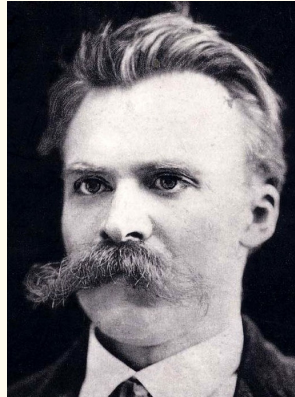


Part 5. Nietzsche's Life and Influence

21. Who was Friedrich Nietzsche?

“That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” “Live *dangerously!*”⁴⁶

Friedrich Nietzsche was a nineteenth-century German philosopher famous for his worship of human potential and for encouraging individuals to seek great heights and make real their creative dreams. He is also famous for his absolute loathing of all things small, cowardly, or mediocre.



Friedrich Nietzsche

In his writings we find a corresponding reverence of all things great, noble, heroic. He spoke directly and passionately to the best within each of us: “Do not throw away the hero in your soul” and “Hold holy your highest hope.”⁴⁷ And for those of us who sense we have a creative spark that must be honored and nurtured—“the noble soul has reverence for itself.”⁴⁸

One indication of the importance of Nietzsche is the pantheon of major twentieth century intellectuals whom he influenced.

He was an influence on Jean-Paul Sartre and Hermann Hesse, major writers, both of whom won Nobel Prizes. He

⁴⁶ *EH* “Why I Am So Wise” 2 and GS 283.

⁴⁷ *Z I*.

⁴⁸ *BGE* 287.

was an influence on thinkers as diverse in their outlooks as Ayn Rand and Michel Foucault. Rand's politics are classically liberal—while Foucault's are far Left, including a stint as a member of the French Communist Party. There is the striking fact that Nietzsche was an atheist, but he was an influence on Martin Buber, one of the most widely-read theologians of the twentieth century. And Nietzsche said harsh things about the Jews, as we will see—but he was nonetheless admired by Chaim Weizmann, a leader of the Zionist movement and first president of Israel.

So what is the attraction of Nietzsche? There is the exciting, sometimes scorching prose—Nietzsche was a stylist *par excellence*. There is his romanticism of life as a great, daring adventure. And of importance to serious intellectuals, there is the fundamentality and sheer audacity of the questions he raises about the human condition.

According to his teachers and professors, the young Friedrich Nietzsche showed extraordinary intellectual promise. He was appointed professor at University of Basel in Switzerland—at the age of twenty-four, which is unusually young for a professor. Even more unusually, he was appointed before finishing his doctoral degree, which was almost unheard of.

As brilliant as Nietzsche was, he was not suited for academic life. By most accounts he was a terrible lecturer, and he suffered from chronic health problems, which contributed to a general nervous collapse in 1870.

From the late 1870s, he wandered mostly alone and lonely over Europe, surveying the cultural landscape.

And when we take stock of the world in the late nineteenth century, what do we learn?

22. *God is dead*

“God is dead.” For thousands of years we have believed in religion. But in the modern world religion has become a shadow of its former self. Nietzsche’s dramatic phrase, *God is dead*, is meant to capture the personal and shocking quality of this revelation.⁴⁹ For those of us raised religiously, religion personalized the world. It gave us a sense that the world has a purpose and that we are part of a larger plan. It gave us a comfort that, despite appearances, we are all equal and cared for and that upon death—instead of a cold grave—a happily-ever-after ending awaits us.

We find that hard to believe anymore. In the modern world we have seen the dramatic rise of science providing different, less comfortable answers to questions religion traditionally had a monopoly on. We have thrown off the shackles of feudalism with its unquestioning acceptance of authority and knowing our place. We are more individualistic and naturalistic in our thinking.⁵⁰

But in historical time, all of this has happened very quickly—in the span of a few centuries.

For millennia we have been religious, but come the nineteenth century even the average man has heard that religion may have reached the end of its road. For most of us, even the suggestion of this hints at a crisis.

Imagine a thirteen-year old who is awakened in the middle of the night to be told by strangers that his parents have died. He is suddenly an orphan. As long as he can remember, his mother and father have been presences in his life, looking after him and guiding him, sometimes firmly, but always a benevolent protection and support in a world that he is not yet able to handle on his own. Now they are gone and, ready or not, he is thrust into that world alone. How does the young

⁴⁹ GS 108, 125.

⁵⁰ GS 117.

teen handle that sudden transition?

Culturally, Nietzsche believes, we are like that young teen. For as long as we can remember, our society has relied on God the Father to look after us—to be a benevolent and sometimes stern guiding force through a difficult world. But suddenly we are orphaned: we wake up one morning to discover in our heart of hearts that our naïvely childhood religious beliefs have withered.

So now, whether we like it or not, a question creeps into our minds: How do we face the prospect of a world without God and religion?

Well, says Nietzsche, in the nineteenth century most people do *not* face that question well.

23. *Nihilism's symptoms*

Most people avoid the issue, sensing that even to raise it would be to enter dangerous territory. They sense that the game might be up for religion, but out of fear they shutter their minds and will themselves to believe that God is still out there somewhere. Life without religion is too scary to contemplate, so they retreat to a safety zone of belief and repeat nervously the formulas they have learned about faith. Now, believes Nietzsche, it is one thing for a medieval peasant to have a simple-minded faith, but for us moderns such a faith has a tinge of dishonesty about it.

Slightly better to Nietzsche, but not much, are the socialists of the nineteenth century.⁵¹ Socialism is on the rise, and many socialists have abandoned the religion of their youth—but only halfway. Most socialists accept that God is dead—but then they are very concerned that the State take God's place and look after them. The mighty State will provide for us and tell us what to do and protect us against the mean people of the world.

⁵¹ Z 1:11; *TI* Skirmishes 34; also 37: "Socialists are decadents." See also *HAH* 473: "Socialism is the fanciful younger brother of the almost expired despotism whose heir it wants to be."

Think of it this way: The Judeo-Christian tradition says this is a world of sin, in which the weak suffer at the hands of the strong; that we should all be selfless and serve God and others, especially the sick and helpless; and that in a future ideal world—heaven—the lion will lay down with lamb, and the inescapable power of God will bring salvation to the meek and judgment to the wicked.

The Marxist socialist tradition says this is a world of evil exploitation, in which the strong take advantage of the weak. But we should all be selfless and sacrifice for the good of others, especially the needy—“From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”—and that the forces of history will necessarily bring about a future ideal world ending all harsh competition, empowering the oppressed and eliminating the evil exploiters.

Both religion and socialism thus glorify weakness and need. Both recoil from the world as it is: tough, unequal, harsh. Both flee to an imaginary future realm where they can feel safe. Both say to you: Be a nice boy. Be a good little girl. Share. Feel sorry for the little people. And both desperately seek someone to look after them—whether it be God or the State.

And where, asks Nietzsche, are the men of courage? Who is willing to stare into the abyss? Who can stand alone on the icy mountaintop? Who can look a tiger in the eye without flinching?

Such men exist. Every generation produces its occasional magnificent men—sparkling, vital



*Wanderer Above the Sea of
Fog, Caspar Friedrich,
1818*

individuals who accept easily that life is tough, unequal, unfair, and who welcome asserting their strength to meet the challenge. Those who have unbending wills against anything the world can throw at them.

But such magnificent human beings are few and far between in the nineteenth century, and Nietzsche wonders why. And he looks back on past cultures where the magnificent men dominated: strength was prized and inequality was a fact of life. Assertiveness and conquest were a source of pride. He names the Japanese feudal nobility as an example, with their samurai code of honor, and the Indian Brahmins who rose and imposed their caste system, the Vikings who raided ruthlessly up and down the European coast, the expansionist Arabs—and of course the awesome Roman Empire.⁵²

What explains this stark contrast? Why do some cultures rise to greatness and unabashedly impose their will upon the world—while other cultures seem apologetic and urge upon us a bland conformity?

24. *Masters and slaves*

Part of the answer, says Nietzsche, is biological.

All of organic nature is divided into two broad species-types—those animals that are naturally herd animals and those that are naturally loners—those that are prey and those that are predators. Some animals are by nature sheep, field mice, or cows—and some animals are by nature wolves, hawks, or lions. Psychologically and physically, this divide also runs right through the human species. Some people are born fearful and inclined to join a herd—and some are born fearless and inclined to seek lonely heights. Some are born sedentary and sluggish—and some are born crackling with purpose and craving adventure.⁵³ Some of us, to use Nietzsche's language, are born to be slaves, and some are born to be masters.

⁵² *GM*, 1:11.

⁵³ *TI* "Skirmishes" 33, 35.

And which type you are—there is little you can do about it. There is a brute biological fact here: Each of us is the product of a long line of evolution, and our traits are evolutionarily bred into us. Just as a sheep cannot help but be sheepish and a hawk cannot help but be hawkish, each of us inherits from our parents and from their parents before them a long line of inbuilt traits. “It cannot be erased from a man’s soul what his ancestors have preferably and most constantly done.”⁵⁴

The master types live by strength, creativity, independence, assertiveness, and related traits. They respect power, courage, boldness, risk-taking, even recklessness. It is natural for them to follow their own path no matter what, to rebel against social pressure and conformity.⁵⁵

The slave types live in conformity. They tend to passivity, dependence, meekness. It is natural for them to stick together for a sense of security, just as herd animals do.⁵⁶

Now, Nietzsche says, let’s talk about *morality*, about good and bad, right and wrong. For a long time we have been taught that morality is a matter of religious commandments set in stone thousands of years ago.

Not so, says Nietzsche. What we take to be moral depends on our biological nature—and different biological natures dictate different moral codes.

Think of it this way: If you are a sheep, then what will seem good to you as a sheep? Being able to graze peacefully, sticking close together with others just like you, being part of the herd and not straying off. What will seem bad to you? Well, wolves will seem bad, and anything wolf-like, predatory, aggressive. But what if you are a wolf? Then strength, viciousness, and contempt for the sheep will come naturally to you and seem good. There is nothing the wolves and the sheep can agree on morally—their natures are different, as are their needs and goals, as is what feels good to them. Of course it would be

⁵⁴ *BGE* 264.

⁵⁵ *GM* 1:6.

⁵⁶ *BGE* 199.

good for the sheep if they could convince the wolves to be more sheep-like—but what self-respecting wolf would fall for that?

“That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no grounds for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: ‘these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?’ there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: ‘we don’t dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.’”⁵⁷

The same point holds for humans. The divide between strong and weak, assertive and timid, runs straight through the human species. The key question to ask about morality is *not*: Is such and such a value universally and intrinsically good? Rather the question is: *What kind of person* finds this value to be valuable?

In Nietzsche’s words, one’s moral code is a “decisive witness to who he is,” to the “innermost drives of his nature.”⁵⁸ “Moral judgments,” Nietzsche says, are “symptoms and sign languages which betray the process of physiological prosperity or failure.”⁵⁹

So: one’s moral code is a function of one’s psychological make-up, and one’s psychological make-up is a function of one’s biological make-up.

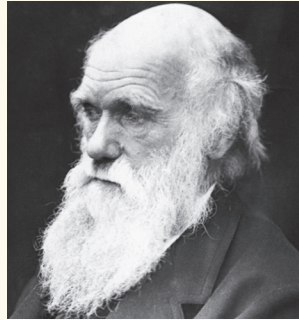
The biological language and examples in those quota-

⁵⁷ *GM* 1:13.

⁵⁸ *BGE* 6.

⁵⁹ *WP* 258. See also *D* 542 and *BGE* 221.

tions show that biology is crucial to Nietzsche's views on morality. Nietzsche was a precocious fifteen years old when Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859. Evolutionary ideas had been in the air for a long time before Darwin, and much of the intellectual world was moving away from thinking of the reality in terms of timeless, unchanging absolutes to viewing it in terms of process and change. All of this applies to morality too.



Charles Darwin

Moral codes, Nietzsche is here suggesting, are part of a biological type's life strategy of survival, and the more we look at the history of morality evolutionarily and biologically, the more we are struck by the diversity of circumstances and how dramatically beliefs about values have changed across time.

This is precisely our key problem culturally, Nietzsche argues. The evidence shows that we once prized excellence and power and looked down upon the humble and the lowly. Now the meek, the common man, the kindly neighbor are the "good guys" while the aggressive, the powerful, the strong, the proud are "evil."⁶⁰

Think of it this way: Suppose I gave you the following list of traits and urged them upon you positively.

It is good to be *proud* of yourself, to have a healthy sense of *self-esteem*.

Wealth is good, for it gives you the power to live as you wish.

Be *ambitious* and *bold*, and seek your highest dream.

Don't take any nonsense from other people—make it clear that

⁶⁰ GM 1:4.

you will take *vengeance* and exact *justice* against those who mess with you.

Seek to improve your life and devote yourself only to things that will *profit* you; don't waste your time or resources.

Seek great *challenges*, great *pleasures*, including *sensual* pleasures of the body, and go your own *independent* way in life, embracing whatever *risks* you must to develop a full and realized sense of yourself as an *individual*.

And when you accomplish something great, *admire yourself* for what you have done and *indulge* yourself in the rewards that greatness deserves.

Pride, Self-esteem

Wealth

Ambition, Boldness

Vengeance

Justice

Profit

Challenge

Pleasure, Sensuality

Independence

Risk

Individualism

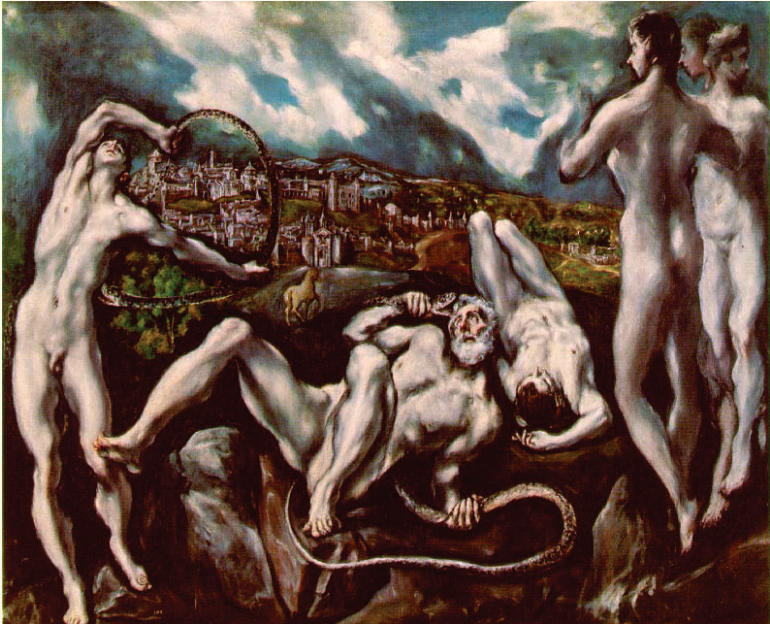
Admiration of self

Indulgence

Now consider the elements in this list together as a package. Does that list resonate with you? Do you feel in your bones that if more people lived this way they would live more active, fuller lives and they and the human species would realize its highest potential?

Now consider a different list of traits, and let me urge them upon you positively too.

One should be *humble*, for *pride goeth before the fall*. The *meek* shall inherit the earth, and blessed are the *poor*. As for wealth and the rich, *it shall be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven*. Instead of seeking profit, one should *sacrifice* and give to *charity*. Be *patient* and *forgiving*. *Turn the other cheek*. Be aware of one's *weaknesses* and *sins*, and be *ashamed* and self-deprecating as a result. Practice *self-restraint*, particularly with respect to your lower, impure, and often *disgusting physical* desires. Play it *safe*, think of other people's needs and *don't rock the boat*, and realize that we're all *dependent* upon each other. *Obey* your parents and your preacher and the politicians.



El Greco, *Laocoön*, c. 1610/1614

<i>Masters</i>	<i>Slaves</i>
Pride, Self-esteem	Humility; Pride goeth before the fall.
Bold	The meek shall inherit the earth.
Rich	Blessed are the poor.
Wealth	It shall be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to get into heaven.
Profit	Sacrifice, Charity
Ambition	Patience
Vengeance	Forgiveness
Justice	Turn the other cheek
Sense of self worth	Weakness, sinfulness
Admiration of self	Shame
Indulgence	Self-restraint
Sensuality	Disgust at the physical
Challenge	Safety
Individualism	Don't rock the boat
Independence	Dependence
Autonomy	Obedience

Does the list on the right resonate with you? Do you feel that if more people lived that way they would live better lives and they and the human species would realize its highest potential?

Nietzsche is crystal clear about the list on the right—that list is *dangerous* to human potential. It reeks of weakness, even sickness and unhealthiness. It undermines the human potential for greatness, and it is, tragically, the dominant morality of our time. In our time, the traits that ennoble man are condemned, and all the traits that weaken man are praised. Morality, as Nietzsche puts it paradoxically, has become a bad thing;

morality has become immoral: “precisely morality would be to blame if the highest power and splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers?”⁶¹

Accordingly, Nietzsche concludes, “we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed.”⁶²

25. The origin of slave morality

Our problem is this: Somehow the morality of the weak has become dominant, and the morality of the strong has declined. How is this rather paradoxical state of affairs to be explained?

Part of the story depends on our individual biological and psychological make-ups—for each of us individually, one or the other of the two moralities resonates more within us. But part of the story is cultural, because sometimes the master morality dominates a culture and sometimes the slave morality dominates—and here there is a history lesson.⁶³

Part of the historical story is that the modern world has embraced democracy, and democracy means giving power to the majority, and a majority of people are, shall we say, conformist in their tastes, concerned with what their neighbors think about them, looking forward to retirement when they won’t have to do anything, content to sit passively in their little homes gossiping and griping about their bosses and mothers-in-law.

Democracy gives *that* sort of person power, so we should expect that democratic laws and policies will reflect the tastes and interests of that sort of person. Democracies tailor their policies to the majority—not to the exceptional few who

⁶¹ GM Preface 6.

⁶² GM Preface 6.

⁶³ GM Preface: 3 and 6.

are radicals, trailblazers, and uncompromising risk-takers.

But according to Nietzsche, the modern movement to democracy is itself an effect of deeper historical causes. If we reflect again on the elements that were on the right side of the list—*Pride goeth before the fall*; *Blessed are the meek*; *Turn the other cheek*—clearly all of them come out of the Western religious traditions.

Nietzsche is forthrightly blaming the Judeo-Christian moral tradition for the rise of the slave morality.⁶⁴ For Nietzsche, there are no essential differences between Judaism and Christianity—Jesus was a Jew who wanted to reform Judaism, and the ensuing split between Judaism and Christianity is a matter of two variations on the same theme.

Both Judaism and Christianity share the same roots and the same general approach to morality. Nietzsche traces the origin of that morality back to a decisive set of events early in Jewish history, before the time of Moses. That event was the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt. If we recall our Biblical history, the Jews were for a long time a slave people under powerful Egyptian masters.



Yet we know that the Jews found a way to survive their enslavement under the Egyptians, and while their Egyptian masters have long since perished the Jews have survived, spread across the globe, and they have kept their religion and culture alive despite often horrible adversity. How did the Jews do it?

Here Nietzsche says the Jews asked themselves some very realistic, practical questions about morality. If it is good to survive, then what policies and actions will keep you alive? And if you happen to be a slave, how does one survive as a slave? And, by contrast, what policies and actions will likely get

⁶⁴ GM 1:7.

you killed? If you are a slave and you have children whom you desperately want to survive and grow up, what will you teach your slave children to increase their chances of doing so?

Here Nietzsche is saying that what is good and bad, what is moral and immoral, is not a matter of supernatural theological commandments that hold for all circumstances timelessly. What is good and bad is a matter of real-life, practical circumstances, and different circumstances call for different moral strategies.

So if your real-life circumstance is that you are a slave, what strategy will be moral—that is, what strategy will actually help you survive?

Clearly, if you are going to survive as a slave, then you must obey the master. This does not come naturally. All living things, says Nietzsche, have an instinct to express themselves, to assert their power. So as a slave you have to stifle your natural instinct. Or suppose the master strikes you because you did something wrong—the desire for revenge comes naturally—but you have to stifle it. You train yourself to restrain your natural impulses and to internalize a humble, patient, obedient self. The slaves who don't do this end up dead. Slaves who are proud, impatient, and disobedient do not last long. Consequently, slave virtues of obedience and humility have survival value. And those are the traits you will drill into your children if you want them to survive. Slave virtues thus become cultural values across generations. Thus, Nietzsche argues, during this decisive event in early Jewish history, the slave values became the internalized cultural values of the Jews.⁶⁵

Notice that Nietzsche is saying that obedience, humility, forgiveness, and patience are moral *not* because some supernatural being commanded them to be so—fundamentally, morality has nothing to do with religion. The goodness of those traits is based on down-to-earth, nitty-gritty, practical

⁶⁵ GM 1:14.

how-do-you-survive-in-a-tough-world-of-power-struggles considerations. If you are a slave in such a world, then slave morality is a tool of survival.

Now of course time passes and many people forget where their culture's moral code came from. Or they are passive and don't think much about it at all and simply accept the prevailing norms. And even among the slaves many are sheep-like and do not especially mind being slaves. But others resent it. And here the story Nietzsche tells becomes darker.

Some of those Jews who are slaves under the Egyptians and later masters are living human beings with a human being's desire to live, grow, express who one is. But they cannot express it. To live as a slave is to be frustrated constantly, and the more one is energetic and alive, the greater one's frustration.⁶⁶

Such slaves will naturally start to resent the master strongly—and they will also start to hate themselves for having to do what the master says. How do you feel when the boss tells you to do something you don't want to do? Do you tell the boss to take this job and shove it—or do you knuckle under silently and do what he says all the while resenting it? And if you knuckle under often enough and resent long enough, what does that do to your soul? The pressure builds up: Not only do you start to hate the master, you start to hate yourself for being such a weakling and knuckling under. And that in turn causes unbearable pressure inside, psychologically. And that is when psychologically ugly things start to happen.

Nietzsche puts the point this way: “The outward discharge was inhibited [and] turned backward against man himself. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction—all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the ‘bad conscience.’”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *GM* 2:10.

⁶⁷ *GM* 1:16. Also: “but to think revenge without possessing the force and courage to carry it out, means to carry about a chronic suffering, a poisoning of body and soul” (*HH* 1.60).

So if you are one of those who have this bad conscience, how do you console yourself? How do you *not* descend into self-destructive rage? How do you channel all that pent-up energy and frustration in a safe direction that nonetheless lets you feel good about yourself? You cannot take *real* revenge against the masters—but what about *fantasy* revenge?

Here Nietzsche asks us to think about priests, those who are not the usual sheep-like followers of a religion but who are cleverer, who are more driven and ambitious, and who feel more acutely the internal battle between the natural animal drive for power and the demands of a morality that has taught them to be selfless and humble. Inside such priests, Nietzsche says, we find the most interesting and disturbing psychological phenomena.

Nietzsche puts it harshly: “It is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions. The truly great haters in world history have always been priests.”⁶⁸

And what are the priests of the Judeo-Christian tradition constantly talking about in their sermons? Isn’t it one big revenge fantasy?

They tell their flocks that it is good to be humble, meek, and obedient. But to whom is one to be obedient? Well, to God of course. But God is not often around, so being obedient to God in practical terms means being obedient to God’s representatives here on earth—and guess who those people are. Of course, it is the priests. So this is part of the strategy: form a power base of large numbers of people who are your obedient followers. You might not have quality people on your side, but sometimes large quantities of people can be a powerful weapon.

Another part of the sermon is to condemn those who are rich, powerful, and assertive—to demand of them that they give away their money, put their power in the service of the weak and the sick, and be like the lion that is supposed to

⁶⁸ GM 1:7.

lie down with the lamb and not eat it for lunch. What is the point of all these sermons against the rich and the powerful? Of course part of it is a consolation for those in your audience who are weak and poor—it plays on their envy of the rich and powerful and gives them the satisfaction of hearing the rich and the powerful getting a tongue-lashing.

But the sermon is also meant as a direct weapon against the rich and the powerful and is meant to induce in them a sense of guilt and self-doubt about who they are and how they live. The moral sermons are psychological weapons in the battle of the weak against the strong, and the weak use *psychological* weapons since *physical* weapons are not their forte. The priests never use physical confrontation against the masters, and the masters find it beneath their dignity to fight against an unarmed, and to them contemptible, enemy. Instead the priests use *morality* as their weapon of confrontation: they praise the meek and condemn the strong. Judeo-Christian ethics, Nietzsche says, “has waged deadly war against this higher type of man; it has placed all the basic instincts of his type under ban.”⁶⁹

The Judeo-Christian moral code, Nietzsche concludes, becomes part of their revenge strategy. Its point is to enable the weaker to survive in a harsh world in which they are often on the receiving end of the big stick—but also to undermine the master-type’s confidence in themselves and eventually to subdue and bring down the masters so as to exact a spiritual revenge.⁷⁰

As evidence of this, Nietzsche reminds us of standard Judeo-Christian rhetoric about how, despite current appearances, the weak, the sick, and the poor will triumph in the end. Their kingdom shall come some day and God will visit his wrath upon the rich and powerful. In a perfect catch, Ni-

⁶⁹ A 5.

⁷⁰ BGE 219; GM 1:7, 1:10, 1:15.

etzsche quotes St. Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of Catholic theology and the most influential philosopher of Christianity for the last millennium: “In order that the bliss of the saints may be more delightful for them and that they may render more copious thanks to God for it, it is given to them to see perfectly the punishment of the damned.”⁷¹



St. Thomas Aquinas

Boiling all of this down to two essential points, Nietzsche believes that the slave morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition is a two-fold strategy: (1) it is a survival code that enables the weak to band together for survival; and (2) it is as revenge and a power play in their battle against the strong.

In Nietzsche’s judgment there is no serious question about who is winning the age-old battle.

An early Christian Church father named Tertullian once asked, rhetorically: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” In early church history, Christians such as Tertullian were regularly argued with and mocked by philosophers of the pagan schools of classical Greek philosophy. The point of Tertullian’s reply—“What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”—was that the traditions that came out of Athens and the traditions that came out of Jerusalem are opposed and have nothing to do with one another. It is an age-old battle for dominance over the soul of the Western world.

Nietzsche agrees, but he phrases the point differently. Jerusalem is the home of the major Western religious traditions, all of them stemming from Judaism. But instead of Athens, Nietzsche points to classical Rome as the greatest height

⁷¹ GM 1:15n. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. III, Supplementum, Q.94, A.1 and 3: “Whether the blessed in heaven will see the sufferings of the damned?” and “Whether the blessed rejoice in the punishment of the wicked?” In Article 3, Aquinas qualifies the rejoicing by stating that it is in reaction to the justice of God’s punishment of the wicked.

the pagan traditions achieved. In Rome, the philosophy and art of the Greeks was combined with the political and military genius of the Romans to create the greatest empire the world had ever seen.⁷²

So in Nietzsche's reading of history, the great battle for the soul of the Western world is: *Rome versus Judea*.

As evidence of whether Rome or Judea is winning, he invites us to consider to whom one kneels down before in Rome today. The Judeo-Christians have taken over Rome, and to use Nietzsche's words, "everything is visibly becoming Judaized, Christian-ized, mob-ized."⁷³ The chief slave has for a long time established his camp and planted his flag in the center of what was the greatest master empire the world had ever seen.

All of this is a great moral crisis, and it is a crisis because the future development of mankind is at stake. What kind of species do we want to be? In what way do we want to develop? The moral code we choose will set our course. What most people consider to be the only morality possible, Judeo-Christian morality, Nietzsche sees as a threat to human development because it damns all those traits of assertiveness and egoism and independence and risk-taking that make human greatness and development possible—and that same morality praises smallness and meekness and falling on your knees in shame—all traits that undermine human greatness.

"Nothing stands more malignantly in the way of [mankind's] rise and evolution ... than what in Europe today is called simply 'morality.'" And more bluntly: "let me declare expressly that in the days when mankind was not yet ashamed of its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is now."⁷⁴

So the current dominance of the Judeo-Christian mo-

⁷² Nietzsche: "For the Romans were the strong and the noble, and nobody stronger and nobler has yet existed on earth or even been dreamed of" (*GM* 1.16).

⁷³ *GM* 1:9.

⁷⁴ *GM* 2:7.

rality is an unhealthy development that must be overcome.⁷⁵ The fate of the human species depends upon it. We must go beyond good and evil.

26. *The Overman*

Nietzsche once said that he philosophized with a hammer.⁷⁶ By that he did not mean anything crude like a sledgehammer that smashes things. He had in mind a delicate hammer like the one a piano tuner uses to strike keys on a finely-built musical instrument—to see which notes ring clear and which are discordant or muddy. In writing his philosophy, Nietzsche intended for his words to be like that delicate hammer on your soul. When you read them, how does your soul respond? Does it vibrate clearly—or does it wobble uncertainly? When you hear that God is dead—do those words cause you to shrink inside and fill with a squishy panic—or do they strike a clear, pure, liberating note that heralds the beginning of the tremendous symphony that you can become?

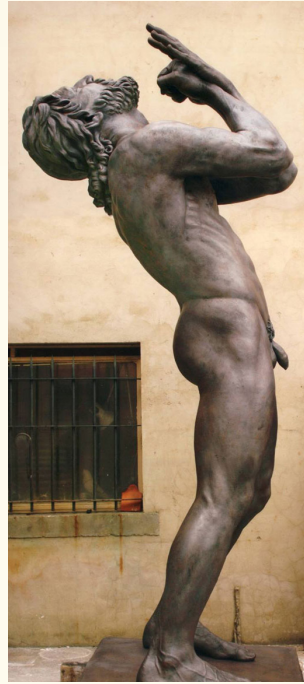
God is dead, so we must become gods and create our own values. Yet most people are afraid of legislating for themselves. They know there is inequality and risk out there in the big, bad world. So they want to let some higher power shoulder the responsibility. But, Nietzsche says, for some precious few among us, the realization that God is dead galvanizes every fiber of their being. They respond by feeling, both passionately and solemnly: *I will become the author. I will create. I will embrace the responsibility—joyously. I will move beyond good and evil and create a new, magnificent set of values.*

Such an individual will raise mankind to a higher level of existence. He will be on the path to the *Übermensch*—the superman or overman.

⁷⁵ Noting here that toward the end of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche argues that the new masters will thus combine the physical vitality of the aristocratic masters with the spiritual ruthlessness of the slave-priests of Christianity: the new masters will be “Caesars with the soul of Christ” (*WP* 983).

⁷⁶ Preface to *Ecce Homo*.

The entire history of mankind, Nietzsche believes, will have prepared the *Übermensch* for his great creative adventure. In himself he will embody the best of the past. The physical vitality and exuberance of the past master types will flow through his veins. But Nietzsche also credits the Judeo-Christian tradition for its internalized, spiritual development—by turning all of its energy inward and stressing ruthless self-discipline and self-denial, that tradition has been a vehicle for the development of a stronger, more capable type of spirit. The new masters will thus combine the physical vitality of the aristocratic masters with the spiritual ruthlessness of the slave-priests of Christianity. As Nietzsche put it in a memorable phrase, the new masters will be “Caesars with the soul of Christ.”⁷⁷



Thus Spake Zarathustra,
Peter Schipperheyn,
Bronze

We cannot say ahead of time what new values the masters will create. Not being *Übermenschen* ourselves, we do not have the power to decide for them or even predict. But Nietzsche does indicate strongly what broad direction the new masters will take.

(1) The overman will find his deepest instinct and let it be a tyrant. The creative source of the future lies in *instinct*, *passion*, and *will*. To put the point negatively, the overman will not rely much on reason. Reason of course is the favorite method of modern, scientific man, but Nietzsche holds that reason is an artificial tool of weaklings—those who need to feel safe and secure build fantasy orderly structures for themselves. Instead, instincts are the deepest parts of your nature—and to the ex-

⁷⁷ WP 983.

tent that you feel a powerful instinct welling up within you, you should nurture it and let it dominate—for from that spring flows true creativity and true exaltation.

“One thing is needful—To ‘give style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art! In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!”⁷⁸

And again: The “‘great man’ is great owing to the free play and scope of his desires and to the yet greater power that knows how to press these magnificent monsters into service.”⁷⁹

(2) Another hint Nietzsche gives us is that the overman will face conflict and exploitation easily, as a fact of life, and he will enter the fray eagerly. In the face of conflict many people become squeamish and given to wishing that life could be kinder and gentler. For such people, Nietzsche has nothing but contempt: “people now rave everywhere, even under the guise of science, about coming conditions of society in which ‘the exploiting character’ is to be absent:—that sounds to my ear as if they promised to invent a mode of life which should refrain from all organic functions.”⁸⁰

Conflict and exploitation are built into life, and the overman himself will not only accept that as natural but will himself be a master of conflict and exploitation.

As Nietzsche puts it, “We think that . . . everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species ‘man’ as much as its opposite does.”⁸¹

And further: “a higher and more fundamental value

⁷⁸ GS 290.

⁷⁹ WP 933.

⁸⁰ BGE 259.

⁸¹ BGE 44.

for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust.”⁸²

(3) Another suggestion Nietzsche gives us is this: The overman will naturally accept the fact of great inequalities among men and the fact of his own superiority. The overman will have no qualms about his superior abilities—and his superior *worth* to all others.

About the superior men, Nietzsche forthrightly proclaims: “Their right to exist, the privilege of the full-toned bell over the false and cracked, is a thousand times greater: they alone are our warranty for the future, they alone are liable for the future of man.”⁸³

So those who are strong should revel in their superiority and ruthlessly impose their wills upon everyone else, just as the masters did in past aristocratic societies. “Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other.”⁸⁴

(4) And, as the last quotation suggests, Nietzsche indicates approvingly that the overman will have no problem with using and exploiting others ruthlessly to achieve his ends. “Mankind in the mass sacrificed to the prosperity of a single stronger species of man—that would be an advance.”⁸⁵

Nietzsche gives a name to his anticipated overman: He calls him *Zarathustra*, and he names his greatest literary and philosophical work in his honor.

Zarathustra will be the creative tyrant. Having mas-

⁸² *BGE* 2.

⁸³ *GM* 3:14.

⁸⁴ *BGE* 257.

⁸⁵ *GM* 2:12.

tered himself and others, he will exuberantly and energetically command and realize a magnificent new reality. Zarathustra will lead mankind beyond themselves and into an open-ended future.

Nietzsche longs for Zarathustra's coming. "But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt ... This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; ... this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—he must come one day.—"⁸⁶

And on that prophetic note, Friedrich Nietzsche stops—and leaves the future in our hands.

⁸⁶ *GM* 2:24.