

1. Master and Slave Moralities

Augustine's ideal of the self is one in which we worship God. He relies upon our natural desires that have objects which are not necessarily religious. But to get us to change the objects of our desires, Augustine assumes that we are motivated by a maximizing self-interest and that the objects of our desires can be evaluated on a standard whose maximum is identical to God.

Mencius' ideal is that human nature is good. He admits that our natural desires range from the love life and fear of death – which are bad desires – and the so-called four “beginnings” – which are good desires. With this mixed bag of natural desires, if we act according to our human nature which comprises both our sense experience and our reason, we will act only upon the good desires.

Both feel the need to deny certain natural desires, while reason selects other desires. On this basis, one's natural desires are labeled as moral or immoral on the basis of certain reasons. Augustine's specific reason is simply that the objects of every desire can be rationally evaluated on a scale whose maximum value is God. Mencius' claims that using reason will lead us follow desires which do not have material things as objects. To this extent, both are examples of what Nietzsche calls **master morality**. It is a discriminating system by which certain desires are labeled good and other bad. This is despite the fact that at bottom all of these desires are natural. For Nietzsche, master moralities are exhibited in

... an aristocratic society ... that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other.
(257)

Once this type of moral system has begun, it is difficult to change because

The moral discrimination of values has originated ... among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight ...
(260)

But also when we look at the content of the moral codes of these moral systems, both are also examples of **slave morality**:

... those qualities are brought out ... which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored – for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility. (260)

Refraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation and placing one's will on a par with that of someone else ... as soon as this principle is extended, and possibly even

accepted as the *fundamental principle of society*, it immediately proves to be what it really is – a will to the *denial* of life – a principle of disintegration and decay. (259)

2. A New Type of Naturalism.

Both Augustine and Mencius begin with a type of moral naturalism whereby one's natural desires are good. However, what they valorize in our desires is not the "complete" desire. While Augustine begins by accepting our natural desires for wealth, power, and pleasure, he valorizes desires only when they have the proper object (God). Likewise, Mencius begins with an analogy that concludes that our human nature is naturally good as long as we follow our desires. However, he valorizes desires only when they are guided by reason to non-material objects.

One way of summarizing these views is in terms of two variables. The first concerns our natural desires. Both Augustine and Mencius limit what is moral to what we naturally desire. To this extent, they do not differ from Nietzsche. However, they go further to discriminate between the objects of these natural desires and offer reasons to further delimit what is moral to only certain objects of our natural desires. Let's call this **a priori naturalism** as reason is used to discriminate between our natural desires before they are used. These moral conclusions can then be applied to any and all human situations. Nietzsche's view is an **a posteriori naturalism** as his criterion for valorizing desires are those which lead to the overall health of a person. This view is a kind of relativism because the healthiness of a desire depends other desires and the environment of the person.

Developing the ideas from the previous quote, Nietzsche claims that we need to begin with our natural desires or what he refers to as the will to power.

...life is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation ... Exploitation ... belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function, it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life. (259)

One needs to be careful in interpreting Nietzsche's comments here. His description here does not apply to the intentions with which one acts, but only to the effect of one's desires. The best analogy is suggested by his reference to "sipo matador" vine (258). Imagine a thriving forest comprised of healthy vegetation. In this ecosystem, each plant "exploits" its environment for nutrition and turns it into growth. This is a basic organic function. It is the overall health of the ecosystem which is valued. This is accomplished without plants helping one another – see above first quote from 259 – but plants may "adapt" to one another in some form of symbiosis – as their strengths may complement each other. Plants that are more successful than others grow and survive, while those that are not wither and die. In other words, what is weaker or alien is overpowered.

At this point, Nietzsche does not discriminate amongst our desires. His description is intended to cover all of our desires. His focus is not on the object of desire, but rather on the drive or push

for the satisfaction of desires, regardless of what objects we believe will satisfy a desire. His term for this drive or push is to “exploit.” Nietzsche’s ideal is expressed in his notion of the noble man. As noted above, Nietzsche differs from both Augustine and Mencius in how he valorizes certain desires over others. His criterion is very simple: health.

The noble type of man experiences *itself* as determining values; ... it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is *value creating*. ... In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power. (260)

To the question of morality, Nietzsche’s naturalism “creates” moral values. Those desires that are the strongest and most life preserving form the basis of actions that are then valued. This is embodied in what Nietzsche calls the noble man. Although an explicit appeal to health does not appear in this passage or in any other in our text, other passages in Nietzsche bear this out. Recall that in an ecosystem, plants thrive depending upon their abilities to grow with available nutrients. Healthy plants are relative to an ecosystem. The noble type is analogous to a healthy and thriving plant. The determination of which desires are important and their appropriate objects can be determined only in a healthy and thriving person. Call this an ideal of a healthy happy person. This healthy and happy ideal is not a momentary happiness determined by satisfying those desires which allow us to thrive in an environment and relative to other desires may vary.