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978-0-521-77078-1 - Friedrich Nietzsche: Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future

Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman

Excerpt

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Beyond Good and Evil  
Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future

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## Preface

Suppose that truth is a woman – and why not? Aren't there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women? That the grotesque seriousness of their approach towards the truth and the clumsy advances they have made so far are unsuitable ways of pressing their suit with a woman? What is certain is that she has spurned them – leaving dogmatism of all types standing sad and discouraged. *If* it is even left standing! Because there are those who make fun of dogmatism, claiming that it has fallen over, that it is lying flat on its face, or more, that dogmatism is in its last gasps. But seriously, there are good reasons for hoping that all dogmatizing in philosophy was just noble (though childish) ambling and preambing, however solemn, settled and decisive it might have seemed. And perhaps the time is very near when we will realize again and again just *what* actually served as the cornerstone of those sublime and unconditional philosophical edifices that the dogmatists used to build – some piece of folk superstition from time immemorial (like the soul-superstition that still causes trouble as the superstition of the subject or I), some word-play perhaps, a seduction of grammar or an over-eager generalization from facts that are really very local, very personal, very human-all-too-human. Let us hope that the dogmatists' philosophy was only a promise over the millennia, as was the case even earlier with astrology, in whose service perhaps more labor, money, ingenuity, and patience was expended than for any real science so far. We owe the great style of architecture in Asia and Egypt to astrology and its "supernatural" claims. It seems that all great things, in order to inscribe eternal demands in the heart of humanity, must first wander the earth under monstrous and terrifying masks; dogmatic philosophy

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was this sort of a mask: the Vedanta doctrine in Asia, for example, or Platonism in Europe. We should not be ungrateful towards dogmatism, but it must nonetheless be said that the worst, most prolonged, and most dangerous of all errors to this day was a dogmatist's error, namely Plato's invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself. But now that it has been overcome, and Europe breathes a sigh of relief after this nightmare, and at least can enjoy a healthier – well – sleep, we, *whose task is wakefulness itself*, are the heirs to all the force cultivated through the struggle against this error. Of course: talking about spirit and the Good like Plato did meant standing truth on its head and disowning even *perspectivism*, which is the fundamental condition of all life. In fact, as physicians we could ask: "How could such a disease infect Plato, the most beautiful outgrowth of antiquity? Did the evil Socrates corrupt him after all? was Socrates in fact the corrupter of youth? did he deserve his hemlock?" – But the struggle against Plato, or, to use a clear and "popular" idiom, the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia – since Christianity is Platonism for the "people" – has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals. Granted, the European experiences this tension as a crisis or state of need; and twice already there have been attempts, in a grand fashion, to unbend the bow, once through Jesuitism, and the second time through the democratic Enlightenment: – which, with the help of freedom of the press and circulation of newspapers, might really insure that spirit does not experience itself so readily as "need"! (Germans invented gunpowder – all honors due! But they made up for it – they invented the press.) But we, who are neither Jesuits nor democrats, nor even German enough, we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free spirits – we still have it, the whole need of spirit and the whole tension of its bow! And perhaps the arrow too, the task, and – who knows? the *goal* . . .

*Sils-Maria*, Upper Engadine,  
June, 1885

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## Part I On the prejudices of philosophers

### I

The will to truth that still seduces us into taking so many risks, this famous truthfulness that all philosophers so far have talked about with veneration: what questions this will to truth has already laid before us! What strange, terrible, questionable questions! That is already a long story – and yet it seems to have hardly begun? Is it any wonder if we finally become suspicious, lose patience, turn impatiently away? That *we ourselves* are also learning from this Sphinx to pose questions? *Who* is it really that questions us here? *What* in us really wills the truth? In fact, we paused for a long time before the question of the cause of this will – until we finally came to a complete standstill in front of an even more fundamental question. We asked about the *value* of this will. Granted, we will truth: *why not untruth instead?* And uncertainty? Even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth came before us, – or was it we who came before the problem? Which of us is Oedipus? Which one is the Sphinx? It seems we have a rendezvous of questions and question-marks. – And, believe it or not, it ultimately looks to us as if the problem has never been raised until now, – as if we were the first to ever see it, fix our gaze on it, *risk it*. Because this involves risk and perhaps no risk has ever been greater.

### 2

“How *could* anything originate out of its opposite? Truth from error, for instance? Or the will to truth from the will to deception? Or selfless action from self-interest? Or the pure, sun-bright gaze of wisdom from a covetous leer? Such origins are impossible, and people who dream about

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such things are fools – at best. Things of the highest value must have another, separate origin *of their own*, – they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, from this mad chaos of confusion and desire. Look instead to the lap of being, the everlasting, the hidden God, the ‘thing-in-itself’ – *this* is where their ground must be, and nowhere else!”<sup>1</sup> – This way of judging typifies the prejudices by which metaphysicians of all ages can be recognized: this type of valuation lies behind all their logical procedures. From these “beliefs” they try to acquire their “knowledge,” to acquire something that will end up being solemnly christened as “the truth.” The fundamental belief of metaphysicians is the *belief in oppositions of values*. It has not occurred to even the most cautious of them to start doubting right here at the threshold, where it is actually needed the most – even though they had vowed to themselves “*de omnibus dubitandum*.”<sup>2</sup> But we can doubt, first, whether opposites even exist and, second, whether the popular valuations and value oppositions that have earned the metaphysicians’ seal of approval might not only be foreground appraisals. Perhaps they are merely provisional perspectives, perhaps they are not even viewed head-on; perhaps they are even viewed from below, like a frog-perspective, to borrow an expression that painters will recognize. Whatever value might be attributed to truth, truthfulness, and selflessness, it could be possible that appearance, the will to deception, and craven self-interest should be accorded a higher and more fundamental value for all life. It could even be possible that whatever gives value to those good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same. Perhaps! – But who is willing to take charge of such a dangerous Perhaps! For this we must await the arrival of a new breed of philosophers, ones whose taste and inclination are somehow the reverse of those we have seen so far – philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps in every sense. – And in all seriousness: I see these new philosophers approaching.

## 3

I have kept a close eye on the philosophers and read between their lines for long enough to say to myself: the greatest part of conscious thought

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Human, All too Human*, I, §1.

<sup>2</sup> Everything is to be doubted.

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must still be attributed to instinctive activity, and this is even the case for philosophical thought. This issue needs re-examination in the same way that heredity and “innate characteristics” have been re-examined. Just as the act of birth makes no difference to the overall course of heredity, neither is “consciousness” *opposed* to instinct in any decisive sense – most of a philosopher’s conscious thought is secretly directed and forced into determinate channels by the instincts. Even behind all logic and its autocratic posturings stand valuations or, stated more clearly, physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life. For example, that the determinate is worth more than the indeterminate, appearance worth less than the “truth”: despite all their regulative importance for *us*, these sorts of appraisals could still be just foreground appraisals, a particular type of *niaiserie*,<sup>3</sup> precisely what is needed for the preservation of beings like us. But this assumes that it is not man who is the “measure of things” . . .

## 4

We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign. The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates, the type. And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable to us, and that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the wholly invented world of the unconditioned and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world through numbers, people could not live – that a renunciation of false judgments would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life. To acknowledge untruth as a condition of life: this clearly means resisting the usual value feelings in a dangerous manner; and a philosophy that risks such a thing would by that gesture alone place itself beyond good and evil.

## 5

What goads us into regarding all philosophers with an equal measure of mistrust and mockery is not that we are struck repeatedly by how innocent

<sup>3</sup> Silliness.

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they are – how often and easily they err and stray, in short, their childish childlikeness – but rather that there is not enough genuine honesty about them: even though they all make a huge, virtuous racket as soon as the problem of truthfulness is even remotely touched upon. They all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic (in contrast to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest than the philosophers and also sillier – they talk about “inspiration” –): while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an “inspiration” or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact. They are all advocates who do not want to be seen as such; for the most part, in fact, they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as “truths” – and *very* far indeed from the courage of conscience that confesses to this fact, this very fact; and very far from having the good taste of courage that also lets this be known, perhaps to warn a friend or foe, or out of a high-spirited attempt at self-satire. The stiff yet demure tartuffery used by the old Kant to lure us along the clandestine, dialectical path that leads the way (or rather: astray) to his “categorical imperative” – this spectacle provides no small amusement for discriminating spectators like us, who keep a close eye on the cunning tricks of the old moralists and preachers of morals. Or even that hocus pocus of a mathematical form used by Spinoza to arm and outfit his philosophy (a term which, when all is said and done, really means “*his* love of wisdom”) and thus, from the very start, to strike terror into the heart of the attacker who would dare to cast a glance at the unconquerable maiden and Pallas Athena: – how much personal timidity and vulnerability this sick hermit’s masquerade reveals!

## 6

I have gradually come to realize what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir; in short, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown. Actually, to explain how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about, it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is *he* –) getting at? Consequently, I do not believe that a “drive for knowledge” is the father of

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philosophy, but rather that another drive, here as elsewhere, used knowledge (and mis-knowledge!) merely as a tool. But anyone who looks at people's basic drives, to see how far they may have played their little game right here as *inspiring* geniuses (or daemons or sprites –), will find that they all practiced philosophy at some point, – and that every single one of them would be only too pleased to present *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and as rightful *master* of all the other drives. Because every drive craves mastery, and *this* leads it to try philosophizing. – Of course: with scholars, the truly scientific people, things might be different – “better” if you will –, with them, there might really be something like a drive for knowledge, some independent little clockwork mechanism that, once well wound, ticks bravely away *without* essentially involving the rest of the scholar's drives. For this reason, the scholar's real “interests” usually lie somewhere else entirely, with the family, or earning money, or in politics; in fact, it is almost a matter of indifference whether his little engine is put to work in this or that field of research, and whether the “promising” young worker turns himself into a good philologist or fungus expert or chemist: – it doesn't *signify* anything about him that he becomes one thing or the other. In contrast, there is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is* – which means, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand with respect to each other.

## 7

How malicious philosophers can be! I do not know anything more venomous than the joke Epicurus allowed himself against Plato and the Platonists: he called them Dionysiokolakes.<sup>4</sup> Literally, the foreground meaning of this term is “sycophants of Dionysus” and therefore accessories of the tyrant and brown-nosers; but it also wants to say “they're all *actors*, there's nothing genuine about them” (since Dionysokolax was a popular term for an actor). And this second meaning is really the malice that Epicurus hurled against Plato: he was annoyed by the magnificent style, the *mise-en-scène* that Plato and his students were so good at, – that Epicurus was not so good at! He, the old schoolmaster from Samos, who sat hidden in his little garden in Athens and wrote three hundred books,

<sup>4</sup> Epicurus, Fragment 93.

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who knows? perhaps out of anger and ambition against Plato? – It took a hundred years for Greece to find out who this garden god Epicurus had been. – Did it find out?

## 8

In every philosophy there is a point where the philosopher’s “conviction” steps onto the stage: or, to use the language of an ancient Mystery:

adventavit asinus  
pulcher et fortissimus.<sup>5</sup>

## 9

So you want to *live* “according to nature?” Oh, you noble Stoics, what a fraud is in this phrase! Imagine something like nature, profligate without measure, indifferent without measure, without purpose and regard, without mercy and justice, fertile and barren and uncertain at the same time, think of indifference itself as power – how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living – isn’t that wanting specifically to be something other than this nature? Isn’t living assessing, preferring, being unfair, being limited, wanting to be different? And assuming your imperative to “live according to nature” basically amounts to “living according to life” – well how could you *not*? Why make a principle out of what you yourselves are and must be? – But in fact, something quite different is going on: while pretending with delight to read the canon of your law in nature, you want the opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to dictate and annex your morals and ideals onto nature – yes, nature itself –, you demand that it be nature “according to Stoa” and you want to make all existence exist in your own image alone – as a huge eternal glorification and universalization of Stoicism! For all your love of truth, you have forced yourselves so long, so persistently, and with such hypnotic rigidity to have a *false*, namely Stoic, view of nature, that you can no longer see it any other way, – and some abysmal piece of arrogance finally gives you the madhouse hope that *because* you know how to tyrannize yourselves – Stoicism is self-tyranny –, nature lets itself be

<sup>5</sup> “In came the ass / beautiful and very strong.” According to *KSA* these lines could be taken from G. C. Lichtenberg’s *Vermischte Schriften (Miscellaneous Writings)* (1867), V, p. 327.