Why We Are Not Equal:

And What We Did About It

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Contents

"*I don't like him.*"

—Why?

"*I am not equal to him.*"

—Has any human being ever answered that way?

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Introduction

Nietzsche's account of the "slave revolt in morality" (I:7),[1] presented in the first essay of what is arguably his most important work, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, articulates the groundwork for a critique of our contemporary moral values that is at once cogent, sophisticated, and potentially devastating. In outline: the slave revolt in morality is the process by which "noble morality"—so named for individuals who, by virtue of their *superior psychophysiological character* (as determined by attributes such as physicality, vitality, good humor, or some other arbitrary value that grants social power in a society characterized by competing wills and scarce resources)—came to be subverted and overturned by "slave morality"—so named for individuals who, suffice it to say, lack such advantages—culminating in the so-called "moralization" of noble values. The ideals that constitute slave morality (ideals such as: compassion, altruism, and egalitarianism), Nietzsche argues, inhibit individuals of superior psychophysiological character from fulfilling the promise of their innate and inborn advantages.

This paper is divided into two parts. In Part I ("*What the Slave Revolt Did*"), I will lay the foundation for an inquiry into the slave revolt by examining: (1) what morality *is*—that is, what distinguishes morality from any other evaluative schema—

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 17. A note on annotations: I will append to every textual citation of the *Genealogy* a parenthetic reference to the relevant essay and section; for instance, section 4 of the preface is cited as (P:4). I will occasionally also make references to arguments advanced in earlier sections of the paper. Brackets are used to distinguish these citations from citations to Nietzsche's *Genealogy*; for instance, section 8 of Part II of this essay is cited as [II:8].

and (2) what distinguishes noble morality from slave morality. I will also (3) produce an account of Nietzsche's *rejection of moral responsibility*—that is, his claim that it is logically inconsistent for slave morality to hold individuals morally responsible for their *behavior* (which Nietzsche claims is an immutable result of one's psychophysiological character) and yet no other attribute of an individual's psychophysiological character. In Part II ("*Why They Did It*"), I will examine the psychic trauma experienced by the slaves prior to the slave revolt living under the regime of noble morality. Nietzsche traces the origin of the slave's revaluation of values to his *ressentiment*—that is, the slave's deep and seething hatred of the nobles, a hatred "whose like has never before existed on earth" (I:8).[2]

I am particularly interested in the question of to what degree the so-called "slaves," in creating and propagating a system of values that ultimately proved catastrophic for the so-called "nobles," intended consciously to *overpower* their noble subjugators—in other words, to what degree was the initiation of slave morality a *strategic act*? (And how is this consistent with the instruction so central to slave morality to "love thy neighbor" and "do no harm"?) Finally, I intend to produce a comprehensive account of the psychic variables preceding the emergence of *ressentiment* in the slave—that is, the perceptual suppositions that enabled *ressentiment* to "become creative" and give birth to our contemporary moral values. By positing the morality of compassion, altruism, and egalitarianism as a descendant of hate—and not just of any hate, but the *most sublime hate on earth*—and by furthermore positioning slave morality as an obstacle to an end that he considers to

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[2] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 17.

be of preeminent value, Nietzsche intended to facilitate a "revaluation of values" (assisted by the decline of religion, the "death of God") which he hoped would culminate in the final dislodgment of our slave-acquired moral prejudices.[3]

My intention, simply, is to explain it.

[3] See, for instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kauffman (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 782: "*Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity, become flesh and genius in me. It is my fate that I have to be the first decent human being; that I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia."

Part I. *What the Slave Revolt Did*

1. Introduction. The slave revolt in morality, according to Nietzsche, "begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values" (I:10)[4]—though this is somewhat misleading, for the principal achievement of the slave revolt is not so much the creation of *values* but rather the creation of *moral values*. "The job of the 'slave revolt,'" as Maudemarie Clark observes, "is to explain the transformation of a pre-moral notion of *goodness* into a specifically moral one."[5]

At its core, Nietzsche's slave revolt is an account of the psychological and social condition that caused a once-dominant evaluative schema—in this case, noble morality—to be radically undermined and reformulated. I use the term "evaluative schema" to denote any general system of assigning values of *goodness* and *badness* to objects with reference to an "*evaluative ideal*"—that is, an object or a set of objects considered fundamentally valuable, and therefore fundamentally good. In every such schema, values are assigned according to the degree to which an object expresses the evaluative ideal: a "revaluation of values" therefore simply suggests a revaluation of an ideal.

And yet even to say that the slave revolt gave birth to moral values is problematic, since the evaluative schemas attributed to both the nobles and the slaves are said by Nietzsche to be "moral." Since only slave morality and *not* noble morality is the object of Nietzsche's apparent enmity, we might conclude that there

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[4] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 19.

[5] Maudemarie Clark, introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), xxx.

is some understanding of the word "morality" that does not elicit any particular antipathy from Nietzsche. Indeed, a great deal has been written about the distinction between the word "morality" as used by Nietzsche to describe a *particular* evaluative schema, such as "slave morality" or "noble morality," and the "morality" that is the object of his sustained critique in the *Genealogy*.[6] Without first clarifying the differences between these two uses of the word, phrases such as "the moralization of noble values" or "the pre-moral values of noble morality" can quickly become perplexing.

2. Morality in the wider sense. Hoping to untangle this terminological ambiguity, Clark suggests Nietzsche uses the word "morality" in both a *wider* and a *narrower* sense, such that morality in the wider (and, presumably, non-pejorative) sense encompasses both the widely accepted principles of slave morality and the less-intuitive peculiarities of noble morality.[7] Morality in the wider sense, Clark explains, is used by Nietzsche to denote "any internalized code of conduct or system of values that constrains behavior in relation to other people." She continues: "We can, for instance, entertain the possibility that thieves and others who are beyond the pale of what we call 'morality' live by an ethical code, perhaps a code of honor. This means that they may consider it important not treat each other, or their victims, in certain

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[6] "One of the standing problems in the interpretation of Nietzsche is how to define the precise *scope* of his critique of morality," Leiter observes. For a concise overview of the various approaches that have been taken to resolve this problem in the secondary literature, see Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), 74-77.

[7] For an expanded discussion of morality in the wider sense as well as a thorough account of the *Genealogy* as a unified project, see 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), 15-34.

ways, even when it would be convenient to do so, that they might actually be unable to live with themselves if they did."[8] Of course, one thing Clark needs to do is differentiate morality in the wider sense from any general evaluative schema. To this end, Clark construes morality in the wider sense as a system of conferring values to objects that necessarily implicate "other people" (whether *all* other people or, in the case of noble morality, merely a *subset* of other people—i.e., other nobles).[9] Nietzsche's understanding of "morality" in the wider sense, she writes, is "thus equivalent to 'ethic' or 'ethics,' as Bernard Williams uses these terms."[10]

Clark's interpretation may seem compelling to us for several reasons. For one, it neatly concurs with popular conceptions of moral judgments. As Philippa Foot notes: "Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society,"[11] citing John Stuart Mill's assertion that even so-called "hurtful indulgences," such as rashness, obstinacy, and self-conceit, "are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself."[12] Moreover, moral judgments throughout the first essay of the *Genealogy* do have a tendency to appear within a social context—that is, within the context of a particular class-based social hierarchy occupied by nobles at the top and slaves at the bottom. While it is true, for instance,

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[8] Clark, introduction to *Genealogy of Morality*, xviii-xix.
[9] Even Clark's reference to "people" here is a bit problematic, since non-human animals are often said to merit at least some of the moral considerations that we offer to people. A more encompassing term for this discussion might be "subjects."
[10] Clark, introduction to *Genealogy of Morality*, xviii.
[11] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 68.
[12] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Penguin Group, 1974), 87.

that the noble's evaluation of himself as "good" is said to have grown "spontaneously" (I:10),[13] it also originated "in contrast to everything base, low-minded, common, and vulgar" (I:2)[14]—in other words, it emerged from the distance that separated the high-ranking noble from *other people*.

3. The noble's absence of unegoistic concern for others. Yet insofar as the social realm is not the *only* context in which moral judgments may rightfully appear—and it is not—Clark's interpretation is ultimately unsatisfying. A sense of profound self-satisfaction, for instance, which under noble morality would have certainly been valued as not only good but *morally* good, does not presuppose the presence (or even existence) of other individuals at all.

In other words, noble morality assigns values of goodness and badness to objects with reference to a fundamentally *inward-looking and individualist evaluative ideal*. The mistake that moral historians have made, Nietzsche writes at the very outset of the first essay, is their ascription of the origin of moral goodness to the habitual praise heaped upon "unegoistic actions," or actions done to defend or advance the interests and welfare of *other people*: "'Originally'—so they decree—'unegoistic actions were praised and called good from the perspective of those to whom they were rendered, hence for whom they were *useful*'" (I:2).[15] When Nietzsche asks of the progenitors of noble morality—those "noble, powerful, higher-ranking, and high-minded" individuals who "first took for themselves the right to create

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[13] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 19.
[14] Ibid., 10.
[15] Ibid.

values"—"What did they care about usefulness!" (I:2),[16] he might as well have asked: "What did they care about the consequences of their actions? What did they care about the concerns of anybody else?"

The lack of "usefulness" to other people that Nietzsche attributes to the pre-slave-revolt interpretation of moral goodness might be recast as a statement about the noble's *absence of unegoistic concern for the welfare of others*:

> The judgment 'good' does *not* stem from those to whom 'goodness' is rendered! Rather it was 'the good' themselves . . . who felt and ranked themselves and their doings as good . . . in contrast to everything base, low-minded, common, and vulgar. Out of this *pathos of distance* they first took for themselves the right to create values, to coin names for values: what did they care about usefulness! The viewpoint of utility is as foreign and inappropriate as possible, especially in relation to so hot an outpouring of highest rank-ordering, rank-distinguishing value judgments . . . . It is because of this origin that from the outset the word 'good' does not *necessarily* [emphasis added] attach itself to 'unegoistic' actions—as is the superstition of those genealogists of morality. (I:2)[17]

That Nietzsche qualifies his final statement with the word "necessarily" suggests the noble's conception of human goodness *can* indeed attach itself to unegoistic actions. Of course, merely because an action appears unegoistic does not mean that the action necessarily arose from an *unegoistic concern for another person*. It may well be the case that the noble considers the compassionate treatment of another person to be instinctively pleasurable; and, consequently, the noble might privilege the realization of this pleasure over the realization of some competing

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 10-11.

pleasure. Consider, for instance, the iconic scene in Homer's *Iliad* in which Hector, bidding goodbye to his wife and child for the last time before returning to Troy, stretches out his arms to his son only to have the infant shrink away, terrified by the horse-hair plume on his helmet: "Hs dear father laughed aloud, and . . . forthwith glorious Hector took the helmet from his head, and laid it, all gleaming, upon the earth; then kissed he his dear son and dandled him in his arms."[18]

The noble's expression of compassion, however, takes place only in consultation with *the noble's own subjective values, instincts, and desires*: at no point does the *usefulness* of his conduct to some other person enter necessarily into his calculation. For this reason, I take issue with Clark's appeal to the thief's "code of honor" as a useful example for our understanding of noble morality. The thief who refrains from killing her victim *not* because it would be against her interest to do so, but because the victim's child would be orphaned, has not embraced an evaluative schema substantively distinct from slave morality: rather, she has simply internalized those particular elements of slave morality that compel empathy and compassion toward children, while rejecting the elements of slave morality that compel abstaining from theft.

Indeed, in putting forward an interpretation of morality in the wider sense that necessitates the recognition of "other people," Clark appears to have inadvertently invoked a conception of "morality" that more closely aligns with how the word is commonly understood today rather than in the era of the nobles. "On

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[18] Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, and Ernest Myers, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 42.

the contrary," writes Nietzsche, "only when aristocratic value judgments begin to *decline* does this entire opposition 'egoistic' 'unegostic' impose itself more and more on the human conscience" (I:2).[19]

4. Morality's interest in exemplifying human goodness. This is not to say, however, that a compelling interpretation of morality in the wider sense (to proceed with Clark's terminology) should not begin by examining what it means for an object to attain a value of moral goodness in the first place, as opposed to any other form of goodness. There are, after all, virtually no restrictions on the kinds of objects that an individual might conceivably rank as "good": hot showers, Balanchine's ballets, the feeling of fullness, directions to the airport, telling the truth, and Amartya Sen are all objects to which I, on any given day, may be inclined to assign a value of goodness. But which (if any) of these objects would Nietzsche consider worthy of *moral* consideration?

Complicating this question is the undeniable fact that Nietzsche's conception of noble morality—and thus his conception of morality in the wider sense—goes further than most moral philosophers are willing to go in broadening the eligibility criteria for moral evaluation. Still, it would nonetheless ring false to suggest that Nietzsche conceptualized morality in the wider sense *so* broadly that even objects such as hot showers or directions to the airport could attain a measure of moral significance. What, then, distinguishes the set of objects within the realm of moral judgment, whose constituent elements are as varied, according to Nietzsche, as a

[19] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 11.

"powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even overflowing health" (I:7)[20] (deemed morally good by the noble) and "unegoistic actions" (I:2)[21] (deemed morally good by the slaves)?

We might begin with the observation that moral judgments did not originate with the *slave*, as an initial reading of the *Genealogy* might suggest, but rather with the *noble*. It was the noble who first turned the practice of evaluating objects in the world inward and toward himself—by recognizing that he, too, was an object in this world that could be ranked; that, like the breed of oxen he extols as superior to other oxen on account of its physicality (or its ease of capture, or the taste of its flesh, or *any other evaluative ideal*), the noble, too, is an object within a set that can be evaluated and ranked with respect to his peers with reference to an evaluative ideal (that is, an ideal of how human beings *ought* to be).[22]

The noble's creation of moral values begins the moment he realizes he can make claims about himself beyond the statement "I am," and proceeds to make the statement "I am how a person *ought to be*." What is therefore common to the noble's and the slave's moral evaluations alike—and what is truly distinguishing about morality in the wider sense, as Nietzsche understands it—is a shared interest in identifying objects (such as traits, actions, or individuals) that reveal a certain subjective account of *human goodness*: an interest, in other words, in determining

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[20] Ibid., 16.
[21] Ibid., 10.
[22] We should not read into this formulation the principle that "ought implies can," for we will soon see that the evaluative ideal of noble morality is, in practice, unattainable by the slave.

whether and to what degree any given individual expresses a particular evaluative ideal of how a human being *ought to be*.[23]

5. Ought to be vs. ought to act. Such an interpretation of morality may not strike the reader as anything exceptional or surprising: after all, hasn't human goodness functioned as a central concern of moral philosophy since Aristotle? Yet Nietzsche's conception of morality in the wider sense radically departs from how morality is generally conceived by the vast majority of philosophers. This is because most moral philosophers tend to understand moral goodness not as a matter of how a person ought to *be*, but as a matter of how a person ought to *act* (and perhaps also—in the case of Kant, for instance—how a person ought to *think*, although one can make the claim that thinking itself is merely a subcategory of action).[24]

H.G. Alexander notes: "It is often said that in science a particular experiment is interpreted as establishing a general result. . . . In rather the same way, any moral judgment implies not only that it is wrong for X to do Y at time *t*, but for anyone in a position such as X's to do an act similar to Y."[25] Moral judgments, in other words, are to be—if not universalizable per se[26]—then at the very least generalizable to the

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[23] In other words, evaluative schemas that are *moral* will inevitably evaluate the goodness and badness of *human beings*. This is not to say that the evaluative ideals of every such schema will necessarily be cognizant of the wide disparity in aptitudes and abilities that exists among human beings. It is certainly possible for an evaluative schema to be moral, and yet at the same time hold as its evaluative ideal a human property that is unrealizable by some members of the human population—such is the case with noble morality, for example.

[24] In fact, just as one might make the claim that thinking is a merely a subcategory of acting, Nietzsche would make the claim that acting is merely a subcategory of being, and a person can no more be responsible for how she *acts* than she can for how she *is*. I will examine this argument shortly.

[25] H. G. Alexander, "Subjectivity in Aesthetics," *Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1955): 330.

[26] This caveat is intended to account for ethical systems that reject universal prescriptivism.

degree that they are pertinent to more than just a single individual in a single spatiotemporal context. The operative assumption of generalizability is that a different person in a different spatial and temporal context must nevertheless be *free* to do Y should he or she so choose. Thus moral judgments tend to be rendered with an implied appreciation for an individual's *freedom* to act either in accord or discord with what the judgment demands: to imbue *personal attributes* (e.g., an individual's eye color, athletic ability, or station of birth)—over which an individual has no authority or control—with *moral significance* would appear to most rational observers as unjust, if not absurd.

Yet moral evaluations of an individual's personal attributes lie at the crux of noble morality. "Grant me just one glimpse of something perfect, completely formed, happy, powerful, triumphant, in which there is still something to fear," writes Nietzsche. "Of a human being who justified man *himself*; a human being who is a stroke of luck, completing and redeeming man, and for whose sake one may hold fast to *belief in man*" (I:12).[27] It is this hypothetical being to whom Nietzsche ascribes not only value, but *moral* value—a man who embodies not only strength and happiness, but that rare olympian fortune of having emerged from the womb endowed with a natural potency over himself, his peers, and his natural obstacles; an innate capacity to consummate his desires and overpower his rivals (often, but not always, other human beings) in a competitive social environment characterized by competing wills and scarce resources. It is a man who thrives in competition, for he—*by happenstance*—possesses the set of innate characteristics that predispose him

[27] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 24.

to victory and mastery over not only other people *but nature itself*, such that the child who dies of leukemia is considered *morally bad* under noble morality, even if he did nothing to deserve his fate![28] The man whose fate, on the other hand, arouses envy in others is considered not only fortunate, but *morally good*: the paragon toward which other individuals are to impossibly strive.

If slave morality has Christ as its mythological ideal, noble morality might be said to have Achilles. The cruelty, of course, is that no common man or woman can actually expect to be like Achilles—or even to be morally good—for, although noble morality might have an Achilles-like figure as its paradigmatic ideal, it operates under no illusion that every human being is equally capable of achieving its evaluative ideal. Whereas contemporary morality is interested in evaluating *behavior*, an object that is within our immediate and conscious control, noble morality is interested in evaluating *being*. An individual may very well be fortunate or misfortunate in such a way that one's fortune lies outside one's sphere of actionable influence, yet for him to be fortunate is nevertheless considered *morally good*—and for him to be misfortunate, *morally bad*—according noble morality.[29]

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[28] See ibid., 16-17: "It was the Jews who in opposition to the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) dared its inversion, with fear-inspiring consistency, and held it fast with teeth of the most unfathomable hate (the hate of powerlessness), namely: 'the miserable alone are the good; the poor, powerless, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly are also the only pious, the only blessed in God, for them alone is there blessedness,—whereas you, you noble and powerful ones, you are in all eternity the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless, you will eternally be the wretched, accursed, and damned!'" (I:7).

[29] The noble's conception of moral badness might be articulated as simply what the noble instinctively despises, divorced from any notion of justice or desert. Consider, for instance, the following passage in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kauffman (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 394: "In [the case of noble morality],

6. Noble morality and the instinctive ideal. "All noble morality grows out of a triumphant yes-saying to oneself" (I:10),[30] Nietzsche observes; and here we might ask: what about "oneself"—that is, what traits and characteristics—might an individual be most naturally and instinctively inclined to say "yes" to?

"It is of no small interest," Nietzsche writes, in seeking the early origins of moral goodness, "to discover that often in those words and roots that designate 'good' that main nuance still shimmers through with respect to which the nobles felt themselves to be humans of a higher rank" (I:5).[31] He later observes that, as a general rule, "the concept of superiority in politics always resolves itself into a concept of superiority of soul" (I:6).[32] In other words, the first evaluations of moral goodness—as devised by "the noble, powerful, higher-ranking, and high-minded who felt and ranked themselves and their doings as good" (I:2)[33]—can be traced to the individual's natural and instinctive impulse to say "yes" to that which produces some feeling of *power* within his or her mind. "Every animal, thus also *la bête philosophe* ["the philosophical animal"], instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can vent its power completely and attain its

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when the ruling group determines what is 'good,' the exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank. The noble human being separates from himself those in whom the opposite of such exalted, proud states finds expression: he despise them. It should be noted immediately that in this first type of morality the opposition of 'good' and 'bad' means approximately the same as 'noble' and 'contemptible.'"

[30] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 19.

[31] Ibid., 13.

[32] Ibid., 14.

[33] Ibid., 10.

maximum in the feeling of power" (III:7),[34] writes Nietzsche in one of his most well-known articulations of his theory of the *will to power*.

Although a thorough account of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power falls outside the scope of this paper, our discussion of noble morality may be most usefully informed by the following interpretation put forth by Brian Leiter: "As [Walter] Kaufmann and Clark, among others, have noted, Nietzsche's doctrine of will to power in its origin and most of its later development is *psychological* in character: the will to power is posited as the best psychological explanation for a wide variety of human behaviors (Kaufmann 1974, Ch. 6; Clark 1990: 209-12)."[35] The will to power, it appears, motivates the noble to desire "the feeling of satisfaction that comes from being permitted to vent his power without a second thought on one who is powerless, the carnal delight *'de faire le mal pour le plaisir de la faire'* ["to do evil for the pleasure of doing it"], the enjoyment of doing violence" (II:5).[36]

Nietzsche, explaining the basic feeling of power that the creditor derives from punishing the debtor, notes derisively that the creditor's enjoyment at executing his punishment is "valued all the higher the lower and baser the creditor's standing in the social order . . . as a foretaste of a higher status," concluding: "Through his 'punishment' of the debtor the creditor participates in a *right of lords*: finally he, too, for once attains the elevating feeling of being permitted to hold a being in contempt and maltreat it as something 'beneath himself'" (II:5).[37] Similarly, the *slaves*

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[34] Ibid., 75.
[35] Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 142.
[36] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 41.
[37] Ibid., 41.

themselves are said by Nietzsche to be motivated by the will to power insofar as they experience a sense of moral superiority every time they perform a morally commendable action. "By prescribing 'love of one's neighbor,'" Nietzsche writes, "the ascetic priest is basically prescribing an arousal of the strongest, most life-affirming drive, even if in the most cautious of doses—the *will to power*. The happiness of the 'smallest superiority,' such as accompanies all doing good, being useful, helping, honoring, is the most plentiful means of consolation that the physiologically inhibited tend to make use of" (III:18).[38]

Although Nietzsche's articulation of the relationship between pleasure and power is somewhat ambiguous, its ambiguities (for our purposes, at least) need not be resolved. Leiter, in an unrelated discussion of Nietzsche's theory of action, helpfully observes: "We identify . . . with the *feelings of command* rather than those of obedience because identifying with the former increases pleasure (it is pleasant to feel the body 'obeying')—so the explanation might seem straightforwardly hedonistic. But this would be too quick, since the real explanation, as often happens in Nietzsche, is cast in terms of feelings of power which, *in turn*, produce pleasurable sensations."[39] Suffice it to say, the evaluative ideal of noble morality valorizes an individual's ability to produce pleasurable feelings at his or her command, thus giving rise to a feeling of power that, in turn, triggers ensuing feelings of pleasure.

From an evaluative premise that glorifies power as the summit of human goodness, it follows that only those with power can arrive at the conclusion: "I am

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[38] Ibid., 97-98.

[39] Brian Leiter, "Nietzsche's Theory of the Will," *Philosophers' Imprint* 7 (2007): 4.

how a person *ought to be*." It is therefore no coincidence that moral judgments—judgments, that is, of human goodness—arose with the noble rather than with the slave, for the noble alone is in a position to enjoy the basic feeling of power that comes from saying "yes" to himself. (The slave, on the other hand, has an inherent incentive to *subvert* the evaluative premise of noble morality, an incentive that is ultimately acted upon during the slave revolt in morality.)

Let us now formally articulate the evaluative premise that underlies noble morality: the premise that lionizes the traits and characteristics of Achilles over those of Christ. Why does noble morality have as its objects of highest commendation "a powerful physicality" or "a blossoming, rich, even overflowing health" (I:7)[40]? Why does it not extol those individuals who act selflessly, generously, or toward the welfare of others? Nietzsche's explanation appears to be that it is simply *instinctive* for individuals both strong and weak to idealize the human attributes of strength and power over those of pity and compassion. Since the evaluative ideal of noble morality arises from the individual's instinctive impulse for power—or, at least, the feeling of power—let's call this ideal the *instinctive ideal*.

7. The difference between noble morality and ethical egoism. At this point, an objection might arise about what noble morality could possibly have to tell us about human goodness if, at the same time, it effectively obliterates any concern for the welfare of all but *one* human being—that is, the noble himself. It might be helpful here to distinguish noble morality from ethical egoism: whereas ethical egoism posits that *all human beings ought to do what is in their own self-interest*, noble

[40] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 16.

morality merely posits that the *strong*, insofar as they illustrate the paradigmatic ideal of human power, exemplify how human beings ought to be and, as such, *ought simply not to deviate from being themselves*. In being himself, the noble necessarily acts in consultation with his own subjective values, instincts, and desires. It is incorrect to say, however, that noble morality detaches itself completely from the interests of humanity as a whole—since, according to Nietzsche, the ascendancy of even *one* human being has the potential to incite in *every* human being a new "*belief in man*"—that is, a belief in "a human being who justifies man *himself*; a human being who is a stroke of luck, completing and redeeming man" (I:12).[41]

The signature element of morality that Nietzsche's conception of morality in the wider sense thus wishes to *retain*—even as it rejects slave morality's insistence upon the guardianship of the welfare of other people—is, as Alan Gewirth puts it, morality's service of "the interests or purposes of at least some person or persons other than or in addition to the agent [in question]."[42] The idea here is *not* that noble morality ought to be in any way attentive to the well-being of anyone other than the nobles themselves (just as slave morality, Nietzsche would say, is not in any way attentive to the well-being of anyone other than the slaves themselves)—*but precisely the opposite*. The well-being of the slaves, Nietzsche wants to say, is ultimately deleterious to the human species as a whole.[43] What is at stake under

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[41] Ibid., 24.

[42] Alan Gewirth, "From the Prudential to the Moral: Reply to Singer," *Ethics* 95 (1985): 302.

[43] For an expanded discussion of the value of slave morality vs. the value of noble morality, see Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 33: "The question: what is the *value* of this or that value table or 'morality'? demands to be raised from the most diverse perspectives; for this 'value relative *to what end*?' cannot be analyzed too finely. Something, for example, that clearly had value with regard to the greatest possible longevity of a race . . . would by no means have the same value if

both noble and slave moralities alike is therefore a shared interest in capturing what it means to be an exemplary member of the human species—human goodness is exemplified, for the noble, by the Homeric heroes and, for the slave, by the ascetic priests—such that even *one* human being's excellence might bolster and justify the excellence (or, at least, the *potential* excellence) of the human species *as a whole*.

To see how this works, we might illustrate this idea in the following way: "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." Noble morality begins with an evaluative premise that glorifies power as the paragon of human goodness. Suppose that in a hypothetical universe where all but one human being are blind, a one-eyed woman named Athena is able to overpower every other human being in such a way that she is ultimately in a class of her own. Although Athena's dominance over others would serve nobody's interests but her own, she would nevertheless be hailed as morally good under noble morality. How can this be justified?

The value of her eyesight, noble morality wishes to say, does not end with Athena herself, for Athena, *as the pinnacle of human excellence*, vindicates how "perfect, completely formed, happy, powerful, triumphant" (I:12)[44] a human being has the (hypothetical) *potential* to be: and, in doing so, she adds value to *humanity* itself. (What a weak and pitiful race the human species would be, compared to the other species, were *all* human beings to be blind!) The fundamental conceit of noble morality is thus that "the noble, powerful, higher-ranking, and high-minded" (I:2)[45]

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it were an issue of developing a stronger type. The welfare of the majority and the welfare of the few are opposing value viewpoints: to hold the former one to be of higher value already *in itself*, this we will leave to the naïveté of English biologists" (I:17).

[44] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 24.

[45] Ibid., 10.

can bolster the value of the human species *without* actually having to bother with the particular interests of any individual (or set of individuals) other than the noble himself. "*I* am how a human being ought to be," we might imagine the noble gushing in self-indulgent delight—in much the same way that a dog breeder might praise a breed of dog that outlives, outruns, and outhunts all other breeds of dog as vindicatory of the worthiness of *all* dogs—and, with this exclamation, the noble produced moral values for the first time.

Most of us, of course, would be very hesitant to call a Scottish Terrier or an Irish Setter *morally good*, because (as the reasoning goes) dogs have done nothing to "earn" their attributes. Neither the guide dog nor the dog that kills the child can be held morally responsible for its actions because its actions, presumably, are not the product of *free and conscious deliberation*. Similarly, while we may grant that the noble's ability to vent his power completely and attain a feeling of psychological pleasure at his command may indeed tell us *something* about human goodness, the noble cannot be morally good because he did nothing to *earn* his relative advantage over others. Our prejudices about the nature of moral goodness—and, specifically, our restrictions upon the particular conditions under which values of moral goodness may and may not be assigned—prevent us from convincingly asserting that the noble's ability to consummate his desires is of any moral value.

8. Nietzsche's characterological determinism. The noble, quite simply, has no such prejudices. An individual's freedom of the will as a criterion for moral evaluation is nowhere to be found under noble morality, precisely because—unlike our contemporary, slave-derived ideas about moral goodness—noble morality does not recognize human action as an independent category that is in any way separable

from the category of personal qualities that otherwise already falls within its general evaluative purview. Nietzsche writes:

> Just as common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a *doing*, as an effect of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express strength—or not to. But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind the doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything. Common people basically double the doing when they have the lightning flash; . . . the same happening is posited first as cause and then once again as its effect. (I:13)[46]

Nietzsche's interpretation of the "doer" as a fabricated invention abstracted from the "deed" is central to his rejection of what he claims is one of the fundamental conceits of slave morality: that actions are an independent category over which human beings have a kind of free authority that they otherwise lack over every other personal attribute, and for which they are thus *morally responsible*. Slave morality, Nietzsche writes, posits the inability of the slave to overpower the noble as

> a voluntary achievement, something willed, something chosen, a *deed*, a *merit*. This kind of human [the slave] *needs* the belief in a neutral 'subject' with free choice . . . . It is perhaps for this reason that the subject (or, to speak more popularly, the *soul*) has until now been the best article of faith on earth, because it made possible for the majority of mortals, the weak and oppressed of very kind, that sublime self-deception of interpreting weakness itself as freedom, of interpreting their being-such-and-such as a *merit*. (I:13)[47]

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[46] Ibid., 25.
[47] Ibid., 26.

But in what way could our actions *not* be "a voluntary achievement, something willed, something chosen"? We might most usefully understand Nietzsche as saying something along these lines: that even if slave morality's model of a neutral subject can account for an individual's moral culpability for both his or her actions *and* his or her choices, it would still not be able to account for an individual's moral culpability for his or her *character*. Since choices that stem from outside an individual's causal agency can hardly be said to be free, *an individual's free choices must come from within his or her causal agency*. Let us define the individual's "character" as the causal agent behind the individual's (supposedly) free and conscious choices. What, then, gives us any reason to believe that any of us *chose* our characters?

Although we might compellingly argue that one's actions are rendered freely from one's choices—that is to say, there are no meaningful constraints upon one's ability to perform the actions that one chose to perform—one's choice to perform any particular action can ultimately be traced to one's *character*, and we would be at a loss to identify any point at which an individual, as a "neutral subject" or an "indifferent substratum," freely adopted the particular character that produced any corresponding set of choices and actions.

Suppose that you, the reader, were born on April 20, 1889 as the fourth child to Alois and Klara Hitler. You have a set of genes that determine you to have dark hair, a tall nose, and the predisposition to grow a mustache; and, to the extent that elements of your personality—your intelligence, your temperament, your preferences and aversions—are determined by your genes as well, so be it. In fact, your entire life trajectory insofar as it is outside your control (for instance, what you learn, who

you encounter, the ideas that you are exposed to) proceeds in exactly the same way as it had for Adolf Hitler himself.

Could you convincingly argue that you—as someone with Hitler's genes, caregivers, peers, and environmental influences—would nonetheless retain some transcendent metaphysical character (in the form of a "soul," perhaps) with the capacity to *will different choices and actions* than the choices and actions Hitler had willed? And even if you could successfully argue for the existence of such a neutral and indifferent substrate, is it not just blind chance that your "soul" is ontologically predisposed toward peaceful choices, while Hitler's "soul" was ontologically predisposed toward violent choices? Thus, the argument goes, if we are no more responsible for the content of our character than we are for, say, our physical health, then *how can we be held morally responsible for our actions*, yet at the same time *not* be held morally responsible for our health?[48]

Recall, however, that noble morality has no qualms about assigning values of moral goodness to traits and characteristics that an individual was not free to choose.

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[48] A more formal statement of this problem is presented by Galen Strawson as the "Basic Argument," which he articulates in the following way; see Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies* 75 (1994): 5: "(1) Nothing can be *causa sui*—nothing can be the cause of itself. (2) In order to be truly morally responsible for one's actions one would have to be *causa sui*, at least in certain crucial mental respects. (3) Therefore nothing can be truly morally responsible." The premise that opponents of the Basic Problem are more likely to take issue with is the second premise, which Strawson in a later passage formulates as the requirement that a morally responsible agent be able to "choose, in a conscious, reasoned, fashion, to be the way [he or she] is mentally speaking," see ibid., 75:6), inevitably by attempting to reformulate moral responsibility in such a way that human beings are, at some level, morally responsible for things which they were not free to choose. The implication of this sleight of hand should not be understated, however, for it necessarily opens up the possibility that moral evaluations may be assigned to objects that fall outside an individual's scope of influence.

Noble morality deviates from slave morality in holding that facts about an individual's character alone are *enough* to convey information about his or her actions, and vice versa. Nietzsche's denial of the "indifferent substratum" is, in effect, a denial that an individual's particular character consists of anything *but* the descriptive properties (that is, the traits, qualities, and characteristics) that directly and perfectly correspond to that individual's particular set of actions.

An individual who is truly athletically superior, in other words, will have no choice *but* to win athletic contests: and, consequently, to evaluate an individual's athletic superiority as morally good is to necessarily evaluate his or her actions as morally good. The claim is *not* that the individual, upon being bestowed by some observer a trait esteemed as morally good, can then go on to do *anything* and have the totality of his or her actions be *prejudged* as morally good. Consider, for instance, the quality of possessing "a powerful physicality," a trait that is unequivocally revered as morally good under noble morality.[49] The actions that directly correspond to the possession of a powerful physicality (winning a physical contest, for instance) are themselves but the inevitable expressions of the trait itself, such that to evaluate the action as morally good is *at the same time* to evaluate the trait as morally good, and vice versa.

To separate the action from the trait, and to judge them each separately as morally good, is to "double the doing"; and to judge *only* the action as morally good,

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[49] See Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 16: "The knightly-aristocratic value judgments," Nietzsche writes, "have as their presupposition a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even overflowing health, together with that which is required for its preservation: war, adventure, the hunt, dance, athletic contests, and in general everything which includes strong, free, cheerful-hearted activity" (I:7).

without acknowledging the action of winning a physical contest as but the *inevitable* consequence of possessing a superior physicality, is to perpetuate the fundamental myth of slave morality: the myth that "*the strong one is free* to be weak" (I:13),[50] that the physically superior is free to *lose* a physical contest, that lightning is free to produce anything other than a flash. But suppose that the individual who is said to possess a powerful physicality goes on to *lose* a physical contest. Each loss endured by the individual reveals the degree to which her physicality was *not* great, but, in fact, *circumscribed*, the entire time: circumscribed in comparison to the physical superiority of her competitors, over which the individual has no authority or control, or perhaps limited simply against the whimsical inhaling and exhaling of nature itself—the direction of the wind—over which the individual, again, has no authority or control.

The argument can thus be summed up in the following way: *an individual's body of actions is the perfect fulfillment of a corresponding body of descriptive properties*,[51] but no individual freely chooses his or her set of descriptive properties,

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[50] Ibid., 25.

[51] In developing this account, I draw from several similar interpretations advanced in the secondary literature, particularly Robert B. Pippin's example of the poorly written poem; see Robert B. Pippin, "Lightning and Flash, Agent and Deed (GM I:6-17)," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays*, ed. by Christa Davis Acampora (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 140-141: "Our 'original' intentions are just provisional starting points, formulated with incomplete knowledge of circumstances and consequences. We have to understand the end and the reason for pursuing it as both constantly transformed, such that what I end up with, what I actually did, counts fully as my intention realized or expressed. Thus, if I start out to write a poem, I might find that it does not go as I expected, and think that this is because the material resists my execution, my inner poem, and so what I get is a 'poorly expressed poem.' This is a very misleading picture on this account . . . . The poem is a perfect expression of what your intention *turned out to be*. To ask for a better poem is to ask for another one, for the formation and execution of another intention. . . . It (the expression of what has

so therefore no individual freely chooses his or her actions. If every action is determined by some underlying personal attribute, then the elevation of human action as an independent category distinct from an individual's other personal attributes should be considered the *first great innovation of slave morality.*

9. Slave morality and the ascetic ideal. For a host of reasons (that have as much to do with the psychological constitution of the slaves as they do with the relationship of power between the nobles and the slaves), the *slave revolt in morality* succeeded in revaluing the instinctive ideal of noble morality in such a way that what was once considered "bad" came to be valued as "good," and what was once considered "good" came to be valued as "evil." This is what Nietzsche means when he says that the slave's *ressentiment* became creative and gave birth to values: it gave birth to a radically new evaluative schema that replaced the noble's pre-revolt values of "good" and "bad" with the slave's post-revolt values of "good" and "evil" and, in doing so, it brought about what Nietzsche considers to be the great "reduction and equalization of the European" human being.

"We see today," Nietzsche writes, "nothing that wishes to become greater, we sense that things are still going downhill, downhill—into something thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more apathetic, more Chinese, more Christian . . . . Precisely here lies Europe's doom—with the fear of man we have also forfeited the love of him, the reverence of him, the hope for him,

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turned out to be the intended poem) *just turned out to be a bad poem; not a bad expression of a good poem.* As Nietzsche keeps insisting, our egos are wedded to the latter account; but the former correctly expresses what happened." See also Leiter, "Nietzsche's Theory of the Will."

indeed the will to him. . . . We are tired of *man*" (I:12).[52] Nietzsche's characterization of slave morality as *pejoratively* moral is thus a function of the particular evaluative ideal that came to be expressed as the fundamental standard of human goodness within the slaves' revolutionary evaluative schema: this ideal being the *ascetic ideal*. To say that the slaves created values that are moral in the narrow (or pejorative) sense is to say that they created values that were informed by the ascetic ideal—the defining characteristic of Nietzsche's account of slave morality.[53]

Just as the instinctive ideal underlies the noble's conception of pre-slave-revolt moral goodness, the ascetic ideal underlies the slave's conception of post-slave-revolt moral goodness. We do not need to look very far to see just what is demanded of us by the ascetic ideal, for the slave revolt has succeeded to such an extent that very few of us intuit human goodness in any form *but* its post-slave-revolt form: the morally good person, we wish to say, does no harm, is considerate of others, and is governed by a modest temperament. Yet this interpretation of moral goodness,

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[52] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 24.

[53] Slave morality is comparable to what Nietzsche elsewhere calls the "morality of decadence." See, for instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Water Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 535-536: "An 'altruistic' morality—a morality in which self-interest wilts away—remains a bad sign under all circumstances. This is true of individuals; it is particularly true of nations. The best is lacking when self-interest begins to be lacking. Instinctively to choose what is harmful for *oneself*, to feel attracted by 'disinterested' motives, that is virtually the formula of decadence. 'Not to seek one's own advantage'—that is merely the moral fig leaf for quite a different, namely, a physiological, state of affairs: 'I no longer know how to *find* my own advantage.' . . . Man is finished when he becomes altruistic. Instead of saying naïvely, '*I* am no longer worth anything,' the moral lie in the mouth of the decadent says, 'Nothing is worth anything, life is not worth anything.' Such a judgment always remains very dangerous, it is contagious: throughout the morbid soil of society it soon proliferates into a tropical vegetation of concepts—now as a religion (Christianity), now as a philosophy (Schopenhauerism)."

Nietzsche argues, is wholly a product of the slave revolt in morality, informed by an underlying ideal of unselfishness and unegoism—informed, in other words, by the ascetic ideal.

"[Slave] morality is an ascetic interpretation of ethical life," writes Clark, "which means that how far a form of ethical life is from [slave] morality depends on the extent to which an ascetic (hence, life-devaluing) interpretation is woven into its basic evaluative practices."[54] The pre-slave-revolt evaluative schema of noble morality is now largely foreign to us, precisely because it weaved nothing resembling the ascetic ideal into its basic evaluative practices. Whereas the instinctive ideal valorizes an individual's ability to produce pleasurable feelings at his or her command, thus giving rise to a feeling of power that, in turn, triggers ensuing feelings of pleasure, the ascetic ideal holds as its highest standard of goodness the individual's ability to *suppress* his or her natural impulses: it, as Leiter observes, valorizes "*all* states of self-denial in which we forgo satisfaction of desires."[55] The substitution of noble morality's instinctive ideal with slave morality's ascetic ideal is thus the *second great innovation of slave morality.*

10. Conclusion. One of the most remarkable achievements of the *Genealogy* is surely its uncompromising articulation of the arbitrary, self-serving, and logically untenable underpinnings of slave morality. The principal achievement of the slave revolt in morality is not so much the creation of *moral values*—as an initial reading of the *Genealogy* might tempt us to believe—but, rather: (1) the elevation of human

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[54] Clark, introduction to *Genealogy of Morality*, xxxiii.
[55] Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 246.

action as an independent category divorced from an individual's other personal attributes and (2) the revaluation of the evaluative ideal of noble morality to suit the needs and purposes of the slave.

Bertrand Russell famously said, "I cannot see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of ethical values, but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it."[56] By correcting only a few words, we might imagine the noble as saying something analogous, yet totally dissimilar: "I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with powerlessness is that I don't like it." There is nothing exceptional about the ascetic ideal, in other words, that justifies the slaves' present mantle of authority over the word "morality," for both slave and noble moralities alike are but parallel systems for determining whether, and to what degree, any given person expresses a particular, *subjective* account of how human beings *ought to be*.[57]

Our post-slave-revolt ideas about moral goodness, we might conclude, were informed by: (1) a logically untenable conception of moral responsibility that claims to hold an individual morally accountable for only the actions that he or she freely chooses, without acknowledging that it must *inevitably* assign moral significance to personal attributes that an individual could not have freely chosen (such as, his or her character), and (2) an equally untenable revaluation of an evaluative ideal of

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[56] Bertrand Russell, "Notes on Philosophy, January 1960," *Philosophy* 35 (1960): 146-147.
[57] Furthermore, as uses of the word "morality" in phrases such as "the moralization of noble values" or "the pre-moral values of noble morality" are inattentive to this fact, I will use the words "moral" and "morality" only in the wider sense for the remainder of this paper (unless otherwise indicated).

power that was itself motivated by a subversive and self-contradictory incentive to *gain power*.

That slave morality, on top of all this, happens also to be—Nieztsche furthermore says—deleterious to the human species *as a whole* (which is not to say that it is deleterious to the interests of the *human majority*) speaks to its utter unfitness as a desirable ideal of human goodness. In her uncompromising endorsement of our contemporary slave-derived moral ideals, Foot, an adamant defender of an ontological neo-Aristotelian conception of human goodness, cites Elizabeth Anscombe's argument for the necessity of slave morality for the long-term survival and prospering of the human species. To be immoral in the sense that Foot conceptualizes is to be, in fact, ontologically defective:

> Anscombe writes, 'Getting one another to do things without the application of physical force is a necessity for human life' . . . . Anscombe is pointing here to what she has elsewhere called an 'Aristotelian necessity': that which is necessary because and in so far as good hangs on it. We invoke the same idea when we say that it is necessary for plants to have water, for birds to build nests, for wolves to hunt in packs, and for lionesses to teach their cubs to kill. . . . And for all the enormous differences between the life of humans and that of plants or animals, we can see that human defects and excellences are similarly related to what human beings are and what they do.[58]

It is not clear that Nietzsche would disagree with at least a portion of Foot and Anscombe's claim: that "getting one another to do things without the application of physical force" is necessary in some contexts, and that a general assurance of this policy might indeed be quite important to the maximal longevity of

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[58] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 15.

the human species. The question, then, is not whether slave morality is valuable with regard to the maximal longevity of the human species, but, rather, whether the maximal longevity of the human species is *itself* a valuable end. "The welfare of the majority and the welfare of the few are opposing value viewpoints," Nietzsche writes, adding that "to hold the former one to be of higher value already *in itself*, this we will leave to the naïveté of English biologists" (I:17).[59] Thus, if the case can be made that what is valuable to humanity is not, as it were, the "welfare of the many" but, in fact, the "welfare of the few," then slave morality would indeed appear to be every bit as deleterious to the human species as Nietzsche so ardently claims.

[59] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 33.

Part II. *Why They Did It*

1. Introduction. An approximate picture of the psychological and sociological processes that motivated the slave revolt in morality should have by now come into focus. In a society comprised of individuals with markedly divergent capacities for satisfying the instinctive human desire for power, the nobles (characterized by their superiority in power): (1) *subjugated* the slaves (characterized by their inferiority in power) at every juncture in which it was convenient, instinctive, and pleasurable for them to do so, and (2) subsequently *ranked* the thrill and triumph of each event of subjugation as *morally good* according to an evaluative ideal that ranked "themselves and their doings as good" (I:2).[60]

The resultant evaluative schema of noble morality, which, from the slave's perspective, effectively valued the humiliation and suffering of the slaves as positive, favorable events, became radically upended in what Nietzsche calls the "revolt which has a two-thousand-year history . . . and which has only moved out of our sight today because it has been victorious" (I:7)[61]—demonstrating, one might conclude, the spectacular failure of the nobles to sustain if not the initial act of slave-subjugation itself, then at least the subsequent evaluation of slave-subjugation as morally good (in a society, after all, that Nietzsche himself acknowledges as composed predominantly of slaves).[62]

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[60] Ibid., 10.

[61] Ibid., 17.

[62] The numeric minority of the nobles is contrasted with the numeric majority of the slaves at several points in the *Genealogy*: See, for instance, Nietzsche's characterization of Napoleon's entrance into power following the French Revolution as "the terrible and thrilling counter-slogan 'the *privilege of the few*' [resounding] in the face of the old lie-slogan of *ressentiment*, 'the

2. Characterologically-determined inequality and the power hierarchy. Underlying the story of the slave revolt is thus a deeply pessimistic account of human inequality that Nietzsche neither criticizes nor attempts to defend, but simply takes for granted as a natural feature of the human condition. It is impossible to develop an adequate understanding of the slave revolt without first acknowledging this starting supposition: that human beings are differentiated, and effectively stratified by innate psychological and physiological differences (1) that are, if not immutable, then susceptible only to factors *outside an individual's immediate and conscious control* (such that any illusion of mutability in an individual's psychophysiological makeup may ultimately be traced to, for example, the interplay of the individual's innate characteristics with his or her spatiotemporal environment), and (2) that may either privilege or hinder an individual's ability to satisfy his or her desire for pleasure and power.[63] In advancing this argument, I draw heavily from what Leiter has called the "doctrine of types," which he sums up in the following way: "Each person has a fixed psycho-physical constitution, which defines him as a particular *type* of person."[64] I will argue shortly that an individual is constituted also

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privilege of the majority'" (I:16) in ibid., 32, and his characterization of "the weak and oppressed of every kind" as constitutive of "the majority of mortals" (I:12) in ibid., 24.

[63] By "innate," I do not mean to suggest that these psychological and physiological differences are necessarily inborn, but simply that they are fundamental and constitutional to the character of the individual in question. Moreover, my claim is not that human beings *only* possess psychological and physiological differences of this type, but that only psychological and physiological differences of this type are relevant to the model of human inequality that I am about to introduce.

[64] Leiter continues: "These 'type-facts', for Nietzsche, are either *physiological* facts about the person, or facts about the person's unconscious drives or affects. The claim, then, is that each person has certain largely immutable physiological and psychic traits that constitute the 'type' of person he or she is. While this is not, of course, Nietzsche's precise terminology, the ideas are

by a set of social circumstances—e.g., his or her station of birth, schooling, the social perceptions of his or her race and gender, or any other fact about how the individual encounters the world, insofar as the fact falls outside the individual's immediate and conscious control—that will have the above-mentioned qualities, and that, together with the individual's psychophysiological attributes, will determine her position within a class-based social hierarchy.

Earlier in the paper, I argued for an interpretation of the evaluative ideal of noble morality as something fundamentally *inward-looking* [I.3]. As Nietzsche writes, the noble manner of valuation "acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks out its opposite only in order to say 'yes' to itself still more gratefully and more jubilantly—its negative concept 'low' 'common' 'bad' is only an after-birth, a pale contrast-image in relation to its positive concept, saturated through and thorough with life and passion" (I:10).[65] The insular quality of noble morality's evaluative ideal should not be taken to imply, however, that the *superior* ability to satisfy one's instinctive desire for power is not still a *precondition* for the determination of one's status as a noble—superior, that is, to other individuals within the competitive social sphere, characterized by antagonistic wills and scarce resources, in which we are all said to live. "The pathos of nobility and distance," Nietzsche writes, "this lasting and

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familiar enough from his writings. A typical Nietzsche form of argument, for example, run as follows: a person's theoretical beliefs are best explained in terms of his moral beliefs, and his moral beliefs are best explained in terms of natural facts about the type of person he is (i.e., in terms of type-facts)." See Joshua Knobe and Brian Leiter, "The Case for Nietzschean Moral Psychology," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 88.

[65] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 19.

dominant collective and basic feeling of a higher ruling nature in relation to a lower nature, to a 'below'—*that* is the origin of the opposition 'good' and 'bad'" (I:2).[66]

Nietzsche's account of noble morality thus reveals a landscape of natural competition in which individuals whose position within a class-based social hierarchy is determined by the degree of power that he or she wields relative to other people—and the very individuals who enjoy an advantageous position within this social hierarchy also happen to be the exclusive proprietors of the "right to create values." Let us call the social hierarchy that emerges from the unequal distribution of power among human beings the *power hierarchy*. The individual's ability to satisfy his or her instinctive desire for power, which determines his or her relative rank within the power hierarchy, is itself determined by the competitive advantages (or disadvantages) bestowed by his or her psychological, physiological, or sociological characteristics.

I include in this account an acknowledgement of an individual's *social circumstances* (e.g., station of birth) that are relevant to our discussion insofar as they are both (1) status-determining and (2) outside the individual's immediate and conscious control. Many social circumstances are indeed as innate to an individual's constitution as any psychophysiological trait: a man may be born with political power and lose it over time, just as a man may be born with blonde hair and lose it over time. Furthermore, while it might seem dubious to describe an individual's upbringing as "innate" to his constitution, the nature of one's socialization can be reasonably characterized as outside his or her immediate and conscious control. The

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[66] Ibid., 11.

interplay of an individual's psychophysiological traits with his or her social environment will inevitably produce an additional body of facts about the individual that are sociological in nature. I will thus from this point onwards refer to an individual's psychological, physiological, and sociological makeup collectively as the individual's "character" and posit that a person's character cannot be meaningfully altered by any substrate outside the causal chain that extends back to anything other than either (1) circumstances outside the individual's immediate and conscious control, or (2) the individual's character itself.

The innate advantages enjoyed by an elite minority of nobles—and, likewise, the innate disadvantages suffered by the slave majority—have profound consequences on an individual's life experience. The noble, prior to the slave revolt, owed his superior status entirely to the characterological traits that were conferred to him or her arbitrarily—often, but not necessarily, at birth[67]—such that neither the noble nor the slave could have done anything to earn or prevent his or her relative position within the power hierarchy. "The knightly-aristocratic value judgments," Nietzsche writes, "have as their presupposition a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even overflowing health . . . . The priestly-noble manner of valuation—as we have seen—has other presuppositions: too bad for it when it comes to war!" (I:7).[68] Inequality among human populations, in other words, is outside an individual's immediate and conscious control and existentially consequential.

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[67] Political influence or abundance of wealth may be an innate advantage insofar as they were conferred by one's station of birth, but they may also be the consequence of some other inborn advantage, such as an individual's intelligence, his access to schooling, or (again) his physical power.

[68] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 16.

3. The conditions for the emergence of *ressentiment* in the slave.

The preceding account does not explain *why* the slaves revolted against the moral values of their noble subjugators. It is certainly the case that the slaves were displeased with their situation: that is, with their inferior position within the power hierarchy, and with the noble's subsequent evaluation of their inferiority in power as *morally bad*. As Nietzsche puts it, "One will already have guessed how easily the priestly manner of valuation can branch off from the knightly-aristocratic and then develop into its opposite; this process is especially given an impetus every time the priestly caste and the warrior caste confront each other jealously and are unable to agree on a price" (I:7).[69]

This displeasure alone, however, does not account for the feeling of profound anger, resentment, and hate that, according to Nietzsche, grows and festers in the heart of the slave, before it is finally discharged in the slave revolt in morality, "the deepest and most sublime hate . . . whose like has never before existed on earth"—or what Nietzsche calls "*ressentiment*" (I:8).[70] The challenge of responding to an unfavorable and potentially unpleasant situation is a challenge confronted by nobles and slaves alike—and yet the *content* of the response, we may infer from Nietzsche's proto-psychological analysis of the slaves, is directly correlated to the *type of person* that the individual is. The emergence of *ressentiment* in an individual, like the emergence of any other emotional state, is determined by an interplay of the individual's particular *psychological state* (i.e., his or her subjective affects,

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 17.

cognitions, and instinctual drives) with his or her particular *environmental circumstances*.

The auxesis of an initial sting of frustration into a general feeling of discontentment and finally into the "ideal-creating, value-reshaping hate" of *ressentiment* signals several key pieces of information about the psychological and environmental conditions of the slave. Useful accounts of these conditions have been produced by a number of authors, including Bernard Reginster and R. Jay Wallace. In the following section, I will begin by synthesizing and defending Reginster's and Wallace's accounts of the psychological and sociological conditions required for the emergence of non-dischargeable *ressentiment* in the slave. I will then turn my attention to what in my opinion is an undervalued insight offered by Wallace into the psychological state of the *ressentiment*-affected slave.

Both Wallace and Reginster agree that the slave develops a concomitant psychological tension as a consequence of some interplay of his affective desires with his inferior position within the power hierarchy, which the slave subsequently attempts to defuse in executing his moral revolt against the noble. By applying pressure to Wallace's insight into the perceptual processes that precede the onset of *ressentiment* in the slave, I hope to produce an account of the slave's attempt to defuse this psychological tension as a process that unfolds in two acts: (1) the creation of the slave-morality value of "evil" and (2) the creation of the slave-morality value of "good".

4. The slave's perception of his irremediable deprivation of power. The individual who experiences *ressentiment*, in both Reginster's and Wallace's accounts, is not merely deprived of power but by his own estimation *irremediably*

deprived, such that he is necessarily unable to correct the cause of his displeasure. As Reginster observes about the *ressentiment*-affected priests:

> The feeling of impotence is not a temporary state of mind caused by an accidental reversal of fortune. It must rather have become an essential feature of one's self-assessment. . . . Though Nietzsche is unclear on this issue, his analysis of *ressentiment* (as I understand it here) presupposes that the priest believes he has tried *everything he could think of* to regain power and failed. Accordingly, he does not see his defeat as a fluke, but as evidence of his constitutional impotence (GM I:6), which appears to be, for that very reason, "incurable" (see GS 359).[71]

Reginster's reading is consistent with my account of Nietzsche's characterological determinism in which an individual's body of actions is always the perfect realization of an initial body of descriptive properties [I.8]. Because the slave is defined by his inferior relationship to the noble within the power hierarchy, the individual who reverses his inferior relationship to the noble in any meaningful way can be no more regarded as a slave than the promising rookie who with every victory reveals the superiority of his athletic ability can be regarded as an inferior athlete.

Thus any slave's ability to attain a superior position within the power hierarchy would reveal the extent to which he was never really a slave at all, but a *noble*, perhaps temporarily ensnared by impotence but who was able to discharge this sentiment before it could mature into *ressentiment*. (As Nietzsche puts it, the "*ressentiment* of the noble human being, when it appears in him, runs its course and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction" (I:10).[72] Thus an individual's ability to

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[71] Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on Ressentiment and Valuation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997): 286.
[72] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 21.

discharge *ressentiment* in an "immediate reaction" indicates a capacity to remedy the source of his displeasure, a capacity that the slave *by definition* does not have.) The *ressentiment* of the slave grows and festers precisely because the slave is *unable* to discharge it through ordinary means. An individual's displeasure with his inferior position within the power hierarchy matured into a feeling of *ressentiment if and only if* the individual is powerless to change it.

5. The slave's perception of plausible attainment of power. Wallace introduces a second requirement for the emergence of *ressentiment* in an individual (in addition to the individual's recognition of his inability to remedy a source of profound displeasure): the individual must also be aware that the displeasure he or she feels is not *equally felt* throughout the population. Were it the case that an entire population is "equally subject to a condition in which [individuals are] denied coveted goods," Wallace reasons, "the result might be a tendency to feelings of rage, frustration, and depression in the populace at large, but not the kind of focused hatred characteristic of *ressentiment*."[73] While this is not a claim Nietzsche advances explicitly, I will argue here that it is consistent with Nietzsche's characterization of the psychological despair experienced by the slaves.

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[73] Wallace continues: "For the latter emotions to emerge, there needs to be some people who are singled out from the rest in not being deprived of the coveted goods, and who are publicly known not to be deprived. . . . Thus Nietzsche's slaves are systematically excluded from enjoying many of the desirable things that the masters in their society have in abundance, including status, material possessions, and above all political power and influence." See R. Jay Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication: Making Sense of Nietzsche's Slave Revolt," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

Embedded in Wallace's assertion is an assumption about the slave's self-perception of the attainability of power which I will formulate in the following way: the emergence of *ressentiment* in an individual deprived of some coveted good y requires that the individual first to develop a conceptual relationship to some entity already in possession of y, such that he can *plausibly imagine* himself also in possession of y. Consider the many natural burdens and restrictions placed upon human life that we docilely accept: e.g., our mortality, the inevitability of our aging, the numerous functions that we must perform every day simply to maintain our health. We docilely accept these burdens and restrictions precisely because we have no point of comparison to which we can plausibly imagine the lifting of these burdens and restrictions. "The ur-context of *ressentiment*," Wallace argues, "is one in which some people have things that you very much desire, but that you lack and feel yourself unable ever to obtain."[74]

Now let us imagine that one member of the human race has achieved immortality. Would you feel envious of her? Perhaps not. I will now posit that the mere fact that someone else has "y" ("y" being something you covet but are unable to attain) would be of *no consequence to you* unless you furthermore believed that you were *similar enough* to the person in possession of y that you conclude, from her attainment of y, that it is *plausible* for you to attain y as well. Thus, the psychological development that allows the slave to feel no longer resigned to his fate occurs in tandem with the slave's perception—justified or not—that he can plausibly attain what the noble enjoys. So long the slave believes that he is *categorically*

[74] Ibid.

distinct and separate from the noble, he will not entertain the possibility that his existence as a slave could have unfolded any differently. It is only when the slave imagines himself as an equal of the noble that he abandons his docile acceptance of his limitations as a slave, enabling envy to develop and eventually calcify into the sublime and targeted hatred that constitutes *ressentiment*.

The earnest belief of the *ressentiment*-afflicted slave in the attainability of power—"the best article of faith on earth" (I:13),[75] Nietzsche taunts—might thus be summed up as the earnest realization that the situation *could have been different for the slave*. The slave's irremediable displeasure with his inferior position within the power hierarchy cannot by itself supply the affective grounds necessary for the emergence of *ressentiment*. The development of *ressentiment* necessarily indicates that an individual has developed an earnest belief that what he or she so powerfully covets, yet has so far been unable to attain, is nonetheless still *plausibly attainable*.

6. The slave's perception of the noble's plausible responsibility for his deprivation. The third requirement for the emergence of *ressentiment*, I will now argue, is the ability to assign *plausible responsibility* to some external entity for one's internal dissatisfaction: this entity being the ultimate target of the individual's *ressentiment*. Here, an example might be made of human beings and their belief in an authoritarian, omnipotent, and often despotic God. Even when they believe that God has caused them great pain and suffering (in the event of a natural disaster, for example), religious individuals tend not to feel *ressentiment* toward God, since they typically conceptualize God in such a way that He is ontologically blameless. "That

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[75] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 26.

the lambs feel anger toward the great birds of prey does not strike us as odd," Nietzsche writes, "but that is no reason for holding it against the great birds of prey that they snatch up little lambs for themselves" (I:13),[76] perhaps hoping to extend this same principle of ontological irreproachably to nobles as well.

In this sense, *ressentiment* is distinguishable from envy, which is targeted at individuals with no regard for whether the envied individual is *plausibly responsible* for the envier's unhappiness. Although it proceeds naturally from his observation that "there needs to be some people who are singled out from the rest in not being deprived of the coveted goods, and who are publicly known not to be deprived,"[77] such a distinction does not appear in Wallace's account of *ressentiment*, who writes:

> Envy grows into ressentiment when ordinary rectification . . . is (believed to be) impossible, because one is systematically prevented by one's nature or one's circumstances from acquiring the things that one so covetously desires. . . . The intensification of hatred into which envy grows becomes focused specifically on the persons who are comparatively privileged; though it is occasioned by relative disadvantage, it is no longer really about the fact of relative disadvantage, but about the individuals who are advantaged, whom the unfortunate come to despise. . . . The process through which ordinary envy turns into the kind of personal animus involved in ressentiment cannot plausibly be traced to any further emotion or complex of ideas. It seems to me a primitive mechanism, one that can perhaps be understood to reflect our deeply social nature, our nearly obsessive concern for our relative standing within local and less local communities.[78]

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[76] Ibid., 25.
[77] Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication" in *Nietzsche and Morality*, 116.
[78] Ibid., 117.

It seems to me, however, that the process by which ordinary envy develops into the "ideal-creating, value-reshaping hate" of *ressentiment* is principally tied to the perception of an external entity's plausible responsibility for one's own disadvantaged state. Consider the case of a city devastated by a massive hurricane in which a majority of the residents no longer have access to food, shelter, or basic utilities. A small minority of residents, however, were not affected by the hurricane and therefore do have full access to these goods.

Our initial instinct might be to say that, after some time has passed, the deprived residents' envy of the non-deprived residents will naturally intensify into *ressentiment* targeted toward the non-deprived group. Suppose, however, that, for one reason or another, it happens to be (1) *logically* impossible for the non-deprived group to affect—that is, to either relieve or exacerbate—the suffering of the deprived group in any way, and furthermore (2) the deprived group is uniformly aware of this logical impossibility. For the deprived group to therefore deem the goods that they covet even *plausibly* attainable, they will have to first imagine a situation in which either they themselves or some third party is plausibly capable of relieving their suffering.

At some point, of course, the deprived residents will no longer have any reason to imagine themselves as plausibly capable of relieving their own suffering (since otherwise they would have done so already). They would thus have three options: (1) they can assign a capacity to relieve their suffering to some plausible third party (perhaps the government), (2) they can delude themselves into believing that the non-deprived group is somehow plausibly capable of relieving their suffering, or (3) they can do nothing, and accept the fact that their relief from suffering is

simply logically impossible. Suppose that the deprived residents come to deem the government as plausibly capable of relieving their suffering. While their envy, in this case, would still be directed toward the non-deprived residents, their anger would be directed toward the government and their envy toward the non-deprived group would not harden into *ressentiment*. Therefore, in order for *ressentiment* to emerge, then the deprived residents must now see the non-deprived residents as *plausibly responsible* for their misfortune. It seems therefore that the relevant feature of *ressentiment*'s target is not so much the privileged qua privileged, but rather the privileged insofar as they can also been seen to be *plausibly responsible* for the perpetuation of an inequality.

7. The strategic interpretation of the slave revolt. We now have an account of the three psychological perceptions that must be present in an individual before *ressentiment* may emerge: (1) the individual's perception of her irremediable inability to attain some object y that she also powerfully desires, (2) her perception that y is nevertheless plausibly attainable to her, and, finally, (3) her perception that some entity external to herself is plausibly responsible for her not attaining y.[79] Given these three conditions, an individual who additionally experiences significant displeasure at not having y will develop *ressentiment*.

This, indeed, is exactly what happened to the slave: "Of all that has been done on earth against 'the noble,' 'the might,' 'the lords,' 'the power-holders,' nothing is worthy of mention in comparison with that which the *Jews* have done

[79] This is not to say that the external entity is perceived to be responsible for the individual's *inability* to secure y for herself, but, rather, the external entity is plausibly able to secure y for the individual but has, for one reason or another, not yet done so.

against them: the Jews, that priestly people who in the end were only able to obtain satisfaction from their enemies and conquerors through a radical revaluation of their values, that is, through an act of spiritual revenge" (I:7)[80]—the slave revolt in morality.

There is an interpretation of the slave revolt in morality, which Wallace calls the "strategic interpretation," that goes something like this:

> *Ressentiment* is a negative affect of hatred on the part of the powerless toward their oppressors, involving the desire to strike out against them, in ways that will harm them and deprive them of their cultural and social advantages. The slave revolt may then be thought of strategically in relation to this fundamental aim, as an undertaking that is precisely calculated to harm the powerful. The inferior position of the powerless means that they are unable to pursue this goal directly, through actions that are immediately damaging to the interests of the powerful. So they resort to a more indirect strategy, erecting a new table of values as a devious way of undermining the position and advantages of the people they despise.[81]

Wallace refutes the strategic interpretation of the slave revolt by articulating three serious problems with its formulation: (1) it is unreasonable that the slaves would "choose to pursue [their goal of retaliation against the nobles] by a strategy so feckless and obscure as the erection of a new table of values,"[82] (2) the strategic interpretation fails to account for why the slave's revaluation of moral values succeeded in undermining the political supremacy of the nobles, and (3) to the extent that slave morality is "viewed strategically [by the slave] as an instrument of

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[80] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 16.
[81] Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication" in *Nietzsche and Morality*, 112.
[82] Ibid., 113.

revenge,"[83] it cannot coherently function as a legitimate system of values. I would like to supplement these three points cogently formulated by Wallace by refocusing our attention onto the precise nature of the object that the slave considers himself to be lacking.

The psychological tension that emerges within the *ressentiment*-affected individual is between the individual's desire for y and her inability to obtain y [II:6]. In the case of the slave, the psychological tension might be formulated in the following way (as articulated by Reginster): "The soul of the 'man of *ressentiment*' is torn by a tremendous tension between his desire to live the life he values and his belief that he is unable to satisfy it."[84] But y, in the case of the slave, actually appears to be two distinct (yet closely related) things: either (1) a superior position within the power hierarchy or (2) a superior position within the evaluative hierarchy of noble morality. Both, crucially, are wedded together, such that to attain a superior position within the power hierarchy is to necessarily attain a superior position within the evaluative hierarchy of noble morality. It would be incorrect, however, to imagine that the slave considered a superior position within the evaluative hierarchy of noble morality to be in any way *more* attainable than a superior position within the power hierarchy: the illogicality of such a presumption would be apparent to anyone who realized that to move upwards or downwards on one is to move simultaneously upwards or downwards on the other as well.

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[83] Ibid., 114.

[84] Reginster, "*Ressentiment* and Valuation," 57: 290.

But the relationship between the two hierarchies is also strictly *unidirectional*. While the slave's inferior position within the power hierarchy does indeed determine his inferior position within the evaluative hierarchy of noble morality, there is no reason for the slave to believe that, should he achieve a superior position within an evaluative hierarchy informed by some other evaluative ideal, his evaluated superiority would have any consequence upon his position within the power hierarchy. The illogicality is carried to absurd heights by the strategic interpretation, when the evaluative ideal that the slave eventually selects to elevate his position within the power hierarchy is revealed to be one that simultaneously idealizes an inferior position within the power hierarchy. The object y coveted by the slave is thus precisely the superior position within the power hierarchy currently occupied by the noble; and the slave, furthermore, does not value y for its consequential properties (upon, say, his position within the evaluative hierarchy of noble morality) but instinctively—that is, the slave values power *in and of itself*. This suggests the slave has actually *internalized* the very ideals of noble morality that he is otherwise unable to attain, a point likewise made by Reginster but rejected by Wallace.

Wallace denies that "the slavish evaluate the powerful as genuinely good,"[85] and he predicates this denial upon his interpretation of *ressentiment* as "a primitive mechanism . . . [that reflects] our deeply social nature, our nearly obsessive concern for our relative standing within local and less local communities" and that "cannot be traced to any further . . . complex of ideas."[86] According to what Wallace calls the

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[85] Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication" in *Nietzsche and Morality*, 128.
[86] Ibid., 117.

"expressive interpretation" of the slave revolt in morality, the psychological tension that dominates the slave is *not* between what the slave wants yet cannot have, but between what the slave viscerally abhors yet is compelled to admire.[87] The slave revolt in morality can thus be understood as an ensuing expression of the slave's "embrace of an evaluative framework that makes sense of that basic orientation"[88]—resolving, in other words, his psychological tension between what he despises but what was seen by the dominant evaluative schema of his society as good.

Wallace's expressive account of the slave revolt in morality hinges on the assertion that the slaves do not *genuinely* internalize the values of noble morality, which itself hinges on an interpretation of *ressentiment* as a primitive mechanism that

> grows out of a situation of structural comparative deprivation, and its essential features are psychically primitive by comparison with . . . common envy. . . . To experience oneself as deprived in comparison to others it is enough that there are things that one simply desires to possess, things that other people have and that are unattainable for oneself. In these terms, the psychic structure of Nietzschean *ressentiment* might involve a susceptibility to elemental desire or longing, the kind of brute urge observable in young children when they strike out at their siblings or make off

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[87] See ibid., 118: "To understand this emotional dynamic, we need to reflect on the situation of the powerless in the period immediately preceding the invention of the new table of values. *Ressentiment* has festered within these people for years, building up to the point where it becomes the dominant emotional orientation of their lives. This involves a concentration of hatred and hostility directed toward the people in their society who are powerful, successful, and outwardly flourishing. At the same time, the evaluative framework that is available under these cultural conditions characterizes the objects of this concentrated negative affect as precisely good in a superlative degree. . . . So the powerless find themselves in a conceptual situation in which the negative affect that dominates their emotional lives is directed at individuals whom they themselves seem compelled to regard as exemplars of value and worthy of admiration."

[88] Ibid.

> with their playmates' toys. . . . There is no need to postulate that the slavish evaluate the powerful as genuinely good, still less need we assume that they take themselves to have been wronged by those whom them come to hate.[89]

It is unclear to me, however, how an elemental desire or longing could drive individuals towards objects *in a discriminate manner* without operating from an evaluative point of view: after all, no child will be driven to desire a classmate's paper cut or a friend's pneumonia out of an elemental drive to indiscriminately covet what other people have. "The crux," Wallace writes, "is the idea that the powerless masses are subject to a kind of longing or desire to possess things that is intelligible independently of evaluative concepts and attitudes."[90]

But even "the desiderative states" that Wallace describes as functioning "at an unconscious level"[91] must operate in consultation with a conative self that directs us toward some object that we evaluate *instinctively* as good, and away from other objects that we evaluate *instinctively* as bad. For this to *not* be the case, then Nietzsche would be unable to make any kind of claim resembling his famous articulation in the third essay that "every animal . . . instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can vent its power completely and attain its maximum in the feeling of power" (III:7).[92] This observation singularly underlies the evaluative ideal of noble morality: if Nietzsche is correct, then the

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[89] Ibid., 128.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 129.
[92] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 75.

slave—insofar as he, too, is an animal—must share noble morality's idealization of the expression of one's own power as fundamentally good.

8. *Ressentiment*'s ability to give birth to values. What exactly is happening then when *ressentiment* "gives birth to values"? We have thus far established the following facts about the slave: (1) the slave, having internalized the evaluative system of noble morality, desires for himself a superior position within the power hierarchy, (2) he has come to a conclusion that he is *utterly powerless* to reverse his subjugation by the noble, and (3) he conceptualizes the noble in such a way that he can sensibly and coherently imagine the noble *not* subjugating him, either (a) by imagining a situation in which the noble has the capacity to not subjugate him or (b) by imagining himself as an entity *similar enough* to the noble that he can sensibly envision himself as enjoying the noble's position of power. From these suppositions, the slave has come to believe that the noble has the capacity to *not* subjugate him and is simply not acting upon this capacity.

Consider, now, the parallel case of the dwarf who is systematically prevented by his nature from acquiring the thing that he most covetously desires: tall stature. He might conceivably come to hate and despise taller individuals for enjoying what is inaccessible to him as a result of his physiological constitution; but his animus, no matter how severe, would be much more compellingly interpreted as a form of intensified envy rather than a genuine expression of *ressentiment*, for it is unlikely to generate any meaningful new values or ideals. To articulate this in a different way: the principal feature that differentiates *ressentiment* from envy is not its intensity or its desire for revenge but, rather, its ability to *give birth to values*. The point at which the dwarf's envy is able to give birth to values—and, specifically, normative

values about how an external entity ought to be or ought to act—is the point at which his envy has indeed developed into the "ideal-creating, value-reshaping hate" of *ressentiment*. The values must necessarily target an external entity with the purpose of correcting the source of the dwarf's unhappiness.

Values about how an external entity *ought to be* or *ought to act* necessarily engender a corresponding duty either to *be* or to *act* accordingly. A value that only engenders a responsibility to *be* a certain way, however, is fundamentally problematic. Suppose that the dwarf's *ressentiment* generates the value that tall stature is bad and therefore all human beings should be dwarves. Presumably then the value generated by the dwarf's *ressentiment* will fail to be internalized by anyone other than the dwarf himself. The dwarf, upon realizing that tall individuals cannot plausibly be held *responsible* for being tall, will realize that he has created a meaningless value that has no potential for relieving his psychic tension. For this reason, *ressentiment* requires the existence of an outside entity who can plausibly overturn the individual's suffering if the entity so chooses to do so.

The emergence of the slave's *ressentiment* thus inevitably entails the slave's creation of a value that speaks directly to the noble's plausible responsibility for his suffering, unfolding more or less this way: the interplay of the slave's covetous desire for power and his earnest belief that the noble alone has the capacity to grant him power resolves itself in a conceptual invention within the mind of the slave that the noble is somehow *responsible* for securing power for the slave and, correspondingly, the evaluative judgment that the noble acts poorly when he fails to do so.

The slave has effectively invented a revolutionary way of perceiving the circumstances of his disadvantage so that the burden of remedying the slave's

profound psychological displeasure shifts from the slave to the noble: the slave's inferior position within the power hierarchy is no longer a position that he was simply fated to have occupied as a slave, but, rather, a position that the noble *chose* for the slave to occupy. With this perceptual reorientation, the slave assigns a negative value to the noble's *choice* to subjugate the slave, which slave morality has come to name "evil." The creation of the slave-morality value of "evil" is thus *the first act of the slave revolt in morality.*

9. Values that are non-contrived and consequential. Let us now briefly return to the example of the tall man and the dwarf. Suppose that the tall man is one day informed by the dwarf that to be tall is to be evil. The tall man might object to the dwarf's assertion on the grounds that he had no choice *but* to be tall.

Suppose, however, that the tall man comes to completely internalize the dwarf's moral values, such that his aversion to being tall is now instinctive and a constitutive element of his affective and conative being. Initially, the tall man might do whatever he can think of to reduce his physical stature—to no avail. Since he has completely internalized the dwarf's moral values, the tall man faces a psychological tension similar to the one that we have been discussing so far: the tall man wants to be a dwarf, but he is, at the same time, physiologically unable to be a dwarf. Unlike the slave, however, the tall man cannot imagine a situation in which the dwarf is *plausibly responsible* for his inability to be a dwarf.

Eventually, he will realize the futility of his situation and grow deeply despondent, confronted with a second, more existential tension born from his inability to annul an attribute to which he himself has assigned an internalized negative value. His only hope for the resolution of this existential turmoil, it would

seem, is to strategically replace his instinctive values with contrived values designed to improve his self-perception. However, as Wallace persuasively explains in his rejection of the strategic interpretation of the slave revolt in morality, to the extent that an evaluative framework can function as a "framework for preference, deliberation, and criticism," it cannot simultaneously be understood by "the agent whose experience it fundamentally shapes as a device that is calculated to bring about revenge."[93] It is incoherent, in other words, for the tall man to replace his instinctive values with contrived values with the strategic aim of resolving an existential tension.

A value is contrived insofar as not even the originator cannot meaningfully internalize it. The slave, of course, faces a similar quandary to the tall man: his experience of inferiority is effectively *doubled* under noble morality, first within the power hierarchy and then again within the evaluative hierarchy of noble morality. However, unlike the tall man, the slave is able to fully internalize a new set of moral values (values, in other words, of how a human being *ought to be*) in addition to his instinctive values. Why is this so? Dwarf morality—like noble morality—is uncontrived insofar as it derives its justification from an individual's instinctual affects (that is, how a person instinctively feels). Slave morality, likewise, is uncontrived insofar as it derives its justification from an appeal to the noble's plausible responsibility for the slave's suffering. The tall man's values are contrived by virtue of the fact that there is nowhere for him to situate them: that is, he can neither situate his values in an appeal to his instinctual affects nor can he situate

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[93] Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication" in *Nietzsche and Morality*, 114.

them in an appeal to an external entity's plausible responsibility for his suffering. The slave, however, insofar as he can situate his value in the noble's plausible responsibility for his suffering, has created a value that he can coherently internalize.

Of course, just because a value can be coherently internalized does *not* mean that it is necessarily also *consequential*. (Recall the example of the dwarf's inability to generate meaningful values [II:8].) In order for the slave's moral value of how the noble *ought to be* to also be consequential, it must demand responsibility from an element of how the noble is that the noble can consciously change. The slave avoids this problem masterfully by generating a moral value of how a person *ought to be* that addresses only how a person *ought to act*. Insofar as he has accurately judged the noble's ability to consciously (if not, metaphysically speaking, freely) choose his actions, the slave has generated a moral value of "evil" that is both *uncontrived* and *consequential*. "From the outset," Nietzsche observes, "slave morality says 'no' to an 'outside,' to a 'different,' to a 'not-self': and *this* 'no' is its creative deed" (I:10);[94] and from this value of how a person *ought not* to act, the slave invents a corresponding value of how a person *ought* to act. The creation of the slave-morality value of "good" is thus *the second act of the slave revolt in morality*.

10. Conclusion. Emerging as a mechanism for nullifying the innate and natural privileges of the aristocratic elite, the slave revolt succeeded in accomplishing two things: (1) by evaluating certain expressions of the noble's superiority in power as *evil*, the slaves—who, we should not forget, are in the numeric majority—enkindled a cultural environment in which certain expressions of power became

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[94] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 19.

universally condemned (and, consequently, universally disincentivized), and (2) by shifting the loci of moral evaluation from objects that are outside an individual's immediate and conscious purview (e.g., his or her health, physical strength, intelligence, emotional disposition, or station of birth) towards objects that are supposedly within an individual's free control (i.e., his or her actions), the slave revolt replaced the evaluative schema of noble morality with an evaluative schema in which, or so the idea goes, everyone can freely and equally compete. (Indeed, the thrill of triumphing over others in this competition, as Nietzsche quite gleefully observes in the third essay, appears to be quite central to slave morality.[95])

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Afterword

Nietzsche makes a compelling case that our contemporary moral values are grounded in an ontologically arbitrary preference for the welfare of the many over the welfare of the few—just as noble morality is grounded in an ontologically arbitrary preference for the welfare of nobles. An individual could be constituted in such a way that her affective and conative self is unable to conjure the requisite feelings of empathy necessary to successfully compete within the evaluative hierarchy of slave morality.

But there is, at the same time, something deeply unsettling about the notion that it is a sign of human nobility to consciously and deliberately take advantage of someone else's innate and inborn disadvantages. Mine is a subjective assessment, of course, and one that regrettably appears to be shared by a smaller and smaller proportion of human beings every day. "Nietzsche's endless talk about inferiors and superiors," writes Philippa Foot, "together with his own readiness to sacrifice—to write off—the 'mediocre,' confirms the impression that justice gets short shrift in his scheme of things: that it is quite wrong to see his 'aesthetic' as taking nothing we think precious from the morality he attacks."[96]

More than anything else, what has awakened in me in my study of Nietzsche is the troubling realization that morality is not as it were sustained by anything grander than the assent of large swaths of people to principles that are impermanent, arbitrary, and—most ominously—potentially unsound. It is an underpinning that

[96] Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism," *New York Review of Books*, June 13, 1991, 20.

strikes me as wholly unbefitting of the magnitude of (slave) morality's import upon our social organization. How are we to responsibly defend morality—the tenets of which sustain, for starters, our liberal democracy—in a post-God, post-Nietzschean world? An acknowledgment of the unsavory fact that we are not equal to one another can elicit either one of two responses:

"So let us do something to even things out."

Or: "So?"

For the committed egalitarian, there is a lot of work left to do.

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