



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

DEPARTMENT FOR
CONTINUING EDUCATION

Philosophy of History

Week 6: Nietzsche (II)

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On the Genealogy of Morality

- ‘So that morality itself were to blame if man, as species, never reached his *highest potential power and splendour*? So that morality itself was the danger of dangers? . . .’ (GM P§6)

three questions:

1. how is it that morality is detrimental to life?
2. given that it is detrimental to life, how did morality come about in the first place?
3. with what resources can morality be contested?

1. the pernicious effects of morality are demonstrated by describing the historical conditions in which it came about, in particular, the types of human being whose interests it was created to promote;
2. which then answers the question as to how morality originated;
3. historical investigation also reveals the latent presence of other, non-moral, forms of valuation, which can be revived in opposition to morality.

genealogy

- ‘a real *history of morality*’ (GM P§7)
- the ‘English’ genealogists (GM P§7)
- who wander off ‘*into the blue*’ (GM P§7)
- the ‘colour [which] is a hundred times more important for a genealogist than blue: namely grey’ (GM P§7)

First Essay – two evaluative schemas:

1. noble/warrior: good/bad; the positive comes first – self-assertion; doesn't require contrast with the other;
2. priestly: good/evil: the negative comes first – resentful condemnation of the other, and only thereby can any positive value be determined (“we're good because we're not like them”)

three points:

- the good/evil valuation is parasitic on the first; works by adopting and inverting the noble form of valuation
- the good/evil valuation is more thoughtful, clever
- morality starts with the good/evil valuation

Second Essay, §§12-13

- ‘How have the moral genealogists reacted so far in this matter? Naively, as is their wont –: they highlight some “purpose [*Zweck*]” in punishment, for example, revenge or deterrence, then innocently place the purpose at the start, as *causa fiendi* [cause of the coming into being] of punishment, and – have finished.’ (II§12)

- ‘important proposition for every sort of history [is] that the origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are [everywhere] separate; that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering*, *dominating*, and in their turn, [these] [*cont’d*]

- [...] consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former “meaning” and “purpose” must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.’ (II§12)
- ‘the whole history of a “thing”, an organ, a tradition can to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations, the causes of which need not be connected even amongst themselves, but rather sometimes just follow and replace one another at random.’ (II§12)

- ‘the concept “punishment” presents, at a very late stage of culture [...], not just one meaning but a whole synthesis of “meanings”: the history of punishment [...] finally crystallizes in a kind of unity which is difficult to dissolve back into its elements, difficult to analyse and, this has to be stressed, is absolutely *undefinable*.’ (II§13)
- ‘only that which has no history is definable’ (II§13)

historicism

- ‘We can come, and can only come, to a proper knowledge or comprehension of our *own* thought by becoming conscious of the historical development in thought which preceded and produced our own thought’ (Michael Forster, *Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 430).

critique of historical progress

- progress is either a matter of unintended, aimless movement;
- or where goals are recognized, these are worthless, demeaning, destructive;
- in any case whatever the goal, as a historical goal it requires abdication of the will:

critique of historical progress

- ‘one still follows the old habit and seeks *another* authority that can speak unconditionally and command goals and tasks [..., e.g.] *history* with an immanent spirit and a goal within, so one can entrust oneself to it. One wants to get around the will, the willing of a goal, the risk of positing a goal for oneself; one wants to rid oneself of responsibility’ (WP §20)

critique of historical progress

- thus progress as in fact *regression*:
- ‘The European of today is vastly inferior in value to the European of the Renaissance: further development is altogether not according to any necessity in the direction of elevation, enhancement, or strength’ (A§4)

critique of historical progress

- denial that humanity or the species function as an historical subject: ““Mankind” does not advance – it doesn’t even exist’ (WP §90);
- denial that humanity even really is a species;
- diagnoses: secularized religion, etc.

- ‘*Whispered to the conservatives.* What was not known formerly, what is known, or might be known, today: a reversion, a return in any sense or degree is simply not possible [...] Yet all priests and moralists have believed the opposite - they wanted to take mankind back, to screw it back, to a former measure of virtue [...] Even the politicians have aped the preachers of virtue at this point: today too there are still parties whose dream it is that all things might walk backwards like crabs. But no one is free to be a crab. Nothing avails: one must go forward [...]’ (*The Twilight of the Idols*, IX§43)

- ‘Just as in the celestial realm, the track of one planet will sometimes be determined by two suns; just as, in certain cases, suns of different colours will shine on a single planet with red light one moment and green light the next, and then strike it again, inundating it with many colours all at once: in the same way, thanks to the complex mechanics of *our* “starry skies”, we modern men are determined by a *diversity* of morals; our actions shine with different colours in turn, they are rarely unambiguous, – and it happens often enough that we perform *multi-coloured* actions.’
(*Beyond Good and Evil*, §215)

‘In an age of disintegration [...] a person will have the legacy of multiple lineages in his body, which means conflicting [...] drives and value standards [...]. A man like this, of late cultures and refracted lights, will typically be a weaker person: his most basic desire is for an end to the war that he is. [...] – But if conflict and war affect such a nature as one more stimulus and goad to life –, and if [...] the ability to control and outwit himself [is also] inherited and cultivated [...], then what emerge are those amazing, incomprehensible, and unthinkable ones, those human riddles destined for victory and for seduction [...]. They appear in exactly those ages when that weaker type, with his longing for peace, comes to the fore. These types belong together and derive from the same set of causes.’ (BGE, §200)

- ‘In another sense, success in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a *higher type*, which is, in relation to mankind as a whole, a kind of overman. Such fortunate accidents of great success have always been possible and *will* perhaps always be possible. And even whole families, tribes, or peoples may occasionally represent such a *bull’s-eye*.’ (*The Antichrist*, §4)

- ‘Higher types are indeed attained, but they do not last [...] the “higher type” represents an incomparably greater complexity - a greater sum of co-ordinated elements: so its disintegration is also incomparably more likely.’ (*The Will to Power*, §684)

- ‘[...] one must go forward - step by step further into decadence (that is my definition of modern ‘progress’). One can check this development and thus dam up degeneration, gather it and make it more vehement and sudden: one can do no more.’ (*The Twilight of the Idols*, IX§43)

- ‘The amount of “progress” can actually be *measured* according to how much has had to be sacrificed to it; man’s sacrifice *en bloc* to the prosperity of one single stronger species of man – that *would be* progress . . .’ (GM II§12)

'Going on ahead [Vorschrift]. - When one lauds progress [Fortschritt], one is lauding only the movement and those who refused to let us stand still – and in certain circumstances much is thereby achieved, especially if one is living among Egyptians. In volatile Europe, however, where movement “goes without saying” as they say – ah, if only we knew what to say about it! – I prefer going on ahead [Vorschrift] and those who do so [Vorschreitenden]: those, that is to say, who again and again leave themselves behind and give no thought to whether anyone else is following behind them. “Wherever I stop I find myself alone: so why should I stop! The desert still stretches away!” - that is the feeling of one who in this way goes on ahead [Vorschreitender].’ (Daybreak, §544)