

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*



Central questions:

1. Where do our evaluative concepts (good and evil) come from?
2. What is the “value of these values themselves”?

According to Nietzsche, the earliest usages for the evaluative concepts of “good” and “bad” were significantly different from contemporary uses.

Good: “Noble”

“Good” is simply a name given to those things and activities preferred by the dominant social class.

Bad: “Other”

“Bad” things were simply those which were not preferred by the noble class.

The Slave Revolt in Morality

With the rise of a “priestly” social leadership, the uses for evaluative terms is re-appropriated.

“Good” now refers to the activities and characteristics that the priestly class prefers, and vice-versa for “bad”.

In the resultant evaluative framework, it is the *weak*, and not the powerful, who are given preference and advantage.

How does this happen?

Ressentiment: A deeply-held jealousy of the naturally stronger.

Notice that the new moral framework serves to protect those who would otherwise be susceptible to domination in the hands of the stronger.

The naturally stronger are convinced that their own natural tendencies are “evil”, giving rise to two crucial mechanisms of “slave morality”:

Guilt and conscience.

Let's Ruminare!

1. This view seems to presuppose that there is no such thing as an intrinsic sense of right and wrong. What do you think about that? Can you think of something that can't be anything *but* right to do? Wrong?
2. Do you think this really is a plausible account of where our value judgments come from? Does any part of it not make sense?
3. Can you give any alternative account?
4. Suppose Nietzsche is right about this account of the origin of our morals. Is this really such a bad state of affairs after all?