

The Radical Goals of Slave Morality in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*

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Abstract: This paper offers a new account of Nietzsche's critique of morality in the first treatise of his *On the Genealogy of Morality*. According to the general view, Nietzsche places political revenge at the center of slave morality: the priest invents slave morality in order to rule the noble. I argue that this view is incomplete, for Nietzsche's deeper critique reveals that the priest's revenge is not purely political but also radically ontological. Ultimately, the priest aims at supplanting not just the noble but also the rule of nature. This reading reveals the priest's attempt to transform the natural order of rank through imagining the human being as subject to the omnipotent God of monotheism, i.e., the "just God." This interpretation not only broadens our understanding of Nietzsche's critique of morality but also clarifies its purpose, namely, to show us how the demand for morality can blind us to the world's truths.

Of the three treatises that make up Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*,¹ the first, entitled "'Good and Evil,' 'Good and Bad,'" has received

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I would like to thank Heinrich Meier, Clifford Orwin, Leigh Meredith, and the reviewers and editor of the *Review of Politics* for their instructive comments on early versions of this paper.

¹Citations to Nietzsche's works are given parenthetically in the text, referring to aphorism numbers or section headings, and using the following abbreviations AC = *Antichrist*; BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*; D = *Daybreak*; EH = *Ecce Homo*; HAH = *Human, All Too Human*; GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality*; KSA = *Kritische Studienausgabe*; SB = *Sämtliche Briefe*; TI = *Twilight of the Idols*; Z = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; WS = *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. In the cases of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*, references are to the part and section numbers (Z II 20, GM III 12). The discussions of previous works in the third part of *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," are cited by the appropriate abbreviation followed by the section number (EH, "BGE" 2). References to the *Nachlass* in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* are by volume,

the most scholarly attention.² This is due, at least in part, to the compelling clarity of its critique of slave morality. For in Nietzsche's notoriously opaque oeuvre, the first treatise stands out as a particularly forthright and didactic account of slave morality's flaws. Scholars often read the first treatise independently of the subsequent two, drawn in by its powerful polemic that pits "slave" against "noble" in the battle for moral and political power. Most often, these scholars assume that the first treatise's argument regarding morality's origins is exhaustive. As a result, they reduce morality to the cunning and primarily pragmatic response of the slave (and his Pied Piper, the priest) to noble domination. On this reading, the slave invents morality as a strategy to reverse the existing sociopolitical hierarchy and ultimately rule the noble.

But the seeming clarity of the first treatise is misleading. Nietzsche alludes to the *Genealogy's* deliberate deceptiveness in his later work *Ecco Homo*. He writes of the *Genealogy's* three treatises: "Each time a beginning that is *intended* to mislead, cool, scientific, ironic even, intentionally foreground, intentionally discouraging" (*EH* III 'GM'). Here, Nietzsche suggests that the good reader of the *Genealogy* should be alert for those traps which might "mislead" her; she should be doubly suspicious of that which seems most obvious in each treatise. When read with this warning in mind, the first treatise's emphasis on political revenge becomes suspect, and with it the traditional reading of slave morality's origins and aims. In fact, reading against the grain reveals that attention to slave morality as political revenge must be supplemented and deepened by an understanding of morality as ontological revenge. Morality aims not only at ruling the noble but also at changing nature, specifically at transforming the natural order of rank that authorizes the noble's supremacy.

I support this claim in five related sections. In the first, I argue that the intensity of Nietzsche's polemic in the first treatise of the *Genealogy* leads to exaggerations in his analysis that the second treatise serves in part to correct. In the second section, I examine the effects of the first treatise's distortions on Nietzsche's portrayal of resentment, the affect that drives both priest and slave. This reveals—contrary to the scholarly consensus—that resentment is a moral affect, which highlights the priest's underlying motivations. In the third and fourth sections, I expand this argument to show that the priest's aim is not only to supplant the noble, but also to punish the noble for violating his right to rule, and ultimately to punish nature itself. In the fifth section, I examine the mechanism by which the priest punishes nature: the just God. With this invention, the priest supplants nature with an alternative order, one that is guided by will or intention as opposed to

notebook, and section number—e.g., volume XIII, notebook 11, section 50, is 13: 11 [50]. Translations of Nietzsche's works are my own.

²Cf. Matthias Risse, "The Second Treatise in the *Genealogy of Morality*: Nietzsche on the Origin of Bad Conscience," *European Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2001): 55.

necessity. The priest's resentment, his indignation at his subjection to an order of indifferent necessity, leads him to punish the world for its "unjust" dispensation of power. Ultimately, slave morality punishes nature for its apparent injustice—its being what it is, its having a necessary character—and seeks a substitute power that stands outside or beyond nature, to which nature is itself subject.

On the Relationship between the *Genealogy's* Treatises

The *Genealogy's* subtitle is *Eine Streitschrift* ("A Polemic"). Generally speaking, the polemic, as a literary genre, demonstrates opposition and provokes action. It expresses indignation at a perceived injustice while at the same time articulating a means for rectifying that injustice.³ To achieve that end, the polemical pamphlet employs rhetorical techniques such as provocation, exaggeration, and intensification. It is thus concerned less with an objective assessment of opposing viewpoints and more with partisan refutation that seeks to expose the hypocrisy of individuals and institutions. This is precisely the *Genealogy's* approach. The first treatise explains the origins of slave morality in order to convince its reader of slave morality's calamitous effects and, in turn, to incite action against that morality and its promulgators. The first treatise aims to incite the reader to revolt against the slave revolt in morality, that is, to restore the supremacy of noble and so natural values.

Yet scholars have tended to overlook or deemphasize the polemical nature of the first treatise; in so doing, they have misinterpreted the relationship between the first and second treatises. Instead, they have tended to approach the relationship among the treatises in one of two ways, approaches which I call the "supplemental" and the "synthetic." The supplemental approach places primary emphasis on the first treatise, turning to the second and third only to fill in the argumentative gaps of the first. In so doing, they take Nietzsche's account of the slave revolt in the first treatise at face value; they argue that morality is simply the strategic vengeance of the "weak" against the "strong," and ignore or downplay the contradictions and complexities introduced by the second and third treatises.⁴ For example, the

³Michael Galchinsky, "Political Pamphlet," in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*, ed. Frederick Burwick et al. (Blackwell: Oxford, 2012), 1025–26.

⁴Max Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, ed. Manfred S. Frings (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004); Peter Berkowitz, *The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on Resentment and Valuation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 2 (1997) and *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); R. Lanier Anderson, "On the Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," in *Nietzsche's "On the Genealogy of Morality": A Critical Guide*, ed. Simon May (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Scott Jenkins,

interpretation of resentment as premoral affect is only possible if one jettisons Nietzsche's analysis in the second treatise, where he revises this by making explicit resentment's origin in the relationship between equals (an argument which I explain in more detail below).

The synthetic approach assumes, by contrast, that each treatise is equally important. Scholars using this approach rightly recognize that each treatise abstracts from certain features of morality in order to highlight others; for example, they show how the first treatise avoids the question of noble conscience in order to clarify the nature of slave morality. They therefore understand that the treatises must be read together in order to fully grasp the *Genealogy's* argument.⁵ However, the synthetic approach, like the supplemental one, overlooks the extent to which Nietzsche's polemic forces the abstraction and oversimplification of noble morality in the first treatise. For example, while David Owen correctly identifies a peculiarity in the ordering of the first two treatises, he misidentifies its cause. He shows that the analysis of the second treatise logically precedes the first insofar as Nietzsche's analysis of metaphysical free will in the first presupposes his analysis of earlier and more primitive forms of accountability in the second.⁶ However, according to Owen, Nietzsche's ordering of the two treatises is rhetorically strategic: by inverting their proper sequence Nietzsche "problematizes" the reader's assumption that slave morality is "the only possible ethical perspective."⁷ However, such a strategy would be redundant insofar as the first treatise contrasts slave morality with noble morality and so already presents the reader with an alternative ethical perspective. Instead, the second treatise treats what the rhetoric of the first ignores: morality's origin in the noble type. Thus, the synthetic approach does not guarantee awareness of the problems generated by Nietzsche's polemic.

In contrast to the supplemental and synthetic approaches, I argue that the composition of the *Genealogy* is due to the deeply polemical character of the first treatise. The ordering of the first two treatises is therefore a consequence rather than a function of its rhetoric. More specifically, I argue that Nietzsche wrote the second treatise in order to fix the exaggerations and distortions generated by the extreme rhetoric of the first. This interpretive approach is supported not only by the *Genealogy's* literary form but also by its publication

"Resentment, Imaginary Revenge, and the Slave Revolt," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96, no. 1 (2018).

⁵See Maudemarie Clark, introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998): xxvii–xxx; Berkowitz, *Ethics of an Immoralist*, 67–99; David Owen, Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morality" (London: Routledge, 2014), 109, 131; cf. 75–90; Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche On Morality* (London: Routledge, 2015), 146–54.

⁶Owen, Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morality," 109.

⁷*Ibid.*, 131–32.

history. Nietzsche conceived of and wrote the first treatise independent of the second and the third and intended to publish it on its own.⁸ He conceived of and wrote the second treatise only after submitting the first for publication.⁹ Indeed, the third treatise was added comparatively late in the publication process.¹⁰ In what follows, I both provide textual evidence for this claim and demonstrate its implications for my analysis of resentment and, in turn, ontological revenge.

Rethinking Resentment

Distinguishing between polemic and analysis in the first treatise clarifies resentment's punitive—as opposed to merely vengeful—character. Most scholars have not seriously considered its punitive character because they deny its moral character. Swept up by the force of Nietzsche's polemic, they prematurely conclude that resentment produces morality. Thus, they argue that resentment cannot itself be moral because it precedes morality. In contrast, I argue that resentment is a product of morality or, more specifically, of justice. As such, it articulates the individual's experience of the world as a violation of his or her innermost beliefs and desires. It thus pinpoints the aspects of the world he or she seeks not merely to dominate but also to punish.

Scholars employing the supplemental approach have focused almost exclusively on the relationship between resentment and revenge in the first treatise. Up to a point, this attention makes sense—Nietzsche repeatedly characterizes vengeance as closely tied to resentment and one of the primary motivators of the slave revolt. However, the exclusive focus on resentment as simply synonymous with revenge leads scholars to mischaracterize the slave revolt as a pure power struggle. Bernard Reginster's analysis is characteristic of this approach.¹¹ In Reginster's view, resentment is goal oriented and aims primarily at restoring the priest's lost superiority.¹² Thus, resentment is simply a strategy for correcting the power imbalance between "weak" and "strong." Because resentment is purely instrumental, it neither blames the noble for his wicked deeds nor desires to punish him for them. It simply craves the noble's power. Reginster's approach is useful in that

⁸SB VIII 877; cf. also 878. For a general overview of the *Genealogy's* publication history see William H. Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon: A Publication History and Bibliography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 122–26.

⁹SB VIII 880; cf. also 881

¹⁰SB VIII 897.

¹¹Reginster, "Resentment and Valuation," 281–305 and *Affirmation of Life*, 251–60. Cf. also Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, 31–34; Berkowitz, *Ethics of an Immoralist*, 73–83; Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 237–45; Anderson, "On the Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," 24–55; Jenkins, "Resentment, Imaginary Revenge, and the Slave Revolt," 200–202.

¹²Reginster, "Resentment and Valuation," 296–97, and *Affirmation of Life*, 255–56.

it helps to clarify the relationship between resentment and valuation. But in its narrow focus on resentment's pure instrumentality, this approach reduces resentment's complexity and its more radical aims, which are not merely to dominate the noble but to change him.

R. J. Wallace provides a trenchant critique of this approach, which he calls the "strategic interpretation," and offers an alternative: the "expressive interpretation."¹³ Wallace's "expressive" approach avoids Reginster's singular focus on revenge and challenges the resulting overemphasis on pure instrumentality. Wallace argues that resentment is oriented not towards action, but rather (as the name implies) towards expression; it is a response to a world that denies human longings and desire.¹⁴ Resentment has a psychological aim. A type of coping strategy, it arises primarily in order to help the powerless priest resolve the tension between the world as he experiences it (as one of systematic deprivation) and the world as he expects it to be (one in which he can satisfy his own desires). It serves primarily to "vindicate" or justify the most basic way in which the powerless experience the world.¹⁵ The expressive view helps to clarify the unconscious psychic processes that drive resentment's need to realign the experienced world with the desired world. However, in reducing resentment to an expression of psychological pain caused by a world that denies one's own deepest longings and desires, the expressive view wrongly denies that resentment has any substantive relationship to revenge.

The "strategic" and "expressive" approaches each capture an essential function of resentment: a drive for domination and a psychological response to the disjunction between expectation and reality. However, both suffer from their denial of the opposing approach, which leads them to minimize the complexity of resentment's aims and ends. In particular, both approaches overlook resentment's ontological goals, namely, its attempt to supplant the indifferent natural order with a conventional one that is ordered and overseen by an omnipotent and caring God. These two approaches overlook resentment's more fundamental aims because each wrongly conceives of it as a premoral affect, one that is temporally prior to and logically independent of any evaluative concepts or attitudes. For this reason, both seek to distinguish the experience of resentment from that of "resentment." Resentment, they argue, includes a more restrictive moral sense, which entails the conviction that certain moral obligations have been violated. This would imply that those subject to resentment have already accepted precisely those moral valuations that resentment is meant to explain. Hence, they argue, resentment and resentment must be conceptually distinct because resentment produces

¹³R. J. Wallace, "Resentment, Value, and Self-Vindication: Making Sense of Nietzsche's Slave Revolt," *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 110–37.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 130.

the moral valuations that are a necessary precondition of resentment. While the two approaches draw opposite conclusions regarding the precise nature of the distinction Nietzsche makes between ressentiment and resentment, they nevertheless agree that the experience of ressentiment, owing to its primacy vis-à-vis value, is necessarily free of anything resembling resentment.

However, interpreting ressentiment as a premoral affect makes sense only if we understand the first treatise's genealogy as tracing the origins of morality as such rather than the origins of slave morality in particular. But this is clearly not the case. The thesis of the first treatise argues that there are two moralities, noble morality and slave morality. Nietzsche's phrase "slave revolt in morality" implies that morality *preceded* this revolt. "Good and bad" defined the first morality, "good and evil" the second. So, at I 10 Nietzsche speaks of the morality of the noble ("While every noble morality develops from...") and proceeds to speak of the "noble mode of valuation." Then in I 11 he refers to the "good man of the other morality," that is, of the noble morality. Furthermore, Nietzsche speaks repeatedly of the conflict between the two ideals or the two values as defining the spiritual history of the West. So, in I 4–6—before introducing the concept of ressentiment—he sketches the moral code of the nobles, concluding by examining its priestly version. "Good and bad" defines a morality opposing "good and evil." According to the argument of the first treatise, then, morality is clearly present before ressentiment "becomes creative and gives birth to values" (GM I 10).

The seemingly premoral character of ressentiment can be explained by the polemic of the first treatise and, in particular, the way in which it distorts the very phenomena Nietzsche's genealogy is meant to explain. The most significant distortion of Nietzsche's polemics in the first treatise is arguably the way in which it ignores noble morality. In particular, the first treatise pays virtually no attention to what might be called the noble's *Binnenmoral* or in-group morality.¹⁶ That is, it disregards how nobles relate to *each other* and thus the fact that nobles must fulfill moral requirements *among themselves*.¹⁷ By turning a blind eye to noble morality and so to the question of how *equals* relate to one another, Nietzsche makes it seem as if morality is simply a product of the weak slave's ressentiment toward the strong noble. Ignoring the noble's *Binnenmoral* makes it appear *as if* morality is simply a product of the relationship between superior and inferior, namely, between the strong noble and the weak priest/slave. Disregarding the noble's *Binnenmoral* thus

¹⁶I borrow the term *Binnenmoral* from Max Weber. See his *Wirtschaftsgeschichte: Abriss der universalen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1923), 300–315, and *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr, 1956), 214–18.

¹⁷Nietzsche briefly sketches without examining the implications of the noble's *Binnenmoral* for the presence of "evil" in noble societies in section 11. However, he fleshes out those implications in the second treatise (cf. GM II 16–19).

serves Nietzsche's polemic insofar as it enables him to present the noble as wholly innocent and the slave as wholly responsible for humanity's currently debased condition: the upright noble has simply been hoodwinked by the duplicitous slave.

However, ignoring the noble's *Binnenmoral* distorts Nietzsche's own understanding of resentment. In II 11 Nietzsche argues that justice produces resentment, not the other way around. Specifically, he argues that resentment is a byproduct of the agreement reached by parties of approximately equal power, that is, of justice as approximate equality (*GM* II 8; cf. 5–6, 9–10). Resentment emerges under conditions wherein one party *exceeds* the common measure established by that agreement. Furthermore, Nietzsche's earlier analyses of emotions related to resentment, for instance, envy and indignation, consistently draw similar conclusions, namely, that such emotions *presuppose* a belief in equality (cf. *HAH* 92, *WS* 22–23 and 29).

The first treatise conceals more about resentment than it reveals. The obscurity of Nietzsche's presentation of resentment is indicated by the way he characterizes the origins of the slave revolt in morality. Rather than tracing that revolt to the slaves, he traces it to the noble or, more specifically, to a noble subtype, namely the priestly-noble. Furthermore, as I argue below, the priest views his subjugation by other noble types as illegitimate. This suggests that the priest's emotional response to that subjugation is akin to resentment; it is his bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly. The priest's nobility illuminates the character of his emotional response, specifically the character of his resentment, and, in turn, the aim and scope of his revenge.

The Nobility of the Priest and Its Implications for the Aim and Scope of the "Slave Revolt in Morality"

Nietzsche's analysis of the slave revolt demonstrates clearly, if somewhat paradoxically, that the agents of that revolt were not the slaves but the nobles or, more precisely, a subtype of the noble—the priestly-noble (*priesterlich-vornehme*) (*GM* I 6–7). His identification of the priest as a noble points to the priest's experience of the pathos of distance, the "lasting and dominating comprehensive and basic feeling of a higher ruling nature in relation to a lower nature, to an 'Under-one' [*Unten*]" (*GM* I 2; cf. *BGE* 257). The priest takes from that pathos his *right* to create values and thus to rule (cf. *GM* I 2 and 4–5). The noble's supremacy violates that right and as a result ignites the priest's indignation or resentment. His resentment aims not only at supplanting the noble's rule but also at transforming the natural order of rank that grounds it.

The priest's status as a noble is controversial in the Anglo-American Nietzsche scholarship. Bernard Reginster,¹⁸ R. Lanier Anderson,¹⁹ and

¹⁸ Reginster, "Resentment and Valuation," 281–305.

¹⁹ Anderson, "Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," 24–55.

Avery Snelson²⁰ all argue that the priest is a noble and that the values he espouses, i.e., the values of purity, are noble values insofar as they derive from the priest's experience of the pathos of distance.²¹ Indeed, these scholars argue that the priest understands himself as more noble (because purer) than his noble oppressor.²² Furthermore, they argue that the priest's sense of superiority incites his resentment and, in turn, prompts the slave revolt in morality.²³ Against this claim, Paul S. Loeb argues that we should interpret the priest as a slave.²⁴ Loeb's most compelling argument against the priest's nobility is that Nietzsche consistently presents the priest as having a "psychologically slavish" disposition toward his noble conqueror or master.²⁵ The priest necessarily acquires slavish dispositions and attitudes, that is, he becomes inoffensive, anxious, cowardly, and so forth, because of his forcible subjection to the noble and his inability to take physical revenge owing to his own impotence.²⁶ Against Reginster, Anderson, and Snelson, Loeb argues that Nietzsche portrays the priest as deceiving himself about his superiority: rather than admit his psychological slavishness the priest convinces himself that his weakness is "something virtuous and meritorious."²⁷ While I agree with Loeb that Reginster, Anderson, and Snelson fail to adequately account for the priest's slavish dispositions and attitudes, Loeb does not provide sufficient reason for abandoning the argument supporting the priest's nobility, particularly with respect to that figure's sense of superiority or pathos of distance.

Loeb's analysis is problematic because it insists that the priests come to understand themselves as purer and so morally superior to the noble *only after* the noble conquers them. Thus, according to Loeb, the priest's claims to purity and, in turn, moral superiority are not acts of self-affirmation and so should not be construed as expressions of the pathos of distance. Rather, Loeb argues, they are *reactions* to the noble's supremacy. The priest thinks he is morally superior to the noble because he abstains from "impure" noble practices and behaviors, but his physical weakness prevents him from replicating them. He thus deceives himself about his "superiority"

²⁰Avery Snelson, "The History, Origin, and Meaning of Nietzsche's Slave Revolt in Morality," *Inquiry* 60, nos. 1–2 (2017): 1–30.

²¹Reginster, "Resentment and Valuation," 286–88, and *Affirmation of Life*, 254–55; Anderson, "Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," 52; Snelson, "History, Origin, and Meaning," 24.

²²Reginster, "Resentment and Valuation," 289; Anderson, "Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," 30–31; Snelson, "History, Origin, and Meaning," 12.

²³Reginster, "Resentment and Valuation," 286; Anderson, "Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," 48–49; Snelson, "History, Origin, and Meaning," 8.

²⁴Paul S. Loeb, "The Priestly Slave Revolt in Morality," *Nietzsche-Studien* 47, no. 1 (2018): 100–139.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 116–28.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 127.

²⁷*Ibid.* Cf. also 109, 111, 123, and 137.

and thereby “lies his weakness into a merit.”²⁸ However, Loeb’s claim that the priest sees himself as morally superior *only after* the slave revolt makes sense only if we follow Loeb in reading Nietzsche’s analyses in *GM I 10–11* back into his analysis in *I 6*. But such an interpretive approach is problematic for two reasons.

The first is that Nietzsche clearly links the priest’s purity to the pathos of distance in *GM I 6*. “According to this rule, that the political concept of superiority always elicits itself in a psychological concept of superiority, it still at first makes no exception (although it gives rise to exceptions) when the highest caste is at the same time the *priestly* caste and consequently prefers a predicate for its collective-designation that recalls its priestly function.” The priest, like the noble, descends from the ruling caste and has also internalized the belief in his superiority over non-nobles (cf. *GM I 5*). Moreover, Nietzsche explicitly traces the priestly type’s branching off (*abzweigen*) and subsequent development (*fortentwickeln*) back to the priest’s way of life and its elevation of purity over all other values. “Here for example ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ face one another for the first time as insignia of the estates; and also here there later develops a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ in a sense that is no longer based on the estates” (*GM I 6*). The priest distinguishes himself from the noble through his “purity,” i.e., avoiding certain foods, fasting, sexual and social abstinence. The priest’s purity not only distinguishes him from the other castes but also establishes his superiority over them: his asceticism or self-denial reflects a superior capacity for self-control that inspires fear in the other castes, i.e., in the nobility and the vulgar. Indeed, Nietzsche argues that the internalization and heightening of the valuation opposites pure and impure led to gulfs being torn open between the castes “over which even an *Achilles* of free-thinking [*Achill der Freigeisterei*] will leap *not without shuddering*” (*GM I 6*; emphasis mine). Not even the most courageous of freethinkers could approach the priest without some sense of dread. While the noble is physically superior to the priest, the priest is mentally (and so *morally*) superior to the noble and *that* superiority gives him power over the noble.²⁹ Thus, contra Loeb, Nietzsche does not trace the priest’s purity back to his *physical* weakness but rather to the priest’s superior *mental* strength (*GM I 6*).

²⁸Ibid., 111.

²⁹Cf. *BGE 51* and Nietzsche’s Spring 1887 note from the *Nachlass*: “The priest occasionally the god himself, at the very least his proxy / In itself ascetic habits and practices are far from indicating an antinatural and existence-hostile [*daseinsfeindliche*] attitude: just as little degeneracy and disease / Self-overcoming, with severe and dreadful inventions: a means of having and demanding reverence of oneself: asceticism as means of *power* / The priest as representative of a suprahuman feeling of power, even as a good *player* of a god, which is his *calling* to represent, grasps instinctively after such means by which he attains a certain formidableness in control over himself” (*KSA 12: 7[5]*).

Loeb's analysis poses a second exegetical problem because the priestly aristocracies in *GM I 6* were clearly formed *prior to* the slave revolt in morality. The priest achieved supremacy by means of his own power and so would have had no reason to deceive himself about his superiority vis-à-vis the noble. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt (as Loeb would have us do) the sincerity of the priest's continuing belief in his own superiority after his subjugation to the noble. Furthermore, *I 6* outlines the process that led to the noble's eventual dominion over the priest. The priest's pursuit of purity and the habits thereby cultivated weaken and sicken him. The remedies he prescribes himself to combat his illness make him weaker and sicker still.

From the beginning there is something *unhealthy* [*Ungesundes*] in such priestly aristocracies and on account of the customs ruling there, ones turned away from action, partly brooding, partly emotionally explosive, whose consequences appear in priests of all times as almost unavoidable, inherent intestinal sickness and neurasthenia; however, what they themselves had invented as cures against this diseasedness [*Krankhaftigkeit*], —must one not say it, that in their aftereffects they ultimately proved still a hundred times more dangerous than the disease from which it was supposed to have redeemed them?

In articulating the vicious circle resulting from the priest's prioritization of purity, Nietzsche shows how the priest's way of life turns him against the basic presuppositions of life itself, against sensuality and desire, and thus from nature as such.

Nietzsche thus extends his analysis of the evolution within the noble caste, from its "branching off" into two subtypes (the "knightly noble" [*ritterlich-aristokratischen*] and the "priestly noble" [*priesterlich-vornehme*]) to how that development led in turn to a structural transformation within the political order of the noble caste. After the priest branches off from and, in turn, comes to see himself as superior to the noble, he becomes *weaker*. Consequently, the newly enfeebled priest is now subjugated to the noble. This power shift—and the presumption of superiority which it disrupts—becomes the catalyst for the resulting moral revolution.

For, despite his subjugation, the noble continues to see himself as the noble's superior. Despite his weakness, the priest's egoism remains intact, and he rages against his demotion (cf. *GM I 7*). Indeed, the priest's new sense of superiority vis-à-vis the noble motivates him to dominate the noble. The priest seeks to establish the supremacy of his "pure" way of life over the noble's, which the priest now views as "wretched" and "accursed" (*GM I 7*). Yet the priest faces a conundrum: the very way of life he seeks to affirm renders him powerless against the noble. Ressentiment becomes "creative" and "gives birth to [new] values" in response to *this* conundrum (*GM I 10*).

Nietzsche simply cannot trace the slave revolt back to the slave or "common man." In principle, the common person cannot experience

ressentiment towards his superior—the noble—because he does not understand himself as the noble’s equal. Consequently, he cannot feel indignation when he suffers from the noble’s predatory behavior. Such behavior is “justified” by the noble’s natural superiority. The order of things is such that the naturally inferior are subject to the naturally superior. At the very least, the common person cannot—according to Nietzsche’s own analysis—experience indignation to the same extent as the priest who is the noble’s equal (or, more precisely, former equal). As Nietzsche puts it: “The very great haters in world history have always been priests, also the most ingenious haters—compared with the spirit of priestly revenge all remaining spirit hardly comes into consideration” (*GM I* 7). The priests are the greatest haters because at one point they possessed power but lost it and continued to covet it despite becoming constitutionally incapable of recovering it. The intense hatred or resentment this creates inaugurates the slave revolt. While the common man eventually comes to experience resentment toward the noble, he must *learn* that (cf. *D* 188 and 189). He learns that through the teaching of the priest, namely, that we are all equal insofar as we are all equally capable of not acting on our instincts or drives (cf. also *AC* 43). The concept of free will makes the common man the noble’s equal and so capable of experiencing indignation or resentment at his predatory behavior.

The priest is psychologically neither entirely noble nor entirely slavish. Rather, the priest is a liminal figure. He is a noble type who nevertheless sides with the slave in order to overcome a shared enemy: the noble. Recognizing the priest’s liminal status resolves both the problem of the priest’s nobility and clarifies the nature of the priest’s revenge. Because the weak priest cannot directly confront the strong noble, he must do so indirectly, which explains, in part, why the priest adopts slavish values and dispositions, for instance, promoting qualities that alleviate existence for sufferers: “pity, the obliging, helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness” (*BGE* 260; cf. *GM I* 13–14). The priest weaponizes slave values, using them against the noble as a tool of moral censure, while at the same time employing them to enlist the slave, his fellow sufferer, in his campaign against the noble (cf. *AC* 51 and 58).

Something more radical drives the “slave revolt” than the mere desire to dominate others or to soothe one’s own psychological pain. Alongside these goals, the priest also wants to punish the noble *for violating his right to rule*. Viewed in this manner, slave morality represents an objection not only to the noble’s supremacy, but also to the natural necessity of different human types, to the inescapable difference between strong and weak, and to the unjust dispensation of strength and weakness authorizing that supremacy. The priest’s revenge thus aims not only at the noble—at supplanting the noble’s rule—but also at nature, insofar as it also seeks to correct and so transform nature by replacing a natural inequality between human beings with a conventional equality.

Ressentiment's Creative Turn: From the "Order of Nature" to the "Order of Will"

The priest's impotence prevents him from directly confronting the noble, so he must do it indirectly. He "revalues values." Nietzsche's discussion of the Jews in section 7 highlights this point.

It was the Jews, who against the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved by god) dared the inversion with an awe-inspiring consistency and held fast with teeth of the most abysmal hate (the hate of powerlessness), namely, "the miserable alone are the good, the poor, the powerless, the humble alone are the good, the sufferers, the needy, the ugly are also only the pious, only the blessed, for them alone is there bliss,—you by contrast, you noble ones and powerful ones, you are in all eternity the evil, the cruel, the wanton, the insatiable, the godless, you will also always be the unholy, the cursed, and damned!" (GM I 7; cf. GM I 10–11)

The priest's "reevaluation of values" is both vengeful and strategic; it allows him to discredit the natural traits that make the noble powerful. Scholars such as Max Scheler, Tracy Strong, and Peter Berkowitz emphasize this narrowly strategic or "slandering" function of slave morality.³⁰ While they correctly identify the ways in which slave morality's inversion discredits the noble, they miss its deeper function and aim. The "reevaluation of values" acts not simply to empower the priest at the noble's expense, nor to replace one arbitrary normative system with another. Instead, the priest's (unconscious) intent and (actual) effect is to overturn the cruel and capricious force that empowered the noble: nature itself.

The priest's powerlessness confronts him with a reality that not only conflicts with but also (and most importantly) offends his understanding of how the world *ought to be*. This misalignment between "is" and "ought" incites the priest's resentment (cf. GM I 10–11). His resentment becomes creative, seeking to bring these two competing perspectives into alignment by forcing the world to conform to his own expectations. That is, resentment subjugates the world *indirectly* by distorting perception of the world and by devaluing it.³¹ For example, it transforms "its object into a real caricature and monster" by "reseeing" the noble as "*the evil one*," that is, by turning the noble into a malevolent actor (GM I 10–11). In demonstrating resentment's need to reinterpret that which it finds unacceptable, Nietzsche reveals slave morality's chief prejudice, namely, the belief that nature can be other than what it is. The "recoloring" (*umfarben*), "reinterpreting"

³⁰Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, 31–34; Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration*, 237–45; Peter Berkowitz, *Ethics of an Immoralist*, 73–83.

³¹Heinrich Meier, *Was ist Nietzsches Zarathustra? Eine philosophische Auseinandersetzung* (Munich: Beck, 2017), 97.

(*umdeuten*), and “reseeing” (*umsehen*) by the “poisonous eye of resentment” facilitates the moral belief that the world can and, ultimately, should, be remade to fit resentment’s own expectations (*GM I 11*).

The priest’s revolutionary aim expresses itself in two ways. First, it redefines human subjectivity, inventing the notion of the neutral subject with free will (*GM I 13*). That establishes the noble, and by extension the human individual, as a “willing” entity. In this view, the human is not subject to nature (controlled by instinct or biology) but rather a being who can choose to exert his will (or not) as he pleases. Secondly, and even more radically, the priest’s teaching regarding the “just God” replaces the governing principle of the world itself. No longer is the world ultimately subject to nature; now even nature itself is subject to God (*GM I 14–16*). Understanding how these two parts—the neutral subject and the just God—function together reveals the punitive core of slave morality.

According to Nietzsche, the priest’s moral revolution is contingent on the invention of the human subject as free to act, or not act, as he wills. The subject is “neutral” in the sense that it connotes a consciousness that stands before and behind all its actions. Nietzsche defines this notion as the idea that “all effecting [is] conditioned by an effecting something, by a ‘subject’” (*GM I 13*). In perhaps his most radical critique of the notion of the neutral subject, Nietzsche relates this notion to the way in which the “common people” talk about lightning (*ibid.*). They “take the [flash] as a *doing*, as an effect of a subject called lightning.” In fact, Nietzsche points out, the two are one and the same. The priest’s invention is to interpret human activity in the same way—making a distinction between the “doer” and his “deed.” Just as the common people separate the lightning from its flash, the priest “separates strength from the expressions of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express strength—or not to” (*GM I 13*). This demand places “will” (or, more colloquially, “free will”) at the heart of the subject—fundamentally mistaking actions and desires as expressions of human choice rather than of human nature. The priest exploits this fallacy in order to justify his demand that strength “*not* express itself as strength, that it *not* be a desire to overwhelm, a desire to cast down, a desire to become lord, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs” (*ibid.*).³²

³²Aaron Ridley presents an alternative to my reading of the subject in *GM I* as a transcendental subject. According to him, Nietzsche identifies two distinct though related conceptions of free will: whereas *GM I* analyzes a *material* subject, *GM III* analyzes a *transcendental* subject. He argues that the invention of the transcendental subject represents a development in slave morality beyond what Nietzsche describes in the first treatise. See Ridley, *Nietzsche’s Conscience*, 26–37 and 54–57. However, Ridley’s reading is made problematic by the fact that the transcendental subject is present in *GM I* insofar as the revenge fantasy of the weak, i.e., the Last Judgment, presupposes it: eternal punishment requires an eternal soul (cf. *GM I 14–15*).

The priest's resentment demands that all men be in full control of their actions, and it is precisely this demand that gives slave morality its essentially punitive character. Resentment judges all transgressions as intentional and so blameworthy. In insisting on radical self-sovereignty, resentment calls for the punishment of those who violate its moral commands regardless of the circumstances surrounding the offense. And, because of its faith in intentionality and the neutral subject, resentment refuses to accept that anyone can be ignorant of his own intentions. Resentment is thus driven by blind judgment; it punishes regardless of any factors mitigating the crime. It finds its most general expression in the priest's condemnation of the noble as "evil." The priest does not simply condemn the noble's offenses, he also blames the noble for deliberately perpetrating those offenses—his intentionality is the source of his "evil."

The belief in the neutral subject with free will solves the problem of the noble's supremacy by equipping the priest with a mechanism through which he can hold the noble accountable for his deeds. But that solution is only partial. Belief in the neutral subject alone cannot solve the problem of the priest's impotence. Nietzsche's genealogy thus culminates in the insight that the chief instrument of the priest's revaluation, the "masterpiece of these black magic artists, who produce white, milk, and innocence out of every black ... their achievement in cunning ... their boldest, subtlest, most ingenious, most mendacious artists-manipulation [*Artisten-Griff*]" is the invention of the "just God" (*gerechte Gott*), namely, the omnipotent God of monotheism: a being whose absolute power grants him absolute authority over the whole of existence (*GM I 14*).

One of the most important features of the "just God" is, of course, His justice. The presence of such a God presumes a world ordered by rules and governed by laws—exactly the opposite of the chaos and arbitrariness of nature. But Nietzsche's analysis shows that His most important feature is not, in fact, justice but rather omnipotence. Only an omnipotent god is free to order and guide the world—and to reward those who adhere to His order and punish those who transgress it. The linked idea of omnipotence and divine retribution comforts the believer against "all the sufferings of the life," and enables him to live "'in faith,' 'in hope,' 'in love'" of an anticipated future in which the righteous and the wicked will receive their just

Furthermore, the first treatise no less than the third tells a "transcendental" story. In the first the slave is rewarded for his worldly suffering in the next with the spectacle of the noble's eternal suffering in hell; in the third he comes to understand himself as a "sinner" and therefore deserving of his own suffering. In both cases, though in different respects, the slave interprets "a whole mysterious machinery of salvation into suffering" (*GM II 7*). Nietzsche's double presentation of free will then reveals different features of the same phenomenon, not, as Ridley suggests, two distinct formulations of it.

deserts (GM I 14).³³ Nietzsche makes this point indirectly through his long citation from Tertullian's *De spectaculis*: the idea of the just God's omnipotence gives the Christian certainty that the wicked will be punished and enables him to imagine and exult in the various ways in which the damned will be consumed by eternal flames (GM I 15). The plausibility of the Christian conception of justice thus depends entirely on an all-powerful God who stands outside of the natural order and whose power enables Him to intervene in that order in whatever way He sees fit.

Slave Morality as Punishment

Nietzsche's analysis emphasizes the priest's desire to punish the noble for his wicked deeds. This suggests that the priest blames the noble for the use he makes of his strength and superiority, for what he sees as the noble's choice, for the noble's choosing to act on his nature. In this respect, the noble's intentionality is the source of his "evil" and so the target of the priest's blame. According to the priest's own understanding, the noble deserves to be punished for choosing to engage in immoral deeds, for acting contrary to what is "right" and "good" in a moral sense. However, Nietzsche offers—at the same time—a more trenchant critique of the priest's desire to blame and punish the noble. This deeper explanation suggests that, while the priest thinks he is blaming the noble, he is in fact blaming nature itself. Albeit unconsciously, the priest blames nature for its unjust distribution of strength and weakness. Thus, the first treatise shows that the priest invents slave morality not only to punish the noble for his deeds, but rather, and more fundamentally, to punish nature for its injustice.

Nietzsche points to this more basic view of punishment as a critique of nature in his concluding remarks on the first treatise in section 16. While recapitulating the first treatise's arguments, he points to a more fundamental opposition on which the conflict of values rests. The "slave revolt" reflects the deeper conflict between natural necessity and human will.

The two *opposed* values "good and bad" and "good and evil" have fought a terrible, millennia-long battle on earth; and just as certain as the second value has also long-since been dominant, it is still also not lacking in places where the battle continues to be fought undecided.... The symbol

³³Consider Nietzsche's Fall 1887 note from the *Nachlass*: "On the Psychology of Metaphysics / This world is seeming—consequently there is a true world. This world is conditional—consequently there is an absolute world. This world is contradictory—consequently there is a world without contradiction. This world is becoming—consequently there is a world of being. All wrong conclusions (blind trust in reason: if A is then its counterconcept B must also be) / Suffering inspires these conclusions: they are essentially *wishes* that there must be such a world; likewise the hatred of a world that makes suffer is expressed in the fact that another is imagined, a *valuable* one: the *ressentiment* of the metaphysician toward the world is creative here" (KSA 12: 8[2]).

of this battle, written in a script that remains legible across all human history, reads “Rome versus Judea, Judea versus Rome”:—until now there was no greater event than *this* battle, *this* problem, *this* mortally hostile contradiction.... The Romans to be sure were the strong ones and the noble ones, never before had anything stronger and nobler than them been seen, never even been dreamt of; every remnant of them, every inscription thrills, presupposing that one guesses *what* writes there. The Jews, conversely, were the priestly people of resentment par excellence, in whom dwelled a popular-moral inventiveness without equal.

The conflict of the first treatise finds its highest expression in the formulation “Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome.” On its face, this seems to restate the conflict between noble morality and slave morality. Yet, two things in this formulation suggest a problem that runs deeper than the conflict of value systems. First, Nietzsche describes the problem of “Rome versus Judea” as “legible across all human history” (*lesbar über alle Menschengeschichte hinweg*). This suggests the problem precedes and extends beyond the specific conflict between Romans and Jews. Second, “Rome versus Judea” as the most representative formulation of the problem is an explicitly political one insofar as it emphasizes the conflict between two competing “value systems” or ways of life. However, Nietzsche’s subsequent analysis, his analysis of how Rome and Judea “sensed” or “perceived” (*empfanden*) one another, suggests an alternative *philosophic* formulation of the problem. That formulation centers not on the conflict between values but on the conflict between natural necessity and human will. More specifically, it focuses on the conflict between the natural necessity of different human natures (strong and weak) and the human will to abolish that necessary difference. According to Nietzsche, “Rome sensed [*empfang*] in the Jew something like antinature itself [*die Widernatur selbst*], its antipodal monstrosity as it were; in Rome the Jew stood ‘convicted of hatred against the entire human race’: justifiably so, insofar as one has a right to link the salvation and future of the human race to the unconditional sovereignty of aristocratic values, of Roman values.” In other words, Roman values are natural insofar as they are aristocratic. In opposing those values, Judea threatened not only the preservation of the human species, but also its flourishing. Thus, Rome sensed in Judea *Widernatur* or “antinature” because it was fundamentally opposed to the natural order of rank codified in Rome’s values.

However, Nietzsche sharpens and further clarifies the character of the opposition between Rome’s and Judea’s values by quoting Tacitus’s *Annals*: “the Jew stood ‘convicted of hatred against the entire human race.’” Tacitus’s quote explicitly refers to Nero’s accusation that the Christians lit the Great Fire of Rome (64 CE). Nietzsche clearly alters that quote by attributing Nero’s blame to the Jews as opposed to the Christians. But, in altering Tacitus, he connects his claim about Jewish antinature to claims of Jewish “misanthropy” or hatred of human nature in the Hellenistic-Roman

period.³⁴ Accusations of Jewish “misanthropy” in that period derived in part from the Jewish practice of monotheism.³⁵ Jewish monotheism implicitly denied the authority and validity of the pagan gods and, in turn, the authority and validity of the “aristocratic” values supported by those gods. Thus, the Jews were regarded as “misanthropic” because their belief in the one true God challenged the existence of the Greek and Roman gods and, in turn, Greek and Roman aristocratic values and ways of life. By connecting Jewish “misanthropy” to Jewish monotheism and its denial of aristocratic values, Nietzsche’s Tacitus citation suggests that the priest’s enmity extends beyond the noble’s values (and the deeds they support) to human nature itself. In other words, this suggests that the Jewish religion denies the necessary hierarchy of natures on which noble values are based. Nietzsche’s observation thus—if only implicitly—traces the conflict of values back to the more fundamental conflict between nature and human will.

Nietzsche confirms this more basic conflict in his subsequent observation of what Judea sensed regarding Rome. “What the Jews by contrast sensed [*empfundene haben*] regarding Rome? One guesses it from a thousand indications; however, it suffices to recall once again the Johannine Apocalypse, that most immoderate of all written outbursts that revenge has on its conscience.” Of the myriad indicators revealing Judea’s sense regarding Rome, Nietzsche cites the “Johannine Apocalypse,” that is, the New Testament’s Revelation of John. That text documents in excruciating detail all the various punishments and tortures God will visit upon the sinners when he returns to judge them for their evil deeds (Rev. 9, 16, 18–21). Or, as Nietzsche would have it, when God returns to take vengeance on the strong for preying on the weak, that is, for acting according to their nature. Thus, what Judea sensed regarding Rome was *nature*, that is, the necessary difference between strong and weak natures, and what Judea felt towards the necessity of those two natures was hatred and vengefulness.

Nietzsche treated the “Johannine Apocalypse” earlier in sections 14 and 15. Thus, by asking the reader to “recall once again” his treatment of it, he encourages us to reflect once again on the priest’s appeal to an indirect power (i.e., God) as a means of vengeance or retribution. But he intends for us to return to that theme with an enlarged perspective on the object of the priest’s revenge. As I argue above, Nietzsche now shifts his analysis from the priest’s purely pragmatic struggle for dominance to his attempt to abolish the natural hierarchy of human types. In so doing, he expands his focus from the priest’s struggle for political supremacy to his struggle for

³⁴The editor of the Loeb Classic Library’s edition of *The Annals* notes that “Jewish ‘misanthropy’—which was proverbial—may have suggested the charge” (*The Annals of Tacitus*, ed. John Jackson [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937], 285n2).

³⁵See Jerry L. Daniel, “Anti-Semitism in the Hellenistic-Roman Period,” *Journal of Biblical Studies* 98, no. 1 (1979): 58–62.

metaphysical supremacy. Thus, Nietzsche encourages us to reread the “Johannine Apocalypse” in the light of his expansion. Consider, in this context, Revelation 21:1–9, which prophesies a fundamentally new order of things: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth are gone, and the sea is no more.” According to Revelation, God’s coming displaces the “first things.” The “first heaven” and the “first earth” will be replaced by a “new heaven” and a “new earth”—the “new Jerusalem.” More importantly, God’s arrival inverts the previous order. “Behold, I make all new.... I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.” In this new order power derives from faith rather than political or physical strength. “The victor will inherit these things, and I shall be his God, and he will be my son. To the cowards and the unbelievers and the corrupt and the murderers and the fornicators and the wizards and the idolaters and all who are false, their portion shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”³⁶ Those who in the previous order may have been weak will now be given eternal life without sorrow, lamentation, or pain. The unbelievers, regardless of their earthly power, will face eternal punishment in hell.

Considered in the light of Nietzsche’s expanded analysis, the prophesy of Revelation can be interpreted as a refutation of a natural order of rank. For any such order would be entirely dependent on the will of God and on His will alone. He has the power to “make all new.” Thus, on Nietzsche’s analysis, Rome “sensed in the Jew something like antinature itself, its antipodal monstrosity as it were” because the omnipotent God of monotheism is—in principle—antithetical to any natural order of rank. For the monotheist, no power (natural or otherwise) can supersede God’s own ranking. His will alone establishes the “victors” and the damned. Nietzsche’s analysis thereby points to a fundamental incompatibility between the idea of nature on the one hand and the idea of an omnipotent will on the other. Within the framework of monotheism, the two cannot coexist: the order of the world is entirely determined by God’s will. Thus, to posit omnipotent will is to deny nature and natural order.

At the same time, the expansion of Nietzsche’s analysis from political to metaphysical supremacy is accompanied by an expansion in his analysis of the priest’s demand for retribution. The more fundamental conflict between nature and will suggests that slave morality aims not only at punishing the noble for his wicked deeds, but also at punishing nature for its unfair because unequal dispensation of strength and weakness, superiority and inferiority. While the priest may not be entirely conscious of his bias against nature, the terms he uses to distinguish himself from the noble (e.g., pure/impure, holy/unholy) erect a metric that aligns with the order of will over and against the order of nature. The appeal to purity or holiness is a function

³⁶Translation from *The Four Gospels and the Revelation*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Dorsett, 1979), 284–85.

of the priest's sickly nature or morbidity (*Krankhaftigkeit*) (*GM I 6*). As Nietzsche puts it: "From the beginning [*von Anfang an*] there is something *unhealthy* [*Ungesundes*] in such priestly aristocracies" (*ibid.*). The priest attempts to cure his morbidity by avoiding whatever aggravates it. Nietzsche lists as examples restrictive dietary forms, fasting, sexual abstinence, self-isolation. He then adds to that list "the entire antisensual, lazy- and refined-making metaphysics of the priest ... and the ultimately, only too understandable general weariness with its radical cure [*Radikalkur*], *nothingness* (or God ...)" (*ibid.*). Nietzsche's list escalates from those cures which treat the physical symptoms of the priest's physical morbidity (different forms abstinence) to those which treat his spiritual morbidity (antisensual metaphysics and God). It thus moves from the denial of the body, to the denial of the self, to the "radical cure"—the denial of the world itself. What the priest seeks to overcome through his "cures" is his morbid or sickly nature. Furthermore, Nietzsche explicitly states that the most extreme version of that attempt expresses itself in the idea of nothingness or God. Nothingness or God represents the highest form of purity insofar as each represents the radical opposite or denial of nature. In this respect, the priest's pursuit of purity, which is to say his longing for "nothingness" or "God," is the latent expression of his deep antipathy toward nature.

Slave morality "punishes" nature in two fundamental ways. First, it strips what is naturally higher of its superior status. It uses conventional means to make the naturally superior noble subordinate to the naturally inferior priest. One of the chief doctrinal elements of slave morality is, as we have seen, the belief in the neutral subject with free choice, which teaches that the neutral subject can do anything and so can be held responsible for everything. It thereby denies natural differences between human beings with respect to their instincts and drives as well as their innate capabilities and powers. Belief in free will challenges such differences insofar as it denies that our nature determines or explains our actions. We are all equal in the eyes of slave morality because we are all equally free not to act on our natural desires and inclinations.

By positing this equality of neutral subjectivity, slave morality seeks to deny the natural order of rank that authorizes the unequal treatment of unequal natures. The priest thus tries to overcome the problem of natural inequality through inculcating a "will to equality" (*Z II 4–6*). By advocating justice as equality, slave morality aims to abolish any and all differences between higher and lower natures. The "will to equality" is thus, for Nietzsche, a "will to lowering, to debasement, to leveling, to the downward and evening-ward of man" (*GM I 16*). The priest's justice is a convention that seeks to remedy nature's stinginess, its unfair dispensation of superiority and inferiority. It does so through the artifice of moral equality, the teaching that we are all equal because we are all equally responsible for our own actions. In turn, the notion of moral equality helps establish his superiority

over the noble; it is a prerequisite for the priest's domination insofar as it justifies his condemnation of the noble as "evil" because of his predatory actions.

The effects of slave morality on the noble are—as Nietzsche portrays them—catastrophic. Slave morality harms the noble both psychologically and physiologically. Morality tames the noble, makes him less harmful, and, in so doing, crushes him in spirit and body. It "deforms," "reduces," "atrophies," and "poisons" him (*GM* I 11; cf. 9, 12, and 16; II 22; III 14, 21–22). *That* is his punishment.

Slave morality does more than punish the noble; it "punishes" nature itself by depriving it of its sovereignty. As I argued above, the central concept in slave morality, the concept that grounds both its values of meekness and its belief in the neutral subject, is the concept of the just God. The just God is the omnipotent God of monotheism, the very idea of which entails the downgrading of nature's sovereign status. The invention of the omnipotent God of monotheism ushers in a new order of things. His omnipotence generates an order that is outside of or beyond nature and that subsumes nature. The "just God" punishes nature by subordinating it to a "higher" purpose, downgrading nature's status to that of an instrument of salvation (*GM* I 14–15; cf. *AC* 25–26). According to the moral world order, subordination and degradation are the price that nature must pay for bringing into being a natural order of inequality and so for contravening convention.

Conclusion

By focusing on slave morality's punitive aims, we are better able to identify what Nietzsche considers to be one of morality's core features, namely, its demand for change, even when the change it seeks is impossible. The first treatise presents the demand for morality as the expression of a particular human type—the priest or man of resentment—who is deeply dissatisfied with the world as it is and who, in turn, seeks to alter the world to make it fit his own needs. Unable to bring about that change himself, the priest must appeal to an indirect power capable of enacting it for him. By appealing to the omnipotent God of Christianity, the priest attempts to replace the natural or necessary order with an order of will.

The analysis of ontological revenge in the first treatise clarifies not only the true scope of Nietzsche's critique of morality but also, and more importantly, its purpose. For it reveals that his critique of morality is motivated not, or at least not primarily, by practical concerns but rather by theoretical ones. He is concerned less with rectifying the topsy-turvy political order brought about by slave morality and more with remedying the way in which that morality distorts our perception of the world. For in framing morality as punishment, Nietzsche ultimately shows how morality deceives both slave and master, weak and strong, into believing that God (as the apotheosis of man's own will) can alter the necessary character of the world. This shows the ways in

which morality leads the human being to unwittingly distort the world, to see how it *ought to be* rather than letting it be what it *is*. By calling attention to the ways in which morality fits the world to the human being's own needs and desires, Nietzsche, in turn, shows it to be a barrier to knowledge for all men—even, and perhaps particularly, for the philosopher. In so doing, he points the reader back to the problem with which the *Genealogy* began, namely to the problem of self-knowledge and the knowers who “remain of necessity unknown to themselves.”