



Revaluating The Revaluation: Nietzsche's Umwertung And The Advaitic Transcendence Of Papa–Punya

A Comparative Study of Moral Accounting and Liberation

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Abstract:

This paper undertakes a comparative philosophical examination of Friedrich Nietzsche's project of the "revaluation of all values" (Umwertung aller Werte) and Advaita Vedanta's transcendence of the papa-punya (merit–demerit) framework. Although these traditions emerge from distinct intellectual and cultural contexts—nineteenth-century European philosophy and classical Indian metaphysics—both critically interrogate conventional morality as a system of psychological and existential constraint. Nietzsche's genealogical analysis reveals moral dualism as an expression of resentment that suppresses life-affirming instincts, whereas Advaita Vedanta interprets attachment to papa and punya as karmic bondage that perpetuates samsara. Through textual interpretation and comparative analysis, the study demonstrates that both traditions identify moral accounting as a mechanism that conditions consciousness through fear, guilt, and deferred reward. However, their solutions diverge fundamentally. Nietzsche's revaluation seeks the creative affirmation of finite existence through will to power and amor fati, while Advaita Vedanta directs the aspirant toward non-dual realization and liberation through self-knowledge. By examining these convergences and divergences, the paper clarifies two contrasting post-moral trajectories: intensified engagement with becoming versus transcendence into non-dual being. The study contributes to comparative philosophy by offering a structured analysis of value-dismantling projects and their implications for contemporary ethical thought.

Index Terms — Nietzsche, Advaita Vedanta, Umwertung, Papa-Punya, Moral Dualism, Comparative Philosophy, Ethics, Moksha

1. Introduction

Moral systems across cultures commonly operate through binary distinctions such as good and evil, virtue and vice, or merit and demerit. These distinctions function as organizing principles that regulate individual conduct and sustain social order. Yet, philosophical reflection has repeatedly questioned whether such dualistic frameworks genuinely liberate human beings or instead impose subtle forms of psychological constraint. Rather than merely reforming moral categories, some thinkers have argued for their radical dismantling. This paper examines two such radical critiques: Friedrich Nietzsche's project of the revaluation of all values and Advaita Vedanta's call to transcend the papa–punya dualism.

Nietzsche's philosophical intervention emerges in response to what he identifies as the collapse of metaphysical foundations in modern Europe, symbolized by the "death of God." In this context, inherited moral values persist without their original grounding, producing what Nietzsche describes as nihilism. His response is not moral revision but *Umwertung*, a comprehensive re-examination of the origins, functions, and effects of moral valuation. Through genealogical critique, Nietzsche exposes conventional morality as life-denying and rooted in resentment, thereby calling for the creation of new values grounded in affirmation of life.

Advaita Vedanta, particularly as articulated by Adi Shankara, approaches morality from a radically different metaphysical horizon. Within the karmic framework of Indian thought, ethical action produces papa or punya, which determine future experiences across lifetimes. While this system maintains social and cosmic order, Advaita Vedanta argues that attachment to moral results binds consciousness to samsara. Liberation (*moksha*) therefore requires transcending the moral ledger altogether through discriminative knowledge of non-dual reality.

Although Nietzsche and Advaita Vedanta arise from distinct traditions, both converge in their diagnosis of moral dualism as a form of bondage. At the same time, they diverge sharply in their ultimate aims: Nietzsche affirms becoming and creative individuality, whereas Advaita dissolves individuality in non-dual being. This paper undertakes a structured comparative analysis to clarify these convergences and divergences and to explore their significance for post-moral ethical reflection.

2. Literature Review

Comparative engagements between Nietzsche and Eastern philosophical traditions have attracted scholarly attention, particularly in relation to Buddhism. Early studies highlighted similarities in critiques of metaphysics, selfhood, and reactive morality. However, focused analysis of Nietzsche in relation to Advaita Vedanta remains relatively limited. Existing scholarship often gestures toward thematic parallels without sustained conceptual comparison.

Within Advaita Vedanta studies, extensive work has examined the ethical implications of karma, dharma, and liberation. Classical commentaries by Shankara establish the doctrinal foundation, while modern scholars have explored how Advaita ethics function at both conventional and ultimate levels of reality. These analyses emphasize that moral action, while necessary for mental purification, does not itself produce liberation.

Nietzsche scholarship, on the other hand, has devoted significant attention to genealogy, resentment, and the critique of moral valuation. Studies have examined how moral concepts operate as instruments of psychological regulation rather than expressions of objective truth. Yet few works place Nietzsche's critique of moral accounting in direct dialogue with Indian ethical metaphysics.

The present study addresses this gap by comparing Nietzsche's *Umwertung* with Advaita Vedanta's transcendence of papa–punya as parallel critiques of moral dualism. Rather than seeking synthesis, the paper emphasizes structural analysis, highlighting both shared insights and irreducible differences in metaphysical orientation and existential aim.

3. Nietzsche's *Umwertung*: Critique and Reconstruction of Moral Values

Nietzsche's project of *Umwertung* aller Werte arises from his diagnosis of a cultural crisis in modern Europe. With the decline of traditional metaphysical and religious foundations, moral values continue to function without their original justification. Nietzsche characterizes this condition as nihilism, wherein inherited values persist but no longer serve life. Rather than lamenting this crisis, Nietzsche treats it as an opportunity to expose the historical and psychological origins of morality and to initiate the creation of new values.

Central to Nietzsche's critique is his genealogical method, most clearly articulated in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Genealogy rejects the assumption that moral values are timeless or objectively given. Instead, it traces their emergence to concrete social conditions and psychological forces. Nietzsche distinguishes between "master morality" and "slave morality" to demonstrate how moral concepts arise from differing relations to power. Master morality originates in self-affirmation and strength, where values express vitality and confidence. Slave morality, by contrast, emerges from resentment—the reactive hostility of those unable to express power directly. Through resentment, the weak reinterpret strength as evil and elevate weakness as moral virtue.

As slave morality becomes culturally dominant, morality increasingly functions as a system of guilt and debt. Nietzsche highlights the conceptual link between guilt (*Schuld*) and indebtedness, portraying the moral subject as perpetually accountable to an abstract authority. This moral economy produces what Nietzsche calls "bad conscience," in which instinctual energies are turned inward, generating self-surveillance and self-punishment. Rather than cultivating excellence or creativity, morality becomes a mechanism of regulation that suppresses life-affirming impulses.

Nietzsche's revaluation does not end with destruction. He proposes an affirmative reconstruction grounded in the concept of will to power, understood as the fundamental drive toward growth, expansion, and creative self-overcoming. The revalued individual no longer acts from fear of punishment or hope of reward but from an overflow of strength. The ideal of *amor fati*—the love of one's fate—expresses unconditional affirmation of existence, including suffering and contingency. The figure of the *Übermensch* symbolizes the individual who creates values from within life itself, thereby moving beyond reactive moral calculation.

4. Advaita Vedanta and the Transcendence of Papa–Punya

In Advaita Vedanta, ethical life is embedded within the broader framework of karma and dharma. Human actions generate consequences that manifest as papa (demerit) or punya (merit), shaping future experiences across lifetimes. This moral causality sustains cosmic and social order, encouraging individuals to act in accordance with prescribed duties. From the empirical standpoint, papa–punya functions as a rational and just ethical system.

Adi Shankara, however, reinterprets this moral framework through the lens of non-dual metaphysics. Advaita Vedanta distinguishes between transactional reality (*vyavaharika satta*) and ultimate reality (*paramarthika satta*). At the transactional level, distinctions between agent, action, and result remain operative, and ethical injunctions retain their practical validity. At the ultimate level, however, only Brahman exists as non-dual consciousness. The world of multiplicity, including moral distinctions, arises from ignorance (*avidya*).

From this perspective, attachment to papa and punya constitutes a form of bondage. Even virtuous actions generate karmic residues that reinforce the sense of individuality and agency. Shankara consistently argues that action, whether moral or immoral, cannot directly produce liberation. Ethical discipline serves only a preparatory function by purifying the mind and reducing attachment. Liberation requires knowledge (*jnana*)—the direct realization that the Self (*Atman*) is identical with Brahman.

The Advaitic ideal of the liberated person (*jivanmukta*) illustrates this transcendence. Although actions may continue at the empirical level, they no longer generate karmic consequences because the sense of doership has dissolved. The moral ledger of papa–punya becomes irrelevant, having fulfilled its provisional role. Freedom, in Advaita, is not achieved through moral perfection but through the dissolution of the moral self itself.

5. Convergent Critique: Moral Accounting as Bondage

Despite their distinct metaphysical commitments, Nietzsche and Advaita Vedanta converge in their critique of moral accounting. Both traditions identify moral dualism as a mechanism that binds consciousness through fear, expectation, and self-regulation. Nietzsche's analysis of bad conscience reveals how moral systems internalize guilt and fragment the self. Advaita's diagnosis of karmic bondage similarly shows how attachment to moral results perpetuates ego-identification.

A further point of convergence lies in their critique of future-oriented ethics. Nietzsche argues that morality grounded in deferred reward devalues present life, reducing existence to a means toward imagined compensation. Advaita likewise holds that action motivated by future karmic results entangles the individual in desire and postpones freedom. In both cases, moral calculation diverts attention away from immediate existence.

Both traditions also valorize spontaneity as a mark of freedom. Nietzsche's affirmative individual acts creatively, without reference to moral profit or loss. The Advaitic *jivanmukta* acts without attachment, allowing actions to arise naturally from circumstances. In each case, freedom emerges when action is no longer governed by moral bookkeeping.

6. Fundamental Divergence: Immanence and Transcendence

The convergence between Nietzsche and Advaita Vedanta ultimately gives way to a decisive divergence. Nietzsche affirms the world of becoming as the only reality. Flux, struggle, and impermanence are not defects to be overcome but conditions to be embraced. His ethical ideal intensifies individuality and celebrates creative self-assertion.

Advaita Vedanta, by contrast, treats the phenomenal world as ultimately illusory. The aim of liberation is not affirmation of becoming but realization of unchanging being. Individuality is understood as a superimposition upon consciousness, and freedom consists in its dissolution. Where Nietzsche sees self-overcoming as the height of life, Advaita sees the cessation of individuality as liberation.

These opposing orientations yield incompatible ethical horizons. Nietzsche's revaluation culminates in affirmation of life as it is, whereas Advaita's transcendence culminates in freedom from the cycle of becoming itself. Their dialogue thus clarifies the fundamental choice confronting any attempt to move beyond moral dualism.

7. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Nietzsche's *Umwertung* and Advaita Vedanta's transcendence of papa–punya converge in identifying moral dualism as a source of psychological and existential bondage. Both expose how moral systems grounded in reward and punishment constrain freedom and fragment consciousness. Yet their ultimate visions diverge sharply. Nietzsche affirms finite existence and creative individuality, while Advaita dissolves individuality in non-dual realization. These contrasting trajectories illuminate two radically different possibilities for post-moral thought: intensified engagement with life and transcendence of life's apparent structures. The comparison underscores the richness of cross-cultural philosophy in revealing both shared insights and irreducible differences in the pursuit of freedom.

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