Friedrich Nietzsche

Interpret Michael Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* with reference to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*

(Eli Edelson: Discussion of *The White Ribbon* and Nietzsche's "Second Essay")

1. Brief Summary of the Plot:

*The White Ribbon* is a film that takes place in a small village in the north of Germany in the years prior to World War I. Narrated by the School Teacher, the film essentially chronicles life in the village punctuated by strange, violent events. A hidden wire is placed that causes the doctor to have a riding accident; the barons son is kidnapped, caned, and hung upside down in a barn. Finally Karli, the mentally challenged child, is found severely beaten in the forest. As we witness these events affect the village, we also get glimpses into the various lives of the families. The authoritarian world of the Pastor, the disturbingly sexual home of the Doctor, the aloof existence of the baroness, the grief-stricken and angry tension between the farmer and his son, and so on. At the end of the film, the School Teacher slowly pieces together that it must be the children who are committing these acts; it is implied that more specifically it is the pastors children led by Klara. After confronting the Pastor with this discovery, the Pastor goes into utter denial and the topic in never broached again. The School Teacher leaves to fight in World War I at the end of the film.

2. Brief summary of Nietzsche's idea on the (detrimental) effects of morality to health (conscience, guilt in Second Essay) and on the relationship between moral values and social hierarchy:

According to Nietzsche, the ultimate and negative effect of morality is that man becomes successfully convinced of his own absolute worthlessness. He specifically relates this effect to the constructed morality of Christianity, which he calls the most terrible sickness ever to rage in man (64). This is one of the ultimate conclusions of Nietzsche's Second Essay; he arrives at this conclusion through some complex logic which I will try to summarize in a few steps:

1) **Pre-society:** some select men are able to master the will's memory and thus form their own standard of values based on promises (36-37). Promises lead to morality of customs and eventually the construct of the conscience is formed.

2) **Initial Society:** the creditor and the debtor transform into many aspects of society. But at its essence, the community is formed by the creditors, and the debtors are punished or exiled (46-47).

3) **Developing Society:** the aspects of the creditor-debtor relationship start to manifest. The penal system is formed for the purpose of making criminals feel internal guilt. This is not accurate, Nietzsche argues instead that punishment is a way to control ressentiment, every purpose and use for [punishment] is just a sign that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful (51). There is the also the existence of the present generation and their forebears (60), in which the present generation owes the debt of their existence to the sacrifices of past generations.

4) **Current Society:** The generational debt eventually transforms into religious debt: ancestors become gods and the gods eventually become the Christian God. The Christian God is the maximal creditor (62) as we are born in the debt of sin. This stage brings us back to the ultimate conclusion of Nietzsche's essay: morality, of religion and penal codes, renders men utterly worthless.

In addition to worthlessness, man turned his instincts inwards and thus impatiently ripped himself apart as a result of morality and conscience. If worthlessness is the conclusion to religion, than mans hatred of man is the conclusion to the penal system.

3. Speculative suggestion how different characters, situations, or plot features of the film could be used to illustrate #2:

Throughout his Second Essay, Nietzsche outlines many social manifestations of the creditor and the debtor. He believes this relationship to be the source of all morality in society. There are three manifestations which I believe are very well represented in *The White Ribbon*. First, the baron and the villagers; this is the most concrete representation of creditor and debtor because it has a relationship based purely on wealth. Second and perhaps most important, the relationship between the parents and their children, the generational difference which Nietzsche labels present generation and their forebears (60). Nietzsche actually discusses this generational difference as a precursor the third relationship represented in the film, between man and God. Nietzsche describes the Christian God as a maximal creditor, one to whom we are all born to in the debt of sin (62).

I believe that the narrative force behind the film, that of the strange acts of violence, is really just an ultimate manifestation of ressentiment. The parents enforce an oppressive regime of morality over their children and so the children react with an anti-ethos of violence. If the parents employ violence for their own system of morality, the children react with a violence that has absolutely no purpose. Karl is perhaps the most innocent character in the film and yet he received the most extreme punishment. Nietzsche stated, [pain] needed, in this connection, some kind of sublimation and subtilization, it had to be transformed into the imaginative and spiritual (44). By this he means, suffering required a purpose, an ends that made it acceptable. The childrens ressentiment is that of suffering with absolutely no purpose, other than to undermine the morality imposed on them.

Nietzsche ends his essay with a curious passage describing the advent of another sort of spiritstrengthened by wars and victories, for whom conquest &amp; even pain have actually become a necessity (66). The film could be analyzing this violent generation of children to the lost generation of WWI. Both groups seem to be committing unforgivable acts of violence for seemingly no ethos whatsoever.

Please reconstruct Nietzsche's critique of the Sermon on the Mount

(Lily Kubota, Jason Wang)

Comment:

Wills Hines

Nietzsche's side of the debate--claiming that violence IS inherent in politics. (Recap of debate in class between Sam (Neitzsche) and Martin Luther King (Corey)).

Introduction

Politics without violence is impossible. Its true! So, how did I come up with this conclusion? I will have to go back to my fundamental beliefs in order to explain this to you.

Authority
The meaning of history is the higher man! A political superiority is naturally created by a psychological superiority! What I should be able to do, the weak should never be able to do. Why? Well, we want society to progress, dont we?

Progression

But, violence and authority is needed for progression! Civilized society is inherently a series of competitions in which the strong outlast the weak. While the strong may change with every imposition, these successions are what drive progression! What is needed for progression is an aggressive man. the active, aggressive, overreaching man is still a hundred paces nearer to justice than the passive man who reacts & the aggressive person, as the stronger, nobler man, has always had a clearer eye, a better conscience on his side. It is only from the hatred of the aggressive man that love is able to be formed. Take the example of the Jews. From the trunk of the tree of revenge and hatred, jewish hatred, there grew something just as incomparable, a new love & the love grew out of the hatred.

Instincts

Man is naturally a beast of prey, and not a tame household pet. We cannot lose our fear of man, because we will also lose our love and respect for him. Why should we repress our natural instincts? You speak of the lambs that bear a grudge towards large birds of prey, but there is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off the little lambs. The strong are not at fault any more than the weak. Violence in the form of punishment has always had festive aspects throughout history, and life was more cheerful when human nature accepted who they really were. Weber agrees with me in his political argument when he says that passion is natural and necessary for politics, in fact, it is what politicians thrive on. By definition, politics is fighting for a share of power between groups of people, and this must be enforced through violence.

Law

To me, the law is not being used as a means in the fight for united power, but as a means against fighting in general, which makes the state a repressive instrument. Since man is inherently violent, the punishment from prisons etc. does not make conscience, but strengthens the feeling of alienation and the power to resist. Man is prone to cruelty, and the institution of custom has been oppressive, narrow and ripped man apart.

Weber believes in violence, though, even in the state, and says that physical violence has been successful in the monopoly of law. In his words, the only sure means of discrediting war for the foreseeable future would have been peace on the basis of the status quo & it would have been reduced to absurdity, which is not possible. What will now happen—once the phase of exhaustion has passed—is that peace, not war, will have been discredited, and this will be the result of absolute ethics.

We have both proven, though through different methods, then, that violence is inevitable in political matters.

-Sam Brown