

POSC 256/350: NIETZSCHE AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Winter 2011
Office hours: TH & F 10-12,
and by appt.

I. Purpose and Scope

Few could have 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 even truth itself. Yet Nietzsche seems to have intended to be more than just *an* influence. He believed that the core issues of civilization—one's values, how one lives, and how one views 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 major 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, i.e. 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, hoping thereby to solicit the interest of certain kinds of readers and to begin the process of shaping their sensibilities, and providing us with an outline of his complete project and his goal.

To help grasp what Nietzsche is up to in *Beyond Good and Evil* and in his mature work more generally, we will begin the course by reading an early essay, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," which lays out some of the problems to which the later work would offer solutions. I also strongly recommend another early essay in the same volume, "Schopenhauer as Educator," as a means to better understanding both the spiritual needs that propelled Nietzsche's work and his extraordinary conception of the identity and task of the philosopher. Both essays will help us to understand Nietzsche as he wanted to be understood by the readers he sought.

But our task in this course goes beyond trying to understand Nietzsche as he would have wished. It also involves critical engagement, which Nietzsche insists that he wants in any event: "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: are Nietzsche's views, including the parts that have already become popular, compatible with the political liberalism

that most of us still subscribe to? 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 fulfill the requirements and potentials of our well-being? We may find that we are drawn to Nietzsche's vision, or that we are repelled by it, or something of both. But whatever we ultimately conclude about him, it is well that we understand him, for his influence, if anything, is still on the rise.

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) and to lead class discussion for a portion of that day's meeting. The short paper will count for 25% of your grade. A twenty-page seminar paper will count for 50% of your grade. The seminar paper will be due on Monday, March 14; paper topics must be approved by me by Monday, February 28 (preferably earlier). The remaining 25% 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 will be asked to write three 6-8 page papers, due on February 4, February 25, and March 14. You will also be asked to help lead one day's class discussion. Each paper will count for 25% of your grade. The remaining 25% of your grade will be based on class participation.

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 (it is your responsibility to read "Academic Honesty in the Writing of Essays and Other Papers"), and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions.

IV. Assigned Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore. Be sure to purchase the translations I have assigned:

Untimely Meditations, trans. and ed. R.J. Hollingdale
Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, trans. Walter Kaufmann

V. Secondary Reading

You are not required to read anything but the assigned texts by Nietzsche, and you should always read Nietzsche before looking at any interpretive work. For those interested, however, I have placed the following materials on closed (i.e., two-hour) reserve or eReserve as indicated. The first work listed is strongly recommended. The rest, listed alphabetically by author, may also prove useful:

Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil*. This is a chapter by chapter, section by section commentary on *Beyond Good and Evil* by an incisive and entirely sympathetic reader. In Nietzsche Lampert sees one who speaks the truth and whose truth is more humane than is sometimes thought. Closed reserve.

Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*. A respectful but critical treatment of Nietzsche. Includes a chapter on *Beyond Good and Evil*. 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 chapter by chapter 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 postmodernist 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 radical 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 study of Nietzsche in the English-speaking world, though its view of Nietzsche as a kind of liberal and Socratic has increasingly been challenged in the decades since its appearance. 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 and postmodernist 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." The "Last Man" and us, or 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. We may depart from it if and when class discussion so requires.

January 4: Introduction and excerpt from Plato's *Republic* (eReserve)

January 6: "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (in *Untimely Meditations*)

January 11: Excerpt from *Ecce Homo* (eReserve); Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* (i.e., Nietzsche's Preface, not the translator's preface)

January 13: Part One of *Beyond Good and Evil*

January 18: Reread Part One

January 20: Part Two

January 25: Reread Part Two

January 27: Part Three

February 1: Reread Part Three; also read Part Four

February 3: Part Five

POSC 256—FIRST PAPER DUE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 4:00 PM

February 8: Reread Part Five

February 10: Part Six

February 15: Reread Part Six

February 17: Part Seven

February 22: Reread Part Seven

February 24: Part Eight

POSC 256—SECOND PAPER DUE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 4:00

March 1: Part Nine

March 3: Reread Part Nine

March 8: “From High Mountains: Aftersong”

ALL STUDENTS—FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, MARCH 14, 5:00