

Phil 104, Monday, November 1, 2010
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.

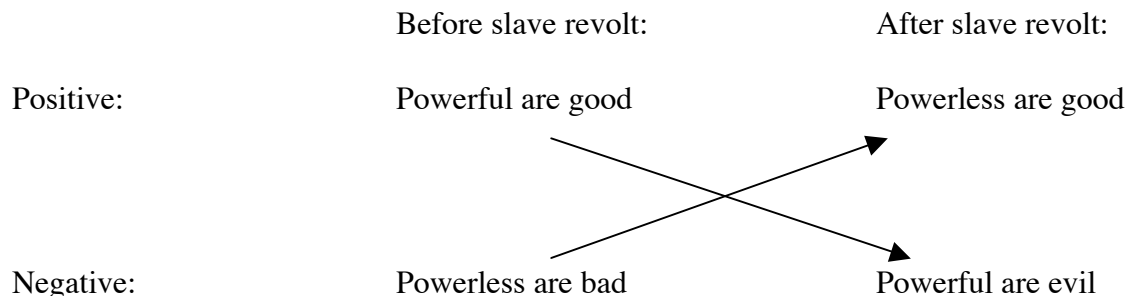
- The values of the powerful, organized around the distinction between good and *bad*,
- were replaced by the values of the powerless, organized around the distinction between good and *evil*.

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 will come in

section III. It will turn on a particular “priestly class” of nobles and their exploitation of the “ascetic ideal.”

Review Question:

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).