Critique of Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals

**Critique of Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals**.

Friedrich Nietzsche is one of the most iconic philosophers, and his work *On the Genealogy of Morals* is regarded as one of the most significant ethical works. This treatise consists of three essays, namely Good and Evil, Guilt, and What is the meaning of ascetic ideals. This exposition will involve the critique of the first essay.

In the first essay, Nietzsche construes two historical meanings of good; one which is natural and more historical and the other which arises from the original term. According to him, good comes from a sense of feeling that a person feels for himself/herself. For instance, a Roman emperor may look at the mirror and feel proud of himself. Nevertheless, good is a naïve and simplistic view of contemporary tastes and its emphasis on aesthetics, excellence, dominion, and status, displays self-centeredness and bigotry. Indeed, naivety arises in the sense that the term may be having other interpretations. This is the basis of Nietzsche’s contention in the first essay and puts it rather uncharacteristically and forthrightly saying, “With regard to moral genealogy, this seems to be a fundamental insight (4).” Nietzsche goes on to contrast between Master morality and slave morality. The former was created by the healthy, free people who see their happiness as the epitome of goodness. Contrastingly, they perceived those who were weak and enslaved as undesirable due to their status. The slaves who were oppressed and shunned by the affluent master called the slavers as evil and labeled themselves as good.

Therefore, on the one hand, there is the first meaning of good which comes from the elite class and second meaning of good which arises from the first and is a form of mirrored perception of oneself. When the person from the elite class looks himself/herself at the mirror, he/she develops a sense of pride which is connected to physical beauty, power, and health. Those who are ruled are, on their part, powerless and must remain subservient to the rulers. The term good is now inverted to refer to evilness and primarily describes subjugation of slaves and forceful usage of power. Christianity having arisen from Judaism is paradigmatic of this inversion, and the doctrines it teaches vindicate this view.

Granted then, the first weakness in Nietzsche’s work is that it could easily be used by Nazis and Fascists to support their ideologies and immoral actions. Indeed, one race can easily be interpreted as superior purely by being hegemonic. The Romans may, for instance, be construed to be superior to the Jews since they dominated them for a long period. In the same token, European powers may be described as superior since they colonized African nations for more than five decades. Nietzsche’s first essay, therefore, helps to vindicate racial superiority ideologies promoted by groups such as Ku Klux Klan and Nazis. Nietzsche is also perceivably racist in spite of the apparent prescriptive nature of the work. Certainly, his constant allusion of different races and racial conflicts in his genealogy shows that he, in fact, recognizes some races as inferior to others. The first essay thus becomes blatantly supercilious to marginalized groups in the society making lose its definitive moral role.

Secondly, Nietzsche’s rendition of Judaism is fallacious. The Judaic teachings in the old testament have much similarity with the warriors of yore than the “slave morality” in which Nietzsche portrays. For instance, consider King Solomon, and Psalms which were allegedly written by Solomon and David, or the fictional story of the peregrine Jews who were led by Joshua towards the “Promised land.” Put it differently, Judaism has a huge similarity with Christianity, which arose long after Judaism had been established.

Nietzsche writes that “About the time of the Thirty Years War, late enough, therefore, this meaning changed to the one now customary (50).” That the German philosopher puts slave uprisings in ethical constructs late shows that he deliberately discriminates his audience. It is alarming to the contemporary moralist and Nietzsche aficionado that the passage is not referring to world history but in fact only talks about German history. Yet, throughout the genealogy, the slave uprisings in morality that he talks about, the reference is always about Romans versus Jews but not Germans versus Jews. The entire conception fits well: “As the Romans overtook the Jewish promised land (55).” The impotence of the Hebrews resulted in ressentiment, a French word which Nietzsche uses to describe suppressed emotion. In other words, the Jews developed hateful feelings against the Romans for taking their “promised land.” The ensuing psychological tempestuousness among the Hebrews led to factionalism and eventually to the creation of Christianity.

Thence, Nietzsche’s comparison of Master morality and slave morality, which forms the basis of the first essay is built on historically inaccurate facts. Correctly, does *Genealogy of Morals* accurately apply Germany’s history? His deliberate misinterpretation of historical facts is suspicious. As a German, he was, probably, trying to be nationalistic by claiming the moral high road for his compatriots. Nevertheless, it becomes incumbent upon the reader to identify these inconsistencies in the treatise for a meaningful acquisition of the knowledge provided.