existed so far (which have all been *sovereign*) have played a principal role in keeping the type “man” on a lower level”

(*Beyond Good and Evil* 62)

See also e.g. *Ecce Homo* III 5, *On the Genealogy of Morality* Preface, 6, and *Beyond Good and Evil* 197.

“Higher” in virtue of what? Possibly creativity:

1. The firmness of your moral judgement could be evidence of your personal wretchedness, of lack of a personality; your ‘moral strength’ might have its source in your stubbornness – or in your inability to envisage new ideals…We, however, want to *become who we are* – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves

(*The Gay Science* 335)

Thwarted by a herd mentality intrinsic to morality (see e.g. *Beyond Good and Evil* 201)

(See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* Harvard University Press, chapters 5-7)

Possibly a perfectionist picture of the good life, a collection of excellences that together comprise a “higher type” of life. For some (e.g. Thomas Hurka) Nietzsche’s perfectionism centres around power

(See Thomas Hurka, ‘Nietzsche: Perfectionist’ in Leiter and Sinhababu *Nietzsche and Morality* Oxford University Press, 2007)

**An axiological problem**

Nietzsche both denies that values are intrinsic to any object, action, or character traits and yet makes quite a number of evaluative claims

Many have tried to solve this issue by attributing a meta-ethical stance to Nietzsche. Some positions in the literature:

Nietzsche is an **error theorist**: an error theorist thinks that evaluative or normative claims such as “lying is wrong” try to refer to something that doesn’t exist, and thereby are systematically untrue, or erroneous.

Niezsche is a **fictionalist**: a fictionalist denies value realism but nonetheless endorses a creative process of seeing or regarding the world as if it were valuable despite the fact that values are no more than illusions

(See e.g. Nadeem Hussain 2007, “Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche’s Free Spirits”, in Leiter and Sinhababu, *Nietzsche and Morality* 2007: 157–91.)

Nietzsche is a **constructivist:** A constructivist maintains that normative facts are grounded in the evaluative attitudes of the relevant person or people. Thus the sentence “lying is wrong” might be true, but it depends on who is saying it or considering whether lying is wrong.

(See e.g. Alex Silk 2015. “Nietzschean Constructivism: Ethics and Metaethics for All and None”. Inquiry, Special Issue: Nietzsche’s Moral Psychology, 58(3): 244–280.

For criticism of Silk see Thomas Lambert ‘Nietzsche on creating and discovering values’ *Inquiry* 62(1) 2019)

[Or we might think Nietzsche doesn’t really have a meta-ethics: Andrew Huddlestone has argued that the above readings are wrong to think that Nietzsche gives up entirely on value realism because he doesn’t have a particular meta-ethical position

See Andrew Huddlestone 2014 ‘Nietzsche’s Meta-axiology’ *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22(2) 322-43]

**A moral psychological problem (the genealogy of conscience)**

So how is moralism – inhibiting the flourishing of great and noble types – possible? And how do slave values “infect” the moral psychology of the masters?

Nietzsche’s answer is that morality creates another mechanism alongside the values of good and evil: moral conscience. His account of the development of the concept of conscience is more complicated than the genealogy in the first essay. It can broken down into three parts.

*Part One – the history of debt institutions*

Historically, debt institutions have included clauses that allow creditors to inflict physical pain and torture on defaulting debtors.

Violence against debtors is not punishment; it is compensation for lenders who are not repaid what is owed. The currency of that compensation is a satisfaction of their instincts for cruelty, specifically a satisfaction drawn from the knowledge that they are entitled to enact their cruelty (i.e. a feeling of power).

1. …Throughout most of human history, punishment has not been meted out because the miscreant was held responsible for his act, therefore it was not assumed that the guilty party alone should be punished: - but rather, as parents still punish their children, it was out of anger over some wrong that had been suffered, directed at the perpetrator, - but this anger was held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its equivalent which can be paid in compensation, if only through the pain of the person who injures. And where did this primeval, deeply-rooted and perhaps now ineradicable idea gain its power, this idea of an equivalence between injury and pain? I have already let it out: in the contractual relationship between creditor and debtor, which is as old as the very conception of a 'legal subject' and itself refers back to the basic forms of buying, selling, bartering, trade and traffic.

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay II, 4)

1. …The equivalence is provided by the fact that instead of an advantage directly making up for the wrong (so, instead of compensation in money, land or possessions of any kind), a sort of pleasure is given to the creditor as repayment and compensation, - the pleasure of having the right to exercise power over the powerless without a thought, the pleasure 'de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire', the enjoyment of violating: an enjoyment that is prized all the higher, the lower and baser the position of the creditor in the social scale, and which can easily seem a delicious titbit to him, even a foretaste of higher rank. Through punishment of the debtor, the creditor takes part in the rights of the masters: at last he, too, shares the elevated feeling of being in a position to despise and maltreat someone as an 'inferior' - or at least, when the actual power of punishment, of exacting punishment, is already transferred to the 'authorities', of seeing the debtor despised and maltreated. So, then, compensation is made up of a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty.

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay II, 5)

This history establishes two principles for Nietzsche:

*Justice-equivalence*: wrongdoings correlate to an identifiable compensation that is equivalent to the extent of the wrongdoing (Nietzsche does not endorse this principle but attributes it to non-specific historical societies)

*Deserving suffering:* suffering that is inflicted on wrongdoers proportional to the extent of their wrongdoing is in accordance with justice i.e. deserved

*Part Two – Civilisation and Repression*

Instincts like the instinct to cruelty evident in the history of debt are restricted and repressed in civilised societies, specifically those societies governed by a state.

With no external outlet, these instincts “turn inwards” and cause internal psychological suffering. Thus repression is responsible for universal suffering, to some degree, within civilization. It is also responsible for the “internalisation” of humanity.

1. All instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards - this is what I call the internalization of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his 'soul'. The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin, was expanded and extended itself and gained depth, breadth and height in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of man's instincts was obstructed

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay II, 16)

Part two establishes the following principle for Nietzsche:

*Repression*: in civilized societies all people suffer, in various degrees and ways, from the repression of their violent and cruel instincts (Nietzsche endorses this principle)

**NB** This principle applies to all people – Nietzsche gives no indication that the masters or ruling nobilities are exempt from this

*Part Three – Debt and Guilt*

Nietzsche helps himself to a further principle:

*Meaning*: suffering with meaning, purpose, or, sufficient reason, is preferable to the same amount of suffering without meaning, purpose, or sufficient reason.

On the basis of this principle Nietzsche claims that those suffering from repression in the civilized world will want to find meaning for their suffering. This meaning is provided thanks to another, parallel historical development.

According to Nietzsche, many ancient societies felt indebted to their ancestors for their good fortune. As some societies grew stronger and their fortunes improved, the level of a feeling of indebtedness outstripped the plausible capacities of their ancestors, and so ancient religions suggested that good fortune was owed to gods.

In the modern era, Christianity takes this level of indebtedness to a new extreme. Humanity’s original sin is redeemed through the self-sacrifice of Christ himself, an act of generosity so extreme that the debt for humanity becomes infinite and irredeemable (what could we do that would be large enough to repay God for the death of Christ himself?)

1. With the moralization of the concepts debt/ guilt and duty and their relegation to bad conscience, we have, in reality, an attempt to reverse the direction of the development I have described, or at least halt its movement: now the prospect for a once-and-for-all payment is to be foreclosed, out of pessimism, now our glance is to bounce and recoil disconsolately off an iron impossibility, now those concepts 'debt' and 'duty' are to be reversed - but against whom? It is indisputable: firstly against the 'debtor', in whom bad conscience now so firmly establishes itself, eating into him, broadening out and growing, like a polyp, so wide and deep that in the end, with the impossibility of paying back the debt, is conceived the impossibility of discharging the penance, the idea that it cannot be paid off ( 'eternal punishment'); ultimately, however, against the 'creditor', and here we should think of the causa prima of man, the beginning of the human race, of his ancestor who is now burdened with a curse ('Adam', 'original sin', 'the will in bondage'), or of nature, from whose womb man originated and to whom the principle of evil is imputed (diabolization of nature), or of existence in general, which is left standing as inherently worthless (a nihilistic turning-away from existence, the desire for nothingness or desire for the 'antithesis', to be other, Buddhism and such like) - until, all at once, we confront the paradoxical and horrifying expedient through which a martyred humanity has sought temporary relief, Christianity 's stroke of genius: none other than God sacrificing himself for man's debt, none other than God paying himself back, God as the only one able to redeem man from what, to man himself, has become irredeemable - the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of love (would you credit it? -), out of love for his debtor! . . .

(On the Genealogy of Morality, Essay II, 20)

*Synthesis of Parts One Two and Three*

These religious stories, particularly the Christian version, give us a way of interpreting meaning into the suffering caused by civilized repression. Our suffering is demanded by justice; just as justice demands that creditors are repaid what they are owed in the form of the suffering of a defaulting borrower or debtor, so too justice demands that all of humanity, and with it each individual person, must suffer as a form of repayment for our debt to God.

Conscience is the name that is given to the suffering that we deserve. That suffering is reinterpreted as feeling of guilt, felt because we are in fact guilty.

1. …The second essay gives the psychology of the conscience: conscience is not, as is believed, 'the voice of God in man', - it is the instinct of cruelty that is turned inwards after it cannot discharge itself outwards anymore. Cruelty is first brought to light here as one of the oldest and most persistent underpinnings of culture…

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

**Next week: genealogy**

**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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