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Reading Nietzsche in the Wake of the 2008-09 War on Gaza

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ABSTRACT: This paper argues for a psychological understanding of Nietzsche's categories of master and slave morality. Disentangling Nietzsche's parallel discourses of strength, superiority, and spirituality in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I argue that master and slave morality are better understood as ethical practices of the self than surrogates for either a binary classification of strength and weakness or a political demarcation of oppressor and oppressed. In doing so, I offer an application of this analysis to the horrific violence visited upon the Gaza Strip by Israel in its 2008-09 military assault.[1]

IN LATE JANUARY 2009, I SAT DOWN to re-read Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. I remember this otherwise uneventful event so distinctly because, at that moment, Israel's war on Gaza was brutally and unremittingly underway. During this 3-week-long military attack, Israel killed over 1400 Palestinians, most of whom were civilians and approximately 400 of whom were children. Israel, in fact, deliberately targeted civilians—including children and humanitarian aid workers—assaulting Palestinians simultaneously by air, land, and sea, and deploying white phosphorus against them, a chemical intended to operate as a smokescreen for troop movements but when used as a weapon burns people's flesh down to the bone.[2] The brutality of Israel's war was all the more agonizing

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[2] These facts have been amply documented by, among others, Amnesty International, 2009; Dugard 2009; Goldstone 2009; Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, 2009.

due to the fact that the people of Gaza were not allowed to leave there, Gaza itself being among the most densely populated areas on the earth. This unrelenting, intentional, and indiscriminate massacre, conducted by one of the largest military powers in the world against a largely unarmed, civilian, refugee, and subject population, resulted in mass murder, rampant homelessness, devastation of Gaza's infrastructure, and destruction of the major institutions and workings of Palestinian daily life, including schools, universities, mosques, hospitals, and roads.[3] Opening the *Genealogy* had been the first break I had taken from non-stop news coverage of these bloody and horrific events, a diversion I felt compelled to undertake due to the demands of my professional life. The confluence of these two events, however—the situation of reading Nietzsche in the wake of the war on Gaza—confronted me, as if for the first time, with many of the difficulties I have struggled with as a student of Nietzsche. In that moment, I was transported back to the first time I had read the *Genealogy*, when I found myself stunned to encounter his bald advocacy of hierarchical domination and merciless critique of those who object to it. Nietzsche's naming of the exponents of slave morality as the "oppressed" (*Gedrückten*; *Unterdrückten*[4])—specifically in the context of his playful allegory of the lambs and birds of prey, itself told with the rhetorical intention of mocking all those who would object to such "victimization" (as the eagles say, "*we* don't dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb" [*GM* I:13])—suggested to me that slaves and (other) oppressed people were simply the prey of other, naturally predatory, animals. Thus not only was victimization of the oppressed wholly unremarkable, but it was not even best understood as victimization; instead, their predation was better assimilated to one of the many, amoral workings of nature. This seemed to imply that oppression is inevitable and thus render anti-oppression politics (of which I was then an avid adherent) a resentful incarnation of slave morality, a moralization of otherwise natural (and thus unobjectionable) conditions, a political principle borne of envy, impotence, and revenge that sought to restrain and punish oppressors who could not do otherwise than oppress. Nauseated, I asked myself, could Nietzsche's critique of slave morality in the *Genealogy of Morals* be understood as justifying the brutality I was witnessing in Gaza?

Although today I am much less scandalized—even, indeed, rather persuaded—by Nietzsche's amoral reading of domination, I remain disturbed by the possibility that he may, indeed, provide justification for events like Israel's war on Gaza, a possibility that is confronted only abstractly, if at all, in the secondary literature on Nietzsche, and never from any particular (explicitly avowed) political loyalty or concrete political event. While the classic studies of Nietzsche's political thinking include elaborate discussions and analyses of master and slave morality, they rarely, if ever, raise the important political implications of Nietzsche's contempt for slave

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[3] The devastation wrought by this war has not even remotely begun to be mitigated; see, e.g., Amnesty International 2009.

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I:10, I:13; henceforth cited in the text as *GM*. Roman numerals indicate essay number; Arabic numerals indicate aphorism number. German taken from Colli and Montinari. Also: *Twilight of the Idols:* henceforth *TI*; *Beyond Good and Evil*: henceforth *BGE*; and *The Gay Science*: henceforth *GS*.

morality or locate the consequences of this analysis in specific political events, movements, or policies (see Connolly 1993); Connolly 1991); Detwiler 1990); Strong 2000); Thiele 1990).   The major exception to this tendency is when Nietzsche's implication in the 20th century's fascist regimes and imperial wars is under consideration (see essays in Golomb and Wistrich 2002).   Thus, his critique has been considered either abstracted from specific political events or within a framework wherein Jewish people are the presumptive victims. One goal of this paper, then, is to disrupt both of these tendencies in the secondary literature on Nietzsche's philosophy.

To be clear, I have no interest in pacifying Nietzsche or appropriating him for my own, 21st century political sensibilities. Nor do I offer these reflections in a banal and self-congratulatory exercise in public hand wringing. Furthermore, I am not asking if Nietzsche's philosophy is somehow compatible with morality, nor am I searching for some (version of) moral condemnation that Nietzsche might somewhere subtly authorize (see Foot and Nussbaum in Schacht 1994). Rather, my inquiry concerns configurations of power: for Nietzsche, are they always just what they are, end of story? Does Nietzsche's critique of slave morality entail that we must affirm any and all expenditures of strength as such? While such questions may seem naïve or easily refutable, they are invited conclusions from his writing in general and from his discussion of slave morality in the *Genealogy* in particular. Dismissing them neither answers them nor resolves the dilemma raised by Nietzsche's awe-filled rhetoric of strength-worship, nor does it do the important work of taking seriously the "might makes right" assertion that, however many times it is "refuted," proves intractably to haunt not simply Nietzsche's philosophy, but also political theory, Political Science (witness Realism), and politics in the "real world."[5] This paper is thus an attempt to determine, with both a philosophical and political acuteness, what we can learn from Nietzsche (and, ultimately, what we cannot) about the war on Gaza, political warfare in general, and the viability of anti-oppression politics.

I. Strength and Superiority

Much turns on what Nietzsche means by "strength."   Now, if "morality" constitutes the illegitimate, subjectifying lie dreamed up by the weak to limit the strong and valorize the weak for being weak, then the *Genealogy* is incompatible with any condemnation of any expenditure of strength, no matter on what basis, and we have already reached the end of the argument. This is expressed most clearly in Nietzsche's famous analysis of his own allegory of the lambs and the birds of prey: "To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength" (*GM* I:13). To refer to Israel's

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[5] As Nietzsche says, "It is certainly not the least charm of a theory that it is refutable; it is precisely thereby that it attracts subtler minds. It seems that the hundred-times-refuted theory of a 'free will' owes its persistence to this charm alone; again and again someone comes along who feels he is strong enough to refute it" (*BGE* §18).

military assault on Gaza collectively as "war crimes," then, perpetuates the error that there is a "neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so" and indulges the "submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred" that seek to deploy this error in order "to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey." Indeed, as Nietzsche observes elsewhere in the *Genealogy*, international tribunals in place of war are one of the symptoms of modernity's overall decline (*GM* III:25).

Nietzsche is not the first to advance such a critique; it has haunted political theory since Plato. In the *Gorgias*, for example, Callicles accuses Socrates of slavishness and argues that laws were invented by weak people who knew they would lose out if the strong were left to their own devices. Unwilling to simply accept and receive their due—little to nothing—the weak devised laws, customs, and social mores in order to police and limit the few, superior, powerful ones who would otherwise get the "more" from life Callicles argues they deserve (Plato 1986, 483c-484a). In typical fashion, Socrates inquires as to what exactly Callicles means by this word "superior." Does he mean stronger? For, Socrates observes, a handful of Callicles's slaves are stronger than he. Is Callicles honestly suggesting that because his slaves are stronger than him, they are therefore superior to him? Immediately relenting in the face of this objection, Callicles concedes that "strength" and "superiority" must be distinct (498a-d).

Nietzsche raises a similar such objection in the *Genealogy*, albeit not in his own voice. An unspecified interlocutor, named only as a "free spirit" by Nietzsche, offers the following rebuttal to Nietzsche's complaints about the triumph of the slave revolt in morality:

> But why are you talking about *nobler* ideals! Let us stick to the facts: the people have won—or 'the slaves' or 'the mob' or 'the herd' or whatever you like to call them—if this has happened through the Jews, very well! in that case no people ever had a more world-historic mission. One may conceive of this victory as at the same time a blood poisoning (it has mixed the races together)—I shan't contradict; but this in-toxication has undoubtedly been *successful* (*GM* I:9).

In other words, our "free spirit" asks, on what grounds can Nietzsche object to the triumph of the slave revolt in morality when it has, in the most obvious and undeniable of ways, triumphed?[6] Is this not a sign of its overwhelming strength, and, thus, to be celebrated?

That the individual raising this objection is someone either contemptuously or at least skeptically referred to by Nietzsche as a "free spirit" suggests that he does not regard this objection highly. Just as the likely physical triumph of Callicles's slaves does not convince him of their actual superiority, so too does the victoriousness of the Jewish slave revolt not convince Nietzsche of *its* superiority. For while the Jewish slave revolt has been victorious—one that has "hitherto triumphed again and

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[6] The consignment of this triumph to "the Jews" in this passage reflects the speaker's inattentiveness to Nietzsche's remarks in the prior two aphorisms, wherein he claims that the Jewish inversion of values may have begun the slave revolt in morality but was responsible for neither its completion nor success (for these, Christianity is to blame; see *GM* I:8-9).

again over all other ideals, over all *nobler* ideals" (*GM* I:9)—Nietzsche still insists it is slavish or base, "an act of the *most spiritual revenge*" (*GM* I:7). Nietzsche offers a similar disparagement of the triumph of the weak in *Twilight of the Idols*, criticizing Darwin for overlooking one of the most fundamental facts of modern life: it is precisely not the strong who triumph, but rather "the weak," who "prevail over the strong again and again, for they are the great majority—and they are also more *intelligent*. Darwin forgot the spirit (that is English!); *the weak have more spirit* [*Geist*]." (*TI*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" §14, entitled *Anti-Darwin*).

Despite Nietzsche's complaints, then, what must be acknowledged is that the weak clearly *are* strong in some sense, if they triumph again and again. Indeed, according to Nietzsche himself, the Jews have set the stage of world history through the triumph of their slave revolt and the weak will continue to prevail on the basis of their "spirit" or "intelligence." But on what basis, then, can Nietzsche refer to the weak as weak? Either he cannot do this at all, or he must subtly elide the distinction between "weak" and "slavish," the latter of which is opposed to nobility or mastery, not strength. Indeed, for Nietzsche, it is not the weakness of the weak that is contemptible but in fact their strength, which in this case functions as the name of whatever it is that allows them to triumph. Nietzsche acknowledges this distinction by qualifying the character of the strength of the weak as "spiritual," which he explicates as "care, patience, cunning, simulation, great self control," and "mimicry" (*Anti-Darwin*). However, the fact that spiritual strength can triumph over physical strength leaves us with the question of what power physical strength in fact possesses if it can be vanquished by the ostensibly non-physical power of spiritual strength, and moreover raises the question once again as to why spiritual strength is contemptible if it triumphs repeatedly. As Nietzsche undermines any easy or common-sense conflation of "spirit" with mind or strength with body, the question becomes: what, in fact, does Nietzsche object to in the exercise of "strength" by the weak?

These questions are made even more confusing in the *Anti-Darwin* aphorism when Nietzsche says: "One must need spirit in order to acquire spirit; one loses it when one no longer needs it. Whoever has strength dispenses with the spirit ('Let it go!' they think in Germany today; 'the Reich must still remain to us.')." While it may be the case that "whoever has strength dispenses with the spirit," Nietzsche's appending a mocking counterexample to this sentence throws that schema into doubt, insofar as the Reich's triumph—despite its indisputable strength—represents no noble victory for Nietzsche but instead the ascendance of *kleine Politik* (*GS* §337; cf. *TI* "Skirmishes" §37). In fact, the indisputable, physical strength of these politically victorious forces (what political scientists straight-facedly refer to as "hard power") is nevertheless not noble in Nietzsche's book, regardless of its domination *and* dispensation with the spirit. It is rather an ignoble triumph, one that (as we well know from his other writings) Nietzsche holds in contempt.

Furthermore, while Nietzsche disparages the "spirit" or "spiritual" character of the strength of slavish types, he praises spiritualization itself in other places. In part, he does so because spiritualization is one of the last resorts available to modern men for their survival and flourishing in the face of modernity's demise (see Conway 1997). That spiritualization "represents a great triumph over Christianity,"

signaling an opportunity for growth and victoriousness where, Nietzsche states, "we, we immoralists and Antichristians, find our advantage in this, that the church exists" (*TI*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" §3). Perhaps performing his own critique that "spiritualization" is the only resource remaining to cope with a suffocating modernity, Nietzsche here credits Christianity with giving him the opportunity for enmity, the condition of his "advantage." Going even further, Nietzsche later suggests that:

> The most spiritual human beings, if we assume that they are the most courageous, also experience by far the most painful tragedies: but just for that reason they honor life because it pits its greatest opposition against them (*TI*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" §17).

Coupled with Nietzsche's bravado-laden apologia for Christianity's existence in the first passage, this surprising defense of the most spiritual human beings as the most courageous types and the honorers of life (knowing as we do that priests are among the most "spiritual" types) suggests either that the ostensibly noble can themselves manifest the characteristics of "spirit" that Nietzsche elsewhere criticizes in relationship to the Jews and Darwin, or else that Nietzsche has ambivalent feelings about spirituality itself—namely, it can be either base or noble.[7]

Just as "spiritualization" cannot constitute an unconditional demarcation of weakness in Nietzsche's vocabulary, other aspects of weak people or behaviors Nietzsche condemns are nevertheless also displayed by the strong or else are appropriable by them for noble purposes. For example, slave morality is criticized for being fundamentally resentful and essentially reactive, rather than affirmative, active, and self-determining. Yet both are qualities that the nobility may also exhibit. So, first, Nietzsche acknowledges that *ressentiment* —that glowering lust for revenge that poisons all morality and may be the best candidate for what is definitively slavish in Nietzsche's view—occurs in masterful types. Of course, he hastens to note that it appears much less frequently than among slavish types, noting conditionally that "*Ressentiment* itself, <u>if</u> it should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not *poison*" (*GM* I:10; underline emphasis added). But the point is that *ressentiment* is not necessarily the monopoly of slaves. As for reactivity, that other hallmark of slavishness, Nietzsche importantly if casually observes that the creativity of slave morality emerges from the *ressentiment* of "natures that are denied the *true* [*eigentliche*] reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge" (*GM* I:10, emphasis added). Here Nietzsche suggests that "deeds," that province of the masters, may be understood as "true" reactions, thereby offhandedly acknowledging that no deed could be purely active, undetermined by any pre-existing condition or force; every action is always also reaction. If this is the case, then reactivity is not the sole province of slaves, but rather the very condition of activity itself.

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[7] See, e.g., *GM* II:6, wherein he notes that the spiritualization of cruelty "in a significant sense" constitutes the history of higher culture, and *GM* III:8, wherein he notes that "all animal being becomes more spiritual" in "good air, thin, clear, open, dry, like the air of the heights…"

This leaves us with Nietzsche offering a critique of the weak that cannot claim "weakness" to be either objectionable in itself or the definitive mark of slavishness. Although Nietzsche frequently elides the binary opposition of "strength" and "weakness" with the binaries of both "master" and "slave" and "noble" and "base," it is the latter set of categories that must be primary for him, for nothing else reconciles his shifting evaluations of spiritualization, resentment, and reactivity. While Nietzsche's discussion of slave morality retains both its binary and hierarchical character, the classification he is discussing—whatever names one wants to use for it—is a consistent hierarchy of neither simply physical nor simply political power. In short, Nietzsche condemns slaves for something other than weakness and praises strength for something other than its ability to triumph.

II. Strength and Psychology

The set of qualities Nietzsche rejects as ignoble and praises as masterful are psychological in character. Master morality is better read as a paradigm of healthy psychic functioning, a kind of ethical practice of the self in relationship to itself, other(s), and activity. Slave morality, by contrast, emblematizes correlative psychic dysfunction.[8] To get at these observations, a brief examination of master and slave moralities is in order.

As noted previously, in §10 of the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche claims that the slave revolt in morality is the by-product of persons or groups who have somehow been prevented from acting and must therefore resort to other means in order to live and flourish. Reactive from the outset, then, Nietzsche notes that slave morality always requires "a hostile external world" in order to exist at all; "its action is fundamentally reaction." This reactivity is fundamentally negative: slave morality says "no" to that hostile external world, to what thwarts its own activity and expenditure. The selfhood of the slavish type, then, comes to exist only via reference to an imposed external (set of) force(s) and can only understand and affirm itself through negation: "slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself.'" Nietzsche calls this negative reactivity *ressentiment*; its mightiest production is the concept of evil: "picture 'the enemy' as the man of *ressentiment* conceives him—and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived 'the evil enemy,' 'the Evil One,' and this in fact is his

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[8] As Tracy Strong notes, it is not power that is at stake in determining who is a master and who a slave; "What counts, in both cases, is the particular relationship between one's sense of self and one's sense of others" (239). Nietzsche repeatedly claims himself to be a psychologist; that he is so particularly in the *Genealogy* has been persuasively argued by Ken Gemes: "The point of [Nietzsche's] historical narratives is ultimately to make us aware of certain psychological types and their possible relations" and "In reading Nietzsche we should follow the implied advice of looking for psychological, rather than philosophical or historical, insights"(in Acampora 2006, 207-208). Nietzsche's psychology seems most associated with inquiry regarding the instincts (in a proto-Freudian, depth-psychological sense) and a mocking deconstruction of the soul/subject, free will, and consciousness. While "spiritualization" sometimes names a particular psychological mechanism or process in Nietzsche (e.g., sublimation), his otherwise wide-ranging references to "spirit" (as mentioned in the previous section) seem to cover a much broader terrain than the more narrowly psychological, a tempting conflation I think we must refuse. On the issues of psychology, instincts, and "the soul," see Schotten 2009, Chapter 1, and Golomb, Santaniello, and Lehrer 1999.

basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a 'good one'—himself!" "Evil" is used to limit, judge, and punish those deemed to have brought about the original imposition that has so bitterly limited the activity of the weaker.   This production of evil is accomplished via the fabrication of the responsible subject, the notion of an actor with the freedom and ability to do otherwise, and who thus may be held accountable for their deeds. Incapable of acting themselves, impotent to imitate – much less strike back at – their aggressors, and condemning the activity of the strong as the very definition of evil, slavish types valorize their own weakness and produce the unwieldy apparatus responsible subject-moral opprobrium-political punishment to restrain the activity of the strong. Nietzsche is clear about the effectiveness of this weapon (*GM* I:7, I:8), and equally clear that it is not a weapon the strong deserve to have wielded against them. For imposition is the character of life itself. It is weakness to think such fatality comes at one's own expense or vengefully demand that life be otherwise. Rather, "to be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long—that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget" (*GM* I:10).

   Noble morality, by contrast, does not emerge as the result of any necessary relationship to any other person or set of forces.[9] Instead, noble morality is cast by Nietzsche as the anti- or non-morality; it is a kind of disposition or relationship with the self that might be characterized as unself-conscious self-affirmation: "the 'well-born' *felt* themselves to be the 'happy'; they did not have to establish their happiness artificially by examining their enemies, or to persuade themselves, *deceive* themselves, that they were happy (as all men of *ressentiment* are in the habit of doing)" (*GM* I:10).   Although slave morality, too, constitutes a kind of relationship with the self, it is nevertheless also clearly a morality in its production of the concept "evil." But noble morality has no notion of evil (only "bad"-ness, which functions simply as the designation for whatever is not-me) and cannot even exactly be construed as a relation with the self insofar as, as we have seen, the self comes into existence, at a minimum, via reference to some competing or disparate set of others that are not oneself. Thus a masterful type becomes aware of himself[10] as a self-affirmer only through unpredictable and insignificant encounters with other people, forces, or things that are not himself. These phenomena are designated as "bad," which carries no moral weight and is better thought of as empirically descriptive. Contrary to the slavish type, the masterful person regards such encounters with foreign elements as at best unremarkable, at worst, a negative confrontation so fleeting or light that it is quickly forgotten or otherwise dispensed with:

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[9] Indeed, it does not seem to *emerge* at all, being presented by Nietzsche in Essay I as some sort of originary state of the healthy, more beastly version of human being. Nietzsche also encourages us to believe that slave morality emerges as a reaction *to* noble morality or the behavior of the nobles, a relationship that is neither necessary nor explicitly established by him (more on this in Section III).

[10] I use male pronouns because I think this is clearly to whom Nietzsche is referring. For justification, see Schotten 2009*,* A Note on Citations and Chapters 4-5.

[The noble mode of valuation] acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly—its negative concept 'low,' 'common,' 'bad' is only a subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept—filled with life and passion through and through—'we noble ones, we good, beautiful, happy ones!' When the noble mode of valuation blunders and sins against reality, it does so in respect to the sphere with which it is *not* sufficiently familiar, against a real knowledge of which it has indeed inflexibly guarded itself: in some circumstances it misunderstands the sphere it despises, that of the common man, of the lower orders; on the other hand, one should remember that, even supposing that the affect of contempt, of looking down from a superior height, *falsifies* the image of that which it despises, it will at any rate still be a much less serious falsification than that perpetrated on its opponent—in *effigie* of course— by the submerged hatred, the vengefulness of the impotent. There is indeed too much carelessness, too much taking lightly, too much looking away and impatience involved in contempt, even too much joyfulness, for it to be able to transform its object into a real caricature and monster (*GM* I:10).

Now, recalling that Nietzsche condemns slaves for something other than weakness and praises strength for something other than its ability to triumph, it becomes clear from this discussion of master and slave morality that "strength" and "weakness" name neither physical prowess nor "spiritual" cunning but rather a set of qualities or characteristics that are better described as ethical dispositions, the content of which is twofold: (1) the order (first or second) and character (affirmative or deceptive) of self-recognition, and (2) the resulting activity in response to this self-recognition (nothing at all or revenge). So the masterful type, for instance, recognizes himself first and the other second, if at all. Indeed, "recognition" is not really the correct word here, for the masterful type is self-affirmative without necessary reference to any other being or standard of affirmation. He is first insofar as he is good, and he is good insofar as he is first. The two entail and are inextricable from one another, leaving any other person, force, or thing secondary if not irrelevant, and rendering the "first" of this formulation an erroneous, retrospective attribution.

While the masterful type is largely indifferent to the existence of others, the slavish type, by contrast, takes his existence to be founded upon and in reaction to the existence of that other(s) to whom he responds in negation and with hostility:

This, then, is quite the contrary of what the noble man does, who conceives the basic concept "good" in advance and spontaneously out of himself and only then creates for himself an idea of "bad"! This "bad" of noble origin and that "evil" out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred—the former an after-production, a side issue, a contrasting shade, the latter on the contrary an original thing, the beginning, the distinctive *deed* in the conception of slave morality—how different these words "bad" and "evil" are, although they are both apparently the opposite of the same concept "good" (*GM* I:11).

Therefore, these two types have very different behavioral responses to their encounter with an/other: the masterful type is indifferent—having no reaction at all—or else is harmlessly destructive, seeking "blindly" to remove obstacles to his own existence and flourishing, which he thoughtlessly calls "bad."[11] The slavish type, by contrast, because of his derivative existence, resorts to vengefulness and resentment, for the alleged hostility experienced by the slavish type himself. Destruction and revenge, then, respectively constitute the distinctive forms of activity for the masterful and slavish type.[12]

Understanding master and slave morality from this psychological perspective makes clear what Nietzsche condemns about "weakness" and what he finds admirable about "strength." As we know, victoriousness is an insufficient characterization of strength. Instead, what Essay I of the *Genealogy* reveals is that the "strong"—i.e., masterful—type is strong because he affirms his own existence for no other reason than that existence itself—i.e., for no reason at all. Physicality—despite Nietzsche's rhapsodizing of its importance—is simply not what is at stake here. The strong man is affirming, honest, and un-self-consciously entitled, but physical prowess or victoriousness is neither what is distinctive about him nor plays a significant role in determining the shamefulness of his defeat. Similarly, Nietzsche critiques the "weak" because they are slavish, a consideration to which physical qualities are immaterial. Slavish types understand themselves only residually, as afterthoughts, as secondary to a (set of) force(s) deemed primary and domineering, if not outright hostile and oppressive. They wage war on these forces, condemning them for their "injustice," seeking to triumph over them by criminalizing their activity, without which they could not exist and against which they have come to understand themselves, even if only as a negation. Ironically, then, slaves *need* the external phenomena from which they claim to suffer, for without these constraints they themselves are nothing.[13] Slave morality, then, despite its critical façade, is a deeply conservative and risk-averse comportment. As Nietzsche notes, it is the instinct of self-preservation at work, the "prudence of the lowest order which even insects possess (posing as dead, when in great danger, so as not to do 'too much')" (*GM* I:13). The indefinite endeavor of the slaves is

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[11] The masterful type's destructiveness is "harmless" from a perspective that is, as Nietzsche might say, beyond good and evil—outside the demands of any slave morality that measures an activity's value by its effect on the weak or the many. It may be "destructive," however, precisely *from* the perspective of the weak or the many. Thus, reading master morality as an ethical disposition accurately describes not simply Nietzsche's fictitious pre-historical humans, but potentially also Wall Street CEOs, colleagues who refuse departmental service, or unreliable parents more interested in their own affairs than those of their children.

[12] This is an approach that de-privileges "active" and "reactive" as central categories of analysis in Nietzsche's philosophy, a conclusion that follows in part from Nietzsche's important qualification of activity as "true" reaction, discussed above; cf. Deleuze 1983.

[13] Wendy Brown offers a clear application of this understanding of slave morality to a critique of left-leaning identity politics in her groundbreaking essay "Wounded Attachments," in Brown 1995). However, Brown's argument paved the way for a series of critiques of feminism as a version of slave morality which, while compelling in their own right, nevertheless seem to have set an unspoken precedent that only progressive movements—or only feminism?—should be subjected to this particular analysis, a critique recently reincarnated in Halley 2008, 354-363 (see also Brown 1998); Conway 1998); Stringer 2000); Tapper 1993). This article is one attempt to disrupt this puzzling tendency in political theory scholarship.

simultaneously to preserve the external world and demonize it, thereby maintaining themselves securely intact. As is obvious, this disposition is quite opposed to the indifferent expenditure of the masterful type, who confronts obstacles if and as they arise with the energy, awareness, and morality of any other force of nature—the rain, a gust of wind, the crashing of waves onto the shore.

III. Strength, Slavishness, and the War on Gaza

The reason the physical and the psychological versions of master and slave morality are so difficult to disentangle is due, in part, to Nietzsche's own incessant, pounding rhetoric of physical domination. But there is another difficulty: Nietzsche tends to suggest that master and slave morality arise in a historical, dialectical relationship with one another, such that the "others" whom the master encounters are necessarily slaves while the "others" so vehemently hated and stigmatized by the slaves are necessarily masters, who have imposed the constraints against which the slaves protest. Yet while Nietzsche clearly presents things as developing this way, there is certainly no necessity that they do so. First, it is clear according to the psychological framework Nietzsche offers that the master sees virtually all external phenomena, insofar as they are not-himself, as that which is "lower" or not to be affirmed—regardless of whether that not-me is "strong" or "weak." Indeed, it is hard to imagine the masterful type even taking the time to determine the relative nobility or slavishness of the external, not-me phenomena he encounters. This is especially so when we remember that these phenomena need not be limited to other humans: the masterful type will experience everything from an avalanche to other people to the mall being closed as a kind of foreign, not-me obstacle in his path, one perhaps worth reckoning with but not otherwise worthy of extended reflection or rancor (worthy of ridicule, perhaps, but only if he happens to bother with it for that long).[14]

Similarly, it is simply not the case that the "hostile external world" to which the slave objects and against which he reacts is necessarily the existence, imposition, or violence of the nobility. There are two points here: first, as is the case with the masters' not-me phenomena, there is no reason to suppose that the external impositions encountered by the slave are necessarily other humans. Second, and consequently, just because the slave perceives the external world—whether other humans or an avalanche or the mall being closed—*as* hostile does not mean this external world actually *is* hostile. Indeed, this act of projection is an essential aspect of the slave's slavishness. As Nietzsche notes, "This inversion of the value-positing eye—this need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at

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[14] Thus there is also no necessity that a masterful type be an oppressor or someone with a penchant for domination. As Aaron Ridley (1998) observes, "Whether life affirmers are bound also to be murdering, rapacious, pyromaniacal torturers, however, is an entirely separate question (i.e., not one settled either way by the observation that Nietzsche prefers the original nobles, unattractive habits notwithstanding…)…You could say yes to life, that is, without being then obliged by any logical consideration to go and burn something down" (129).

all—its action is fundamentally reaction" (*GM* I:10).   Looking at this important sentence more closely, I would argue that there is quite a bit of difference between needing "external stimuli"—Nietzsche's *physiological* explanation of slavishness—and needing a "hostile external world"—Nietzsche's *psychological* explanation of slavishness. Given the overall dishonesty of slavish types (see, e.g., *GM* I:10, I:11, I:14), it seems reasonable to conclude that the "hostility" of these external stimuli are not intrinsic to the phenomena themselves. A slavish type understands and experiences himself as under siege—but this is a fact about the slave, not the external world, much less the masterful type. Even if the slave *were* under siege, and by the master no less, the slave would still not be under siege in the willful or systematic sense associated with the word "oppression."

Nietzsche thus rhetorically conflates categories he analytically distinguishes.[15] Although he seems an unequivocal advocate of strength, which seems uncontroversially to be the domain of the physically superior, domineering, and, let us acknowledge it, supremely *manly* man, there are also significant problems with taking Nietzsche at his word on these issues. So, to return to the question asked at the outset of this paper: are all expenditures of strength justifiable for Nietzsche as, simply, expenditures of strength? I think the answer to this question is no. It is possible to condemn certain expressions of strength or triumphs of power while nevertheless endorsing Nietzsche's critique of slavishness, first, because the categories of master and slave do not correspond to obvious categories of strong and weak, and second, because Nietzsche's critique of slave morality is not, in fact, a critique of condemnations of strength per se. Slave morality is problematic for Nietzsche insofar as what is slavish is whatever understands itself as derivative, and subsequently seeks retribution against the phenomena it believes itself to be derivative *of*, thereby preserving the antagonistic relationship in a defensive and reactionary attempt at preserving itself. Thus one can clearly condemn particular expenditures of strength insofar as they are slavish in this way, and condemnations of strength per se are not themselves slavish. Third, the victimization against which slaves identify themselves is in no way is necessarily committed by the masterful or "strong." Because these categories have been adequately disentangled and their actual referents established, it becomes clear that those who are victimized are not natural victims any more than those perpetrating the victimization cannot do otherwise than undertake it. Indeed, what Nietzsche laments in the triumph of the slave revolt is the triumph of derivative, conservative, self-preservative vengefulness and the loss of mastery: honest, un-self-conscious, self-affirmative activity. There is no reason to presume that those with political power are strong in this particular, psychological way, or that those who suffer from impositions of political domination are weak in this particular, psychological way.

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[15] Why he would do this is itself a psychological question which, while not considered here, is crucial to any interpretation of Nietzsche that takes the form of his philosophy as seriously as its content (Conway's *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* is instructive in this regard; see also my *Nietzsche's Revolution*). As Ridley notes, Nietzsche's binary categorizations in the *Genealogy* seem as though they function as "navigational aids," when "In truth, they are what need to be navigated….To expect, in light of this, that Nietzsche's dichotomous pairs should function as solid path markers is to expect quite the wrong sort of thing. Instead, one should expect that good/bad, slave/noble, and so on would mark out fields of tension," or, even, "treacherous zones" (*Nietzsche's Conscience*, p. 12).

In the case of the recent war on Gaza, then, I would argue that Nietzsche's categories of master and slave suggest that this particular war was in fact an exercise in slavishness, not mastery. The gratuitous and gruesome disproportion of Israel's aggression was not the indifferent destruction of a self-affirming power merely eliminating obstacles to its existence. It was instead a revenge that mistook the existence—and paltry "imposition"—of others as the source of its identity and suffering.[16] Israel's actions exemplify slavishness insofar as the justification of this war relied on a wildly inaccurate portrayal of Israeli society as a nation precariously under siege by forces that, if not immobilized, would have brought about the destruction of the state itself. This political narrative is consonant with Israel's larger justification of its existence—as the safe refuge of a people perpetually besieged by a historically variable but ever-present genocidal hatred. Without this desperately needed hostile external world, the reason for Israel's existence and the content of its national identity would evaporate.[17] This narrative of Israel's existence is longstanding: it was essential to its historical founding and continues to be used to defend Israel's otherwise indefensible activities—such as, in this case, Operation Cast Lead—to this day (see Arendt 1991, 10 and Zertal 2005, esp. Chapter 5). The endurance of this narrative, however, does not make it any the more true.[19] Like all adherents of slave morality, then, Israel will continue to constitute itself in relation to an ever-shifting constellation of hostile enemies – whether the PLO, Hamas, or, now, Iran – a dysfunctional and tragic state of affairs that chillingly suggests that wars of the kind we recently witnessed will by no means remain either exceptional or rare.[21]

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[16] I recognize the difficulties involved in psychologizing about national identities or cultures. Nevertheless, I follow Judith Butler when she claims that "when we are speaking about 'the subject' we are not always speaking about an individual: we are speaking about a model for agency and intelligibility, one that is very often based on notions of sovereign power" (Butler 2004, 45).

[17] As President Obama has put it, "America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied" ("Text: Obama's Speech in Cairo," *New York Times*, June 4, 2009). As Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz puts it, "[I]mages of male/state power are complicated inside Israel (as in Jewish communities around the world) by the excruciating history of Holocaust, manipulated to arouse shame and fear, and to blur the distinction between a period of European Jewish powerlessness, and a current reality of an extremely powerful Israeli military, complete with nuclear weapons. The Israeli/Jew is seen one minute as a *sabra* (native of Israel) paratrooper, the next minute as a shtetl victim, a 'sheep to the slaughter'" (in Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt 2008, 244).

[19] As Rashid Khalidi puts it in a recent interview with the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*: "Israel is always going to be stronger than everyone else [in the region] because of its nuclear arsenal, because of its conventional edge, because of its technological edge, because of its links to the United States and I can go on and on and on. The idea that Israel is under any existential danger [from Iran] is fantasy. Is that deeply implanted in many Israelis' minds because of Jewish history? Yes. Is that an irrational fear? Yes. We can talk psychology, but we're talking nuclear capabilities, actual intentions, the ideological orientation of this regime, who actually controls things—those are factual matters." (http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/full-transcript-of-interview-with-palestinian-professor-rashid-khalidi-1.399632 [accessed 12/13/2011]).

[21] On Hamas as the latest incarnation of Nazism, see this production by the David Horowitz Freedom Center, disseminated widely during the 2008-09 Gaza massacre, which encapsulates this particular Zionist discourse of victimization, advancing the racist claim that "Arabs" irrationally hate Jewish people and seek to destroy Israel primarily for that reason: http://fun.mivzakon.co.il/flash/video/2664/2664.html (accessed 5/14/09; subsequently re-posted onto YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f81j5Zk-GSA [accessed 1/8/2012). On Iran as the newest Nazi threat, see, for example, the Ha'aretz article,

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