

Nietzsche's Revaluation of All Values

Primary Sources:

Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, Section 103 (Handout)

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Section 335, 341 (Handout)

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue 1-6; First Part: "On the Three Metamorphoses" (Handout)

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Sections 44, 56, 61-62, 203, 211-212, 242, 272, 296, in Kaufman, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, pp. 243-246, 258, 262-266, 307-308, 325-329, 366-367, 411, 426-427

Background:

From the *Routledge Online Encyclopedia*:

[Based on our reading of Nietzsche's account of guilt and "bad conscience":] The priest now has the notion of 'evil' required for the revaluation of the noble values: the moralized notion of virtue as self-denial provides the standard against which the nobles could be judged inferior [**recall *Beyond Good and Evil* 260**], whereas the moralized notion of debt provides the basis for blaming the nobles for that inferiority [**recall *The Genealogy of Morals* selections from the Second Essay**]. Both notions (of virtue and duty) were moralized by being tied together under the understanding of value provided by the ascetic ideal. Morality connects duty and virtue in such a way that blamable violations of duty are taken to show lack of virtue and lack of virtue is blamable (luck has nothing to do with it). Because he sees this connection as having been brought about by means of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche regards that ideal as a major element of morality.

His own ideal is a very different one. Named after the Greek god Dionysus [**recall him from *Birth of Tragedy***], Nietzsche's ideal celebrates the affirmation of life [**recall his account of truth in *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil***] even in the face of its greatest difficulties, and thus gives rise to a doctrine and valuation of life that is fundamentally opposed to the one he finds behind morality. Committed to finding the sources of value in life, he rejects all non-naturalistic interpretations of ethical life, those that make reference to a transcendent or metaphysical world [**recall his rejection of Christianity and the death of god**]. It therefore seems likely that what he opposes in morality is not the idea of virtue, or standards of right and wrong, but the moralization of virtue and duty brought about by the ascetic ideal. Morality 'negates life' because it is an ascetic interpretation of ethical life. By interpreting virtue and duty in non-natural terms, it reveals the assumption of the ascetic ideal: that things of the highest value must have their source 'elsewhere' than in the natural world. This is why Nietzsche says that what 'horrifies' him in morality is 'the lack of nature, the utterly gruesome fact that *antinature* itself received the highest honors as morality and was fixed over humanity as law and categorical imperative'.

But how is this connected to Nietzsche's complaints against 'herd morality'? 'Herd' is his deliberately insulting term for those who congregate together in questions of value and perceive as dangerous anyone with a will to stand alone in such matters. He calls the morality of contemporary Europe 'herd animal morality' because of the almost complete

agreement 'in all major moral judgment'. Danger, suffering, and distress are to be minimized, the 'modest, submissive, conforming mentality' is honored, and one is disturbed by 'every severity, even in justice'. Good-naturedness and benevolence are valued, whereas the 'highest and strongest drives, if they break out passionately and drive the individual far above the average and the flats of the herd conscience,' are slandered and considered evil.

This morality does not seem to involve the ascetic ideal. In fact, it is more likely to be packaged as utilitarianism, which offers a naturalistic, and therefore presumably unascetic, interpretation of duty and virtue, in terms of happiness. We might, in fact, formulate Nietzsche's main objection to herd morality as a complaint that there is nothing in it to play the role of the ascetic ideal: to hold out an ideal of the human person that encourages individuals to take up the task of self-transformation, self-creation, and to funnel into it the aggressive impulses, will to power and resentment that would otherwise be expressed externally. Although it horrifies him, Nietzsche recognizes the greatness of the ascetic ideal. It is the only ideal of widespread cultural importance human beings have had so far, and it achieved its tremendous power, even though it is the "harmful ideal *par excellence*", because it was necessary, because there was nothing else to play its role. "Above all, a counter-ideal was lacking - until Zarathustra".

The problem is that the ascetic ideal is now largely dead (as part of the "death of God"). Nietzsche thinks we need something to replace it: a great ideal that will inspire the striving, internalization, virtue, self-creation that the ascetic ideal inspired. "Herd animal morality" is what we are left with in the absence of any such ideal. It is what morality degenerates into once the ascetic ideal largely withdraws from the synthesis it brought about. The virtuous human being no longer is anything that can stir our imagination or move us. For Nietzsche, this is the 'great danger' to which morality has led: the sight of human beings makes us weary.

Questions:

- Does Nietzsche reject every morality or does he advocate a new morality?
- What is the relation between Nietzsche's revaluation of values and the doctrine of eternal recurrence?