

Phil 2, Thursday, March 3, 2011
Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I

Nietzsche criticizes the morality of modern, European, bourgeois culture, which...

- is deeply influenced by Christianity
- values, in individuals, humility, modesty, charity, forgiveness, patience, and self-sacrifice
- values, in politics, fairness, equality, and democracy
- values, in life, happiness over suffering
- opposes aggression, self-aggrandizement, and distinctions in social status
- recommends curtailing one's interests, not putting oneself above others, giving support to the weak, and so on.

Nietzsche argues that this morality is the result of a "slave revolt," in which the dominated substituted their own values for those of their dominators.

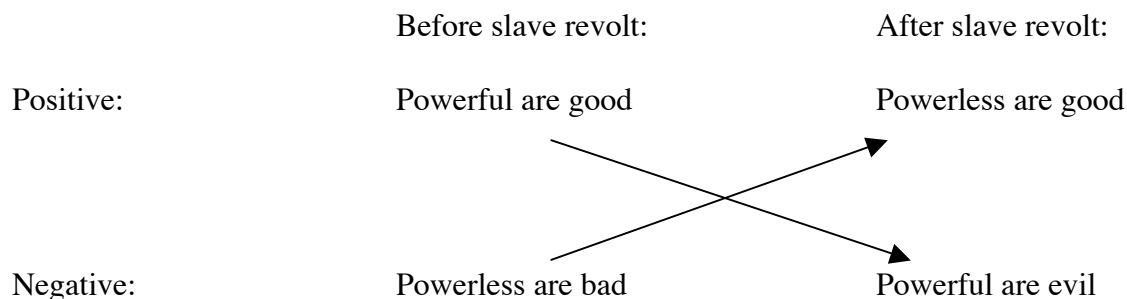
- The values of the powerful, organized around the distinction between good and *bad*,
- were replaced by the values of the powerless, organized around the distinction between good and *evil*.

Originally the distinction between good and bad was *simply a distinction in social standing* (§4). The word for "good" in most languages derives from words for "aristocratic," or "noble, whereas the word for "bad" derives from words for "common," "plebeian," or "low." The distinction between good and bad came to signify not only differences in political power, but also character traits associated with those differences in political power. The good are the warlike or the godlike, for example, and the bad are the cowardly.

The "slave revolt" inverts this distinction between good and bad.

- Where the traits of the powerful were once associated with the positive value, good, and the traits of the powerless were once associated with the negative value, bad, ...
- ... the traits of the powerful come to be associated with the negative value, evil, and the traits of the powerless come to be associated with the positive value, good.
- Note that although the *word* for the positive value, "good," stays the same, it *means something different* as contrasted with "bad" from as contrasted with "evil."

Which traits of the powerless become good? Precisely those traits that our Christianized morality now prizes so highly: humility, modesty, fairness, equality, charity, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, etc.



When did this slave revolt occur? A gradual transformation, involving the rise of Christianity, which accounts for the gulf between the values of the Greeks and Romans, and our own.

The more important question for Nietzsche is *why* the slave revolt occurred. His formulations suggest two different explanations.

On the “conspiracy theory,” the slave revolt was a plot deliberately hatched by the powerless to control the powerful. But why then does morality continue to have such a deep and pervasive hold on us? What psychological forces sustain our adherence to the distinction between good and evil?

On the “psychological theory,” the slave revolt was the result of *unconscious* psychological forces in the minds of the powerless.

- The powerless have the same instinct (the “will to power”) to dominate others, to subject the world to their will, to overcome resistance, as have the powerful.
- Since it cannot be given outward, physical expression, this will to power takes an inward, psychological form. The powerless harbor hatred and *ressentiment* of the powerful.
- These negative *emotions toward* the powerful give rise, in one way or another, to negative *evaluations of* them.
- Having come to evaluate the powerful negatively, the powerless then evaluate themselves, by contrast, positively. If they are the opposite of those who are evil, they assume, then they must be good.

Ressentiment:

- Notice that the powerless *first* evaluate the powerful negatively and *only later*, in reaction, evaluate themselves positively. They are *reactive*.
- The powerful do the reverse. They first evaluate themselves positively and only later evaluate the powerless negatively, as lacking the traits that they (the powerful) have. Moreover, they view the powerless with pity, rather than enmity. It would be debasing to give the powerless that kind of recognition, to care about them that much.

That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: ‘these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good’ there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: ‘*we* don’t dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb’ (§13).

But there seems to be a huge hole in this explanation. Why should the nobles ever have bought into this? Why wasn’t their attitude just like that of the birds of prey? The answer comes in section III (which I didn’t ask you to read). It turns on a particular “priestly class” of nobles and their exploitation of the “ascetic ideal.”

Where do “*bad* conscience” and guilt come from?

In part II (which I didn't ask you to read) Nietzsche asks: How did we become liable to bad conscience: to painful, negative assessments of ourselves and our conduct as not being what they ought to have been?

Again, Nietzsche is impressed by etymology. He notes that the German "*Schuld*" means both "guilt" and "debt."

- The primitive response when someone injures you is simply to vent your anger on him.
- But once the idea of "debtor" and "creditor" has gained currency, then another possibility presents itself. The person who has injured you owes you a "debt" that he must repay.
- And this repayment need not take the form of "literal compensation" such as "money, land, possessions of any kind."
- Instead, the repayment can take the form of submitting to your (the "creditor's") punishment, which compensates you by giving "the pleasure of being allowed to vent [your] power freely upon one who is powerless": the pleasure of feeling, if only for a moment, like a master.
- This is how we come to see the infliction of pain as the fitting response to injury.

So far, you are inflicting pain *on someone else, the person who injured you*, as "payment" of the "debt" that that person owes you. But "bad conscience" involves your inflicting pain *on yourself* as "payment" of the "debt" that *you* owe. Where does *this* idea come from?

- With the advent of civilization, natural drives to aggression and cruelty are repressed.
- Since these drives, especially those of the powerless, cannot find any outward, physical expression, the will to power again takes an inward, psychological form. That is, with no one *else* to dominate, man dominates the only victim he can lay his hands on: *himself*.

Nietzsche's criticism of morality

- (1) The morality of good and evil is reflectively unstable. It is sustained by psychological forces—hatred, vengeance, aggression—that it condemns.
- (2) The morality of good and evil is unhealthy for those who internalize it. Their aggressive instincts are pent up and redirected at themselves.
- (3) The morality of good and evil stifles individual greatness. Because...
 - it devalues greatness, creativity, and valorizes meekness, conventionality;
 - it burdens the great with the care of the weak;
 - opposes suffering and risk in favor of contentment and tranquility;
 - prevents inequality and the transformative self-criticism that such inequality produces.
- (4) The morality of good and evil (and the associated "ascetic ideal" discussed in part III) prevents us from fully affirming life or existence. It leads us to view *this* world (as opposed to heaven, nirvana, etc.) as imperfect, flawed, because it involves suffering, change, becoming.

Review Questions:

1. What point is Nietzsche making in the following passage?

The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself’; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is the essence of *ressentiment*. In order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction (§10).

2. Which of the above criticisms of morality—(1), (2), (3), or (4)—do the following passages illustrate? Explain.

- A. the higher *ought* not degrade itself to the status of an instrument of the lower, the pathos of distance *ought* to keep their tasks eternally separate! Their right to exist, the privilege of the full-toned bell over the false and the cracked, is a thousand times greater: they alone are our *warranty* for the future, they alone are *liable* for the future of man. The sick can never have the ability or obligation to do what *they* can do, what *they* ought to do: but if they are to be able to do what *they* alone ought to do, how can they at the same time be physicians, consolers, and “saviors” of the sick.
- B. by prescribing “love of the neighbor,” the ascetic priest prescribes fundamentally an excitement of the strongest, most life-affirming drive, even if in the most cautious doses—namely, of the *will to power*. The happiness of ‘slight superiority,’ involved in all doing good, being useful, helping, and rewarding, is the most effective means of consolation for the physiologically inhibited, and widely employed by them when they are well advised: otherwise they hurt one another, obedient, of course, to the same basic instinct.
- C. The man who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom, impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted, and maltreated himself; this animal that rubbed itself raw against the bars of its cage as one tried to ‘tame’ it; this deprived creature, racked with homesickness for the wild, who had to turn himself into an adventure, a torture chamber, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness—this fool, this yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of the ‘bad conscience’