UNIT 11: NIETZSCHE'S CONCEPT OF MORALITY

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of morality
- discuss Nietzsche's rejection of traditional western morality.
- explain Nietzsche's concept of aristocratic morality.
- describe Neitzsche's idea of will to power.
- explain the concept of superman as representing Nietzsche's aristocratic morality.

11.2: INTRODUCTION

The term morality in common understanding refers to some codes of conduct or human behaviour put forward by a society or a group, or by religion, or accepted by an individual for his own way of life. It is a code of values accepted by a man, or a society as the guide to their course of actions, which determine the purpose and course of life. The goal of morality is to create an environment where all people live peacefully by performing good actions as directed by moral codes and

avoiding bad actions as such. As a result morality tends to make us good and together with this it attempted to establish a developed society or nation. Another goal of morality is to make people obedient to the almighty or to some supernatural power. Morality is the course of 'how to be' and 'how to act'. It deals with concepts like right, wrong, good, evil etc. in their application to individual human life and the society. Depending upon the culture or society, morality can vary. Hence, what is moral to some, in some society, may not be so to others, and in other societies.

11.3: NIETZSCHE'S VIEW ON MORALITY

As an existential philosopher self-development andlife-affirmation is the primary concern in Nietzsche's thought. For him ideal state of existence for human beings is when they are capable of flourishing or living to their maximum potential. Independence and self-assurance are important characteristics of human flourishing. On the other hand, morality imposed some fixed universal objective standards on man and one has to abide by those standard or values without any condition. But rejecting such morality Nietzsche held that there is no fixed universal objective value. Moral values are nothing but human constructs and thereby needs to be rectified with the change of time and conditions under which they grow. He observed that there are two classes in a society – master class and slave class. All values developed within the struggle between master and slave class. In the master class (the powerful) values of courage, dominance, positivity, and self-love etc. are regarded as 'good'. On the other hand, as a reaction to such a valuation of the masters,a separate morality developed within the slave, weak or inferior class. This is slave morality. In such morality everything which is regarded as 'good' within master morality turned to be 'evil' and those which are abhorred as 'bad' turned to be 'good'. Thus, in salve morality all the weak values like pity, compassion, kindness, self-sacrifice were highly esteemed and termed as good. Again all the life-affirming strong values of the masters were termed as 'evil'. Thus 'good', 'bad', 'evil' all

these developed due to the struggle between these two classes of society without having any metaphysical or supernatural sanction behind them. Nietzsche even went on to reject Christian morality which has dominated the west during his time. He rejected Christian ethics or morality mainly for two reasons- 1) Christian ethics is grounded on God. All must abide by the commandments of God without any condition. All must lead their life in accordance to this absolute moral principle. This goes against Nietzsche's conviction that there is no universal absolute moral order but only subjectively interpreted moralities which must be one's own creation without any external barrier and again such moralities keep on changing with the change and requirement of the time.2) Again, in Christian ethics the highest good for man is to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness in one's life. Here everyone performs action so that one may have a blissful after-life. Nietzsche objected this and stated that performing actions not to value this earthly life, which is the only life and valuing some transcendental eternal life (after-life), is ridiculous.

Thus, Nietzsche Rejected morality revered so far. But at the same time he wanted to build an aristocratic morality under which creativity and potentiality of man find expression.

11.4 WILL-TO-POWER

To explain the idea of aristocratic morality Nietzsche offered the concept of will-to-power. It is the will to create, the will to self-overcome, and the will to involve oneself in the continuous process of self-development. 'Power' in Nietzsche's concept of will-to-power does not refer to the greed for power or dominion on other people. It is the power to create. It is an affirmative force which allows us to say 'yes' to life. Will-to-power is the prime motivator behind all human actions and behaviours. For Nietzsche all values of life are the creation of will-to-power and as such there can be no metaphysical basis (other worldly values) of morality that lies beyond the reach of man.Nietzsche stated that

possessing such will-to-power people can build his own values which will help him to exhibit his creativity instead of following the age-old values of the tradition which will make him a 'herd animal' and nothing else. Hence will-to-power is the force behind the revaluation of all the pre-established and fixed morality. In such process of revaluation only those values will be accepted which do not hinder one to exhibit his will-to-power otherwise values will be counted as weakening human existence and hence will be evicted immediately. Nietzsche by introducing the concept of will-to-power added a big 'yes' to life by adding affirmation and creation to life. On the basis of this will-to-power Nietzsche wanted to revaluate all the previously established values. Because will-to-power is that which interprets, which determines, which creates.

11.5 SUPERMAN

The concept of will-to-power finds its highest expression in Nietzsche's ideal concept of 'superman'. Superman is one who involves himself in the continuous process of self-overcoming. He lives creatively by exhibiting his will-to-power. To be a superman one must examine every prescribed code of morality instead of blindly accepting them. Superman must be opposed to 'herd morality" – the morality which isaccepted by the common masses, by following some general laws, which are prescribed either by their religion or the prophets. In such morality one becomes a member of the herd and his sole principle in life is to follow the herd in every situation of life without considering his own power and strength. Superman is one who is never satisfied with his present achievement but always strives to make him a better one through continuous process of self-overcoming. And as such superman affirms his creativity. Thereby superman becomes 'the highest manifestation' of will to power. Everyone must aspire to become a superman through his own excellence without following any universal guidelines. Everyman is a project in him with the mission to become superman.Nietzsche offered the ideal of superman as an individual

capable of unrestricted creative power. To realise such creativity and as such to live an authentic life man had to transform himself into superman by overcoming his present state. Nietzsche presents three stages of development by which man can overcome him and can attain the status of superman – 1)the camel, it represents average ordinary man, who accepts the duties and norms prescribed by the society without any protest and thereby carries the weight of the society on their back. 2) The lion is the next stage in the way of development. In this stage the camel becomes lion. Here one recognizes his own individual creativity and freedom and so he says 'no' to every prescribed duties and norms set by society. 3) The stage of the child. As a child takes a new beginning and understanding of life without any previous concept, in the same way here an individual takes a new beginning to life free from all the constraints that has made him simply a member of the herd. With this new outlook an individual tries to achieve the highest position in life. This represents the superman of Nietzsche who says 'yes' to life and creates his own set of values.

It is important to note here that, while offering his concept of superman, Nietzsche did not ask one to become wild animals by breaking all codes of life and dance to one's own music. Rather he wanted to define life through his 'aristocratic noble morality' based on 'will-to-power'. Such morality aims at bringing out the creativity and potentiality in man. Such a morality values and rejoices this earthly life rather than absorbing by some other-worldly hopes. Thus one can celebrate a "yes-saying" life and celebrate an aristocratic morality too.

11.6: CONCLUSION

Nietzsche's idea of 'superman' can restore the aim of morality – the general well-being. Superman is not a destroyer of all morality and thereby creating disorder in society. Rather he is one who believes in an aristocratic morality. Aristocratic in the sense that he is free from the herd mentality, from blindly following the existing values of society. In this

process one can build a better society through his improved and superior perspective. It can also be said that Nietzsche wanted to build morality as an inner necessity instead of an external law imposed on people. His merit lies in the fact that he opens our eyes to evaluate the value of morality itself instead of blindly following what is given or revered so far. He repudiated predominant morality due to its decadent and life-denying attitude. But he was an advocate of 'noble aristocratic morality' which permits men to be creative, potent and self-overcome.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: What is the primary concern in Nietzsche's existential thought?

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Q.2: What is the ideal state of existence for human being according to Nietzsche?

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Q.3: What are the two classes in a society according to Nietzsche?

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Q.4: Mention the values that are regarded as good in master class.

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Q.5: What are the values that are accepted as good in slave class?

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Q.6: What is the highest good for man in Christian ethics?

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Q.7: What is the prime motivator behind all human action and behaviour?

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Q.8: What is the aim of Nietzsche's morality?

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Q.9: What are the three stages through which man transform him into superman?

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Q.10. What does the word 'power' refers to in Nietzsche's will-to-power?

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

- The goal of morality is to create an environment where all people live peacefully by performing good actions as directed by moral codes and avoiding bad actions as such.
- Morality tends to make us good and together with this it attempted to establish a developed society or nation.
- In Nietzsche's philosophy human being is the centre point – his development and self-creation.
- Nietzsche observed that there are two classes in a society – master class and slave class. All values developed within the struggle between master and slave class.
- In the master class (the powerful) values of courage, dominance, positivity, and self-love etc. are regarded as 'good'.
- In salve class all the weak values like pity, compassion, kindness, self-sacrifice were highly esteemed and termed as good.

- Will-to-power is the will to create, the will to self-overcome, and the will to involve oneself in the continuous process of self-development.
- Power' in Nietzsche's concept of will-to-power refers to the power to create. It is an affirmative force which allows us to say 'yes' to life.
- Nietzsche's morality aims at bringing out the creativity and potentiality in man. Such a morality values and rejoices this earthly life rather than absorbing by some other-worldly hopes.
- For Nietzsche all values of life are the creation of will-to-power and as such there can be no metaphysical basis (other worldly values) of morality that lies beyond the reach of man.
- The concept of will to power finds its highest expression in Nietzsche's ideal concept of 'superman'
- Everyone must aspire to become a superman through his own excellence without following any universal guidelines.
- Superman must be opposed to 'herd morality" – the morality which isaccepted by the common masses, by following some general laws, which are prescribed either by their religion or the prophets.
- Superman is not a destroyer of all morality and thereby creating disorder in society. Rather he is one who believes in an aristocratic morality.
- Nietzsche wanted to build morality as an inner necessity instead of an external law imposed on people.



11.8: FURTHER READING

1) Kaufmann, Walter (1974).*Nietzsche Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2) Hollingdale, R.J (1973). *Nietzsche – The Man and His Philosophy*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.