

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM 103)

NIETZSCHE II:
MORALITY IN A PEJORATIVE SENSE

LECTURE BY RIAZ P KHAN



Scope of Nietzsche's Critique of Morality

- ❖ Is Nietzsche arguing against all morality (value of all values) or specific morality?
- ❖ Is Nietzsche pointing toward 'life-affirming' values (morality); values *for* life?
- ❖ Not critique of all morality
 - Explicitly proposes idea of a "higher morality"
 - Offers revaluation of existing values that seems to invoke 'moral' standards
- ❖ Not critique of specific morality or philosophy
 - Attacks Christian, European, Kantian, Utilitarian moralities
 - Criticizes something that he takes to be characteristic of all 'traditional' morality
- ❖ Problem: Uses same terms (*die Moral*; *die Moralität*) both for moralities that he criticizes and those he approves
- ❖ The morality that he criticizes can be called '*traditional morality*,' or what Nietzsche himself refers to as '*herd morality*' or *slave morality*,' or in more recent parlance, '*morality in the pejorative sense*' (Brian Leiter)



Targets of Nietzsche's MPS

- ❖ Critique of the specific *content* of MPS (e.g., antagonism to excellence, levelling tendency, endorsement of pity, selflessness, and so on)
- ❖ Critique of the *origins* or *genesis* of MPS out of *ressentiment*
- ❖ Critique of *presuppositions* of MPS that assumes autonomy or freedom, agency, responsibility, blame, guilt of the individual agent
- ❖ Critiques of the *universal* view of MPS that one moral code of conduct is appropriate for all, without exception



Critique of Morality in the Pejorative Sense (MPS)

- ❖ All MPS share structural characteristics (*descriptive* and *normative* components)
- ❖ Descriptive Component
 - ❖ All MPS presuppose a particular descriptive account of human agency
 - The concept of the ‘free will’
 - The concept of the ‘transparency of the self’
 - The concept of the similarity or universality of all people
- ❖ Normative Component
 - ❖ All MPS embrace norms which favor the interests of some, at the expense of others
 - They embrace norms that harm the ‘highest’ human beings while benefiting the lowest men
- ❖ Relation between descriptive and normative components



The Descriptive Component of MPS – I

❖ Free Will Thesis

- ❖ Human agents possess a will capable of free choice
- ❖ Human agents are responsible for their actions
- ❖ If agents lack free will, they cannot be held responsible for their actions

❖ Nietzsche's Critique

- ❖ An autonomous agent would have to be *causa sui* (cause of itself, self-generated), but since nothing can be self-caused, no one could be an autonomous agent
- ❖ What rises to the level of consciousness is simply an effect of something unconscious, or even physical (i.e., our conscious life is *epiphenomenal*)
 - Each person has certain characteristics that causally determine her will
 - Each person has physiological and psychic traits, that constitute the “type” of person she is
 - Type-facts ‘cause’ and explain all other facts about a person (beliefs, actions, life arc)
 - Conscious states are only causally effective in virtue of the type-facts about a person



The Descriptive Component – II

❖ Transparency of the Self Thesis

- ❖ The self is transparent such that agent's actions can be distinguished by their motives
- ❖ The motives for which agents act can be evaluated and 'ranked'
- ❖ If agent motives could not be distinguished, then no evaluative distinctions could be drawn among acts in terms of their motives

❖ Nietzsche's Critique

- ❖ "Every action is unknowable" ... determined by non-conscious type-facts about an agent
- ❖ Motives for actions may be different; we do not have epistemic (knowledgeable) access to the 'causally effective' motives
- ❖ Since motives for action are largely unknown, they cannot be the basis of moral evaluation of actions



The Descriptive Component - III

❖ Similarity Thesis

- ❖ Human agents are sufficiently similar that one moral code is appropriate for all
- ❖ Presuppose that 'morality' has universal applicability
- ❖ If agents were different in some relevant respect, then it would not be *prima facie* apparent that one morality should have universal application

❖ Nietzsche's Critique

- ❖ Insofar as people possess different type-facts, they are dissimilar
- ❖ Type-facts determine a person's interests (what is good for them)
- ❖ What counts as *flourishing* for a person is **relative** to type-facts about that person
- ❖ Like nutrients, *values* can also be good or bad for different types of persons, depending on their natures
- ❖ Denial of absolute goodness



The Normative Component

- ❖ Normative agenda of MPS is harmful to the “highest” human beings
- ❖ MPS thwarts the development of human excellence
- ❖ MPS is “harmful to life” or “anti-nature”
- ❖ Some quotations:

“The demand for one morality for all is detrimental to the “higher men” (*Beyond Good and Evil*)

“When a decadent type of man ascended to the rank of the highest type, this could happen only at the expense of its countertype, the type of man that is strong and sure of life” (*Ecce Homo*)

“Our weak, unmanly social concepts of good and evil and their tremendous ascendancy over body and soul have finally weakened all bodies and sapped the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men, the pillars of great strong civilization” (*Daybreak*)

“men of great creativity, the really great men according to my understanding, will be sought in vain today” because “nothing stands more malignantly in the way of their rise and evolution ... than what in Europe today is called simply “morality”” (*The Will to Power*)



Normative Agenda of MPS

Pro

Happiness
Altruism/Selflessness
Equality
Pity/Compassion

Con

Suffering
Self-love/self-interest
Inequality
Indifference to the suffering



Higher Beings/Types

“The people who ‘want to become those they are’ are precisely human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves” (*The Gay Science*)

- ❖ Examples of “higher” human being: Goethe, Beethoven, Nietzsche himself
- ❖ Characteristics of “higher” human beings
 - ❖ Higher types are solitary and deal with others instrumentally
 - ❖ Higher types seek burdens and responsibilities, in pursuit of unifying project
 - ❖ Higher types are healthy and resilient
 - ❖ Higher types affirm life – they are prepared to will the eternal return of their lives
 - ❖ Higher types have distinctive bearing towards others and especially towards their own selves: The higher type has “self-reverence”

