Note from professor: Section ii of this paper (explanation of relevant background with quotations) is especially long. It’s just the way the person did it; it’s fine for it to be this long but it doesn’t need to be.

Essay 2

 In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche supports the idea that some people should give up altruistic morality in favor of creating their own values. His position does not provide a clear answer, and the question of does his position support and permit terrible acts on others arises. The answer to this would be that he does not support the acts but only supports free, independent thinking, and that creating one’s own values does not exclude helping behavior, albeit from different motives. The counterargument of harmful acts that are freely and independently conceived to be helpful then comes into question. The rebuttal to this point would be that Nietzsche’s main focus is the individual, and having no constraints of others on the individual. Hence, once any concern with others comes into conception, it descends into slave morality.

Nietzsche supports that some people should give up altruistic morality in favor of creating their own values. He begins by pointing out that there are two distinct moralities: slave morality – associated with altruistic behavior —and master morality – creating one’s own values. Nietzsche highlights the qualities of master morality as being, “The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval… it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating” (Nietzsche, p.205). The qualities of the slave oppose those of master morality. “The slave’s eye is not favorable to the virtues of the powerful” (Nietzsche, p.207). Furthermore, the quality that most consider altruism is within the confines of slave morality. “Those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored… Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility” (Nietzsche, p.207).

Nietzsche does not support slave morality because its only utility is survival and not flourishing. “Human beings are together there who are dependent on themselves and what their species to prevail, most often because they have to prevail or run the terrible risk of being exterminated” (Nietzsche, p. 210). He adds that once “a day arrives when conditions become more fortunate and the tremendous tension decreases… At one stroke the bond and constraint of the old discipline are torn: it no longer seems necessary, a condition of existence – if it persisted it would only be a form of luxury, an archaizing taste” (Nietzsche, p. 211).

Not only is it instinctual in noble morality that one posits his or her own values, but it is inherently desired, and that slave morality prevents this. Nietzsche suggest the idea of cruelty, and how in slave morality one may desire for cruelty to be curtailed; however, it is the desire of the free spirit to acknowledge cruelty. “To see this we must, of course, chase away the clumsy psychology of bygone times which had nothing to teach about cruelty except that it came into being at the sight of the sufferings of others… Indeed, any insistence on profundity and thoroughness is a violation, a desire to hurt the basic will of the spirit which unceasingly strives for the apparent and superficial – in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty” (Nietzsche, p.159).

One question may arise from Nietzsche’s position that creating one’s own values is more favorable to altruistic or slave morality: Does this support, and permit the acts of any and all individuals? For instance, the various examples throughout history of wars and injustices committed on other people. Those who have performed these acts clearly would have had their own set of values – distinct from those of the target groups. There does not seem to be an obvious answer since Nietzsche does not explain what individuals should do once they posit their own set of values.

To say that Nietzsche would be a supporter of the markedly terrible acts across human history would be an overstatement. Nietzsche seems only to suggest that the flourishing of an individual lies in his or her capacity to posit his or her own values. To not be a follower of the crowd, and to have independent thinking. An individual who is able to conceive his or her own set of values independently of the urges of others flourishes not because they have to suppress others in order to rise above. Instead, it is the freedom of individuality, and freedom from the effects of judgement of others that allows one to be their best self. Nietzsche suggest that, “the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power” (Nietzsche, p. 205). In this, it is fairly telling of Nietzsche’s position. Formulating one’s own values does not devalue the less fortunate or other. Additionally, the motives of helping others are different from what we would consider altruism.

A counterargument may be derived from this: those in positions of power may perform harmful acts on others since they may deem harmful acts as helpful behavior – instantiated by eugenics. Once in the position of power, they are free from judgement of others and independent thinkers because they instill fear. Take Hitler as example, he probably considered the extermination of the Jewish race as helpful to his Aryan race – those of whom were not in his similar position of power. His position was evidently free of judgement from the numerous followers under him.

Again, this extrapolation is possible but appears to be an overstatement. The main idea that Nietzsche is promoting has a stark resemblance to subjectivism. That is, the main concern of any person should be that which promotes the flourishing of the individual themselves. Suppose it was the case that Hitler not only did as he did to acquire power for himself, but also to promote the Aryan race’s superiority, then the motives of his actions extend beyond that of his own flourishing to include that of others. This perspective, and that being that one needs to subjugate others in order for flourishing descends Nietzsche’s position into slave morality. Once the set of values becomes concerned with others, it is no longer free and independent.

Nietzsche suggests that some people should discard altruistic morality and create their own values. Does Nietzsche, then, support and permit terrible acts on others that have been witnessed across human history? The answer that Nietzsche would have is that he supports the freedom to think independently as the source of flourishing. The counterargument to this is that freely and independently conceived thoughts which are thought to be helpful to the individual may be detrimental to others. Nietzsche would probably respond that once flourishing becomes entangled with the concerns of others, it no longer is free, independent, and of his noble morality.

References

Nietzsche, F. W. (1989). *Beyond Good and Evil* (Walter Kaufman trans.) New York: Vintage.