Nietzsche and slave morality

Conventional (Christian) morality

Values like tolerance, equality, gentleness, non-violence are considered to be **noble**.

e.g. "blessed are the meek…", "turn the other cheek…"

Attitudes like greed, individuality, competition, desire for power are seen as **bad**

Nietzsche's genealogy of Christian Morality

Genealogy – criticising an idea by exposing its historical origins

Ancient times **(pre-moral)**

Two classes existed – Masters and Slaves

Master

Power, wealth, physical freedom, indulgence of appetites → **GOOD (TO BE)**

Slave

No power, no wealth, no physical freedom, no means of indulging appetites → **BAD (TO BE)**

The slaves tried to rebel, but failed.
Instead, they pretended that they didn't want what the master had.

Wealth, power, freedom, indulgence of appetite are all bad things. "We may be slaves, but at lest we're righteous/going to heaven"

After the inversion

Master

Power, wealth, physical freedom, indulgence of appetites → **MORALLY BAD**

Slave

No power, no wealth, no physical freedom, no means of indulging appetites → **MORALLY GOOD**

Nietzsche and conventional morality

After all, "love to our neighbour" is always a secondary matter, partly conventional and arbitrarily manifested in relation to our FEAR OF OUR NEIGHBOUR. After the fabric of society seems on the whole established and secured against external dangers, it is this fear of our neighbour which again creates new perspectives of moral valuation. Certain strong and dangerous instincts, such as the love of enterprise, foolhardiness, revengefulness, astuteness, rapacity, and love of power, which up till then had not only to be honoured from the point of view of general utility--under other names, of course, than those here given--but had to be fostered and cultivated (because they were perpetually required in the common danger against the common enemies), are now felt in their dangerousness to be doubly strong--when the outlets for them are lacking--and are gradually branded as immoral and given over to calumny. The contrary instincts and inclinations now attain to moral honour, the gregarious instinct gradually draws its conclusions. How much or how little dangerousness to the community or to equality is contained in an opinion, a condition, an emotion, a disposition, or an endowment--that is now the moral perspective, here again fear is the mother of morals. It is by the loftiest and strongest instincts, when they break out passionately and carry the individual far above and beyond the average, and the low level of the gregarious conscience, that the self-reliance of the community is destroyed, its belief in itself, its backbone, as it were, breaks, consequently these very instincts will be most branded and defamed. The lofty independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, and even the cogent reason, are felt to be dangers, everything that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbour, is henceforth called EVIL, the tolerant, unassuming, self-adapting, self-equalizing disposition, the MEDIOCRITY of desires, attains to moral distinction and honour. Finally, under very peaceful circumstances, there is always less opportunity and necessity for training the feelings to severity and rigour, and now every form of severity, even in justice, begins to disturb the conscience, a lofty and rigorous nobleness and self-responsibility almost offends, and awakens distrust, "the lamb," and still more "the sheep," wins respect.

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)

Problems with Nietzsche's account

- Aren't the slaves actually strong? If they managed to change the way that an entire culture views morality, then surely this quite a big achievement.

- Why is Christian morality such a "bad" morality? If there are no objective values then it is impossible to condemn this form of morality.

- Does Nietzsche commit the "Genetic Fallacy"?

The Genetic Fallacy

The **genetic fallacy** is a fallacy of irrelevance where a conclusion is suggested based solely on something or someone's origin rather than its current meaning or context. This overlooks any difference to be found in the present situation, typically transferring the positive or negative esteem from the earlier context.

From *Attacking Faulty Reasoning* by T. Edward Damer, Third Edition p. 36:

" "You're not going to wear a wedding ring, are you? Don't you know that the wedding ring originally symbolized ankle chains worn by women to prevent them from running away from their husbands? I would not have thought you would be a party to such a sexist practice." There may be reasons why people may not wish to wear wedding rings, but it would be logically inappropriate for a couple to reject the notion of exchanging wedding rings on the sole grounds of its alleged sexist origins. "

From *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies* by S. Morris Engel, Fifth Edition, pg. 196:

" "America will never settle down, look at the rabble-rousers who founded it." "

Nietzsche and the Genetic Fallacy

- Is Nietzsche guilty of committing such a fallacy?

- Is conventional morality flawed simply because of its origins?

- Does the fact that Christian morality began as a "slave" morality mean that it is not correct or valid now?

- How might Nietzsche respond to these criticisms?