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NIETZSCHE CONTRA FREUD ON BAD CONSCIENCE

**Abstract:** In the following essay, I argue that Nietzsche's conception of moral conscience is opposed to Freud's view in a number of important respects. Freudian moral conscience is essentially and irredeemably a bad conscience, based in an insurmountable conflict of desire and morality and characterized by repression, subordination to prohibition, and inevitable feelings of guilt. Nietzschean conscience, on the contrary, is grounded in affirmation, memory, individual sovereignty, and the feelings of pride and power. Nietzsche's psychology of "the will to power" does not assume an essential conflict of desire and morality or the inevitability of guilt; consequently, it does not transform all moral conscience into guilty conscience. Whereas Freudian psychology leads to the pessimistic choice between civilization and happiness, Nietzsche's view suggests the possibility of forms of moral self-determination that are free of guilt, blame, and self-cruelty: a noble form of moral conscience that might serve as the foundation of noble forms of morality and society.

**Keywords:** Freud, Psychology, Bad Conscience, Guilt, Drives, Morality, Will to power.

**Zusammenfassung:** In der folgenden Abhandlung erörtere ich, dass Nietzsches Begriff des moralischen Gewissens Freuds Ansicht in einer Reihe wichtiger Punkte entgegensteht. Das Freudsche moralische Gewissen ist im Wesentlichen und unausweichlich ein schlechtes Gewissen, das auf einem unüberwindlichen Konflikt zwischen Begierde und Moral basiert und durch Verdrängung, Unterwerfung unter Verbote und unvermeidliche Schuldgefühle gekennzeichnet ist. Im Gegensatz dazu beruht Nietzsches Gewissen auf Affirmation, Erinnerung, individueller Souveränität und den Gefühlen von Stolz und Macht. Nietzsches Psychologie des Willens zur Macht setzt keinen grundlegenden Konflikt zwischen Begierde und Moral oder die Unvermeidbarkeit von Schuld voraus, folglich wird das moralische Gewissen nicht zwangsläufig zum schlechten Gewissen. Während die Freudsche Psychologie zu einer pessimistischen Wahl zwischen Kultur und Glück führt, suggeriert Nietzsches Ansicht mögliche Formen moralischer Selbstbestimmung, die frei von Schuld, Tadel und gegen sich selbst gewendete Grausamkeit sind: eine vornehme Form von moralischem Gewissen, das als Grundlage für vornehme Formen von Moral und Gesellschaft dienen könnte.

**Schlagwörter:** Freud, Psychologie, Schlechtes Gewissen, Schuld, Triebe, Moralität, Wille zur Macht.

*Introduction*

While much has been made of the similarities between the works of Nietzsche and Freud, insufficient attention has been paid to their differences. Even where they have been noted, the degree of these differences, which some-





times approaches direct opposition, has often been underestimated.<sup>1</sup> In the following essay, I will suggest that on the subject of bad conscience Nietzsche and Freud have opposing views, with substantially different moral consequences.

Despite similarities, Nietzsche's conception of moral conscience is opposed to that of Freud in a number of crucial respects. For Freud, conscience is primarily associated with bad will, repression, subordination to social prohibition, and the feeling of guilt. For Nietzsche, conscience is primarily related to affirmation, memory, individual sovereignty, and the feelings of pride and power. To be sure, Freudian bad conscience has its parallel in Nietzsche's philosophy – but only as a modality of conscience, not as its foundation. Freudian conscience is, on the contrary, an essentially bad conscience.

In light of Nietzsche's distinction between noble and slavish forms of evaluation (GM I 10f., KSA 5.270–277), it may be more appropriate to say that Freudian conscience is fundamentally an "evil" and guilty conscience, in contrast to merely "bad." According to Nietzsche, in the noble mode of moral evaluation, the term "bad" identifies simply difference from and lack of the good, as opposed to the slavish evaluation of "evil," which is inseparable from implications of moral responsibility, guilt, and blameworthiness.

The complementary concept of the good also differs dramatically in noble and slavish value-systems. In noble moralities, the good originates in direct self-affirmation, whereas in the slavish form, the judgment of the good is reducible to the negation of evil and indicates, not a truly positive evaluation, but the negation of another person, group, or set of values. This distinction also applies to the notion of "good conscience," which can be seen as having its primary basis in either the affirmation of a moral will or the negation of bad will. It will be seen that Nietzsche takes the former view, while Freud takes the latter.<sup>2</sup>

For this reason, in my discussion, I will use the opposition of good conscience and guilty conscience, rather than good and bad. By "good conscience"

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<sup>1</sup> The most extensive and insightful discussions of this topic can be found in Günter Götde, *Traditionslinien des Unbewußten. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud*, Tübingen 1999, Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology of Power*, Jerusalem 1987, and Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, Paris 1980, trans. by Richard Collier. All three studies provide admirably careful examinations of the historical and intellectual ties between Nietzsche and Freud, while carefully noting important points of both correspondance and difference. In most cases, the common emphasis upon the deep connections in Freud and Nietzsche's work is fully justified. Nevertheless, I believe the degree of difference and direct disagreement on certain points – particularly the theories of the drive, society, and conscience – has often been understated in the literature.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, any act of moral conscience will include aspects of both: the affirmation of a good will is inevitably also the negation of any "bad" counter-volitions. But noble conscience is distinguished in two ways. First, it negates a contingently rather than essentially bad will; thus, it is not a negation of "evil" will. Second, the negation of a conflicting will follows from the direct affirmation of a moral volition, rather than the moral volition being reducible to the negation of bad will. The affirmation of will is primary and affirmative, not a secondary negation of negation.





I will mean, not simply the absence of guilt, but an act of self-determination primarily grounded in the affirmation of a desire rather than in an original negation of desire. And I will use “guilty conscience” to indicate a state of conscience that not only negates a desire on moral grounds, but also includes a self-assignment of moral blameworthiness and some aspect of self-punishment, such as guilt.<sup>3</sup>

I will begin by suggesting that Freudian conscience is essentially and irredeemably guilty in two ways. First, according to Freud, the self-punishing feeling of guilt is made inevitable by an essential and insurmountable conflict between two basic categories of the drives: life drives (or Eros), which are the basis of social bonds, and death drives, which are the basis of aggressive and destructive social behavior. Indeed, even without the controversial assumption of a death drive, Freud’s basic theories of pleasure and the drives suggest a fundamental antagonism between desire and social life that ensures the inescapability of guilt.

Second, for Freud, the only function of moral conscience is to negate anti-social desire and to produce the feeling of guilt. Every activity of conscience is fundamentally reactive and negative, because moral goodness in the Freudian worldview is essentially reactive and negative in character. That is, the good is nothing other than the reduction of suffering, where suffering is equated, in Freud’s particularly nihilistic variant of hedonism, to stimulation and, ultimately, vitality – that is, to life as such.

I will then suggest that in Nietzsche’s theory of conscience there is, on the contrary, no essential conflict between desire and moral life that would lead to the inevitability of guilty conscience. Moreover, the function of moral conscience for Nietzsche is not solely to negate bad will and produce guilt. Far to the contrary, its original function is to affirm and sustain the will in the forms of promise and responsibility-to-self.

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<sup>3</sup> My definition of guilty conscience corresponds in many respects to Nietzsche’s notion of guilty conscience proper, which he distinguishes from a more basic form of guilty conscience that does not have specifically moral content. The more basic form is “a piece of animal psychology, no more,” in which we find “guilt in its raw state” (GM III 20, KSA 5.389). This form of guilty conscience does not include recognition of moral blameworthiness, and although it involves the negation of desires or drives, it does not negate desires for moral reasons. Consequently, it is not a form of truly moral conscience at all. This basic, non-moral form of guilty conscience does, however, share one aspect of guilty conscience as I have defined it: it includes self-cruelty. However, I will argue that this element of self-cruelty in Nietzsche’s account of conscience is a historically contingent product of social-political conditions and, consequently, not an essential feature of Nietzschean conscience. On the distinction between primary guilty conscience and guilty conscience, see David Lindstedt, *The Progression and Regression of Slave Morality in Nietzsche’s Genealogy. The Moralization of Guilty conscience and Indebtedness*, in: *Continental Philosophy Review* 30 (1997), pp. 83–105, and Mathias Risse, *The Second Treatise in On the Genealogy of Morality. Nietzsche on the Origin of Guilty conscience*, in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2000), pp. 55–81.





Finally, I will suggest that the striking consequence of Nietzsche's theory of conscience is the possibility of forms of moral self-determination that are free of guilt, blame, and self-cruelty. Put in Nietzschean moral language, a "noble" [*vornehm*] form of moral conscience is possible – a possibility that is eliminated from the very start by Freud's theory of conscience. Such a form of conscience would complement to, and support the actualization of, a noble form of morality in Nietzsche's sense: namely, a morality founded upon positive, self-affirming values, rather than upon the negation of an externally grounded concept of evil.<sup>4</sup>

It should be emphasized that when I speak of a noble form of moral conscience, I do not have in mind a possible return to the moral and psychological conditions of the master class Nietzsche so vividly and disturbingly portrays in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and to which he attributes the founding of the noble form of values.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, Nietzsche's historical masters are free of guilty conscience only because they are free of moral conscience altogether. Their nobility lies not in this lack of conscience, but rather in the independence and self-affirmation that characterizes their values and actions.

It is these characteristics of independence and self-affirmation, as opposed to the social subservience and self-sacrifice that characterizes the subject af-

<sup>4</sup> It might be objected that for Nietzsche morality and nobility are mutually exclusive and that, consequently, a noble form of conscience is impossible. This is surely not true of the broad sense of "morality" that Nietzsche uses throughout the *Genealogy of Morals*, where he speaks explicitly of "noble morality" [*vornehme Moral*] (GM I 10, KSA 5.270). Nor is it the case in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche clearly identifies "master morality" [*Herren-Moral*] as a noble form of morality (BGE 260, KSA 5.208). Nietzsche's self-proclaimed "immoralism" is first and foremost a rejection of one historical form of morality and not a rejection of morality as such: "Beyond Good and Evil. – At least this does not mean 'Beyond Good and Bad'" (GM I 17, KSA 5.288). For excellent discussions of the limits of Nietzsche's critique of morality, see Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, London 2002, Philippa Foot, *Nietzsche's Immoralism*, in: Richard Schacht (Ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality. Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*, Berkeley 1994, Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality*, in: *Ibid.*, and Frithjof Bergmann, *Nietzsche's Critique of Morality*, in: Robert Solomon / Kathleen Higgins (ed.), *Reading Nietzsche*, New York, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> It is sometimes mistakenly believed that because Nietzsche's treatment of the slave revolt against the masters' values is critical, Nietzsche must wish to return us to the values and type of the master. See, for example, Richard White, *The Return of the Master. An Interpretation of Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (June 1988). Such interpretations imply an essentialization of the psychological types of master and slave that is very much at odds with the historical and genealogical methodology that Nietzsche employs to trace the origin and development of each type. It also overlooks the key moment in the *Genealogy*: the role of conscience and self-mastery in producing a supramoral [*übersittliche*], as opposed to amoral or pre-moral, form of the human individual (GM II 2, KSA 5.293). The implication is clearly that Nietzsche's over-human ideal is not a return to the state of humanity prior to the development of conscience. See Nietzsche's distinction of pre-moral, moral, and extra-moral [*aussermoralische*] phases of human history in BGE 32, KSA 5.50f., and TI, *Expeditions of an Untimely Man* 48, KSA 6.150: "I too speak of a 'return to nature,' although it is not really a going-back but a going-up."





fllicted by guilty conscience, that would distinguish a truly noble form of moral conscience. In the spirit of Nietzsche's insistence that "beyond good and evil" does not mean "beyond good and bad" (GM I 17, KSA 5.288), a noble moral conscience would be one that exhibits an autonomy originally grounded in the affirmation rather than the negation of the will. Although such a form of conscience must be self-determining, and so might include the negation of desires for moral reasons, it would nonetheless be a form of good conscience, free of guilt and self-punishment for assumed moral blameworthiness.

*I.*

In Freud's theory of moral conscience, conscience is essentially and irredeemably an "evil" conscience because guilt is inescapable.<sup>6</sup> According to Freud, this is due to an essential instinctual conflict between life drives and death drives. The life drives, or as collectively described, Eros, are rooted in a primary psychological tendency toward the formation and extension of sexual and social bonds, while the death drive is an essential psychological demand to bring mental life to the lowest possible level of stimulation or tension. According to Freud, the death drive is satisfied either through self-cruelty or social aggression and destructiveness. The conflict between life and death drives is, in turn, the foundation of guilty conscience. When civilization thwarts the anti-social manifestation of the death drive in destructiveness, moral conscience takes it over and redirects this destructiveness toward the ego in the form of self-cruelty, self-punishment, and a heightened feeling of guilt.<sup>7</sup>

It might be objected that Freud's claim that guilt is inevitable should be rejected, since it depends upon the existence of the death drive – a speculative, tentative addition to his general theory of the drives, made very late in his career. In his important work on Nietzsche and Freud, Günter Gölde has emphasized the centrality of Eros in his interpretation of Freud's drive theory,<sup>8</sup> contrasting Freud's tendency to prioritize sexuality, narcissism, and erotic drives with

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in: Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. by James Strachey. London 1961 (SE) 21, p. 132, Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*. Hg. von Anna Freud. London 1948 (GW) 14, S. 492: "Whether one has killed one's father or has abstained from doing so is not really the decisive thing. One is bound to feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* and *The Ego and the Id*, SE 19: V, GW 13: V.

<sup>8</sup> Gölde, *Traditionslinien*, 11: 4, S. 496: "Als Differenz bleibt, daß Nietzsche – und Adler – den Selbsterhaltungs- und Machttrieben, Freud hingegen den Sexualtrieben die Vorherrschaft im Unbewußten zuerkannt haben." See also S. 489, 493–497, and 542.



Nietzsche's frequent focus on the selfish and aggressive aspects of human motivation. If this emphasis on Eros as a counterweight to instinctive hostility is justified, Freud may also be able to endorse the possibility of an authentically good conscience, grounded in the affirmation of the will rather than in the feeling of guilt and the negation of the will.

However, we do not need to appeal to Freud's controversial postulate of the death drive to ground his claim about the inevitability of guilt. Nor will Freud's theory of Eros, in any of its manifestations, provide a sufficient counterweight to save the Freudian subject from the fate of guilty conscience. For the subject's guilt is founded in the very core of Freud's theory of sexuality and Eros: the theories of the drives, instinctual satisfaction, and pleasure.

Gödde rightly points out that Freud's theory is not a truly hedonistic one,<sup>9</sup> for it does not treat pleasure in any and every form, or pleasure simply, as the final end of human action. He believes Freud's theory escapes hedonism by distinguishing sublimation as a higher form of pleasure, as well as by privileging the satisfaction of erotic drives over destructive drives. However, Freud's theory escapes hedonism in an even more radical way: by rejecting the very existence of positive pleasure and making the goal of instinctual life the complete elimination of drive and pleasure altogether.

Throughout his work, Freud consistently equates unpleasure with psychological stimulation and pleasure with the decrease of such stimulation, a negative definition of pleasure and satisfaction that grounds his entire theory of the mind.<sup>10</sup> In his early writings, Freud expresses this view in the form of the biological hypothesis of the principle of inertia. Under the necessity of dealing with internal stimuli, he tells us, the nervous system exhibits a primary tendency of "bringing the level of  $Q\dot{u}$  [the quantity of intercellular energy or activity in the nervous system] to zero [...] an endeavor at least to keep the  $Q\dot{u}$  as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it – that is, to keep it constant."<sup>11</sup>

This originally biological hypothesis survives as psychological principle throughout his work (and, in the later work, returns in its biological form), serving as the foundation of his definition of the drive as the discharge of a stimulus,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., S. 495: "Obwohl Freud vom Lustprinzip im Sinne Fechners ausging, unterschied auch er zwischen niedrigen und höheren Arten des Lustgewinns. In der Sublimierung sah er eine höhere Art des Luststrebens."

<sup>10</sup> Gödde notes that this equation of pleasure with the elimination of pain resembles Schopenhauer's view (Traditionslinien, S. 481), but he does not fully pursue this important similarity – a first clue that Freud did not escape Schopenhauer's metaphysics as successfully as he believed.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, Project for a Scientific Psychology, SE 1, p. 296, GW 1: [1]. See also Sketches for the Preliminary Communication of 1893, SE 1, p. 153, GW 17: (C): "The nervous system endeavours to keep constant something in its functional relations that we may describe as the 'sum of excitations.'"



as well as grounding the constancy and pleasure principles.<sup>12</sup> In this way, Freud makes the avoidance and reduction of unpleasurable stimulation into the primary governing principle of both psychological and biological life. Unlike the death drive, this tendency does not characterize one category of drive or one principle among others, but serves as the foundation of every drive and principle of mental life.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, Freud suggests that human desire and motivation – even manifestations of Eros or life drives – are fundamentally at odds with a hostile external world. For the external world is a constant source of increased stimulation, a constant source of displeasure, and a frustration of the goal of reducing mental tension and stimulation to their lowest possible level: “It cannot be denied that hating, too, original characterized the relation of the ego to the alien external world with the stimuli it introduces [...]. At the very beginning, it seems, the external world, objects, and what is hated are identical.”<sup>14</sup>

This fundamental relationship of hatred between subject and external world is the basis of an essential tendency in the Freudian subject toward social domination. For the conflict between self and world is an insurmountable one: although the subject’s relation to the external world allows for the satisfaction of instinctual demands, it is also essentially a source of unpleasure. The external world, including the social human world, is in its very essence a frustration of the primary guiding principles of mental and biological life. This basic antagonism between self and world is particularly troublesome in the case of non-libidinal social relationships that do not involve sexual or affectionate bonds. For non-libidinal social relations make social and ethical demands upon the subject without, in return, serving as a direct means to instinctual satisfaction. Consequently, the Freudian subject is related to the social world first and foremost as an obstacle to its desire, a basic relationship of hatred that is only mitigated – and then only partially – through the other’s utility (whether sexual or through shared labor) to the alleviation of instinctual and organic needs. The true image of the individual as social subject is that of the mythical father of the primal horde, the

<sup>12</sup> Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*, SE 14, p. 120f., GW 10: “The nervous system is an apparatus which has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or of reducing them to the lowest possible level; or which, if it were feasible, would maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition.” See also *Ego and Id*, SE 19, p. 47, GW 13, S. 275, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE 5, p. 565, 598, GW 3: (C); and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE 18, p. 9, GW 13: 5.

<sup>13</sup> As I have argued elsewhere (Donovan Miyasaki, *Nietzsche or Freud. Desire, Pleasure, and Social Happiness*, University of Toronto dissertations 2004 / Ottawa, Library of Canada 2005, pp. 70–79), although Freud explicitly hesitates between a monism of life drives or a dualism of life and death drives, the consistent foundation of all versions of his theory in the principle of constancy and inertia suggests that, despite apparent variations, Freud’s theory is a disguised monism of the death drive from the beginning to the end of his career.

<sup>14</sup> Freud, *Instincts*, SE 14, p. 136, GW 10.



absolutely narcissistic, despotic, and terrifying leader that Freud imagines ruled the earliest forms of human society.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, the social desire of the Freudian subject is, in the sense given by slavish modes of evaluation, an “evil” will: inherently and invariably anti-social and immoral. The subject desires to dominate the other as both a source of instinctual satisfaction and an obstacle to its fundamental drive toward the elimination of unpleasure and stimulation. Due to this essentially anti-social tendency, the subject’s desire is always in conflict with the social good and with moral responsibility. Although it is true, as Gödde has noted,<sup>16</sup> that for both Freud and Nietzsche, the severity of guilty conscience depends in part upon the approachability of the ideal against which the ego is measured, guilt is not escaped by avoiding excessively high ideals. As Freud insists, guilt is inescapable, no matter how reasonable the measure and no matter how successfully the ego attains it: “The more virtuous a man is, the more severe and distrustful is [the] behavior [of conscience], so that ultimately it is precisely those people who have carried saintliness furthest who reproach themselves with the worst sinfulness.”<sup>17</sup> And although the demands of conscience are supported by a compromised social desire to protect limited instinctual satisfaction through the renunciation of domination, this desire is only a modification of the foundational desire for domination. “Bad” or “evil” will – and the guilt that it produces – belongs essentially to the Freudian subject.



## II.

Bad will does not, however, belong essentially to the Nietzschean subject. While Nietzsche’s psychology of the will to power appears to assume a fundamental tendency toward domination or exploitation in the same morally problematic sense, in fact, his adamant refusal to attribute an essential teleological aim to the drives and action makes such a conclusion impossible.<sup>18</sup> A fundamen-

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, SE 10, p. 123, GW 13, S. 138. Ironically, Freud compares the father of the horde to Nietzsche’s overman, projecting his own pessimism about the foundations of society into Nietzsche’s work.

<sup>16</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 526–527.

<sup>17</sup> Freud, *Civilization*, SE 21, p. 125 f., GW 14, S. 485. See also *Ego and Id*, SE 19, p. 54, GW S. 284: “The more a man checks his aggressiveness towards the exterior the more severe – that is aggressive – he becomes in his ego ideal.”

<sup>18</sup> While many commentators note Nietzsche’s critique of teleological interpretation, few take it seriously enough to question the teleological status of the will to power as psychological principle. Those who interpret the will to power as a principle of domination overlook the incompatibility of such a principle with Nietzsche’s rejection of teleology. See, for example, Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton 1950, and Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosophy. An Original Study*, New York 1965, p. 215. For two admirable







tal aspect of Nietzsche's rejection of the mythologies of the atomistic subject and the metaphysical account of the faculty of the will is his demand that the purpose or aim of an activity be rejoined to the act, an added consequence of his demand that we reject the essential distinction and separation of doer from deed, agent from act. Consequently, as Maudemarie has pointed out, the word "will" in the phrase "will to power" cannot be interpreted on the model of the causality of the will.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, if the will to power were a primary drive to dominate, it would fall into that model: a will to dominate that produces the action of domination as its causal effect. There is, then, no "will" to power in the sense of a primary motivation to gain or accumulate power, a bad will that would inevitably cause anti-social or destructive behavior: "The will no longer moves anything, consequently no longer explains anything – it merely accompanies events [...]. The so-called 'motive': another error. Merely a surface phenomenon of consciousness, an accompaniment to the act" (TI, *The Four Great Errors* 3, KSA 6.91). Consequently, Nietzsche cannot consistently treat any particular aim or goal as the motivational basis of human action. He cannot, as Freud explicitly does, treat death, destructiveness, or the formation of sexual and social bonds as essential instinctual aims.

Nor must his psychology of will to power entail, as often thought, that human motivation aims essentially at the domination of others – that power is analogous to the Freudian aims of inertia, pleasure, Eros, or death. To be sure, Nietzsche's psychology does suggest the necessity of agonistic relations of tension and struggle among subjects, but it does not require that these agonistic relations take specifically violent or destructive forms. After all, the most striking aspect of Nietzsche's power psychology is that he interprets every human interaction, even the most innocuous or apparently altruistic, as essentially agonistic – not just relations of overt conflict. Thus, even if power is interpreted as a teleological aim, there is no reason to restrict its forms of satisfaction to morally questionable forms or power. Above all, Nietzsche's psychology does not entail that subjects are motivated toward ending relations of agonistic struggle through the subordination of one subject to another. It does not, in other words, require that the Nietzschean social and moral subject be plagued by an essentially "evil" or anti-social will.<sup>20</sup>

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attempts to reconcile Nietzsche's general criticisms of teleology with a limited teleology of the will to power, see Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life. Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, Cambridge, Mass. 2006, pp. 124–147 and John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, Oxford 1996, pp. 16–35.

<sup>19</sup> Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 214f.

<sup>20</sup> I provide a more extended argument against the equation of will to power with domination in: *Freud or Nietzsche II: 5, The Social Consequences of Nietzsche's Theory of the Drive as Will to Power*, pp. 130–191.





Admittedly, the interpretation of the will to power as closely related to domination or anti-social manifestations of power is a common one. For example, Gödde contrasts the will to power as a primary psychological principle to Freud's pleasure principle, suggesting that the former implies a form of psychological egoism, while Freud's emphasis upon pleasure, because it is ultimately a principle in service of Eros, suggests a more sociable theory of human nature.<sup>21</sup>

However, if, as I have argued, Eros, the pleasure principle, and the aim of the drives are founded in the demand to reduce mental stimuli, then Eros is not a truly social psychological principle, and cannot be seen as a strong counterweight to the psychological egoism of Freud's theory. Like the early Nietzschean theory of the Dionysian to which Gödde compares it,<sup>22</sup> Eros achieves unity not through the affirmation of the social bond, but through the destruction of difference as a source of displeasure: through domination or mutual sublimation and the shared, partial renunciation of instinctual demand.<sup>23</sup>

And if, as I have also argued, the will to power cannot consistently be interpreted as a teleological principle, then it cannot be considered a principle of direct self-interest, egoism, or self-preservation. Indeed, Nietzsche frequently emphasizes the opposition of the theory of the will to power to egoistic theories of self-interest and self-preservation: in the willingness of life to sacrifice itself for power (BGE 13, KSA 5.27f.), in the status of the ego as an epiphenomenal identification of the self with ruling drives (BGE 17–19, KSA 5.30–34), and in the identification of the will to power as the foundation of asceticism (BGE 51, KSA 5.71).

In the end, it is Nietzsche's refusal to attribute to the drives and human motivation a strong teleological aim that establishes the decisive difference between his psychological theory and Freud's, a difference with substantial ethical and political consequences. It also indicates a more fundamental and important difference between Freud and Nietzsche's work as a whole: Freud's theory remains a metaphysical one. Although Gödde rightly considers Freud and Nietzsche's

<sup>21</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 493: "Daher scheinen Schopenhauers Konzeption des Lebenswillens, die in Freuds Libido und Eros wieder auflebt, und Nietzsches Konzeption des Machtwillens, die in Alfred Adlers Machtstreben einen Nachfolger gefunden hat, einander konträr zu sein: 'Im einen Fall ist der Eros und dessen Schicksal die oberste und ausschlaggebende Tatsache', meint C. G. Jung, 'im andern Fall die Macht des Ich. Im ersteren Fall hängt das Ich bloß als eine Art Anhängsel am Eros; im letzteren Fall ist die Liebe jeweils bloß ein Mittel zum Zweck des Obenaufkommens.'"

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 491. Compare Golomb, *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology*, p. 199: "A similar type of closed change is to be found in Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence of the same,' which restricts the infinitely open change of the will to power. Indeed, since the will to power and Eros are restrained by a similar 'enemy,' they come to resemble each other even more immediately."

<sup>23</sup> Compare Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, p. 60: "In the irreversible current of energetic loss, instincts are by no means principles of efficient construction, but rather salutary anti-positions of life."





mutual rejection of Schopenhauer's metaphysics to be an important similarity in their work,<sup>24</sup> this does not mean that both thinkers succeeded in their attempt to distance their theories from metaphysics.

Gödde rejects the view that Nietzsche's will to power is a metaphysical principle along the lines of Schopenhauer's concept of will.<sup>25</sup> He rightly points out that, while Schopenhauer's metaphysical will is a more primordial reality, a single unity that underlies all seemingly diverse phenomenal appearances, Nietzsche's will to power is bound up with a rejection of the traditional dualism of reality and appearance, so the will to power cannot be an underlying unitary being, law, or force that causes and explains all mental phenomena.

However, Gödde does not apply the same criteria of metaphysical explanation to Freud's theory. When we do, it becomes clear that Freud's theory strongly resembles Schopenhauer's philosophy in its metaphysical characteristics. As we have already seen, in the principle of inertia Freud has identified a single causal agency that underlies and explains all mental phenomena – and, in the later speculative theory, all biological life. More importantly, it is a principle that conforms to the traditional metaphysical distinction between reality and appearance. The principle of inertia is, on one hand, a descriptive principle: it describes the form of every mental principle and drive. The pleasure principle seeks to obtain the satisfaction of the drives, thereby reducing the stimulus at the source of the drive, tending toward the overall reduction of psychological stimulation. The reality principle tolerates the temporary increase of excitation, but only as a means to an overall reduction, again mirroring the form of the inertia principle.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 482 and 11: 3, S. 486–92.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 477f. and ders., *Nietzsches Perspektivierung des Unbewußten*, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 31 (2002), S. 187–191. Contrast Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, p. 92: “Freud's Libido and Nietzsche's Will to Power are both invested with the princeps function of exhibiting an energetic and qualified explanatory principle which immediately permits the subsumption of the entire ensemble of anthropological phenomena.”

<sup>26</sup> Freud, *Instincts*, SE 14, p. 120f., GW 10: “When we further find that the activity of even the most highly developed mental apparatus is subject to the pleasure principle, i.e. is automatically regulated by feelings belonging to the pleasure-unpleasure series, we can hardly reject the further hypothesis that these feelings reflect the manner in which the process of mastering stimuli takes place – certainly in the sense that unpleasurable feelings are connected with an increase and pleasurable feelings with a decrease of stimulus.” See also *Beyond*, 18, p. 9, GW 13, S. 5: “The facts, which have caused us to believe in the dominance of the pleasure principle in mental life, also find expression in the hypothesis that the mental apparatus endeavors to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant. This latter hypothesis is only another way of stating the pleasure principle; for if the work of the mental apparatus is directed towards keeping the quantity of excitation low, then anything that is calculated to increase that quantity is bound to be felt as adverse to the functioning of the apparatus, that is as unpleasurable. The pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy.”



On the other hand, the principle of inertia is not merely descriptive, but also teleological. It identifies the basic aim or purpose of every drive, the end that causes every decision and action. The apparent motives of our actions are revealed through our conscious goals: the satisfaction of the aim of a specific drive. Yet the more primary aim, the reduction of excitation in the mental apparatus, directly contradicts the apparent ones (sexual pleasure, self-preservation, destructiveness, or erotic unity). Consequently, the principle of inertia mirrors the traditional distinction of reality and appearance, particularly in its ability to unite contradictory appearances. This metaphysical habit in Freud's work of reducing differences to unities, dualism to monism, appearance to a more fundamental reality, appears at every stage of development in his overall theory. The initial opposition of self-preservative and sexual drives is synthesized in the new conceptual distinction of ego and object libido, both reducible to erotic drives, which are, in turn, grounded in the principle of constancy. In the later work, even the cosmic conflict of Eros and death resolves itself into a hidden unity: the compulsion to repetition, we are told, may be the cause of both life and death, constancy and inertia.<sup>27</sup>

It is this metaphysical tendency that necessitates Freud's grim conclusions about the inevitability of human unease under the conditions of culture. His cultural and political pessimism is grounded in the metaphysical singularity and inflexibility of primary human motivation, an inflexibility of aim and satisfaction that makes sublimation – the redirected, partial satisfaction of a drive and the sacrifice of full satisfaction – a necessary condition of social harmony and morality. Without the theory of sublimation, Freud's theory of society would collapse.

Consequently, although sublimation as aim-inhibited satisfaction of the drive tempers the subject's essentially anti-social will and makes civilization possible, it does not allow for the possibility of a truly good conscience – that is, a moral conscience founded in the affirmation of good will rather than in the primary negation of bad will. Freud's theory of society is, at every level, grounded in the reality principle as a compromised function of inertia and constancy, rather than a direct expression of any fundamentally social instinctual tendency. Society is based in the partial or temporary frustration of instinctual aims in exchange for the lesser net instinctual sacrifice: upon the necessity of sublimation and the overvaluation of the libidinal object that the frustration of instinctual aims produces.<sup>28</sup> All lasting social bonds depend upon the very failure of the subject to obtain authentic, full satisfaction of its principle psychological aim.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, *Ego and Id*, SE 19, p. 40f., GW 13, S. 269: "Both instincts would be conservative in the strictest sense of the word since both would be endeavoring to reestablish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life. The emergence of life would thus be the cause of the continuance of life and also at the same time of the striving towards death."

<sup>28</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology*, SE18, pp. 111–116, GW 13, S. 122–128.



This aspect of Freud's theory is a direct consequence of its metaphysical inflexibility. If all human motivation – every form of drive and psychological principle – is grounded in a single teleological end of the reduction of stimulation to an ideal zero, then every form of social bond and behavior, as the preservation and expansion of sources of resistance to this overarching aim, must be a frustration of desire: “It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression, or some other means) of powerful instincts.”<sup>29</sup>

We may reasonably conclude that the theory of sublimation does not help Freud escape the consequence of the inevitability of guilty conscience, since the need for sublimation follows from the frustration of the foundational metaphysical aim of the mind. Sublimation is not, as Gödde suggests,<sup>30</sup> a higher form of pleasure and, by implication, a basis for instinctual happiness without renunciation. Rather, Freudian sublimation can only be consistently read as a compromised, lesser pleasure: an instinctual frustration preferred only as a defense against greater instinctual sacrifice.

For the same reason, it is misleading to compare, as Kaufmann, Gödde, Golomb, and Assoun all do,<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche's distinction of higher and lower forms of pleasure to Freud's theory of sublimation. Although Nietzsche speaks of “sublimated” desires, he has no need of a theory of sublimation in Freud's sense of the term. His anti-metaphysical, anti-teleological approach to the will to power guarantees that there is no single, causal aim of the drives or mental life and, consequently, that there is no sublimation in the sense of a redirection of the drive from its authentic aim. To be sure, an individual drive can, just as in Freud's theory, be satisfied through redirection toward an alternate aim – for example, a sexual drive can be redirected into intellectual or artistic labor. But in Freud's case, this redirection is a frustration of an aim more primary than sexuality: the frustration of the inertia principle and thus a compromised satisfaction.

In Nietzsche's case, on the contrary, the redirection of a drive is simply the replacement of one manifestation of power with another – not a compromised pleasure or the frustration of a more fundamental aim. There is no true “sublimation” of lower aim into a higher, because the will to power and the drives have no essential aim. The manifestation of power is not a truly teleological aim (say, the goal of obtaining power, accumulating power, or overpowering another subject), but a non-metaphysical description of the form of every instinctual aim:

<sup>29</sup> Freud, *Civilization*, SE 21, p. 97, GW 14, S. 457.

<sup>30</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 495.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton 1950, pp. 211–256, Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 493–495 and 518, Golomb, *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology*, pp. 67–77, and Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, pp. 97–106 and 161–164.





the engagement with resistances and the expression or manifestation of power in activity against resistance.<sup>32</sup>

Because there is no fundamental and inescapable conflict at the basis of conscience, the Nietzschean subject can possess a moral conscience with a good will. Its desires need not be in conflict with morality. For the Nietzschean subject's desire is not, as the Freudian subject's desire is, necessarily at odds with moral interest. Consequently, the price of moral conscience is not, as it is for Freud, the necessary negation or restraint of an insurmountably anti-social desire. Guilty conscience is not inevitable for the Nietzschean subject because bad will is not inevitable. To be sure, this leaves room for contingent moral conflicts of interest, and thus for guilty conscience of a milder kind, but only as a contingency of the Nietzschean subject's moral life, not as its very foundation and possibility. In other words, the Nietzschean subject can become free from guilt: a will in conflict with moral commitments is accidental rather than essential.

My interpretation of Nietzschean conscience also has the advantage of making sense of Nietzsche's repeated claim, in later works, that his moral philosophy offers humanity the opportunity for liberation and redemption [erlösen]: the restoration of the innocence [Unschuld] of becoming (TI, The Four Great Errors 8, KSA 6.97). He clearly rejects moral responsibility on a practical, rather than merely conceptual, level: "We immoralists especially are trying with all our might to remove the concept of guilt and the concept of punishment from the world and to purge psychology, history, nature, the social institutions and sanctions of them" (TI, The Four Great Errors 7, KSA 6.96). If, contrary to my interpretation, guilty conscience were inseparable from the human condition, Nietzsche's claims in such passages would be incomprehensible.

More importantly, Nietzsche's theory suggests that this liberation of conscience from guilt is not identical to a return to the absence of morality or the absence of moral conscience. For good conscience is compatible with autonomy

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<sup>32</sup> Gödde acknowledges that Nietzsche's will to power does not seek direct satisfaction in the form of complete satiation of the stimulus of the drive (Traditionslinien, S. 494), but instead actively seeks out resistances and obstacles. However, he maintains that Nietzsche's "victorious" conception of pleasure is analogous to Freud's higher form of sublimated pleasure as the overcoming of an obstacle. This overlooks the fact that Nietzsche's will to power makes the element of resistance central to the aim, not a means to the end of overcoming: the demand for resistance is integral to the drive, in stark opposition to Freud's theory of the drive, in which a resistance is fundamentally a frustration of the aim of the drive. For this reason, the will to power is not, as Gödde has also suggested, comparable to a "cathartic" form of therapeutics. Tension, obstacles, and resistance are intrinsically valuable to the will to power in a way the cathartic model cannot support. Contrast Günter Gödde, *Die Antike Therapeutik als Gemeinsamer Bezugspunkt für Nietzsche und Freud*, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 32 (2003), S. 215: "So lässt sich am Beispiel der Katharsis zeigen, dass Freud und Nietzsche unabhängig voneinander, aber angeregt durch gemeinsame Vermittler – in diesem Fall die ekstatische Therapeutik der Antike und die neuere Katharsis-Auffassung von Jacob Bernays – sich mit derselben Thematik auseinandergesetzt haben."





and self-determination; it is possible even given the presence of a moral conflict of the will. In the next sections, I will argue that because Nietzschean conscience is founded in self-affirmation rather than social subordination and sacrifice, it is possible for the Nietzschean subject to negate a desire for moral reasons, to act morally in the case of conflict of the will, and yet remain free of bad conscience in the sense of self-cruelty, blame, and guilt.

### III.

Nietzschean good conscience is not defined only negatively as the absence of bad will or guilt. One of the most important differences between the Freudian and Nietzschean views of conscience is that for Nietzsche, the production of guilt is not the only – or the principal – function of conscience. Instead, moral conscience originates in an essentially affirmative act: the act of promising.<sup>33</sup> It is this positive foundation of the theory of conscience that allows for the possibility of a positively determined, and thus noble, form of good conscience, one that is not reducible to the absence of bad will. Guilty conscience, we shall see, is merely a modality of the more primary, positive form.

While Freud's theory of the origin of moral conscience begins with an act of motivated forgetfulness, the repression of a forbidden desire, Nietzsche's theory of conscience begins in opposition to forgetfulness. It begins with the development of the ability to remember and keep promises. Nietzsche claims that forgetting is an active faculty that is essential to human health.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, promising requires a sustained act of will to continually counter forgetfulness: "This involves no mere passive inability to rid oneself of an impression [...] but an active desire not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real memory of the will" (GM II 1, KSA 5.292). This primary act of

<sup>33</sup> To clarify, this claim requires distinguishing good moral conscience from both the raw, original form of bad conscience and the later, moralistically interpreted form of guilty conscience. The initial form, the internalization of drives producing a form of self-cruelty without guilt or blame, is later shaped into moral conscience, the noble affirmation and preservation of a chosen state of the will – a form that is, in turn, transformed by slave morality into guilty conscience: self-cruelty as merited punishment for bad will.

<sup>34</sup> Ronald Lehrer misleadingly compares this faculty of forgetting to Freudian repression. See Ronald Lehrer, Adler and Nietzsche, in: Jacob Golomb / Weaver Santaniello / Ronald Lehrer (Eds.), *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, Albany 1999, p. 190. However, there are important differences between the two. Nietzsche speaks simply of forgetting; there is no indication that an idea is, as in Freudian repression, maintained unconsciously. Furthermore, Nietzsche gives no indication that the act of forgetting is motivated by the specific content of an idea, which is crucial to the Freudian notion of repression. A more fruitful point of comparison might be that of Freudian repression with the state of psychic "dyspepsia" that Nietzsche attributes to an inability to forget – i.e., repression as the breakdown of the faculty of forgetting (GM II 1, KSA 5.292).



memory and sustained volition that serves as the origin of conscience is – much like the noble conception of the good – a form of self-affirmation, an affirmation of one's present state of will as one that is worth preserving. Nietzsche calls the capacities of memory and protracted will the right to “really make promises [...] to stand security for oneself and to do so with pride, thus to possess also the right to affirm oneself” (GM II 2, KSA 5.293 f.).

Consequently, the primary act of conscience – the act of memory that founds the ability to make promises – is an act of good conscience: not the negation of a desire but an act of continued affirmation of desire. Whereas the founding act of the Freudian conscience is obedience to a negative, external command – to the “thou shalt not” of the father's prohibition of incest – the foundational act of Nietzschean conscience is an affirmative self-command, an original “I will,” “I shall do this” (GM II 1, KSA 5.292) that is actively asserted by the subject. While Freudian conscience encourages a primary forgetting of the subject's desire – the child's repression of its incestuous desire for its mother – Nietzschean conscience commemorates and affirms the subject's desire through “protracted” [langen] will (GM II 2, KSA 5.293). And while the founding affect of Freudian conscience is the guilt that serves as the child's self-punishment for its forbidden desire, the founding affect of Nietzschean conscience is pride in the feeling of power that accompanies the subject's ability to sustain an act of volition in the face of change: “A proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of what has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion” (GM II 2, KSA 5.293).

This connection of Nietzschean conscience to freedom is perhaps the most striking point of contrast to the Freudian view. Although Freudian conscience makes possible individual self-control and responsibility, it has its primary basis in subordination to social control: the internalization of external authority and the sacrifice of the original, prohibited object of desire. Consequently, in the Freudian subject, individual sovereignty is from the start a compromise; the individual is freed only through socially-mediated strategies of self-domination and the frustration of the drives – fortunately so, if Freud is correct in his view that the subject's essential will is a devilish one that has its root in suicidal, murderous, and tyrannical drives.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Frithjof Bergmann rightly argues that many philosophers' principal objection to Nietzsche's account of morality has its roots in an assumption of egoism that Nietzsche does not share. See Frithjof Bergmann, *Nietzsche's Critique of Morality*, in: Robert Solomon / Kathleen Higgins (Eds.), *Reading Nietzsche*, New York 1988, p. 36. Because they presuppose the truth of egoism in its usual sense, they conclude, “The values of self-denial, self-effacement, deference, modesty, meekness, and forbearance have to be enforced and practiced after all, since the world otherwise would be a raw, cruel and blood-drenched place.” Such a conclusion is not compatible with Nietzsche's view of human motivation, but would certainly be appropriate if Freud's view is correct.







For Nietzsche, on the contrary, the invention of conscience and responsibility makes possible a truly “sovereign individual” whose freedom consists not in the internalization of external authority, but rather in independence from it: “Like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom [Sittlichkeit der Sitte], autonomous and supramoral [übersittliche] (for ‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ [sittlich] are mutually exclusive)” (GM II 2, KSA 5.293). Nietzschean conscience is independent of morality because it has its basis in the subject’s self-affirmation of its own positive desire, rather than in an externally imposed prohibition of the subject’s desire. Such affirmative and independent acts of conscience are essentially impossible on the Freudian understanding of conscience.<sup>36</sup>

Admittedly, Freudian conscience has its beginnings in what is only contingently a negative act: the father’s prohibition of the child’s incestuous desire and the child’s negatively-structured desire to avoid the harm that might come from violating the prohibition. Although the faculty of conscience begins, in Freud’s theory, with an act of self-denial in obedience to social authority, this does not mean that moral conscience cannot also serve positive, autonomous, and self-affirming action as well. Nevertheless, the Freudian subject’s desire is, at root, always at odds with social and moral demands. Consequently, for Freud, even an act of conscience that affirms a moral will is the affirmation of a negatively structured desire: it is the negation of the subject’s essential desire to avoid, dominate, or destroy the social and libidinal other.

It is true that certain aspects of Freud’s theory of conscience support more positive readings. Gödde suggests that Freudian conscience should not be understood solely as a source of prohibition, but also in light of its positive foundation in an act of identification with role models that produces an idealized

<sup>36</sup> Contrast Gödde, who suggests a greater potential for autonomy in the Freudian subject, *Traditionslinien*, S. 542: “So hat Freud z.B. dem Ich eine potentiell größere Eigenständigkeit im Verhältnis zu den Trieben eingeräumt. Bei aller Skepsis traute er dem Ich letztlich doch zu, daß es sich unter bestimmten Bedingungen aus der Abhängigkeit von seinen drei Gegenspielen der Außenwelt, dem Es und dem Über-Ich zu lösen und neue Freiräume für seine Entwicklung zu gewinnen vermag.” However, this is only true given Freud’s questionably Kantian conception of autonomy as the independence of the subject from its own drives. Nietzsche believes, on the contrary, that autonomy is the independence of the subject as a social-structure of drives from the morality of mores – of the drives from reality, rather than of reality (as represented by the ego) from the drives (represented by the Id and Superego). On this view, Freud’s implied morality of “Where id was, there ego shall be” (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE 22, p. 80, GE 15) is the very opposite of authentic autonomy. See TI, *The Problem of Socrates* 11, KSA 6.73: “To have to combat one’s instincts – that is the formula for *décadence*: as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one.” See also TI, *Morality as Anti-Nature* 4, KSA 6.85: “All naturalism in morality, that is all healthy morality, is dominated by an instinct of life [...]. Anti-natural morality [...] turns on the contrary precisely against the instincts of life.”





sense of self.<sup>37</sup> In this way, moral conscience is not inseparably bound to the negative identifications with social and familial prohibition and authority that found the super-ego.<sup>38</sup> In his description of the ego-ideal, Freud's stress is upon identification with the other as what one would like to be, rather than upon similarity, prohibition, or threat. The ego-ideal is also the basis of self-esteem, which suggests that Freudian moral conscience could conceivably be grounded in self-affirmation, since the moral restraint of a desire could be secondary to the affirmation of the ego-ideal as what the individual aspires to become.

This interpretation of Freudian moral conscience would indeed have much in common with Nietzsche's theory of conscience, since a primary, positive form of conscience (the affirmation of an ego-ideal) grounds the possibility of guilty conscience as a modality of the more basic form. There are, however, substantial difficulties with this reading. First, Freud suggests that the basis of the ego-ideal is an identification grounded in aim-inhibited sexual love – where affection is precisely a compensation for the rejection of forbidden sexual desire. This suggests that the ego-ideal is, after all, grounded in self-negation, as its negatively structured form of esteem already indicates (pride in becoming otherwise, the self as lacking or falling short of the ideal). Secondly, this possibility simply does not resolve the first problem I raised – that the essentially antisocial nature of the drives makes guilt inevitable. Consequently, even if the ego-ideal is a source of positive moral motivation and esteem, it is irrevocably coupled in the Freudian concept of moral conscience with the superego as a source of inevitable guilt. Like the theory of sublimation, the ideal-ego tempers, but does not escape, Freud's moral and social pessimism.<sup>39</sup>

For Nietzsche, in contrast, every act of conscience is fundamentally a self-affirmation. The sovereign individual takes pride in maintaining a promised state of will over time and in the face of changing circumstances and desires. Because the act of promising includes the negation of desires at odds with the will that is maintained, it is the Nietzschean basis for the possibility of a moral conscience, for the negation of a desire on moral grounds. But on Nietzsche's theory of conscience, the moral negation of a desire is possible only in obedience to a more primary self-affirmation: to the will it affirms and maintains in this act of negation.

<sup>37</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 534: "Neben dem Gewissen als einer Verbots-, Richter- und Straf-Funktion hat Freud dem Über-Ich noch eine Vorbild- und Ideal-Funktion zugeschrieben und sie als "Ich-Ideal" bezeichnet. Gemeinsam ist beiden, daß sie eine ethische Komponente enthalten und deshalb an der Verdrängung damit unvereinbarer Triebregungen beteiligt sind."

<sup>38</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology*, SE 18, p. 110, GW 13, S. 120.

<sup>39</sup> See Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, p. 178: "Here we touch upon an essential cleavage between the two conceptions. In other respects, it is remarkable that Freud ended, after having distinguished them, by identifying the Ego-Ideal to a critical instance or a 'moral conscience' that he christens the Superego. Nietzsche's wager is in toto, by contrast, to conceive of an Ego-Ideal that is no longer a Superego."





*IV.*

It might be objected that the Nietzschean subject is capable of good conscience only because Nietzsche uses the term in a very different sense than Freud's more conventional usage. Nietzschean conscience is not moral conscience, we might argue, just as Nietzsche's noble morality is not truly a morality. After all, in Nietzschean conscience, the act of promising and implication of responsibility is only that of the subject to itself, rather than to another (as conscience in the moral sense must include). While this is true, I will now argue that the positive foundation of Nietzschean conscience, unlike the Freudian view, allows for the possibility of a truly noble form of moral conscience, one that is free of guilt and self-cruelty. Nietzsche's view frees us from Freud's conclusion that moral conscience must always be guilty conscience – that moral demands can be actualized only through self-cruelty. Nietzschean conscience as described its original, primary form, is not moral conscience. But it does allow for the possibility of a form of moral conscience that would preserve the affirmative character of the original form.

For Nietzsche, the earliest form of guilty conscience originates, as does the slavish form of moral evaluation, in historical conditions of social domination. It begins, he tells us, when a “conqueror and master race [...] lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad” (GM II 17, KSA 5.324). It is this condition of social oppression that produces what Nietzsche calls the “internalization of man” (GM II 16, KSA 5.322, see GM II 16 f., KSA 5.321–325), in which drives that are prevented from discharging themselves externally are turned inward. This redirection of powerful drives produces guilty conscience.

As Gödde and others have pointed out,<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche's explanation of guilty conscience in many ways parallels Freud's explanation of guilt and guilty conscience. Freud suggests that civilization requires the diversion of destructive drives away from the external social world, and that guilt is produced when these drives seek substitute satisfaction in self-punishment. But we should be wary of conflating the two accounts. Freud's theory places the origin of guilt in an essentially destructive drive. Consequently, it leads necessarily to the pessimistic choice between the absence of society or a society of universal and inescapable self-destructiveness in the form of guilt. I have already suggested that Nietzsche's rejection of teleology is incompatible with the attribution of a distinct, es-

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<sup>40</sup> Gödde, *Traditionslinien*, S. 534: “Nach diesen vergleichenden Betrachtungen kann man Ernest Jones nur zustimmen, wenn er eine ‘wirklich bemerkenswerte Analogie’ zwischen Freuds Auffassung des Über-Ichs und Nietzsches Darlegungen über den Ursprung des ‘schelchten Gewissens’ konstatiert.”





sential aim to human activity or to the drives. Consequently, for Nietzsche, guilty conscience cannot begin with the internalization of essentially destructive drives. Admittedly, Nietzsche's account encourages such a view: "All those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward against man himself. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction – all this turned against the possessors of such instincts" (GM II 16, KSA 5.322f.). But, although the foundation of desire in will to power allows for pleasure in destruction (just as it allows for pleasure in anything the produces a feeling of power), it cannot admit of drives that have such destructive behavior as an essential aim.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, unlike Freud's view, there is no inevitability to self-destructive and self-punishing behavior. The production of guilty conscience in Nietzsche's account of the historical origin of conscience depends upon the contingent condition of severe social and political oppression. Self-cruelty only becomes a necessary outlet for the drives if other forms of the manifestation of power are prevented. Like slave psychology and slave morality, guilty conscience is merely a contingent product of social hierarchy and domination, not a necessary entrance ticket into civilization.

Of course, this establishes only the possibility of the separation of moral conscience and self-cruelty. It might still be objected that it is practically, if not in principle, impossible to free morality from guilty conscience. Nietzsche has, after all, suggested that modern humanity is the product of the slave revolt in morals, the outcome of a two thousand year history of frustration, *ressentiment*, and guilt. Humanity is not accidentally afflicted with the illness of guilty conscience, but born out of it, having this illness as its very nature. It is "the sick animal" (GM III 13, KSA 5.367).<sup>42</sup>

Such pessimism about the practical possibility of overcoming guilty conscience depends upon a misinterpretation of Nietzsche's metaphorical comparison of guilty conscience to an illness. The identification of guilty conscience with illness does not, in fact, support the inevitability of the cruel and self-punishing form of guilty conscience Nietzsche describes. Rather, it emphasizes the histori-

<sup>41</sup> For an excellent discussion of Nietzsche's view of cruelty, see Ivan Soll, Nietzsche on Cruelty, Asceticism, and the Failure of Hedonism, in: Richard Schacht (Ed.), Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality. Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality, p. 175: "Nietzsche's explanation consists in a removal of the locus of the satisfaction of cruelty away from the occurrence of the suffering in the other (and even from my own consciousness of or belief in this suffering), and its relocation in my feeling of delight in being able to make him suffer, that is, in my enjoyment of my own power."

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Golomb, Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology, p. 318: "Any morality and any society necessarily manifest both the negative aspects of repression and violence as well as the positive dimensions of sublimation and creativity." See also p. 326: "Being vital to sublimation, [Nietzsche] cannot ask us to forego completely the mechanism of repression, that 'serious illness that man was bound to contract'."





cal – and thus changeable – nature of this particular mode of human psychology. Nietzsche identifies guilty conscience as an illness “as pregnancy is an illness” (GM II 19, KSA 5.327), which suggests that it is a temporary condition out of which new forms of life, or new forms of conscience, are produced. Indeed, when he identifies humanity as the “sick animal,” he underlines precisely the degree to which humanity’s nature is yet to be shaped: “For man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate” (GM III 13, KSA 5.367).

The truly dangerous illness that afflicts humanity, the guilty conscience of self-cruelty, moral blame, and guilt is not, then, an essential and insurmountable part of human nature. Guilty conscience in its most basic form or raw state, the inward redirection of the drives, is precisely the possibility of the self-transformation of human psychology. Guilty conscience is a pregnancy, because it gives birth to its own transformation from self-cruelty into self-mastery. It gives birth to a new form of human being: “If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process [...] where society and the morality of custom at last reveal what they have simply been the means to: then we discover the ripest fruit is the sovereign individual, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom [Sittlichkeit der Sitte], autonomous and supramoral [übersittliche]” (GM II 2, KSA 5.293). The sovereign individual is liberated from morality and custom. It is surely, as well, liberated from the self-cruelty and guilt of guilty conscience.

What is most significant about the possibility of a noble form of moral conscience is that its negative form need not include self-cruelty and guilt – that “bad conscience” need not be guilty or “evil” conscience. If, as I have argued, Nietzschean conscience is primarily an affirmation of the will and if, in the absence of conditions of social oppression, self-cruelty is not a necessary aspect of conscience, then it is possible for a noble form of moral conscience to be both morally self-determining and free of self-cruelty and guilt. An act of conscience may include the moral negation of an act or desire without the additional self-punishing affect of guilt or blameworthiness. Consequently, a noble form of normative social morality can be effective in the realization of its aims without inflicting, or demanding the self-infliction of, suffering.

