

# FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

**QUESTIONS:** What do you make of Nietzsche's critique of morality and Christianity? How does such a view of the human person differ from Augustine or Day?

## INTRODUCTION TO FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is one of the most controversial figures in the history of modern philosophy as well as a severe critic of the Catholic Church. He delighted in shocking people, deliberately phrasing many of his most quoted epigrams as he did simply for their shock value. If we can look beyond these often infuriating aphorisms, we may well discover that his thought was more complex and subtle than the usually accepted interpretation of it would have us believe.

Nietzsche appears at first glance to be an amoralist. His book *Beyond Good and Evil* constantly advocated "the transvaluation of values." Yet in a letter to a friend he spoke of himself as having "a more severe morality than anybody." The explanation of such an apparent inconsistency is simply that, although he rejected the accepted morality of his civilization, Nietzsche was far from devoid of moral standards of his own. He believed that modern Europe was dominated by two institutions, democracy and Christianity, both of which were expressions of a morality fit for slaves—democracy advocating the equality of all men and Christianity preaching pity for sufferers. In place of this "slave-morality," Nietzsche expounded his theory of a "master-morality," and called for the emergence of a race of men in Europe who could live up to its exacting demands.

Although he was born in Germany, Nietzsche was contemptuous of German culture. Most of his adult life was spent outside his native land, first in Switzerland, where he was professor of classical philology at the University of Basel, and later, after his health broke down, in retirement in Italy, where he did most of his writing. Although Nietzsche was not widely read in his own lifetime, he has received increasing attention during the twentieth century. His influence is apparent both in philosophy, particularly among existentialists, and in contemporary literature.

---

# MASTER VERSUS SLAVE MORALITIES

## Beyond Good and Evil: The Will to Power

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE<sup>1</sup>

### HOW MORALITIES SHOULD BE VIEWED

Under “Morality” I understand a system of valuations which is in relation with the conditions of a creature’s life.

Formerly it was said of every form of morality, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” I say of every form of morality: “It is a fruit and from it I learn the *Soil* out of which it grew.”

I have tried to understand all moral judgments as symptoms and a language of signs in which the processes of physiological prosperity or the reverse, as also the consciousness of the conditions of preservation and growth, are betrayed—a mode of interpretation equal in worth to astrology, prejudices, created by instincts (peculiar to races, communities, and different stages of existence, as, for instance, youth or decay, etc.)

Applying this principle to the morality of Christian Europe more particularly, we find that our moral values are signs of decline, of a disbelief in *Life*, and/or a preparation for pessimism.

My leading doctrine is this: *there are no moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena. The origin of this interpretation itself lies beyond the pale of morality.* What is the meaning of the fact that we have imagined a *contradiction* in existence? This is of paramount importance: behind all other valuations those moral valuations stand commandingly. Supposing they disappear, according to what standard shall we then measure? And then of what value would knowledge be, etc. etc.???

A point of view: in all valuations there is a definite purpose: the preservation of an individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a belief, or a culture. Thanks to the fact that people *forget* that all valuing has a purpose, one and the same man may swarm with a host of contradictory valuations, and *therefore with a host of contradictory impulses.* This is the *expression of disease in man* as opposed to the health of animals, in which all the instincts answer certain definite purposes.

This creature full of contradictions, however, has in his being a grand method of acquiring knowledge: he feels the pros and cons, he elevates himself to *Justice*—that is to say to the ascertaining of principles *beyond the valuations good and evil.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, Inc. 1966) Used with permission.