morality and ethics

From the Glossary:

bad--

Generally taken as a broad concept that is the polar opposite of what is defined as "good" in each and every period of time V. GOOD- D.G. # As defined by the nobility - "the terms for 'good' all led me back to the same conceptual transformation - that everywhere, 'noble', 'aristocratic' in social terms is the basic concept from which, necessarily, 'good' in the sense of spiritually noble', 'aristocratic', of 'spiritually highminded', 'spiritually privileged' developed: a development that always runs parallel with that other one which ultimately transfers 'common', 'plebeian', 'low' into the concept 'bad'. (Nietzsche, GM, 13)

1. Racially structured - "the word designating the aristocracy and finally the good, noble, pure, was originally a blond person in contrast to the dark-skinned, dark-haired native inhabitants." (Nietzsche, GM, 14)
2. Reversal of order as initiated by the religious sectors - "If the highest caste is at the same time the clerical caste and therefore chooses a title for its overall description which calls its priesthood to mind, this does not yet constitute an exception to the rule that the concept of psychological superiority. This is an example of the first juxtaposition of 'pure' and 'impure' as signs of different estates; later 'good' and 'bad' develop in a direction which no longer refers to social standing." (Nietzsche, GM, 15) - Bjorn Li

categorical imperative

1. A certain duty that applies to all rational beings, deduced entirely a priori. A categorical imperative is an imperative that we follow not because it is good as a means to something else, but because it is good in itself.
   (Kant, Groundwork p. 25)
2. A procedure that allows to create a maxim for actions that one can act on, and at the same time will that it become a universal law, without creating a logical contradiction
   (Kant, Groundwork p. 30)

It is important to note that the requirement of non-contradiction is the most important here. On pages 30-32 of Groundwork, Kant gives different examples of how to interpret the categorical imperative. For example, in the case of the lying promise (case 1), the man decides that a lying promise would conflict with his duty not because he cannot imagine a world without promises, but because if he was in a world without promises, his act of the lying promise would be impossible - creating a contradiction.

Nietzsche argues against the existence and application of the categorical imperative. In fact, he goes beyond the definition of the categorical imperative and seeks to undermine the very idea of moral duty in civilization. For Nietzsche, morality is anything but a priori. Perhaps Kant and Nietzsche agree in that the imperative is not good as a means to something else, but Nietzsche would argue that it is an established duty not because it is "good in itself" but because it has been forced upon society by the "rights of the masters" (41).

Nietzsche, especially in his Second Essay in the Genealogy of Morality, tries to rebuild the origins of morality in society. At its essence, his conclusion is that some men were able to master the "will's memory" and thus gain advantage over others in society. These more powerful individuals were then able to establish their own "standard of values" (37) which they imposed on everyone else. As society progressed the relationship became one of creditors and debtors, in which the creditors imposed their morality on the rest of society. Nietzsche is accusing Kant of supporting and articulating this "standard of values" which has been enforced by the stronger half of society. He states, "and may we not add that this world has really never quite lost a certain odour of blood and torture? (not even with old Kant: the categorical imperative smells of cruelty...)?" (41). To Nietzsche, the categorical imperative is just the continuing assertion of the creditor's morality as some sort of ultimate, true morality. When indeed its effect is that of cruelty.

---E. Edelson 4.7.11

good

1. A statement of social rank applying to nobles or aristocrats whose opposite is "bad"

   "...’noble’, ‘aristocratic’ in social terms is the basic concept from which, necessarily, ‘good’ in the sense of ‘spiritually noble’, ‘aristocratic’, ‘spiritually privileged’ developed that always runs parallel with...the concept ‘bad’” [Nietzsche 13]

   In particular, this is the uncorrupted form of “good”, its original form. In addition, “good” or “bad” have no positive or negative implications. They are statements of status.

   ---Jason Wang 5/30/11

To illustrate this particular point, Nietzsche uses the metaphor of the lambs and hawks: "And if the lambs say to each other, ‘These birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey and most like its opposite, a lamb - is good, isn’t he?’ then there is no objection to setting up of an ideal ... It is just absurd to ask strength not to express itself as strength, not to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master” (GOM 26). This passage mainly serves to illustrate how both ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are terms constructed by those who are weaker.

2. A judgement of morality applying to the suffering, poor, powerless, lowly, etc. whose opposite is "evil"

   "It was the Jews who, rejecting the aristocratic equations (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed) ventured...to bring about a reversal and held it in hatred [from] the powerless, saying: ‘Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel...damned!” [Nietzsche 17]

   This definition of “good” reverses the previous definition found above. Furthermore, this conception of “good” is now intertwined with Christianity and morality. As a result, “good” becomes a judgment of morality; The "good" are given "salvation", while the "bad" are damned.

   ---Jason Wang 5/30/11

MLK:

That which adheres to a moral code transcendant of the laws of any given society; for MLK, this moral code is determined by what is "God's Law" and what constitutes justice independent of any societal status quo.

ethics
a theory or system of moral values, a guiding philosophy to determine what is good and bad and [what constitutes as moral duty] great entry - note that the phrase in brackets may or may not be part of a system of ethical views d.g.

-Chris Chen

Weber introduces the idea of two kinds of ethics: ‘ethic of principled conviction’ (Gesinnung) or the ‘ethic of responsibility’

“There is a profound opposition between acting by the maxim of the ethic of conviction (putting it in religious terms: ‘The Christian does what is right and places the outcome in God's hands’), and acting by the maxim of the ethic of responsibility, which means that one must answer for the (foreseeable) consequences of one’s actions.” (Weber, Politics as a Vocation 359) The ethics of responsibility is described very similar to utilitarianism. This involves taking account of circumstances within situations and the ultimate consequences of actions, which become the guiding influence in decisions. The ethics of conviction excludes taking account of circumstances or allowing consequences to determine or modify behavior.

“If evil consequences flow from an action done out of pure conviction, this type of person holds the world, not the doer, responsible, or the stupidity of others, or the will of God who made them thus. A man who subscribes to the ethic of responsibility, by contrast, will make allowances for precisely these everyday shortcomings in people.” (Weber, Politics as a Vocation 359) Weber asserts that an ethic of responsibility is the only practical alternative in the real modern world. He identifies the ethics of responsibility as being the characteristic position of a politician, and the ethics of conviction as the characteristic position of a saint.

-Ahmad Qamar

Noble vs. Slave Morality (Nietzsche)

Nietzsche disputes the claims of other philosophers who say that the concept of goodness arose from those to whom good was done, rather it was the good themselves, that is the noble, powerful, higher-ranking, and high-minded who felt and ranked themselves and their doings as good (Nietzsche, 10). In Nietzsche’s view, the strong and powerful, the nobles, saw themselves to be happy, and deemed their own actions to be good. This good is contrasted with a concept of bad, which was represented by all those who were not nobles – who were base, weak and vulgar. Nietzsche provides evidence for his claims by examining the etymology of various words for good, and noting that everywhere it seems that those words are related to concepts of nobility and high blood, while various words for bad have connections to concepts of commonness or baseness – an example of this would be the relation between the German schlicht and schlecht, the first meaning bad, and the second meaning plain or simple (Nietzsche, 12). Thus the noble morality consists of emphasis on a powerful physicality & together with that which is required for its preservation: war, adventure, the hunt, dance, athletic contests, and in general everything which includes strong, free and cheerful-hearted activity (Nietzsche, 16). This noble morality will then provide a backdrop for the growth of its opposite, namely the slave morality.

We see the birth of a slave morality from what Nietzsche calls the priestly manner of valuation. The priestly caste, as opposed to the noble caste, does not have power. However it is precisely this powerlessness that Nietzsche claims makes priests such great enemies: out of their powerlessness their hate grows into something enormous and uncanny, into something most spiritual and most poisonous (Nietzsche, 16). Thus, the resentment of the powerful by these weak priests drives them to attempt to exact revenge upon the lords. As they lack power, the only way to complete this revenge is by a revaluation of the noble morality into a system of values that praises the weak. Such a statement is typical of this priest morality: the miserable alone are the good; the poor, powerless, lowly alone are the good, & whereas you, you noble and powerful ones, you are in all eternity the evil (Nietzsche, 16-17). This priestly manner of valuation begins what Nietzsche calls the slave revolt in morality, and is represented most poignantly in the Jewish and Christian system of ethics.

There are a few characteristics of slave morality that are important to illustrate. Firstly, the good and bad of noble morality, and the good and evil of slave morality, are essentially reversed. While noble sees himself as good, and the lowly commoners as bad, in a slave morality, he who is evil is precisely the good one of the other morality, precisely the noble, the powerful, the ruling one, only recolored, only reinterpreted, only reseen through the poisonous eye of resentment (Nietzsche, 22)

-Patrick