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AN INTRODUCTION

BY CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY

> "There is no such thing as moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena."

In *Beyond Good and Evil* we find Nietzsche at the height of his powers as a writer and as a thinker. It is regarded by many as his greatest, most concentrated work.

In some ways it is quite easy to read. Full of energy, the book has many short sections that appear more or less self-contained. It is not bogged down by long-winded arguments and qualifications, and so is not like much traditional philosophical writing.

Nietzsche excites, amuses, provokes, shocks, and questions. We the readers are not just addressed but engaged. The very first line of the book is "Supposing truth is a woman – what then?" We as readers have to make up our own minds what to *do* with the truths he reveals. What do they mean for society and civilization, and for our own lives?

WHAT IS BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL?

Nietzsche wrote that the book was "in essence a *critique of modernity*, including modern science, modern art – even modern

politics – along with indications of an opposite type who is as un-modern as possible, a noble, affirmative type".[1]

He might have said a critique of modern values. For, as the book's title already intimates, values are its primary concern. For Nietzsche, good and evil are the values that define the morality of modern Europe, and of the Christian religion out of which it has grown. He puts both Christianity and morality itself in the judgement dock.

Though he famously dismisses Christianity as a 'slave morality', his bigger questions are: What are values as such? How do we come by them? How do they show up in our behaviour, in our science, our art, and in the way we do philosophy itself? Which values might we get 'beyond' and no longer believe in, and what might we replace them with?

Such questions have been asked by many philosophers, but Nietzsche takes things a lot further: Is suffering really bad? Is compassion really good? Is self-denial a form of seeking power? Is seeking power bad? Is truth good? Are truths always a kind of error?

Although Nietzsche pursues these themes in all his subsequent works, it's in *Beyond Good and Evil* that they get his deepest and most penetrating attention.

The book is also about human possibility and potential. When we go beyond morality and modernity, where does that leave the individual? We'll find out why Nietzsche's philosophy of the 'will to power' might fuel success, yet also be dangerous if in the wrong hands.

NIETZSCHE'S FINAL DECADES

Nietzsche published *Beyond Good and Evil,* subtitled *Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, in 1886, during the most productive decade of his life.

Between 1879 and 1889 he wrote many startlingly original books that display a mix of explosive pronouncement and incisive critique. Before 1879 he was Professor of Classical Philology (the study of ancient texts and languages) at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He was known principally for producing an unorthodox piece of classical

scholarship, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and four essays of cultural criticism that were collected under the title *Untimely Meditations.*

Up until this point, he did not depart too far from the typical life arc of an academic. After 1879, that changed. He resigned from his professorship and began a decade of wandering, largely alone and often in poor health, staying in rented accommodation in the Swiss Alps, Italy, and the South of France.

Though he corresponded with many acquaintances throughout this period, one of his themes is the essential solitariness of the thinker. Sometimes in his books, he even addresses remarks to would-be intellectual fellow-travellers, his 'friends' who do not yet exist.

Zarathustra, the fictional character that preoccupied him throughout 1883–5, becomes a sort of mirror for Nietzsche himself. Zarathustra repeatedly retreats into a hermit-like existence. He has followers to whom he expounds his doctrine, rather like the Buddha, but at the same time he does not really want them to follow him.

The writing of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* marked the start of a final phase of enormous pace and intensity. In his remaining four years of activity he completed *The Gay Science*, and wrote *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *The Case of Wagner*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, and *Nietzsche contra Wagner.*

This flow of work was cut short in brutal fashion by a mental and physical collapse on 3 January 1889. The story is quite well known. Nietzsche was living in Turin, already in a somewhat precarious mental state, when he saw an old horse being whipped in the street. He flung himself, sobbing, around the animal's neck. He never recovered his sanity. Nietzsche remained an invalid, unable to write and sometimes even to speak, until he died in 1900, aged 55.

Few lives can have had two such contrasting final decades as this.

A GOOD EUROPEAN

Nietzsche was born and schooled in Germany, and the German language was the medium that he used so brilliantly. Yet his primary identification was not with Germany, but with Europe. In the Preface

to *Beyond Good and Evil* he speaks on behalf of 'we good Europeans', and it is the future health of European culture that is his most pressing concern.

German political nationalism (along with 'beer and Wagnerian music') had become abhorrent to Nietzsche, as was even the idea of 'nations'. Europe should be unified, he says in Section 256 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, not 'morbidly estranged' by the 'nationality-craze'.

Given that he seemed to be ahead of his time in a political sense, it was both surprising and highly unfortunate that the German National Socialists later co-opted him to their movement, a fact that has unfairly tarnished his wider reputation ever since. His attitude towards the Jews was distorted into the bargain, though here the issues are quite complex.

Nietzsche's intellectual life coincided with a growth in anti-Semitism, and he read and interacted with many texts that propagated this outlook. Sometimes his own rhetoric is harsh towards the Jews and their role in world history, and this can be hard to read now. We inevitably associate such passages with the appalling twentieth-century events that Nietzsche could not know were coming. But if we look carefully at a passage such as Section 251 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, we find him critical of the Germans' 'anti-Semitic folly', urging that the Jews are seeking to be, and should be, fully integrated into Europe. To that end, it is the 'anti-Semitic bawlers', he says, who should be expelled.

The issue was poignant for Nietzsche, because his sister Elisabeth, to whom he had been close, joined the political Anti-Semitism movement, and even married its prominent activist, Bernhard Förster. In the same year as *Beyond Good and Evil*, Förster and Elisabeth sought to establish a 'pure Aryan' colony in Paraguay, upon which Nietzsche wrote to his sister that anti-Semitism was 'further away from him than Paraguay'. Förster soon committed suicide, but Elisabeth lived on till 1935, having joined the National Socialist party. She was all too happy to lend Nietzsche's name to the cause he would have despised. Hitler attended her funeral.

from the world as a whole. One would attain consciousness that all is one and that individuality is really an illusion.

TRAGEDY AND WAGNER

Nietzsche's early devotion to Schopenhauer's system of thought manifested itself in spirit, if not in detail, in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872. On one level this is a book about ancient Greece by a classics professor, analysing the origins and importance of tragic drama, the powerful art form that the Greeks developed in the fifth century BCE. But, in reality, the book is much more ambitious, and so eccentric that it aroused the contempt and dismay of distinguished academics in the field.

The central theme is that the ancient Greeks invented tragic drama as a way of affirming life's suffering through aesthetic means. The central character of a tragedy is an individual who suffers agonies and is destroyed, but we can rejoice in this spectacle because music (and dance in the original Greek form) transports us beyond the illusion of individuality, and merges us into the primal unity of the world that unfolds itself endlessly, indifferent to the individual. Nietzsche is not just studying the ancient world. With the help of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, he proposes a way for the modern world to replicate the cultural achievements of the classical era, and to cope with the Schopenhauerian world of suffering through an elevated form of art – specifically the music of Richard Wagner, to whom the book is dedicated.

In 1868 Nietzsche had met Wagner, many years his senior, and was welcomed into the inner circle of the great composer and his wife Cosima, who had already adopted Schopenhauer's works as their favourite reading. For a while Nietzsche was infatuated with the celebrity couple and the heady atmosphere of their intellectual and artistic world. His book, whose full title on publication was *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, owes much to this personal experience.

But a few years later the infatuation palled. Nietzsche began to see Wagner as a self-aggrandizing showman propagating values he could not agree with. Eventually he wrote vitriolic criticisms of Wagner and looked back on *The Birth of Tragedy* as an embarrassing and 'impossible' book. However, the questions the book had addressed – the need to revive modern European culture, the relation of art and life, and the task of affirming an existence plagued by suffering – did not go away.

NEW DIRECTIONS AND A HUMILIATION

The years from 1878 to 1882 were a period of transition for Nietzsche. His books from this period are *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak* (or *Dawn*), and *The Gay Science.* They are works of sharp critical analysis written in an aphoristic style, with relatively short, compressed sections, leaving much open to the reader's interpretation. His move away from Wagner in this period was intellectual as well as personal. He no longer placed art on a pedestal and turned away from metaphysics towards a more empirical or broadly scientific approach.

Nietzsche became friends with a lesser known thinker, Paul Rée, who had published a book on the origins of morality. Rée adopted a decidedly empiricist point of view, taking a lead from Darwin. Nietzsche was stimulated by Rée's work, and through him had become deeply attracted to a brilliant young Russian woman, Lou Salomé. She had rejected Rée's proposal of marriage in favour of an intimate but purely intellectual relationship. They invited Nietzsche to join them in this partnership, and the three planned to set up together. Nietzsche then rather bizarrely asked Rée to propose to Lou on his behalf. This proposal was also declined, and the two men entered a period of semi-suppressed rivalry. Nietzsche proposed again, and was again rejected, but the ultimate blow came when Lou and Rée departed together to continue their intense relationship without him. Nietzsche was bereft, and the devastation was increased by a rift with his sister, who had taken against Lou and done everything she could to keep her away from her brother.

The theme of suffering that he had pursued in Schopenhauer and Greek tragedy now hit home for Nietzsche. His loneliness and emotional desolation were compounded by constant poor eyesight and other physical health problems.

During these years he developed a dramatic idea about how one might affirm one's life. While walking in the Swiss Alps at Sils-Maria, '6,000 feet beyond humanity and time', as he later wrote, he became seized with the idea that everything might recur over and over again into all eternity. This idea of eternal recurrence surfaces at the end of *The Gay Science* (Book 4, 1882). The reader is asked to consider how they would react if, in their loneliest hour, a demon whispered to them that their whole life, down to its tiniest detail, would return to them infinite times more.

Commentators have debated whether Nietzsche ever literally believed that everything would repeat itself infinitely. But whether he did or not, he became fixated by the question of whether someone could emotionally bear the *thought* of their life recurring eternally. Would the thought crush you, he asks, or could you be strong and healthy enough to welcome the prospect with joy? Could you affirm your life, even under the weight of this thought?

ZARATHUSTRA'S DOCTRINES

Nietzsche's next project, and the one he eventually considered his greatest achievement, was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, written in four parts between 1883 and 1885. It is unlike Nietzsche's other writings in a number of ways, being a work of fiction, set in an indeterminate place and time, and mentioning no real-life human beings (with the sole exception of Jesus). The book narrates the encounters of the character Zarathustra and relays his teachings in a quasi-Biblical style replete with parable and vivid metaphor.

No summary could substitute for reading this book (this indeed applies to all Nietzsche's writings), but a few features stand out. Here the eternal recurrence appears as Zarathustra's defining doctrine, as

does the notion for which Nietzsche has become well known, that of the *Übermensch*, or Overhuman. He has Zarathustra announce that the human should make way for the Overhuman, a higher type of being that can constitute a goal to aim at, higher than any human achievement so far. The Overhuman would transcend the deficiencies of humanity and would be someone who has 'turned out well' to the highest degree.

Some of the defining ideas of Nietzsche's mature philosophical phase are forming here. What is needed, he now believes, is not negation of the will, but its affirmation – saying Yes to life. Suffering must be embraced by a type of strength that is big enough to commit to truthfulness about the world. We must no longer seek refuge in a disembodied metaphysical 'other realm', or a 'beyond', of the kind found in religion. And the fundamental will is not 'will to life' but 'will to *power*'.

As we shall see, this latter notion especially comes to prominence in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which was published immediately after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

Let's now go into some of the major themes of *Beyond Good and Evil.*

TRUTH

Nietzsche writes continually about truth and seeks to make it a more problematic notion than it has customarily been.

In the opening Part of *Beyond Good and Evil* he speaks to philosophers, wishing to reveal their 'prejudices'. He introduces the notion of 'the will to truth'. What does this mean? At first sight it could be just the desire to discover the truth. But by calling it a 'will', echoing Schopenhauer's notion of the 'will to life', Nietzsche seems to be indicating something like an underlying drive that governs us without being rationally considered or chosen. For Nietzsche, philosophers have a sheer unexamined faith that the pursuit of truth is desirable, but why do we think it is better to seek and to know the truth than to hold an erroneous belief? Why don't we seek *un*truths?

After all, Nietzsche says, a false opinion or judgement can sometimes preserve and enhance our life more than a true one. What is really at stake is the value of 'truth' for *life*: does it help us to survive, to flourish, to enhance ourselves?

Some interpreters of Nietzsche have seen him as questioning the very notion of truth, as though we cannot ever describe anything as being true. This is wrong. It's not that there is no such thing as judgements being true or false. Rather, it's that false ones can be more valuable than true ones. We might be better off believing things that are false, and not finding out that they are false. A finely nuanced example for Nietzsche is the case of religious belief. People had a direction in life, a sense of meaning and purpose, when they wholeheartedly believed in traditional dogmas. God was their 'truth': did it matter that their belief was false?

The European culture that developed Christianity believed also in the virtue of truthfulness, and this combination eventually produced a scientific revolution that pressed for truth at all costs. This had the effect of destroying the illusion of God. The result is not a happy one: we ended up with the prospect of *nihilism*, the belief that there are no real values and a bleak, directionless outlook on the world. Pursuing truth has in this sense made the world more depressing.

Yet Nietzsche is no nihilist but is rather the diagnostician of nihilism as the modern malaise. He wishes to resurrect a new kind of optimism from the ashes of the old values. Acknowledging the depth of the nihilism to which we have sunk is a necessary step, but more important is the resulting opportunity for a new positive valuing of life. We'll go into this opportunity below.

As for the pursuit of truth itself, Nietzsche doubts whether it is ever as pure and disinterested as investigators make out. Human beings are not so constituted that there is a fundamental drive towards knowledge for its own sake. Rather, Nietzsche suggests, other drives (or 'impulses' as Helen Zimmern's translation has it) really govern philosophical activity. Nietzsche states that every great philosophy so far has been "the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and

with the capacity to act in this way, because they are physically or politically stronger, come to be seen as evil. By contrast, the morally good person is the one who is not evil. It is easy to trace a link with Christianity here: 'Blessed are the meek, … the merciful, … the peacemakers', as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount.

Nietzsche disparages this as a 'slave morality' and 'morality of the herd'. He contrasts it with a pre-Christian set of values that he calls 'master morality'. Nietzsche associates the status of 'master' with that of nobility. Someone is noble if they are strong, self-affirming, able to exercise power over themselves and over others, valuing honesty, courage, and generosity of spirit. The noble value themselves for what they are, marking themselves out as of higher rank than others, looking down on them with the 'pathos of distance'.

Nietzsche is plainly no egalitarian. Socialism and the emancipation of women are just two aspects of the modern world that he deplores. Few would regard his remarks on women in *Beyond Good and Evil* – almost certainly inflamed by his experiences with Lou Salomé and his sister – as his finest hour. But his opposition to equality goes wider: the whole 'democratic tendency' that is increasing apace in the Europe of his day is for him an undesirable dumbing down, a levelling of human potential towards the lowest common denominator. Every enhancement or elevation of humanity, he thinks, has required not democracy but aristocracy.

In earlier cultures, Nietzsche claims, the nobility confidently regarded themselves as *good*, and assigned the opposite value, *bad*, to the ordinary masses who lacked their prowess and power. Who would not want to be healthy, strong, courageous, beautifully adorned, and in control? 'Bad' then meant deficient, weak, ineffective, humble, and therefore despicable. So 'bad' is not really a moral concept for Nietzsche and is quite different from 'evil'.

How then did the distinctively moral notion of 'evil' come into existence? Through a new recognition of the point of view of the weak and powerless, those who were not masters but slaves. "Supposing that the abused, the oppressed, the suffering, the unemancipated,

the weary, and those uncertain of themselves should moralize," Nietzsche asks, "what will be the common element of their moral estimates?" (Section 260). They will quite naturally resent the powerful and self-assured for being powerful and self-assured. The very qualities on which the masters pride themselves will be seen as harmful. By the time we reach the modern era in Europe, given its long heritage of specifically Christian beliefs and institutions, this slave morality, the morality that seeks to protect the mass, or the 'herd', from harm has become so entrenched that it seems the only possible set of values. Nietzsche bemoans the fact.

SUFFERING AND SYMPATHY

Nietzsche uses a common German word, *Mitleid*, which literally means 'suffering-with'. We can translate it as 'pity', 'compassion', or (as in this edition) 'sympathy'. This notion was central to Schopenhauer's view of morality. Because all creatures are liable to suffering, the most important impulse we have is a fellow-feeling that prompts us to alleviate or prevent suffering in others.

Nietzsche criticizes this outlook, which he finds not only in Schopenhauer, but in the whole tradition of Christian doctrine, and in more recent forms of moral thinking. But what could be wrong with sympathy for sufferers? Nietzsche has many probing thoughts about this. Sometimes helping others who are suffering is actually a disguised form of egoism or self-assertion. You can feel good about yourself by helping people and also experience a kind of superiority over them. In a subtle way they almost become your 'victims'. Nietzsche thus insinuates that compassionate behaviour can sometimes be just as much as a form of power-seeking as cruelty.

But Nietzsche's chief objection is not to sympathy as such, but rather to a version of moral theory which states that the prime good is the prevention of all suffering, just on the grounds that it is suffering. This, for Nietzsche, is to treat human beings as though they are merely weak, vulnerable creatures for whom the only good is safety. If

we take this to be the only good, we shall end up with an utterly bland, sanitized existence with no danger, no risk, adventure or creativity, and no capacity for growth in individuals or in societies. Nietzsche has a deliberately shocking way of making this point: "You want, if possible … *to do away with suffering*; and we? – it really seems that *we* would rather have it increased and made worse than it has ever been!" (Section 255). His sympathy lies with the powerful, expansive, creative part of human nature, through which nobility and greatness are achieved. This will be dulled down to nothing if we seriously think of well-being as the mere elimination of suffering.

For Nietzsche suffering is as an opportunity for growth, a necessary condition for humanity's pressing on to higher achievements. As he would famously put it two years later in *Twilight of the Idols*, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." He also, more problematically, believes that human beings naturally gain a feeling of power from inflicting suffering and from seeing it inflicted. Like it or not, history shows this to be a truth about human beings, he claims. Modern society winces at this thought and tries to pretend that it is not true, shielding itself behind the assumptions of morality.

Nietzsche's implication is that humanity could be greater if it were less squeamish about suffering. At the same time, especially when couched in his inflammatory rhetoric, the view that suffering can be useful in promoting higher aims opens the door to sinister practical applications. Nietzsche is fond of describing his ideas as dangerous, but, in this instance, he seems naïve in not anticipating how disastrously his message could be exploited in the real world.

RELIGION

For Nietzsche, atheism is really the only sound intellectual option in the Europe of his day. His famous slogan 'God is dead' is followed by 'and we have killed him'.[4]

He never argues for the proposition that God does not exist. Rather he treats it as a fact that, by the time he is writing, the belief in God

has run its course, is discredited, and serves no purpose. But this does not mean that he treats religion as unimportant. In fact, another aspect of modernity that he criticizes is its very indifference to religion – its superficiality, its obsession with work, pleasure, and patriotism at the expense of reflection on higher values. He does not oppose religion as such. The ancient Greeks used their deities to personify the noble side of humanity. The Jewish Old Testament has a grandeur that reflects the self-confidence of a people. Nietzsche finds it grotesque that this book has been conjoined with the New Testament. It is Christianity that is for him the greatest problem.

His rhetoric against Christianity is violent: for eighteen centuries Christianity has tried to make 'a *sublime abortion* of man', he says, resulting in 'a dwarfed, almost ludicrous species' (Section 62). Christianity is the major product of that slave morality discussed above, the inversion of values that made weakness and impotence into a virtue. Belief in God may wane, but the values that drove Christianity in the first place continue to thrive. In Nietzsche's view Europe will continue to decline and degenerate unless there occurs another inversion of values.

For Nietzsche, the Christian belief in an all-powerful supernatural being serves to give the impression of absolute authority to various troubling commandments: deny your bodily desires, refrain from creative self-expression, become a harmless, meek, and 'tame' kind of being. When he refers to the 'religious neurosis', he has in mind the result of systematic indoctrination of the view that one's natural urges, and one's very bodily existence, are sinful, forbidden, and in need of suppression. Nietzsche constantly laments this as a psychological sickness, a soul in conflict, its own powerful energies turned inwards against itself.

Many will be sympathetic to Nietzsche's diagnosis here, partly because conceptions of morality and of psychological health have dramatically changed since he was writing. The 1880s may have needed his critique in a way that Western culture perhaps no longer does. The first stage in liberating ourselves from the straitjacket of this kind of

damaging morality is to realize that, without a God, we now lack a foundation for these absolute, self-torturing imperatives. But Nietzsche is clear that change will not be so simple. Morality is so ingrained that it will survive the death of religion. What is needed is much more profound: we need to discover what values really are, and what questionable assumptions we have been making about the nature of values, but also about the nature of truth and the nature of the self. In order to do this, we need to scrutinize the very way we approach these questions, that is, philosophy itself.

THE METAPHYSICS OF OPPOSITES

In Section 2 of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche makes some profound allegations about the way we think of things as having opposite values. In the case of good and evil we tend to think that they are utterly exclusive values which have different origins. A certain kind of religious outlook would provide an example of this, with the idea that 'evil' arises out of our 'baser' natural inclinations, whereas 'the Good' is somehow pure, unchanging, and separate from the human.

In fact, this sort of idea is not exclusive to Christianity or any modern theistic religion, and it is found paradigmatically in the works of Plato. Nietzsche invokes Plato in his short Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, mentioning Plato's 'invention of Pure Spirit and the Good in Itself'. Christianity contains a reiteration of the same pattern, and Nietzsche famously dubs Christianity 'Platonism for the "people"'. He sees Europe as engaged in a struggle against Platonic 'dogmatism'.

From Plato onwards, through the centuries of Christian philosophy, and into modern secular thinking about morality, Nietzsche finds a tendency to see ourselves as polarized between our mundane humanity and a 'Beyond', something 'higher' whose value is supreme and transcends ordinary transient desires and practices. The eternal realm of the absolute God is the most obvious version of this pattern. But Nietzsche finds it in more disguised places: in the idea that we have absolute, categorical duties, for example, or that truth is something sacred.

We can assume it means the opposite of the psychological impoverishment and sickness that Nietzsche diagnosed in modern values. He holds that human beings gain feelings of increased power from exercising agency, from self-expression and growth attained through overcoming resistance. Cultural values that promote this kind of agency are to him preferable on the grounds that they allow for greater human flourishing. He adds weight to these claims by situating them within a 'physiological' theory about life in general: "a living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength – life itself is *will to power*" (Section 13; see also Section 259).

Nietzsche says that it's in the nature of human beings to seek opportunities to overcome obstacles to their own growth and agency. But sometimes these obstacles are internal. Given his view that the self is a composite of drives that themselves stand in power-relations to one another, one way the individual can gain in power is by one of their internal drives commanding the others and disciplining them into a unity, without sacrificing their individual strength. Such a human being will then be capable of taking on external obstacles. Hardships and sufferings will be treated as welcome occasions through which to grow by overcoming them.

But if it is natural for every living thing to seek to discharge its strength, then the morality of good and evil and compassion for suffering hampers the great achievements through which this strength would be discharged. Therefore, morality can only get in the way of humankind's full expression and advance.

THE AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

Much of Nietzsche's work can seem to have a negative orientation. He is so often sceptical and debunking, applying question marks to so many cherished beliefs – that there is a God; that all is right with the world; that we can distinguish the morally good from the morally evil; that we are free, rational, and in control; that everyone is equal; that suffering is bad; that the pursuit of truth is good; that progress is underway in Europe.

Beyond Good and Evil, as we said at the outset, is a *critique* of modernity. But it is more than that. After saying No to all these aspects of the modern world, Nietzsche does not recoil into pessimism or sink into nihilism. He wants to indicate how there can be a 'noble, affirmative type' of human being. He writes repeatedly in his late period about the possibility of affirming life. That, at any rate, is how the idea often appears in English translation. Nietzsche's usual term is simply *Ja-sagen*, saying Yes.

What is it to say Yes to life? One idea is to place value on the propensities that belong to life: instead of seeking to curtail human drives and make everyone equal and harmless, value the dynamic, expansive, and exploitative capacities that in Nietzsche's view belong to life as such, and that can advance humanity. Another idea is that of affirming one's own life. In Section 56 Nietzsche says that having thought one's way through life-negating outlooks on the world, in which he includes Schopenhauer and the Buddha, and having finally also rejected the morality of good and evil, one might want to affirm the world as it is and to such a degree that you want everything to return over again. Here he invokes the idea of eternal recurrence found in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche sees those who value the expression of will to power as capable of growing into fuller, healthier selves, and as being able to embrace their lives whole, without disowning any part of them, without the need to discriminate between good and evil, happiness and suffering, or compassion and cruelty.

Other philosophers have tended to find this a fascinating, if probably over-strenuous, ethical ideal. They see Nietzsche's critique of moral values, truth, metaphysics, free will, and the self to be admirably iconoclastic, testing our preconceptions and prejudices to breaking point in a way that philosophy should. At the same time, it is only right to acknowledge that some of Nietzsche's utterances could easily provide an excuse for those who are less concerned with such theory – people who are instead bent on dubious political and social goals.

Nietzsche complains throughout *Beyond Good and Evil* of the impotency of philosophers – that they are dry theorists or moralists. The real philosopher, he says, takes risks and acts as a 'bad conscience' to the rest of society, 'putting the vivisector's knife to the breast of the very virtues of their age'.

Given that he wasn't widely read in his own lifetime, Nietzsche felt that he had little to lose by firing off philosophical salvos. As it turned out, his ideas became more powerful and influential than he could have imagined – not only on politics and culture, but on the idea of human potential itself. Despite its darkness, and even though Nietzsche's own life may not have been judged a 'success', there's a big question running through *Beyond Good and Evil*: Is greatness *possible* nowadays?

Nietzsche may bemoan the restrictions and levelling down of modern society, but he never rules it out. He often writes as though only a few can be great, but his idea of unlocking our potential by questioning received values that disempower us may appeal to many.

NOTES

1 From *Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 135.
2 *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface.
3 *The Gay Science*, Section 357
4 *The Gay Science*, Section 125.
5 The German term is *Wissenschaft*, which has a rather wider use than 'science'.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Born in Röcken, Prussia in 1844. Nietzsche's father, who died when he was five, was a Lutheran minister, as was his grandfather.

Attended a boarding school in Pforta, then studied classical philology at the University of Bonn.

At 24 was made a professor at the University of Basel in classical philology.

Following time spent as a medical orderly in the Franco-Prussian War, wrote *The Birth of Tragedy.*

Ill-health forced him to resign his professorship. Living on a modest pension, he moved about Europe, writing from rented accommodation.

In 1889 suffered a mental breakdown. The cause is not clear, possibly syphilis or depression.

Nursed by his mother, then his sister, until his death in 1900.

Major works include *Human, All Too Human*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Gay Science*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, *The Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, and the autobiographical *Ecce Homo*.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

In this edition we use the first English translation ever published, by the writer Helen Zimmern (1846–1934). Zimmern was born in Germany but brought up in England. She played an important role in acquainting the English public with German and Italian literature and culture. She met Nietzsche in the same year as the book was published, and her translation appeared in 1907.

ABOUT CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY

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PREFACE

SUPPOSING that Truth is a woman—what then? Is there not ground for suspecting that all philosophers, in so far as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women—that the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to Truth, have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman? Certainly she has never allowed herself to be won; and at present every kind of dogma stands with sad and discouraged mien—IF, indeed, it stands at all! For there are scoffers who maintain that it has fallen, that all dogma lies on the ground—nay more, that it is at its last gasp.

But to speak seriously, there are good grounds for hoping that all dogmatizing in philosophy, whatever solemn, whatever conclusive and decided airs it has assumed, may have been only a noble puerilism and tyronism; and probably the time is at hand when it will be once and again understood WHAT has actually sufficed for the basis of such imposing and absolute philosophical edifices as the dogmatists have hitherto reared: perhaps some popular superstition of immemorial time (such as the soul-superstition, which, in the form of subject- and ego-superstition, has not yet ceased doing mischief): perhaps some play upon words, a deception on the part of grammar, or an

audacious generalization of very restricted, very personal, very human—all-too-human facts.

The philosophy of the dogmatists, it is to be hoped, was only a promise for thousands of years afterwards, as was astrology in still earlier times, in the service of which probably more labour, gold, acuteness, and patience have been spent than on any actual science hitherto: we owe to it, and to its "super-terrestrial" pretensions in Asia and Egypt, the grand style of architecture. It seems that in order to inscribe themselves upon the heart of humanity with everlasting claims, all great things have first to wander about the earth as enormous and awe-inspiring caricatures: dogmatic philosophy has been a caricature of this kind—for instance, the Vedanta doctrine in Asia, and Platonism in Europe.

Let us not be ungrateful to it, although it must certainly be confessed that the worst, the most tiresome, and the most dangerous of errors hitherto has been a dogmatist error—namely, Plato's invention of Pure Spirit and the Good in Itself. But now when it has been surmounted, when Europe, rid of this nightmare, can again draw breath freely and at least enjoy a healthier—sleep, we, WHOSE DUTY IS WAKEFULNESS ITSELF, are the heirs of all the strength which the struggle against this error has fostered. It amounted to the very inversion of truth, and the denial of the PERSPECTIVE—the fundamental condition—of life, to speak of Spirit and the Good as Plato spoke of them; indeed one might ask, as a physician: "How did such a malady attack that finest product of antiquity, Plato? Had the wicked Socrates really corrupted him? Was Socrates after all a corrupter of youths, and deserved his hemlock?"

I

PREJUDICES OF PHILOSOPHERS

1. The Will to Truth, which is to tempt us to many a hazardous enterprise, the famous Truthfulness of which all philosophers have hitherto spoken with respect, what questions has this Will to Truth not laid before us! What strange, perplexing, questionable questions! It is already a long story; yet it seems as if it were hardly commenced. Is it any wonder if we at last grow distrustful, lose patience, and turn impatiently away? That this Sphinx teaches us at last to ask questions ourselves? WHO is it really that puts questions to us here? WHAT really is this "Will to Truth" in us? In fact we made a long halt at the question as to the origin of this Will—until at last we came to an absolute standstill before a yet more fundamental question. We inquired about the VALUE of this Will. Granted that we want the truth: WHY NOT RATHER untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth presented itself before us—or was it we who presented ourselves before the problem? Which of us is the Oedipus here? Which the Sphinx? It would seem to be a rendezvous of questions and notes of interrogation. And could it be believed that it at last seems to us as if the problem had never been propounded before, as if we were the first to discern it, get a sight of it, and

RISK RAISING it? For there is risk in raising it, perhaps there is no greater risk.

2. "HOW COULD anything originate out of its opposite? For example, truth out of error? or the Will to Truth out of the will to deception? or the generous deed out of selfishness? or the pure sun-bright vision of the wise man out of covetousness? Such genesis is impossible; whoever dreams of it is a fool, nay, worse than a fool; things of the highest value must have a different origin, an origin of THEIR own—in this transitory, seductive, illusory, paltry world, in this turmoil of delusion and cupidity, they cannot have their source. But rather in the lap of Being, in the intransitory, in the concealed God, in the 'Thing-in-itself—THERE must be their source, and nowhere else!"—This mode of reasoning discloses the typical prejudice by which metaphysicians of all times can be recognized, this mode of valuation is at the back of all their logical procedure; through this "belief" of theirs, they exert themselves for their "knowledge," for something that is in the end solemnly christened "the Truth." The fundamental belief of metaphysicians is THE BELIEF IN ANTITHESES OF VALUES. It never occurred even to the wariest of them to doubt here on the very threshold (where doubt, however, was most necessary); though they had made a solemn vow, "DE OMNIBUS DUBITANDUM." For it may be doubted, firstly, whether antitheses exist at all; and secondly, whether the popular valuations and antitheses of value upon which metaphysicians have set their seal, are not perhaps merely superficial estimates, merely provisional perspectives, besides being probably made from some corner, perhaps from below—"frog perspectives," as it were, to borrow an expression current

among painters. In spite of all the value which may belong to the true, the positive, and the unselfish, it might be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life generally should be assigned to pretence, to the will to delusion, to selfishness, and cupidity. It might even be possible that WHAT constitutes the value of those good and respected things, consists precisely in their being insidiously related, knotted, and crocheted to these evil and apparently opposed things—perhaps even in being essentially identical with them. Perhaps! But who wishes to concern himself with such dangerous "Perhapses"! For that investigation one must await the advent of a new order of philosophers, such as will have other tastes and inclinations, the reverse of those hitherto prevalent—philosophers of the dangerous "Perhaps" in every sense of the term. And to speak in all seriousness, I see such new philosophers beginning to appear.

3. Having kept a sharp eye on philosophers, and having read between their lines long enough, I now say to myself that the greater part of conscious thinking must be counted among the instinctive functions, and it is so even in the case of philosophical thinking; one has here to learn anew, as one learned anew about heredity and "innateness." As little as the act of birth comes into consideration in the whole process and procedure of heredity, just as little is "being-conscious" OPPOSED to the instinctive in any decisive sense; the greater part of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly influenced by his instincts, and forced into definite channels. And behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, there are valuations, or to speak more plainly, physiological demands, for the maintenance of a definite mode of life. For example,