

1 Revaluation of All Values as a Philosophical Project

Nietzsche uses the expression 'revaluation of all values' in two different, but for him related, senses. On the one hand, it refers to a philosophical task or problem related to the setting of rank of values and the determination of the value of values. On the other hand, he used it as the title (at first as subtitle) to his planned philosophical magnum opus in four volumes that he worked on from at least 1884 until his collapse, but never completed. The first time Nietzsche ever used the expression was as a subtitle to that work. I have here separated these aspects, and in the first part treat it as a philosopheme and in the second part as a literary project.

1.1 Introduction to Section 1: Revaluation of Values as a Philosophical Project

Why is Nietzsche's thought and philosophy still regarded as relevant today? There are a large number of possible answers to a question like this, but one of the most important and persuasive is that Nietzsche questioned and discussed the nature, character, and value of our values. Nietzsche frequently turns other questions such as epistemological and ontological ones into axiological ones, making values pivotal in his thought. It is possible to argue that the revaluation of all values is both the most important and today the most relevant of Nietzsche's main philosophical themes and projects. Furthermore, the theme is intimately involved with what Nietzsche regarded as his most important work, his magnum opus (that he called his *Hauptwerk*), for a long period called *The Will to Power* but later *Revaluation of All Values*.

Revaluation of all values, the critique of Christian and modern values, and the affirmation of an alternative set of values are generally regarded as one of Nietzsche's most important main themes or tropes. Nietzsche refers to the expression for the first time in his published books in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE 46), and it is therefore usually regarded as a late trope, as important during the last years, 1886–88. I will show that it began much earlier, including that it is important in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85), where, surprisingly, it is usually ignored, probably because he does not yet use the word 'revaluation'. I instead argue that its origin should be regarded as occurring in 1880/81. I thereafter comment on its rather complex context at this time, with no single obvious thematic textual context outweighing all the others. I will also consider some of the consequences of this early dating.

Relatively little interest has been directed at Nietzsche's revaluation of all values by philosophers and scholars. This is surprising considering the importance the late Nietzsche gives to it and unfortunate since a disregard of it is

associated with an overemphasis on Nietzsche's critical philosophy at the price of undervaluing his constructive and affirmative alternative. In *Ecce Homo* (EH BGE 1 and EH Destiny 1), he suggests that the revaluation is the goal and purpose of his life.

The revaluation of all values consists of a critique of our present and Christian values and an affirmation of another set of healthier values. What some of these alternative values can be I will mention herein. The expression 'revaluation' started as a planned subtitle, later the full title, of what Nietzsche regarded as his most important work, his magnum opus (*Hauptwerk*).

I will next show that (a) Nietzsche speaks of the revaluation in terms of a dichotomy of values – in terms of the existence of two paradigms of values; (b) one revaluation has already occurred, from antiquity to modernity by the means of Socrates, Plato, and Christianity; (c) a second 'opposite' revaluation has been attempted during the Renaissance but failed: the 'Renaissance [. . .] The revaluation of Christian values [. . .] my question is its question', and (d) that Nietzsche explicitly denies utopian interpretations of the revaluation and affirms the importance of history for the revaluation: 'I sought in history the beginning of the construction of the reverse ideals (the concepts "pagan", "classical", "noble" newly discussed and expounded –).' Nietzsche also gives some other more specific clues to his own revaluation. (e) He reverses the conventional moral statement 'do this and you will be happy' by claiming instead 'a "happy one" must perform certain acts', i.e., that character determines actions. (f) He also refers to his first book (*The Birth of Tragedy*) and its attempt to revive tragedy as part of his revaluation: 'Everything in this essay is prophetic: the proximity of the return of the Greek spirit, the necessity for counter Alexanders to retie the Gordian knot of Greek culture after it had been untied.' Finally, with his very strong person-oriented approach, (g) he claims that 'we ourselves, we free spirits, are already a "revaluation of all values"'.

Important for understanding the revaluation is that Nietzsche constructs a dichotomy of values. The very explicit use of such expressions as 'reversing ideals', 'the opposite values', 'antithetical evaluations' 'stand evaluations on their head', 'inimical value', and 'the inverse values' clearly indicates that there basically exist only two alternatives. Most emphasis is by Nietzsche placed on ancient contra Christian values which are seen, for example, by his recurrent claim that the present values have ruled for two millennia, but many other versions of essentially the same dichotomy are also mentioned: master-morality contra slave-morality, noble contra plebeian, Roman contra Jewish, and moralities of self-affirmation contra self-denial. At least one revaluation has already occurred in the history of European culture, and Socrates, Plato, Jesus, and Paul are associated with this, and Luther with its revival. Many of Nietzsche's

statements imply that the revaluation will mean an inversion of values so that the values held in low esteem today will be held in high, and conversely. Furthermore, the present Christian values are regarded as anti-natural. On several occasions, Nietzsche implies that the revaluation has already begun, and even occurred, through Nietzsche himself and his equals. It follows that Nietzsche's affirmative values are the values associated with the healthy side of the dichotomy. Finally, we are in fact given an example of a revaluation from decadence to health in the form of the Renaissance, and Nietzsche closely associates the present revaluation to that of the Renaissance – 'my question is its question'.

Apart from these general statements, we are also given three concrete examples of what Nietzsche means by the revaluation. First, he refers to his understanding of Greek tragedy as his first revaluation of all values: 'the soil out of which I draw all that I will and *can*'. Second, he claims that the free spirits already constitute a revaluation of all values. Furthermore, Nietzsche ends *Ecce Homo* with the statement: '*Dionysus against the Crucified*', where Dionysus represents healthy and life-affirming values, while the Crucified represents Christian and present values.

1.2 The Interpretation of the Revaluation in Secondary Literature

Surprisingly, studies of the revaluation of all values remain remarkably rare. This is evident from both bibliographies and the discussions in many book-length studies of Nietzsche. Many books on Nietzsche discuss will to power, *Übermensch*, and eternal recurrence, but say nothing, or almost nothing, about the revaluation of all values. Others say little. Some examples: Karl Jaspers seems to understand it as the creation of essentially wholly new values. Tracy Strong, in his interesting study, has two long chapters on the will to power and the eternal return, little about the *Übermensch* but no chapter on the revaluation, and, in spite of a very detailed index, no entry corresponding to revaluation. Thiele emphasizes the transvaluation as the creation of new values after the old ones have been destroyed (nihilism). Schutte, who has written a PhD on the revaluation, seems to hold a similar view in *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* (1986). Philippa Foot, in her 'Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values', published in Solomon (1973, 1980), emphasizes the critical nature of the revaluation as an attack on Christian and 'all morality'.

Walter Kaufmann (1974) has a long chapter in his book on Nietzsche entitled 'The Death of God and the Revaluation' (also republished separately in Solomon). However, the actual discussion of the revaluation covers only eight pages. Kaufmann asks if Nietzsche offers us new values, or, expressed

differently, if it is his intention to pour us new wine: ‘The answer is: No. [...] In other words, the “revaluation” was a war against accepted valuations, not the creation of new values’ (1974: 111). The revaluation is ‘the diagnosis itself’. However, strangely enough, Kaufmann adds that ‘this consists in nothing beyond what Socrates did’, referring to Socrates in his role as a ‘gadfly’ and quoting Nietzsche’s use of him in this sense. This is unfortunate, for Nietzsche also regarded Socrates as one of the most important revaluators of the first negative revaluation, the one from antiquity to moralization and Christianity. Kaufmann’s conclusion is clearly that the revaluation is a critical project: ‘The revaluation is thus the alleged discovery that our morality is, *by its own standards*, poisonously immoral’ (1974: 113). However, he also mentions, but without drawing conclusions or consequences, that ‘The “revaluation” is not a new value-legislation but reverses prevalent valuations that reversed ancient valuations’ (1974: 111).

Ackermann’s book *Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look* is one which attempts ‘to sketch Nietzsche in movement’ in which much of Nietzsche’s later thought is related back to his earlier writings and to his sympathy with the pre-Socratics. Without going into details, he nonetheless claims in the preface: ‘I try to show Nietzsche’s thoughts develop and ramify from his early, concentrated vision of Greece before Socrates, a vision that Nietzsche never abandons and a vision that is the source of his shocking new tables of values’ (1989: ix).

One work that does take the ‘revaluation of all values’ as a central thought in Nietzsche’s philosophy is Beat Kissling’s 400-page PhD dissertation entitled *Die Umwertung der Werte als Pädagogisches Projekt Nietzsches* (1992). It also acknowledges the importance of early Greek thought for Nietzsche, but the emphasis in the book is on interpretations of Nietzsche’s views by later thinkers, and on its relevance for pedagogics.

This general lack of discussions about the revaluation is surprising and unfortunate. It is surprising, considering Nietzsche’s own emphasis, which is as much, or more, on this theme as on any other. It is unfortunate, since this is closely associated with Nietzsche’s own affirmative or constructive values. A disregard of the revaluation is associated with an over-emphasis on Nietzsche’s critical philosophy at the price of under-valuing his constructive and affirmative alternative. It is also ‘unfortunate’ because we are confused about and lack understanding of values, and Nietzsche is one of the few philosophers who have thought profoundly about values.

A work that frequently mentions revaluation is Bernard Reginster’s *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (2006), where his main claim is the truism that according to Nietzsche, for us to overcome nihilism, we need to revalue the values that leads to nihilism (50). Reginster uses a rather

analytical approach and divides nihilism into two forms, nihilism of despair and nihilism of disorientation (a dichotomy that Nietzsche does not set up). He assumes that Nietzsche regarded that 'the essential inhospitality of this world' leads to despair (100). However, Nietzsche seems to regard life-affirmation as being natural (and therefore refers to natural and anti-natural, i.e., decadent, values), especially before the first revaluation (performed by the Jews, Christianity, and Plato). Nietzsche emphasizes the richness and superabundance of life, nature, and the world. He thus, counter to Reginster, regards affirmation as the default view (Nietzsche rejects pessimism as well as nihilism). Nowhere does the book discuss or even mention the first 'negative' revaluation nor the four-volume literary project, *Revaluation of All Values*, that Nietzsche worked hard on for the last four to five years of his active life. Reginster bases much of his arguments on the somewhat unreliable collection of late notes, *The Will to Power*, rather than on the much more reliable KSA (which also is much more chronologically reliable).

A full-length study of Nietzsche's revaluation is E. E. Sleinis' *Nietzsche's Revaluation of Values: A Study in Strategies* (1994). His emphasis is 'on the theoretical feasibility of such an enterprise'. His main concern is to examine the apparently impossible attempt to revalue all values. Can values be revalued without recourse to values? For this purpose, he examines the methods and strategies Nietzsche uses. He argues that Nietzsche has a naturalistic conception of value and that the source of all value lies within valuing beings. Further, he asserts that for Nietzsche there exists an objective measure of value and that this is power. In four chapters, he deals with truth, moral values, religious values, and aesthetic values, and their relation to a revaluation. For example, in the chapter on religious values, Sleinis correctly argues that Nietzsche performs a meta-revaluation in that he views religions not as an ontological thesis but as essentially concerned with value. Concretely, he argues that Nietzsche's higher-order values are those that result in the invigoration and the enrichment of life.

This book thus contains both more and less than its title seems to promise. There is no examination of what Nietzsche said or meant when he referred to revaluation, nor any discussions of the concrete values that Nietzsche referred to as healthy values. What it does contain is an analytical account of much of Nietzsche's philosophy in general and especially regarded values. However, the gap between what Nietzsche actually says and Sleinis' analysis is often so great that the analysis becomes less interesting and all too abstract. Nowhere in the book is there any reference to, or discussion of, Nietzsche's many statements that a revaluation has already occurred between antiquity and Christianity. These and many other of Nietzsche's references to revaluation give us important information about what Nietzsche meant by revaluation. To me, it seems very

clear that it is not an abstract revaluation of all our present values, including all of Nietzsche's own values, into something completely new. Instead, the revaluation refers to the change from one set of (life-denying) values to another and opposing set of (life-affirming) values. Some of these values will be new, but many will be old in the sense that we are aware of them today and that they were even more prevalent during antiquity and the Renaissance. With such a view, many of Sleinis' investigations appear abstract and irrelevant, but a number of side issues are clarified and his examination of many of Nietzsche's strategies remains relevant and illuminating. A related study is Aaron Ridley's article 'Nietzsche and the Re-Evaluation of Values' (2005) that also, in an analytical manner, attempts to clarify what a revaluation would entail. Both studies conclude that a revaluation is at least theoretically feasible.

John Richardson has recently written a valuable study, *Nietzsche's Values* (2020), that contains many interesting and good arguments and insights. Especially valuable, it seems to me, is his emphasis on value, on truth, and on using historical approaches. However, oddly enough, revaluation is not much discussed in the book. There is no chapter or subchapter that discusses it, nor does he refer to the only full book-length study of revaluation, that of Sleinis (discussed earlier), and in the index the term 'Revaluation' has only five pages listed, and these pages do not contain much discussion of it. He, like a better Sleinis, works mostly on a theoretical level. There is little discussion of actual values Nietzsche revalues, and there is no discussion or even mention of the four-volume literary project, *Revaluation of All Values*, that Nietzsche worked on. Nonetheless, Richardson correctly points out that 'genealogy is indispensable for a *revaluation* of our values' (325) because it discloses the origin of our values and because it creates a necessary distancing effect that history always has. He further argues that what Nietzsche wants is 'spiritual' growth, not a technological, an economic or one of physical power, but 'understanding of itself and especially of its own willing and valuing' (456). He continues:

What Nietzsche anticipates, I suggest, is another advance in human self-awareness, comparable to that by which human passed from 'custom' into 'morality' [...] it will happen at the whole societal level: new capacities will be trained into members generally via new shared norms. These new norms will be the outcome of the '*revaluation of values*' Nietzsche so famously calls for (456).

He further points out that 'the overall way Nietzsche means to "revalue" our norms is by "de-moralizing" them' (457). These, and many other observations, are valuable, but it seems to over-emphasize the social and long-term aspects of a revolution of values, and miss the more concrete revaluations (e.g., of

Christian and moral values) Nietzsche most frequently argues for, and his claims, at least in part, to already have performed.

Andreas Urs Sommer has in his *Friedrich Nietzsches 'Der Antichrist'* (2000) insightfully discussed several aspects of the theme revaluation, and especially emphasized Nietzsche's use of false coinage and fraudulence, e.g., in *The Antichrist*, 12, for references to those who argue for the false present values (from the perspective of the healthy and true early values). He argues that one of the senses of the hammer, in the subtitle of *Twilight of the Idols*, is a 'Prägehammer', which determines which coins are valid and which are false. 'Nietzsche's revaluation reinstalls that, which due to the "false coinage" of the idealists, Christians and other bad company had been regarded as invalid coinage' (155). Joseph Kranak has written an interesting dissertation entitled *Nietzsche's Revaluation of All Values* (Marquette University, 2014), that examines many different aspects of Nietzsche's philosopheme as an unfinished concept (and unfinished work), but without using any German language material.

Much remains to be studied to better understand Nietzsche's revaluation and his views of and relation to value. Perhaps it is also possible for us to use Nietzsche to better understand values and evaluation in general. In a note at the end of the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM I 17, Nietzsche's note), he writes, 'All the sciences have from now on to prepare the way for the future task of the philosophers: this task understood as the solution of the *problem of value*, the determination of the *order of rank among values*.'

1.3 The Nature, Importance, and Meaning of the 'Revaluation of All Values'

The importance for Nietzsche of the revaluation was great. From *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE 46 and 203), where it is explicitly introduced in his published writings, it constitutes an outstanding *Leitmotif*, and it reaches a crescendo in the last books, promising even more for the near future. In *Ecce Homo*, he seems to suggest that the revaluation is the goal and purpose of his life. The *Leitmotif* is so strong that it is reflected in most of the book titles from *Beyond Good and Evil* onwards. *Beyond Good and Evil* means beyond our present and Christian moral values (but not beyond good and bad), and the subtitle, *Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, seems to point to the future epoch with new values Nietzsche hopes we will enter, as well as to his planned magnum opus in four volumes, which he had announced as a work in progress on the back cover of the book. The revaluation of all values includes aesthetical values, but since the strongest values today are moral values, the centre of gravity concerns a revaluation of these. Nietzsche, as a philologist, historian, and realist, believes that a