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NIETZSCHE AS A MORAL PHILOSOPHER

I

Nietzsche has a distinctive conception of philosophy and the role of philosophy in society. He speaks of what he calls "philosophers of the future" — philosophers who will be probing critics and "men of experiments." It is necessary, if we are not to be misled, to gain some sense of what Nietzsche means by "critics" and "men of experiments." Clearly he means *moral* critics and critics of ways of life; disciplined, severe men who will fundamentally and non-evasively subject the extant way of life, including (and most particularly) the way of life of their own society, to searching and withering criticism. By "men of experiments" he means men who will actually put aside doing the thing done and instead try forging and living with new tablets of value. They will be men who will seriously bracket the actual concrete valuations of their society, e.g. "Love thy neighbour," "Pity the weak and poor in spirit," "Turn the other cheek" and the like. More than that, they will take the same attitude toward other cultures as well and they will seek out the origins of such human valuations and will seek, keeping in mind these origins, to transvaluate such traditional values.

These "philosophers of the future" will not only challenge abstract moral theories, meta-ethical and normative ethical, they also will challenge the very concrete moral beliefs that are typically taken as given in Western culture. To do this is not as easy as it seems. Nietzsche remarks that it requires a hardness and a shrewd courage and the ability to stand alone and give an account of oneself (BGE p. 134).¹ Men quite understandably shrink from it but they are also propelled toward it by their passion to understand the springs of action and motives of men. This "will to knowledge" forces them to go further with audacious and painful experiments than will soft-hearted men with effeminate tastes. But it is important not to forget that this "will to knowledge" is itself but a particular manifestation of "the will to power" — a primary and central drive which motivates all men.

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Such philosophers of the future will be harder than most human people may wish; they will not take something to be true simply because it is pleasing, useful, elevating, or because it serves one's conception of what one would like the world to be like. The philosopher, that Nietzsche would like to see come into being, is not a philosopher who will rest content with believing in some enticing fantasy or some anxiety-relieving phantasmagoria. In this respect, such a philosopher of the future has much more in common with Thucydides than with Plato. In short, they will not be people who will run from the hard facts of life in order to produce a tension-reducing, ego-supporting vision of the world.

Moreover, they will not, even in an indirect and subtle sense, be apologists for their age. Nietzsche remarks of these philosophers of the future: "And whoever knew how to follow them into the most secret chambers of their hearts would scarcely find any intention there to reconcile "Christian feeling" with "classical taste" and possibly even with "modern parliamentarianism" (BGE p. 135). They are not hung up by any of these popular evasions. In being critics of their age, they will be thorough and they will not in some eclectic fashion merely provide "a new balance" by simply scrambling together old ideas.

We have so far only a part of Nietzsche's conception of what philosophers are to become. They must be analysts and critics, but not simply analysts and critics. Such philosophers of the future, Nietzsche remarks, will consider it no small disgrace for philosophy when people decree that "philosophy itself is criticism and critical science — and nothing whatever besides" (BGE p. 135). Philosophers must use the tools of conceptual analysis and they must engage in such analyses and criticism. But philosophers must be something more than that. Philosophers, Nietzsche stresses, are not to be confounded with or identified with purely scientific or analytical men. They must indeed have these skills if they are to be good philosophers, but they must also, on Nietzsche's account, be historians and poets as well. Yet even here, for a man who is really to be a philosopher, being a conceptual analyst, an historian, a critic, a poet, are "merely preconditions for his task." Beyond that what this task requires is that *the philosopher should create values* (BGE p. 136).

Such a conception of philosophy commits Nietzsche to the rather paradoxical position of denying that Hegel, with his owl of Minerva, and Kant, with his rationalizing of old valuations, were genuine philosophers. And

Nietzsche does, audaciously, set Kant in with thinkers who are merely critics (BGE p. 136). In moral philosophy, Nietzsche perceptively remarked, "Kant wanted to prove in a way that would dumbfound the common man that the common man was right..." Kant remains for Nietzsche merely a very systematic critic for he did not create new values and he did not transvaluate valuations.

By contrast "Genuine philosophers... are commanders and legislators : they say "thus it shall be !" *They first determine the whither and for what of man*, and in so doing have at their disposal the preliminary labor of all philosophical laborers, all who have overcome the past" (BGE p. 136). In short, the philosopher must be the "*bad conscience of his time*"; he must, without evasion, carry out a "revaluation of all values" by "applying the knife vivisectionally to the chest of the very virtues" of his time. He indeed, as Nietzsche remarks in his preface to *Twilight of the Idols*, does this with fear and trembling, for "a revaluation of all values" places such a question mark about morality and is "so black, so tremendous that it casts shadows upon the man who puts it down" (T p. 465).

However, it would be a mistake to think that Nietzsche regards such a revaluation as a purely negative, nihilistic task. In applying such a scalpel to the morality of convention, the philosopher betrays his own drive, his own deepest need, to "Know of a new greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement" (BGE p. 137).

It is easy to lampoon Nietzsche's characterization of a philosopher and it would indeed hardly count as an historically acceptable characterization of what it is to be a philosopher, for on such an account Aristotle, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Occam, Descartes, Kant and Hegel would not be genuine philosophers for they did not "create values" and they most certainly were not commanders and legislators who determined "the whither and what of man." And surely any characterization of philosophy which ended up denying that these men were philosophers must be inadequate. Moreover, there can be creators of values — commanders and legislators — who are not philosophers. Jesus, Mohammed, Gengis-Khan, Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Hitler and Marshall McLuhan are "creators of values," but they are hardly philosophers. While this criticism of Nietzsche is correct, it is also trivial, for it does not touch what is perceptive and worth pondering in Nietzsche's prescriptions about what it is to be a philosopher. Historically speaking, the word "philosophy" has been applied to a heterogeneous group of activities. It has been,

and continues to be, different things to different people, though it is indeed important not to forget, as Nietzsche sometimes sees to, that philosophy is indissolubly linked with reasoned argument. It is in this way that the philosopher is to be distinguished from the sage and the seer. Moreover, we should not neglect the fact that there are philosophers as different as Husserl and Wittgenstein who limit or at least try to limit philosophy to a *purely descriptive activity*. The last thing for them that a philosopher *legitimately* can do, is to create values — to tell men what they should do and strive to become. And there is indeed more to this normatively neutral activity in philosophy than is usually supposed by non-philosophers; but it also remains true that historically this normative task has also been something that some important philosophers have taken to heart.

Until and unless we have some good reason to believe that there are some very definitive, logical arguments to show that such a “reevaluation of all values” is a conceptual impossibility, it is of the utmost importance — given the despair, the confusion, the boredom, the very interregnum quality of our age — that some people in our culture should try to do what Nietzsche says a “genuine philosopher” should attempt. Whether we call him “a philosopher” or not is a matter of small importance, for it is the activity and not the label that is important. That is to say, no matter what we call them, we need men who will challenge, deeply and pervasively, the mores — the conventional ideals — of our society and we need men like Plato, St. Augustine, Spinoza, Mill, and Marx who will give us a new *normative picture* of what man could and should be.

Nietzsche, like Freud and Wittgenstein, has an acute awareness of how difficult and nasty this is. To do it for keeps, and not as a kind of dilettantish play, is to engage in something which indeed is anxiety-arousing. Moreover, such philosophizing is not simply a matter for specialists, even a specialist in conceptual analysis, but a man must bring to it a range and multitude of capacities, abilities, proclivities and indeed, Nietzsche maintains, responsibilities. It is not something that can be simply learned, that is, something that can be “gotten up” by diligent study, and it does not depend *simply* on intelligence. Indeed one needs intelligence and a sharp eye, but it also depends on character — on the ability to stand alone, to judge for oneself and to look on the idols of one’s tribe with cold and ironical disdain. Beyond that it takes an inventive and adventuresome spirit and a driving “will to knowledge” — a will to point “imperiously into the depths, speaking more

and more precisely, demanding greater and greater precision." Such a conception of a philosopher implies, as Nietzsche realizes, a "readiness for great responsibilities." It is a demanding ideal, an ideal that few can meet, but it is a not unattractive ideal of what a philosopher should be.

II

It should be evident from what I have said so far that if Nietzsche's conception of a philosopher is correct "the heart of philosophy" is moral philosophy — taken in a broad sense as "the revaluation of all valuations." As Nietzsche put it at the end of his first essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the future task of philosophers is "the determination of the order of rank among values." This is the central problem in fundamental reflection about human valuations.

How did Nietzsche go about this? How did he proceed in moral philosophy and what are the fundamental features of his moral philosophy? In trying to answer these questions, I will start from his Preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Nietzsche tells us that we should start by asking "under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil, where did they really originate?" This immediately puts off an analytic philosopher, for it looks like Nietzsche is confusing questions of justification with questions of origin. But attention to what he actually does shows this not to be the case. His interest in genealogy is not purely or even primarily psychological or historical. For in asking the above question, he is actually trying to come to grips with the fundamental question: *what value do these human valuations have*. "Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them on the contrary, the plenitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?" (GM p. 17). In brief, what is fundamentally at stake for Nietzsche in asking about the origin of morality is not what Nietzsche calls "empirical 'hypothesis-mongering' but the very value of morality."

However, in asking about the "value of morality," Nietzsche has something rather special in mind; he is querying the value of an "unegoistic morality" — a morality which involves an "overestimation of and a predilection for pity," a morality committing one to treating as intrinsic values

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self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and pity. Nietzsche contends that this life-denying, instinct-repressing, morality needs to be examined with a jaundiced eye. With respect to it, we need to do some transvaluing of our values.

We must not, as has almost always been the case with previous philosophers, simply assume that such altruistic, life-denying moralities are in some sense well-grounded. We must instead question the very morality of such a morality. We must ask whether the morality of pity is not symptomatic of cultural illness or decay, the setting in of a weariness with life.

This morality of "turning the other cheek," this morality of mercy, humility and meekness is indeed, culturally speaking, our official morality. Living in a culture largely committed to such a moral view of the world, we very much need a critique of moral values; "the value of these values themselves must be called into question" (GM p. 20). We need an enhanced sense of the actual alternatives before men. We must not, as did Kant and Schopenhauer, simply take the values of our conventional moral values as something that is given — as something beyond serious question. Our doubts here should be real doubts and not simply Cartesian methodological doubts.

Nietzsche stressed that in moral philosophy we must take very seriously the ethnographic facts about the variety of moral beliefs in different cultures. Part 5 of his *Beyond Good and Evil* begins with some perceptive remarks on this subject. What we must do, if we are to do moral philosophy seriously, is to "prepare a typology of morals" (BGE p. 97). We must, by paying attention to the differing moral valuations of different men in different times and conditions, collect material and "conceptualize and arrange a vast realm of subtle feelings of value..." (BGE p. 97). We should clearly display the "differences of value which are alive, grow, beget and perish..." The task is to present vividly, as live options, the variety of moral beliefs that there are.

We should, as moral philosophers, first carry out this modest task: a task that is a necessary first step in any rational articulation of a normative ethic. However, as Nietzsche points out, it has not usually been the case that philosophers have been that modest. They have not been willing to do that kind of homework. Without such a typology of morals, without such an empirical anchorage, and with only the slightest knowledge of what men are like and of the values they actually have, philosophers have, in a presumptuous manner, tried to supply "a rational foundation for morality" (BGE p. 97). This presumption seems to be endemic to moral philosophy, for, as Nietzsche puts it, "every moral philosopher so far has believed that he has

provided such a foundation" (BGE p. 97). But on Nietzsche's view, the efforts of even such subtle and profound thinkers as Kant and Schopenhauer have been in reality ethnocentric rationalizations for the morality of their culture. They simply took *the actual morality of their culture as given*, and treated as "insignificant and left in dust and must" the *descriptive* task of a genuine typology of morals. Nietzsche, to put the matter succinctly, is saddling all philosophers with what in *Twilight of the Idols* he taxed English philosophers with, namely of not taking actual morality, everyday moral beliefs, as a problem — as something to concretely and seriously question and challenge. As Nietzsche puts it, in a striking and often quoted passage :

... Just because our moral philosophers knew the facts of morality only very approximately in arbitrary extracts or in accidental epitomes — for example, as the morality of their environment, their class, their church, the spirit of their time, their climate and part of the world — just because they were poorly informed and not even very curious about different peoples, time, and past ages — they never laid eyes on the real problems of morality; for these emerge only when we compare *many* moralities. In all "science of morals" so far one thing was *lacking*, strange as it may sound : the problem of morality itself; what was lacking was any suspicion that there was something problematic here. What the philosophers called "a rational foundation for morality" and tried to supply was, seen in the right light, merely a scholarly variation of the common *faith* in the prevalent morality; a new means of *expression* for this faith; and thus another fact within a particular morality, indeed, in the last analysis a kind of denial that this morality might ever be considered problematic — certainly the very opposite of an examination, analysis, questioning, and vivisection of this very faith (BGE p. 97-98).

So one must carefully scrutinize actual moralities. The task is to describe what they are like, to come to understand the hidden motives that have led people to commit themselves to them and to see clearly the consequences of living in accordance with these various moralities. And in doing this we should become vividly aware of what sort of person we must become to live according to these various moralities.

We must not try to evade the fact that there are considerable differences between men here. If we really look and see and do not simply ruminate about it in our studies, we will come to recognize that people are not all of a piece. People in fact have different tablets of value : they consider different goods worth striving for, disagree about "what is more or less valuable" and "about the order of rank of the goods they recognize in common" (BGE p. 106). And these culturally defined differences in valuation are passed on

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from generation to generation in the different cultures. They become the "precious heritage" of a people. Involuntarily, "parents turn children into something similar to themselves." This indoctrination, this enculturation of the infant, is called education. But it is here, at this very early age, that the child gets a determinate set of values.

III

Given that this is a central task of the moral philosopher, how does Nietzsche execute it? What kind of a typology does he give us? Going back into history, Nietzsche avers, we can, as our most general division of moralities, characterize moralities as either *slave moralities* or *master moralities*. This famous classification of Nietzsche's has given him, in some circles, a bad name and has led to much confusion. It is important at the outset to bear in mind Nietzsche's claim that present-day moralities in complex societies are a combination of both moralities, though Nietzsche indeed also gives us to understand that in the Western World the ethos of slave morality predominates. Yet he does not regard either the religious or secular humanist moralities of his time as pure cases of slave moralities. Rather they contain elements of both moralities.

What is this contrast between slave morality and master morality? In their purer earlier forms the moralities of Judaism and Christianity were slave moralities and the aristocratic morality of the Greeks and of the old Teutons were master moralities. Judaism, Nietzsche contends, arose from slavery. That is to say, it emerged from a slave revolt in Egypt. The Jewish prophets used the term "the world" as a term of opprobrium and treated "rich," "godless," "evil," "violent" and "sensual," as if they were nearly equisignificant. And "poor" became nearly synonymous with "holy."

However, I have been using a classification which I have yet to characterize. Let us see what Nietzsche intends. Slave morality is the morality of the "violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary" (BGE p. 207). When these sorely taxed people gain power and indeed *de facto* authority, we have slave morality. The conditions for its emergence are social conditions where there are masters and what are in effect slaves. Now consider the slaves? Such burdened and frequently tyrannized men, with their longing for freedom, have quite naturally, a "pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man..." The virtues

such grieved men prize are those of "pity, the complacent and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility and friendliness..." (BGE p. 207). These are all virtues, note, which have great survival value for them in enduring the pressure of their burdened and unfree existence.

Slave morality is a morality of timidity. It developed as the slave's reaction to and finally revolt against master morality. In many, no doubt most, cultures, throughout most of human history, most people have had in many areas central to their lives simply to obey orders. "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die" has been the rule of life for most men, while in the same society a small number of men have commanded. Most men, in short, simply obeyed, cultivated obedience as a virtue, while a few gave orders. For the masses — those who cultivated obedience — moral utterances come to have the force of "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." They come to look like categorical imperatives or laws which they simply must accept if they are to be men of goodwill. The "rationale" for these directives remains obscure, but that they are commands they must obey remains for them evident. This is an obvious feature of the phenomenology of such a moral life. That is to say, moral injunctions are taken by such people — people accustomed to obey — as unconditional social demands: things that they must do whether they like to or not. Where such a system of valuation is firmly established, we have a slave morality.

There are societies where aristocrats determine what is good and bad, where they determine what ought to be done and avoided. We have a master morality where this obtains. And it is this aristocratic set of values which the slave grudgingly takes as binding. Slave morality grows out of the slave's resentment of the master's demands. We have a slave morality where the masses come finally to define the morality of their culture — where they come at last to exercise the tyranny of the majority and even determine the order of things to the extent of making men who naturally would be rulers ashamed of their superiority. In such a morality moral utterances have the force of *unconditional social demands*.

Where such a slavish people come to utter the commands themselves, they deceive themselves into believing they are carrying out the commands of God or of the "natural law" or some other comforting but convenient obscurity. These "vague generalities" give men with a hard mentality the soothing but illusory conviction that they are *not* commanding — that they are *not* expressing their will to power. To believe that they were actually command-

ing and determining values would be just too anxiety arousing. Rather, not understanding the semantical status of their own utterances, they falsely believe that what they state or give voice to are objective moral laws (BGE p. 111).

It is because of this that Nietzsche contends that slave morality stinks with hypocrisy and evasion. The ideal type of man in such a society is easy to get along with and useful to his fellowmen. Industriousness, considerateness, moderation, modesty, pity are his key virtues. And he has a deep, but often disguised, need for a leader (BGE p. 111). Such a man will look with suspicion on "everything, haughty, manly, conquering, domineering — all the instincts characteristic of the highest and best-turned-out-type of 'man'..." (BGE p. 75).

Men committed to a slave morality have a conception of "the common good" and a conception of utility which consists, most essentially, in the preservation of the community. Where love of neighbour develops as a moral belief, it develops out of *fear* of neighbour (BGE p. 113). Fear, Nietzsche tells us, is often the mother of morals. For slave morality "everything that elevates an individual above the herd and intimidates his neighbour is henceforth called evil" (BGE p. 114). By contrast, "the fair, modest submissive, conforming mentality" is the morally desirable mentality. To do what one ought, to be, on such a conception of morals, not only a man of good morals, but a morally good man, one must be such a meek and non-assertive human being. Even the happiness of such a man will be a kind of contentment, a kind of tranquilizing medicine and not something active, something that flows from the distinctive behaviour of the well-formed human animal. For the herd, severity, even justice, disturbs the conscience; punishment itself becomes a necessary evil: we need it to keep at bay the state of nature, but punishment and even the severity and demanding character of justice is still something which is in itself terrible (BGE p. 114).

This slave morality was the morality of the Jews and the Christians. And it remains, Nietzsche would have us believe, the dominant morality in our democratic age. It is the morality of the herd. Such a herd animal morality tries to represent itself as *the* moral point of view, but this "flattery of the most sublime herd animal desires" must be resisted. Slave morality is in reality but one morality among others.

Master morality is quite different. It has a severity quite lacking in the slave morality; and it does not take the prevention of suffering to be the

central goal of ethical endeavour (BGE p. 117). Against the ascetic, world-denying, altruistic morality of slave morality, it sets the distinct ideal of an earthy, high-spirited, world-affirming human being. The human model is that of a powerful, disciplined man accustomed to commanding and to being obeyed; a man who can *create* values without anxiety and without hiding from himself that this is what he is doing.

Such a morality does not seek, what is impossible anyway, the abolishment of suffering; it is not even particularly concerned with its diminution. Rather it stresses the point that it is only through the discipline of suffering that the great achievements of man have been attained (BGE p. 154). Men are creatures who want happiness but they are, or at least aristocratic types are, *creator* as well as creature and as creator they are beings with a *will to hardness*. ("Let us remain hard, we last Stoics.") The creator in man — the rider and not the ridden — will resist pity "as the worst of all pamperings and weaknesses" (BGE p. 154). In this aristocratic morality, neither human well-being, nor happiness, nor the avoidance of pain and suffering are ends of moral endeavour. Rather honesty, integrity, self-overcoming are the central virtues of the aristocrat.

IV

A master morality will also reject *equality* as an ideal. The doctrine that all men, morally speaking, are equal and have equal rights and claims is for such a morality a swindle. In the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche proclaims that there is "no more poisonous poison anywhere" than the doctrine of equality. It is in reality the termination of justice" (T p. 553). Master morality requires, and Nietzsche most certainly appears to commit himself to this belief as well, that "there is an order of rank between man and man" (BGE p. 157). A Rousseauan or egalitarian morality which would override these differences is for him an utterly unacceptable morality. In a master morality, the fundamental principles of justice should be: "Equal to the equal, unequal to the unequal." And this aristocratic principle of justice, Nietzsche remarks, should have as its corollary "Never make equal what is unequal" (T p. 553).

In a similar vein in part 7 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche tells us that "what is fair for one cannot by any means for that reason alone also be fair for others." Men are different, the man of discipline, understanding and

courage should not be treated like herd animals. It is a kind of childish moral blindness to believe that all men are of the same worth or of the same moral value or even that all of us stand in a position of even *prima facie* equality. Our humanitarian, democratic indoctrination simply blinds us and prejudices us here. It is not the case that all men have the right to be treated as persons of equal intrinsic worth. To believe that they should be so treated is simply liberal muddle-headedness.

In master morality "society doesn't exist for society's sake" or to make life tolerable for as many as possible but as a "scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of being..." (BGE p. 202). The good and healthy aristocratic conscience will accept, as within its moral proprieties, "the sacrifice of untold human beings who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments" (BGE p. 202). In such a morality, there is an equality and a mutual consideration between *peers* (equals). But a master morality will not, nay cannot, accept the equality of all men as a fundamental principle of a just society.

Master morality takes as its ideal the noble type of human being. Here we are talking about a type of human being who "honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and who respects all severity and hardness" (BGE p. 205). He is an autonomous man, who creates his own values and does not simply accept the mores of his society. Rather he is one of the *creators* of new mores. He is capable of long revenge and proud disdain and he is not made for pity, though he may, but need not, help the unfortunate. And when he does help the unfortunate, he is prompted by an excess of power, not by pity or a sense of obligation. He is fully aware that he has no duties or obligations to the rabble; toward them he may behave as he pleases or as the heart desires (BGE p. 206). Moreover, he will cultivate in the masses, before whom he is a creator of values, a sense of station, i.e., "that they are not to touch everything; that there are holy experiences before which they have to take off their shoes and keep away their unclean hands" (BGE p. 213). This, Nietzsche continues, "is almost their greatest advance toward humanity" (BGE p. 213).

Some of Nietzsche's commentators maintain that he is neither concerned to defend master morality or any essentially fierce conception of how the life of a noble man is to be lived nor is he concerned to undermine slave

morality.² But whatever the merits of such a claim, it still remains the case that it is patently evident that Nietzsche prefers master morality and that he regards master morality as embodying a higher conception of man — a conception that is part of a morality that is a higher, profounder, more adequate morality than slave morality. It is indeed true, as Nietzsche remarks in section 260 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, that modern moralities typically involve elements of both moralities. But of the two, the values of master morality are the higher, though a new creative synthesis of both would be better still.

Nietzsche remarks that a Caesar with the heart of a Christ is an ideal type of man. But suggestive as this is, it remains vague and Nietzsche is well aware that no synthesis has yet been forged from these two philosophical anthropologies. The doctrine of the *Übermensch* remains too indeterminate to constitute a clear guide or goal to our own self-overcoming. However, we should qualify this by adding that we are not completely in the dark here, for it is the mark of nobility and “the higher man” that he will struggle to achieve such a synthesis. Out of the smithy of his own struggling, ambivalent soul he is to forge new tablets of value and his very will to power is the will to see that they prevail. But this must not be taken to mean that Jewish-Christian morality, which inverted the aristocratic equation of good noble-powerful, is to be given a new lease on life. The higher man, Nietzsche will not allow us to forget, will not sanction an equation of “good” with “beloved of God,” accept a morality of pity or a morality of self-abnegation. It is a lie, Nietzsche repeatedly proclaims, to maintain that the wretched alone are the good, that the poor, impotent, lowly are the good and that the powerful, noble, and the hard are the embodiment of evil. To be kind and considerate, to turn the other cheek, is not the essence of virtue. There is, on Nietzsche’s view, moral value even in cruelty. This is indeed very hard for us to accept, but without giving to understand that Nietzsche is beyond criticism here, I would like to remark that we should not forget that “almost everything we call ‘higher culture’ is based on the spiritualization of cruelty.” The very tragic vision of life so central to a fully human life is tied to this cruelty, to this hardness toward oneself. And this cruel determination to drive oneself to the very edge is the source of deep searching into the human condition. An extraordinary amount of creativity arises from such a hardness toward oneself and toward others. Recall, that even the seeker after knowledge forces his spirit to “recognize things against the inclination of the

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spirit, and often enough also against the wishes of his heart..." (BGE p. 159). The truth here is cruel : he would like to say "Yes" and love and adore and model reality after his heart's desire, but this reverence for truth or, if you will, just the awareness of what is the truth leads him to say "No" and to suffer. He affirms the value of life and creativity and is "elevated above the surfeit of ill-constituted sickly, weary and exhausted people of which Europe is beginning to stink today..." (GM p. 43).

Such remarks might seem to conflict with Nietzsche's comments that we should question the very value of truth and that we should be sceptical whether anyone can know the truth. Nietzsche certainly did attack traditional correspondence theories of truth and challenged — as many philosophers would today — whether there is any such thing as Absolute Truth. He rejected all metaphysical theorizings about knowing what ultimate reality is like or about knowing what reality is like in and of itself. He also rejected any claim that statements can be true in the sense that they correspond to reality or that ideas or concepts make some perfect fit with an antecedently knowable reality. He was as hard on such conceptualizings as the most tough-minded positivist. But he did not reject the belief that some ways of conceptualizing and thinking are more successful and more adequate ways of coming to grips with our environment and our lives than others. And he did not reject the belief that in that sense such claims could be true and that one claim could be truer than another. And while he did *not* take truth to be some "absolute value" beyond question which could not sometimes be sacrificed to other considerations, he did recognize its instrumental value in the making of "the higher man."

V

The very concept of good bears witness to the division of moralities into slave moralities and master moralities. There is not one concept of good which is common to them both. In a master morality 'good' means (most essentially means) 'noble.' To speak of a 'good man' is to speak of a 'noble man.' 'Bad' connotes 'common,' 'plebeian' or 'low.' The contrast in such an ethic is between good and bad and not, as in a slave morality, between good and evil. (GM pp. 27-28). In slave morality there is the inversion of values of the traditional aristocratic morality (the master morality). From the slave's revolt a new conception of morality arises. In that new morality, the noble,

powerful, hard, warlike, and joyful become 'the evil ones' and the meek, the impotent, the pious, the blest of God become 'the good men'. And note that these are the ideals of human excellence of our conventional wisdom : ideals which came with the rise of the priestly ethic of Judaism and Christianity. With the slave revolt in morality 'good and evil' replaces 'good and bad' as the fundamental categories of morality.

One of the ironies of the history of ethical thought is that out of this hatred and vengefulness of the priestly class grew the "profoundest and sublimest kind of love" (GM p. 34). To understand this we must explicate Nietzsche's concept of *resentment*. As he remarks in Section 10 of the first essay in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "the slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values..." (GM p. 36). It springs from the tribulations of frustrated, vengeful, and envious men who are not allowed to act and compensate for their frustration by an imaginary revenge. By contrast the nobleman, espousing a master morality, freely creates values while the only creative act of the slave is to say 'No' to the valuations of his master. His moral posture is essentially negative. Indeed in the very nature of the case, his reaction is essentially negative and reactive, for the slave's values are the result of resentful reactions to the values of others. They are not a creative forging of a way of life. Resentment in a man of noble character "consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction." It does not poison him as it does a member of the priestly caste; it is not something which is his deepest concern and from which his valuations emerge as a reaction. The noble man has "no memory for insults and vile actions done him." Rather "such a man shakes off with a single shrug much vermin that eats deep into others" (GM p. 39). 'Bad' for him is the contrast with 'good.' By contrast, the man of resentment, the slave — living in fear and longing for freedom — regards his master as the enemy, as 'the Evil One,' the one against whom the brunt of his emotional energy is directed. And it is against this 'Evil One' that he develops his ethics of resentment in which the basic categories are good and evil. The concept of evil, in short, grows out of "the cauldron of unsatisfied desire." Note that the good man, of master morality, i.e., "the noble, powerful man, the ruler," is the evil man of slave morality. The same word 'good' here occurs in both moralities, but it is used in these two moralities in radically different ways. We do not have a single concept here but two concepts (GM p. 40).

Many, on grounds I will come to later, will utterly reject Nietzsche's

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claim that the weak, the deprived, or wretched of the earth, must be bad and that they are beings whom one may treat as one wishes, and still recognize that there is moral insight and a perceptiveness of vision in Nietzsche's critique of our conventional tablets of virtue. There is a hidden vindictiveness, pettiness, and life-destroying resentment in people caught up in such a conventional morality. They frequently, in spite of their aroma of sanctity, express in an oblique way the vengeful cunning of impotence. They say of the strong, noble, and masterful man, who is the creator of values, that he is evil and that they, the weak, are good, for they are people who harm no one, do not require harm done, leave vengeance to God, desire little from life and walk humbly before their God, i.e., their Master. In reality, Nietzsche remarks, this is but a counsel of prudence, but the slave, the mass man, deceives himself, masks his impotence and hatred, and, in effect, makes calm resignation the essence of virtue. Here "weakness is being lied into something meritorious"; weakness is being made into the key human excellence. In such a slave morality, the most desirable style of life becomes a life-denying, embittered, altruistic, resigned style of living. For slave morality the man who adopts this style of life, who loves and fears his enemies, is the best sort of man. And even to describe this morality in the way Nietzsche does is surely to call it in question. Nietzsche has made us see, by his very description, that this ideal is a lie; that it is hardly an ideal worthy of men.

VI

Nietzsche overdramatizes and overevaluates cruelty, hardness, and suffering. And while a sense of order and rank no doubt has its place in morality, Nietzsche has, I submit, also overprized this feature of the moral life. Moreover, in telling us that we have "renounced the great life when we renounce war" and in looking upon war as a great purifier, rather than as a brutalizer, Nietzsche fell into the kind of romanticism and unreality which in other areas he so keenly criticizes. Surely hardness, discipline, suffering, and sometimes even cruelty, are sources of value, but their value, great as it is, remains *instrumental*; suffering to no end, suffering pointlessly, suffering for no purpose, is merely sick and senseless. That suffering must have a rationale, a purpose, to be morally desirable shows that suffering is not an intrinsic good.

Nietzsche's challenge of the currently accepted valuations stands out most obviously as a relief from and a corrective to Judaism and Christianity and even to the kind of hedonism which would treat, or try to treat, pleasure as being some kind of delectable sensation or as something like a tranquilizing contentment, rather than something which is very often active and cannot be sundered from action. But once we come to see the limitations of these moral postures and come to reject them as they most surely ought to be rejected, we are then starkly up against the problem : what would constitute a truly human life, an adequate conception of the higher man, and a true set of moral valuations ? It may very well be true that Nietzsche's conception of human nobility — of the *Übermensch* — is far superior to our Sunday school picture of gentle Jesus meek and mild. It is even arguable that it is superior to a conception of human endeavour that seeks to maximize satisfactions and minimize pains for everyone alike. But even if that is so, the question remains ; why should we emulate the conqueror, the splendid blond beast, "prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory ?" Why should we take as our ideal of human excellence the man who honours his peers, respects those who are resourceful enough to be his enemies, but will when it fits his purposes be prepared to treat the masses as cannon fodder or, to switch the metaphor, grist for his own mill ? There are indeed some things to admire in this 'splendid blond beast' and it is at least arguable that he is an advance over certain Christian moral conceptions. But again, I ask, why should we take such a man as our model ? Nietzsche was no racist and he was not an anti-Semite. But he sometimes writes as if he regarded what he called the noble 'splendid blond beast' as the paradigm for what man should be. But, as on Nietzsche's own account the slave's valuations are simply reactions to master morality, aren't Nietzsche's valuations here in turn simply a reaction to Christianity and hardly the positive creations of 'a free spirit ?'

However, let me hasten to add that I may here do Nietzsche an injustice. Nietzsche does indeed say many different things and he does engage in hyperbole and deliberate paradox. Given such an extensive corpus, written in such a manner, one has to make hard judgments on what critical weight to give certain passages. Against my above reading and the criticism attendant on that reading, we must balance what Nietzsche says in other places, for he does say elsewhere that he accepts neither noble master morality nor slave morality, but that the *Übermensch* must be forged from a mingling of what

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is of greatest value in both. Of utmost importance in this context is his remark in the first essay of his *On the Genealogy of Morals* "that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a 'higher nature,' a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense..." There, he gives us to understand that the yet to be articulated 'higher morality' will arise from the "battleground of these opposed values" (GM p. 52). Nietzsche seems here to be a goad and not a guide to our moral reflection. But we must remember, as he says in his *Zarathustra*, that it is not his task to give us a new *Weltanschauung*, but to point to how we can, as creators of values, forge our own fundamental valuations, rather than as slaves remain caught in the vicissitudes of our mores. Moreover, his picture of Goethe, whom he took to be an approximation of the *Übermensch*, is at considerable distance from the image of "the splendid blond beast." Note this extended quotation from *Twilight of the Idols* : (T pp. 553-554)

... *Goethe* — not a German event, but a European one : a magnificent attempt to overcome the eighteenth century by a return to nature, by an *ascent* to the naturalness of the Renaissance — a kind of self-overcoming on the part of that century. He bore its strongest instincts within himself : the sensibility, the idolatry of nature, the anti-historic, the idealistic, the unreal and revolutionary (the latter being merely a form of the unreal). He sought help from history, natural science, antiquity, and also Spinoza, but, above all, from practical activity; he surrounded himself with limited horizons; he did not retire from life but put himself into the midst of it; he was not fainthearted but took as much as possible upon himself, over himself, into himself. What he wanted was *totality*; he fought the mutual extraneousness of reason, senses, feeling, and will (preached with the most abhorrent scholasticism by *Kant*, the antipode of Goethe); he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself.

In the middle of an age with an unreal outlook, Goethe was a convinced realist : he said Yes to everything that was related to him in this respect — and he had no greater experience than that *ens realissimum* called Napoleon. Goethe conceived a human being who would be strong, highly educated, skillful in all bodily matters, self-controlled, reverent toward himself, and who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, being strong enough for such freedom; the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from that from which the average nature would perish; the man for whom there is no longer anything that is forbidden — unless it be *weakness*, whether called vice or virtue.

Yet it remains true that Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* is not a pellucid one. Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* says that he teaches us the *Übermensch*

and Nietzsche seems at least to give us to understand that in this doctrine we will find a unitary goal which will overcome in some sense the relativity of all values and provide us with a genuine foundation for a universal morality. (Or is this Nietzsche's aim? It is difficult to be sure.)

But, after all, what is it to teach the *Übermensch*? What is this model for the good man? Even in *Zarathustra*, as Danto points out, there is no specific characterization of what Nietzsche has in mind. "As the ideal we are to pursue in our capacity as humans, it is a goal of singular indefiniteness and unspecificity."³ We know from Nietzsche that the *Übermensch* should neither be other-worldly nor the herd animal seeking pleasure and the greatest happiness for the greatest number. And he is not the resigned man who is convinced that human nature cannot be changed and who, as a result of this conviction, turns to cultivating his garden, leaving well enough alone in a world he has not made.

But what is it that we should become? How should we strive to overcome ourselves to go in the direction of *Übermenschen*? Nietzsche makes *Zarathustra* lyricize:

... Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All beings have created something higher than themselves. And would you be the ebb of this great flood, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?

Man is a rope, tied between beast and *Übermensch* — a rope across an abyss.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal. What can be loved in man is that he is a overgoing and an undergoing.⁴

That is, as one of his commentators, Arthur Danto, puts it, "we go beyond ourselves by overcoming something in ourselves."⁵ In talk that sounds like a Faustian conception of striving, Danto interprets Nietzsche as teaching, in advocating, the doctrine of the *Übermensch*, that "We are more than we were, but less than we might become, and the higher fulfillment of ourselves as humans is that which we should seek."⁶ But how are we to proceed to go in the direction of the *Übermensch*? How, quite concretely, to put it with deliberate naïveté, should we act to go in that direction, or how should we educate our children such that they could go in that direction? To engage in this self-overcoming it is "surely not a matter of stopping only what we have been doing, it is a matter of starting in a fresh direction."⁷

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But what direction are we to take? Something of what Nietzsche says about Goethe gives us some inkling. Moreover, cutting through Nietzsche's metaphors, we can also come to see that the *Übermensch* is a man of discipline who keeps both his intellectual and emotional life under his command and in balance. But there — important as this is — Nietzsche has not said anything new that was not already stressed by Plato and Aristotle and restressed by Butler. Here we find the *Übermensch* as "a joyous, guiltless, free human being, in possession of instinctual drives which do not overpower him. He is the master and not the slave of his drives, and so he is in a position to make something of himself rather than being the product of instinctual discharge and external obstacle."⁸

He is to thrust himself into life and live fully, making hard demands upon life and upon himself. One must, given such an ideal of human excellence, strive to be thoroughly educated, aware of one's motives and reverent toward oneself. And such a man does what he does not out of fear or because the opposite is forbidden but because it is what on reflection he decides to do.

With such a conception we have come a long way from the blond beast, from the domineering tyrant who acts toward others as if he were a bird of prey. It cannot be denied that Nietzsche — never very restrained in his language and an indulger in pun and metaphor — sometimes speaks as if a Jack London figure were his conception of the *Übermensch*. And it is true that Caesar Borgia, as well as Goethe, was one of Nietzsche's models for the direction to take toward the higher man. There is indeed the fierce Nietzsche. But the above less original, though more restrained and morally sounder conception — something more in keeping with a gentler more spiritualized conception of Nietzsche — is also genuine Nietzsche. And I would hope that it was his more considered conception. But whether it was or not, it is true that it played a central role in his thinking.

Yet this gentler conception of the *Übermensch* still lacks specificity and it is not clear why these virtues should, so to speak, be the cardinal virtues in our ideal of what it is that we as men are to become.

But for all of that, Nietzsche has returned to a side of ethic that much needs stressing. He has developed with a new twist the self-realizationist tradition initiated by Plato and Aristotle. Both utilitarianism and Kantianism give us a supreme principle of morality in virtue of which we can assess acts, rules, practices, laws and the like. This task of articulating and defending such a supreme principle of morality, is, I would argue, the most central

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consideration in morality, but it is also true that morality is not entirely a matter of rules or of trying to ascertain what would constitute a just society or of looking for a criterion to appraise moral practices. We also, and very pervasively, want to ask : What sort of a human being am I to become, what am I to make of myself and the like. Here neither utilitarianism nor deontology (including Kant) is very helpful, but Nietzsche, by contrast, gets us to feel the force of this baffling and humanly vital question.

VII

I should like now to turn to another side of Nietzsche's thought and to indicate a place where I believe Nietzsche's actual valuations need to be challenged — indeed transvaluated. It is in his attitudes to what he called 'the herd,' 'the mass,' the 'lying common man.' One man can share his distress over a society which is becoming a herd society and his disgust with a world in which, as Kierkegaard put it, men of sensitivity and conviction will be trampled by the geese. We have every reason to feel disquietude about the tyranny and stupidity of an uninformed and unreflective majority. In his diagnosis of this social ill, Nietzsche was far ahead of his time. Moreover, I think he is quite right about 'a herd mentality' and in part, but only in part, about the tyranny of the majority. And I think it is fair to say that we find this exemplified in present day industrial society. But it is important to remember that neither Marx nor Trotsky nor Rosa Luxemburg had any more illusions about the proletariat, the peasants or the bourgeoisie than did Nietzsche. But we have learned from Marx, and indeed from the whole development of social psychology and social science as well, to recognize that the 'stupidity of the Pöbel' is a function of certain social conditions over which they had and could have had no control. And we realize, so to say, "that there by the grace of God go we," and realizing that, our sense of injustice, and not our envy, resentment or fear, is aroused by Nietzsche's ringing claim that we should never make equal what is unequal, and that sympathy for suffering is the sentimental twaddle of ritualistic liberals.

VIII

There is another, more theoretical and logically more fundamental, purely internal objection to Nietzsche's moral philosophy. Central to Nietzsche's

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thought is the doctrine of the higher and the lower man and his doctrine of self redemption (BGE p. 211). Man, Nietzsche will not let us forget, is something to be surpassed; but then, we need, as we have seen, to articulate a conception of the *Übermensch* to give sense to this notion and we deeply need to become aware of and to struggle against the social reality that we are on the verge of becoming. That is, we need to fight against a *Weltanschauung* set by the wishes of incurably mediocre men. Again and again, Nietzsche returns to his contrast between whole men and 'fragments of humanity.' "Every individual," he tells us, "may be scrutinized to see whether he represents the ascending or descending line of life."

However, particularly in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche states a nihilism or scepticism about the rational foundations of morality that is logically incompatible with drawing a distinction between the 'higher' and 'lower' man. Since I have not brought to the fore this nihilistic and sceptical side of Nietzsche, let me do so by first citing and then commenting on a selection of central quotations from his *Twilight of the Idols*.

In the section on the improvers of mankind, Nietzsche denies that there can be any moral truth or that we can know the difference between good and evil or good and bad. The philosopher must leave the "illusion of moral judgment"; he must come to recognize that "morality is mere sign language, mere symptomatology..." and that, as he puts it :

... *there are altogether no moral facts.* Moral judgments agree with religious ones in believing in realities which are no realities. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena — more precisely, a misinterpretation. Moral judgments, like religious ones, belong to a stage of ignorance at which the very concept of the real and the distinction between what is real and imaginary, are still lacking; thus "truth", at this stage, designates all sorts of things which we today call "imaginings." Moral judgments are therefore never to be taken literally : so understood, they always contain mere absurdity (T p. 501).

On such a foundation there clearly can be no knowledge of how we ought to live or what we ought to try to make of ourselves; likewise there can be no appraisal of what is the optimal life and so there can be no objective or even reasonable distinction between 'the higher' and 'lower man.' That this is the conclusion to be drawn from his beliefs about the foundations of morality is further supported by a quotation from an earlier section of the *Twilight of the Idols*. There he remarks in the part entitled "The Problem of

Socrates'' :

... Judgments, judgments of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true : they have value only as symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms; in themselves such judgments are stupidities. One must by all means stretch out one's fingers and make the attempt to grasp this amazing finesse, *that the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by the living, for they are an interested party, even a bone of contention, and not judges; not by the dead, for a different reason. For a philosopher to see a problem in the value of life is thus an objection to him, a question mark concerning his wisdom, an un-wisdom (p. 474).

That is to say, a philosopher, if he has his wits about him, is not to ask the meaningless question "What is the meaning of life ?" Moral judgments cannot be true and this entails they cannot be false either and thus there can be no knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil or even good and bad and thus the value of life cannot be estimated. But this in turn entails either the falsity or the meaninglessness of the doctrine of the *Übermensch* and it seems at least to undermine the rationality of the very pursuit that Nietzsche sets for the philosopher of the future, namely to be a creator of new values. For, given Nietzsche's above theoretical account — if you will meta-ethical account — wouldn't such a 'philosopher of the future' of necessity be 'the creator of new illusions' ?

If we take seriously Nietzsche's nihilism or subjectivism, we cannot take seriously his doctrine of the higher man or his conception of a philosopher. It only *makes sense to say* that man is something to be surpassed, that liberalism and socialism both make for the herd animalization and withering of man into "small cowardly and hedonistic" creatures, if one can have some objective conception of what 'the higher man' is and this in turn depends for its viability on some measure of moral objectivity.

It might be replied that Nietzsche, with his conception of Goethe and the Renaissance man, has given us, in part at least, a conceptualization of 'the higher man.' At least we have a model for such a conception. But the point is that if Nietzsche's above statement of nihilism is accepted, Nietzsche's remarks about 'the higher man' are themselves of value only as symptomatology, as revealing something concerning Nietzsche's approvals and disapprovals, and of his attitudinal postures toward life, but nothing of the true condition of man. If Nietzsche's claims about 'moral truth' and the status of moral judgments are correct, there can be no question of an appraisal of

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the relative merits of slave morality versus master morality. There can in such an eventuality be no question about what in an inflated idiom is called 'a truly human society' or in a more ascetic idiom would be called an 'optimal life'; and it becomes senseless to assert, as Nietzsche does, that "Man is finished when he becomes altruistic" or that the priestly morality made a "caricature of man like a miscarriage" (T. p. 502). And if his nihilism or subjectivism is true, one cannot sensibly proclaim "One must be above mankind in strength, in loftiness of soul, in contempt" (T p. 569). If Nietzsche's nihilism or subjectivism is true, such judgments are incoherent — are mere symptomatology — and if such moral judgments are true Nietzsche's nihilism or subjectivism is false.

NOTES

1 The texts most extensively used are *Jenseits von Gut und Bös, Zur Genealogie der Moral, Also sprach Zarathustra, Götzen-Dämmerung*. All of these are in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, hrsg. v. Karl Schlechte (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969, 2 Aufl.). I have quoted and cited references to the English translations of Walter Kaufmann. The following English editions were used: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: 1966, Random House); Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: 1967, Random House); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: 1954, The Viking Press). All the references to Nietzsche are given in the text with the following abbreviations: *Beyond Good and Evil* — BGE, *On the Genealogy of Morals* — GM, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* — Z, *Twilight of the Idols* — T.

2 Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Cleveland and New York: 1956, The World Publishing Company) and Walter Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (Garden City, New York: 1960, Doubleday and Company), Chapter Eleven.

3 Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: 1965, The Macmillan Company), p. 197.

4 Cited by Danto, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198.

5 Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.