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## Nietzsche and equality

‘During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.’ Nelson Mandela<sup>1</sup>

‘[...] what they sing – ‘equal rights’, ‘free society’, ‘no more masters and no more servants’ – has no allure for us. We hold it absolutely undesirable that a realm of justice and concord should be established on earth (because it would certainly be the realm of the most profound levelling down to mediocrity and *chinoiserie*); we are delighted by all who love, as we do, danger, war, and adventure; who refuse to compromise, to be captured, to reconcile, to be castrated; we consider ourselves conquerors [...]’ Nietzsche, *Gay Science* 377

The idea that there is something ethically corrupt or ethically corrupting about Nietzsche’s work is an anathema to Nietzsche scholars today. Although there are some serious moral philosophers, such as Philippa Foot, Jonathan Glover and Martha Nussbaum<sup>2</sup> who write about Nietzsche whilst finding his position ethically deplorable, most Nietzsche scholars tend to focus rather more heavily on his positive aspects. This means that negative ethical assessments of Nietzsche now tend to be relatively few and far between, and given that they tend to be composed by people who know the texts less well than the dedicated Nietzsche scholars, these criticisms can usually be swatted away quite easily.<sup>3</sup>

So is there still anything ethically problematic about Nietzsche’s work that we must face up to and disown? The assumption in play amongst Nietzsche scholars seems to be that there is not. I think we can detect three broad camps:

Camp A: there is nothing revealed in a sensitive interpretation of Nietzsche's views that need count as ethically problematic.

Camp B: the ethical views of Nietzsche that are ethically problematic are of only minor concern (akin, for example to Aristotle's defence of slavery), so that the interpretation of his ethical contribution can sideline them.

Camp C: one need not take an ethical stance on the rightness or wrongness of Nietzsche's ethical views: it is enough to study them, and to find them challenging and interesting.

My interest is, if you like, in forming a Camp D: composed of anyone who thinks that, despite Nietzsche's undoubted interest and brilliance as an ethical thinker, at the deepest level we must think of him as an *opponent*. For what he is trying to achieve is to dislodge the idea of the equality of all human beings from its central place in our ethical thinking; but to allow this to happen would be a deep mistake.

There are two halves to this paper. The first half sets up the problem for the Nietzsche interpreter: the moral equality of human beings is the basic idea through which we (now) think about morality; and Nietzsche's views on the nature of human ethical life commit him to opposing the moral equality of human beings. Given that Nietzsche's views bring him into direct conflict with the most basic principle of morality that we have, it is implausible to hold to a Camp B or a Camp C interpretation. The Camp B interpretation must wildly underestimate either the centrality of the idea of the moral equality of human beings to our interpretation of morality or the extent to which Nietzsche opposes this ideal. The Camp C interpretation imports a failure of moral nerve; a failure to condemn what ought to be condemned. So we face a straight choice between Camp D and Camp A: between supporting the moral equality of human beings against Nietzsche's attack on it, or supporting Nietzsche against the moral equality of human beings. You cannot serve two masters: you must choose between Nietzsche and the idea of the moral equality of human beings.

The second half of the paper examines Nietzsche's critique of moral egalitarianism in more detail. Nietzsche's critique, I suggest, is composed of two parts: a negative and a positive. The negative part

(the *slave morality thesis*) argues that (a) we should make a distinction between *moralities of affirmation* and *moralities of denial*;<sup>4</sup> and (b) all moralities which have the equality of human beings as their fundamental value are moralities of denial. The positive part, which, following Nietzsche, I shall call the *pathos of distance thesis* claims that human greatness requires a feeling of great height from which the great person looks down in lofty contempt on others.

I shall argue that it is false to claim that *all* moralities which have the equality of human beings as their fundamental value are moralities of denial, and that the pathos of distance thesis is either false or question begging or both. Hence there is no reason, even being as generous to Nietzsche as we can be, to think his critique should force us to give up moral egalitarianism. However, even if not *all* egalitarian moralities are moralities of denial, it is certainly true that some are, which leaves us with a very difficult question: how do we ensure that *our* belief in the moral equality of human beings forms part of a morality of affirmation rather than one of denial?

## The conflict between Nietzsche and Egalitarianism

### The ubiquity of egalitarianism

The concept of moral equality – the idea that every human being has a right to be treated *as an equal* to all other human beings and has a corresponding duty to treat others as equals – forms the horizon within which we debate about what is morally right and what is just.<sup>5</sup> Debate, both within philosophy and outside, focuses on what the best *conception* of moral equality is: what does it mean to really treat one another as equals, rather than whether it is in fact a good thing for the concept of equality to play such a central role in our moral and political thinking.<sup>6</sup>

This has by no means always been the case; but the depth and pervasiveness of our commitment to it can be seen by the fact that when moral equality *is* challenged we find it difficult to take the

challenger's argument seriously. (We simply do not take seriously any arguments that would defend slavery, or show that it is better that certain groups of people's interests (Blacks, Jews) *not* be taken into account when deciding what to do.)

One reason for this may be the ubiquity (at least within moral and political philosophy) of reflective equilibrium as a model of ethical thinking. The model of reflective equilibrium requires that we test our moral theories against our considered judgements – that is, judgements about which we are most confident that we are not judging wrongly.<sup>7</sup> The judgement that we ought, in some sense, to treat one another as equals, is now our most fundamental considered moral judgement. Any theory of right and wrong which is in disagreement with such a deep and fundamental part of our intuitive moral framework will tend, if we apply the standard of reflective equilibrium, to discredit itself through this very fact.

Thus, if we stick to the model of reflective equilibrium, it is rather difficult to set up a useful confrontation between Nietzsche and the views of someone who takes for granted the moral equality of human beings (someone who in Kymlicka's words stands on the 'egalitarian plateau.'<sup>8</sup>) For his part, Nietzsche is simply not bothered with debates which seem important to anyone who believes that the concept of equality should play a central role – such as whether a utilitarian or a Rawlsian society better fulfils the promise of treating human beings as equals. Conversely, for the moral egalitarian, Nietzsche, by the very fact of not adhering to the principle of moral equality, puts himself beyond the pale.

In this paper I do not appeal to our moral intuitions or our considered moral judgements in an attempt to refute Nietzsche. Instead I look at Nietzsche's arguments against egalitarianism from a perspective that is friendly to Nietzsche's: one which allows that a scepticism about the value of our values is necessary; but which argues that *pace* Nietzsche, moral egalitarianism survives such a searching examination.

## Nietzsche's Objections to Egalitarianism

Nietzsche puts forward his objections to egalitarianism most clearly in the chapter 'What is Noble' of *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>9</sup> His basic objection requires us to compare two different types of society: societies where aristocratic values predominate, and societies where non-aristocratic values predominate. A system of values is aristocratic if it maintains *orders of rank*: that is, if it maintains that there is a natural pecking order of human beings, and that those at the top of the pecking order are superior *as human beings* to those at the bottom of the pecking order. Non-aristocratic value systems are egalitarian value systems: they believe that there is no *order of rank*: all human beings are equal *as human beings*.<sup>10</sup>

We are so steeped in non-aristocratic values that it is easy for us to miss what Nietzsche has in mind. In Nietzsche's conception of an aristocratic society, those lower on the order of rank are not deemed important for their own sake. They are entirely expendable: creation of beings of the highest rank enjoys a lexical priority over the comfort or flourishing of those of lower rank.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche's argument aims to persuade us that societies in which aristocratic value systems hold sway are necessary for the flourishing of the kind of people he is interested in (those of higher rank):

Every elevation of the type 'man' has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society – and so it will always be: a society which believes in a long scale of orders of rank and differences of worth between man and man and needs slavery in some sense or other. Without the *pathos of distance* such as develops from the incarnate differences of classes, from the ruling caste's constant looking out and looking down on subjects and instruments and from its equally constant exercise of obedience and command, its holding down and holding at a distance, that other, more mysterious pathos could not have developed either, that longing for an ever-increasing widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of every higher, rarer, more remote, tenser, more comprehensive states, in short precisely the elevation of the type 'man', the continual self-overcoming of man. (BGE 257)

Conversely, societies in which egalitarian value systems predominate thwart the creation of the kind of people Nietzsche is interested in:

To refrain from mutual injury, mutual violence, mutual exploitation, to equate one's own will with that of another: this may in a certain rough sense become good manners between individuals if the conditions for it are present (namely if their strength and value standards are in fact similar and they both belong to *one* body). As soon as there is a desire to take this principle further, however, and if possible even as the *fundamental principle of society*, it at once reveals itself for what it is: as the will to the *denial* of life, as the principle of dissolution and decay. (BGE 259)

Nietzsche, then, is attempting to establish a two-way link between the prevalence of norms of moral equality and human flourishing: on the one hand, human beings can only reach their highest potential in highly stratified societies which bow before order of rank; and on the other egalitarian values have a deadening effect on life when they come to have precedence.

There is a long running dispute about what Nietzsche intends the metaphysical status of these claims to be: does he think that those he denominates as 'higher' really are better in some objective sense than those he denominates as 'lower', or does he merely think of himself as expressing his own perspective – one which others (particularly those whom he has denominates as 'lower') may disagree with if they wish? But this dispute is not to the point here. What is important for our purposes is how *we* interpret our values, not how Nietzsche thinks about his values: *we* take the belief in the moral equality of human beings to be something that *everyone* should acknowledge.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche's stance is incompatible with the principle of moral equality regardless of whether we take his claims about the badness of egalitarian value systems to be put forward as objectively true, or as only perspectivally so.<sup>13</sup>

## Four approaches to Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism

What attitude should we take to Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism? I think, as I laid out earlier, we have four options. We can either (a) approve; (b) attempt to downplay the importance of it, but potentially disapprove of it; (c) not pass ethical judgement; or (d) disapprove. Any reasons to approve of Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism would have to be parasitic on the soundness of Nietzsche's views. These we shall examine in part two. The rest of this section aims to show that positions (b) and (c) are untenable.

I shall begin with the claim that we can safely downplay the importance of Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism. Someone who wants to hold this view might object as follows:

(1) Nietzsche is not opposed to equality per se: he is willing to admit that equality can sometimes be a useful value.<sup>14</sup> He is opposed to equality only when it is put forward as the fundamental value.

(2) Nietzsche is an esoteric moralist: he is not demanding (or even suggesting) that *everyone* should read his writings. He wants to be read (and to have an effect on) only by a few – the nascent higher types.<sup>15</sup> As for those who are not 'higher types', he is willing to allow their ideas about morality to carry on undisturbed.<sup>16</sup>

(3) Where Nietzsche is opposed to equality, this is not because he thinks that there is too much respect and consideration in the world, and not enough domination and humiliation; but because the prevalence of egalitarian *values* will tend to thwart the flourishing of higher men.<sup>17</sup>

(4) Given the central place of (a) freedom from resentment, and (b) acceptance of one's fate in Nietzsche's ethical system it seems plausible to suggest that a flourishing life of a higher type is likely to be self-contained and will not in fact lead to very much treating others as less than equal.

(1) and (2) do not succeed in lessening the impact of the disagreement with Nietzsche. This is because of the nature of the

value that *we* place on equality. (1) Equality for us is the centre of morality and so if one's belief is only that equality can be valuable in *some* contexts then you are still in fundamental disagreement with the principle of moral equality; and you are still putting yourself beyond the pale. (2) The claim that the moral equality of human beings is a useful idea only for the weak, whilst the strong should adopt a different approach to thinking about values, also puts you beyond the pale: the moral equality of human beings purports to be a universal value. So neither suggestion reduces the gulf between Nietzsche and what we take to be morally decent. (3) Is based on a somewhat contentious reading of Nietzsche. Even if we accept this reading, I don't see that it does much to reduce the conflict between Nietzsche and moral egalitarianism: even if Nietzsche objects only to the *effects* of egalitarian values on higher types and not to the effects that egalitarian values have on those who benefit from them, then his so objecting would still put him beyond the pale. (4) There are two problems with the claim that living the life of a Nietzsche 'higher type' will not conflict living the life of a moral egalitarian: one empirical, the other conceptual. First, given the way in which Nietzsche insists on the *differences* between people, it seems highly implausible to argue that every higher type is going to find his or her personal maximum in a peaceful and self-contained manner. Some people (Cesare Borgia or Napoleon, say) may just be built for dominating others rather than sublimating this drive into a shaping of the self. (And, of course it doesn't take very many tyrants to make the world a much worse place). Second, even in the limiting case where pursuit of the individual's flourishing *never* interfered with equal relations with their fellow human beings, this would still be a *contingent* fact. And from the perspective of moral egalitarianism it is wrong to hold principles which do not count others as equals even if in ordinary circumstances these principles do not lead to different actions from genuinely egalitarian principles.

So I take it that it is untenable to claim that Nietzsche is not in direct contradiction to our main moral value.



### Avoiding taking a moral stance on Nietzsche's work

This leaves the possibility that, despite the fact that *Nietzsche* is clearly opposed to the idea of moral equality, and the fact that *we* are firmly committed to it, we, as scholars and as Nietzsche interpreters do not need to take a moral stance on Nietzsche's views.

The first thing that we should note is how far this position is from Nietzsche's view of philosophy. For Nietzsche, real philosophy is about the creation of value systems: the philosopher proper is a commander and a law giver, who seeks to determine where mankind should be going. So if we were to approach Nietzsche's work in a way that *he* would regard as genuinely philosophical, then we would treat his work as merely a 'means, an instrument, a hammer' [BGE 211] as we reached for the future and created new values. So avoiding taking a moral stance can at best be true to the letter, but not the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy.

Second, treating the interpretation of Nietzsche's texts as a purely scholarly endeavour without any implications for what we *ought* to think about morality diminishes both Nietzsche and ourselves. It diminishes Nietzsche, because it treats him merely as a figure in the history of ideas, rather than as someone who is making serious claims about how we should live, claims which contradict and seek to undermine what we believe in the rest of our lives, and who therefore sets us the task of determining whether what he says is *true*. It diminishes us if we are unwilling to challenge views we take to be wrong.

So much for the attempt to avoid taking a moral stance on Nietzsche's work. This leaves us with a straight fight between Camp A and Camp D: we can either approve or disapprove of Nietzsche's anti-egalitarianism. We cannot simply ignore it.

### Why Nietzsche's Anti-Egalitarianism is unconvincing

Nietzsche's views on morality, whether we interpret them in an objectivist or a subjectivist way, presuppose that it is only the flourishing of 'higher types' which matters. This of course is a claim that the egalitarian denies. But even if we grant Nietzsche's claim for the sake of argument, it does not follow that the right kind of system of values and the right kind of society to have is one which systematically disregards the claims of 'lower' types. For it might be the case that higher types require an *egalitarian* society to flourish; that it is aristocratic (inegalitarian) societies which stifle the flourishing of nascent higher types.

Nietzsche, of course denies this. There are two factors driving Nietzsche in this direction: (a) a claim about the nature of value systems that take moral equality as their fundamental value, namely that they are based on resentment (*the slave morality thesis*) and (b), the claim that human greatness requires a feeling of great height from which the great person looks down in lofty contempt on others (*the pathos of distance thesis*).

I shall argue that neither part is convincing. The slave morality thesis has the virtue of alerting the moral egalitarian to a potential problem: *if* belief in the moral equality of human beings were invariably based on resentment, then moral egalitarianism would indeed be highly suspect. But this is not the case: belief in the moral equality of human beings need not be reactive or resentful, and can be just as affirmative of human life as the master morality adhered to by those Nietzsche would describe as 'higher types'. Hence the slave morality thesis provides no reason to object to moral egalitarianism as such. As we shall see, the pathos of distance thesis depends for what plausibility it has on the slave morality thesis: without it, it can be seen to be either false or question begging, or both.

So Nietzsche's critique does nothing to force us to give up on moral egalitarianism; but nonetheless, Nietzsche's critique leaves us with a problem: how do we combine our belief in the equality of all human beings with a morality that is affirmative rather than denying?

### Moralities of affirmation and moralities of denial

Nietzsche's argument requires us to agree to his distinction between *master* and *slave* moralities. Master moralities are those which are formed by higher types out of an overflowing self-confidence and as a means of glorifying their own positive traits.<sup>18</sup> Slave moralities are those which are created by lower types in reaction to their feelings of powerlessness and their resentment at the higher types' superfluity of strength. Slave morality is always negative: it starts not with anything that it takes to be good and worthwhile, but with what is bad and to be avoided.<sup>19</sup> And it is a jealous and envious form of evaluation: at base, once decoded, slave morality's evaluations come to the following: 'We weak people are just weak; it is good to do nothing *for which we are not strong enough*.' [GM I.13]

I shall use the phrases 'moralities of affirmation' and 'moralities of denial' in preference to 'master moralities' and 'slave moralities'. The terms 'master' and 'slave' moralities run together claims about the type of person who creates a value, with the psychological effect of holding a value and thus imply that the psychological effects of holding a value are determined by the power position of those who hold it. But this begs the question against the position I shall be arguing for, namely that the value of the equality of human beings is both a value for everyone, and (in some cases at least) has the psychological profile that Nietzsche associates with a master morality. Hence I shall split the slave morality thesis into two claims: (1) there is an important distinction to be drawn between *moralities of affirmation* and *moralities of denial*. Moralities of affirmation make the life of the person living them more worthwhile to that person: in a morality of affirmation, the performance of actions that are mandated by the morality increase the joy and the meaning that the agent performing them has in living.<sup>20</sup> Moralities of denial make the life of the person living them *less* worthwhile for that person: in a morality of denial, the actions that are mandated by morality must be motivated by (and in turn tend to reinforce) feelings of guilt, shame, resentment,

self-punishment and so on. (2) All moralities which make the equality of human beings their fundamental value are moralities of denial.

I agree that there is a useful distinction to be drawn between moralities of affirmation and moralities of denial. And I am also willing to admit that, other things being equal, we have good reason to choose moralities of affirmation, and shun moralities of denial. Hence *if* all moralities which make the equality of human beings their fundamental value are moralities of denial, then Nietzsche's critique of moral egalitarianism exposes a real problem.

I take it that it is true to claim that *some* moralities which have the equality of human beings as their fundamental value are moralities of denial. (If this were not the case then Nietzsche's criticisms in the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morality* would not hit home in the way they do.) But if it is only *some* and not *all* moralities which have the equality of human beings as their fundamental value that are moralities of denial, then Nietzsche's criticism will do nothing to show that moral egalitarianism *per se* is flawed.

In what follows I will argue that even Nietzsche must admit that it is false to claim that all moralities which have the equality of human beings as their fundamental value are moralities of denial. I shall attempt to do this by providing a counter-example: a conception of the moral equality of human beings which is also a morality of affirmation. I suspect that this account will not be equally acceptable to all those on the egalitarian plateau. But other egalitarians will, I hope concede two things: first that the egalitarian requires *some* sort of reply to Nietzsche's slave morality thesis;<sup>21</sup> and second that the account I shall give is at least a plausible candidate for such a reply.

#### An affirmative account of moral equality

I shall argue that Kant's conception of moral equality makes the equality of human beings a morality of affirmation, rather than denial; and so, given the availability of Kantian accounts of equality, it is plainly false to claim that *all* moralities which place the moral equality of human beings at their centre are moralities of denial.

The most obvious way to envisage the equality of human beings is by analogy to an equality of physical magnitude (as when we say two sticks are of equal length); that is, to imagine that the equality of human beings must consist in their possession of an *equal amount* of some feature. But Kant thinks about the equality of human beings differently. Human beings are said to be *equal*, rather, because *each* must be valued for his or her own sake: the equality lies in the *attitude* with which each must treat others and with which each may in turn expect to be treated by them. For Kant, this attitude is *respect*.

Kant suggests that the reason why we should treat one another with respect is that every human being has a particular type of value, namely a dignity, which we appropriately respond to by valuing that person for their own sake. And valuing the person for their own sake *is* respecting them.<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche has two chief worries about moral equality: first, that moral equality must involve levelling-down 'higher types', and second, moral equality is based on a reactive morality of denial. Neither worry can gain any purchase on a conception of moral equality that takes the dignity of human beings as its centre.

First, if one adopts the dignity of human beings as the centre of one's system of valuation, then it is simply untrue to claim that this involves a levelling down of any potential 'higher types'. To accord someone a dignity is to value them *for their own sake*. To claim that every human being has a dignity is to claim that every human being should be valued for his or her own sake. Therefore, those whom Nietzsche considers to be higher types are also to be valued for their own sakes.<sup>23</sup>

Nor do the sorts of prohibitions and restrictions that are part and parcel of belief in the dignity of human beings do anything to show that what we have is a morality of denial, rather than affirmation. Rather such prohibitions, are merely the inevitable result of holding every human being to be valuable for his or her own sake. As Paul Ricoeur puts it:

[Y]ou shall not take life, you shall not steal, you shall not kill, you shall not torture. In each case, morality replies to violence. And if the commandment cannot do otherwise than to take the form of a prohibition, this is precisely

because of evil: to all the figures of evil responds the *no* of morality. On the level of the ethical aim, however, solicitude, as the mutual exchange of self-esteems, is affirmative through and through. This affirmation, which can well be termed original, is the hidden soul of the prohibition. It is what, ultimately, arms our indignation, that is, our rejection of *indignities* inflicted on others.<sup>24</sup>

So I take it that it is simply untrue that all conceptions of morality which place the moral equality of human beings at their centre are moralities of denial. But an important question remains, which I shall return to in the conclusion: to what extent is our belief in the moral equality of human beings *in fact* part of a morality of affirmation, and to what extent is it, perhaps despite our best intentions, part of a morality of denial?

#### The pathos of distance thesis

The pathos of distance thesis looks weak unless it can call upon support from the slave morality thesis. For, suppose it were accepted that valuing other human beings as equals need not be a reactive and resentful mode of valuation, and can be the centre of a morality of affirmation. What reason would there remain to believe in the pathos of distance thesis? Any such reasons, obviously, could not depend on the claim that belief in moral egalitarianism is slavish; they would have to stem from some other positive virtue that non-egalitarian values are suppose to have.

Nietzsche's only reason in favour of the pathos of distance thesis which is independent of the slave morality thesis seems to be a claim about the structure of the self. Recall the following passage, which I quoted earlier:

Without the *pathos of distance* such as develops from the incarnate differences of classes, from the ruling caste's constant looking out and looking down on subjects and instruments and from its equally constant exercise of obedience and command, its holding down and holding at a distance, that other, more mysterious pathos could not have developed either, that longing for an ever-increasing widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of every higher, rarer, more remote, tenser, more comprehensive states, in short

precisely the elevation of the type 'man', the continual self-overcoming of man.  
(BGE 257)

Here Nietzsche argues that depth and greatness of the soul comes from *looking down*. But even if we grant that that such an exalted contempt is *a* means of making one's soul deep and great, this does little to make the case for the stronger claim that exalted contempt is the *only* means of making one's soul deep and great.<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche's position requires this stronger claim. But this claim is false: leaving aside the question of greatness, it is obvious that human beings can become deeper, more individual through relationships of mutual respect and recognition.<sup>26</sup> And if we think in terms of 'greatness', what reason is there to think that love will be outshone by contempt in the creation of 'great' human beings?

Nietzsche might at this point object that it is *only* vertical relationships of contempt which are able to create the right sort of relationship to oneself. But I cannot see what reason he could have for saying this unless he wants to make the further claim that viewing other human beings with a lofty contempt *just is* an intrinsic part of the best human lives. But such a claim would beg the question: for there are a number of candidates for being 'great men' or 'higher types' who are quite able to lead their exemplary lives, and create new ways of looking at the world and of living in it without any touch of exalted contempt. Some examples might be Nelson Mandela, Socrates, William James, John Dewey.<sup>27</sup>

[So it follows that the pathos of distance thesis has no separate plausibility.](#)

## Conclusion

We have seen that Nietzsche's criticisms of moral egalitarianism are unconvincing, in as much as there is at least one way of conceiving of moral equality according to which moral equality is a morality of affirmation. How should Nietzsche respond?

The first thing that Nietzsche would do is to point out that we should make a distinction between moralities that are affirmative in *theory* and those that are affirmative in *practice*. Someone could

believe that their morality is one of affirmation, and even have a theory as to why their morality was indeed one of affirmation, but at the same time they could be wrong about this: indeed such self-deception is a hallmark of resentment. So it does not follow from anything that I have said that resentment-free moral egalitarianism is in fact possible.

This point is well taken, but if we descend to the level of individual psychology, then there do seem to be many people who are moral egalitarians, and whose moral egalitarianism is part of a morality of affirmation, rather than one of denial.<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche has two possible replies: first, he could simply bite the bullet and claim that, appearances to the contrary, even Nelson Mandela is secretly seething with resentment. But this seems desperate, absent some fairly powerful empirical evidence.

Second, and more promisingly, Nietzsche could concede that resentment-free egalitarianism is possible for some, but argue that this says something about the unusual physiology or psychological type of the resentment-free egalitarian, and it does nothing to show that resentment-free egalitarianism is possible, or even desirable for others.

The egalitarian will, I think, best reply to this claim by simply denying that resentment-free egalitarianism requires any special psychological or physiological type. But even leaving aside the doctrine of psychological types, we are each left with a number of searching questions: is *our* commitment to moral equality free of resentment and other negative emotions? And if it is not, is this because of something we could change (for example, by changing the way we think about our values), or is it something we are stuck with? And if our failure to be resentment-free egalitarians is something we are stuck with, does this undermine the plausibility of egalitarianism? Or should we simply admit that a large part of our moral consciousness is composed of a morality of denial, but argue it is nonetheless the best morality to have?<sup>29</sup>

References:



For a general bibliography of Nietzsche's works in German and English see end of volume.<sup>30</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 From the speech he gave in court on his treason charge, April 20, 1964. He repeated the same words in his speech on his release after 27 years of incarceration.
- 2 See Philippa Foot 'Nietzsche's Immoralism' in Richard Schacht ed. *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: a Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1999; Martha Nussbaum 'Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism,' in Schacht, ed., *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*; 'Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 5, 1997, pp 1-13.
- 3 See for example these characteristically pugnacious comments by Brian Leiter: 'Lack of 'scholarly caution' would be a charitable characterization of the work of those intent on excoriating Nietzsche's alleged 'political thought'... Nussbaum [in 'Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?'] should remind us how readily Nietzsche inspires scholarly recklessness in the service of moral indignation.' *Nietzsche on Morality*, London: Routledge 2002, pp 292-3.
- 4 I explain these terms of art later.
- 5 There are also some thinner principles of equality, for example, the principle of formal equality (namely the principle that like cases must be treated alike), and Aristotle's principle of proportional equality (namely that we should treat equals equally, and unequals unequally in proportion to their relevant differences). These do not entail the moral equality of all human beings (Aristotle's principle of proportional equality is compatible with his commitment to slavery for instance), and they are not incompatible with anything Nietzsche says. When I talk of equality and egalitarianism in this chapter I should be understood to be referring to the thicker principle of *moral* equality.
- 6 For this way of explaining the role of the concept/conception distinction and its relation to equality, see Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978, pp 134-40, and

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Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2nd edition 2001, pp 3-5. We can see claims such as Bentham's 'each person is to count for one, and no one for more than one' and Kant's 'Every man has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow men and is *in turn* bound to respect every other' [*Metaphysics of Morals* p 462, tr. Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2nd edition 1996] as attempts to provide a conception of the concept of moral equality in the field of moral theory. Rawls's theory of justice as fairness, Nozick's entitlement theory and Dworkin's 'luck egalitarianism' provide leading conceptions of the concept of moral equality in political philosophy.

7 The idea of a considered judgement (and of course of reflective equilibrium) comes originally from Rawls: see the section 'Some remarks about Moral Theory', pp 40-46 of *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press revised edition, 1999.

8 Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* 2nd ed. pp 3-5.

9 A note on translations and abbreviations. Quotations from *Beyond Good and Evil* are from R. J. Hollingdale's translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), except for one occasion (§30) where I preferred Kaufmann's translation (New York: Vintage, 1996), and are abbreviated as *BGE* plus the relevant section number. Quotations from *On the Genealogy of Morality* are from Carol Diethe's translation (ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and are abbreviated as *GM* plus the relevant essay and section number. Quotations from *The Gay Science* are from Josefine Nauckhoff's translation (ed. Bernard Williams, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Quotations from the *Will to Power* are from the R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann edition (New York: Vintage, 1968), and are abbreviated as *WP* plus section number.

10 The non-aristocratic (egalitarian) society will, of course, agree that some human beings are better than others *in certain respects*, and that it can be morally legitimate to construct an order of rank for human beings in these particular respects. (For example, the golf handicapping system constructs an *order of rank*, according to which the better players are at the top and the worse players at the bottom.) But the egalitarian denies that it is possible or morally appropriate to attempt to rank people *as human beings*.

11 'The essential thing in a good and healthy aristocracy is, however, that it does *not* feel itself to be a function (of the monarchy or of the commonwealth) but as their *meaning* and supreme justification – that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of innumerable men who *for its sake* have to be suppressed and reduced to imperfect men, to slaves and instruments. Its fundamental faith must be that society should *not* exist for the sake of society but only as foundation and scaffolding upon

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- which a select species of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and in general to a higher *existence*' [BGE 258].
- 12 As Nietzsche puts it, our belief in moral equality is one which says 'I am morality itself, and nothing is morality besides me!' [BGE 202].
- 13 This approach to conflicts between our moral values and others is influenced by Ronald Dworkin's 'Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1996) pp 87-139.
- 14 See for example the already quoted passage from *BGE* 259.
- 15 See for example, *Beyond Good and Evil* 30: 'Our highest insights must - and should - sound like follies and sometimes crimes when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them'. (Kaufmann's translation)
- 16 See for example, *WP* 287: 'The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd'. For this interpretation, see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* pp 296-7.
- 17 See Leiter: 'Nietzsche is not claiming that people are *actually* too altruistic and too egalitarian in their practice; he is worried that (as a consequence of the slave revolt in morals, etc.) they are now 'imprisoned among... concepts' of equality and altruism, and that the conceptual vocabulary of value is itself the obstacle to the realization of certain forms of human excellence. This is a very different charge, one that raises subtle psychological questions that no one, to date, has really explored.' [*Nietzsche on Morality*, p 300].
- 18 'The noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values, he does not need to be approved of, he judges 'what harms me is harmful in itself', he knows himself to be that which in general first accords honour to things, he *creates values*. Everything he knows to be part of himself, he honours: such a morality is self-glorification' [BGE 260].
- 19 'This reversal of the evaluating glance – this *inevitable* orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself – is a feature of *ressentiment*: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, - its action is basically a reaction' [GM I.10].
- 20 In Nietzsche's terms, 'In the foreground stands the feeling of plenitude, of power which seems to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would like to give away and bestow' [BGE 260].
- 21 The person who has best argued this case, it seems to me, is Charles Taylor: see the final chapter of his monumental *Sources of the Self*: 'Nietzsche's challenge is based on a deep insight. If morality can only be powered negatively, where there can be no such thing as beneficence

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powered by an affirmation of the recipient as a being of value, then pity is destructive to the giver and degrading to the receiver, and the ethic of benevolence may indeed be indefensible. Nietzsche's challenge is on the deepest level, because he is looking precisely for what can release such an affirmation of being. His unsettling conclusion is that it is the ethic of benevolence which stands in the way of it. Only if there is such a thing as agape, or one of the secular claimants to its succession, is Nietzsche wrong.' [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, p 516].

22 'The respect that I have for others or that another can require from me (*observantia aliis praestanda*) is therefore recognition of a dignity (*dignitas*) in other men, that is, of a worth that has no price, no equivalent for which the object evaluated (*aestimii*) could be exchanged. ... Every man has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow men and is *in turn* bound to respect every other' [*Metaphysics of Morals* p 462].

23 The only way in which belief in universal human dignity could be thought to involve levelling down would be if a potential higher type needs to treat others in ways incompatible with their dignity to ensure his flourishing.

24 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, tr. Katherine Blamey, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, p 221. One could also point out that there are many things (for example, regret and pity) that Nietzsche's preferred person must say 'no' to, even if he is tempted by them; so the mere fact of opposing things cannot make a system of valuation reactive.

25 Indeed elsewhere he himself suggests *any* form of protracted constraint is sufficient to expand and deepen the soul: see *BGE* 188.

26 Hegel of course was the first to philosophically theorize this point. Habermas helpfully glosses the point as follows: 'In a symmetrical relation the point of mutual recognition is that the two persons involved seem to sacrifice their independence; but in fact each gains a new kind of independence by coming to recognise, in the mirror of the eyes of the other person, who he or she is. Both become for themselves the kind of characters they mutually attribute to each other. Both gain awareness of their individuality by seeing their own images reflected in the dense and deep exchange of an interpersonal relation.' ['From Kant to Hegel and Back Again: The Move Towards Detranscendentalization', *European Journal of Philosophy* vol. 7.2, 1999: pp. 129-157; p 140]. For further discussion of the claim within a philosophical context, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, (tr. Joel Anderson, Cambridge: Polity Press 1995; and within a psychotherapeutic context see Jessica Benjamin, *The bonds of love: Psychoanalysis, feminism, and the problem of domination*, New York: Pantheon, 1988.

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- 27 Perhaps Nietzsche's counterargument would be that great men have to be creative in a way that forces them to be solitary and not care about others. But this is just to express the deeply flawed (and self-serving) Romantic view of the creative genius. On Nietzsche's conception of 'greatness', in general see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, pp 115-124.
- 28 Nelson Mandela or Desmond Tutu would be obvious examples here. (For example, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee, over which Tutu presided was remarkable for its *lack* of sentiments of revenge and recrimination.) But each of us, I would suggest, also encounters many less famous resentment free egalitarians.
- 29 Acknowledgements: thanks to the participants of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society Conference 2004, and to the Research Seminar at the University of Keele for helpful comments.
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