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OC ACXLW Meetup: Vengeance and Morality - August 17, 2024

Date: Saturday, August 17, 2024

Time: 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Location: 1970 Port Laurent Place, Newport Beach, 92660

Host: Michael Michalchik

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Hello Enthusiasts,

Join us for our 71st OC ACXLW meetup, where we'll explore the concepts of vengeance, morality, and the interplay of Nietzschean philosophy in contemporary discourse. This session will feature two thought-provoking articles by Scott Alexander: one on the ethics of vengeance and the other examining Matt Yglesias through the lens of Nietzschean philosophy.

Discussion Topics:

1. Some Practical Considerations Before Descending Into An Orgy Of Vengeance

- **Reading:** Scott Alexander explores vengeance's ethical and practical ramifications, specifically in the current political climate and cancel culture.
 - [Google Doc](#)
- **Audio:** [Listen here](#)
 - URL:
<https://sscpodcast.libsyn.com/some-practical-considerations-before-descending-into-an-orgy-of-vengeance>

2. Matt Yglesias Considered As The Nietzschean Superman

- **Reading:** Scott Alexander examines Matt Yglesias through Nietzschean philosophy, discussing the balance between master and slave morality and its implications for modern liberalism.
 - [Google Doc](#)
- **Audio:** [Listen here](#)
 - URL:
https://open.substack.com/pub/askwhocastsai/p/matt-yglesias-considered-as-the-nietzschean?r=fbgbc&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

Questions for Discussion:

1. Vengeance and Morality:

- What are the potential consequences of engaging in retaliatory cancel culture?
- How does history illustrate the cyclical nature of vengeance? Can this cycle be broken?

- Is collective punishment ever justified, or does it undermine the principles of individual accountability?
- 2. **Nietzschean Philosophy and Modern Liberalism:**
 - How does Scott Alexander's analysis of Matt Yglesias illustrate the tension between master and slave morality?
 - In what ways does modern liberalism attempt to balance these competing moralities? Is it successful?
 - Can Nietzschean philosophy be reconciled with contemporary political ideals, or are they at odds?

Detailed Breakdowns:

Some Practical Considerations Before Descending Into An Orgy Of Vengeance

1. **Introduction:** The article begins by discussing a Home Depot employee's controversial comment, leading to a debate on whether conservatives should engage in cancel culture as retaliation against the left.
2. **Ethics and Morality Debate:** Scott Alexander critiques the right-wing argument for vengeance, highlighting that engaging in cancel culture does not lead to moral clarity but perpetuates harm and division.
3. **Historical Context and the Dialectic of Vengeance:** The article emphasizes that cancel culture is not new, comparing it to historical cycles of retribution, such as the Red Scare and ancient purges.
4. **The Problem of Collective Punishment:** Alexander critiques treating people as collectives rather than individuals, warning against the dangers of collective guilt and punishment.
5. **The Dangers of Tribalism and Polarization:** The article highlights how political tribalism justifies actions by demonizing the other side, leading to increased polarization and a breakdown of civil discourse.
6. **Friendly Fire and the Incompetence Problem:** Alexander notes that cancel culture often results in "friendly fire," where individuals within the same political group are harmed. This leads to a decline in competence as open debate is stifled.
7. **The Illusion of Power:** The article warns that the right-wing might overestimate its power, as the real levers of cancel culture remain in left-leaning institutions.
8. **The Case for a Principled Approach:** Instead of engaging in vengeance, Alexander advocates for dismantling the structures supporting cancel culture, promoting free speech, and creating better frameworks for moderation.
9. **Conclusion:** The article argues that vengeance will not solve the problem of cancel culture and calls for a long-term strategy focused on promoting free expression and dismantling the mechanisms that enable cancel culture.

Matt Yglesias Considered As The Nietzschean Superman

1. **Bentham's Bulldog:** Scott Alexander begins by discussing a blog post titled "Shut Up About Slave Morality," which criticizes Nietzsche's concept of "slave morality." The post

argues that slave morality is just a label for normal moral behavior and criticizes the right-wing for using the rejection of slave morality as an excuse for cruelty.

2. **Friedrich Nietzsche:** Alexander delves into Nietzsche's distinction between "master morality" and "slave morality." Master morality values strength, ambition, and power, while slave morality, created by the weak and oppressed, values humility, meekness, and compassion. Nietzsche predicted that slave morality would dominate and lead to the "Last Man," a person who worships mediocrity and avoids ambition.
3. **Ozy Brennan:** Alexander introduces a self-help concept by Ozy Brennan, which critiques goals rooted in avoiding failure, emotions, or standing out—coined as "dead people's goals." Brennan advocates for goals that celebrate life and achievements. Alexander relates this to master morality, which encourages individuals to "embiggen" themselves, in contrast to slave morality's emphasis on making oneself smaller and less distinct.
4. **Edward Teach:** Alexander examines slave morality as a defense mechanism that avoids positive judgment by downplaying virtues and accomplishments. Strategies to avoid judgment include believing the system is rigged, dismissing virtues as subjective or meaningless, and deriding those who achieve or stand out. This section critiques how modern society often penalizes excellence and promotes mediocrity.
5. **Jason Crawford:** The discussion shifts to how societies reflect master or slave moralities. Alexander points out how the 19th and early 20th centuries were focused on "embiggening" through progress, technology, and grand achievements. However, a shift occurred post-World War II towards "ensmallening," with a focus on harm reduction and modesty, which he links to the rise of slave morality.
6. **Andrew Tate:** Alexander uses Andrew Tate, a controversial figure known for his wealth, strength, and misogyny, as an example of master morality. While Tate embodies certain virtues admired by master moralists, his moral vices, particularly his treatment of women, make him problematic. Alexander wrestles with reconciling admiration for Tate's virtues with contempt for his vices.
7. **Cotton Mather:** Alexander explores Puritanism as a blend of master and slave moralities. He distinguishes between two forms of slave morality: one that replaces master virtues with different virtues (like Puritan self-discipline) and another that rejects all virtues. He uses Progressive-era propaganda to illustrate how societies have historically balanced these moralities.
8. **Ayn Rand:** Ayn Rand is presented as a modern proponent of master morality, but with a twist. Unlike Nietzsche's chaotic masters, Rand's heroes follow rules grounded in reason and nonviolence. Alexander discusses the strengths and limitations of Rand's philosophy, particularly her attempt to justify a peaceful, positive-sum society without resorting to slave morality.
9. **Matt Yglesias:** Alexander considers Matt Yglesias as a Nietzschean figure who embodies a balanced compromise between master and slave moralities. Yglesias advocates for progress and excellence but within the constraints of liberal democracy, emphasizing equality before the law and focusing on benefits for the worst-off. This section suggests that modern liberalism attempts to reconcile these competing moralities.

10. **Richard Hanania:** Richard Hanania is discussed as an example of a modern Nietzschean liberal who values excellence and rejects slave morality. Despite his right-wing alignment, Hanania's positions on issues like immigration, vaccines, and globalism reflect his commitment to master morality. However, Alexander notes that Hanania's Nietzscheanism is isolated, with no broad political or cultural movement to support it.
 11. **Sid Meier:** Alexander concludes by reflecting on the liberal compromise as a utilitarian balance between master and slave moralities. He discusses effective altruism as an extension of this compromise, arguing that it allows for the pursuit of excellence (like building rockets) while maintaining a focus on helping others. He ends with a meditation on the cyclical nature of ambition and altruism in life.
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We look forward to a stimulating discussion where your insights will contribute to a deeper understanding of these complex and timely topics. For any questions, please contact Michael Michalchik at michaelmichalchik@gmail.com.

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