

Nietzsche: Genealogy and the Spirit of Moral Revaluation

Kimberly A. Herring
Philosophy 493
Senior Honors Thesis
March 27, 1995

Abstract

Nietzsche is concerned with the lack of value that threatens the moral structure upon which man has relied for generations. He challenges us, therefore, to reflect upon our moral history in a new way. His use of a genealogy allows him to reveal the nuances and shades of our moral descent with minimal consideration of historical accuracy. Although it is this questionable accuracy that critics most often dispute, the perspective that his genealogy lends is most valuable. He uses the genealogy not to erect a firm foundation for a future morality, but to disturb the previous one. His study of the descent of morality is important in that it shows the stages through which man must pass before arriving at a more worthwhile valuation. In this way, Nietzsche's genealogy embodies both the sense of despair and hope that directs his revaluation. I focus on the aesthetic ideal as the embodiment of the will to power, that to which Nietzsche assigns highest value. He finds in this ideal the spirit of life and creation, qualities that give him reason to believe in man. The question around which my thesis revolves is whether basic standards of human value can be criticized and discarded without creating new values to fill that void that are potentially as groundless as the ones they replace. I arrive at the conviction, however, that Nietzsche cannot be reduced to this problem of methodology without disregarding the spirit of his revaluation. He does not need to defend the accuracy of his valuation, because objectivity is not his claim. His genealogy is valuable for its spirit of revaluation, for its capacity to raise our moral consciousness.

NIETZSCHE'S TASK

Nietzsche's moral philosophy threatens the structure of moral value upon which generations of men have depended. He is concerned with values that have gone unquestioned throughout time and challenges man to face his own moral history in a new way. The problem inherent in Nietzsche and his work, however, extends far beyond the moral issues to the manner in which he approaches them and, consequently, the way that we approach him. It is as difficult to approach Nietzsche as to dismiss him. Nietzsche and his reader alike face the dilemma of how basic standards of human value can be criticized and discarded without creating new values to fill that void that are potentially as threatening as the ones they replace. Critics often find that in creating a new standard of value with which to displace the old, Nietzsche misunderstands the character of his own rejection. To reduce his task to a level at which we could criticize him for mistaken criteria or method, however, would suggest that he is correct in his allegation that man deals only with the surface. We cannot criticize him with the very criteria that he says have been overcome. We can only understand his success or failure in relation to his own self-appointed task.

Nietzsche's predicament is a world of men who are weak and without spirit, decaying traditions, and moral misunderstandings. He faces with disgust this world that seems on the verge of giving way, a world that cannot and should not withstand time. He questions and finds faulty the most fundamental structures of human

society, the structures of morality that have led and misled generations of men, and reproaches man for not bothering to evaluate the very values that define his life. Mankind faces a great downfall, a rupture in the religious and ethical foundations that have for years gone unquestioned. George Morgan proposes that:

To lead mankind through this crisis becomes the central problem of Nietzsche's philosophy; to free every phase of life from the moribund remnants and to rebuild on a new basis that should justify the loss of the old by the creation of a yet higher form of existence.¹

Nietzsche assumes an active role in this revolution, eager not only to tear down but to hold on to what is worthwhile and create anew. He does not propose a unified theory of morality but conducts a moral inquiry, because he believes that "we need a critique of moral values,"² a revaluations of values, in order to ensure a future worthy and supportive of life.

In this sense, he transcends his generation and seeks an approach to the future that is creative and life-affirming. He attempts to establish a criterion which demands that values agree with life, that they affirm and encourage man to live. This task demands that he penetrate the surface of things, that he be fearless and radical as well as comprehensive. His argument is most striking, therefore, when considered with respect to the many

¹Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1941. 38.

²Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Genealogy of Morals." Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1992. s456.

strands that unite in his world view. Morgan recognizes that the "canvas he paints is nothing smaller than a comprehensive indictment of western civilization."³

Nietzsche is, therefore, often considered a most pessimistic and nihilistic philosopher. Critics often focus on his writing as a frantic and chaotic statement of immorality. They emphasize his disgust with man rather than his hope for man; his rejection of a sort of morality becomes, to them, inclusive of all morality. Philippa Foot says that it "may be argued that he is rightly to be called an immoralist," because he resists uniform imposition of social rules and codes of behavior throughout a community.⁴ He is accused of presenting a problem whose grand solution he cannot find. Foot says critically that "Nietzsche seems to have fallen into the trap of working a modicum of psychological observation into an all-embracing theory which threatens to become cut off from facts that could possibly refute it."⁵ The idea of the will to power as man's sole motivation allows him to suspect any common moral value and to champion expressions of strength and power. To many critics, his task seems absurd and his attitude appalling; he poses a great threat to a society already suffering from a lack of self-respect and questionable morality.

We must pay close attention, however, to Nietzsche's own

³Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. 4.

⁴Foot, Philippa. "Nietzsche: Revaluation of Values." Virtues and Vices. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978. 91.

⁵Foot, Philippa. "Nietzsche's Immoralism." Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality Ed. Richard Schacht. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. 13.

purpose, to the magnitude of the goal he has established, and to the necessary means of reaching this goal. He holds firmly the idea that "every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word also a mask."⁶ Nietzsche wears his own mask, and his work is necessarily polemical. He desperately wants to wake mankind from the slumber, to illuminate a desperate situation no matter how repulsive, to shake deteriorating structures until they fall. We must, therefore, consider his work in light of its argumentative and purposeful nature, responsive to and respectful of the great vision that it assumes. Behind the mask of immoralism and nihilism, Nietzsche presents his reader with an account of an outdated morality and the denial of life that underlies it. He exhibits the creative, life-affirming forces that must counteract this decay. He exemplifies, therefore, the role that Morgan feels Nietzsche urges philosophers to play. His work corresponds to his belief that:

Real philosophers conquer the future: they create new values and scales of values, and are thereby prime movers of history, men of the longest foresight, with responsibility for the destiny of man. They are not so much lovers of pre-existing truth as creators of what shall be held true.⁷

Nietzsche represents the cycle of despair engendering the greatest sense of hope and livelihood; he is the free-spirit willing to create his own future.

⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Beyond Good and Evil". Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1992. s289.

⁷Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. 30.

THE SPIRIT OF GENEALOGY

Nietzsche's creation begins when he points a finger at mankind, accusing us of involvement in extreme acts of self-denial, degradation, and sickness in the name of morality. He wonders about the type of ideal that supports this hostility to life and asks, "What, seen in the perspective of life, is the significance of morality?"⁸ What is a value and how does it direct and undermine mankind? What sorts of values affirm life? Nietzsche proposes to help man recognize those values that threaten to stifle the life in him. He attacks morality because, as Bergmann says, "It threatened to pull the rest of the values down with it...Morality needed to be severed and pushed aside, so that one could redeem and salvage other values (or ways of holding values) that it had overlain and nearly killed."⁹ Nietzsche attempts, therefore, a revaluation of values to discriminate between values that are worthwhile and those that are held in vain.

Such discrimination demands an ideal focus on our moral history. Paul Ricoeur remarks, "The illusions of our consciousness can be compared to a palimpsest, a text written over another text. Nietzsche... [developed a] reductive hermeneutic for revealing and clarifying the primary, underlying text."¹⁰ Although when reduced to issues of methodology Nietzsche is accused of creating little

⁸Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Birth of Tragedy." Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1992. s4.

⁹Bergmann, Frithjof. "Nietzsche's Critique of Morality." Reading Nietzsche. Ed. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 36.

¹⁰Ricoeur, Paul. Religion, Atheism, and Faith. 62.

more than gaping holes, the way in which he works reflects his task as clearly as the words he writes. The past turns on how we are able to investigate it, and Nietzsche does so with a new kind of hermeneutic. Ricoeur says that for Nietzsche, "the cultural dimension of human existence, to which ethics and religion belong, has a hidden meaning which requires a specific mode of decipherment."¹¹ Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals represents his attempt to decipher "the entire long hieroglyphic record...of the moral past of mankind."¹² However, no straight historical account conveys the shades of morality that Nietzsche reveals through his genealogy. He sounds the depths, not content with mere chronological, etymological, or factual data.

Nietzsche employs his genealogy to give the reader perspective on the ideas from which he wants him to be free. The genealogy is, therefore, a suitable rhetorical device lending a new perspective on moral valuation and does not rely upon historical accuracy. Although this lack of facticity is a point of conflict among Nietzsche scholars, factual accuracy continues to be secondary to the insight our seeing morality thus displayed can yield.

Michel Foucault presents a theory of genealogy that corresponds perfectly to Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. He suggests a unique style and importance in the genealogy that does not attempt to restore continuity to time passed or to present the factual evolution of a species. Foucault says, "Its duty is not to

¹¹Ricoeur, Paul. Religion, Atheism, and Faith. 61.

¹²Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Nietzsche's Preface." Genealogy of Morals. s7.

demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes."¹³ Nietzsche's genealogy accordingly does not propose a historical account of how man throughout time has engendered disaster. Nor does it claim, despite its etymological interest, to have traced the faults of man to a linguistic misunderstanding.

The genealogy does attend to the course that moral valuation has taken and presents flashes of where it has gone wrong. Foucault, challenging the reader to consider Nietzsche from this perspective, says:

To follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations -or conversely, the complete reversals -the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us.¹⁴

Nietzsche uses the genealogy, therefore, not to erect a firm foundation on which a morality of the future can stand, but to disturb the previous foundation. Foucault confirms that "it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."¹⁵ The entangled events of history need not be woven into a continuous and dormant theory of truth, but should be explored for their fragments of fault and

¹³Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. 81.

¹⁴Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 81.

¹⁵Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 82.

of livelihood.

NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF MORAL HISTORY

Nietzsche employs this carefully creative interpretation of history in order to expose what Foucault admits is "a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body."¹⁶ His revaluation, therefore, is both destructive and creative - embracing expressions of the will to power and rejecting weakness. Because the destructive phase of Nietzsche's revaluation is broad and encompasses many realms and figures in current and historical societies, I must narrow my focus to several representative figures who exemplify the faulty moral fiber that Nietzsche finds repulsive. The moral values of the noble type, the slave, the herd, the Christian, and the ascetic man, in particular the Ascetic priest, represent that which Nietzsche finds discouraging in our moral history. To evaluate the development of morality as a process in which each stage has lasting effects on the nature of contemporary morality lends special insight into the weakness of this structure.

Nietzsche makes the important distinction in the "First Essay" of Genealogy of Morals that, in a stage of life he calls Pre-moral, men derive the value of an action from its agent and its consequences, with no concern for the motive of the action. This stage of man's moral history is important in that it makes evident the very problem of what is given the name "good" or "moral".

¹⁶Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 83.

Nietzsche finds that actions are called "good" not from the perspective of those to whom "goodness" is shown, but from those who perform the actions. He suggests that this lordly right to name is so extensive that "one should allow oneself to conceive of the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of the rulers."¹⁷ The etymology of both "good" and "bad", in various languages, namely German, point to this phenomenon, as "good" comes from "aristocratic," and "bad" stems from "low" or "plain". This stage, according to Nietzsche, marks the introduction of linguistic concerns to the designation of value. He touches on basic etymological distinctions which hint that goodness signifies only the distance between the ruling and the ruled. Goodness, as Foucault says, "is nothing but... the void through which [the strong and the weak] exchange their threatening gestures and speeches."¹⁸ The differentiation of values depends, in this society, solely upon one class's domination of another. The moral structure of this period, therefore, does not rely on showing "goodness" to others. Rather, as Nietzsche says, "It was 'the good' themselves, that is to say, the noble, the powerful, the high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good."¹⁹ Good does not therefore imply any elevated moral behavior or virtuous intent. It merely renames a set of characteristics already expressed by the strong; thus, no

¹⁷Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 2.

¹⁸Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 84.

¹⁹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 2.

new sort of value is created. Hence the significance of the acts is lost in the naming, and moral designations are assigned to men rather than actions.

What Nietzsche calls the "pathos of distance"²⁰ results from a ruling caste conscious of its own superiority and maintaining the subordination of another class. From this distance, the noble assume the right to create and name values in their own honor. This right licenses the ruling class to determine the standard of value in society and thus to affect the future of moral valuation. Because the nobles can only maintain their own biased perspective, they see value in what glorifies their own lives; they deem themselves superior.

Political or societal superiority, Nietzsche finds, assumes superiority of the soul. The noble man, therefore, begins to assume that he is the truthful, the spiritually noble figure. Thus, the stratification created by the noble class persists, as they seemingly have justification for what they consider moral. Morality becomes to them self-gratification. Value signifies personal strength rather than personal moral virtue. Nietzsche reveals 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 honor to things; it is value-creating."²¹ Having conceived the basis for "good" out of themselves, they can

²⁰Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 2.

²¹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s260.

then create an idea of "bad". By virtue of their difference from the commoners, the noble class assumes inherent "badness" within the plebeian class, which, consequently, continues to be subordinate in both class and soul. Maudemarie Clark recognizes a fundamental problem with the foundation that this stratification establishes for morality. She suggests that "when noble birth, power, and wealth are the criteria for being 'good,' it is easy to see that goodness is not equivalent with moral virtue."²² Misdirected language engenders its own standard of moral value, and the problem appears - morality has no reliable standard by which it can be judged. Valuation in its earliest stages, therefore, is rightly called Pre-moral.

Nietzsche finds worth, however, in the emphasis that this morality places on the active and positive characteristics of man. As it evolved, morality of the nobles rewarded traits of strength and control. As he says, "The knightly-aristocratic value judgements presupposed a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even over-flowing health."²³ Although he recognizes the harmful lack of an acceptable standard of value in the noble, Nietzsche encourages the same depth and strength in man. A healthy figure represents that on which a future can rely. He feels that strength of any sort, physical or psychological, makes man "dependable to a certain extent - a foundation on which subsequent

²²Clark, Maudemarie. "Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality." Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality. Ed. Richard Schacht. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. 24.

²³Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 7.

moral developments could build."²⁴ He suggests, therefore, that there are fragments of this faulty morality that deserve to persist.

Men unable to cultivate these qualities cultivate a remarkable sense of their own impotence. The suffering and hatred that the noble class bred in the lower class, however, yielded nothing less than an inversion in valuation, a revaluation by the priestly mentality based on spiritual revenge and the most repressed hatred. Still valuation asserts no inherently worthwhile measure with which to judge man. The tumultuous nature of the rules of morality at this point allow the resurgence of new expressions of control. Foucault remarks that the rules of valuation to that point are "violent and unfinalized; they are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose."²⁵ The hope for any intrinsic value disappears, and valuation becomes a matter of resentment.

Nietzsche remarks that it was this repressed class:

who, with awe-inspiring consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value-equation and to hang on to this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying 'the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, ...and you, the powerful and noble are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity.'²⁶

Through this mission of the Jews, the best of those with the priestly mentality, valuation shifts from the spontaneous, active

²⁴Morgan, George. What Nietzsche Means. 147.

²⁵Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 86.

²⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 7.

noble mode to the hostile, reactive mode of resentment. Action becomes reaction, and virtue becomes suffering. The Jews essentially redirect "goodness" to their own perspective from that of the noble. This revaluation marks change, but has it engendered progress? Can their criteria boast any greater inherent worth than that of their oppressors?

Certainly this question of legitimate value troubles critics who doubt the sovereignty of any new set of values. Though their values may be as wanting of worth as those of the nobles, the values of oppressed Jews assume control because they are able, as Foucault says, "to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had originally imposed them."²⁷ In this sense they turn the rulers own rules against them. The slave revaluation marks the beginning, therefore, of what Nietzsche finds a most troubling turn in man's morality.

The revolt in morality that marks this mutation of moral values is important in its relation to both the noble and ascetic morality. Contrary to the affirmation that accompanies noble valuation, slave morality says "No to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself'; and this No is its creative deed."²⁸ This man of resentment only learns to deny, to say No, to hide from the world, to be self-deprecating. The valuation of slave morality cannot persist as a sufficient system of values, as

²⁷Foucault, Michel. 86.

²⁸Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 10.

it is merely faith in opposite values and a reaction to another more forceful morality. Nietzsche finds that slave morality represents a decline in man, an overcoming of the vigorous spirit of the master. Nietzsche characterizes the slave as a reprehensible part of man's moral history, representative of all that Nietzsche detests in the falsified system of contemporary moral value.

Morality of the herd represents a similar decadence or resentment in that it too is a symptom of degeneration; it too relies on antagonism. The slave revolt in morality that disposed of the master allows the herd to establish its own common morality. The herd mentality stems from the fear and weakness of common man and cannot tolerate that which is different or independent from itself. It is based, therefore, on self-protection, again on a mere resistance to what is outside of itself. The herd assigns value to what is non-threatening, to what is timid and obedient. Again, Nietzsche is appalled at the lack of moral substance and the absence of criteria for moral judgement. Nietzsche points to the hypocrisy of "the herd man in Europe today [who] gives himself the appearance of being the only permissible kind of man, and glorifies his attributes, which make him tame, easy to get along with, and useful to the herd, as if they were the truly human virtues."²⁹ The independence or strong drives of any member of the community threaten the herd and are, therefore, considered evil.

Value lies for the herd in what does not raise the brow, in

²⁹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s199.

that which does not hint of life, that which gives the community nothing to be afraid of. As he says, "Everything that elevates an individual above the herd and intimidates the neighbor is henceforth called evil; and the fair, modest, submissive, conforming mentality, the mediocrity of desires attains moral designations and honors."³⁰ The members of the herd, resentful of a weakness in themselves, come together to avoid the consequences of this weakness. Morgan remarks on the paradox of the herd as it attempts to preserve its integrity by maintaining equality within itself, persecuting even the natural leaders whom it needs so desperately to survive.³¹ The herd fosters that which is commonplace and dreary in man; it encourages the declining type of man. Through its emphasis on comfort, safety, and timidity, the herd stifles its own life's breath and exhibits a lack of worthy moral value.

Christianity, says Nietzsche, "indulged and flattered the most sublime herd-animal desires."³² Nietzsche feels that it engenders the same weakness and lack of value. Christianity, as the most profuse elaboration of morality that man faces, must be overcome. Surrounded and supported by their own type, Christians call themselves moral. Beneath its mask of virtue and piety, however, Christianity is the supreme cruelty. Nietzsche says that its "depressive and contagious instinct thwarts those instincts bent on

³⁰Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s201.

³¹Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. 154.

³²Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s202.

preserving and enhancing the value of life."³³ In order to maintain its innocuous and self-preserving nature, Christianity must rid man of that which distinguishes him from one another, that which gives him strength. Christianity therefore teaches the denial of the most primitive instincts. Therefore, man sacrifices his own nature to God and calls himself moral. In Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche suggests that "Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life's nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in 'another' or 'better' life."³⁴ Christianity represents to him a sacrifice of freedom and pride, a denial of spirit, a sort of enslavement of the self. Christian figures sublimate their instinct, that which is good and strong, in the name of piety; they deny life for a nebulous salvation. In an attempt to interpret everything under a Christian schema and to monopolize virtue, Christians have practiced extreme denial of the life-giving forces that disagree with their narrow faith. Nietzsche argues that the Christian concept of God, because it encourages weakness, brings about its own over-coming.

He does not try to dismantle Christianity by disputing proof of God's existence or calling the concept of Him meaningless. Rather, as Ricoeur says, he creates "a mode of critique in which cultural representations and creeds are considered as symptoms of

³³Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Anti-Christ. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 1990. 130.

³⁴Nietzsche, Friedrich. Birth of Tragedy. s5.

disguised wishes and fears."³⁵ Christianity relies on the prevalence of the ascetic ideal, that which attempts to justify the Christian submission to God. Nietzsche wonders how man claims to preserve himself by sacrificing to God that which makes him man. This practice of self-denial and self-cruelty runs counter to life, and yet it constitutes the moral value of Christianity. He treats Christianity, therefore, as "the most prodigal elaboration of the moral theme to which humanity has ever been subjected."³⁶

Asceticism, however, is a human phenomenon that reaches past Christianity and assumes a large role in Nietzsche's critique. In his Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche arrives at one of his most probing and extensive questions: "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?"³⁷ The comprehensive way in which he deals with this question suggests the breadth of the misunderstanding which surrounds morality. As a stage of morality through which mankind must pass, asceticism encompasses the most misunderstood and seemingly repulsive ideas of value. Weary of asceticism, Nietzsche warns:

It is on such soil, on swampy ground, that every weed, every poisonous plant grows, always so small, so hidden, so false, so saccharine. Here the worms of vengefulness and rancor swarm; here the air stinks of secrets and concealment; here the web of the most malicious of all conspiracies is being spun constantly - the conspiracy of the suffering against the well-constituted and victorious, here the

³⁵Ricoeur, Paul. Religion, Atheism, and Faith. 61.

³⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Attempt at Self-Criticism." Birth of Tragedy. s5.

³⁷Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 1.

aspect of the victorious is hated.³⁸

Asceticism preserves the declining man. While the noble mode of valuation needed nothing against which to direct its hatred, the ascetic suffers from the lack of a target. The very origin of the ascetic ideal indicates a void; Nietzsche asserts that man "did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he suffered from the problem of his meaning."³⁹ Created as a means to counteract this meaninglessness, to give man some control and understanding of his own existence, asceticism instills in man a hatred of what is human, a distaste for life, but still fails to cultivate any real idea of moral value.

Life for the ascetic, therefore, becomes self-contradictory. The ascetic ideal beneath which man justifies what Nietzsche calls the "horror of the senses,...this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself"⁴⁰ is essentially self-denial. Man, offended by his own instinct and livelihood, gains greatest pleasure by inflicting pain on himself, from exerting any kind of power over himself. The ascetic figure, therefore, assigns moral value to his behavior, when in fact, according to Nietzsche, it represents merely "deliberate exclusion, shutting of one's windows, an internal No to this or that thing, a refusal to let things

³⁸Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 14.

³⁹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 28.

⁴⁰Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 28.

approach...a satisfaction with the dark, with the limiting horizon."⁴¹ To the ascetic the absence of harmful behavior is synonymous with virtuous behavior. He maintains a sense of virtue by turning cruelty only against himself, against his own barbarian instincts. Nietzsche recognizes the absurdity of the ideal of "life against life" that the ascetic appears to represent.⁴²

THE ASCETIC PRIEST

Much of what is most misunderstood and masterful in Nietzsche lies in his consideration of the ascetic priest. The figure of the ascetic priest who occupies a major position in man's moral history and in Nietzsche's moral genealogy represents the shifts and disguises of Nietzsche's inquiry. The ascetic priest exemplifies the paradox that colors Nietzsche's work and the insight that distinguishes his work from desperate nihilism. While the ascetic priest organizes the instincts of weakness that encourage the herd mentality and Christianity, he represents the mastery and desire that Nietzsche praises in man.

Essentially, the ascetic priest is the shepherd of the sickly; he strives to give direction to their depression and suffering. He alone renders the sickly masses harmless by turning them against themselves. He faces dissatisfaction with life by prescribing petty pleasures of doing good. He encourages the masses to love their neighbors and to be kind and pious. He is, therefore, both

⁴¹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s230.

⁴²Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 13.

the advocate and the antithesis of the sick. The ascetic priest can only lead the masses by both sharing their ideal and being able to rise above it. Nietzsche suggests:

He must be sick himself, he must be profoundly related to the sick - how else would they understand each other? - but he must also be strong, master of himself even more than of others, with his will to power intact, so as to be both trusted and feared by the sick, so as to be their support, resistance, prop, compulsion, taskmaster, tyrant, god.⁴³

The ascetic priest commands Nietzsche's respect because he has an intense desire to be different; he is not numb to pain or passion. He represents a sense of what Nietzsche considers true moral worth - the expression of the will to power. Nietzsche remarks on the subtlety of distinction that separates the priest from his herd: "this apparent enemy of life, this denier - precisely he is among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life."⁴⁴ Through a system of morality which he prescribes, the priest implements his power. He offers man a way to feel that he is doing what is good. He represents, if not true distance from the corruption of man, the desire to be different, the desire to be respected by man, the desire to be superior. Conveying the spirit of creation and the will to power, the ascetic priest offers Nietzsche something onto which he can hold in constructing a moral type for the future.

Although critical of the ascetic priest for addressing the symptoms of man's sickness rather than the sickness itself,

⁴³Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 15.

⁴⁴Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 13.

Nietzsche praises the grand style with which the priest exists. He recognizes in the priest, despite his affiliation with the sickly, something worthy of life. With the same discriminating approach, Nietzsche discloses the ascetic ideal. He rejects what it has come to mean, but honors its possibility. He says:

The ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence...The case is therefore the opposite of what those who reverence this ideal believe: life wrestles in it and through it with death and against death; the ascetic ideal is an artifice for the preservation of life.⁴⁵

Nietzsche allows, even in his revaluation of morality, for the hope of reconstruction, for the possibility of climbing high on the debris of outdated moralities. He admits, therefore, that the Extra-moral period he proposes will destroy the supremacy of old values but will grow from this rubbish. He says it will "essay a synthesis of all the past which shall preserve what man has accomplished."⁴⁶ It will maintain a will beyond that of nihilism.

NIHILISM

We return to the great threat of a man unaware of his own potential, a man seemingly determined only to become more comfortable, mediocre, and prudent. Nietzsche points out that having assigned moral value to this dormant lifestyle, the insipid man can see no further. He can neither fear nor love another man;

⁴⁵Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 13.

⁴⁶Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. 167.

he cannot generate hope for mankind. Nietzsche claims, "The sight of man now makes us weary - what is nihilism today if it is not that? - We are weary of man."⁴⁷ Nihilism represents a coming to terms with the absence of true moral value, with the nothingness, that has misled man for so long. Man becomes nihilistic when he recognizes what Ricoeur calls "the nothingness inherent in the illusory origin of religious and ethical values."⁴⁸

The problem that man faces in nihilism reflects his struggle for meaning throughout his moral history. Through Christianity and asceticism man reveals his need for meaning in his life; through them he faces his own weakness and consoles himself with their empty ideals. These ideals attempt to fill the threatening void that men find in their lives. By interpreting suffering and frailty with moral criteria, man assumes meaning in his life. Nietzsche feels that it was critical that man could "will something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: the will itself was saved."⁴⁹ Though his will represents an aversion to life, man enables himself to hold on to something with all of his might; he gives his own life the meaning of nothingness. As Nietzsche points out, "Man would rather will nothingness than not will."⁵⁰ Man, in his most desperate state, therefore, maintains something that offers hope for the future.

⁴⁷Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 12.

⁴⁸Ricoeur, Paul. Religion, Atheism, and Faith. 63.

⁴⁹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 28.

⁵⁰Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 28.

The ascetic ideal saved man from this nihilism by giving him something that he could will. The will to power that announces itself here represents the most instinctual and, therefore, the most intrinsically valuable expression of man. This will maintains highest value because it represents the same creative force found in nature; it, as Nietzsche says, "'live[s] according to life.'"⁵¹ Although running from despair, man finds purpose in this will. Again, Nietzsche has found something worthwhile in even the most disheartening aspect of man; he has found a bit of hope even in what he finds repulsive; he has accepted a healthy fragment from a decadent whole.

THE SELF-OVERCOMING OF MORALITY

Nietzsche's moral philosophy continues to assert his belief that:

Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives.⁵²

His treatment of nihilism and of the ascetic ideal and the ascetic priest points to this phenomenon of his moral revaluation. For him to push aside the crumbling structure of contemporary morality seems to critics merely a destructive assertion of his own immorality, a blatant statement of his pessimism and hostility

⁵¹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s8.

⁵²Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s40.

toward man. That he faults every figure in man's moral history for the moral apathy that prevails in Europe seems to leave man with an even greater void - a lack of any valuable model for the future. Morgan suggests that if man's dependence on Christianity and the ascetic ideal gives him meaning, then the death of God and the failure of the ascetic ideal "means that the very heart has dropped out of existence."⁵³ Man no longer has a goal or a reason for existing; he no longer has a will. Man is struck again by the sense of nothingness or emptiness of nihilism and must seek a creative way beyond it. Nietzsche's genealogy, therefore, is a vehicle through his reader can recognize this possibility. With Christianity outdated and God dead, what does Nietzsche offer man? Where is man if he is without a goal, a spirit, or a hope?

Nietzsche is certainly struck by a similar sense of despair and disgust. His dissatisfaction, however, does not approach hopelessness. His claim that no morality that we have seen thus far can boast of any true value and that moral values are in fact misplaced fear and expressions of weakness does not suggest that immorality will reign. He holds firmly that "all great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming."⁵⁴ Morality will perish because it has no meaning. Man's attempt to give his life value and meaning by assigning his actions moral value proves to be in vain, because a structure that is hollow cannot stand.

⁵³Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. 52.

⁵⁴Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 27.

Each stage in our moral history, though it demonstrates change, fails to support any standard by which to determine value. Change is not necessarily progress, and one criterion is no more valuable than another simply because it is different. The figures Nietzsche presents, however, represent mere stages in man's moral history, stepping stones to an Extra-moral period. He is critical of them not because they are worthless, but because he would not have us settle. Walter Kaufmann says, "He wants us to climb higher - which, however, cannot be done without passing through these stages...Without ascetic ideals, without self-control, without cruel self-discipline, we cannot attain that self-mastery which Nietzsche ever praises and admires."⁵⁵ Nietzsche, therefore, wears a mask of despair to call attention to the tragedy facing man. By expounding violently on his disgust with the ill-constituted souls of mankind, Nietzsche alters our perspective on morality. He wakes us from a moral slumber and forces us to look discriminately at standards of value. Nietzsche asserts his belief that creation necessarily involves destruction. The notion of process and progress, therefore, becomes the hallmark of Nietzsche's moral philosophy.

Nietzsche wants to "teach man the future of man as his will."⁵⁶ The freedom of the will must be salvaged. Man must find a way to justify himself, to give meaning to his life, to say Yes

⁵⁵Kaufmann, Walter. "Introduction to Genealogy of Morals." Basic Writings of Nietzsche. s4.

⁵⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s203.

to life. Nietzsche anticipates man's recovery. He acknowledges man's tendency for despair, but offers hope. He says:

Man has often had enough;...but even this nausea, this weariness, this disgust with himself - all this bursts from him with such violence that it at once becomes a new fetter. The No he says to life brings to light, as if by magic, an abundance of tender Yeses; even when he wounds himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction - the very wound itself afterward compels him to live.⁵⁷

The most desperate valuation can therefore be the most powerful springboard into a more hopeful, creative, life-affirming existence. Nietzsche's own revaluation of morality faces such nihilistic despair and turns back toward life.

THE AESTHETIC IDEAL

Nietzsche seeks a higher morality, one which as Nimrod Aloni says, "affirms the principle element through which life grows in meaning and value."⁵⁸ Nietzsche is disheartened by the continual dearth of true moral value, by the illusion of ethics. A higher morality will sustain and enrich life; it will maximize human excellence and strength. Nietzsche says that this morality will provide "something for the sake of which one may still believe in man!"⁵⁹ Diverse virtues will compete with and enrich one another. Qualities essential to life will no longer be condemned; morality

⁵⁷Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. III 13.

⁵⁸Aloni, Nimrod. Beyond Nihilism. New York: University Press of America, 1991. 169.

⁵⁹Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. I 12.

will be in harmony with life.

Such change demands men who will lead and support the ascending type of man. This strong-willed free spirit will be proud of his own freedom and power. He will establish and enforce standards and ideals that are worthy of emulation. Nietzsche says that in the process of developing a higher morality, we "discover that the ripest fruit is the sovereign individual, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral," a man with a will.⁶⁰ This ascending type of man exists in sharp contrast to the declining type of man who scars man's moral history. The will to power that distinguishes the ascending type suggests a worthy standard of value. Aloni offers valuable insight into what Nietzsche considers necessary for this higher morality to flourish. He says, "Nietzsche thought that many and diverse types of worthy, noble, or heroic individuals are needed for the creation of a morally healthy culture."⁶¹ This individual, faithful to his own will to power and actively engaged in life, creates a standard of value. The hero who grasps this role fulfills himself and his own power at any expense and, thereby, furthers man as a whole. Nietzsche expresses fervent hope that this noblest individual will appear. He says:

This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and the great decision that liberates the

⁶⁰Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. II 1.

⁶¹Aloni, Nimrod. Beyond Nihilism. 169.

will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Anti-Christ and anti-nihilist; this victor over God and nothingness--he must come one day.⁶²

This individual will establish a valuation that is inherently meaningful because it is in accord with nature, with life. Nietzsche says that this man will assume the most respectable task; he will "conceptualize and arrange a vast realm of subtle feelings of values and differences of value which are alive, grow, beget, and perish...to prepare a typology of morals."⁶³ Nietzsche believes, therefore, that despite the disheartening lack of previous moral value, man will rebound into a higher morality with the instinct of growth and affirmation of the will to power.

The figure capable of fulfilling Nietzsche's hopes is the aesthetic figure, the artist. The artist commands Nietzsche's respect because he creates; his creativity is a measure of power. The artist enlarges his own feeling of power and liveliness and presents it to the world. He is in accordance with the world, as he exudes the same life-forces. He is, therefore, the antithesis of the ascetic man. Aloni suggests that the extraordinary qualities of the artist or creator resemble those of the Greeks who affirm the natural world and its qualities, as "the only world that is available for man: a life-world where the cultivation of one's natural powers and the displaying of human arete--whether in music, drama, speech, politics, or wisdom--has equally a moral, aesthetic,

⁶²Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morals. II 24.

⁶³Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s186.

and religious significance."⁶⁴ The energy inherent in expression and creation is a stimulant for life.

Nietzsche proposes, therefore, an aesthetic approach to morality that we might find value in what is free, spontaneous, creative, and life-affirming. Art alone offers and enhances this spirit. Again, Nietzsche applauds the Greek appreciation for art, because, as Aloni says, "It represents the human craving for moments of heightened and intensified life; for ecstatic experience in which one affirms the total character of life, including its ugly, painful, and horrible aspects."⁶⁵ Is this not the very character of Nietzsche's genealogy? His work embodies this Greek spirit of aestheticism. The aesthetic state promotes a world stripped of illusions; it allows the honesty of value that morality to this point lacks. If morality were to emulate the spirit of art and to maintain the same grace and precision, it could sustain itself. Appreciation of the aesthetic state, however, allows morality as a decaying facade to crumble and be rebuilt as a worthwhile valuation. Nietzsche expresses this believe in the same spirit he encourages, saying:

I could imagine a music whose rarest magic would consist in its no longer knowing anything of good and evil, only now and then some sailor nostalgia, some golden shadows and delicate weaknesses would pass over it-an art that from great distance would behold, fleeing toward it, the colors of a setting moral world that had almost become unintelligible.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Aloni, Nimrod. Beyond Nihilism. 117.

⁶⁵Aloni, Nimrod. Beyond Nihilism. 118.

⁶⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s255.

Art, therefore, embraces the same subtleties and nuances of expression that the ascending man desires. Foot proposes that "what we should do is simply to suggest a similarity between the way we attribute value (aesthetic value) to art objects and the value that Nietzsche attributes to a certain kind of man."⁶⁷ The aesthetic ideal inherent in art exhibits hope for both man and morality. Nietzsche can assign value to this ideal because it exists of and through the will to power, it is true to man's greatest instinct.

Nietzsche's own work manifests the aesthetic ideal. His life is of the same character as his thought. He, too, resists what is false and dying in life, and his own philosophy becomes an attempt to refute what does not resemble life. His genealogy, true to this spirit of creation, seeks to go beneath the illusory surface of morality and to portray a disheartening moral history. His philosophy cannot tolerate the illusions that suffocate value. As Morgan says, Nietzsche, therefore, "concentrates all his passionate energies to prevent this petering out of humanity, and, instead, to send it on, in an adventure of 'self-overcoming,' toward the realization of his highest potentialities."⁶⁸ He is the aesthetic, captivated with creation and destruction, fascinated with the shades and shadows of man's judgements. He is successful and valuable to man, considered in light of his own criteria, by virtue of his creativity, purpose, and unique perspective.

⁶⁷Foot, Philippa. Virtues and Vices. 89.

⁶⁸Morgan, George. What Nietzsche Means. 114.

NIETZSCHE'S FULFILLMENT OF THE AESTHETIC IDEAL

The problem remains. Having considered the remnants of morality that Nietzsche finds empty, we must question how he can justify dismantling them. Has he misunderstood his own project by attempting to replace one faulty foundation with another? For Nietzsche to assume a perspective whereby he can call into question and refute the values that dictate man's moral history raises the question of his own criteria for judging values. He is criticized for rejecting one standard and putting forth another, because any standard by which he can propose valuation is potentially as groundless as the one he replaces. We must question how he can evaluate any morality without the prejudice of his own moral values. He cannot measure the worth of one value without adopting the standard of another. Similarly, the reader cannot judge Nietzsche's endeavor with standards that he finds unavailing because that, too, presupposes the supremacy of yet another standard of valuation.

We must, therefore, be fervent in our attempt to honor his own spirit of creation and discretion. Morgan says, "Nietzsche judges a work of art in two ways. He estimates its success in carrying out its intention, and he evaluates the quality of life behind that intention."⁶⁹ I propose that we approach Nietzsche's art in a similar fashion. We cannot impose a form onto his work that does not belong. We cannot assume that he is prescribing for mankind an absolute valuation; nor must we assume that his valuation is

⁶⁹Morgan, George. What Nietzsche Means. 224.

efficacious in our lives. For, as Morgan says, "Values go as deep as life itself; they are perspectival, therefore many and changing; but valuing is an indestructible part of living."⁷⁰ As an expression of every individual's will to power, valuing must reflect the individual from whom it stems.

Nietzsche's task is, therefore, a perfect expression of this idea that values are created and are not simply inherently truthful. By illuminating the descent and imperfection of moral valuation, he necessarily encourages the reader to create and bear the burden of his own values, to express his will to power. As mentioned above, a healthy morality depends upon the conflict and flux of values. In this way, values are continually in contest. Valuation, therefore, is interpretation and cannot be the same from one individual to the next. Aloni states clearly that this is reflective of Nietzsche's supposition about a moral order. He says:

Nietzsche's basic assumption [is] that there exists neither a preordained moral world-order, nor one right way to live, nor moral phenomena that are independent of our moralistic interpretations of experience. The enhancement of life, he believed, to the heightening of man and culture, is determined solely by the continuous introduction of, and agonal interaction between perspectives, world-views, virtues, and ideals.⁷¹

For us to criticize Nietzsche for imposing his own misleading moral valuation upon us or to question his perspective is to

⁷⁰Morgan, George. What Nietzsche Means. 294.

⁷¹Aloni, Nimrod. Beyond Nihilism. 169.

misunderstand his project.

He should not need to defend the accuracy of his genealogy, nor the sovereignty of his values, for objectivity is not his claim. As John Heil suggests, Nietzsche approaches the problem of morality by constructing a map of confusing terrain- emphasizing and ignoring what he must to make it useful.⁷² Though we welcome the comfort of objectivity and reliability, this too removes from us the burden of being artists and creators. Nietzsche says:

The objective man is indeed a mirror: he is accustomed to submit before whatever wants to be known, without any other pleasure than that found in knowing and 'mirroring'; he waits until something comes, and then spreads himself out tenderly lest light footsteps and the quick spiritlike beings should be lost on his plane and skin.⁷³

We cannot claim, therefore, that Nietzsche wears a mask of objectivity in order to persuade us that our moral history is tainted and to have us adopt his revaluation. His account of man's moral history need not be documented as the absolute truth nor rejected as a fable. To approach him in that way is to set valuation apart from us and from him as something that stands alone on its own truth. Values, however, cannot be intelligibly maintained in this way; they are essentially human, essentially subjective.

We make Nietzsche's point for him if we reduce him to a level

⁷²Heil, John. The Philosopher as Physician of Culture: Nietzsche and 'The Problem of Morality'. Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1988. 6.

⁷³Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s207.

at which we are comfortable dealing with him. He goes beneath what is put forth to see the possibility of hidden motives and illusions that underlie morality, and, thereby, encourages the reader to do the same. In the poem that concludes Beyond Good and Evil, he says:

Restlessly happy and expectant, standing,
Looking all day and night, for friends I wait:
For new friends! Come! It's time! It's time!⁷⁴

He suggests that we, too, would benefit from this revaluation. He does not, however, want us to join him and adopt his way as our own. Rather, Nietzsche warns us to "put a halt to the exaggerated manner in which the 'unselfing' and depersonalizing of the spirit is being celebrated nowadays as if it were the goal itself and redemption and transfiguration."⁷⁵ We must create our own values with the most personal emphasis and intention. They are valuable insofar as they reflect every individual's own will to power. Nietzsche questions, "Why is it then that I have never yet encountered anybody, not even in books, who approached morality in this personal way and who knew morality as a problem, and this problem as his own personal distress?"⁷⁶ Morality is not a phenomena as much as our interpretation of a phenomena. There is, therefore, no prescription for curing moral decay, nor a convenient

⁷⁴Nietzsche, Friedrich. "From High Mountains: Aftersong." Beyond Good and Evil. 431.

⁷⁵Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil. s207.

⁷⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Gay Science. s345.

standard of values which will never fail. Any rules we impose upon morality are simply expressions of our own will to power. We must, therefore, only see morality as a problem worthy of our own consideration.

Nietzsche is successful if he re-directs our moral consciousness. To be successful rhetorically, he must not prove a parallel between what he extols and the "truth". His aesthetic approach to valuation presupposes creative possibility within morality itself, and he employs it to give us perspective on something from which we can only free ourselves. His genealogy, therefore, is valuable for its spirit of revaluation and change.

Works Cited

- Aloni, Nimrod. Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche's Healing and Edifying Philosophy. New York: University Press of America, 1991.
- Bergmann, Frithjof. "Nietzsche's Critique of Morality." Reading Nietzsche. Ed. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 29-46.
- Clark, Maudemarie. "Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality." Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality. Ed. Richard Schacht. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.
- Foot, Philippa. "Nietzsche's Immoralism." Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality. Ed. Richard Schacht. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.
- . "Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values." Virtues and Vices. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978.
- Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Heil, John. The Philosopher as Physician of Culture: Nietzsche and 'The Problem of Morality'. Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1988.
- Kaufmann, Walter. "Introduction to Genealogy of Morals." Basic Writings of Nietzsche. New York: The Modern Library, 1992. 439-448.
- Morgan, George A. What Nietzsche Means. New York: Harper and Row, 1941.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. Basic Writings of Nietzsche. Trans. and Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1992.

---. Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ. Trans. R.J.
Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Books, 1968.

Ricoeur, Paul. Religion, Atheism, and Faith. N.p: n.p., n.d. 59-
97.