

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE: A PHILOSOPHER OF IMMORALISM?

Rafael Pangilinan
University of Santo Tomas
España St., Manila

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche's criticisms were directed against what he reckons as the progressive 'moral' disintegration of late 19th century Germany. He described morality as "the doctrine of the relations of supremacy (*Herrschafts-Verhältnissen*) under which the phenomenon of 'life' comes to be."¹ This definition, however, is broad and mired in ambiguity, and as will be pointed out later, escapes multitudinous 'moralities' available throughout Nietzsche's corpus which had been culled by scholars, such as Heidegger and Solomon.²

He wished to be called an immoralist in that his project was not to promote any morality but to undermine traditional morality, which he accused of decadence. In thus dislodging previously unchallenged moral claims anchored on the Enlightenment constancy in reason it was imperative for him to act as though a physician that diagnoses the ills of society and prescribes radical changes to salvage humanity from such condition by examining the birth of different values, the particular values that these values had so far evinced for humankind, as well as an account of their evolution. Comparisons too had to be fixed to ascertain commonalities and differences in the standards of moral valuations of peoples across epochs and localities.³ And for this purpose he employed **genealogical method**⁴ to arrive at the origin (*Ursprung*) of man's morality. In Section 32 of *Beyond Good and Evil* he charts out three stages of moral development in human history: 1) pre-moral (*vormoralische*); 2) moral (*moralische*); and 3) post-moral (*aussermoralische*), each having their nuances in interpretations and explanations.

In the pre-moral period, which occupied the longest part in history, the morality of the action was weighed based on the consequences the action in question engendered, so that the motivation in agency, and the circumstances surrounding the action is unimportant. During this

stage life was subordinated to customs, to what Nietzsche designated as “morality of mores” (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*). People had to assimilate and tailor their acts according to the existing traditions of a society; to be sure some of these traditions are bequeathed uninterruptedly to the following generations for the perpetuity of human progress, whilst some are abrogated, whenever necessary, as part of the evolutionary adaptation to ensure that customs are yet germane with the demands of the times. The custom initially functioned for the preservation of life, for the maintenance of a community or people—it has nothing to do with determinations of good and bad and moral imperatives. Every practice which from time to time arises in a community should receive a dispassionate acceptance from all people, as it was blindly taken that to do otherwise could be deleterious insofar as gods of ancestral worship to whom pre-moral peoples owe **DEBT** for their lives and for the munificent graces they were provided—debt in Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* has ramifications as well as psychological and ethological implications—may serve punishment/s for disobedience. This punishment thereby tends to elicit conformism with a herd’s dictates from among all persons in the community, who should forgo their individuality and must instead embrace collectivity as their inevitable identity. As regards good/bad bifurcation, which in this period the subject still lacked moral imputation of guilt, good pertained to a practice that is habitually done and passed from one compeer after another to the point that such practice has already acquired ‘reverence’, therefore all the more precluding people from drifting away from normatively doing it. On the other hand, bad pertained to any change, hence deviation, from what is customary: “change [i]s the very essence of immorality (*Unsittliche*).”⁵ One was considered immoral (*unsittlich*) when one uses one’s sense of judgment or moral instinct instead of passively following the moral sensibilities of a given culture.⁶ Be this as it may, this era played a significant role in man’s moral development, for instance, in the formation of a common character of ‘humanity’ that benchmarked and remained a constituent element for all people.

The next period, moral, spanned the last ten thousand years and marked the transition from a morality based on customs to that of an intention-oriented mode for evaluating actions, and represented a ‘reversal of perspective’ inasmuch as it underscored the individual’s autonomy in valuations as against merely adhering with the established precepts originating from *above*, that is, from a transcendental source or from aristocratic instigations. It is during this stage that

people became conscious of themselves not as docile entities which must kowtow with the crowd, but an ‘individual’ who has a free will (albeit which Nietzsche considered as modeling what is ‘moral’ in the narrower sense, and often leading to dogmatic perversion), and can therefore adjudicate and legislate whatever is good or bad for themselves. Corollary to this is the fact that people have become subject to moral judgment; that they are accountable for every act they do; that amidst their reveling power of willing in no case are they empowered to exercise it absolutely, but must defer to a greater Reason⁷ (*Vernunft*); and that transgressions to the authority of Reason in moral valuations ought to be chastened justly correspondent to the gradation of the act thus violated. Nietzsche however saw a fundamental flaw in the moral period; he maintained that despite the people’s self-knowledge in human actions they can never know the epistemological source or conscious antecedents of the motives which prompts them to action—what they hold to be antecedents or motives (arising from their autonomous agency) are merely symptomatic of a value rooted in an unconscious source. This criticism led him to posit a new period, the extra-moral.

In extra-moral period it was again necessary to embark on a reversal and fundamental shift in values, owing to another self-examination of man. Nietzsche located the value of an action in what is ‘unintentional’ in it since everything about an action which is ‘intentional’⁸ and about which we are conscious of is just a surface and so needs to be vivisected further. The consequence of the view that the “morality of intentions” merely reveals the external is that ‘*what one is,*’ that is, one’s individual character, thoughts and drives, remain hidden and operate on the unconscious level. For Nietzsche moral values are indicative of one’s physiological constitution; they are like images projected in a mirror from which one could get an insight into the actual physiological processes, specifically nervous excitations, occurring in the person. **Values are physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life.** Nietzsche states, “The standpoint of value is a standpoint of conditions for the preservation and enhancement of complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming.”⁹ In this sense, values can be looked at in two ways: as a standpoint, and as a demand or condition. Valuing as a standpoint implies the espousal of a certain perspective or paradigm in making sense of the world, whereas value as a demand or condition, denotes the factual life about human beings, i.e. what can only be falsified or ignored but never eradicated; as nourishment is

necessary for the body, so values are ineludible not only for the success of a particular group, but more so for the survival of humankind.¹⁰ Ultimately, for his evaluation of moralities he relied on a conception of life based on the will to power to serve as his moral standard, and determiner of an order of rank. So an apposite understanding of his critical project requires an exegesis on ‘life.’ Life is described as a multiplicity of forces connected by a common mode of struggle and inequality. Living organisms are systems of forces organized along the lines of commanding and obeying. Simply put, some forces command and others obey. The conception of life itself has acquired a normative role which can be gleaned from such pronouncements as “the instinctual life is the development of the will to power” or that good is that which “heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself.” We may say that a healthy and ideal morality for Nietzsche is that which does not thwart or condemn the ‘instinct of life.’

As a ‘sign-language,’ morality or moralities can only be gauged semiotically with physiology as a point of reference; hence they are evaluated according to their overall affects—regression or decadence, or the affirmation of life—exemplified in humanity’s functioning. Nietzsche’s extra-moral stance is aimed at a self-overcoming of morality (*die Selbstüberwindung der Moral*), which however must not be completely severed from the standards of the moral period but must be discerningly/selectively assimilated with them in an effort to found a new moral paradigm that is ideal for the growth of a “higher humanity” as opposed to a “human, all too human” state of existence (*unmensch*).

Indeed, he considered it possible to approximate ourselves to a “higher humanity” through living an affirmative life—*becoming what we are*—mediated by the practice of life-enhancing values, which affirm power as the highest value. “Becoming what one is,” the ideal for life-enhancement, then, underscores **ethical naturalism (Lamarckism)** about values: values are historically determined, so that an individual’s possible values are limited by the particular type of person he is, and the range of values he is capable of pursuing indicates the type of person he is.¹¹ Thus what one is and how one fares is necessarily the function of nature, nurture, and life-circumstances. A life-denying ethic can be overcome by willing it, more exactly, by affirming one of morality’s highest values, i.e. truth.¹² However, such overcoming is not empowered to just about anybody but by the epoch itself that has willed its necessity. For just as

one's inheritance of an ethic is the product of a certain history, so one's overcoming of it can occur only at a particular historical moment.

Simon May fleshed out three criteria for life-enhancement in his reconstruction of Nietzsche's moral philosophy: power, sublimation, and form-creation. Power is an explanatory concept and, as already explained, a standard of value. The drive for power accounts for all our values and urges including those that are self-effacing and self-denying. Sublimation requires discipline that hones and refines the instincts rather than simply suppresses them and that enhances the range and alertness of the senses. It enhances life insofar as it enables us to harness the creative ends and drives (and the values they express) whose violence might otherwise paralyze or annihilate us. Lastly, form-creation refers to that which invites a love of world and life. It is found in valuations that glorify life (achieved through philosophy),¹³ works of art that beautify it (achieved by the creative artist),¹⁴ and one's own character that is pleasing to ourselves (achieved by giving style to one's character). For a maximal life-enhancement to be achieved, these three must come together genially.

Nietzsche's history of morals, then, is instrumental in utilizing past experiences to construct the future. A self-overcoming would entail the recognition that our understanding of morality has evolved. Of course, the dominance of the values belonging to the moral period would be usurped by the extra-moral period. But it should come as no surprise that this 'natural history of morals' was not intended as a strictly impersonal, descriptive account of the evolution of morality. That Nietzsche's preoccupation with *rebus moralibus* was not restricted to a mere 'history' is evident in his major work on morals, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, to which I now turn my attention.

Master vs. Slave Morality¹⁵

On the *Genealogy of Morals* is a polemic concerned to reveal the origin of our moral prejudices. In outline, the story told by its first essay is this: in the beginning were the knightly-aristocratic masters who determined for themselves that they were 'good' and that the weak unfortunates who lacked masterly qualities were in consequence 'bad.' Not surprisingly, the

numerous and miserable bad grew increasingly resentful of their lot until in a surprising and underdescribed stroke of genius, their *ressentiment* became creative. The fruit of this creative *ressentiment* was an unheard of new morality—slave morality—at the heart of which is the claim that those who had previously been regarded as wretched and bad in fact embody all that is truly good in and about humanity. The masters, meanwhile, are, it is said, not good but “evil.”

The slaves or men or *ressentiment*'s hatred is universal; they falsify the object of their hatred, the master or sovereign individual, in order to render him inescapably blameworthy.¹⁶ They assign whoever they resent to a corrupting realm called the phenomenal, in contrast to a truly ‘real’ transcending it altogether. They likewise posit a god who saves the weak and damns the strong. And they invent all sorts of philosophical concepts, viz. essence and metaphysically free will, so that those who possess strength may be made to feel constitutionally guilty and yet still capable of choosing to repudiate what they inescapably are. That is to say, with the aid of such fictions¹⁷ in the last ‘modus’ indicated, the slave is able to despise and to take revenge upon his enemies in effigy, which then brings about a **“spiritualization of revenge.”**¹⁸ In addition, as *ressentiment* is impossible to satisfy, slave’s revenge must be imaginary.

The priority of the noble/master morality is first mentioned in the middle of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I, §2. Nietzsche declares that,

...the judgment good did *not* originate with those to whom “goodness” was shown! Rather it was the “good” themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all that is low, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was out of this pathos of distance that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for things.

Above all else, then, noble morality is self-established, it “develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself”¹⁹; it is the morality of self-glorification (*Selbstverherrlichung*). It is wrong to think that morality originates in the favorable assessment of self-sacrifice and unegoistic behavior generally, or that morality has always rested upon the value of utility. For Nietzsche, noble morality is essentially bound up with an exuberant transcendence of the standpoint of utility, a loft disregard for the values of mere comfort and survival.²⁰

A crucial part of what the nobles affirm about themselves, therefore, is their ability to raise themselves above the common crowd and its concern for comfort and survival. Nietzsche speaks of an “aristocratic value-equation according to which “good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = God-beloved.”²¹ We see from this that at the bottom of the self-affirmation of Nietzsche’s nobles is their delight in their own abundant energy and abilities. Nobles seek to give expression to their felt fullness of power by engaging in certain sorts of activity, initially one that demand strenuous physical effort and involve taking large and dramatic risks—war, adventure, and hunting, for example. By the very fact that they choose to engage in them, nobles take themselves to honor such activities, and they then instinctively begin a cycle of self-reinforcement by honoring themselves for being so good at these honorable pursuits. They set deliberately exigent standards of excellence and then think well of themselves when they pass with supreme aplomb.

Because the criteria of nobility are self-appointed, noble values are, in the end, self-generated and self-grounded. But because measuring up to these criteria is often a matter of readily ascertainable fact, not datable opinion, because superiority in respect of strength, daring, or prowess, for example, can to a great degree be eliminated objectively, we can nevertheless specify certain features of noble lives that account for their favorable self-evaluation: namely, their ability to hit the target they have set for themselves. The most important feature of the activities through which nobles characteristically manifest their zest for life is, I suggest, that is “free,” engaged in for its own sake, not demanded by material circumstance or external authority. Noble morality, I shall say, is a morality of intrinsic value, of lives lived for the sake of the happiness inseparable from engaging in actions and activities deemed worthwhile in and of themselves, together with the honor consequent upon excelling at such actions and activities in the eyes of one’s peers.²²

The powerful physicality and hearty ferocity of Nietzsche’s early nobles is of a piece with their “crude, coarse, external, narrow, and altogether *unsymbolical*” habits of mind.²³ Although the master do value distinguishable qualities and activities intrinsically, they experience each element in their “value-equation” as part of an indivisible, tangible whole; they experience the several elements through the filter of the single “*Urwert*” of being and doing as we do. As a result, readers of *On the Genealogy of Morals* cannot experience life as Nietzsche

imagines the originators of noble morality to have experienced it; their form of life is practically inaccessible to modern men and women. It does not follow from this, though, that the perspective of master morality is epistemically unavailable to inhabitants of the modern world. Master values are not so bizarre as to render it doubtful that we can understand what it might have been like to live in accordance with them.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* we are informed that:

[I]n the majority of cases [those who feel themselves to be men of a higher rank] designate themselves simply by their superiority in power (as “the powerful,” “the masters,” “the commanders”) or by the most clearly visible signs of this superiority, for example as “the rich,” “the possessors.” ... But they also do it by a typical character trait: ... They call themselves, for instance, “the truthful.”²⁴

Nietzsche’s point here is not that the primitive nobles assumed strict causal connections interlinking power, wealth, truthfulness and courage, nor that they regarded the relevant nouns as synonymous terms. If they had held the latter view, it would be questionable whether we could understand their form of life at all. Any group that could not see that being disposed to tell the truth and being wealthy are two different things would be at least as odd as a group that seemed to recognize no distinction between, say, being fleet of foot and being a good cook. If they had held the former view, it would seem that they would have had to accept the truth of conditionals such as: (a) if one who is poor and weak were to become rich and powerful. But on Nietzsche’s account, these conditionals would have been scarcely intelligible to anyone, master or slave, living in the epoch of “pure” master morality. And if these claims could have been made intelligible to the masters, they would have rejected them, just as the members of a present day teenage “in crowd” would reject the claim that if one dresses like the in crowd, one will acquire the desired traits of its members.²⁵ Nietzschean nobles before the advent of slave morality tacitly held a very crude “unity of the virtues” thesis.

The early nobles are too intellectually primitive to be able to defend, or even articulate, their sense that their several virtues naturally belong together, and it is just this incapacity that will render their world vulnerable to the corrosive influence of slave morality. The inability discursively to account for themselves certainly indicates that the early masters are unreflective;

but it does not entail that their favorable self-evaluation is merely a groundless prejudice. In fact, we have seen that Nietzsche's claim that the origin of the opposition of "good" to "bad" is found in "**the pathos of distance**" presupposes that the self-exaltation of the masters has a significant basis in fact rather than fiction or delusion. Nietzsche is not himself to the noble identification of "superior in certain respects"—better at running, jumping, hunting, dancing, fighting or commanding for example—with "just plain superior," "intrinsically better for all," but he clearly does regard the achievements of the nobles in respect of the relevant activities and virtues to be real, matters of (pre)-historical fact rather than sheer mystification. It is indeed largely because of this basis in fact that the pejorative view of the slavish "other" entailed by noble morality is held by Nietzsche to be something of a logically necessary afterthought; to the nobles, "the bad" are simply those who lack the distinctive ensemble of desirable qualities that they have. The distinction introduced by the slave revolt in morality, between good and evil, marks a radically different sort of contrast.

Nietzsche takes pains to emphasize that when slave moralists deny that the masters are good, they are using a different sense of the word "good" from that embodied in master morality, and that in order to think of the masters as evil, the slaves must first "dye [them] in another color, interpret [them] in another fashion, see [them] in another way, through the venomous eye of *ressentiment*."²⁶ When the eye of *ressentiment* looks at the nobles, it does not see the tightly wound skein of power, wealth, courage, truthfulness and the like that the nobles themselves had perceived; it sees instead only cruelty, tyranny, lustfulness, insatiability, and godlessness.²⁷ Once the *ressentiment* of the weak has become creative and given birth to a new kind of morality, the slaves are able when they look at themselves no longer to see unrelenting, unredeemed misery and wretchedness, but rather a new kind of goodness, constituted by the voluntary cultivation of patience, humility and justice.²⁸

The most important accomplishment of slave morality for Nietzsche is not its turning the tables on the masters and deeming the erstwhile bad to be good and erstwhile good to be evil; what is most important about slave morality is that it does this by inventing a new type of values, *impartial value*. Slave morality is the morality of impartial value in that it is the morality of value chosen by an (allegedly) impartial subject, more precisely a subject who is in himself neither master nor slave but can freely choose to behave and to evaluate either as the one or as

the other. Slave moralists, says Nietzsche, “maintain no belief more ardently than the belief that the *strong man is free* to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb—for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey.”²⁹

The idealized relationship between nobles and subjects that Nietzsche imagines to have been the norm throughout pre- and early history is most obviously exemplified in the pre-history of one particular culture, that of classical Greece. Nietzsche’s model for the ethos of primeval man is unmistakably the ethos of Homeric man. So it is not surprising to find Nietzsche’s central claim splendidly illustrated by Odysseus’s treatment of Thersites in Book Two of the *Iliad*. After Thersites berates Agamemnon for his part in the quarrel with Achilles and bemoans the fate of the Achaeans in the war, Odysseus intervenes with the following pronouncement:

Fluent orator though you be, Thersites, your words are ill-considered. Stop, nor stand up alone against princes. Out of all those who came beneath Illion with Atreides I assert there is no worse man than you are. Therefore, you shall not lift up your mouth to argue with princes, cast reproaches into their teeth, nor sustain the homegoing... You argue nothing but scandal. And this also I will tell you, and it will be a thing accomplished. If once more I find you playing the fool as you are now, nevermore let the head of Odysseus sit on his shoulders, let me nevermore be called Telemachos’ father, if I do not take you and strip away your personal clothing, your mantle and your tunic that cover over your nakedness, and send you thus bare and howling back to the fast ships, whipping you out of the assembly place with the strokes of indignity.³⁰

Odysseus’s message is chillingly clear: neither the views nor the well-being of Thersites (and his ilk) are of the slightest concern to the commanders and heroes.

In light of the “pathos of distance” separating the nobles from the inferiors, it needs to be asked how slave morality, how this sublimely subtle slave revolt succeeded in a way unparalleled by any political or economic revolt of the poor and the weak against the strong and the wealthy. The chief explanatory mechanism offered by the *Genealogy* is guilt; masters lose their grip on their own morality by being made to feel guilty for being masters and adhering to master morality. As Nietzsche puts it, “men of *ressentiment*” could achieve “the ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph of revenge ... if they succeeded in forcing their own misery, forcing all misery, *into the consciences* of the fortunate so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune and perhaps said to one another: ‘it is disgraceful to be fortunate;

there is too much misery.’”³¹ How, though, was the job begun? It may be that the first step is to persuade the nobles that they are accountable for their lives and their values, but it still needs to be asked how masters could ever be persuaded of anything by slaves, given that they rarely speak to them at all and tend, when they do, to remain in the imperative mood.

Nietzsche’s nobles are not inarticulate, but rather **dialectically incompetent**. It is only because they are articulate that they can be argued into granting that they are free to choose whether and how to allow expression to their deepest urges to act, and it is only because they are dialectically incompetent that they can be argued into granting this point, which Nietzsche himself believes to be false and pernicious.

A precondition of the masters’ being coaxed into examining the slave morality was their having already developed amongst themselves the practice of settling certain issues by persuasion rather than by force. Not only does Nietzsche represent his nobles as articulate, he also describes them as, in their relations with one another, wonderfully “resourceful [*erfinderisch*] in consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship.” By frightful contrast, in their relation with the bad or the alien they could (and often apparently did) behave “not much better than uncaged beasts of prey.”³² Master morality thus operates (without a second thought) according to a double standard; conduct that would not become a noble in his dealings with peers is not regarded as similarly disgraceful vis-à-vis those beyond the pale.³³ Before the advent of slave morality, this double standard is held not to have given the nobles any pause; they practiced it, Nietzsche would have us believe, on a good conscience.

Nobles are infected with bad conscience when they become convinced—more accurately “half-convinced”—that they are not simply responsible for certain things as nobles, but are responsible for being noble, for living the lives they do. When this happens they are halfway to being (half)convinced that they are not justified in thinking of themselves in the way they had done. The inability of the masters to justify themselves before the bar of the impartial value is the result principally of their inability intellectually to defend two features of their outlook: the double standard that allows the bad or the alien to be treated ignobly, and the powerful physicality that infuses the activities that nobles value intrinsically.

Bad Conscience

Nietzsche introduces the bad conscience early on in the second treatise. The bad conscience, we read in section 17, originates in people oppressed by intruders, the notorious “pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror- and master-race”, which “puts its terrible claws on a perhaps numerically vastly superior, but formless still spreading population.” Thereby these intruders bring the “most thorough of all changes” man has lived to see.³⁴ The idea seems to be that people are living more or less by themselves, following their instincts for food, shelter, sex, and as Nietzsche emphasizes, their drives for aggression. Then some groups get organized, and start oppressing others that do not. Nietzsche insists that these conquests happen abruptly. In the course of long, gradual colonization, wild drives may become domesticated, which might soften the impact of the change. As it is, the instincts do not gradually become domesticated, but are vehemently tuned inwards.³⁵ The oppressed are prevented from letting their instincts act against others, and Nietzsche must have in mind here the instincts for aggression, i.e., “enmity, cruelty, the lust for pursuit, for raid, for change, for destruction”.³⁶ The oppressed are forced to redirect these instincts inwards since otherwise they are threatened with severe punishment. So from now on, the oppressed treat themselves in ways similar to those in which they used to treat others, and to ways in which they themselves are still treated by the oppressors. Nietzsche presents the image of an incarcerated animal that beats itself raw on the bars of its cage.³⁷ He calls this inward-direction of previously outward-directed instincts the **internalization** (*Verinnerlichung*) **of man**, and regards it as the origin not only of the bad conscience, but also of what should come to be called the soul, which is a creation of Christianity.

There is a point that should make us pause when reading Nietzsche’s own account of the origin of the bad conscience. One may wonder when, where, and to whom all this happened. In particular, who was oppressed and who were the oppressors? Nietzsche does not indicate which era he is thinking of. All we can tell is that he is talking about a ‘pre-historic’ time before the development of state-like communities, but also before the rise of Christianity, since Christianity appears when the consequences of the conquest are already in place.³⁸ To see why this lack of specificity should not worry us, it is helpful to recall that, on his postcard to Overbeck from January 1888, Nietzsche points out that he is far from explaining Christianity in terms of only

one psychological category.³⁹ In view of that point, I submit that Nietzsche's interest is in exploring how morality, i.e., Christian morality, could have arisen in the course of human history when only basic assumptions about human psychology are in place. Moreover, Nietzsche's concern is to show how moral phenomena could have arisen in ways that are not only surprising, but appalling. As far as the development of the early form of the bad conscience is concerned, these assumptions are about aggressive instincts. The historical presentation serves only as a medium for exploring the effects of such psychological assumptions. Put differently, the *On the Genealogy of Morals* is a polemic (*Streitschrift*, which is the subtitle of the work), and its ultimate goal is to contribute to the 'revaluation of values.' To that end, then, Nietzsche focuses only on the most significant parts of the historical events at issue, i.e., the moral psychology that figures in the genealogy of morality.

The effects of the development that leads to the early form of the bad conscience are immense. It is only at this stage of the development of the mental that much of what we associate with human intellectual and spiritual activity becomes possible. Among other things, Nietzsche points out that it is only through the rise of the older form of the bad conscience that we can understand 'contradictory notions'⁴⁰ such as selflessness, self-denial, and self-sacrifice as ideals. More generally, only from now on can we understand the 'un-egoistic' as a value. But why would he claim that? The same theme concerned Nietzsche as early as *Human, All Too Human*⁴¹ section 57, where he discusses examples of behavior instantiating such values: a good author with a concern for his subject wishes that another might come and destroy him by discussing the subject more clearly; or a soldier wishes to die for his victorious country. A necessary condition for values such as selflessness to be comprehensible is that a single person to be thought of not, as he says, a plurality within a unity. But only after the oppression of instincts is there a sufficiently rich inner life to allow for such ideas. From then on, a person is, for better or worse, a plurality owing to the presence of different and competing instincts. According to Nietzsche, there is still nothing un-egoistic, but we can now at least see how it was entirely absurd any more to develop such a notion: a person becomes praised as un-egoistic or selfless if a drive within himself that is beneficent to others leads to action. It is in this way that the internalization of instincts and its consequences render the idea of selflessness at least intelligible.⁴²

The development of the early form of inner world also provides the foundations for reflectiveness. Nietzsche does not speak about reflectiveness explicitly. Rather, he says that a person now gives himself a share and can envisage ‘ideal and imaginative events’ as part of a vision. It seems to be this more advanced degree of internalization that Nietzsche also has in mind in *Beyond Good and Evil* section 257, where we read that without internalization culture is impossible. In contrast to slaves suffering from this internalization, the beasts of prey are ‘wholer men’, since they do not suffer from inner conflict due to the oppression of instincts. Yet this also means that they fail to contribute to the development of culture, which is prompted by the growth of the mental. The oppressors initiate the development that leads to the growth of the mental, but it is the slaves who bring about cultural achievements, and do so in virtue of being slaves. Eventually, there are no beasts of prey left since in due course they get absorbed into the form of life created by their slaves and thus by the enslavement that they themselves start.⁴³

Indebtedness to Ancestors and Gods⁴⁴

Nietzsche starts discussing **debtor-creditor relationships**⁴⁵ immediately after raising his initial question about the origin of the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt early on in the treatise.⁴⁶ Having debts is a purely juridical relationship, and whatever emotional or moral connotations the concept of guilt may have, those do not pertain to this original relationship of having debts. One variant of this relationship is the debt of the offspring towards the ancestors in virtue of the latter’s contributions to the flourishing of the tribe.⁴⁷ On the strength of these achievements the offspring owe sacrifices to the ancestors, just as they would owe gratitude to living benefactors. The offspring’s debts grow the more they succeed, and eventually, the ancestors transfigure into gods. Debts towards ancestors on the side of successful clans spread through mankind via their conquests for the submitted population receives and continues the tradition of giving sacrifices to the ancestors of the conquerors.⁴⁸

Nietzsche tells us at the beginning of section 21 that up to that point there is no moral connotation to the notion of *Schuld* (guilt). **Guilt** comes into existence after the old form of the bad conscience and indebtedness have merged. But before I proceed to discuss this next step in the development of the bad conscience, we should have a closer look at Nietzsche’s remarks on the debtor-creditor relationship for doing so will prove illuminating for his understanding of

morality. As Nietzsche puts out in section 4, there is an old idea that originates in the debtor-creditor relationship, namely, the idea that every damage has its equivalent and can be paid off in some way. The origin of this idea is that a debtor who cannot pay his creditor is forced to give the creditor something else that he owns. This may amount to letting the creditor inflict torture on the creditor. As Nietzsche informs us in section 6, the reason why inflicting pain can have this function is because people actually enjoy watching torture or inflicting pain themselves. An individual's relationship with his community is also a debtor-creditor relationship. The community grants him protection, and in turn requires that he individual pay back his debts towards the community by way of respecting certain rules of conduct. For all these debtor-creditor relationships, there is a background assumption that the people involved are roughly equally powerful.⁴⁹ These ideas give rise to an idea of justice as a principle both for interaction among individuals and for communities as a whole, and this idea is that "everything can be paid off, and everything must be paid off."

The reason why this is worth elaborating is because these thoughts provide him with a naturalistic approach to at least simple moral codes. Depending on how one interprets the background assumption that people are supposed to be roughly equally powerful, this principle may account for more than very simple moral codes.⁵⁰ If it is right that such forms of conduct can indeed be regarded as moral codes, then, no matter what the purpose of the *On the Genealogy of Morals* is, Nietzsche cannot intend to dismiss all of morality. We should keep in mind that Nietzsche has developed here a viewpoint from which he can account for codes that one may classify as moral, but without appeal to notions such as guilt, and without any appeal to Christianity. So these moral codes are thoroughly grounded in this world, so to speak.⁵¹

Bad Conscience and Guilt: How they are Combined

We have followed Nietzsche through his discussions of the two elements from which the current meaning of the bad conscience descends, the bad conscience as the result of the internalization of instincts and the indebtedness to gods. We have now reached section 21, where these two elements are combined to give rise to the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt. At the beginning of section 21, Nietzsche says that he has not yet told us anything about the actual moralization of the notions of debts and duty. As he explains in brackets, this moralization is

brought about through the pushing-back of those notions into the conscience with the concept of God.⁵² Our next task is to explain this pushing back of the indebtedness into the bad conscience.⁵³

It is clear on textual grounds that Nietzsche thinks that an explanation of the ‘pushing-back’ requires a third element in addition to the indebtedness to the ancestors and gods and the early form of the bad conscience, that is, the joint presence of these two elements by itself does not lead to the moralization of the notions of debt and duty.⁵⁴ This third element is Christianity, and it is through the interaction of Christianity with the early form of the bad conscience and the indebtedness that the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt arises. Let us focus, then, on how Nietzsche introduces Christianity. The stage is set by the concluding remarks of section 20, where Nietzsche finishes his story about the development of indebtedness towards ancestors and gods with the Christian ‘maximal God.’ Throughout section 21, then, we find key terms of Christian theology (e.g. eternal punishment, Adam, hereditary sin, etc.), and that section ends with a reference to the Christian God sacrificing himself out of love for his “debtors”. In the light of all this, it is clear that the notion of God that the bad conscience gets involved with is the Christian notion of God. The aforementioned key terms of Christian theology then provide valuable hints for the interpretation of section 21.⁵⁵ Similar considerations can also be made with respect to section 22.

Roughly speaking, my account of the ‘pushing-back’ is this: Christianity, notably the ascetic priest discussed in the third treatise, invents what Nietzsche calls an ethical world order, i.e., a comprehensive metaphysical and ethical outlook focused on the notion of the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent God who both creates the world and everything in it and gives divine commandments regulating the proper conduct of his creatures. This ethical world order provides a meaning for suffering and misery. Let me call this account the Christian story. The ‘pushing-back’ of the indebtedness into the bad conscience is plausibly understood as a psychological consequence of accepting the Christian story. Its acceptance gives rise to an entirely new sentiment, namely guilt, which is so strong that by itself it gives rise to a new kind of moral psychology. What used to be a sense of having debts towards ancestors and gods is now transformed, that is, ‘pushed back’, into a much more entrenched, much more profound, and much more demanding sentiment. So Christianity interacts with the indebtedness towards the

gods and ancestors by transforming this into a new sentiment (which may not have arisen otherwise). The original form of the bad conscience is relevant to this account because it provides a kind of psychology that is capable of producing such a sentiment in the first place.

Here then is the Christian story in more detail: the founders of Christianity find oppressed people tormented by internalized instincts and by the general misery of living the life of the oppressed. These people suffer, and they are searching for an explanation of why life is like that. As Nietzsche says in the third treatise of the *On the Genealogy of Morals*, they are looking for a culprit, somebody to blame for their misfortunes.⁵⁶ Christianity names one, claiming that the oppressed themselves are to blame. What at first may appear to be a rather peculiar claim looks more plausible once it is embedded into the Christian ethical world order. Christian metaphysics describes a divine order according to which things and beings have their special place in the functioning of the whole by the will of God, and according to which there are good and bad character traits and right and wrong actions, which are good or right insofar as they are in harmony with the divine order. Many of man's natural instincts, in particular the instincts for aggression, come to be seen as dispositions to violate the divine order, that is, as sins.⁵⁷ Within this framework, the suffering that the instincts cause may be seen as the pain from the struggle of the good inclinations against the bad ones, or as a form of preliminary punishment already on earth for the presence of bad dispositions. Christianity thus gives a meaning to the suffering by explaining why it is perfectly in order.

There is, however, much more to the Christian story. Man is God's creature, and so by violating God's commands he acts against what he is first and foremost, that is, he acts against his very own nature. By thinking of God as giving commandments regulating the lives of his creatures, Christianity creates a point of view from which the ultimate judgment is passed in view of how man conducts himself with respect to the ethical world order. Being condemned from that point of view means being condemned without restrictions. This should be taken quite literally, for eternal punishment is among the sanctions that threaten the transgressors.

Now, finally, we are in a position to see what the 'pushing-back' of the indebtedness into the bad conscience amounts to and how this leads to guilt. Prior to the development of Christianity, religion is a practice of sacrifices to ancestors and gods as an expression of gratitude

for their contributions to the thriving of the tribe. Failing to pay one's debts by no means decreases one's worth as a person, simply because there is no point of view from which one's overall worth as a person is assessed. In the Christian story, debts to God are immense, and they are not even individually acquired, but come along with the very fact of one's being human through hereditary sin. Moreover, any thought of redeeming them seems absurd since man's nature is full of dispositions to violate the divine order and thereby to increase his indebtedness to God for, recall, this point explains the suffering in the first place. The original indebtedness is thereby transformed into a much more profound, much more persistent and much more tyrannizing sentiment, a sentiment that can only arise once there is a privileged point of view from which one's worth as a person is assessed. The original indebtedness turns into a deep sense of being a complete failure with respect to what one is first and foremost, namely, God's creature. It is in this way that the sense of having debts is 'pushed back' into the inner world,⁵⁸ i.e., into the bad conscience at the early stage. The indebtedness has turned into guilt. As a consequence of the 'pushing-back' the bad conscience "fixes itself firmly, eats into him [the debtor], spreads out, and grows into a polyp in every breadth and depth."⁵⁹ The feeling of guilt is so dominant in the inner space that constitutes that the bad conscience is ultimately identified with this feeling of guilt. So the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt has finally emerged.⁶⁰

Yet by providing a meaning for the suffering in this way, the ascetic priest has succeeded in relieving the pain while poisoning the wound⁶¹, that is, the suffering is not meaningless any more, but the price to pay is the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt. To understand the meaning of suffering, man has to condemn himself. Eventually, the existence of guilt is accepted to such an extent that even the accused in witchcraft trials, victims of this way of giving meaning to life, would believe in its reality.⁶² The only temporary relief to the ever growing guilt of humankind is what the guilt of humankind is what Nietzsche calls the stroke of genius of Christianity, i.e., God sacrificing himself for the guilt of man.⁶³ However this temporary relief also implies that man's guilt, from then on, is so great that even the strongest conceivable means could not possibly relieve it.⁶⁴

Ascetic Ideal

Nietzsche goes on to describe the whole variety of ascetic ideals and practices which the priest has promoted to preserve a declining life, and to ensure its continued sickness. He relates the innocent forms of the ascetic ideal which tend towards 'self-narcosis' and allow the slave to avoid the reproach which his own existence offers him. In this category are the hermit's fasting and withdrawal from life; complete immersion in some form of mechanical activity; and "petty devotion to others"—an involvement in the communal life of the herd which allows the individual to forget himself in the shadow of something grander. More dramatically, Nietzsche then reviews the 'guilty' forms of asceticism: the penitent's scourge, the hair shirt and starving body, and the dancing epidemics of the Middle Ages. He claims that all 'remedies' sought to deaden man's secret suffering through the production of an orgy of feeling—although their final effect has only been to weaken man even further.

At the end Nietzsche turns to the state of contemporary scholarship, to argue that in modern times yet another version of the ascetic ideal has become dominant: one that is manifest by the scholar's unselfish devotion of the 'truth', for which he is ready to sacrifice anything, including himself. Thus he talks of "The proficiency of our finest scholars, their heedless industry, their heads smoking day and night, their very craftsmanship," and he comments "how often the real meaning of this lies in the desire to keep something hidden from oneself! Science as a means of self-narcosis: do you have experience of that?"⁶⁵ We should notice, however, that the ascetic ideal of the scholar is definitely not a function of his religious belief. Indeed, in several passages Nietzsche emphasizes that such a total devotion to the 'truth' eventually leads every good scholar away from the lie which supports the belief in God; and in this respect, the will to truth brings about the complete self-overcoming of Christianity and Christian morality. Hence, in promoting this form of asceticism, Nietzsche's priest must survive the abandonment of explicitly religious forms. Nietzsche suggest the necessity for a continual revision of the genealogy of morals for the priest can always assume new masks, though the ultimate effect of his machinations will always be the same.

Finally, then, as the heirs of all priests' disastrous remedies, Nietzsche gives us to understand that the overall tendency of the priestly ideal has actually been to diminish man completely, and to turn him into a timid herd animal. And he concludes that the continual

suppression of the individual will has its issue in ‘will-lessness’ as the basic characteristic of modern life:

We can no longer conceal from ourselves *what* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life.⁶⁶

And again,

... the diminution and leveling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger... We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, down to become thinner, more good natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian — there is no doubt that man is getting ‘better’ all the time. Here precisely is what has become a fatality for Europe—together with the fear of man have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary — what is nihilism today if it is not that? — We are weary *of man*.⁶⁷

Genealogy has revealed the will to nothingness as the fundamental will of history, and Nietzsche equates this will to nothingness, this “last will of man,” with the progress of nihilism. In other words, the meaning of nihilism is nothing other than the triumph of the slave and the continued destruction of the individual as such. And, as the artist of such history the priest is finally revealed as the world-historical agent of nihilism itself.

Conclusion

Nietzsche, indeed, revalues and inverts the established values. His genealogy is an attempt to force the will of millennia upon new tracks by recollecting all that was nonsense and accident in our history, and showing how it may be redeemed with the return of the master or the sovereign individual, as the fulfillment of the individual life. In this way Nietzsche suggests that the slave may free himself from the cancer of *ressentiment*, for the will loses “its ill-will against time,” when, as a sovereign will, it finally becomes capable of embracing every stage of its accidental history as a necessary moment of its self-appropriation. And hence, on both the

individual and world-historical levels, Nietzsche's typology of masters and slaves is a performative critique since it promotes the possibility of a transformation of types.⁶⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2003, §19. See also his "Letter to Fuchs, 29 July 1888," in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), 305. Henceforth abbreviated as BGE.

² Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991); Robert C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great "Immoralist" Has to Teach Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³ Nietzsche asks, "Why is it that the sun of one fundamental moral judgment and main standard of value shines here and another there?" *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), §7.

⁴ Nietzsche uses genealogy as a method of explaining the ethical in terms of the pre-ethical through ethical practices and various ends which serve them.

⁵ Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," trans. Walter Kaufmann, and R.J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 3-163, Edited, with Commentary by, Walter Kauffman (New York: Vintage Books–Random House, Inc., 1989), Essay III, §9. Hereafter referred to as *GM*.

⁶ "The tremendous labour of that which I have called 'morality of custom'...the labour performed by man upon himself during the greater part of the existence of the human race, his entire *prehistoric* labour, finds in this its meaning, its great justification, notwithstanding the severity, tyranny, and idiocy involved with it: with the aid of the morality of custom and the social straightjacket man was actually made calculable" (*GM*, Essay II, §2). This section shows what human beings have suffered during the pre-moral stage. It also shows how human beings were made 'calculable' through what Frank Cameron calls **mnemotechtonics**, a psychology that holds that pain, suffering, cruelty, dissembling, revenge, anger, etc. which are considered virtues, create a quasi-permanent impression in the mind of the experiencer. Through such negative feelings man realizes what he must do and what he must avoid.

These very choices, in turn, affirm and authenticate what he *becomes*. Cf. *Nietzsche and the 'Problem' of Morality*, *Studies in Theoretical and Applied Ethics* 9 (New York; Peter Lang, 2002), 8-9.

⁷ This pertains proximately to a rational authority (*Autorität*) and ultimately to a Divine Reason.

⁸ Traditional morality is a prejudice since the intention is merely a sign or symptom in need of interpretation.

⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed., with Commentary, Walter Kaufmann, with Facsimiles of the Original Manuscript (New York: Vintage Books–Random House, 1967), §715. Hereafter referred to as WP.

¹⁰ Nietzsche also informs us that value and power are interrelated. In §14 of *WP* he writes that “values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values.” All attempts to exert power presuppose an “interpretation,” informed by one’s values, that gives purpose and justification to a particular way of securing power. He also controverts the classical metaphysical conception of Being by describing it as whatever is supremely valuable and powerful, the will to power. Will to power applies to the securing of power over the world and it is expressed through the valuing and interpretation that characterizes all human life. It is said that its greatest sinew is manifested by its ability to stamp BEING with the character of BECOMING.

¹¹ “A person’s “morality” bears decided and decisive witness to who he is, that is, in what order or rank the innermost drives if his nature stand in relation to each other.” (BGE, §6). It must also be added that the values we pursue are basically determined by life-circumstances, e.g. education. Individual history is conditioned by one’s membership in a particular ethical community with a particular history, whilst the self is but a collection of qualities in which every quality is linked directly or indirectly to every other, with the result that the self is its HISTORY.

¹² There are three reasons why we are receptive to reason and truth. First, we have a prior general commitment to truth as a highest value. Second, we have specific drives and needs which will be satisfied by acting in the ways suggested by just those reason. And lastly, we possess the strength to choose, choosing that is not dependent on the free will but on the strong will. Cf. Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on ‘Morality’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press–Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³ Philosophers ought to create and legislate values; they are not supposed to be just fallow expositors of thoughts and ideas which have been thought out already by others. They must posit an ethic that constitutes their self-legislated conditions for the preservation and enhancement of life; however as values are not solipsistic they should not impose what they subjectively think is sound for the community, but should pursue and legislate those conditions which others similarly share for life preservation and enhancement. May mentions five points about a genuine philosopher that is consistent with Nietzsche’s prescriptions. 1) He is the commander of himself: he cannot command others unless he is able to will his own values. 2) He is a severe critic of his time: he must discredit the old values to make way for the new. 3) He has little to do with Kantian-type critiques, which, in their fixation with finding ultimate grounds for knowledge, values and beauty never touch on the real questions, i.e. creation of values. 4) He displays two cardinal virtues: courage and self-respect. 5) Finally, he values truth about the conditions that enhance life.

¹⁴ Artists create the great seduction of life away from life-denying pessimism and its morality. They falsify reality by selectively representing, transfiguring, perfecting, and so render existence affirmable despite its horror. Unlike the genuine philosopher, they cannot and should not create values or dedicate themselves to propositional truth: to be creative means that they had to dissociate themselves from the mundane world and seek refuge in the realm of the superficial. The estrangement of the artist from the actual have three objects, namely 1) inner nature of the character of the individual artist, 2) overall value of his work, and 3) external reality in general (*GM*, Essay I,

§4). Artists also need the philosopher to create or endorse or make vivid the values of the culture within which they live and to protect the culture from the life-denying falsehoods that lead to decadence. Nietzsche oscillates on who qualifies as an artist in *GM*. On the one hand, an artist is he who creates tragedy, music, sculpture, etc. (*Ibid.*, III, §4-5). On the other hand, he tells us that they also pertain to men of religion, philosophers, and ascetic priests (*Ibid.*, III, §20).

¹⁵ *GM* I introduces the contrast between what Nietzsche calls elsewhere “master morality” and “slave morality.” Master morality is the morality of the masters, the nobles, the warriors, who see themselves and their actions as good. Thus, strength, power, health, wealth, and happiness are all considered “good.” These masters then perceive what Nietzsche calls **pathos of distance** between themselves and those who are poor, unhealthy, weak, or impotent. These are all undesirable qualities, and so the masters dub them as “bad.” They have no interest in universalizing their values, yet they expect others of their type to share their values. Insofar as they consider themselves to be the sole ground of values, they find no need in projecting their values onto some external authority. Considered in its pure conceptual form, the word ‘master’, according to some interpretations, concerns not the domination of others (which the slaves likewise attempt) but rather a relationship to oneself, viz. sovereign self-legislation. See Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and His War on ‘Morality’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press–Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 41ff. There are two forms of master morality—**passive** and **active**—although in no case are they mutually exclusive. Master morality is **PASSIVE** when the person submits to his own nature and historical determination. On the other hand, it is **ACTIVE** when one wills one’s own necessity and seeks to abandon all life-denying ways of employing values.

Those opposed to the masters develop slave morality. Nietzsche identifies it with a priestly caste, though he identifies it elsewhere in the book with the plebs or the slaves. These people are the poor, the unhealthy, the weak, and the impotent, and they learn to hate and resent the power of the masters. Slaves or reactive individuals need stimuli, which are the triggers of all their most enduring valuations and practices which concern the strength in others which he fears, in order to act. They experience reactive effects, viz. hatred, envy, jealousy, and attempt to neutralize the strength of others, who are masters and who they believe are the very source of their suffering, by stamping them as evil.

¹⁶ It is said that there are two reasons why **BLAME** which the slave commits is universal. First, the slave’s rage is directed at suffering which existence generates. And second, to repudiate the world as a whole it is best strategy for undermining anything that masters could possibly live for.

¹⁷ The ascetic ideal structures the above fictions created by the men of resentment, which in its limiting form, demands that the whole of phenomenal existence be transcended for the sake of a metaphysical realm.

¹⁸ It is said that spiritualization of hatred and revenge is vital for the slave for two reasons. First, revenge against the master is best achieved by revaluing their values rather than by attempting a direct assault, and second, revenge against existence or time itself cannot be enacted and must be imaginary (revenge over and above the revaluation is imaginary). Nietzsche, *GM*, I, §7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, §10.

²⁰ “What [he writes] had [nobles] to do with utility! The viewpoint of utility is as remote and inappropriate as it possibly could be in relation to such a burning eruption of the highest rank-ordering rank-defining judgments: for here feeling has attained the antithesis of that low degree of warmth which any calculating prudence, any calculus of utility, presupposes—and not for once only, not for an exceptional hour but for good.” *Ibid.*, I, §2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, §7.

²² My characterization of master morality as a morality of intrinsic value has evident affinities with Arthur C. Danto's description of it as a morality of "absolute and unconditioned value" and the "categorical good" [*Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1965), p. 159]. But I think that Danto is mistaken to add that the contrast between master and slave morality "reduce[s] to a fairly simple and, since Kant, routine distinction between an absolute and unconditional value, and a hypothetical or contingent value" (*ibid.*). The unconditioned good for Kant is very different from the intrinsic goods of noble morality. For Kant, the unconditioned good must be independent of circumstance or restriction of any kind, including restrictions having to do with contingent features of us. So for Kant a truly unconditioned good could not possibly be good for some but not for others, while the goods valued intrinsically by Nietzsche's nobles fit just this description; they are thought to be good for nobles, but not commoners. Just as the former view menial employments as unworthy of them, so they view slaves as unworthy of honorable activity. For a Nietzschean noble, the fact that he takes, e.g. leading the troops into battle to be an intrinsically valuable thing to do does not entail that it would be good for one of the troops to attempt the same feat. At root, the difference between Kantian unconditioned value and the intrinsic value I am attributing to Nietzsche's nobles is the difference between a "value in itself" identified by contrast to mere "value for us," and a "value in itself" identified by reference to "us nobles"; as Nietzsche puts in *BGE* §260: "the noble type man ... judges, 'what is harmful to me is harmful in itself'. [Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, with an introduction by Michael Tanner (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2003)]. Henceforth this book shall be referred to as *BGE*.

²³ *Id.*, *GM*, I, §6. Cf. William Van Orman Quine's charming bit of doggerel!: "The unrefined and sluggish mind/Of Homo Javinensis/Could only treat of things concrete/And present to the senses" ["Identity, Ostension, Hypostasis," in *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, §5.

²⁵ At *Ibid.*, II, §23, Nietzsche tacitly admits their ancient Greek nobles were capable of acts that they themselves would deem disgraceful. He insists, however, that such occurrences had to be rare, and that their possibility had to be explained by appeal to a puzzling sort of divine intervention: "[H]ow is it possible?. How could it actually have happened to heads such as *we* have, we men of aristocratic descent, of the best society, happy, well-constituted, noble, and virtuous?"—thus noble Greeks asked themselves for centuries in the face of every incomprehensible atrocity or wantonness with which their kind had polluted himself. 'He must have been deluded by a god,' they conclude finally, shaking their heads..."

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, §11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, §7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, §13.

³⁰ *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Alexander Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Book II, lines 246-64.

³¹ Nietzsche, *GM*, I, §14.

³² *Ibid.*, I, §11.

³³ In *GM I*'s most incendiary passage concerning the propensity of nobles to exempt themselves from their own standards of civilized behavior and return to the innocence or a "predator conscience," Nietzsche speaks of the nobles' releasing their pent-up aggression on "*das Fremde*" (the foreign or alien), rather than on their inferiors. Furthermore, the fact that the marauding warriors are depicted as "returning from a disgusting precession of murder, arson, molestation, and torture, exhilarated and undisturbed of soul, as if it were no more than a student prank, convinced that the poets will have much to sing about for a long time to come" (*ibid.*), suggests that Nietzsche has in mind an expedition such as that of the Greeks to Troy rather than a day to day diet of less dramatic brutalities inflicted upon the weak by the strong. I do not, therefore, think it obvious that master morality's double standard entailed that dealings between nobles and their subordinates were governed by no remotely humane standards at all.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Strangely, Nietzsche compares the immensity of this event with the change inflicted upon the water animals when those started living ashore. Yet change took a long time to be complete. Maybe Nietzsche had Lamarckian tendencies and thought of that transition in terms of fish being stranded. Or maybe the comparison does not include the abruptness, but merely the immensity of the change. But this is contradicted by the text, which says the water animals' instincts were undone at a stroke (*mit einem Male*). One may argue that Nietzsche did think of a gradual change. One may then also say that his point about the final (*endgültig*) enclosure into society and peace discussed there is the outcome of a process. Nietzsche's insistence on the abruptness may then be explained in evolutionary terms: even though all this took 'a long time,' from the point of view of the history of the human species, it was abrupt. I think, on balance, the evidence for the abruptness-view is stronger.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, III, §20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *The Portable Nietzsche*, selected and trans, with an introduction and notes, Walter Kaufman (New York: The Viking Press, 1954).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, §18.

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. with an afterword, Gary Handwerk (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

⁴² Cf. also *Id.*, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §21 for an elaboration on the same theme (*The Gay Science* shall be hereafter referred to as *GS*). In general, just as in society people are oppressed by others, so inside, one part of the soul is oppressed by other parts. Nietzsche takes the interaction of people's as a model of the development of an inner life. See also *BGE* §19, where Nietzsche talks about the body as a 'commonwealth of many souls' (*Gesellschaftsbau vieler Seelen*). *GS* §354 is also relevant, where Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of language with respect to the emergence of reflectiveness.

⁴³ This account suggests that the oppressors themselves do not undergo the internalization of instincts, that is, they do not develop this early from of the bad conscience. Indeed, in section 17, Nietzsche says explicitly that it was not in them that the bad conscience grew. However, it seems that Nietzsche does not think that, in his time, there are still any 'beasts of prey' around, or even people much like the 'beasts of prey' in not having developed a bad conscience. But of that is so, then the oppressors themselves must have developed a bad conscience eventually. This is also plausible on account of Nietzsche's own story because he assumes that the oppressors themselves are

assumed to have some degree of social organization, and thus must have some system of social constraints for their ‘pack’ to persist. What Nietzsche says in section 11 of the first treatise about the nobles should apply here as well: they are “sternly held in check by custom, worship, usage, gratitude, even more by mutual surveillance and jealousy inter pares.”) Moreover, once they erect a state their degree of social organization is reinforced, so that even the instincts of the oppressors themselves are opposed more strongly than before. It is possible to assume, however, that the bad conscience does not arise as abruptly in them as in the oppressed, and that the inward struggle it causes is less vehement.

⁴⁴ In the pre-moral stage, the power attributed to the creditor reflected the power of society. Worship of god was seen as society’s strength. In the moral stage, society has developed real power which it must attribute to someone; ancestors founded and empowered the tribes with untold sacrifices and accomplishments. Lastly, in the post-moral period, society’s triumphs has outstripped even the empowering capacity attributed to great ancestors, so that gods are seen as grand enough to dispense such munificence.

⁴⁵ The debtor-creditor contractual relationship is not only the historical origin of the feeling of guilt (e.g. Nietzsche, *GM*, II, §4 and §8), but can also be used to model the nature of guilt. Furthermore, it does not require that for the debtor, the promise to repay is an “obligation upon his own conscience” (*ibid.*, II, §5), but it does presuppose a notion of personal accountability. If it is taken to be just a mechanical transaction enforced by the threat of punishment, then it could not explain guilt.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, II, §4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, §8.

⁵⁰ Readers who think of Nietzsche as a perspectivist in a sense that might require the addition of the adverb ‘seemingly’ to ‘naturalistic’ here are referred to the discussion of the relevance of Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Nietzsche’s discussion itself (as well as Nietzsche’s discussion of *Genealogy of Morals* in *Ecce Homo*), I think, warrant a naturalistic reading of the *Genealogy*. Cf. “Ecce Homo”, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *On the Genealogy of Morals; Ecce Homo*, ed., with commentary, Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books–Random House, Inc., 1967), pp. 312-313.

⁵¹ I do not elaborate much on Nietzsche’s thoughts about punishment and cruelty. His ideas of punishment had an impact on Michel Foucault, and for that reason, there is a good deal of discussion about them already. Cf. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

⁵² Even though Nietzsche speaks here about the pushing-back of the indebtedness into conscience rather than into the bad conscience a little later. Thus we may assume that Nietzsche is not after the contrast between the conscience and the bad conscience, but still talks about the bad conscience by itself.

⁵³ Two notes are in order here: first in the second treatise of the *GM*, Nietzsche develops three stages about the origin of theism. I do not elaborate on them here, but since they are important they should at least be mentioned. The first is the thesis on the transfiguration of worshipped ancestors into gods, presented in section 19. The second occurs in section 16. After the creation of the bad conscience (which, recall, is the most significant change that has occurred so far), Nietzsche says that from now on the spectacle on earth needed divine spectators in order to receive the appropriate kind of appreciation. So here Nietzsche seems to suggest that the origin of our belief in God lies in

the amazement that people senses at their own, the human condition, which, as Nietzsche says they perceived as too fine, wonderful, and paradoxical simply to happen on some arbitrary planet. Again we encounter a point of proximity to Freud, even though none of these three explanations is quite the same as the one offered by Freud in his *The Future of an Illusion*. For Freud, gods have three tasks: “they must exercise the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations of which a civilized life in common has imposed on them”. Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, and Peter Gay, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 22.

Second, the account that I developed is in harmony with Clark except in one important point. Clark says that “one of the major factors behind [the development of] a purely spiritual God was the need for a weapon against the self—a standard of good we could never live up to, and in relation to which we could enjoy judging, condemning, and chastising ourselves.” I think this way of characterizing the development misplaces the source of the activity. It seems that Nietzsche does indeed think that Christianity is responding to a need a meaning for the suffering. But this need is not by itself the need for a standard of good as Clark describes it. The standard of good is the specifically Christian response to an unspecific quest for meaning, i.e. a response propagated by the ascetic priests (who are discussed in the third treatise, rather than in the second treatise). That there is such a (probably fairly small) group of people who bring about the development of guilt by propagating a very specific response to an unspecific quest is, I think, an important contribution to Nietzsche’s point that the development of guilt is an accidental matter. Cf. Maudemarie Clark, “Nietzsche’s Immoralism and the Concept of Morality,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s ‘Genealogy of Morals’*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁵⁴ Nietzsche’s account of the early form of the bad conscience and indebtedness actually needs a third element to lead to the bad conscience as a feeling of guilt. The reader is invited to verify this by trying to explore ways in which these two former elements by themselves could possibly do so.

⁵⁵ Curiously, in addition to eternal punishment, Adam, and hereditary sin Nietzsche also lists ‘unfreedom of the will’ as such a key term. This is strange because he repeatedly blames Christianity for inventing a free will with the intention to find man guilt (Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans with an introduction and notes, Duncan Large, Oxford’s World Classics, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), “The Four Great Errors”, §7, and the theory of the soul in the first treatise). Moreover, in *BGE* §21, Nietzsche explains that guilt and free will are intimately connected. By refusing to place oneself into a causal web leading to one’s character traits and deeds become guilty oneself.

⁵⁶ *Id.*, *GM*, III, §15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, III, §20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, II, §16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, II, §21.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche also speaks about **shame**. (cf. *ibid.*, II, §7). He says there that the darkening of the heavens over man has increased with the increase of man’s shame before man. The context here is cruelty. It seems that this is an early allusion to the Christian point of view from which practices entailed by the naturalistic idea of justice would be condemned for the inclination to enjoy cruelty is among those that are condemned as sinful, and so their presence in man’s character gives rise to embarrassment, i.e., to shame of man before man.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, III, §15.

⁶² Cf. Nietzsche, *GS* §250, and *GM*, III, §16. However, Christianity does not only offer sanctions, but also some incentives, including the eternal life for behavior in accordance with the divine commandments. Cf. *Id.*, *The Antichrist*, with an introduction by E. Haldeman-Julius (Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1930), §43, where Nietzsche mockingly states that Christianity opens up the possibility for an eternal life “every Peter and Paul”.

⁶³ *Id.*, *GM*, II, §21.

⁶⁴ As noted earlier, Ridley sets himself the task of weaving the three treatises into one consistent narrative. He is fully aware that this attempt faces exegetical difficulties and considers various ways of resolving them [cf. Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche’s Conscience: Six Character Studies from the ‘Genealogy’*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), chapter 1, section vi]. The approach that he decides to follow implies that he cannot understand guilt as connected to Christianity in the way I suggest here. (Thus Christianity also plays no role in his account of the ‘pushing-back’, contrary to textual evidence. *ibid.*, p. 32.) I do not think that this is the route to follow. Giving up on the close connection between Christian guilt and Christianity (or more generally, transcendental concepts, as Ridley says) conflicts with what Nietzsche says in *GM*, II, §21. Ridley may consider such a conflict the price to pay for finding a unified narrative in the three treatises. But Nietzsche’s emphasis on the importance of Christianity on the postcard, in the section on *Genealogy of Morals* in *Ecce Homo* and in section 21 and the surrounding text, is too much cumulative evidence against this view for the price to be acceptable. Moreover, Ridley ascribes too much confusion to Nietzsche’s remarks on the concept of guilt, claiming that Nietzsche’s use is “infuriatingly changeable” (*op. cit.*, p. 35). Then Ridley goes on to say: “Sometimes he uses it as synonym for the bad conscience – which settles nothing (e.g., in Nietzsche, *GM*, II, §4). Sometimes he ties it extremely to religion, as when he glosses the moralization of guilt as “the involvement of the *bad* conscience with the concept of god” (*ibid.*, II, §21) – which appears to make guilt dependent on prior transcendental moves. Sometimes he suggests that religious concepts, such as sin arise through “the exploitation of the sense of guilt” by “the priest...” (*ibid.*, §20) – which implies that guilt feelings are already there to be exploited,” etc. On my account, Nietzsche’s way of talking about guilt looks more consistent, as I hope is clear now. (The *Schuldgefühl* in *ibid.*, III, §20, is again a sense of having debts, or indebtedness rather than a feeling of guilt, and the context there supports that claim.) I think that faithfulness to the text in individual treatises should have priority over the attempt to find a consistent narrative for all three treatises simultaneously. (That should be so in particular if the alternative implies giving up on Nietzsche’s emphasis on the role of Christianity.) For the absence of such a narrative is consistent with the artificial separation of topics announced on the postcard to Overbeck.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, III, §23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, III, §28.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I, §12.

⁶⁸ See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 114-116 for an account of Nietzsche’s typology, and the possibility of such a transformation.