**Friedrich Nietzsche
Excerpts from the**[**Original Electronic Text**](http://www.cwu.edu/~millerj/nietzsche/)**at the web site of the Pirate Nietzsche Page. **

 **Friedrich Nietzsche has been one of the most influential and misunderstood philosophers of the modern era. (His influence in the twentieth century has been greater than his influence in the late nineteenth century.) Nietzsche was critical of the traditions that had most influenced Western Civilization: the Judeo-Christian tradition and the rationalist tradition that dated back to the ancient Greeks but had found new authority in the era following the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment. The following excerpts provide a glimpse at the basis for his criticism of these traditions and his efforts to chart a new direction.**

**Questions
1. According to Nietzsche, why have "errors" been "useful" to human beings? What functions do "errors" serve"?
2. What does Nietzsche mean when he asserts that what we call "explanation" is in fact only "description"?
3. Why is science "the exactest humanizing of things that is possible"?
4. What is the origin of morality? What is the "herd"? Why is morality the "herd-instinct in the individual"? How does the example of "individual independence" illustrate his assertions about morality?
5. What does Nietzsche think of "altruism"?
6. What is Nietzsche seeking to convey when his character of the madman says that "God is dead" and "we have killed him"? when he says that "there never was a greater event - and on that account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any in history hitherto"?
7. Why does Nietzche condemn Christian morality as "hostile to life"?
8. What does Nietzsche mean when he recommends that the philosopher "take his stand beyond good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment beneath himself"?**

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**The Gay Science**

**116**

**Herd-Instinct. Wherever we meet with a morality we find a valuation and order of rank of the human impulses and activities. These valuations and orders of rank are always the expression of the needs of a community or herd: that which is in the first place to its advantage - and in the second place and third place - is also the authoritative standard for the worth of every individual. By morality the individual is taught to become a function of the herd, and to ascribe to himself value only as a function. As the conditions for the maintenance of one community have been very different from those of another community, there have been very different moralities; and in respect to the future essential transformations of herds and communities, states and societies, one can prophesy that there will still be very divergent moralities. Morality is the herd-instinct in the individual.**

**117**

**The Herd's Sting of Conscience. In the longest and remotest ages of the human race there was quite a different sting of conscience from that of the present day. At present one only feels responsible for what one intends and for what one does, and we have our pride in ourselves. All our professors of jurisprudence start with this sentiment of individual independence and pleasure, as if the source of right had taken its rise here from the beginning. But throughout the longest period in the life of mankind there was nothing more terrible to a person than to feel himself independent. To be alone, to feel independent, neither to obey nor to rule, to represent an individual - that was no pleasure to a person then, but a punishment; he was condemned "to be an individual." Freedom of thought was regarded as discomfort personified. While we feel law and regulation as constraint and loss, people formerly regarded egoism as a painful thing, and a veritable evil. For a person to be himself, to value himself according to his own measure and weight - that was then quite distasteful. The inclination to such a thing would have been regarded as madness; for all miseries and terrors were associated with being alone. At that time the "free will" had bad conscience in close proximity to it; and the less independently a person acted, the more the herd-instinct, and not his personal character, expressed itself in his conduct, so much the more moral did he esteem himself. All that did injury to the herd, whether the individual had intended it or not, then caused him a sting of conscience - and his neighbor likewise, indeed the whole herd! It is in this respect , that we have most changed our mode of thinking.**

**118**

**Benevolence. Is it virtuous when a cell transforms itself into the function of a stronger cell? It must do so. And is it wicked when the stronger one assimilates the other? It must do so likewise: it is necessary, for it has to have abundant indemnity and seeks to regenerate itself. One has therefore to distinguish the instinct of appropriation and the instinct of submission in benevolence, according as the stronger or the weaker feels benevolent. Gladness and covetousness are united in the stronger person, who wants to transform something to his function: gladness and desire-to-be-coveted in the weaker person, who would like to become a function. The former case is essentially pity, a pleasant excitation of the instinct of appropriation at the sight of the weak: it is to be remembered, however, that "strong" and "weak" are relative conceptions.**

**119**

**No Altruism! I see in many men an excessive impulse and delight in wanting to be a function; they strive after it, and have the keenest scent for all those positions in which precisely they themselves can be functions. Among such persons are those women who transform themselves into just that function of a man that is but weakly developed in him, and then become his purse, or his politics, or his social intercourse. Such beings maintain themselves best when they insert themselves in an alien organism; if they do not succeed they become vexed, irritated, and eat themselves up.**

**125**

**The Madman. Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the market-place calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why? is he lost? said one. Has he strayed away like a child? said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea voyage? Has he emigrated? - the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. "Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him, you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? - for even Gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife - who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event - and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history hitherto!" Here the madman was silent and looked again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. "I come too early," e then said. "I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling - it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard. This deed is as yet further from them than the furthest star - and yet they have done it themselves!" It is further stated that the madman made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his *Requiem aeternam deo*. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply: "What are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?"**

**Twilight of the Idols**

**Morality as Anti-Nature**

**1**

**All passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity�and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they "spiritualize" themselves. Formerly, in view of the element of stupidity in passion, war was declared on passion itself, its destruction was plotted; all the old moral monsters are agreed on this: *il faut tuer les passions*. The most famous formula for this is to be found in the New Testament, in that Sermon on the Mount, where, incidentally, things are by no means looked at from a height. There it is said, for example, with particular reference to sexuality: "If thy eye offend thee, pluck it out." Fortunately, no Christian acts in accordance with this precept. Destroying the passions and cravings, merely as a preventive measure against their stupidity and the unpleasant consequences of this stupidity�today this itself strikes us as merely another acute form of stupidity. We no longer admire dentists who "pluck out" teeth so that they will not hurt any more. To be fair, it should be admitted, however, that on the ground out of which Christianity grew, the concept of the "spiritualization of passion" could never have been formed. After all the first church, as is well known, fought against the "intelligent" in favor of the "poor in spirit." How could one expect from it an intelligent war against passion? The church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its "cure," is castration. It never asks: "How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a craving?" It has at all times laid the stress of discipline on extirpation (of sensuality, of pride, of the lust to rule, of avarice, of vengefulness). But an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life: the practice of the church is *hostile to life*.**

**3**

**The spiritualization of sensuality is called love: it represents a great triumph over Christianity. Another triumph is our spiritualization of hostility. It consists in a profound appreciation of the value of having enemies: in short, it means acting and thinking in the opposite way from that which has been the rule. The church always wanted the destruction of its enemies; we, we immoralists and Antichristians, find our advantage in this, that the church exists. In the political realm too, hostility has now become more spiritual�much more sensible, much more thoughtful, much more considerate. Almost every party understands how it is in the interest of its own self-preservation that the opposition should not lose all strength; the same is true of power politics. A new creation in particular�the new Reich, for ex ample�needs enemies more than friends: in opposition alone does it feel itself necessary, in opposition alone does it become necessary. Our attitude to the "internal enemy" is no different: here too we have spiritualized hostility; here too we have come to appreciate its value. The price of fruitfulness is to be rich in internal opposition; one remains young only as long as the soul does not stretch itself and desire peace. Nothing has become more alien to us than that desideratum of former times, "peace of soul the Christian desideratum; there is nothing we envy less than the moralistic cow and the fat happiness of the good conscience. One has renounced the great life when one renounces war. In many cases, to be sure, "peace of soul" is merely a misunderstanding something else, which lacks only a more honest name. Without further ado or prejudice, a few examples. "Peace of soul" can be, for one, the gentle radiation of a rich animality into the moral (or religious) sphere. Or the beginning of weariness, the first shadow of evening, of any kind of evening. Or a sign that the air is humid, that south winds are approaching. Or unrecognized gratitude for a good digestion (sometimes called "love of man"). Or the attainment of calm by a convalescent who feels a new relish in all things and waits. Or the state which follows a thorough satisfaction of our dominant passion, the well-being of a rare satiety. Or the senile weakness of our will, our cravings, our vices. Or laziness, persuaded by vanity to give itself moral airs. Or the emergence of certainty, even a dreadful certainty, after long tension and torture by uncertainty. Or the expression of maturity and mastery in the midst of doing, creating, working, calm breathing, attained "freedom of the will." *Twilight of the Idols* who knows? perhaps also only a kind of "peace of soul."**

**4**

**I reduce a principle to a formula. Every naturalism in morality�that is, every *healthy* morality�is dominated by an instinct of life; some commandment of life is fulfilled by a determinate canon of "shalt" and "shalt not"; some inhibition and hostile element on the path of life is thus removed. *Anti-natural morality*�that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and preached�turns, conversely, *against* the instincts of life: it is condemnation of these instincts, now secret, now outspoken and impudent. When it says, "God looks at the heart," it says No to both the lowest and the highest desires of life, and posits God as the *enemy of life*. The saint in whom God delights is the ideal eunuch. Life has come to an end where the "kingdom of God" begins.**

**5**

**Once one has comprehended the outrage of such a revolt against life as has become almost sacrosanct in Christian morality, one has, fortunately, also comprehended something else: the futility, apparentness, absurdity, and mendaciousness of such a revolt. A condemnation of life by the living remains in the end a mere symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether it is justified or unjustified is not even raised thereby. One would require a position outside of life, and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the value of life: reasons enough to comprehend that this problem is for us an unapproachable problem. When we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values. From this it follows that even that *anti-natural morality* which conceives of God as the counter-concept and condemnation of life is only a value judgment of life but of what life? of what kind of life? I have already given the answer of declining, weakened, weary, condemned life. Morality, as it has so far been under stood it has in the end been formulated once more by Schopenhauer, as "negation of the will to life" is the very *instinct of decadence*, which makes an imperative of itself. It says: "Perish!" It is a condemnation pronounced by the condemned.**

**6**

**Let us finally consider how naive it is altogether to say: "Man ought to be such and such!" Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the abundance of a lavish play and change of forms and some wretched loafer of a moralist comments: "No! Man ought to be *different*." He even knows what man should be like, this wretched bigot and prig: he paints himself on the wall and comments, "*Ecce homo!*" But even when the moralist addresses himself only to the single human being and says to him, "You ought to be such and such!" he does not cease to make himself ridiculous. The single human being is a piece of datum from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be. To say to him, "Change yourself!" is to demand that everything be changed, even retroactively. And indeed there have been consistent moralists who wanted man to be different, that is, virtuous they wanted him remade in their own image, as a prig: to that end, they negated the world! No small madness! No modest kind of immodesty! Morality, insofar as it condemns for its own sake, and not out of regard for the concerns, considerations, and contrivances of life, is a specific error with which one ought to have no pity an *idiosyncrasy of degenerates* which has caused immeasurable harm. We others, we immoralists, have, conversely, made room in our hearts for every kind of understanding, comprehending and approving. We do not easily negate; we make it a point of honor to be affirmers. More and more, our eyes have opened to that economy which needs and knows how to utilize all that the holy lunacy of the priest, of the *diseased* reason in the priest rejects�that economy in the law of life which finds an advantage even in the disgusting species of the prigs�the priests, the virtuous. What advantage? But we ourselves, we immoralists, are the answer.**

**The "Improvers" of Mankind**

**1**

**My demand upon the philosopher is known, that he take his stand beyond good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment beneath himself. This demand follows from an insight which I was the first to formulate: that there are altogether no moral facts. Moral judgments agree with religious ones in believing in realities which are no realities. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena - more precisely, a misinterpretation. Moral judgments, like religious ones, belong to a stage of ignorance at which the very concept of the real and the distinction between what is real and imaginary, are still lacking; thus "truth," at this stage, designates all sorts of things which we today call "imaginings." Moral judgments are therefore never to be taken literally so understood, they always contain mere absurdity. Semiotically, however, they remain invaluable: they reveal, at least for those who know, the most valuable realities of cultures and inwardnesses which did not know enough to "understand" themselves. Morality is mere sign language, mere symptomatology: one must know what it is all about to be able to profit from it.**

**2**

**A first example, quite provisional. At all times they have wanted to "improve" men: this above all was called morality. Under the same word, however, the most divergent tendencies are concealed. Both the taming of the beast, man, and the breeding of a particular kind of man have been called "improvement." Such zoological terms are required to express the realities - realities, to be sure, of which the typical "improver," the priest, neither knows anything, nor wants to know any thing. To call the taming of an animal its "improvement" sounds almost like a joke to our ears. Whoever knows what goes on in menageries doubts that the beasts are "improved" there. They are weakened, they are made less harmful, and through the depressive effect of fear, through pain, through wounds, and through hunger they become sickly beasts. It is no different with the tamed man whom the priest has "improved." In the early Middle Ages, when the church was indeed, above all, a menagerie, the most beautiful specimens of the "blond beast" were hunted down everywhere; and the noble Teutons, for example, were "improved." But how did such an "improved" Teuton who had been seduced into a monastery look afterward? Like a caricature of man - like a miscarriage: he had become a "sinner," he was stuck in a cage, imprisoned among all sorts of terrible concepts. And there he lay, sick, miserable, malevolent against himself: full of hatred against the springs of life, full of suspicion against all that was still strong and happy. In short, a "Christian." Physiologically speaking: in the struggle with beasts to make them sick may be the only means for making them weak. This the church understood: it ruined man - weakened him - but it claimed to have "improved" him.**