

Notes

- 1 Ricoeur's "logic of superabundance" is the idea that we should treat others with overflowing generosity – as God has treated us – not just as we *consent* to being treated or are (minimally) *willing* to be treated ourselves.
- 2 The self-interest interpretation of the golden rule to which Ricoeur refers was common in ancient Greece: we ought to treat others well (as we want to be treated) because then others will treat us well. Ricoeur argues for a transformation of the rule: because God has first loved us abundantly, we are inspired to love others (to treat them as we want to be treated) in a selfless manner.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Master and Slave Morality

Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher and philologist who lived from 1844 to 1900, wrote voluminously on socio-cultural issues. He is widely recognized as an astute critic of many of the main currents of nineteenth-century thinking. Using trenchant prose and powerful wit, he savagely attacked ideals of piety, progress, compassion, and scientific rigor. His criticisms have had a profound impact on continental thinkers, such as Heidegger, Adorno, Foucault, and Derrida.

Nietzsche claims that Christianity gave rise to a bourgeois civilization that inculcated unquestioning conformism and resentment against the powerful. Inspired by Darwinian theories of evolution, he argues that nature endows us – as it does animals – with a will to power that, if unimpeded by repression, drives us to individualist displays of strength and even cruelty. He urges the development of a noble morality that allows such urges to assert themselves as we regain our authentic lives.

As you read the selection, ask yourself whether Nietzsche is merely giving an interesting – and possibly ironic – criticism of some of the cultural norms of his society, or whether he is in fact proposing a normative view of how all humans ought to act.

The will to power

[257] Every elevation of the type "man" has been the work of an aristocratic society – a society believing in gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings, and requiring slavery in some form. Let us acknowledge how every higher civilization has originated! Men with a natural nature, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races. The noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their superiority did not consist first of all in their physical, but in their psychological power – they were more *complete* men (which implies "more complete beasts").

[259] To refrain mutually from injury, from violence, from exploitation, and put one's will on a par with that of others: this may result in good

conduct among individuals when the necessary conditions are given (namely, the actual similarity of the individuals in amount of force and degree of worth, and their co-relation within one organization). As soon, however, as one wished to take this principle more generally, and even as *the fundamental principle of society*, it would immediately disclose what it really is – namely, a Will to the *denial* of life, a principle of dissolution and decay. Here one must think profoundly and resist all sentimental weakness: life itself is *essentially* injury, conquest of the weak, and exploitation. Life is precisely Will to Power.

People rave everywhere about coming conditions of society in which “the exploiting character” is to be absent: that sounds to my ears as if they promised a mode of life which should refrain from all organic functions. “Exploitation” does not belong to a depraved, or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *nature* of the living being as a primary organic function; it is a consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power, which is precisely the Will to Life. As a theory this is a novelty – as a reality it is the *fundamental fact* of all history: let us be honest towards ourselves!

Master morality

[260] There is *master-morality and slave-morality*. The distinctions of moral values have either originated in a ruling caste, or among the ruled class.

In the first case, when it is the rulers who determine the conception “good,” it is the exalted, proud disposition which determines the order of rank. The noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the opposite of this exalted disposition displays itself: he despises them. In this first kind of morality, the antithesis “good” and “bad” means practically the same as “noble” and “despicable”; the antithesis “good” and “*evil*” is of a different origin. The cowardly, the timid, the insignificant, and those thinking merely of narrow utility are despised.

The noble type of man regards *himself* as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: “What is injurious to me is injurious in itself”; he knows that it is he himself only who confers honor on things; he is a *creator of values*. He honors whatever he recognizes in himself: such morality is self-glorification. There is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would give and bestow: the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by the super-abundance of power.

The noble and brave who think thus are the furthest removed from the morality which sees in sympathy, or in acting for the good of others, the characteristic of the moral.

A morality of the ruling class is especially foreign to present-day taste in its principle that one has duties only to one’s equals; that one may act towards beings of a lower rank just as seems good to one, or “as the heart desires,” and in any case “beyond good and evil.”

Slave morality

It is otherwise with the second type of morality, *slave-morality*. Supposing that the oppressed, the suffering, the weary, should moralize, what will be the common element in their moral estimates? Probably a pessimistic suspicion with regard to the situation of man will find expression. The slave has an unfavorable eye for the virtues of the powerful. On the other hand, *those* qualities which serve to alleviate the existence of sufferers are brought into prominence; it is here that sympathy, the helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness attain to honor for here these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence.

Slave-morality is the morality of utility. Here is the seat of the origin of the famous antithesis “good” and “evil”: power and dangerousness are assumed to reside in the evil. According to slave-morality, the “evil” man arouses fear; according to master-morality, it is precisely the “good” man who arouses fear. According to the servile mode of thought, the good man must be the *safe* man: he is good-natured, easily deceived, perhaps a little stupid.

[262] The mediocre alone have a prospect of continuing and propagating themselves – they will be the men of the future, the sole survivors: “be like them! Become mediocre!” is now the only morality which has still a significance, which still obtains a hearing. But it is difficult to preach this morality of mediocrity! It can never avow what it is and what it desires! – it will have difficulty *in concealing its irony!*

The noble Superman

[265] Egoism belongs to the essence of a noble soul, I mean the unalterable belief that to a being such as “we,” other beings must naturally be in subjection, and have to sacrifice themselves. The noble soul accepts the fact of his egoism without question, as something that may have its basis in the primary law of things: he would say: “It is justice itself.” He acknowledges that there are other equally privileged ones; as soon as he has settled this question of rank, he moves among those equals and equally privileged ones with the same assurance, as regards modesty and delicate respect, which he enjoys in intercourse with himself. It is an *additional* instance of his egoism, this

artfulness and self-limitation in intercourse with his equals; he honors *himself* in them, and in the rights which he concedes to them.

[270] Profound suffering makes noble: it separates. One of the most refined forms of disguise is Epicurism,¹ which takes suffering lightly, and puts itself on the defensive against all that is sorrowful and profound.

[293] There is nowadays a sickly irritability and sensitiveness towards pain, and also a repulsive complaining, an effeminising, which, with the aid of religion and philosophical nonsense, seeks to deck itself out as something superior – there is a regular cult of suffering. The *unmanliness* of that which is called “sympathy” by such groups of visionaries, is always the first thing that strikes the eye.

[3] For today have the petty people become master: they all preach submission and humility and diligence and consideration and the long *et cetera* of petty virtues. Whatever is of the effeminate type, whatever originates from the servile type: *that* wishes now to be master of all human destiny – O disgust! Disgust! Disgust!

These masters of today – surpass them, O my brethren – these petty people: *they* are the Superman’s greatest danger! Surpass, you higher men, the petty virtues, the pitiable comfortableness, the “happiness of the greatest number”!

[5] “Man is evil” – so said to me for consolation. Ah, if only it be still true today! For the evil is man’s best force. “Man must become better and eviler” – so do *I* teach. The vilest is necessary for the Superman’s best. I rejoice in great sin as my great *consolation*.

[24] Once did people say God, when they looked out upon distant seas; now, however, have I taught you to say, Superman. God is a conjecture. Could you *create* a God? Then, I pray you, be silent about all gods! But you could well create the Superman. Not perhaps you yourselves, my brethren! But into fathers and forefathers of the Superman could you transform yourselves: and let that be your best creating!

Study questions

- 1 Describe the process by which Nietzsche claims that human achievements have an aristocratic origin.
- 2 How does he make the rather counter-intuitive link between refraining from injury and denying life?
- 3 How does he justify exploitation?
- 4 Describe the contrast between master and slave morality. Which does Nietzsche seem to prefer? Why?
- 5 Nietzsche says “Slave morality is essentially morality of utility” [260]. Why are slaves so interested in the good of all?

- 6 Can there be more than one superman? If so, how would they interact with each other?
- 7 What features of religion does Nietzsche highlight? What features does he ignore?

For further study

This selection has excerpts, often simplified in their wording, from two of Friedrich Nietzsche’s works: *Beyond Good and Evil*, sections 257–93, and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, sections 3–24. Both are found in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1954), translated by H. Zimmern and T. Common. Though most of Nietzsche’s works deal with ethical themes, those most relevant to ethics include *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), translated by D. Smith; *Human, All Too Human* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), translated by G. Handwerk; *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), translated by D. Breazeale; *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), translated by R. Speirs; and *Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1967), translated by W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. For secondary sources, see Walter Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Arthur Danto’s *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Karl Löwith’s *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Alexander Nehemas’s *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

Most of the readings in this anthology support some sort of equality or concern for others, and thus would contrast with Nietzsche; see especially Brandt, Mill, Singer, and Smart (who defend various forms of utilitarianism); Hume (who sees sympathy as playing a large role in morality); Ross (who defends duties against injury); King (who criticizes segregation on the basis of love-thy-neighbor); and Hertzler (who stresses that the golden rule was historically supported by people from all classes of society, including the aristocratic class). Also, see Lewis and Ricoeur, both of whom write about the connection between ethics and religion, and the Bible selections, which give the orientation that Nietzsche is criticizing.

Note

- 1 Nietzsche here rejects ancient Greek Epicureanism, which saw pleasure and the avoidance of pain as the goal of life.