

morality has become immoral: “precisely morality would be to blame if the highest power and splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers?”⁶¹

Accordingly, Nietzsche concludes, “we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed.”⁶²

25. *The origin of slave morality*

Our problem is this: Somehow the morality of the weak has become dominant, and the morality of the strong has declined. How is this rather paradoxical state of affairs to be explained?

Part of the story depends on our individual biological and psychological make-ups—for each of us individually, one or the other of the two moralities resonates more within us. But part of the story is cultural, because sometimes the master morality dominates a culture and sometimes the slave morality dominates—and here there is a history lesson.⁶³

Part of the historical story is that the modern world has embraced democracy, and democracy means giving power to the majority, and a majority of people are, shall we say, conformist in their tastes, concerned with what their neighbors think about them, looking forward to retirement when they won’t have to do anything, content to sit passively in their little homes gossiping and griping about their bosses and mothers-in-law.

Democracy gives *that* sort of person power, so we should expect that democratic laws and policies will reflect the tastes and interests of that sort of person. Democracies tailor their policies to the majority—not to the exceptional few who

⁶¹ GM Preface 6.

⁶² GM Preface 6.

⁶³ GM Preface: 3 and 6.

are radicals, trailblazers, and uncompromising risk-takers.

But according to Nietzsche, the modern movement to democracy is itself an effect of deeper historical causes. If we reflect again on the elements that were on the right side of the list—*Pride goeth before the fall*; *Blessed are the meek*; *Turn the other cheek*—clearly all of them come out of the Western religious traditions.

Nietzsche is forthrightly blaming the Judeo-Christian moral tradition for the rise of the slave morality.⁶⁴ For Nietzsche, there are no essential differences between Judaism and Christianity—Jesus was a Jew who wanted to reform Judaism, and the ensuing split between Judaism and Christianity is a matter of two variations on the same theme.

Both Judaism and Christianity share the same roots and the same general approach to morality. Nietzsche traces the origin of that morality back to a decisive set of events early in Jewish history, before the time of Moses. That event was the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt. If we recall our Biblical history, the Jews were for a long time a slave people under powerful Egyptian masters.



Yet we know that the Jews found a way to survive their enslavement under the Egyptians, and while their Egyptian masters have long since perished the Jews have survived, spread across the globe, and they have kept their religion and culture alive despite often horrible adversity. How did the Jews do it?

Here Nietzsche says the Jews asked themselves some very realistic, practical questions about morality. If it is good to survive, then what policies and actions will keep you alive? And if you happen to be a slave, how does one survive as a slave? And, by contrast, what policies and actions will likely get

⁶⁴ GM 1:7.

you killed? If you are a slave and you have children whom you desperately want to survive and grow up, what will you teach your slave children to increase their chances of doing so?

Here Nietzsche is saying that what is good and bad, what is moral and immoral, is not a matter of supernatural theological commandments that hold for all circumstances timelessly. What is good and bad is a matter of real-life, practical circumstances, and different circumstances call for different moral strategies.

So if your real-life circumstance is that you are a slave, what strategy will be moral—that is, what strategy will actually help you survive?

Clearly, if you are going to survive as a slave, then you must obey the master. This does not come naturally. All living things, says Nietzsche, have an instinct to express themselves, to assert their power. So as a slave you have to stifle your natural instinct. Or suppose the master strikes you because you did something wrong—the desire for revenge comes naturally—but you have to stifle it. You train yourself to restrain your natural impulses and to internalize a humble, patient, obedient self. The slaves who don't do this end up dead. Slaves who are proud, impatient, and disobedient do not last long. Consequently, slave virtues of obedience and humility have survival value. And those are the traits you will drill into your children if you want them to survive. Slave virtues thus become cultural values across generations. Thus, Nietzsche argues, during this decisive event in early Jewish history, the slave values became the internalized cultural values of the Jews.⁶⁵

Notice that Nietzsche is saying that obedience, humility, forgiveness, and patience are moral *not* because some supernatural being commanded them to be so—fundamentally, morality has nothing to do with religion. The goodness of those traits is based on down-to-earth, nitty-gritty, practical

⁶⁵ GM 1:14.

how-do-you-survive-in-a-tough-world-of-power-struggles considerations. If you are a slave in such a world, then slave morality is a tool of survival.

Now of course time passes and many people forget where their culture's moral code came from. Or they are passive and don't think much about it at all and simply accept the prevailing norms. And even among the slaves many are sheep-like and do not especially mind being slaves. But others resent it. And here the story Nietzsche tells becomes darker.

Some of those Jews who are slaves under the Egyptians and later masters are living human beings with a human being's desire to live, grow, express who one is. But they cannot express it. To live as a slave is to be frustrated constantly, and the more one is energetic and alive, the greater one's frustration.⁶⁶

Such slaves will naturally start to resent the master strongly—and they will also start to hate themselves for having to do what the master says. How do you feel when the boss tells you to do something you don't want to do? Do you tell the boss to take this job and shove it—or do you knuckle under silently and do what he says all the while resenting it? And if you knuckle under often enough and resent long enough, what does that do to your soul? The pressure builds up: Not only do you start to hate the master, you start to hate yourself for being such a weakling and knuckling under. And that in turn causes unbearable pressure inside, psychologically. And that is when psychologically ugly things start to happen.

Nietzsche puts the point this way: “The outward discharge was inhibited [and] turned backward against man himself. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction—all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the ‘bad conscience.’”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *GM* 2:10.

⁶⁷ *GM* 1:16. Also: “but to think revenge without possessing the force and courage to carry it out, means to carry about a chronic suffering, a poisoning of body and soul” (*HH* 1.60).

So if you are one of those who have this bad conscience, how do you console yourself? How do you *not* descend into self-destructive rage? How do you channel all that pent-up energy and frustration in a safe direction that nonetheless lets you feel good about yourself? You cannot take *real* revenge against the masters—but what about *fantasy* revenge?

Here Nietzsche asks us to think about priests, those who are not the usual sheep-like followers of a religion but who are cleverer, who are more driven and ambitious, and who feel more acutely the internal battle between the natural animal drive for power and the demands of a morality that has taught them to be selfless and humble. Inside such priests, Nietzsche says, we find the most interesting and disturbing psychological phenomena.

Nietzsche puts it harshly: “It is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions. The truly great haters in world history have always been priests.”⁶⁸

And what are the priests of the Judeo-Christian tradition constantly talking about in their sermons? Isn’t it one big revenge fantasy?

They tell their flocks that it is good to be humble, meek, and obedient. But to whom is one to be obedient? Well, to God of course. But God is not often around, so being obedient to God in practical terms means being obedient to God’s representatives here on earth—and guess who those people are. Of course, it is the priests. So this is part of the strategy: form a power base of large numbers of people who are your obedient followers. You might not have quality people on your side, but sometimes large quantities of people can be a powerful weapon.

Another part of the sermon is to condemn those who are rich, powerful, and assertive—to demand of them that they give away their money, put their power in the service of the weak and the sick, and be like the lion that is supposed to

⁶⁸ GM 1:7.

lie down with the lamb and not eat it for lunch. What is the point of all these sermons against the rich and the powerful? Of course part of it is a consolation for those in your audience who are weak and poor—it plays on their envy of the rich and powerful and gives them the satisfaction of hearing the rich and the powerful getting a tongue-lashing.

But the sermon is also meant as a direct weapon against the rich and the powerful and is meant to induce in them a sense of guilt and self-doubt about who they are and how they live. The moral sermons are psychological weapons in the battle of the weak against the strong, and the weak use *psychological* weapons since *physical* weapons are not their forte. The priests never use physical confrontation against the masters, and the masters find it beneath their dignity to fight against an unarmed, and to them contemptible, enemy. Instead the priests use *morality* as their weapon of confrontation: they praise the meek and condemn the strong. Judeo-Christian ethics, Nietzsche says, “has waged deadly war against this higher type of man; it has placed all the basic instincts of his type under ban.”⁶⁹

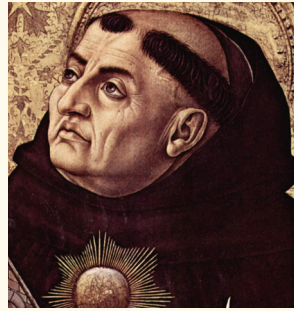
The Judeo-Christian moral code, Nietzsche concludes, becomes part of their revenge strategy. Its point is to enable the weaker to survive in a harsh world in which they are often on the receiving end of the big stick—but also to undermine the master-type’s confidence in themselves and eventually to subdue and bring down the masters so as to exact a spiritual revenge.⁷⁰

As evidence of this, Nietzsche reminds us of standard Judeo-Christian rhetoric about how, despite current appearances, the weak, the sick, and the poor will triumph in the end. Their kingdom shall come some day and God will visit his wrath upon the rich and powerful. In a perfect catch, Ni-

⁶⁹ A 5.

⁷⁰ BGE 219; GM 1:7, 1:10, 1:15.

etzsche quotes St. Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of Catholic theology and the most influential philosopher of Christianity for the last millennium: “In order that the bliss of the saints may be more delightful for them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, it is given to them to see perfectly the punishment of the damned.”⁷¹



St. Thomas Aquinas

Boiling all of this down to two essential points, Nietzsche believes that the slave morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition is a two-fold strategy: (1) it is a survival code that enables the weak to band together for survival; and (2) it is as revenge and a power play in their battle against the strong.

In Nietzsche’s judgment there is no serious question about who is winning the age-old battle.

An early Christian Church father named Tertullian once asked, rhetorically: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” In early church history, Christians such as Tertullian were regularly argued with and mocked by philosophers of the pagan schools of classical Greek philosophy. The point of Tertullian’s reply—“What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”—was that the traditions that came out of Athens and the traditions that came out of Jerusalem are opposed and have nothing to do with one another. It is an age-old battle for dominance over the soul of the Western world.

Nietzsche agrees, but he phrases the point differently. Jerusalem is the home of the major Western religious traditions, all of them stemming from Judaism. But instead of Athens, Nietzsche points to classical Rome as the greatest height

⁷¹ GM 1:15n. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. III, Supplementum, Q.94, A.1 and 3: “Whether the blessed in heaven will see the sufferings of the damned?” and “Whether the blessed rejoice in the punishment of the wicked?” In Article 3, Aquinas qualifies the rejoicing by stating that it is in reaction to the justice of God’s punishment of the wicked.

the pagan traditions achieved. In Rome, the philosophy and art of the Greeks was combined with the political and military genius of the Romans to create the greatest empire the world had ever seen.⁷²

So in Nietzsche's reading of history, the great battle for the soul of the Western world is: *Rome versus Judea*.

As evidence of whether Rome or Judea is winning, he invites us to consider to whom one kneels down before in Rome today. The Judeo-Christians have taken over Rome, and to use Nietzsche's words, "everything is visibly becoming Judaized, Christian-ized, mob-ized."⁷³ The chief slave has for a long time established his camp and planted his flag in the center of what was the greatest master empire the world had ever seen.

All of this is a great moral crisis, and it is a crisis because the future development of mankind is at stake. What kind of species do we want to be? In what way do we want to develop? The moral code we choose will set our course. What most people consider to be the only morality possible, Judeo-Christian morality, Nietzsche sees as a threat to human development because it damns all those traits of assertiveness and egoism and independence and risk-taking that make human greatness and development possible—and that same morality praises smallness and meekness and falling on your knees in shame—all traits that undermine human greatness.

"Nothing stands more malignantly in the way of [mankind's] rise and evolution ... than what in Europe today is called simply 'morality.'" And more bluntly: "let me declare expressly that in the days when mankind was not yet ashamed of its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is now."⁷⁴

So the current dominance of the Judeo-Christian mo-

⁷²Nietzsche: "For the Romans were the strong and the noble, and nobody stronger and nobler has yet existed on earth or even been dreamed of" (*GM* 1.16).

⁷³*GM* 1:9.

⁷⁴*GM* 2:7.

rality is an unhealthy development that must be overcome.⁷⁵ The fate of the human species depends upon it. We must go beyond good and evil.

26. *The Overman*

Nietzsche once said that he philosophized with a hammer.⁷⁶ By that he did not mean anything crude like a sledgehammer that smashes things. He had in mind a delicate hammer like the one a piano tuner uses to strike keys on a finely-built musical instrument—to see which notes ring clear and which are discordant or muddy. In writing his philosophy, Nietzsche intended for his words to be like that delicate hammer on your soul. When you read them, how does your soul respond? Does it vibrate clearly—or does it wobble uncertainly? When you hear that God is dead—do those words cause you to shrink inside and fill with a squishy panic—or do they strike a clear, pure, liberating note that heralds the beginning of the tremendous symphony that you can become?

God is dead, so we must become gods and create our own values. Yet most people are afraid of legislating for themselves. They know there is inequality and risk out there in the big, bad world. So they want to let some higher power shoulder the responsibility. But, Nietzsche says, for some precious few among us, the realization that God is dead galvanizes every fiber of their being. They respond by feeling, both passionately and solemnly: *I will become the author. I will create. I will embrace the responsibility—joyously. I will move beyond good and evil and create a new, magnificent set of values.*

Such an individual will raise mankind to a higher level of existence. He will be on the path to the *Übermensch*—the superman or overman.

⁷⁵ Noting here that toward the end of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche argues that the new masters will thus combine the physical vitality of the aristocratic masters with the spiritual ruthlessness of the slave-priests of Christianity: the new masters will be “Caesars with the soul of Christ” (*WP* 983).

⁷⁶ Preface to *Ecce Homo*.