

Several people who expressed interest in these articles could not make it to the meeting last week, so we discussed other things last week and are doing this topic this week.

OC ACXLW Meetup 72: Vengeance and Morality, Reprise! - August 24, 2024

Date: Saturday, August 24, 2024

Time: 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Location: 1970 Port Laurent Place, Newport Beach, 92660

Host: Michael Michalchik

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Dear ACXLW Enthusiasts,

You are invited to our 72nd OC ACXLW meetup, where we will embark on a rigorous examination of vengeance, morality, and Nietzschean philosophy as they intersect with contemporary cultural and political issues. This session will be centered around two deeply thought-provoking essays by Scott Alexander, providing fertile ground for a profound and intellectually challenging discussion.

Discussion Topics:

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

Reading: Scott Alexander scrutinizes the ethical and practical dimensions of vengeance, with a particular focus on the current political landscape and the phenomenon of cancel culture. He explores whether engaging in retaliatory actions can be justified or if they simply perpetuate cycles of harm and societal fragmentation.

Text: <https://www.astralcodexten.com/p/some-practical-considerations-before>

Audio URL:

<https://sscpodcast.libsyn.com/some-practical-considerations-before-descending-into-an-orgy-of-vengeance>

2. Matt Yglesias Considered As The Nietzschean Superman

Reading: In this analysis, Alexander delves into Nietzschean philosophy to assess Matt Yglesias's position within the modern liberal framework. The discussion navigates the tension between Nietzsche's concepts of master and slave morality, questioning how these ideas resonate within contemporary liberal thought and what they reveal about the broader ideological landscape.

Text: <https://www.astralcodexten.com/p/matt-yglesias-considered-as-the-nietzschean>

Audio:

https://open.substack.com/pub/askwhocastsai/p/matt-yglesias-considered-as-the-nietzschean?r=fbqbc&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

Critical Questions for Exploration:

Vengeance and Morality:

- What are the societal and ethical implications of adopting retaliatory cancel culture tactics? Can such actions ever lead to true justice, or do they merely deepen societal divides?

- How does history illustrate the repetitive nature of vengeance, and what strategies might effectively disrupt this cycle?

- Is collective punishment ever morally defensible, or does it inherently conflict with the principles of individual accountability and justice?

Nietzschean Philosophy and Modern Liberalism:

- How does Scott Alexander's analysis of Matt Yglesias illuminate the persistent struggle between Nietzsche's master and slave moralities? What does this reveal about the underlying tensions in modern liberalism?

- To what extent can modern liberalism reconcile these competing moral frameworks? Where does it succeed, and where does it inevitably falter?

- Can the radical aspects of Nietzschean philosophy be integrated into the fabric of contemporary political ideals, or are they fundamentally incompatible?

In-Depth Breakdown of Articles:

Some Practical Considerations Before Descending Into An Orgy Of Vengeance

- Introduction: The essay opens with a pointed examination of a Home Depot employee's controversial remarks, which spark a broader discussion on whether conservatives should employ cancel culture as a retaliatory measure against the left.

- Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Clarity: Alexander critically evaluates the ethical underpinnings of vengeance, arguing that while it may seem like a path to retribution, it often results in greater societal harm and a lack of true moral resolution. He challenges us to consider whether vengeance can ever truly satisfy the demands of justice or if it merely fuels ongoing cycles of conflict.

- Historical Parallels: Drawing on historical examples such as the Red Scare and ancient purges, Alexander underscores the cyclical nature of vengeance. He illustrates how these past events mirror the dynamics of modern cancel culture, providing a sobering perspective on the dangers of repeating historical mistakes.

- The Flaws of Collective Punishment: The essay critiques the concept of collective punishment, emphasizing the importance of individual accountability over the treatment of people as representatives of a collective. Alexander warns that this approach not only leads to unjust outcomes but also erodes the principles of justice itself.

- Tribalism and Its Consequences: The discussion turns to the dangers of political tribalism, where loyalty to one's ideological group can justify extreme actions against perceived adversaries. Alexander highlights how this mindset exacerbates polarization, undermining the possibility of genuine dialogue and mutual understanding.

- The Problem of Friendly Fire: Alexander explores the unintended consequences of cancel culture, where individuals within the same political faction often become targets. This "friendly fire" stifles open debate and weakens the overall intellectual and moral integrity of the community.

- Illusions of Power: The essay challenges the assumption that the right can effectively harness cancel culture as a weapon, pointing out that the institutional power that sustains cancel culture largely resides within left-leaning entities. Alexander suggests that attempts by the right to engage in similar tactics are likely to backfire.

- A Principled Approach Over Retaliation: Rather than endorsing vengeance, Alexander advocates for a principled approach that seeks to dismantle the very structures that enable cancel culture. He calls for the promotion of free speech and the development of more nuanced and just frameworks for moderation, which can foster a healthier and more robust public discourse.

- Conclusion: The essay concludes with a powerful call to reject the temptation of vengeance and to focus instead on long-term strategies that protect free expression and dismantle the mechanisms that perpetuate cancel culture.

Matt Yglesias Considered As The Nietzschean Superman

- Bentham's Bulldog: Alexander begins by critiquing the blog post "Shut Up About Slave Morality," which challenges common misinterpretations of Nietzsche's concept of slave morality, particularly as it is sometimes used to justify cruelty under the guise of strength.

- Nietzsche's Moral Dichotomy: Alexander provides a thorough exploration of Nietzsche's distinction between master morality, which values strength, ambition, and power, and slave morality, which emerges from the oppressed and values humility, meekness, and compassion. He examines how these moral frameworks manifest in contemporary society and what they reveal about our current ideological battles.

- Ozy Brennan's Critique: Alexander introduces the concept of "dead people's goals" from Ozy Brennan, which critiques the pursuit of goals rooted in the avoidance of failure. This philosophy is contrasted with Nietzsche's master morality, which advocates for the pursuit of life-affirming and ambitious achievements.

- Mediocrity and Modern Society: The essay critiques modern society's tendency to penalize excellence and celebrate mediocrity, a reflection of the dominance of slave morality. Alexander argues that this trend stifles innovation, personal growth, and the pursuit of greatness, leading to a culture that prioritizes safety over ambition.

- Historical Shifts in Moral Values: Alexander contrasts the "embiggening" ethos of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which celebrated progress, innovation, and grand achievements, with the "ensmallening" shift that occurred post-World War II. This shift, characterized by a focus on harm reduction and modesty, reflects the increasing influence of slave morality in modern society.

- Andrew Tate as a Nietzschean Case Study: Alexander uses Andrew Tate as a case study to explore the complexities of master morality. While Tate's ambition, strength, and

defiance align with Nietzschean ideals, his moral vices, particularly his misogynistic views, reveal the inherent tensions and potential dangers within master morality.

- Puritanism and Moral Blends: The essay examines Puritanism as an example of a complex blend of master and slave moralities. Alexander distinguishes between a form of slave morality that replaces master virtues with new virtues, such as Puritan self-discipline, and a form that rejects all virtues. Historical examples are used to illustrate how societies have navigated these moral tensions, often with mixed results.

- Ayn Rand's Rational Mastery: Ayn Rand is presented as a modern advocate of master morality, but with a focus on rational, nonviolent principles. Alexander discusses the strengths and limitations of Rand's philosophy, particularly her attempt to justify a peaceful, productive society that embraces ambition and excellence without resorting to slave morality.

- Matt Yglesias as a Modern Nietzschean: Alexander considers Matt Yglesias as a figure who embodies a balance between master and slave moralities. Yglesias advocates for progress, excellence, and innovation within the framework of liberal democracy, emphasizing the importance of equality before the law and the well-being of the least advantaged. This section suggests that modern liberalism seeks to reconcile these competing moral frameworks, though not without significant challenges.

- Richard Hanania's Nietzschean Liberalism: Richard Hanania is discussed as a contemporary Nietzschean liberal who values excellence and rejects slave morality. However, Alexander notes that Hanania's views lack broad political or cultural support, making him an isolated figure in the broader ideological landscape.

- Sid Meier's Utilitarian Compromise: The essay concludes with a reflection on the liberal compromise as a utilitarian balance between master and slave moralities. Alexander discusses effective altruism as an extension of this balance, arguing that it allows for the pursuit of excellence while maintaining a focus on helping others. The essay ends with a meditation on the cyclical nature of ambition and altruism in human life.

We look forward to an intellectually rigorous and deeply engaging discussion where your insights will be invaluable. This session promises to push the boundaries of our understanding of these critical and timely issues. For any questions, please contact Michael Michalchik at michaelmichalchik@gmail.com.