

SLAVE REVOLT IN MORALITY



In Friedrich Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, he states the "the slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values" (GM Essay 1; 10). This idea of resentment is prevalent in Nietzsche's philosophy because it corresponds to the idea of master and slave morality and, most importantly, explains how the lower slaves are able to overcome the higher masters and change the dominant morality to the slave morality.

Ressentiment is the driving force that causes the anger and hatred of the slaves to rebel against the higher and noble masters. As Nietzsche attempts in *Genealogy of Morals* "to produce a history of the origins of morality" (GM Essay 1; 1), morality is never absolute and values change over time.

"Revolutions" then occur which change humanity's current values. Ressentiment, in a sense, is the catalyst that causes a revolution within morals. But what is resentment exactly and what is this "creative force" of resentment that Nietzsche describes within *Genealogy of Morals*? What values are born after this "creative force" gives birth to a new set of values?

This paper will attempt to reveal the slave revolt Nietzsche describes and how resentment is the mechanism that brings about a reevaluation of morals. This paper will also describe the "creative force" that resentment brings about in the slaves in their assault against the masters and explains what values are born. The paper will explain the important weaknesses that these detrimental values create and make sense of Nietzsche's reasoning for a new revolution and reevaluation in morals.

Nietzsche developed the concept of resentment methodically by analyzing human history and the emergence of what he describes as "slave morality" in human history. He criticizes the so-called "ascetic ideal" that slave morality supports for its dehumanization of the human race. But how did this "ascetic ideal" dominate current morality in the first place? Nietzsche explains that the slave revolt of the lower class brought about this ideal. To understand the slave revolt Nietzsche describes, master and slave morality must be defined.

Nietzsche defines master morality as the morality of the strong-willed. These particular individuals value nobility, strength, courage, confidence and power as "good" and consider weakness, pettiness, and cowardice as "bad."

In the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche states that "the noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, 'what is harmful to me is

harmful in itself'; it knows itself to be that which first accords honour to things; it is value-creating" (GM Essay 1; 11). In this sense, master morality is the recognition that the master measures all things, being the one "who stands alone" (BGE Part 6; 210).

Masters can be thought of as creators while slaves can be thought of as individuals who merely react to conditions of oppression created by the masters. In contrast to master morality, slave morality originates in people who are weak and uncertain of themselves, and oppressed and abused by the masters. Because of this oppression, the slaves develop and possess characteristics of pessimism and skepticism which make them suspicious of anything that their masters value as "good." Slave morality can be seen as essentially utilitarian because good is what is best for everyone (GM Essay 1; 2).

Masters who adhere to the master morality are very few in number compared to the masses of the slaves who adhere to slave morality. The weak can gain power over the strong by treating the "good values" of master morality as inherently "evil" and the values that enable the weak and suffering to endure and improve their lives as inherently "good." This is the "slave revolt in morality," an era of resentful hatred by the slaves on the strong-willed, noble masters.

The good qualities of excellence and power revered by the masters are considered "evil" and the survival of the common people is considered "good." As Nietzsche added, "The 'well-born' felt themselves to be 'happy'; they did not have to establish their happiness artificially by examining their

enemies, or to persuade themselves, deceive themselves, that they were happy (as all men of resentment are in the habit of doing)" (GM Essay 1; 10). Ironically, the definitions of 'bad' and 'evil' for master and slave morality pretend to be the opposites of the same word 'good.' As Nietzsche emphasizes however, 'bad' and 'evil' are opposites and two completely different conceptions of what is good.

Nietzsche states that the cause of the "slave revolt in morality" is resentment.

There are multiple philosophical definitions of resentment but Nietzsche holds it as a state of subdued feelings and desires which become the generative source of values. Resentment is a reassignment of pain created when an individual senses his or her own inferiority and failure then projects it onto a scapegoat. The individual's ego creates an illusion of an enemy that is the "cause" of his or her inadequacy. By issuing blame onto the scapegoat, this leads the individual to desire revenge or the possibility of revenge against this enemy.

Nietzsche states that this "lust" for revenge can take multiple forms such as the socialist conception of revolution and Christianity's conception of the End of Days and Final Judgment. In fact, resentment is rampant in much of Nietzschean thought, especially regarding Judaism and Christianity.

He believed that both Judaism and Christianity were born from

the desires of the slaves to invert the current master morality of the world to establish the supremacy of weakness over strength. Nietzsche gives a couple of examples of this process. For example, Judaism's position of weakness within the Roman Empire was the derivation of its resentment.

The strength and might of the Roman Empire could never be overpowered which caused Judea's inferiority to manifest as hatred for the Romans. This manifestation caused hatred for Roman superiority, which in turn caused the Jews to deem them as "evil" just because the Romans were exhibiting master qualities. Nietzsche also believed that Christianity was responsible for the falling of the Roman Empire because Christian resentment brought inversion of values such as power and strength.

As Nietzsche stated about Judaic and Christian views, "only those who suffer are good; the poor, the powerless, the low are the only good people; the suffering, those in need, the sick, the ugly are also the only pious people; only they are blessed by God; for them alone there is salvation.

By contrast, you privileged and powerful people, you are for all eternity the evil, the cruel, the lecherous, the insatiable, the godless-you will also be the unblessed, the cursed, and the damned for all eternity" (GM Essay 1; 10). If resentment is the cause of hatred against the strong-willed, how does resentment become a creative force that "gives to birth to values?"

It is easier to understand the slave's resentment and its creative force by contrasting the contempt felt by the masters towards the slaves. In Nietzsche's view, masters do not concern themselves with the "bad" of the master morality which merely becomes an afterthought. Masters look down on the slaves with mere disrespect.

"The noble man cannot take his enemies, his misfortunes, even his bad deeds seriously for very long-that is the mark of strong, complete natures, in whom there is a surplus of plastic, creative, healing power, as well as the power to forget" (GM Essay 1; 10). The masters do not simply care at all about the slaves. In contrast to the masters, the slaves' resentment is a consuming hunger. It poisons their mind and makes them skeptical, pessimistic, and bitter.

Unlike the masters who merely shrug with contempt, the slaves' resentment is the focus of all their energy and attention. This brings about the creative force of resentment, the use of any means necessary, in creative ways such as through faith and spiritual well being, to overthrow the dominating values of the "arrogant" and "evil" masters and replace them with the values of "humble" and "just" slaves. Resentment is undoubtedly the central creative force behind Nietzsche's conception of slave morality. An example of this creative force in action is found in Christianity.

For Nietzsche, Christianity and its ascetic practices is the crown of Jewish resentment. Nietzsche, in *Genealogy of Morals*, traces the birth of Christian ideals through its resentment stating that "the Jews, that priestly people, who

in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say, an act of the most spiritual revenge. For this alone was appropriate to a priestly people, the people embodying the most deeply repressed priestly vengefulness" (GM Essay 1; 7).

With the emergence of Christianity, the successful slave revolt in morality gives birth to a new set of values and virtues. The innovative way that the Christian slave revolt was able to reject master morality virtues such as honor, prestige, political power, wealth, strength, beauty, and pride, characteristic of 'master' Roman noblemen, through the manipulation of the masses and exertion of faith brought the lowly slaves to rise above against the masters.

Ressentiment brought the creative force that eventually helped the slaves topple the masters, and thus a set of new values and virtues were born. But what are these new values exactly? The virtues and "good"s linked to the hated nobility came to be hated as "evil" while the traits and values found practical for absolute survival of the weak are elevated to the status of being "virtuous." Therefore, the weakness of the subjugated is completely altered into virtue while the original strength and power of the noble is considered sinful and evil thereby becoming the morality of Christianity.

The values that are born from the creative force of

ressentiment are the Christian values of "self-sacrifice," "love," and so forth. Nietzsche argues that the institution of Christianity has bastardized the teachings of Jesus and created values from within his teachings that inherently make weak and subservient individuals. This, according to Nietzsche, is the greatest weakness of the values that are born from the slave revolt in morality. Nietzsche clearly states that "Christianity came into existence in order to lighten the heart; but now it has first to burden the heart so as afterwards to be able to lighten it. Consequently it shall perish" (Human s.119).

His criticism of slave morality stems from the fact that it develops out of denial and hatred, and evades the present reality. The weaker masses are promised an afterlife and this afterlife becomes the focal point of all their hope. By putting trust in this afterlife, the slaves put their faith in a metaphysical being who hardly even thinks of them. This lack of emphasis on self and on the present is the most prevalent criticism of the current moral value system. As a result, Nietzsche claims that Europe has been infected by slave morality which has made it insipid and monotonous because it has given up all sense of ambition and the present.

In Nietzsche's book *The Antichrist* he struggles to figure out how Christianity has become the ideology created by institutions like the churches and how these churches have failed to embody the life of Jesus Christ. He makes an important distinction between the religion of Christianity and Jesus. Unlike agnostic and atheist thinkers of the Enlightenment who regarded Christianity as false, Nietzsche went beyond this and claimed that Paul the Apostle

proliferated the religion as a psychological weapon within the Roman Empire.

“The result, expressed in moral-psychological terms, is “selflessness,” “sanctification”; and expressed in physiological terms: hypnotism. It is the attempt to attain for human beings something approaching what winter hibernation is for some kinds of animals and what summer sleep is for many plants in hot climates, the minimum consumption and processing of material stuff which can still sustain life but which does not actually enter consciousness. For this purpose an astonishing amount of human energy has been expended. Has it all gone for nothing?” (GM Essay 3; 17).

This is a form of concealed revenge brought about by resentment. The institution of Christianity comes into contrast with Jesus who Nietzsche regarded as an exceptional individual who established his own moral conduct. Nietzsche may have viewed Jesus as a potential *Übermensch*¹.

Unlike the *Übermensch* who embraces the idea of life, Jesus denies reality for “the kingdom of God.” Jesus’ refusal to defend himself strips him away from ever achieving the possibility of *Übermensch* and causes Christianity to use Jesus in a terrible manner to manipulate him merely as a means to an end. Nietzsche analyzes Christian history and finds that as time goes on, the teachings of Jesus becomes more distorted. By turning Jesus into a martyr and his life into a story of redemption for mankind, the Apostles took control of the masses. Nietzsche finds this act by the Apostles to be crude, offensive, and cowardly. He concludes that by the nineteenth

century Christianity has the world dictated by slave morality and not by master morality, a total inversion of what the world should be.

The greatness weakness according to Nietzsche is the manner in which the devaluation of life is caused by slave morality. The Christian resentment brings us away from ourselves and the present and puts our attention into trivial things.

Though resentment may be used to bring a revolution of new values and morals to better the advancement of humanity, the Christian resentment has only deterred human development. Because of this we become less assertive, creative, and motivated. It creates people that are no longer driven to improve themselves. This in turn creates more slaves and fewer masters which Nietzsche believes destroys any form of human progress. Nonetheless, there is a need for a reevaluation of values before humanity is succumbed by slave morality permanently