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PH 327

Morality as a Problem

INTRODUCTION

Morality is a theme that reappears quite often in the work of German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. This is the case because a number of the topics he discusses such as religion, politics, revenge, justice, and virtue, have some relationship with morality. His writings on morality claim that what is moral is not a constant between cultures or even natural. In fact, in his works, he has gone as far as to call himself an immoralist due to the number of fundamental premises associated with the topic he disagrees with and disproves.

In this paper, I will explore why in Section 345 of “The Gay Science Book 5” Nietzsche claims we should view “Morality as a Problem”. To do this I will first reconstruct the claims made by Nietzsche in section 345 because this section outlines why he had been dissatisfied with the current discourse surrounding morality. Afterward, informed by articles written about Nietzsche's views on morality, I will present an analysis of his critique of the topic. This section will primarily focus on examining his writings that relate to the genealogy of morals and religion's role in the destruction of morality. Subsequently, I will briefly detail why his solution to the problem is a reevaluation of values and what this means. Ultimately Through an analysis of the different approaches to critiquing Morality and deconstructing Nietzsche's writings on the topic, I will be able to examine why he believes that those who critique Morality must see “Morality as A Problem” first to find an effective solution to it.

Reconstruction

Section 345 of Nietzsche's 1887 work "The Gay Science Book 5" serves as a condemnation of the effects morality has had on society and how the topic has been studied in the past. Nietzsche's main claims in the section are that the notions we believe are moral are not life-affirming and in fact, prevent people from conducting genuine critiques of moral valuations.

Nietzsche begins section 345 by attacking something that many believe is a core principle of morality: Selflessness. He writes "The lack of personality always takes its revenge. A weakened thin, extinguished personality that denies itself is no longer fit for anything good – least of all for philosophy. "Selflessness" has no value either in heaven or on earth" (Nietzsche 364). To Nietzsche, the valorization of selflessness in the discourse surrounding morality has led to and leads to impersonal endeavors that don't yield as substantive results as they should. Nietzsche then goes on to state that from what he has experienced and knows, those who take problems personally are the ones best equipped to truly solve them. For this reason, he questions why no one has approached morality as a problem. He asks the rhetorical question "How is it that I have not yet met with anyone, not even in books, who seems to have stood to morality in this position, as one who knew morality as a problem, and this problem as his own personal need, affliction, pleasure, and passion?" And his response to this question is simply "It is evident that up to now morality was no problem at all" Nietzsche 364).

Later, Nietzsche claims that no one has approached the topic of morality with the same vigor that is used to approach a problem in other fields and he views this as a problem of great importance. "I see no one who has ventured to criticize the estimates of moral worth. I miss in this connection even the attempts of scientific curiosity, and the fastidious, groping imagination of psychologists and historians, which easily anticipates a problem and catches it on the wing,

without rightly knowing what it catches.” He then explains that he suspects the reason he is finding it difficult to find a thorough critique of moral valuations is that much of our understanding is built upon preexisting moral judgments and historians unknowingly exacerbate this issue. Nietzsche writes “These historians of morality (mostly Englishmen) do not amount to much. Usually, they themselves are still quite unsuspectingly obedient to one particular morality and, without knowing serve that as shieldbearers and followers” Nietzsche 365). Following this, he writes that specifically, Christian Europe operates under the assumption that people who reside in “tame nations” subscribe to the same moral code as they do; A moral code Nietzsche will go on to decry for the emphasis it places on non-life affirming traits like “selflessness, self-sacrifice or sympathy and pity” Nietzsche 365). He ultimately claims that even if a historian does not approach morality from a cultural relativist standpoint they do not genuinely look into the value of morality critically and approach it as a problem. Therefore understanding morality as a whole is now his challenge.

The Difference Between Critiquing Moral Theory and Critiquing Morality

Before I analyze the results of Nietzsche's critique of morality, I will discuss what scholar Brian Leiter believes to be two different approaches to evaluating the topic. Leiter claims in his paper “Nietzsche and the Morality Critics”, that there are those who critique moral theory and those that critique morality as a cultural phenomenon. Understanding the difference between the two approaches to critiquing morality and identifying the one Nietzsche champions and engages in is important because it helps establish how Nietzsche's critique of morality fits within the landscape of the discourse surrounding the topic. Furthermore, it will allow us to determine the value his chosen approach has compared to the other.

Leiter claims that those who critique Moral theory are simply concerned with dissecting what is considered moral in theory rather than trying to understand what morality essentially is and how morality manifests and affects cultures in general. To Leiter morality theory, critics often fail to see that what they are really critical of isn't morality as practiced and understood by ordinary people and even themselves, but instead what they're attacking is " "Morality" as conceived, systemized, and refined by philosophers." Leiter (257). When Nietzsche discusses the way historians from Europe approached understanding morality In Section 345 of "The Gay Science Book V" he also in different words establishes that he has an issue with moral theory critics. On page 365 of "The Nietzsche Reader" Nietzsche writes, "The mistake made by the more refined among them (European historians) is that they uncover and criticize the perhaps foolish opinions of a people about their morality, or of humanity about all human morality- opinions about its origin, religious sanction, the superstition of free will, and things of that sort - and then suppose that they have criticized morality itself" (Nietzsche 365). For Nietzsche, those who critique moral theories can not truly cure the problems with morality because they do not see that the problem with moral theories is inherently morality itself. It is because Nietzsche can identify the difference between critiquing a theory and critiquing morality itself Leiter claims Nietzsche unlike many other philosophers who discuss morality Nietzsche is a true Morality critic.

There are clear distinctions between moral theory critics and morality critics and that's why scholars need to understand which type of critique they are engaging in. In Leiter's paper, he explains that many thinkers attempt to align themselves with Nietzsche and claim that they have critiqued Morality itself however, he writes "For what distinguishes Nietzsche, I will argue is that he is a genuine critic of morality as a real cultural phenomenon . . . Nietzsche, unlike these

writers, situates his critique of morality within a broader "cultural critique," in which morality is attacked as only the most important of a variety of social and cultural forces posing obstacles to human flourishing.” (Leiter 252). Leiter identifies that a major feature present in the works of Nietzsche and other Morality critics is “ that they criticize morality extra-morally, from the standpoint of nonmoral goods and consideration.” (Leiter 258). In essence, Nietzsche and Morality critics claim if one were to be completely moral they would be unable to achieve a good life. This axiom is one that anyone who claims to be a moral theorist would find difficult to disagree with. In fact, much of Nietzsches critique of morality involves him dispelling the belief that morality as culturally conceived and practiced is in congruence with living a good life.

Analyzing Nietzsche's Critique of Morality

Now that we have established that Nietzsche is a morality critic and identified what his goals and reasoning are, I will move on to an analysis of his critique of Morality. To prove his claims, Nietzsche approaches critiquing morality in three separate ways. In his works, he discusses the historical background of morality, and its relationship to religion (primarily Christianity), and then highlights specific aspects of contemporary morality that have led him to reject morality and its presuppositions. To give a comprehensive but brief overview and analysis of Nietzsches critique of morality I will begin by outlining his critique of the genealogy of morals and detailing his condemnation of religion's impact on morality, afterward, I will identify the other specific elements of morality Nietzsche is critical of that were not mentioned earlier in the paper.

An important aspect of Nietzsche's critique of morality is his examination of the history of morals from two perspectives. To support his claim that morality often comes from immoral

thought, Nietzsche dissects both the literal history of morality and the background forces that encourage people to be moral. Nietzsche argues that as long as the history of morality goes unquestioned so will the value of it. Regarding this, in his book “The Will to Nothingness” Bernard Reginster writes “Nietzsche suggests that the genealogy is designed to address one particular worry: “One has taken the *value* of these ‘values as given, as factual, as beyond all question” (GM *preface section 6*). To problematize moral values thus consists in uncovering in their history grounds for challenging the self-evidence that has become associated with them” (Reginster 12).

To craft a more cohesive point about morality, Nietzsche mixes speculation with fact when talking about its history. This is the case because it is impossible to state when we began to be guided by moral judgments. Relating to this point, Leiter writes “The practice of morality derives its functional usefulness from the fact that agents are motivated directly by their moral beliefs, and not by the usefulness of having them. As a consequence it might be difficult to locate a point in history where human beings motivated by certain needs contrived or adopted moral beliefs because of their functional usefulness in fulfilling those needs” (Leiter 35). However, in his writings, Nietzsche eventually identifies that *ressentiment* played a large role in the conception of morality. In short, resentment relates to how a weaker power, in place of the strength to overcome their situation, will call for a revaluation of their opponent's values. Nietzsche considers resentment a natural albeit not life-affirming or strong response to suffering. However as Tom Stern writes in his paper “History, Nature and the “Genetic Fallacy” in The Antichrist’s Revaluation of Values” once Nietzsche has reasoned what the feeling of resentment is and its role in history he is able to identify when and why a shift in moral values had occurred in the past. Stern states that Nietzsche’s goal is to “depict a historical shift in our

moral value system - a revaluation or more loosely but naturally translated, a “turnaround” in our value systems” (Stern 2). To Nietzsche, This turnaround in our values is deeply related to the rise of the Christian religion and its moral code.

In his works, Nietzches critique of religion and specifically Christianity is thorough and within it, he doesn't miss the opportunity to discuss the corrosive effect it had on morality and the will to power. Nietzsche suggests that the goal of Christian morality was to alleviate impotence and provide power to the oppressed. In fact, Nietzsche calls Christian morality “slave morality” because it stands in contrast to the prior prevailing moral outlook which was titled master morality. However, he claims that the adoption of Christian morality was built upon immoral values like vengeance and resentment and that one could not simultaneously live a moral life and a good life. Nietzsche believed this was the case for multiple reasons and of them was the emphasis it placed on selflessness and pity.

In Nietzsche's works, his condemnation of the value Christianity placed upon pity cannot be overstated. David E Cartwright's paper “Kant Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on the Morality of Pity” features a quote from one of Nietzsche’s works that succinctly summarizes his opinions on pity. “Pity is a squandering feeling, a parasite harmful to moral health “It cannot possibly be our duty to increase the suffering in the world.” If one does well merely out of pity, it is really oneself one really does good too, and not the other” (Cartwright 84). For Nietzsche pity is immoral because it imposes a power dynamic between the giver of pity and the pity recipient that leads to a loss of autonomy and power for the recipient. However, Nietzsche also explains that the pitied is not moral in the dynamic either and may ultimately take advantage of the pitier. “There is danger for the pitier, Nietzsche claim, not simply because of the suffering involved in this

emotion, but also because of the susceptibility of the pitier to the manipulation and control by those pitied” (Cartwright 86).

Apart from being critical of the history of morality and its relationship to religion he also interrogates and disagrees with fundamental premises associated with morality. For example, Nietzsche disagrees with the idea that there are good and bad things. In the article, “Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality: An Ethics of Virtue” Thomas H Brobjer writes “Nietzsche, however, rejects the belief in moral opposites. "Between good and evil actions there is no difference in kind, but at the most one of degree. Good actions are sublimated evil ones; evil actions are coarsened, brutalized good ones" (Brobjer 65). In Addition to this because Nietzsche believes humans do not have free will and therefore, we like all animals should not have any moral responsibilities or obligations.

Ultimately Nietzsche's critique of morality leads to him imploring us to consider a revaluation of our values to determine whether they are truly life-affirming and “good”. Nietzsche's Revaluation of his values lead to what is called “affirmative ethics”. With Affirmative ethics served as his response to the compromised and fatally flawed mortality. To Brobjer, Nietzsche's affirmative ethics “Emphasized that ethics is related to the sort of character, the sort of person one is... it is not ideas and principles that justify our existence and improve it and us, but human beings, the best human beings, who by their mere existence both justify and improve man because they are examples of what man can be” (Brobjer 75). In essence, Nietzsche's critique of morality does not lead him to nihilism and supporting a valueless world, in fact, it leads him to encourage people to take back their agency and be the strongest person they can be without worrying about baseless moral valuations.

Conclusion

Ultimately with this paper I hope I have made it clear that it is important to understand how to truly critique a subject, especially something as complex as morality. I say this because Nietzsche realizing that no one had genuinely discussed why we value morality has led to very important discourse and a long overdue reckoning of moral valuations. In addition to this, I hope the reader now understands why in Section 345 of “The Gay Science Book V” Nietzsche implores us to view “Morality as a problem”

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