

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

General theme: the diagnosis of his own time as sick, and the search for a cure.

Nietzsche vs. Hegel:

Hegel: The historical process is a rational process that reached its zenith in Hegel's own time.

Nietzsche: The completion of history is not merely impossible but undesirable, as it would lead to man's degeneration. History is not a rational process, but is full of madness and injustice.

The Use and Abuse of History ("Of the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life")

- Criticizes historicism as the "fault and defect" of the time. He believed his time to be suffering from "malignant historical fever".
- Three types of history that can serve life:
 - o Monumental: provides the man of action with models of greatness by its depiction of great men and events of the past.
 - o Antiquarian: addresses the preserving and revering element in man, imbuing them with a healthy sense of tradition. This is especially important for weak peoples otherwise vulnerable to cosmopolitanism.
 - o Critical: identifies and condemns obsolete aspects of the past. In doing so, it can bring to light surviving injustices so they can be remedied.
- But each of these types of history can also hinder the emergence of current greatness. They are least useful when they contain the most truth (e.g. that the actions of great men were determined their historical conditions).
 - o Useful history cannot be scientific history (which is motivated by a desire for knowledge rather than to serve life).
 - o The attempt at objective history has made modern men think of themselves as *epigoni*, late arrivals for whom there is nothing left to do.
- Despite his criticism of historicism's impact, he accepts the central idea of the impossibility of transcending the historical process.
 - o Men's fundamental assumptions are conditioned by their historical period.
- The problem is that too much historical knowledge has made us aware of these horizons. Human life can only thrive within a horizon accepted as true.
 - o There is a conflict between truth and life.
 - o We should choose life.

The solution, hinted at in *Use and Abuse* and fully developed later, involves proving historicism untrue by denying the possibility of objective truth (nihilism). Nietzsche interprets historicism nobly to reveal man as the creator of horizons. Now he can do so consciously, through the exercise of his will to truth.

Beyond Good and Evil – Nietzsche’s own interpretation of the history of morality and the degeneration of man. There is no science of morality, only of moralities.

- Life is defined by the “will to power.” A living thing “seeks above all else to discharge its strength.”
 - o The instinct for self-preservation and reason are means to that end.
- A great culture is one that elevates men to fulfill their creative potential.
 - o All great cultures have been aristocratic (master-slave) societies (e.g. Greece).
 - o Leads to master-morality (the affirmation of strength by the strong; good vs. bad).
- The triumph of Christianity over Rome was the triumph of slave-morality (the rejection of strength by the weak; good vs. evil).
 - o This transvaluation of values has led to man’s degeneration.
 - o But the universalism of Christianity and its devotion to truth (science) has increased what Nietzsche’s own philosophical project can accomplish.
- Nineteenth century culture is deficient; there are no true individuals.
 - o Democracy = the rule of low forms of life at the expense of higher forms.
 - o All modern states (even monarchies) yield to public opinion, making the democratic.
- Supermen: Nietzsche’s free project for man’s future. Fulfill/transcend previous ideals. Must be willed (won’t emerge by necessity).
 - o Poet: creative, but not a servant of traditional morality.
 - o Philosopher: creating new values, but his will be self-conscious creations.
 - o Saint: soul will contain all the depth of Christianity.
- Political Implications? Often interpreted only as a proponent of radical individualism, with the superman as an apolitical solution to modern problems.
 - o But his solution has political implications, as he advocates that men abdicate their ordinary responsibilities and duties as citizens.
 - o He also foresees a time of apocalyptic politics (wars, eugenics, etc.), which he welcomes as essential to avoid total degradation.

Basic Problem: 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.

Nietzsche on Socrates: "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."

Nietzsche vs. Marx: The realm of freedom and the withering away of the state that for Marx is to be achieved through the inevitable revolution is for Nietzsche the realm of the last man, the utter degradation of mankind. Although it never refers to Marx or Engels explicitly, Nietzsche's political philosophy represents an implicit critique of Marxism

Nietzsche and Fascism: The crude identification of Nietzsche's doctrines and Hitler's writings is inappropriate. Nietzsche was not a fascist, a crude racist, nor even a nationalist. But he clearly influenced fascism. "Fascists may have abused the words of Nietzsche, but his words were singularly easy to abuse."

Nietzsche on God: He's dead. But this implies he existed. "God existed while one could believe in God; God is dead because belief in God has become impossible." The death of God comes when men realize they created him. Ironically, they learn this due to their desire for scientific knowledge, which was fostered by Christianity.

Questions from previous exams: NONE!