

“Whatever is done for love always occurs beyond good and evil.”  
“God is dead.”

## Friedrich Nietzsche

*Central to Nietzsche’s philosophy is the idea of “life-affirmation,” which involves an honest questioning of all doctrines which drain life’s energies, however socially prevalent those views might be.* – Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Nietzsche is often referred to as an Irrationalist, which, as a German living in its Golden Age of Philosophy, should place him at odds with Hegel, Marx, and especially Kant. However, Nietzsche has bigger fish to fry – he critiques the entire rationalist project he sees in Plato/Socrates and Christianity.

### *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life (1874)*

Historicism (read: Hegelians) suffers from a “malignant historical fever.” History is not a rational process, ruling over all other processes/doctrines, by which man (read: German Hegelians) achieve their greatest actualization. It is irrational, blind, mad, and unjust; to “complete history” (an impossibility) would be to render mankind effete/impotent – though the belief that man is currently perfected is creating that effect nonetheless.

*Nietzsche’s distinction between animals (the herd) and man:* They do not remember; mankind does. Man is an historical animal, whose memories weigh down upon him. Happiness is forgetting, though remembering is what gives man the ability to utilize lessons from the past in the present. Therefore, man must find the right balance between remembering and forgetting by finding the right **horizon**. (Zeitgeist?)

“Man’s horizon is constituted by his fundamental set of assumptions about all things, by what he considers the absolute truth which he cannot question. His historical knowledge must be surrounded by an unhistorical atmosphere of darkness which limits the historical sense of man.” – Strauss and Cropsey p. 831

*Uses and Abuses of History:* Three kinds of History –

1. Monumental: records of great men as models for present.
2. Antiquarian: preserving the past to serve as a model for traditions in the present.
3. Critical: condemning the unjust/obsolete from the past to improve the present.

All of these have their uses but are subject to great dangers. Each type of history implies a blindness to the whole story. Furthermore, inordinate attention to past greatness can hinder the development of present greatness. Man must not become *epigoni* – late arrivals (think Fortinbras in Hamlet). If man cannot transcend the historical process, what is there to do in his life? Fortunately (?), for Nietzsche, there is no permanent horizon and life, truth, and history are in a constant state of flux – *the finality of becoming*. Scientific knowledge of the boundaries of that horizon (truth) will be fatal for mankind because it forces us into objectivism and nihilism. There is a tradeoff between life and wisdom. Choose life. (Choose a job, choose a car, choose a big television, etc...)¹

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¹ Watch or read Trainspotting.

*Beyond Good and Evil (1886)*

There is no greater hazard than the will to truth. So, why do we seek truth?

Philosophers are 'cunning pleaders' who 'baptize' truths, defending their prejudices with 'reasons sought after the event.' They have not (as they would protest) 'discovered and attained their real opinions through the self-evolution of a cold, pure, divinely unperturbed dialectic.'

*On Free Will* ("To pull oneself into existence out of the swamp of nothingness by one's own hair"): "A man who wills commands something in himself which obeys or which he believes obeys... Will and action are somehow one... 'Freedom of Will' is the expression for that complex condition of pleasure of the person who wills, who commands and at the same time identifies himself with the executor of the command."

(48-9) Thus, freedom is enjoyed only by those of strong will.

*On Morals (some overlap with GoM)*: morals are the 'sign-language of the emotions' – they are a tyranny against nature, moral men are slaves. Jews (read: Christians) instigated *the slave revolt in morals*, fusing the words rich, godless, evil, violent, and sensual. Transvaluation of values: what was previously 'good' (more on this later) became evil, and what was previously 'bad'/poor became holy and good. This leads to rampant democracy and decay, the collective degeneration of man into a herd animal. (Question: does this imply that democratic man has no memory/sense of history?)

Nietzsche's solution: New philosophers (supermen/übermenschen) spirits strong enough to reverse the current value system. Project of new philosophers: "to teach the future of man as his will, as dependent on a human will, and to prepare for great enterprises and collective experiments in discipline and breeding so as to make an end of that gruesome dominion of chance and nonsense that has hitherto been called history." (126) These philosophers will to truth will be the will to power. Sections 210-213 detail this man of the future.

*On The Genealogy of Morals (1887)*

Subject: origin of our moral prejudices. FN utilizing all his skills as a philologist – what is the meaning of the words 'good,' 'bad', and 'evil' and how have they changed? What was originally defined as 'good' and 'bad' was delineated by the elites, who possessed the *pathos of distance*. The low plebeians were defined as bad. Aristocrats and warriors were good and god-like – good and bad defined political superiority. Jews (Christians) enacted the slave revolt in morals, and defined the previously good as evil and the previously bad as good. This slave revolt grew out of identity politics (self/other distinctions) and *ressentiment*. For this reason, FN decrees that the slave morality is less natural because it requires an external referent to develop, while the aristocratic values arise spontaneously (does this sound plausible?). The symbol of this struggle in history is Rome versus Judea – and Christianity's eventual triumph with its papal seat in Rome.

*Nietzsche on Plato/Socrates/Kant*: How does FN regard the rationalist project?

"Socrates is the enemy of the instinctive life, a theoretical man who is critical rather than creative, who bizarrely equates both happiness and virtue with reason, who withers nobility and the noble virtues by subjecting them to a ruthless dialectical inquiry they cannot withstand, who imposes his will so successfully that, since Socrates, rationalism has been the fate of Western man." (Strauss/Cropsey, p. 835) FN on Epicurus's

description of Plato (*BGE*, p. 38) “Kant... lures us along the dialectical bypaths which lead, more correctly, mislead to his ‘categorical imperative.’” (*BGE*, p. 36, 41-3)

*Nietzsche on Hegel*: How is Hegel’s view of history harmful? What is beneficial about Hegel for FN?

*Nietzsche on Marx/ Utilitarianism*: How is FN’s critique of socialism and utilitarianism the same? Are both JS Mill and Marx democrats to FN? “Moralities... for the promotion of... happiness... what are they but prescriptions for behavior in relation to the degree of perilousness in which the individual person lives with himself; recipes to counter his passions, his good and bad inclinations in so far as they have will to power in them and would like to play the tyrant; great and little artifices and acts of prudence to which there clings the nook-and-cranny odor of ancient household remedies and old-woman wisdom.” (*BGE*, 119)

*Nietzsche on Fascism/Racism*: Who does FN mean when he talks about the Jewish peoples? Is he an anti-Semite? How would FN react to Hitler?

*Nietzsche and the Noble Lie*: Living with one’s own horizon? Is there a tradeoff between life and wisdom? Is the truth fatal? Who is constructing/believing this truth?

### *A couple paragraphs from a paper I wrote about Nietzsche*

Nietzsche does not believe there to be a discoverable objective truth about human values. He calls the inclination to believe that, as humans, we are privy to objective truths “the seduction of words” (Hollingdale translation of *BGE*, p. 46). Whatever our professed opinion on a question of moral value, our arguments of justification are irrelevant because the questions presuppose their own answers. Each observer approaches the question of value with a different set of passions in regard to the moral right and, by arguing for it, we will a justification into existence. Nietzsche sees it as impossible to determine the objective truth or falsity of a particular moral assertion because there is no impersonal standpoint for judgment between rival moral standpoints.

In this light, every moral assertion becomes an irrational imposition of constraints upon human beings. Each individual’s passions are systematically checked and shackled by imposed values; therefore, the benighted efforts of philosophers to discover an objective truth are revealed to be disguises of a will to power, or a desire for control, over other human beings. As Nietzsche says, “every drive is tyrannical, and it is as such that it tries to philosophize” (37).

In the place of the traditional value-discovering philosopher, Nietzsche argues that what is needed is a new value-creating philosopher, a commander and law-giver. However, this new philosopher, being “necessarily a man of tomorrow,” does not exist in the present day and must be created through a grand program of genealogy, breeding candidates for “the right of philosophy” (145). This is to be determined “by virtue of one’s origin, one’s ancestors, and one’s blood” (145-6). The new philosopher is bold, self-reliant and self-perfecting, distinct from the ‘mob’ of humanity, and without a hint of deference to any standard but those that he creates.

Nietzsche argues that the vast transformation of society is necessary because “the herd animal alone obtains and bestows honors in Europe,” because the world is dominated by those with the moral values of slaves (144). These people create “the famous antithesis of ‘good’ and ‘evil’” because they champion pity, humility, kindness, patience, and, above all, utility – the dominant virtues that are valued by society, and the pathways to the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

### *Problem with Nietzsche pointed out by Marty in his notes*

Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will to power/truth represents the highest perspective yet attained because it is aware of the law of perspectivity. But is the doctrine merely an expression of Nietzsche’s own will to truth? Or is it objectively true? He needs both to be true. The doctrine of the will to power must be both an insight into the objective truth of things and the product of Nietzsche’s unique creative self.