Burden of Proof, Nietzsche

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C.W: Discussion of fascism, nazism, eugenics, xenophobia

A Selfless Good Deed

Burden of Proof

- **Who has to prove what to whom?**
- Unless this can be settled, the argument cannot really begin
- Textbook example:
    - Does the egoist have to prove to the rest of us that living by our own desires is the best way of living?
    - Or does the burden of proof fall on those who reject egoism?

Reality Check

- In today's courts of law, arguments between prosecution and defense are governed by a simple legal principle: **the presumption of innocence**
  - Burden of proof placed firmly on the prosecution
- Generally speaking, no equivalent principle for philosophical debates

Egoism vs Moralism Burden of Proof

Egoism: Aim to pursue an individual's own desires.

- If I acknowledge that a desire is my own, for whatever reason, I have a reason to pursue it.

Moralism: Anyone who tries to override my desire by other considerations must accept that the burden of proof falls on them to explain why I should give their argument any weight.

Movie theater road accident example: Moralist has to provide reasons for *NOT* going to the movies and stopping to help.

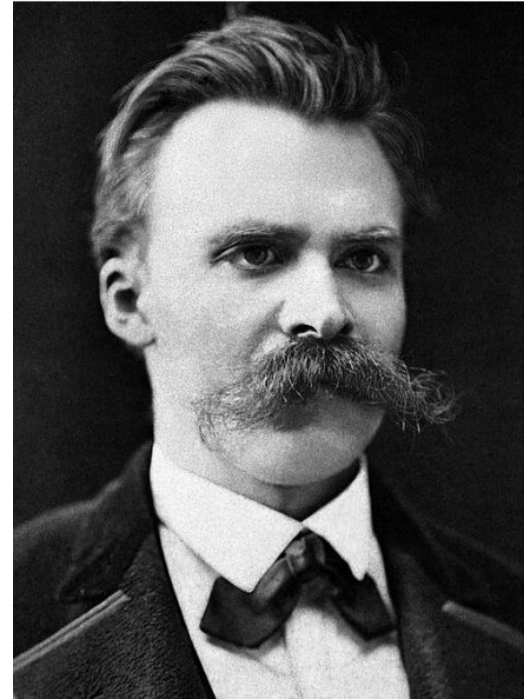# Is eating animals morally wrong?

Moralist: "Eating animals is morally wrong because it causes unnecessary suffering, and we have a moral duty to minimize harm to sentient beings"

Egoist: "I only care about what benefits me. If eating animals brings me pleasure or health, that's reason enough. Morality only matters if it serves my self-interest"

Nietzsche

- **Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche** was a late-nineteenth century German philosopher.
- He argued against imposed morality- calling it an invention of the 'weak'- and that people ought to be judged by their 'attributes' and 'capabilities'. 'Good' and 'bad' were relative rather than absolute, and were based on the difference of capabilities- with 'more' capabilities better than 'less'.
- 'More capable' people were 'better' than 'less capable' people, and hence, social hierarchies were to be on the basis of that, with the 'lower ranking' people being "subject to" their "relative superiors". He argued for 'real' aristocracy, i.e., "rule by the 'best'".
- His philosophy **relates to egoism** with his assertion that a truly 'excellent' man ('higher man', or *ubermensch*') was one who asserted his own will- not "slavishly following the will of the majority."
- Only 'weak' people require morality, for they are not strong enough to assert their own will over others.
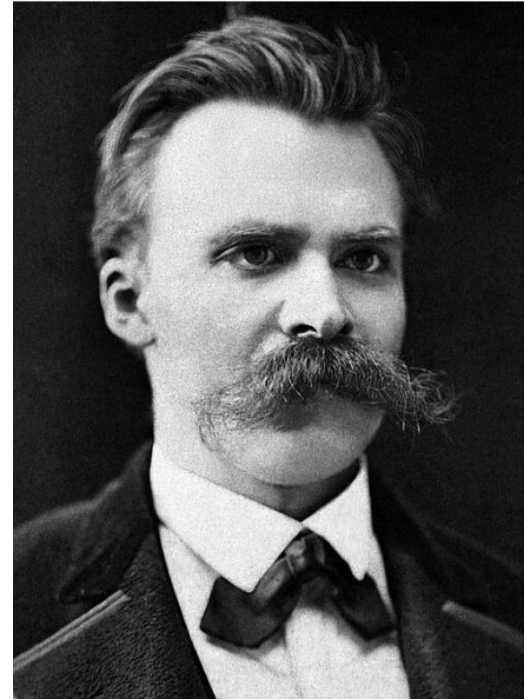
The Will to Power

- Nietzsche believed all humans held a need to assert themselves in society, and see their desires made manifest: the "Will to Power"
    - Psychological Egoism
    - Basis of argument against imposed religious morality
- Related: "There are no facts, only interpretations"
    - Facts don't matter independent of *desire*
- Believed in a "better class of person" able to assert their Will over others and be virtuous for doing so
    - Source of his term Übermensch
    - Believed this was highly correlated with *race*

Nietzsche and Fascism

- Nietzsche's work came to be associated with fascism/Nazism. His ideas about "relative superiority" and *"ubermensch"* was taken up by the Nazis to justify their bigotry and ultranationalism.
- However, some of that association was the result of his work being collected and published posthumously by his sister **Elisabeth Forster Nietzsche** (Illing, 2018) who was associated with the Nazi party.
  - Nietzsche decried German nationalist movements such as the Anti-Semites
  - But, also identified groups like Jews with weakness and "slave morality"
- Even to this day, Nietzscheism is associated with extremist neo-nazi and ultra nationalist movements.

Was Nietzsche a fascist? A 'proto-fascist'?

- Were Nietzsche's ideas falsely appropriated by bad-actors to further their agenda, or did fascists truly align with his ideals?
- If not, does this really vindicate Nietzsche's philosophy, or somehow make it more acceptable?
  - His ideals of *"ubermensch"* and aristocracy run contrary to the principle of human equality, and the dignity of each human being- regardless of 'capabilities'.
  - His rejection of democracy and equality was something he shared with fascism, and his idea of a 'moral society' was one where a dystopian caste system existed, with people at higher ranks lording over people 'below' them.
- Think about the implications of Nietzsche's ideology on the world.
  - How do you define 'capabilities'? Do things like conventional attractiveness ('beauty') matter in Nietzsche's assessment of capabilities (the book uses it as an example)?

Criticism of the Ideal Man

Is being yourself always a good thing?

Does this mean that one could & would never grow and change?

One can argue that if someone's will is to conform to social norms of morality (ex. Adhering to the values of Christianity), then they still would be adhering to Nietzsche's ideal of man.

This makes Nietzsche's ideal either vacuous, or false.

"**Being a man is being yourself... Since there is nothing in it with which he is dissatisfied, there is nothing about it that he would change.**" Graham p.33

Citation

Illing, Sean. "The Alt-right Is Drunk on Bad Readings of Nietzsche. The Nazis Were Too." *Vox*, December 30, 2018. https://www.vox.com/2017/8/17/16140846/alt-right-nietzsche-richard-spencer-nazism.