

Nietzsche, GM I & II

Jan. 21, 2014

PHIL 449

Start with a question about Treatise I, section 9:

N says at the end that he has much to be silent about. What and why?

“free spirit” is the everyday person who is created by the Enlightenment, gotten rid of prevailing dogmas like religion

-- but hasn't gotten rid of the morality that has developed from religion

Like parable of madman: have to be silent b/c what N has said isn't working—the “free spirit” can't really hear it.

The “free spirit” has missed the point entirely, N has nothing to say to this person

-- free spirit is asking for a response from N whether the slaves have achieved victory; N is silent because it's not a matter of victory, but will to power continually moving; this is a continual process without a clear end point

-- free spirit is just describing what has happened, not thinking about what we should do now; history is not binding, don't have to stay with what has happened, so description of it isn't really relevant

“free spirit” is not really free; still holds to view of morality as commandments from outside rather than legislating for self.

N may be silent because he agrees with some of what the free spirit is saying in the sense that this process has to have happened for us to move forward into what N is asking us to do now.

-- this is not a complete condemnation of the free spirit's view

Presentation on the “sovereign individual” in Treatise II

1. What defines the SI?

a. Owen's view

-- SI not only follows the letter of the promise, but also the spirit: can make promises that don't have all their conditions stated clearly when the promise is made (where you can't be absolutely certain ahead of time what would count as fulfilling that promise)

-- in this sense, the SI can make promises that the common person can't

b. Presenter's view

(i). disagree with Owen that SI has to make those kinds of promises to be unique from other people
-- promise of SI is unique not just because of the nature of the promise itself but also b/c of the kind of person the SI is

(ii). promises of the common people have value b/c of the custom of promising and the social censure one would experience if one broke it

-- promises of SI is valuable b/c of SI's character: can promise as an individual, not because owe a debt to society

(iii). support for this

- SI is free from morality of custom, "autonomous and supermoral"
- I.e., SI is free in the sense of not being bound by conventional morality
- same action can differ in terms of being moral or supermoral depending on what kind of agent does it

2. The expertise of the SI

a. Owen's view

- unlike Kant's view, N thinks morality can't be considered a set of universal rules outside of all contexts, but has to take context into account
- SI requires not just learning a set of rules but knowing when & how to apply them, or bend or break them if necessary

b. presenter's view

- flesh Owen's view out further by reference to Confucius, who talks about applying rules in a context-sensitive way
- (i). C did preach strict adherence to rules and rituals on one hand
- (ii). but also emphasized "sympathetic understanding", a Chinese analogue to golden rule
 - and clearly there are situations where adhering to rules would conflict with what's required by sympathetic understanding
- (iii). the right way to approach rules: as "best practices" that one has to adapt to particular circumstances, using one's expert judgment

3. Question

Does N believe we as individuals can learn to become SI, or must this learning take place on the level of cultural evolution (i.e., must older people die and be replaced by younger people untainted by Christianity)? Why do you think so?

Discussion of this question

- Cultural evolution is required, but there may be some individual strategies possible
 - like turning the bad conscience against attempts to quash the instincts (GM II.24)
- Why would N be writing if he thought the only way for us to change would be through a long historical process?
- The Sovereign Individual may be able to learn and change from experiencing new circumstances, with their capacity for memory—they have a deep sense of memory and understanding that is different from just memorizing codified rules or precepts, but knowing how to apply these

- they have an “internal memory” as opposed to an “external memory” in something like written codes, laws
- Change does seem to come over time in that N says the SI is the product of a long history, a “late fruit” (II.3)
- [Christina, later:] Perhaps we can think of N writing at a time when he thinks the historical and cultural conditions have formed us so that we’re close to being able to change. Maybe he thinks we don’t have to wait that much longer, that we’re on the cusp of this change being possible. Then perhaps this text is meant to contribute to the other conditions that have shaped us to help push us over the edge towards being able to change enough to become sovereign individuals. (This is a draft of a thought; I’m not certain it works.)

Presentation on Will to Power and Owen’s claim that the feeling of power should track “real” power

Starts off with a clip from *The Princess Bride* film: Wesley is on a pain machine, the other guy (name?) is testing it out, studying pain and wants to get information on how it makes one feel. Asks Wesley to be completely candid about how it makes him feel when he gets one year of life sucked out of him.

Why brought this up

When N begins Treatise II, there is a focus on pain, suggesting that it is foundational for many aspects of morality.

In this presentation want also to relate discussion of pain to will to power

Will to power

- Essential to human beings
- Need not be exercised in physical way; slaves have imaginary revenge & still feel that exercising will to power

Main question here is about the link between feeling of will to power and real power, according to Owen (35-36): Why is the self-reflexive experience of power dependent on their actually being power?

How does N characterize WTP in Treatise II?

- focus on pain: Section 3 of Treatise II—lots of nasty examples of punishment
- pain subjected to debtor by creditor necessitates a spectator; public exercise of WTP increases power of creditors
- creditors can exercise WTP against debtors while still inside social straightjacket of society; this is how they can express their instincts

Later, exercise of WTP turns against self

- when in the social straightjacket of society (II.16) we can’t exercise natural instincts of will to power outward, so turn inward
- we turn the privilege of creditor against ourselves and cause ourselves pain
- develop gods not only as spectators to our pain, but also as the ultimate creditors—we have a debt we can never repay

N seems to be contradicting Owen:

- don't actually have to *have* power to exercise WTP—e.g., the people who are powerless but exercising power upon themselves
- this suggests also that self-mastery is part of will to power
- why must both the feeling of power and actual power be linked in WTP?

To understand Owen, look at Section 16 of Treatise II

Being oppressed in regularity of custom: animal beats itself raw against the bars of imprisonment

- this is not truest expression of WTP, b/c WTP contains positive as well as negative aspects, not just a sense of controlling someone else like in *Princes Bride* clip
- we don't always think of controlling self as a matter of WTP
- N focuses also on the benefits of WTP as well as the consequences; believer in God reaps all the consequences and not the benefits
- that believer is not living up to full potential

Benefits of expressing WTP

Noble is more vigorous, healthy, etc., no guilt or *ressentiment*: characteristics that come from fulfilling the WTP

- get physical and psychological benefits

This is why the self-reflexive experience of power needs to track power, because if aren't able to really express your WTP then you won't get the benefits

Question: What do you think of this interpretation? Does it make sense?

Discussion of this presentation

Tracking of “real power” can link to what the sovereign individual can do—keep promises over contingency and fate. Nietzsche really means this, that no matter what the situation is, the sovereign individual *will* actually keep their promise, or else not sovereign individual.

Hard to know exactly what N means by “power,” and a lot rides on that.

We move back and forth in our discussion between “power” and “will to power”; maybe the latter is the ability to bring about a felt sense of agency. Can you bring about that sense of power within yourself, or does it come from outside of you?

Need to keep the idea that feeling of power tracks real power so we can actually measure degree of power of people or things like institutions, laws. If we just talk about the feeling of power then we can't distinguish between degrees of power.

If define power as overcoming resistance, then this can be subjective, but you can also genuinely realize that and really get an authentic feeling of power.

