FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND HENRI BERGSON: A COMPARISON OF THEIR MORAL PHILOSOPHIES

by

Douglas E. Webb, Jr.

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APPROVED:

L. R. Mellichamp, Chairman

T. C. Longin

D. D. Burr

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PREFACE

This essay was inspired by an almost accidental discovery of two books: The Two Sources of Morality and Religion by Henri Bergson, and Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. The titles of these two works suggested to me that these two philosophers might be similar in their views on morality. Further acquaintance with these two works confirmed this thought and a comparative study of Nietzsche and Bergson as moral philosophers presented itself as an interesting thesis topic.

In writing the essay, I have relied on both the original writings of the two thinkers and secondary works. Among the commentaries on Nietzsche and Bergson, I am most indebted to Walter Kaufmann's Nietzsche; Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, and Idella Gallagher's Morality in Evolution; The Moral Philosophy of Henri Bergson. The former seems by far the best single work on Nietzsche's thought as a whole, while the latter is the best exposition of Bergson's moral philosophy I have found.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Like their great system-building predecessors--Comte, Mill, Marx, and Spencer--Nietzsche and Bergson responded to both the social and intellectual currents of late nineteenth century Europe. The crisis in religion had a tremendous impact on Nietzsche's life and thought, while Bergson was closer to the scientific revolution that required a modification of the long-lived Newtonian world view. The rise of "mass society" and popular culture had made the common man more visible and attracted the attention of both philosophers to the increasing tendencies toward the conformity, mediocrity, and standardization that seemed to be the result of the democratization and bureaucratization of the nation state and the expansion of national sentiment. Both thinkers also evince traces of an alienation from the masses that became much more pronounced among the artists who participated in the esthetic revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most important for this study, however, was the attraction that the trend toward evolutionary thinking and the exploration of the nonrational aspects of man's nature had for Nietzsche and

Bergson. These are the intellectual elements that had the greatest impact on the views that both thinkers adopted concerning man, nature, and society; these views, in turn, had equally important implications for the moral philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson.[1]

Living in an age dominated by evolutionary thinking, these two philosophers accepted the hypothesis that life had evolved, but refused to accept Darwinism, and, since they rejected any explanation of life in terms of a single act of creation on the part of a transcendent God, both thinkers sought a vital principle as a source of a continuous process of creation that could explain life in terms of evolution. Thus, Nietzsche and Bergson, viewing life and creativity as two inseparable facts of existence, went beyond Darwin and Genesis to construct their own theories of the development of life.

Darwin had established the evolution of life as a scientifically acceptable hypothesis in 1859 with his Origin of Species through Natural Selection. In this work, he set forth the view that organisms were engaged in an unending struggle for survival that could explain evolution as the product of natural selection. Darwin documented his interpretation of the process of evolution with a wealth of

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[1]Ronald N. Stromberg, An Intellectual History of Modern Europe (New York: 1966), 323-68.

evidence drawn primarily from studies in anatomy, paleontology, and experimental breeding.[2] As a scientist, Darwin was content to describe the process of evolution through the mechanism of natural selection; as philosophers, Nietzsche and Bergson could not accept a mere description of the evolutionary process, demanding instead to know why evolution had occurred. Although both thinkers accepted evolution as a fact, they preferred to account for it in terms of a vitalistic principle and thus rejected Darwin's view of nature as inadequate and his "mechanistic" explanation of the process of evolution as incorrect.

Unlike most other evolutionary thinkers seeking the causes of evolution, Nietzsche and Bergson did not attempt to explain evolution in terms of a natural or divine teleology. Instead, both philosophers constructed philosophies of progress in which forward movement was unpredictable. Nietzsche and Bergson rejected the "finalistic" approach to the explanation of evolution because they saw more complexity in nature than did Darwin and later evolutionary thinkers. Both thinkers agreed that life was engaged in a never-ending struggle for survival, yet neither philosopher would accept the struggle for survival as the only, or the most fundamental characteristic

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[2] Ibid., 277.

of life. For this reason, Nietzsche and Bergson sought to explain life as the visible effects of a single and fundamental, though much more complex, natural force which contained within itself the tendency toward movement and evolution.[3]

For Nietzsche, Darwin's struggle for survival failed to interpret properly the mass of data that nature supplied for human observation. In place of the struggle for survival, Nietzsche posited the will to power as the single, most fundamental principle or force pervading nature.[4] Instead of attempting to preserve itself, Nietzsche felt that "all that exists strives to transcend itself and is thus engaged in a fight against itself."[5] He did not believe that a will to live or a will to self-preservation could explain this dialectical, self-denying aspect of life which seemed so evident to him.[6] Since Nietzsche held the need for perfection or continuous improvement to be central to life, he believed that no

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[3]Walter A. Kaufmann, Nietzsche; Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (New York: 1968), 241-2, and Idella Gallagher, Morality in Evolution; The Moral Philosophy of Henri Bergson (Netherlands: 1970), 40-41.

[4]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 207.

[5]Ibid., 242.

[6]Ibid., 250.

living being ever achieved a feeling of sufficiency and thus defined life as "that which must always overcome itself."[7]

As the "unexhausted procreative will of life,"[8] the will to power explains evolution as the natural tendency of life, while life becomes not a simple phenomenon or static condition, but a process of improvement. This is so because the will to power is a "creative Eros--the love of generation and of birth in beauty" that serves as the essentially creative agent in evolution.[9] Furthermore, because the will to power is essentially dialectical in its operation, it provides an insight into the process and movement of evolution. Ultimately, all natural and historical events can be interpreted as contests between the manifestations of the will to power in its constant attempt at self-transcendence.[10] Incessantly at war with itself, the will to power always issues in progress, but its movement is erratic and the outcome of this movement is unforeseeable.[11]

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[7]Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann, The Portable Nietzsche (New York: 1968), 227.

[8]Ibid., 226.

[9]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 253.

[10]Ibid., 242.

[11]Ibid., 241.

Nietzsche also holds that "the will to power is essentially the instinct of freedom,"[12] and this is best illustrated as it is revealed among human beings. In man, freedom reaches its ultimate plateau because he possesses reason. By exercising his reason, man may attain self-mastery which, for Nietzsche, is synonomous with freedom. At the same time, in the process of mastering oneself or attaining freedom, one is engaged in perfecting himself, and this continuous process of improvement is the goal of the will to power. Since it serves as the agent in the acquisition of power, Nietzsche terms reason the highest manifestation of the will to power, granting us power over ourselves and nature.[13]

The will to power is also a naturally restless, dialectical energy, and according to Nietzsche, its very essence is to manifest itself in one form and then to sublimate this first manifestation, channelling its energy into a higher form of activity. This dialectical process of sublimation, similar to Freud's conception of displacement or sublimation of the objectives of drives, is also best illustrated when the will to power is viewed in its human embodiment where it projects itself as reason and

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[12] Ibid., 230.

[13] Ibid.

impulse. For example, an individual may experience an impulse driving him to perform a specific action. If he consciously brings his rational faculty into play, the individual may sublimate this manifestation of the will to power by cancelling its specific objective while preserving the original energy of the impulse and its ultimate objective, power. The individual may then employ the energy preserved from the impulse in another activity with a higher objective of his own choosing. The will to power causes all life to strive for continuous self-perfection in this erratic, dialectical fashion; but only in man, who possesses reason and thus consciously seeks self-perfection, can this objective be realized completely.[14]

The will to power varies in intensity among men, and for Nietzsche this explains both the unequal reasoning abilities among individuals and the fact that all individuals do not have uniformly strong drives. Impulses give direction to the individual's behavior and provide his momentum, but very seldom do individuals become conscious of their drives. When this occurs, the individual is most likely to create imaginary explanations for his feelings, and for this reason, he has little knowledge of why he

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[14] Ibid., 236.

behaves as he does or what he actually is.[15] Thus, most men never achieve what Nietzsche calls "true existence" and their lives are little more than "thoughtless accidents."[16] This is so because a weak will to power generates weak impulses and a feeble reasoning capacity; these, in turn, issue in a low level of self-awareness.[17]

The truly rational man realizes that his own control over his existence--his own freedom--depends on his ability to resist his impulses, his capacity for self-discipline, or the extent to which he can be hard toward himself.[18] Any man may fight his impulses and weaken them, but this is a regretable waste, for the impulses provide a tremendous source of energy.[19] By bottling up his impulses, the individual becomes mentally and physically disturbed, while by emasculating or eliminating them, he becomes weak. According to Nietzsche, these are the two most prevalent methods of dealing with impulse.[20] Most men, through fear, laziness, or conformity with social pressure, fail to

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[15]Arthur C. Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher (New York: 1965), 150.

[16]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 158.

[17]Ibid., 231.

[18]Ibid., 245-6.

[19]Ibid., 224.

[20]Ibid.

utilize their reason, employ their impulses, achieve self-mastery, and thus to fulfill their potential. The will to power is too weak among this majority of mankind, and their fate is mediocrity or even degeneration.[21] For Nietzsche, then, the majority of men are weak, wasteful, lazy, irrational, and often mentally or physically unbalanced. This is why Nietzsche states that "man is something which should be overcome,"[22] and the term ubermenschen or "superman," which he applies to great men such as Goethe and Socrates, expresses this same sentiment.[23]

The difference between man and the superman is the difference between man's nature and his potential. The overman is one who constantly attempts to fulfill this human potential, one who is truly human.[24] The will to power and hence the impulses and intellect of the overman are powerful and highly developed, providing him with an indomitable drive toward self-perfection.[25] Unlike ordinary men, he is able, by sublimating his impulses, to draw on a vast reservoir of energy which he uses creatively. Moreover,

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[21] Ibid., 158.

[22] Ibid., 309.

[23] Ibid., 399.

[24] Ibid., 313-14.

[25] Ibid.

he employs, organizes, and "gives style" to his passions, thereby attaining true freedom and, in this sense, creating himself.[26] Following reason and rejecting impulsive actions involves a great deal of hardness and denial towards one's self, yet in time the superman practices his distinguishing function with ease. Once he has attained complete self-mastery, the superman develops an acquired unconscious which guarantees him the "certainty of instinct" in dealing with impulses. Indeed, rationality itself, once developed to this stage, becomes a matter of instinct; and rational scrutiny, directed toward himself and everything which he encounters, is "second nature" to the overman.[27] Since only he is strong, creative, and free, the superman is like a new species representing a higher evolutionary level.[28]

Besides being strong, creative, and free, the superman is for Nietzsche the good man. This is so because only the man with strong impulses who is at the same time capable of sublimating them, is the good or moral man; while the man whose impulses have become emasculated, too weak to exert

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[26] Ibid., 316.

[27] Ibid., 233-4

[28] William M. Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker; A Study (New York: 1968), 401.

themselves, is not moral but simply weak.[29] The passionate superman, by overcoming, organizing, and styling his impulses, has done the difficult and become a moral and creative man.[30] For Nietzsche then, moral behavior consists essentially in the overcoming of self, and this is set in an evolutionary frame of reference, for man must overcome the "natural" self in order to reach the acquired, potential self.[31]

Like Nietzsche, Bergson felt that evolution must occur through an agency, and he posited the elan vitale as the inner directing principle of the evolutionary process.[32] For Bergson, the evolution of life appeared to be an unpredictable, continuous movement involving constant creation and innovation.[33] Thus, he did not believe that either a single act of creation or Darwin's natural selection could account for this process, and in their place he postulated a vitalistic force. Bergson describes this vital elan as a finite force fulfilling its manifold possibilities by exerting itself continuously in

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[29] Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 224.

[30] Ibid., 280.

[31] Ibid., 211.

[32] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 41.

[33] Ibid., 40.

a conflict with matter, and hence partially explaining the movement and change so characteristic of life. Furthermore, since the life force is a tendency spreading out in all directions, organizing and shaping the matter on which it operates, it can explain the diversity and complexity of nature. Since it struggles with matter and with itself, and because its manifestations are not always compatible, the elan can also account for the strife and conflict so evident in nature. Finally, because it is always in the process of becoming, always attempting to transcend itself yet never completely accomplishing self-transcendence, the life force can explain the progress of life through evolution.[34]

Freedom and creativity are the primary characteristics of the elan vitale. Its freedom, however, is reduced temporarily once it has succeeded in creating a new species, for each species is circular and static. Thus, the march of the elan is halted within the confines of its own creation, but the elan regains its freedom by surging forward to create a new species. Until the creation of man, the life force had only created these circular, static species, but with the emergence of man, the elan succeeded

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[34] Ibid., 42-43.

in creating a progressive species.[35] Although man is the greatest product of the vital force, he is imperfect and not fully himself; he contains both a nature and a potential, or a nature and a "true nature." He is a "being bound to matter, dominated by instinct and intelligence, . . . an unfinished product."[36] According to Bergson, the fact that man is a progressive species means that species-wide evolution has also ended with man and that all further human evolution must be the task of individuals.[37]

Most men are creatures of habit or "instinct" and thus tend toward automatism. Herein lies their capacity both to absorb and to generate social rules and custom, and hence, their ability and tendency to live in groups.[38] They also become aware of human nature through introspection rather than observation. Each individual imagines his own weaknesses to be common to himself alone, so that "each individual is the dupe of all."[39] Each individual

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[35] Ibid., 45.

[36] Ibid., 54.

[37] Thomas Hanna, ed., The Bergsonian Heritage (New York: 1962), 20.

[38] Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. by R. Ashley Audra, Cloudesley Bereton, and W. Horsfall Carter (New York: 1935), 9. Hereafter cited as The Two Sources.

[39] Ibid., 11.

therefore tends to judge others as essentially better than himself, and "on this happy illusion much of our social life is grounded." Society, in turn, attempts to encourage and perpetuate this illusion.[40] Thus, man is a fundamentally social animal, but for Bergson man's social nature is not an unmixed blessing, for societies are traditionally exclusive of one another and to this extent inhuman.[41]

Although his intuitive powers do not equal his innate intellectual capacity, man's saving grace is his possession of this intuitive faculty. In this "fringe of intuition" hovering around the intellect lies man's potential, for intuition enables man to commune with the elan vitale and to forward its operation. Those who perform this operation are the great men who may lead the entire human species toward fulfillment of its human potential.[42] These great men include founders of religions, religious reformers, saints and mystics.[43] Since these great individuals or "moral heroes" can commune with the vital elan they are the greatest products of evolution; since they do commune with the life force, they are at the same time nearest to

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[40] Ibid., 12.

[41] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 62-63.

[42] Ibid., 52.

[43] Bergson, The Two Sources, 70.

the source of evolution.[44] By offering their lives as examples, mystics and moral heroes promote progress in moral and religious spheres. Ultimately, individuals such as St. Paul, St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Sienna, and St. Francis foreshadow the divine humanity which,[45] for Bergson, represents the direction of human development in a universe which is a "machine for the making of gods."[46]

Mystics and moral heroes are the only men who attain true freedom. This is so because they possess a more fully developed intuitive faculty that enables them to rise above the social plane to the unlimited level of the elan vitale. Since they can escape habit and transcend the social claims that bind lesser men, these people may create their own code of life, which is above, but does not contradict, life on the social level. In this respect, the mystic or moral hero achieves true freedom by creating himself.[47]

The mystic or moral hero possesses an "open soul" because he is pervaded by an unlimited love of humanity.[48]

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[44]Jacques Chevalier, Henri Bergson, trans. by Lilian A. Clare (New York: 1928), 313.

[45]Bergson, The Two Sources, 288.

[46]Ibid., 317. Italics mine.

[47]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 66.

[48]Ibid., 75.

Indeed, Bergson states that "each of these souls marked then a certain point attained by the evolution of life; and each of them was a manifestation, in original form, of a love which seems to be the very essence of the creative effort."[49] Participating in the elan vitale, which is apparently a creative Eros, these are the only individuals who are truly human, since they rise above social boundaries to embrace all mankind. In addition, the mystic or moral hero allows other men to become truly human, and thus to create their own destiny, by offering his life as an example for others to follow.[50] The superiority of these souls lies in their level of spirituality, their moral creativity, and their role as instruments of moral and religious progress.[51]

Implicit within both Nietzsche's and Bergson's reply to Darwin's account of the process of evolution is a partial affirmation and a partial rejection of what later became known as "social Darwinism," or the application of Darwin's evolutionary theory to man's social development. Like the social Darwinists, Nietzsche and Bergson accepted Darwin's contention that man has evolved from lower animals and that the distinction between man and the lower

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[49] Bergson, The Two Sources, 95. Italics mine.

[50] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 96.

[51] Ibid., 75.

animals is small. Indeed, Bergson believed that the term Homo sapiens was a less accurate definition of man than Homo faber, for Bergson held man's mental structure to be more fitted for the fabrication of tools and implements than for theorizing.[52] Similarly, Nietzsche viewed man as little more than an exceptional ape, and in place of the traditional conception of the wide breech in nature between man and the lower animals, he considers the broadest breech to be that between men.[53] In this manner, both thinkers accept the Darwinian implication that man is more animal-like than God-like. But they step beyond established evolutionary theory in proposing that although man is only slightly above the other animals in development, he need not remain so. For both thinkers then, a radical distinction between human and lower animal species exists; man is to be distinguished from the lower animals not by his attributes, but by his potential.[54]

Neither Nietzsche nor Bergson believed that Darwinism could fully account for the phenomenon of man, a creature who need not evolve into a more refined or specialized organism in order to progress. For both of these thinkers,

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[52] Ibid., 47.

[53] Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 175.

[54] Ibid., 150, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 49-50.

man is a creature in the process of becoming, not a completed species, and the gap between man's nature and his potential constitutes the area open for progress within the species.[55] The specific spheres in which the two philosophers anticipated progress were the "truly human" aspects of the life of mankind: for Nietzsche, art and philosophy; for Bergson, man's intuitive capacity; and, for both, the realms of morality and religion.[56] It follows that those who participate most fully in these fields are the greatest among mankind, and that these more truly human individuals benefit the human species. Indeed, Nietzsche and Bergson claimed that these outstanding individuals were the only source of human progress, for both philosophers held that progress among men did not occur as species-wide evolution, nor take place naturally without conscious effort.[57] The realization of man's potential, for both thinkers, is the result of individual effort rather than evolutionary growth among mankind as a

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[55]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 161, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 41.

[56]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 175-6, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 53.

[57]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 311, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 52.

whole.[58] Moreover, Nietzsche and Bergson agree that the goal of human development need not be progressively realized by the entire human species through time, but might be foreshadowed in the most perfect specimens of humanity already produced.[59] By observing the superman or moral hero closely then, we may discover the direction of man's movement toward perfection and the general qualities constituting man's potential.

This same interest in man's movement toward the realization of his potential extends to Nietzsche's and Bergson's moral philosophies, which for both thinkers are outgrowths of their overall philosophical positions. As their developmental frames of reference suggest, Nietzsche and Bergson view morality from an evolutionary perspective, and in the development of morality both thinkers assign a central role to what they define as the great man. Indeed, both thinkers mark out a moral type characteristic of outstanding individuals and a separate type common to lesser men. This distinction between types of morality parallels the distinction made by Nietzsche and Bergson

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[58]Bertram Laing, "The Origin of Nietzsche's Problem and its Solution," The International Journal of Ethics, XXVI (July, 1916), 512, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 53.

[59]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 311, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 14.

between man's nature and his potential, a distinction predicated on their conception of life as a fundamentally dynamic phenomenon.

As a formative force in man's development, morality must be designed to serve life. For Nietzsche, this meant that moral codes must cease to be forces for the repression of impulses, that they must strike a balance between offering a vent to impulses and maintaining social life.[60] Nietzsche believed that socially acceptable outlets for impulses would be introduced and become operative only if men would accept the fact that morality must exist for the purpose of improving, as well as preserving and perpetuating life.[61] For Bergson, serving life through morality involved the fostering of freedom and creativity. In a word, Bergson thought that life demanded moral flexibility, for fixed habits and static laws or customs are in opposition to the life spirit.[62] For both thinkers then, no moral code is final, moralities must be open to change if they are to remain relevant to human life.

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[60] Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher, 152.

[61] Ibid., 160.

[62] W. P. Montague, Great Visions of Philosophy; Varieties of Speculative Thought in the West from the Greeks to Bergson (Illinois: 1950), 425-6.

By applying an evolutionary frame of reference to the study of morality, Nietzsche and Bergson construct moral philosophies that are quite different from those of their predecessors. Neither thinker simply defends the values of his era, nor does either attempt to formulate a new moral code. Instead, both philosophers evaluate norms as well as complete moralities according to their correspondence with a continually unfolding human potential. Man's destiny, for both thinkers, is in his own hands; morality has served man in the past, and may serve him in the future, by aiding him in the process of creating himself.[63]

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[63]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 414, and Bergson, The Two Sources, 317. See also Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche; An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity, trans. by C. F. Walraff and F. J. Schmitz (Arizona: 1965), 140.

CHAPTER II

MORAL TYPES

A typology of morals finds a central place in the philosophies of Bergson and Nietzsche. Both philosophers distinguish moral types in explaining the nature, history, and evolution of morality. Bergson distinguishes between a morality of "obligation"--a closed, static, or social morality--and one of "aspiration"--an open, dynamic, or "human" morality. Nietzsche's typology consists of a social, slave, or herd morality, corresponding closely to Bergson's morality of obligation, and a master, personal, or individual morality, similar to Bergson's morality of aspiration.

The typologies of both philosophers must be examined with care in order to avoid confusion. Nietzsche warns us that neither of his two types ever existed in pure form and that traces of each type may be manifested in any specific morality or by any single individual.[1] Bergson echoes this warning when he states that in the development of contemporary morality his two types have become

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[1]George A. Morgan, What Nietzsche Means (New York, 1941), 144.

amalgamated and that both types are incarnated in any specific modern morality or individual.[2] Moreover, Nietzsche's typology of morals is, like his entire philosophy, difficult to understand because of its metaphorical and aphoristic presentation.

In order to understand Nietzsche's discussion of slave morality, we must envision an early Greek or pre-Greek society divided between masters and slaves.[3] We must also assume that the masters are superior individuals and that the slaves are their inferiors.[4] Slave morality is then the ethical code designed by the slaves in an effort to bring their masters around to the slave's point of view. Hence, the very creation of a slave ethics requires the existence of a "sphere different from and hostile to its own." All the actions of the slave class are responses to their masters, an outside stimulus of a higher order, all slave actions being nothing more than reactions.[5] The original and primary notion among the

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[2]Idella J. Gallagher, Morality in Evolution; The Moral Philosophy of Henri Bergson (Netherlands, 1970), 90.

[3]A. H. J. Knight, Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche, and particularly of his connection with Greek Literature and Thought (New York, 1967), 119.

[4]Arthur C. Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher (New York, 1965), 156.

[5]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. by Francis Golffing (New York, 1956), 171. Hereafter cited as Genealogy.

slave class is "evil"; this concept is applied to their superior masters at whose hands they receive harsh, brutal, and unequal treatment. The positive category of slave morality is "good," a derivative category applied by the slaves to themselves as the weak, impotent counterpart to their strong and powerful masters.

Nietzsche holds that the slave is not capable of being anything other than "good," which is identifiable with meekness, humility, patience, diligence, and friendship. However, their masters are quite capable of being "evil." To counter the "evil" tendencies of their masters and to persuade them to conform, the slaves create a prescriptive morality. Denying that the slave is naturally a meek, diligent, and humble creature, slave morality holds that he behaves in this manner because one ought to be "good." Thus, for Nietzsche, the imperatives of slave morality are deceptively invoked to persuade the masters to do intentionally what the slaves must do naturally.[6]

Rancor and resentment are at the root of slave morality. The helplessness and impotence of the slave inhibit the direct release of his impulses. The slave's emotions become bottled up and require something outward to negate rather than something inward to affirm.[7]

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[6] Ibid., 149-51.

[7] Ibid., 171.

Furthermore, since the slave recognizes his inferiority as a specimen relative to the master, he not only fears the master class but also resents it, and his failure to receive equal treatment at the hands of the master class adds to his resentment.[8] Thus, for Nietzsche, slave morality is partially a product of psychological disorders and the physical disturbances that issue from them. Moreover, this unhealthy, decadent morality tends to perpetuate mental and physical distress and produce increasingly degenerate individuals.[9]

According to Nietzsche, social or slave morality is also a means of preserving and perpetuating social life; it is not an end in itself. The specific rules included in any one social morality may vary greatly with those of another, yet their end--the preservation of society--is always identical.[10] Each society defines good and evil, establishes social rules and fosters social relationships beneficial to its own type of social order, using group solidarity as the primary basis of values. Men are valued

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[8] Ibid., 157-9.

[9] Ibid., 161-3.

[10] William M. Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study (New York, 1968), 325.

only for their social utility. Hence, a society's morality is a prescription for the type of individual it most desires.[11]

The conduct of societies toward one another may be consistent or inconsistent with the moral conduct that societies command of their members. For example, most social units generate an imperative designed to preserve the lives of their members and state this in a formula such as "no man shall kill another"; yet in times of danger when social disintegration appears imminent, this same group may command its members to combine en masse and kill external enemies. However, these activities of the group as a whole cannot be termed immoral, for if the society acts in a manner that tends to preserve itself, it seeks the same end as its members follow when they act morally. Only if a society composed of the entire human race existed would morality apply to the conduct of smaller social groups toward one another.[12]

Once established, social moralities are maintained by customs which eventually develop into systems and tend to make a society's rule of conduct rigid. Religious sanctification of social moralities increases their rigidity.

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[11] Ibid., 219.

[12] Ibid., 220-21.

Finally, social moralities claim to be unchallengable, absolute, and eternally valid, a claim reinforced by the tendency of the members of a society to submit unquestioningly to its dictates. In the process, a social morality tends to find expression in absolute antitheses; only good and evil exist with no middle ground. Neither can there be any goodness whatsoever in those things condemned as evil, and likewise, no evil qualities can be attached to the good thing or action.[13]

A social morality, then, will abide no exceptions; the rules which it lays down must be followed by all. For Nietzsche, this is the most important as well as the most infamous characteristic of social morality. Admitting no flexibility, it refuses to recognize the formidable differences among men. Hence, social morality has a built-in leveling tendency, perpetuating mediocrity and confining the superior men who are subject to it.[14]

Bergson's first moral type closely parallels Nietzsche's social or slave morality. This type of morality arises first in small, simple societies and is thus termed a social morality. It survived the advent of more complex and differentiated societies because of

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[13]Henry L. Mencken, The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (New York, 1908), 75-77.

[14]Ibid., 78-79.

the fundamental point of resemblance existing between primitive and modern societies: they are closed societies, including some individuals to the exclusion of all others.[15] Each closed society demands that the social obligations of its members be greater than their obligations to mankind, since such groups are always potentially or actively hostile to one another.[16] A closed morality develops within such a society; its end is social preservation.[17]

Bergson held that man had evolved as a creature best fitted for small, simple societies and closed moral systems.[18] The most natural society, or the one most analogous to an organism, is the instinctive type, such as an ant colony. Human society is built around this original design, although for humans habit plays the role of instinct.[19] In an animal society each rule of organization is demanded by nature, but among humans, nature demands only the necessity of rules.[20] Thus, a closed morality is also a natural morality.

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[15]Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. by R. Ashley Audra, Cloudesley Bereton and W. Horsfall Carter (New York, 1935), 30. Hereafter cited as The Two Sources.

[16]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 68.

[17]Bergson, The Two Sources, 30.

[18]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 68.

[19]Bergson, The Two Sources, 26.

[20]Ibid., 28.

Social morality is a morality of obligation, with habit as its infra-intellectual or sub-rational basis. Habitual social obligations introduce a regularity into the human community nearly as strong as the inflexible order inherent in an organism.[21] Social obligation is of such magnitude that it amounts to a habit of a different order from regular habits. Each social imperative, perhaps trivial in itself, is lent strength by the totality of social obligation, each has the undivided authority of the whole.[22] Although the individual is conscious of his ability to evade social commands, he cannot escape the sense of necessity inherent in them. This dual awareness constitutes the individual's moral consciousness; social pressure insures its operation.[23]

Habit is usually enough to make individuals conform to their social duty, and by excusing individuals from thinking about their every action, habit promotes social harmony and stability.[24] Society reinforces habit by constantly inculcating its morality into its members. In the process the human ego becomes a social ego, and

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[21] Ibid., 11.

[22] Ibid., 10.

[23] Ibid., 14.

[24] Ibid., 18.

this social self adds its weight to external group pressure to provide a dual source to social compulsion. Society aims at strengthening the social ego; "to cultivate this social ego," says Bergson, "is the essence of our obligation to society."[25]

Easing our relation to society and reinforcing our adherence to social morality are the mediaries between ourselves and our collective existence. These include the individual's family and the occupational, religious, and national organizations of which he is a part. We fulfill our social obligations by fulfilling our obligations to these social units; they render obligations less abstract, make them more easily acceptable, and introduce us to our social duties by degrees. As long as one maintains these concrete relations and fulfills his duties within them, his social role seems natural. Only if he departs from this path does he find his role problematic.[26]

Bergson adds that the members of a society see no difference between natural laws and social rules. "Natural laws are constructions determined by facts, yet it is difficult for an individual not to believe that natural

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[25] Ibid., 14-15.

[26] Ibid., 18-19.

laws do not command facts and order nature. A social imperative applying to all assumes the character, in our minds at least, of a natural law. Since social rules seem so natural, a "breach of the social order assumes an anti-natural character; even when frequently repeated, it strikes us as an exception, being to society what a freak creation is to nature."[27] Moreover, religious commands often lie behind social imperatives. Here religion plays an important role in society, sustaining and reinforcing its claims. Religion seems to insure the correctness of social imperatives and makes them appear even more closely analogous to the laws of nature.[28]

All of the buttresses of social morality make it more acceptable; they do not, however, erase the fact that social morality is a static morality.[29] Closed morality is conservative and unchanging; its only aim is group preservation.[30] Since closed morality applies only to the members of a single society, it is incomplete and caught up in the circle of social cohesion, interested in good only for its utility.[31] The fact that it inheres in

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[27] Ibid., 12.

[28] Ibid., 13.

[29] Ibid., 58.

[30] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 69-70.

[31] Bergson, The Two Sources, 31.

habits, customs, laws, language, and institutions further restricts social morality, making it even more unchanging.[32] Moreover, social morality is impersonal and easily translated into a set of rules which tend to become static.[33] In turn, these static maxims tend to confine and dehumanize those who fall within their domain.[34] Hence, the moral attitude of the individual in a closed moral system is self-centered; he and his society are closely tied, since his ego is both individual and social; he possesses a "closed soul."[35] In most cases he obeys automatically, passively acquiescing in his social duty.[36]

Nietzsche's social morality and Bergson's closed morality are "majority" moralities, encompassing the greater part of mankind within small social units. The object of both types is social preservation; the moral value of individuals is thus measured in terms of social utility. An individual living under either of these moralities is commanded to value the fellow members of

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[32]J. H. Muirhead, "M. Bergson's New Work on Morals and Religion," The Hibbert Journal, XXXI (October, 1932), 3.

[33]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 71.

[34]Colin Smith, Contemporary French Philosophy; A Study in Norms and Values (New York, 1964), 145-6.

[35]Bergson, The Two Sources, 37-38.

[36]Ibid., 19.

his society above mankind as a whole. Bergson is critical of closed morality because it excludes all those outside of its social order. Nietzsche criticizes this same shortcoming of his social type in an effort to expose its contradictions. More importantly, however, he criticizes social morality for its inclusion of superior beings. The superman does not need social morality, and it, in turn, stifles him and thwarts his creativity.

Reinforced by religion, expressed in impersonal codes and claiming to be absolute, both types of morality become increasingly rigid and static. Social and closed morality are also both based on social pressure, habit, and tradition, further insuring conformity. For Bergson, these aspects of closed morality dehumanize its followers who passively and automatically fulfill their social duties. Closed morality thus offers little chance for creating better men; indeed, it constrains those who would attempt to escape it with bonds of habit and social pressure. Nietzsche's criticism takes the same direction but is more severe: social morality is not only one of mediocrity tending to dehumanize its followers, but it is also the product and perpetuator of psychological and physical disorders, an enemy of the human species. However, for both men, social and closed morality contain some good

and play a vital role in the evolution of morality, as will be seen in Chapter III.

Over against inferior social morality Nietzsche sets personal, individual, or master morality. Most of his discussion of personal morality is cast in the same setting as his treatment of slave morality: a Greek or pre-Greek society divided between masters and slaves.[37] Originating among the superior elements in society, the values of master morality have nothing to do with social utility; men are evaluated as men with no reference to their relation to society. This is so because, as we have seen, Nietzsche believes that a man's nature is manifested in his actions as an existential fact; there is no "neutral subject" behind an individual's actions allowing him to freely choose one mode of behavior over another.[38] It is thus a man's nature that is the first object of approval in a master morality, his actions are of secondary importance since they follow from his nature. The social impact of actions is totally ignored, for the "good" man, from the perspective of master morality, is his own justification.

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[37]Knight, Life and Work of Nietzsche, 119.

[38]Nietzsche, Genealogy, 178-9.

The superior man considers himself and others like him to be "good."[39] This positive value arises spontaneously as an act of self-affirmation on the part of the master. The masters further affirm themselves by seeking out and labeling their opposites. The negative concepts of master morality, referring to the slaves, are "bad," "humble," and "base."[40]

The prescriptive or moral element has no place in master morality. The bad things within the view of the masters are simply inferior and naturally bad. "Bad humans" are in no way culpable; they simply are bad. In evaluating the actions of men, master morality follows the same pattern. Actions are "good" when they are typical of the master class and "bad" when they typify the slaves.[41] Since the slaves are inferior, they cannot act as the masters do. Any imperative commanding them to model their behavior after that of the masters would thus be ineffective.

Contempt is at the root of master negative valuations. However, contempt does not do violence to reality as completely as does the rancor and resentment of the slave. According to Nietzsche, this is because contempt is a

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[39] Ibid., 161-3.

[40] Ibid., 166-8.

[41] Ibid., 171.

more "casual" emotion, expressed actively in comparison with rancor, which is intense, supressed hatred, bred by the slave's impotence. Thus, the negative valuations of a master morality are not as distorting as those of slave morality.[42]

The master's life of energetic activity and release allows him to live before his conscience truthfully and with confidence.[43] His ideal is strength and health, combined with its natural outlets: adventure, combat, revelry, hunting.[44] In accordance with this ideal, master morality does not bottle up impulses or seek to extirpate them. Since master morality affirms impulse, it is a healthy morality, conducive to the development of superior individuals.[45]

As a healthy morality, Neitzsche's master morality exists for the preservation and improvement of individuals rather than society.[46] However, Nietzsche's personal morality is not to be confused with moral individualism, for all individuals are not capable of designing and following their own code of conduct. Personal morality

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[42] Ibid., 160.

[43] Ibid., 171.

[44] Ibid., 172.

[45] Ibid., 167.

[46] Morgan, What Nietzsche Means, 149.

is only for the superman; one who creates his own rule and style of life.[47] For Nietzsche, these persons--men like Goethe and Socrates[48]--are autonomous; they follow an ethics of self-realization based on self-mastery.[49] They must always transcend established codes, but this does not imply that established norms are repudiated; they may be fulfilled in a higher way.[50] Thus, as fountains of moral creativity, supermen stand out in history as symbols of non-conformity, serving as models and offering a multiplicity of norms that other individuals may strive to fulfill.[51]

Bergson delineates a moral type similar to Nietzsche's personal morality. This type of morality knows no limits; reaching out to humanity as a whole, it rises above the boundaries of closed societies.[52] Since it attempts to unite mankind in a single brotherhood, this type of morality is neither a social nor a closed type, but an

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[47]Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker, 216.

[48]Walter W. Kaufmann, Nietzsche; Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (New Jersey: 1968), 399.

[49]Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker, 322.

[50]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 158. See also p. 280.

[51]Ibid., 309.

[52]Bergson, The Two Sources, 32.

open morality.[53] The individual comes to share social claims in degrees through his family, church, and other social units, but he must make a leap in order to come to share the claims of humanity.[54] In making this leap, the individual does not merely transcend social or national boundaries. Since closed morality is, according to Bergson, natural to the human species, it cannot gradually progress to open morality. Hence, in the leap to open morality, the individual transcends his nature, re-entering the stream of the life force and rising from the level of society to the level of humanity.[55] Open or human morality is thus a supra-natural morality, different in kind from closed morality.[56]

While closed morality is followed by the overwhelming majority, open morality is the ethic of the few. The rule of life followed by great individuals is demanding, requiring great effort and self-discipline in contrast to the passive acquiesence with which others fulfill the imperatives of closed morality. Oblivious to social pressure, the moral hero responds to the call of a dynamic

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[53]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 71.

[54]Bergson, The Two Sources, 50.

[55]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 70.

[56]Ibid., 73.

emotion, the product of his communing with the elan vitale.[57] This liberating emotion experienced by those directly in contact with the vital elan generates moral creativity. Rejecting custom and habit, the mystic or moral hero intuitively creates norms; these are implicit in his actions and disposition.[58] These moral creators stand out as models for mankind to imitate, influencing others by their example.[59]

Social pressure and obligation do not provide the basis for open morality; instead it is a morality of aspiration.[60] As the expression of an emotional state, open morality attracts individuals.[61] This contagious, highly personal emotion radiating from the moral hero, together with the example which he sets, creates a nearly irresistable appeal to those who come into contact with him.[62] The emotional and personal nature of open morality makes it impossible to objectify in its completeness. Once formulated into impersonal rules, the example of the

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[57]Bergson, The Two Sources, 37.

[58]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 75.

[59]Thomas Hanna, The Bergsonian Heritage (New York, 1962), 166.

[60]Bergson, The Two Sources, 49.

[61]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 72.

[62]Smith, Contemporary French Philosophy, 145.

moral hero becomes only a residue of the emotion which he generates.[63] Since it is emotional and resists crystallization into a code, open morality never becomes ossified and is thus a dynamic morality.[64] Constantly moving away from fixed rules toward a "truly human" disposition and outlook, open morality has no dehumanizing tendencies.[65]

The open morality of Bergson and the personal morality of Nietzsche represent, for both thinkers, a superior type of morality. In part this is true because neither type is based on obligation. Bergson's open morality gains its followers through its appeal. Individuals do not feel obliged to follow open morality; instead they are inspired to do so by the example of the moral hero. Nietzsche's personal morality is similar in being non-prescriptive. The superior man does not command adherence of the inferior men around him to his rule of life. Recognizing that this is an impossibility, he offers his example for others to imitate to the extent of their ability. The same holds true for Bergson's moral hero; although individuals may follow his example, very few succeed in matching his disposition and outlook.

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[63] Bergson, The Two Sources, 58-59.

[64] Ibid., 95.

[65] Smith, Contemporary French Philosophy, 145-6.

Because they are demanding moralities requiring great efforts in self-discipline and self-mastery, both Nietzsche's personal morality and Bergson's open morality are moralities of the few. Although it reaches out to all mankind, open morality is truly represented only by the moral hero. Nietzsche's personal morality is, likewise, only completely incarnated in the superman. Rather than attempting to include all men, however, personal morality attempts to differentiate between them, including only superior individuals. In its exclusiveness, Nietzsche's personal morality is similar to Bergson's closed morality.

Both Nietzsche and Bergson describe their superior moral type as an agent of moral progress. Personal morality is progressive because it gives free reign to superior individuals, allowing them to exercise their creativity unrestrained. In addition, for Nietzsche it is a healthy morality, fostering the development of more and better supermen. Ultimately, Nietzsche conceives of personal morality as the primary means toward creating an entire species of supermen. For Bergson, open morality is progressive because it cannot be reduced to impersonal rules which become rigid and static in practice. The ultimate achievement of open morality is an open society

whose more spiritual and intuitive individuals would constitute a species of moral heroes.[66]

The source of values for both personal morality and open morality is the great man. Serving as the source as well as the ultimate end of moral progress, Nietzsche's superman and Bergson's moral hero share an essential characteristic: creativity. Nietzsche's supermen include artists, saints, and philosophers, while Bergson named founders of religions, religious reformers, mystics, saints, and moral heroes as models of open morality. Since supermen and moral heroes fall into some of the same categories, it is possible that Bergson and Nietzsche could have claimed one or more of the same individuals among their great moral agents, but Socrates seems to be the only individual classified as a great man by both philosophers.[67]

The ultimate aim of both Nietzsche and Bergson is the improvement of mankind. Viewing morality as a formative agent in the development of civilization, each of the two philosophers attempts to discover helpful and injurious moral tendencies. Their typologies serve as

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[66]Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 53.

[67]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 399, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 87.

devices for isolating specific aspects of morality and tracing their causes and effects. In the social and closed types Nietzsche and Bergson describe the moral characteristics which they see as obstructing man's advancement, while in the personal and open types we find the moral characteristics that can lead man toward his potential. The role of each of these types in the evolution of morality is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

MORAL EVOLUTION

Nietzsche and Bergson were both convinced that morality could not be understood apart from its origin and development. Choosing the developmental approach to the study of morality, neither thinker constructs an entirely speculative moral philosophy. However, Nietzsche and Bergson do not undertake comprehensive studies of the history of morality and their selections and interpretations of facts from moral history are quite sketchy.

For both philosophers, the first morality to emerge corresponds to one of their moral types and develops around the particular type of moral consciousness characteristic of these original moral types. In Bergson's philosophy, primitive morality is closed morality, while for Nietzsche, the earliest morality is the social type. However, the two philosophers disagree fundamentally on the nature and origin of the form of moral consciousness that they attribute to these original moralities.

Bergson holds that primitive men have, as we have seen, a natural social tendency or moral consciousness,

a virtual instinct which is manifested as habit.[1] These "moral habits," which explain the individual's adherence to the needs of society, are not identical to what is usually defined as habit, for the moral commands of a society cling together and form a "totality of obligation," which, in turn, lends its force to each moral habit. The awareness of social dicta and the sense of necessity that accompanies them, constitutes the individual's moral consciousness.[2] Although nature has "decreed" that man must live by rules, and thus that moral consciousness is a given product of biological evolution, the specific content of moral consciousness is acquired and dependent on environmental circumstance.[3]

In contrast, Nietzsche believed moral consciousness among primitive men was an acquired characteristic. He believed that this type of moral consciousness had a complex origin which he explained in terms of the emergence of two distinct psychic states, "guilt" and "bad conscience." The sense of guilt first arises as a feeling

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[1]Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. by R. Ashley Audra, Cloudesley Bereton and W. Horsfall Carter (New York: 1935), 26. Hereafter cited as The Two Sources.

[2]Ibid., 10-14.

[3]Ibid., 28.

of indebtedness to ancestors and later to gods,[4] while bad conscience is the result of the continuous confining of men's animal instincts required by increasingly complex forms of group living.[5] According to Nietzsche, the psychological discomfort which guilt feelings and supressed drives created was given a religious interpretation: it was the result of sin against God. Man sinned against God by following his impulses, which were thus considered evil; and, for Nietzsche, the emasculation or extirpation of impulses dictated by this view is the essential characteristic of the moral consciousness common to slave morality.[6]

Although Nietzsche and Bergson are in fundamental disagreement on the nature and origin of moral consciousness, the role which they assign to it in moral evolution is identical. Both thinkers agree that moral consciousness impedes moral progress by underpinning an established morality and thereby resisting all moral innovation.[7] This is why Nietzsche and Bergson both hold that normative

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[4]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. by Francis Golffing (New York: 1956), 194-225.

[5]Ibid., 217-29.

[6]Ibid., 276-78.

[7]George A. Morgan, What Nietzsche Means (New York: 1941), 169, and Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 61.

intuition, insofar as it proves to be a product of moral consciousness, is not an agent of moral progress.[8] Thus, it follows that Nietzsche's supermen and Bergson's moral heroes must break the bonds of moral consciousness and transcend it in order to create values.[9]

According to Bergson, in primitive morality the closed moral type may be observed in a pure state, unmixed with open morality. Moreover, in primitive societies Bergson, as we have seen, claims to discern a static religious type that corresponds to closed morality, each one reinforcing the other. Closed morality and static religion were coextensive in these early societies; their common object was the attachment of each individual to the group and the simultaneous detachment of each member from himself.[10]

The psychic basis of static religion is what Bergson calls the "myth-making function," a virtual instinct that conjures up illusory representations of reality such as gods and avenging spirits that incite the individual to act as if he were an instinctual creature.[11] In this

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Bergson, The Two Sources, 123, and Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 250.

[10] Bergson, The Two Sources, 119-22.

[11] Ibid., 14.

context static religion is a "defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual, and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence."[12] Thus, static religion, like closed morality, is natural. Static religion is composed entirely of magic and belief in spirits, while its practice consists in repetitious rites and ceremonies.[13] Belief and practice are inseparable in static religion and sustain one another. Hence, static religion is also similar to closed morality in being infra-intellectual or habitual.[14] Moreover, since static religion is shared by the members of a society and ties its members closely together in frequent religious practice, it fosters social cohesion. Further insuring social solidarity, static religion provides groups with a specific social identity and promises the success of the collective whole. Both static religion and closed morality then share the end of social preservation.[15]

According to Bergson, primitive men have no conception of individuality--they do not distinguish between themselves and the group.[16] For this reason, static religion

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[12] Ibid., 205.

[13] Ibid., 186.

[14] Ibid., 201.

[15] Ibid., 206.

[16] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 57.

and closed morality become operative in these early societies without friction; by perpetuating this condition among primitive men, closed morality and static religion prove to be long enduring. Since no notion of individuality exists in primitive societies, there is also no true awareness of individual responsibility. The group as a whole feels responsible for any member who engages in activities which do not conform to custom, and moral nonconformity is viewed as a contagious physical illness, likely to pervade and contaminate the entire group.[17] The social pressure inherent in closed morality finds its origin in this feeling of collective moral responsibility, and since the weight of social pressure increased as closed morality develops, nonconformity becomes increasingly rare. Combining with closed morality, static religion attempts to preserve and strengthen the feeling of group responsibility by promising the punishment of the entire group for the nonconformity of any of its individual members.[18]

Beginning in primitive societies, closed morality provided the basis for the long period of moral development that eventually culminated in contemporary morality.

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[17] Bergson, The Two Sources, 124.

[18] Ibid.

However, closed morality is by nature static; left to itself it cannot progress. Only two avenues of development are possible in an isolated closed morality; its imperatives may be formulated into a logically consistent system, and the society itself may expand through conquest.[19]

For Nietzsche, the original morality is a social morality. Like closed morality, it is composed entirely of custom, sanctioned by primitive religion, and designed to nourish and perpetuate collective life.[20] Nietzsche agrees with Bergson in holding that no conception of individuality exists among these primitive groups and that any notion of self-interest or individuality bodes ill for these early moralities. Hence, this "collective consciousness" or "herd instinct" is one of the original and most important bulwarks of social morality.[21] Nietzsche is also at one with Bergson in pointing out the failure of primitive men to develop a conception of individual moral responsibility; activity by any member of the group in violation of custom was thus expected to bring supernatural punishment

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[19] Ibid., 276.

[20] Henry L. Mencken, The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (New York: 1908), 76-77.

[21] William M. Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study (New York, 1968), 216.

on the entire community.[22] Since there was no awareness of individuality or individual moral responsibility among these primitive men, motives or intentions were not recognized, and actions were evaluated by their supposed natural or supernatural consequences.[23]

In contrast to Bergson, Nietzsche holds that this early stage of moral development brought about significant moral progress, including the development of moral consciousness and the creation of more uniform, dependable types of individuals with steadily developing powers of memory and reasoning. At the same time however, superstition and obcession with supernatural or avenging spirits prevented men from understanding the real causes and effects of their behavior, leading to imaginary explanations in which men "mistook the sequences of guilt and punishment for cause and effect."[24]

Using their description and analysis of primitive morality as their starting point, both thinkers catalogue the major events and trends in moral history and offer a doctrine of moral progress. Since both closed morality and its supporting religion are by nature static, Bergson's account of moral evolution begins with the genesis of open

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[22]Morgan, What Nietzsche Means, 146-47.

[23]Ibid., 145.

[24]Ibid., 147.

morality and dynamic religion. Although Bergson suggests that some moral heroes and quasi-mystics influenced moral development before the birth of Christ, it is with Christianity that the first truly dynamic religion arises, and it is among the Christian mystics that true mysticism is first attained.[25] This is so because the Christian mystics succeeded in the "establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests." Since this "effort is of God, if it is not God himself," the Christian mystics are "continuing and extending the divine action."[26] Hence, Christianity provided, through its mystics, the first major source of moral progress and represents the major event in Bergson's treatment of the history of morals.

The role of the mystic is the transformation of humanity, a long and slow process, since the attention of men is naturally turned to competition both among themselves and with nature, giving them little opportunity to absorb the mystic's message.[27] Since the mystics reach only a very small portion of humanity, they have historically followed the pattern of creating "spiritual societies" such as convents and religious orders with the intention of

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[25] Bergson, The Two Sources, 227.

[26] Ibid., 220-21.

[27] Ibid., 235.

expanding these small societies and increasing their number until the whole of mankind could be encompassed within them.[28] Yet, until this ultimate end can be achieved, only the immediate followers of the mystic or moral hero participate fully in open morality.

The message of the mystic or moral hero then is not transmitted to all mankind in its completeness. As we have seen, the message of the mystic or moral hero is impossible to objectify completely in rules and concepts.[29] The emotional nature of open morality can be approximated, however, through the medium of intellect. By translating it into expressible maxims, intelligence grounds open morality in language and concepts.[30] Once objectified, open morality takes on the appearance of closed morality, and indeed, one of the cardinal roles of intellect in moral evolution is the application of the same concept--morality--to both the open and closed types, thereby reconciling them.[31] Moreover, the verbal and written expression allowed to open morality through the agency of intellect, gives the residue of open morality thus garnered

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[28] Ibid., 236.

[29] Colin Smith, Contemporary French Philosophy: A Study in Norms and Values (New York, 1964), 145.

[30] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 91.

[31] Ibid., 93.

a less restricted means of transmission and permits it a broader audience. By attaining permanence in language, open morality, like closed morality, also eventually comes to inhere in language, customs, and institutions and is perpetuated through education.[32]

After both moral types have been classified as morality, intellect begins to gradually install the appeals of the open type into the existing closed moral system in a logically consistent manner.[33] Hence, moral progress results from the expansion of closed morality to include portions of conceptually formulated open morality.[34] Both moral types have a crucial role to play in this process; open morality provides new moral material in the form of dynamic emotional appeals, while closed morality lends its obligatory character to the conceptualized appeals of open morality. In the process, the actual nature of both types is obscured. By conceptualizing open morality, intellect gives it the appearance of static maxims, while in combining the two types, it makes them appear as one. Moreover, by casting the appeals of open morality and the imperatives of closed morality into a logical system, intellect causes

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[32] Ibid., 91.

[33] Ibid., 93.

[34] Ibid., 92.

obligatory actions to coincide with rational acts, fostering the illusion that reason is the basis of obligation.[35]

Bergson's doctrine of moral progress allows only for the gradual evolution of closed morality in continuously expanding circles. Although the moral hero broadens the contemporary morality, his example must be reduced to an incomplete formula and thus his impact is diminished. Moreover, these new additions to the prevailing closed moral system become static, ossifying into rules and reinforced by habit and social pressure, distinguishable only from the commands of closed morality in that they are universal rather than social maxims. Thus, although they continuously evolve away from the parochial toward the universal in this manner, moralities necessarily progress slowly.[36]

In contrast to this slow moral evolution in the past, Bergson suggests that science and industrialism may speed moral development in the future and make the transition to an entirely open morality possible. By initiating a radical change in man's material conditions and thereby eliminating the struggle for survival among men, science

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Thomas Hanna (ed.), The Bergsonian Heritage (New York, 1962), 20.

and technology could free man to follow the example of the mystic or moral hero in the creation of a more perfectly moral society.[37] However, at present, industrialism has introduced the "disease" of preoccupation with material comforts and luxury. Thus, mechanization presents both a threat and a promise to the moral life of mankind, and man must choose his own destiny.[38]

Nietzsche's account of moral evolution also involves the interaction of his two moral types and begins with the development of more complex and differentiated societies. As the division of labor becomes more pronounced in a society, consciousness of individuality begins to emerge to the detriment of social morality.[39] This awareness of individuality provides the basis for personal morality which never emerged among the primitives. Since personal and social morality are diametrically opposed, the genesis of master morality ushered in a struggle between the two moralities that ended ultimately in the predominance of the social type.[40]

Apparently, Nietzsche believed that master morality was quite prevalent in the post-primitive age, for he

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[37] Gallagher, Morality in Evolution, 54.

[38] Ibid., 53.

[39] Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker, 216.

[40] Morgan, What Nietzsche Means, 149.

termed the resurgence of social morality the "slave revolt" in morals and the "transvaluation" of master morality.[41] This slave revolt was actually a process of accretion encompassing 2000 years. It took place in man as he developed moral consciousness and in morality with the decline of master morality. The "herd" or social instinct, together with the steady development of moral consciousness, foreshadowed the slave revolt, but Christianity was the major instrument in the triumph of social morality. Although Judaism and its antecedents contributed to the success of the slave revolt, Christianity, as a more fervant, dynamic, and universal faith played the primary role.[42]

Although Nietzsche's language leads one to believe that he considers the "slave revolt" and the emergence of Christianity as completely retrogressive occurrences, this is not the case. Nietzsche thought that the Christian religion was a necessary evil in the development of morals. Both religion and social morality portray the impulses as evil; as such, they divide man against himself, causing him to struggle with himself. As a dialectical thinker, Nietzsche holds that consciousness of the ugly and evil

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[41]Arthur C. Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher (New York, 1965), 164-5.

[42]Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker, 260.

must preceed awareness of the good and beautiful. Thus, the development among all men of the feeling that impulses are evil is a necessary stage in the approach to their sublimation. The next stage of moral development involves the transcending of this evil conception of impulse and the recognition of the potentially creative role that impulse should assume in value formation. Once this stage of moral evolution is reached, human actions can be evaluated as to how well they produce power or self-mastery.[43]

The second major occurrence that Nietzsche discusses in moral history is the "death of God," an event that has no counterpart in Bergson's moral philosophy. The death of God is not simply an expression of Nietzsche's own atheism; it is the phrase that Nietzsche applied to what he believed to be the widespread trend toward atheism in late nineteenth century Europe.[44] Since the slave revolt, Christianity had become the basis for European morality; thus the decline in religious belief signaled the presence of a critical stage in moral evolution and foreshadowed a major alteration in Western values. Nietzsche hoped to confront and surmount the wave of nihilism which he anticipated as the immediate consequence of this decline in religious belief by

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[43]Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (New Jersey, 1968), 253-4.

[44]Ibid., 96-97.

undertaking a thorough critique of the reigning Western values. He believed that an evaluation and criticism of the contemporary morality would lay the foundation for the creation of new values.[45] Because he expected an imminent crisis in morals, Nietzsche's moral philosophy contains an urgency that does not exist in Bergson's analysis of morality, an urgency that caused Nietzsche to perceive his own role in moral evolution differently.

Like Bergson, Nietzsche constructs a theory of moral progress that is a complex process, not a simple additive or cumulative formula, nor an unhalting linear progression. However, Nietzsche's supermen never enter into the process of moral evolution in the same capacity as do Bergson's mystics and moral heroes. The reason for the superman's aloofness from this process is the same as that which compels mystics to form small spiritual societies; most men simply cannot measure up to personal morality. Unlike the message of the mystic or moral hero, however, the superman's code of life cannot be diluted for mass consumption. This is not because his style of life resists verbal or written expression, as is the case with Bergson's moral heroes. Instead, it is because the fulfillment of a personal morality involves a great deal of pain and self-denial

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[45] Ibid., 101-2.

and requires an immense measure of strength and self-discipline.[46] Hence, personal morality must be an elite morality unless or until a species of supermen replaces the current species of social men.[47]

Moral evolution then, insofar as it concerns the majority of mankind, must take place within the confines of social morality, hopefully in the direction of a gradual development of the masses into supermen. The evolution of social morality does however involve a measure of self-overcoming. This is evident in several lines from Zarathustra:

> A table of virtues hangs over every people. Behold, it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power.
>
> Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and . . . the rarest, the most difficult--that they call holy.[48]

Thus, Nietzsche also explains the process of moral evolution in terms of self-overcoming or the "dialectic of self-transcendence."[49] This process is similar to Hegel's conception of dialectical progression, involving, according

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[46] Ibid., 280-81.

[47] Salter, Nietzsche the Thinker, 340-41.

[48] Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann, The Portable Nietzsche (New York: 1968), 170.

[49] Morgan, What Nietzsche Means, 163.

to Kaufmann, "a simultaneous preserving, cancelling, and lifting up," and is designated by both thinkers as aufheben. In this process new values are created from a synthesis of older opposing values in which some old values are partially preserved, others are retained intact, and the remainder are cancelled or eliminated. The "lifting up" implies that values become more closely aligned with the will to power.[50]

In contrast to the Hegelian progression, Nietzsche's dialectic of self-transcendence is not automatic, necessary, or inevitable, for the dialectic becomes operative only if moral progress occurs. Moral progress, however, is by no means inevitable, for the tension which generates the dialectical movement arises only when values attain complete fruition.[51] The penultimate stage in the development of any value is, for Nietzsche, its own self-abolition in an act of self-transcendence. A new value is then created by the synthesis of this old value and its antithesis.[52] As a cultural phenomenon this dialectical process of moral evolution occurs slowly and gradually unless, at a critical stage of the process, an acute

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[50]Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 236.

[51]Morgan, What Nietzsche Means, 167.

[52]Ibid., 164-66.

philosopher intervenes to undertake a thorough critique of the old values. Thus Nietzsche conceived his own role.[53]

The similarities between these two accounts of moral evolution are striking. For both philosophers the central development in moral history has been the emergence of Christianity. Both thinkers use Christianity's impact on moral development to explain the origin of universalist tendencies in a previously "social" or "closed" line of moral development. Indeed, Bergson proclaims that "in moral history the passage from closed to open morality was brought about by Christianity."[54] Since the origin of Christianity and open morality coincide, Christianity is for Bergson the original source of moral creativity and progress. In contrast to Bergson's open type, Nietzsche's personal morality emerges before Christianity and gains no benefit from it. Instead, Christianity lends its force to social morality, assuring the success of the slave revolt in man and morality. However, as was shown above, Christianity has brought progress in morals, although it is by no means an unmixed blessing.

Nietzsche and Bergson also disagree on the specific role of reason, and the nature of what they call the

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[53] Ibid., 167.

[54] Bergson, The Two Sources, 77.

"social instinct" in moral evolution. Reason, for Nietzsche, plays an analytical role in the dialectical process of moral evolution as the arbiter of values, while the "social instinct" arises from the lack of a conception of individuality and provides the starting point for the development of moral consciousness. A more mechanical function is assigned to reason by Bergson: the reduction of an emotionally creative disposition into concepts and the construction of logically consistent systems from scattered moral imperatives. Moreover, Bergson holds that the "social instinct" has a biological origin, and thus that moral consciousness is a virtual instinct. However, both thinkers are at one in the use of the term "instinct" as a metaphorical device to describe a nonrational function, neither thinker holding that man possesses true instincts.[55] Ultimately, both Nietzsche and Bergson posit this social instinct as something to be surpassed or overcome; for Nietzsche, because it involves the suppression or extirpation of impulses, and for Bergson, because of its social, exclusive, and therefore closed tendency.

However, "social instinct" does not exhaust the nonrational aspects of human behavior for either thinker. "Impulse" and "creative emotion" are also nonrational.

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[55] Bergson, The Two Sources, 26. See also Morgan, What Nietzsche Means, 101.

As we have seen, for Nietzsche, impulse enters into creativity, the creative act requiring the energy derived from sublimated impulse. For Bergson, nonlogical processes fall into the realms of habit--the infra-intellectual impedement to moral progress--and creative emotion or love--the supra-intellectual, creative power which allows the moral hero to generate new values. Thus, for both thinkers, the creation of new values cannot be explained without reference to nonrational processes.

Ultimately, the dimunition of the role of reason in moral behavior and moral development is one of the most fundamental similarities between the moral philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson. This retreat from reason may have been occasioned by the attempt of both thinkers to explain morality developmentally, but whatever the cause, Nietzsche and Bergson rejected reason as the cause of both movement and stability in morals, and refused to accept reason as the basis of both everyday moral behavior and for the behavior of the "great man" who creates his own moral code.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A shared vitalism that entailed elitism, the adoption of a developmental perspective, and an interest in the nature and role of both creativity and nonlogical processes--these aspects of the thought of Nietzsche and Bergson seem important in understanding the similarities between their moral philosophies. Besides representing their most fundamental similarities, these ideas and frames of reference account for most of the other points of agreement which exist between the moral philosophies of the two thinkers.

As we have seen, both thinkers adopted the hypothesis of biological evolution, but preferred to explain life's evolution as a creation, the product of a vitalistic principle. All life is thus the result of a continuous process of creation, but man, because he is capable of becoming conscious of the life principle, may actively participate in his own creation. In the thought of both Nietzsche and Bergson there is thus a radical division between man and lower organisms, and an equally radical division between men, for all men do not become conscious

of the vital force. The most cursory observation of the human species reveals that all men are not creators, and both thinkers resolve this dilemma by arguing that all men have not, as it were, arrived at the same stage of human evolution. Indeed, both philosophers hold that man may develop within the species, that he has a potential, which the greatest among men come close to realizing.

Once the outstanding individual has become conscious of the life principle, he adopts a totally new view of life and creates a new code of conduct based on this outlook. For both thinkers, this new code of life is qualitatively different from the moral codes to which lesser men adhere. Indeed, the discrepancy between these ethical systems is so great that Nietzsche and Bergson describe the two as entirely different types of morality. In the philosophies of both thinkers, the lower moral type is distinguished from the higher type by the incomplete, and therefore incorrect, view of life which stands at its center. The higher moral type, of course, is fashioned around a complete view of life, since the great men who create it have become conscious of the essence of life.

Although the outstanding individuals described by both thinkers are valuable in their own right, they may also benefit mankind as a whole in the realm of morality, for moral progress occurs as lesser men approach the attitude

of the great man and assimilate it into their own lower type of morality. Apparently, for both thinkers, once this attitude is fully adopted by the whole of mankind, the superman or moral hero becomes not the exception but the rule, for all men then reach the level of this "higher moral species" and adopt the type of morality that characterizes it.

In following this outline of Nietzsche's and Bergson's moral philosophies, it becomes apparent that the structure of their thought and the direction that it follows are quite similar. However, when we attempt to flesh out this schema, we encounter fundamental differences between the two thinkers. For example, when we ask in what way the great man's view of life is more complete than that of the lesser men around him, Nietzsche and Bergson reply quite differently. By becoming aware of his own will to power, the superman realizes that his basic drives are a potential asset because the energy underlying impulse can be channelled into creative outlets. This insight is not incorporated into the lower moral type adhered to by lesser men; instead Nietzsche believes that this lower type of morality is built around a conception of the impulses as evil, forces to be suppressed or extirpated rather than employed. For Bergson, the moral hero's consciousness of the <u>elan vitale</u> generates a creative

emotion and a love of all men, while the love of lesser men does not extend beyond the boundaries of their families and the fellow members of their society.

The same type of structural similarity is evident in the role that both thinkers assign to the nonlogical aspects of human behavior in moral evolution. Both thinkers divide nonrational processes into two categories, one promoting change in morals and the other obstructing it. As we have seen, for Nietzsche and Bergson, the creation of new values cannot be accounted for without reference to impulse and creative emotion respectively, while "social instinct"--the other category into which the nonlogical processes fall--impedes moral change. Again, however, when the details of this structural similarity are examined, it is found that Nietzsche and Bergson seem to be describing different nonrational processes--impulse or basic drives versus creative emotion or love--as the dynamic elements in moral evolution, and that they are not in agreement on the nature and origin of "social instinct." In Bergson's philosophy, social instinct has a biological origin and is the virtual instinct that serves as moral consciousness in closed morality. Nietzsche does not speculate on the origin of social instinct, but he holds that it serves only as the starting point for the development of moral

consciousness in slave morality. Again, the similarity is in form rather than in content.

Do these similarities in "form" between the moral philosophies of the two thinkers imply that Nietzsche influenced Bergson? There is no evidence that Nietzsche directly influenced Bergson's thought,[1] nor is there any indication that both thinkers were influenced by a common set of immediate predecessors.[2] Furthermore, as Idella Gallagher has shown in her work on the great Frenchman, Bergson's moral philosophy can be explained as the extention and development of the ideas contained in Time and Free Will, Matter and Memory, and Creative Evolution.[3]

No thinker had a monopoly on the major interests that Nietzsche and Bergson pursued or the frames of reference that they adopted. The nature and role of creativity, for example, was a question that Western thinkers had treated at least as early as the Romantics, and while the nonrational aspects of human behavior was a newer concern, this interest was by no means confined to Nietzsche alone. Indeed, Bergson and Nietzsche were at one with the other

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[1]H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society; The Reorientation of European Social Thought (New York, 1961), 105-6.

[2]Ibid., see also, 115.

[3]Idella Gallagher, Morality in Evolution; The Moral Philosophy of Henri Bergson (Netherlands, 1970), 15.

great minds of their age in delving into this little-known realm of man's nature. Moreover, as we have seen, it is not from identical views of man and nature that the similarities in the moral philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson arise, but from the vitalism and developmental frame of reference characteristic of both these views. Nor was Nietzsche the first to arrive at a vitalistic view of nature or to adopt an evolutionary frame of reference, for these are two aspects of Western thought that have a long lineage. Bergson's vitalism and developmental perspective, then, do not imply that he was influenced by Nietzsche. Ultimately, it is not necessary to refer to direct influence in order to explain the similarities between the moral philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson, for there is no reason to believe that Bergson did not arrive independently at the interests and frames of reference that he shared with Nietzsche. And it is these interests and frames of reference that provided Nietzsche and Bergson with similar starting points, influenced the direction of their thought, and probably account for the structural similarities in their moral philosophies.

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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND HENRI BERGSON:
A COMPARISON OF THEIR MORAL PHILOSOPHIES

by

Douglas E. Webb, Jr.

(ABSTRACT)

The similarities between Nietzsche and Bergson can be seen in the reactions of both thinkers to Darwinism, the vitalism that both philosophers utilized to explain life's evolution, the distinction made by the two thinkers between men and great men, the developmental frame of reference applied by both men to their moral enquiries, and the impact that these positions had on their moral philosophies. The division of men into two unequal categories is paralleled by a distinction between types of morality in the thought of both philosophers, and Nietzsche's slave and master moralities prove to be similar to Bergson's closed and open types respectively. The master and open moral types are created by superior individuals and are more relevant to life, reflecting man's continuously developing potential.

In the history of moral development, Nietzsche and Bergson discern moral progress, but hold that this progress is highly erratic. To explain both movement and stability

in morals, Nietzsche and Bergson refer to nonlogical processes and divide them into two categories, one fostering moral change, the other inhibiting it. The major similarities between the two moral philosophers appear to exist in the structure and direction of their thought and seem to be the result of the two major interests they shared--the nature and role of both creativity and nonrational processes--and the frames of reference that both men adopted--a vitalism that issued in elitism and the developmental perspective that this evolutionary theory entailed.