

POSC 256/350: NIETZSCHE AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Office hours: F 10-12, 1-3
and by appt.

I. Purpose and Scope

Few imagined, though Nietzsche himself anticipated, that he would become a decisive influence on the thought of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Increasingly, Nietzsche has proven to be *the* philosopher of our time, influencing our thinking about nature, human nature, social relations, and truth itself. Yet Nietzsche intended to be more than just *an* influence. He believed that the core issues of civilization—our values, how we live, and how we view the world—are determined by philosophers, and he meant to be the philosopher for the coming age. “The greatest thoughts are the greatest events,” he wrote, and “genuine philosophers are commanders and legislators.” Such legislation would be no simple affair. It would require a many-pronged effort, including a critique of reigning orthodoxies, a compelling promise of something better, the articulation of a new creed, and even the formation of new human types. There is no perfect correspondence between these various tasks and Nietzsche’s many books, but there is, perhaps, a rough correspondence. The bulk of this course will be devoted to a close reading of *Beyond Good and Evil*, arguably the most beautiful of Nietzsche’s works and certainly the most political. *Beyond Good and Evil* is by Nietzsche’s own account a negative book. It is where he most powerfully attempts the first of his tasks: the ground-clearing critique of reigning orthodoxies, especially the orthodoxies of modernity. Hence its subtitle: “*Prelude* to a Philosophy of the Future.” But the book is not simply negative: Nietzsche provides tantalizing glimpses into the affirmative core of his vision.

To help grasp what Nietzsche is up to in *Beyond Good and Evil* and in his mature work more generally, we will also read *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which further develops some of the themes of *Beyond Good and Evil* and introduces new ones of its own.

Our primary task in will be to understand Nietzsche’s thought, but we will also engage in critique. Nietzsche asks for this: “One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil. And why do you not want to pluck at my wreath?” We will pose a range of questions, including ones that will originate with you. In order to give some direction to our inquiry, here are three broad questions that you should think about as we work our way through the course. First: considering that he was a critic of modern democracy, can we accept any of Nietzsche’s views without compromising our commitment to liberal democracy? Second: does the destructive part of Nietzsche’s project—his withering critique of all prior attempts to find firm foundations for politics, morality, and even knowledge—undercut the constructive part? (For example, if all supposed knowledge is merely interpretation, how can Nietzsche defend his own apparent claims to knowledge?) Finally, and most fundamentally: is Nietzsche’s vision a good one—how well does it understand and fulfill the requirements of our well-being? We may find that we are drawn to Nietzsche’s vision, or that we are repelled by it, or more likely, both. But whatever we ultimately conclude about him, it is well that we understand him, since his

influence is great and perhaps becoming greater.

II. Course Requirements

By far the most important requirement is that you read all assigned passages **closely** and **before class**. *Beyond Good and Evil* is as lively a book of philosophy as has been written, full of startling aphorisms and ending with a poem. But it is also, by design, a difficult book to penetrate and to see as a whole. For that reason, reading assignments will be comparatively brief, and you should read the assignments more than once.

Students enrolled in POSC 350 will be asked to present a short paper (5 to 7 pages) on a selected portion of the text (chosen by the instructor in accordance with your preferences, if possible). This paper, which will count for 30% of your grade, will serve as the basis for some part of the day's discussion. A twenty-page seminar paper will count for 60% of your grade. The seminar paper will be due on Monday, March 16. Seminar paper topics must be approved by me by Monday, March 2 (preferably earlier). The remaining 10% of your grade will be based on class participation, including your class presentation: since this is a seminar, your active and sustained participation is expected.

Students enrolled in POSC 256 have four options for the paper assignments:

- Option 1: A 20-22 page seminar paper (90%) due on Monday, March 16.
- Option 2: A 5-7 page interpretive paper (30%) to be presented in class and a 15 page seminar paper (60%) due on Monday, March 16. The shorter paper would serve as the basis for some part of the day's discussion.
- Option 3: Two 10 page papers (45% each), one due on Monday, February 9 (mid-term break), the other due on Monday, March 16.
- Option 4: Three 6-8 page papers (30% each). The first paper must be submitted by Friday, February 6; the second by Wednesday, March 11 (the last day of classes); the third by Monday, March 16.

Please let me know your preferred option by Monday, January 12.

All papers should be submitted electronically <lcooper@carleton.edu>, either as Word documents or as PDFs.

III. Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton's regulations on academic integrity, and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Be sure you are familiar with Carleton's principles and policies on Academic Honesty. If you haven't done

so already, read the following: <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/>. I take academic honesty very seriously. Students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions

IV. Assigned Texts

We will be reading two of Nietzsche's books, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Both of these books are included in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. It is important that we all have the same translations in front of us, so be sure to purchase *Basic Writings* unless you already happen to own the Kaufmann translations of *BGE* and *GM*.

One other book will be assigned: *Nietzsche's Task*, by Laurence Lampert. This book is a section by section commentary on *BGE*. Lampert will not be treated by us an authority. However, his comprehensive and sympathetic interpretation should prove very useful both in your reading and in class discussion.

Both required books are available for purchase at the bookstore.

V. Additional Secondary Reading

You are not required to read anything but the assigned texts by Nietzsche and Lampert, and you should always read Nietzsche before looking at any interpretive work. For those interested, however, I have placed the following materials on closed (two-hour) reserve or eReserve, as indicated. These can be quite useful, especially for students who will be writing seminar papers:

Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*. A respectful but critical treatment of Nietzsche. Includes a chapter on *Beyond Good and Evil* and another on the *Genealogy of Morals*. Berkowitz argues strongly against "aestheticist" and "postmodernist" interpretations of Nietzsche (such as Nehamas'—see below). Closed reserve.

Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (chapters 7-9). Chapters 7 and 8 offer a compact interpretation of *Beyond Good and Evil* as Nietzsche's response to Plato's *Republic*. Chapter 9 gives a critical analysis of will to power and how it is like and unlike Plato's conception of *eros*. An ambitious effort—but consider the source. Closed reserve.

Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates*. A very careful and probing analysis of an issue that gets to the core of Nietzsche's self-understanding and the nature of his project. Closed reserve.

Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. A leading postmodern reading of Nietzsche. Closed reserve.

Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*. A rare and welcome effort to discern Nietzsche's political teaching. Closed reserve.

Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, volume 1. Very difficult and based on the questionable premise that Nietzsche's mature thought is presented only in his last, unfinished writings. Even so, a penetrating and highly influential critique. Closed reserve.

Horst Hutter, *Shaping the Future: Nietzsche's New Regime of the Soul and Its Ascetic Practices*. An exploration of what would be required, and what it would mean, to live according to Nietzsche's principles. Closed reserve.

Pamela Jensen, "Nietzsche and Liberation: The Prelude to a philosophy of the Future." A brief commentary on *Beyond Good and Evil*. eReserve.

Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. A comprehensive overview of Nietzsche's thought and development. Probably the most influential treatment of Nietzsche in the English-speaking world. Closed reserve.

J. Harvey Lomax, *The Paradox of Philosophical Education: Nietzsche's New Nobility and the Eternal Recurrence in Beyond Good and Evil*. A stimulating and even startling treatment of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche's highest affirmation or good. Closed reserve.

Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. A study of the idea that serves as Nietzsche's highest affirmation or highest good. Closed reserve.

Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Probably the most popular aestheticist interpretation in English: emphasizes Nietzsche's embrace of self-creation and life-as-art, but decouples this from Nietzsche's embrace of hierarchy and other undemocratic notions. Closed reserve.

Thomas L. Pangle, "Nihilism and Modern Democracy in the Thought of Nietzsche." Investigates Nietzsche's withering critique of the lassitude of the democratic spirit. eReserve.

Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transformation*. A leftist interpretation of Nietzsche political thought. Closed reserve.

VI. Class Schedule

Note: the following schedule is approximate. Very likely we will depart from this schedule as necessary.

Also note that you are required to attend two public talks by Peter Augustine Lawler, who will be visiting Carleton. The dates are January 28 and 29. See below for the details.

January 6: Introduction.

Three readings:

- (1) excerpt from Plato's *Republic* (the Image of the Cave), sent via email;
- (2) excerpt from *Ecce Homo*, pp. 766-767 of *Basic Writings*;
- (3) Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 192-194 of *Basic Writings*.

January 8: Part One of *Beyond Good and Evil*

January 13: Part Two

January 15: Part Three

January 20: Review Parts One through Three

January 22: Parts Four and Five

January 27: Part Six

**Wednesday, January 28: First lecture by Peter Augustine Lawler, Athenaeum, 7:30 pm

**Thursday, January 29, Second lecture by Peter Augustine. Lawler, Weitz 236, noon

January 29: Review Parts Four through Six

February 3: Part Seven

February 5: Part Eight

February 10: Part Nine and "From High Mountains: Aftersong"

February 12: Review Parts Seven through Nine

February 17: Catch-up day

February 19: *Genealogy of Morals*, first essay; also review *BGE* Part Five

February 24: *Genealogy of Morals*, second essay

February 26: Review first and second essays

March 3: *Genealogy of Morals*, third essay

March 5: Review *Genealogy of Morals*, third essay

March 10: Conclusion