Twilight of the Idols

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Friedrich Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844, in Röcken, in present-day Germany. He was the eldest of three children, and his father was the village pastor. Nietzsche's father died in 1849, and Nietzsche's mother moved with her children to Naumberg. Nietzsche attended Pforta, a renowned grammar school. In 1860, he formed a literary society, "Germania," with two of his friends from Naumberg. He began attending the University of Bonn in 1864; he studied theology and philosophy, though he would lose his faith and abandon his theology studies the following year. He published his first work, "Zur Geschichte der Theognideischen" (The History of the Theognidia Collection) in 1867. After completing a year of military service, he was appointed chair of classical philology at the University of Basel. Following a series of health setbacks, he left the university in 1871, and it was during this time that he wrote his most famous works, including *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *The Gay Science* (1882), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Nietzsche never married, though he is purported to have proposed, multiple times, to Lou Andreas Salomé, a Russian-German psychoanalyst, author, and essayist, who rejected him each time. Salomé instead suggested that she, Nietzsche, and author Paul Rée (whom Salomé also rejected) live and study together and form an academic commune, though this plan never materialized. Nevertheless, the three traveled throughout Europe together for a time before Nietzsche parted ways with them in 1882. He suffered a mental collapse in 1889 in Turin and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. He lived with his mother upon his release, and then with his sister, Elisabeth, following his mother's death. Nietzsche never recovered from his mental health issues and died in 1900, possibly from syphilis.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A recurrent subject of scorn for Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* is late 19th-century German culture and politics. At the time of its writing (1888), the unification of Germany into the German Empire (also called the Second Reich) had occurred less than 20 years ago, in 1871. The German Reich was led by Otto von Bismarck, Minister President of Prussia, who became Chancellor. Following unification, the German Reich began a conservative campaign of nationalism based on Prussian authoritarianism, which was simultaneously anti-Catholic, anti-liberal, and anti-socialist. To establish a strong German national identity, the government gradually eliminated the use of non-German languages in public schools. Antisemitism also rose during this period. Nietzsche was highly critical of his day's German nationalism and anti-Semitic movements—he even parted ways with his editor in 1886 over his editor's anti-Semitic views. He ended his friendship with the composer Richard Wagner for the same reason. Despite his explicit condemnation of nationalism, the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany would co-opt his work following his death. This was due, at least in part, to heavily edited editions of his works that Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, curated after Nietzsche's death. Förster-Nietzsche deliberately revised and misrepresented many of Nietzsche's ideas to support her fascist politics. Still, Nazi Germany did draw from several of Nietzsche's unedited views. Thomas Mann and Albert Camus, among others, suggest that the Nazi movement and Nietzschean philosophy had in common a number of socially regressive views; for instance, Nietzsche was staunchly opposed to democracy and egalitarianism. So while it is somewhat misrepresentative to call Nietzsche himself a fascist (since he explicitly opposed fascism), it's also true that legitimate (that is to say, unedited) Nietzschean philosophy did inspire fascist regimes like Nazi Germany, even if they interpreted his words more extremely or literally than Nietzsche may have intended.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nietzsche is an influential figure in 19th-century philosophy. He wrote *Twilight of the Idols* in response to his growing popularity across Europe—the book is an introduction to the core ideas he explores in greater detail in his other works. Some of Nietzsche's most important works include *Beyond Good and Evil*, a critique of traditional morality; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which expands on the ideas Nietzsche covers in *Beyond Good and Evil*; and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a work of philosophical fiction that explores philosophical concepts such as the will to power, eternal recurrence, and the death of God. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche references many philosophers from antiquity and the modern era. One philosopher from the modern era whom Nietzsche criticizes (though from whom he initially took inspiration) is Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) greatly inspired the young Nietzsche, though Schopenhauer's pessimism and emphasis on metaphysics eventually compelled Nietzsche, as he matured as a philosopher, to reject Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his relativism, influenced French Deconstructionist philosophers Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). *Of Grammatology* (1967) is a foundational book on deconstruction by Derrida; *The Order of*

Things (1966) is a famous work by Foucault that explores the relationship between epistemic assumptions and truth throughout history.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Twilight of the Idols: or How to Philosophize with a Hammer
- **When Written:** 1888
- **Where Written:** Sils Maria, Switzerland
- **When Published:** 1889
- **Literary Period:** Nineteenth-Century Philosophy
- **Genre:** Philosophy
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Art Resembles Life. Nietzsche supposedly suffered a mental breakdown after he witnessed the beating of a horse in Turin, Italy. It's said that he ran to the horse and embraced it before falling to the ground. *The Turin Horse*, an art film by Hungarian director Béla Tarr, begins with a narrator recalling Nietzsche's breakdown and draws inspiration from the incident. Tarr was inspired to make the film upon hearing the film's writer, László Krasznahorkai, tell the story of Nietzsche's breakdown.

Puns auf Deutsche. The original German title of *Twilight of the Idols*, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, is a play on Götterdämmerung (Twilight of the Gods), the title of an opera by Richard Wagner (Nietzsche's former friend, who was by then his foe). Nietzsche's title plays on the original title, changing *Götter* (Gods) to *Götzen* (false Gods—idols).

PLOT SUMMARY

In the forward to *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche states the book's central purpose: to examine and destroy the antiquated idols (ideals or values) that are responsible for the nihilism and decadence that plague his contemporary society. Nietzsche will "pose questions here with a **hammer**" to accomplish this task.

Chapter Two, "Maxims and Arrows," consists of a numbered series of maxims (or aphorisms) that scathingly—and sometimes humorously—critique traditional morality.

In "The Problem of Socrates," Nietzsche challenges the value judgments of ancient philosophers. He condemns Socrates for introducing dialectics into western philosophy. Nietzsche thinks that dialectical thinking is bad for society because it allows weaker philosophical views to gain traction. It also encourages people to become skeptical of reality in a way that ultimately devalues life—even as it purports to do the opposite. Nietzsche concludes that Socrates's commitment to extreme rationalism has fooled philosophers and moralists into believing they can eliminate decadence and immorality through logic and reason. In reality, "the entire morality of improvement," which includes traditional Christian morality, is to blame for the decadence that characterizes the modern world.

In "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche accuses philosophers of worshipping the past at the expense of valuing lived human life. The philosophies of Socrates and Plato, in particular, have taught people to distrust their "senses" and view the physical world as "an illusion." Nietzsche thinks people ought to trust their senses—not condemn them as evidence of humanity's fallen, degraded state. He concludes this section with four propositions. #1: The only reality is that which we can discern with our senses. #2: Concepts that earlier philosophers have called "being" (reality) are, in fact, "non-being" (non-reality). #3: It's pointless to consider the existence of "another" or "better" world. #4: dividing the world into a "real" and "apparent" world—whether in Christian terms (Heaven and Earth) or philosophical terms—signifies a "declining" society.

"How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth" consists of six aphorisms that summarize how philosophy came to reject the "real world." #1: People exist in the real (physical) world. #2: The "real" (ideal) world exists but is unattainable. #3: Because the real world is unattainable, people begin to question its existence. #4: The real world is no longer a relevant concept, so people no longer feel obligated to attain it. #6: Society thus abandons the real world and replaces it with the "apparent world."

"Morality as Anti-Nature" further examines traditional morality's life-effacing qualities. Namely, Nietzsche argues that traditional morality (and Christian morality in particular) suppresses human instinct and, in so doing, "attack[s] life at its roots." Traditional morality urges people to control their desires through elimination, which Nietzsche thinks is only for "weak-willed" people incapable of exercising moderation. Nietzsche advocates instead for embracing "an instinct of life" to combat the destruction of traditional morality. He thinks we should abandon the "anti-natural" morality of Christianity, which teaches that natural instincts are bad, with a "natural morality," which embraces human instincts (such as pleasure) as natural and good; in so doing, humanity can affirm life rather than reject it.

In "The Four Great Errors," Nietzsche proposes four great errors that philosophy has made throughout history. The first error is "mistaking the consequence for the cause." Most traditional systems of morality fall victim to this error. Religion, for instance, claims that happiness comes from virtue when, in fact, behaving virtuously is only possible if one already has a happy life. While the Church may claim that vice leads to ruin, Nietzsche argues that vice is actually a symptom of ruin. The second error is "false causality," which refers to how people mistakenly believe they are in control of and can understand

their behaviors when, in reality, a person's motives are mysterious and instinctual. The third error is the "error of imaginary causes." Nietzsche thinks that people mistake their reaction to a stimulus for the cause of that stimulus. People assign subjective meaning to events they can't control because they are uncomfortable with uncertainty. Nietzsche calls this humanity's "cause-creating drive," and he believes that this drive is the foundation of all traditional morality and religion. Finally, the fourth error is free will. Nietzsche argues that theologians invented the concept of free will to make people feel responsible for their immoral behaviors and dependent on religion for redemption.

"'Improvers' of Mankind," critiques philosophers and moralists who throughout history have tried to improve humanity. Nietzsche condemns these people for forcing subjective moral frameworks upon society. Instead, Nietzsche believes philosophers should be "*beyond* good and evil." He thinks that the people who want to "improve" human behavior are actually "taming" people, thus creating a fearful and subservient class of followers.

"What the Germans Lack," focuses on Nietzsche's contemporary German society. Nietzsche believes that German culture has suffered because the nation has prioritized politics and economics over culture and intellect. He criticizes higher education in Germany, which has declined in quality since becoming more democratic—now that education is no longer reserved for the best students, Nietzsche argues, Germans are no longer "free" to give their children "a noble education."

"Expeditions of an Untimely Man," is the book's longest section. In it, Nietzsche analyzes—often critically—cultural figures such as George Eliot, Thomas Carlyle, Emerson, and Schopenhauer, among others, to offer additional insight into the problems that plague contemporary culture. He argues that art can't exist without intoxication, a point he examines through his concept of the Apollonian and Dionysian. Another point Nietzsche raises in this section is his opposition to contemporary society's egalitarian, democratic politics. Nietzsche thinks that the liberal social institutions of the modern world (which embrace altruism and equality in the name of morality) have made people weak-willed and cowardly. They have imperiled freedom and prevented the world's truly powerful, great people from realizing their own potential.

In "What I Owe to the Ancients," Nietzsche returns to his opening attack on Plato and ancient Greek philosophy. He argues that Platonic philosophy was a precursor to Christianity. Furthermore, its fixation on the ideal has greatly harmed humanity. Nietzsche again invokes the Dionysian, arguing that it is the key to letting humanity restore "the external joy of becoming" and the "will to life" that it has lost to years of philosophers and moralists teaching it to devalue life and human instinct.

Nietzsche adapts the book's brief final section, "The Hammer Speaks," from Part III of an earlier work of his entitled *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this chapter, Nietzsche relays a dialogue between a piece of charcoal and a diamond. The charcoal asks the diamond why it (the charcoal) is so soft when the diamond is so hard—after all, they are so closely related. Then, speaking as the hammer (an image Nietzsche resurrects from *Twilight of the Idols*'s foreword), Nietzsche urges his audience to "become hard" and "create" with him.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Friedrich Nietzsche – Friedrich Nietzsche wrote *Twilight of the Idols* in 1888 in response to his growing popularity across Europe. The book serves as an introduction to his work. In particular, *Twilight of the Idols* focuses on Nietzsche's critique of traditional systems of morality and their negative effect on the modern world. Nietzsche's philosophical writing is famous for its aphorism, irony, and other literary elements in place of a drier, academic style, and *Twilight of the Idols* is no exception. Nietzsche, at times, can be a somewhat abrasive and arrogant narrator. He spends much of the work attacking other philosophers and public intellectuals with whom he disagrees; indeed, at one point, he even claims to be incapable of finding another German with whom he is an intellectual equal. He also declares his earlier work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "the profoundest book [humankind] possesses." Nietzsche, for his part, is well aware of the way his arguments, style, and tone might put off some readers—near the end of *Twilight of the Idols*, for instance, he readily admits that his taste "may be called the opposite of a tolerant taste."

Socrates – (470–399 B.C.E.) Socrates was an ancient Greek philosopher. One of Nietzsche's central purposes in *Twilight of the Idols* is to challenge and discredit the philosophers, moralists, and ideals that history has placed on a pedestal, and Socrates receives the brunt of Nietzsche's ire. Indeed, Nietzsche dedicates an entire section of the book, "The Problem of Socrates," to airing his grievances against Socrates for introducing dialectics into western philosophy via the Socratic method, a form of intellectual investigation that draws on dialogue and discussion. Nietzsche believes that Socrates's fixation on logic and rationality—which has shaped the trajectory of western philosophy—has allowed weaker philosophical positions to gain traction and, correspondingly, stifled more vital philosophical positions. Socratic philosophy has also instilled in humanity an immense skepticism toward the physical world, and Nietzsche believes that this skepticism has devalued human life and, as such, is to blame for the decadence and nihilism that characterizes modernity. He believes that a central flaw of Socratic philosophy (and its

descendants) is its mistaken belief that logic—not instinct—causes happiness.

Plato – (428–347 B.C.E.) Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher. One of Nietzsche's central goals in *Twilight of the Idols* is to challenge and dismantle the philosophers, moralists, and ideals that history has placed on a pedestal. Plato (and Socrates) bear the brunt of Nietzsche's ire. In the section titled "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche condemns ancient philosophers like Plato for teaching people to distrust their "senses" and view the physical world as an "illusion." Nietzsche rejects Platonic philosophy because it separates the natural world from the ideal world—that is, it distinguishes between lived, sensory experiences and unattainable ideals. Nietzsche believes that this manner of thinking has taught humanity to devalue human instinct and, ultimately, life itself. Plato's Theory of Forms argues that the physical world is less real than the world of ideas. In the section titled "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth," Nietzsche summarizes how Platonic philosophy taught humanity to distrust their senses and ultimately reject "the real world." Nietzsche thinks this is bad for society because when people no longer trust their instincts or believe in the world, they slip into decadence, nihilism, and ruin—which, according to Nietzsche, are precisely the ills that plague modernity.

Napoleon Bonaparte – (1769–1821) Napoleon Bonaparte was a French military and political leader. As a general, he led successful military campaigns during the French Revolution and would go on to rule the French Empire from 1804 to 1814 and again in 1815. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche doesn't say much about Napoleon's military pursuits, but he does cite Napoleon as an example of a "great man" and "genius," terms Nietzsche uses to describe people of great strength, power, and insight who have emerged throughout history. These people contain an "explosive material" that society cannot suppress.

Thomas Carlyle – (1795–1881) Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish essayist, historian, and philosopher. He's mostly known for his letters, histories, and critical essays. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche calls the *Life of Thomas Carlyle* an "involuntary farce." He criticizes Carlyle for desiring—while simultaneously lacking—a strong religious faith, which is exactly the sort of moral conflict (aspiring to ideals) that Nietzsche associates with the degradation of modern society.

Luigi Cornaro – (1467–1566) Luigi Cornaro was an Italian nobleman and writer who, after surviving a near-fatal illness, wrote a book called *Discorsi sulla vita sobria*, or "Discourses On the Temperate Life" (1588). In the book, Cornaro argues that a restrictive diet can promote longevity. Nietzsche derides Cornaro, accusing him of mistaking the consequence for the cause (Cornaro's slow metabolism required him to eat a spring diet *and* allowed him to live longer—it wasn't the diet itself.) Nietzsche identifies mistaking consequence for cause as one of the four great errors of philosophy.

Darwin – (1809–1882) Charles Darwin was an English naturalist and biologist best known for his work in evolutionary biology, as put forth in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin's theory of natural selection (which is the foundation of his evolutionary theory) holds that organisms better adapted to their environment are more likely to survive, reproduce, and pass down those favorable genetic traits to their offspring. The process of natural selection thus causes species to change over time. Nietzsche is critical of Darwin's theory of evolution because it presents humans as merely a continuation of animal species and, therefore, not special in their own right. Nietzsche's concept of the "will to power" attempts to restore humans to an elevated status of greatness.

Fyodor Dostoevsky – (1821–1881) Fyodor Dostoevsky was a Russian novelist lauded for his psychological insight. Nietzsche examines Dostoevsky in his discussion of criminals, praising Dostoevsky's surprisingly positive experiences living amongst criminals in Siberia, where Dostoevsky spent four years in a prison camp. (Nietzsche, in *Twilight of the Idols*, argues that criminals aren't weak and flawed, but "strong human being[s] under unfavorable conditions.")

George Eliot – (1819–1880) George Eliot was the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans, a British novelist, poet, journalist, and translator. In the section titled "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," Nietzsche claims that Eliot's works illustrate the English tendency (according to Nietzsche) to abandon "the Christian God" while simultaneously (and counterintuitively) maintaining Christian morality.

Ralph Waldo Emerson – (1803–1882) Ralph Waldo Emerson was an American transcendentalist philosopher. Nietzsche greatly admired Emerson's work, and in *The Gay Science* he calls him one of the 19th century's four "masters of prose," (the other three "masters" are Giacomo Leopardi, Prosper Mérimée, and Walter Savage Landor.) Nietzsche praises Emerson for championing individualism, a philosophical idea that values the intrinsic worth of the individual. He places Emerson in direct contrast to Thomas Carlyle, who is self-effacing. Emerson, claims Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols*, is "more enlightened, adventurous, multifarious, refined than Carlyle; above all, happier" than Carlyle.

Immanuel Kant – (1724–1804) Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher. He's a major figure in modern philosophy—his synthesis of rationalism and empiricism influenced the course of western philosophical thought throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and his work continues to inform philosophy to this day. One of Kant's main ideas is that human rationality underlies all experience. He also believes that rationality is objective and universal, regardless of a person's subjective experiences. Therefore, systems of morality derived from reason are reliable indicators of what is good (moral) and what

is bad (immoral). Nietzsche rejects Kantian philosophy for its belief in a "moral world-order" that privileges rationality and undermines human instinct.

Schopenhauer – (1788–1860) Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher best known for his 1818 work *The World as Will and Representation*, which draws from Kantian philosophy to argue that the world that humans experience exists *only as a representation of reality*, and that this representation varies from person to person. Schopenhauer argues that the world does not exist *in itself*—in other words, there is no objective, rational world that exists beyond the way a thinking, conscious subject interprets it. Schopenhauer and *The World as Will and Representation* in particular greatly influenced Nietzsche as a young philosopher, though as Nietzsche matured, he broke with Schopenhauer over Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism (a philosophical worldview that assigns negative value to life).

MINOR CHARACTERS

Goethe – (1749–1832) Johann Wolfgang Goethe was a prolific German writer. Nietzsche admired Goethe—he considers Goethe a "Dionysian man" and praises him for his "anti-historical" and "idealistic" instincts.

Heraclitus – (c. 500 B.C.E.) Heraclitus was an ancient Greek philosopher. Nietzsche admires Heraclitus for his positive view of nature and physical reality, which contrasted the general views of his contemporaries.

Ernest Renan – (1823–1892) Ernest Renan was a French rationalist writer who published important works on early Christianity. Nietzsche attacks Renan's inability to leave religion out of his work.

Sainte-Beauve – (1804–1869) Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beauve was an important literary critic and historian. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche suggests that Saint-Beauve is spineless and self-deprecating.

George Sand – (1804–1876) George Sand was the pen name of Aurore Dupin, Baroness Dudevant. She was a French novelist and writer. Nietzsche attacks Sand for "coquetting with male mannerisms." This is just one instance in *Twilight of the Idols* in which he speaks poorly of women.

David Strauss – (1808–1874) David Strauss was a German Protestant theologian and writer. He wrote *Life of Jesus* and *The Old Face*, important and popular works that presented a historical, rational approach to religion. Nietzsche attacks Strauss's work in *Twilight of the Idols*.

TERMS

Aphorism – An aphorism is a short statement that conveys some kind of truth. **Nietzsche** is known for his frequent use of aphorism, irony, and other literary elements.

Apollonian and Dionysian – Apollo and Dionysus are gods of Greek mythology. They represent opposing values and forces—Apollo is the god of light, reason, and balance, and Dionysus is the god of wine, religious ecstasy, fertility, and insanity. So, while Apollo is organized, logical, and subdued, Dionysus is uncontrolled and instinctual. **Nietzsche** (specifically in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*) argues that Apollonian and Dionysian forces are present within all Greek tragedies, and that a Greek tragedy is rooted in a tension between these opposing forces. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche describes Apollonian and Dionysian as "opposing forms of intoxication." He explains that the Apollonian force stimulates vision in the artist, whereas the Dionysian force stimulates all of the combined human passions.

Decadence – For Nietzsche, "decadence" refers to moral and cultural decline, especially as characterized by overindulgence.

Dialectics – Dialectics refers to a method of intellectual investigation that draws on dialogue and discussion. In *Twilight of the Idols*, **Nietzsche** condemns **Socrates** for bringing dialectical thinking into western philosophy (the Socratic method, a form of argumentative dialogue, challenges commonly held views as a way of identifying contradiction and other logical errors). Nietzsche thinks that dialectical thinking is destructive to life in that it allows lesser, weaker philosophical positions to gain traction in society. He also believes that happiness comes from instinct, not logic.

Ego – In *Twilight of the Idols*, the ego refers to the self—that is, the conscious subject. **Nietzsche** examines how the ego causes people to misinterpret the world, arguing that people project the ego (personal biases) onto everything they engage with and, in so doing, unwittingly pass off subjective judgment as objective fact. At the same time, though, he values egoism (self-interest) and believes that institutions like the religion and democracy dampen the ego and devalue human life.

The German Reich – The German Reich refers to the German nation-state that existed from 1871 (following the unification of Germany) to 1945 (the fall of the Third Reich). When **Nietzsche** discusses the German Reich in *Twilight of the Idols*, he is referring to the German Empire or Second Reich, which lasted from the Germany's unification to the November Revolution in 1918, when Germany's government switched from a monarchy to a republic.

Maxim – A maxim is a short statement that conveys a truth, especially as a rule of conduct. In the section titled "Maxims and Arrows," **Nietzsche** offers a series of 44 numbered maxims that propose rules or ways of thinking that people ought to adhere to if they want to overcome the nihilism and decadence of modernity.

Nihilism –Philosophical nihilism rejects fundamental aspects of human existence (such as morality or objective truth) on the

basis that life is meaningless and moral truths are unknowable.

Theory of Forms – The Theory of Forms is a philosophical concept attributed to Plato. The theory argues that there exists a physical world and a world of ideas or forms. The physical world consists of objects and physical matter that are only *imitations* of ideas, therefore the physical world is not as real as the world of forms.

Value Judgment – A value judgement is a judgment of the rightness or wrongness (morality or immorality) of something based on a particular set of values. Throughout *Twilight of the Idols*, **Nietzsche** criticizes various philosophers and concepts that assign (an often negative) value to life according to the subjective values of traditional systems of morality.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HISTORY AND THE DECLINE OF CIVILIZATION

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote *Twilight of the Idols* over the course of one week in 1888. A response to his growing popularity and influence, the work's primary goal is to provide the reader with a brief introduction to the main ideas of Nietzschean philosophy and cultural criticism. At their core, most of the ideas Nietzsche puts forth in *Twilight of the Idols* relate back to his belief that contemporary western society (and German society especially) is decadent, nihilistic, and on the verge of collapse. Though Nietzsche blames numerous institutions and belief systems for this decline, many of his critiques relate back to the idea that society is too preoccupied with the past; that is, society organizes its art, culture, and politics around the goal of *returning* to a time of (supposedly) superior moral and social systems. This view argues that contemporary humanity exists in a fallen, depraved state and that the only way for humans to find fulfillment—and for humanity to regain its former glory—is to look to the past. But Nietzsche condemns such a view, attacking the "Egyptianism" of philosophers who make "conceptual mummies" of antiquated ideas. In other words, these philosophers worship the past as good and, correspondingly, regard change and natural progress—straying from the past—as destructive and bad. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche condemns such a view, framing this idealization of the past (or, to borrow from the work's title, making an "idol" of the past) as a "going-back" whose attachment to old ideals stalls progress. Instead, Nietzsche suggests a "going-up" to nature that severs the present from the past—that smashes it "with a **hammer**"; it is only through abandoning old, flawed ideas and redirecting our gaze *forward*, Nietzsche argues, that civilization may achieve a better future.

THE WILL TO POWER

Another concept central to *Twilight of the Idols* (and to Nietzschean philosophy in general) is the individual's struggle against institutional power. Nietzsche also condemns contemporary society's embrace of selflessness and altruism over self-affirmation. This theme resonates with the "will to power," a concept that appears in many of Nietzsche's works, though he never provides a clear definition for the concept, which has resulted in various interpretations (and, some scholars claim, misinterpretations). Put simply, the idea behind the will to power is that people have an innate drive to exercise power or mastery over others. Furthermore, different people exercise their will to power in different ways—some good, some bad (Nietzsche doesn't place judgment on the will to power, arguing instead that it is neither moral nor immoral). For example, while a tyrant might exercise their will to power through tyranny, a scientist might exercise their will to power through finding a cure for an infectious disease. Throughout history and into the present day, Nietzsche argues, institutions (and systems of belief or morality) have undermined the individual's will to power, imposing laws and social norms on people that inhibit individualism—that discourage exceptional people from standing out and realizing their full, empowered potential.

But Nietzsche's will to power is a complex (and, some scholars say, misunderstood) idea. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for instance, Nietzsche explicitly states that equality is destructive and that no great societies have emerged out of liberal democracies (he claims that liberalism makes "*herd animal*[s]" of people. Nietzsche argues that society tries to achieve equality by suppressing strong people's freedom in order to lift up the weak—and that, ultimately, this impulse will be the death of civilization as we know it. A significant number of scholars reject the way certain thinkers have misrepresented Nietzschean philosophy as precursor to fascism, citing numerous instances in which Nietzsche condemns Nazism and anti-Semitism. At the same time, it's imprudent to ignore the elitism and scathing attacks on classical liberalism and democracy that Nietzsche puts forth in *Twilight of the Idols*. Thus, Nietzsche's stance on individual freedom is complex and imperfect. While his weariness of exploitative, harmful institutions and his celebration of individual creativity might resonate with today's audience in certain regards, it's not unfounded to also point to the way his attack on equality and altruism undermines human rights and progressive undertakings.

THE IDEAL VS. THE REAL

One of Nietzsche's main gripes with past philosophers (and theologians) is that they rejected the notion of a real world and replaced it with the concept of the apparent world. Nietzsche argues that society embraces (and suffers from) this flawed logic to this day. In the section entitled "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth," Nietzsche employs a series of maxims to summarize what he defines as the "history of an error," the path by which ancient philosophers cast doubt on the "real" (that is, the *observable*) world. At first, he states, people existed in the real world. Then philosophers (and religious leaders) claimed the real world (or the enlightened world, or the afterlife) was only attainable for the wise (or, in Christian doctrine, the redeemed). And once people couldn't attain the real world, it became unknown—and then unreal—to them. Once they saw the world as *un*real, it became irrelevant to life, and they were no longer motivated to attain it. Finally—with the real world irrelevant and inconsequential to human existence—the apparent world replaced the real world. In this context, the apparent world refers to a mere *representation* of reality—not reality itself. In the apparent world, we can't rely on our senses to tell us anything true about reality. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato (whom Nietzsche attacks directly in *Twilight of the Idols*) conceived of the idea in his Theory of Forms, a method of understanding reality that differentiates between the realm of forms (the apparent world) and the physical realm (the real world). In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche expands his attack on past philosophers' denial of the real world into a broader criticism of past philosophers who taught people to cast doubt on their senses (or instincts), thus destroying their self-confidence and thrusting society into a state of nihilism and despair.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE "REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES"

The "revaluation of all values" is a core concept of Nietzschean philosophy. In the forward to *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche boldly declares the work to be "a grand declaration of war" and a "sounding-out of idols." As the work's title suggests, Nietzsche's project in the book is to attack and eliminate the "idols" that he believes have transfixed and degraded society. "Idols," as Nietzsche uses the term, refers to society's ideals—the modes of behavior and being that society has identified as most beneficial to humanity. But how does society determine which ways of being are best? Historically, society has turned to morality to answer this question. In the section entitled "Morality as Anti-Nature," Nietzsche condemns the Church—and, more broadly, Christian morality—for forcing people to conform to a standardized and unnatural (that is, *against* human instinct) mode of behavior. He argues that the Church creates arbitrary rules (i.e., Christian morality) about what people "shall" and "shall not" do to repress human pleasure (which the Church sees as sinful) and encourage self-hatred. Nietzsche thus condemns Christian morality as unnatural and designed to "attack life at its roots."

In place of Christian morality (which Nietzsche blames for civilization's decay), Nietzsche suggests that society should stop assigning arbitrary ideals to condemn or celebrate natural human instinct. To that end, it's worth noting that a key Nietzschean concept is the notion of the Dionysian impulse, though Nietzsche only briefly explores this concept in *Twilight of the Idols*. Put simply, Dionysians live naturally and in harmony with their instincts. Nietzsche thinks we should aspire to this, and he attacks Christian morality for condemning life rather than affirming it. Furthermore, Christianity makes value judgements about life that it is incapable of making, since only those who have known another life (an afterlife, perhaps) can, by comparison, objectively assess humanity's value. In place of Christian morality, Nietzsche advocates for immorality, which refers not to wickedness, but to the *absence* of a standard by which to judge or value behavior. In doing so, he sets forth a philosophy that accommodates multiple ways of being instead of unquestioningly conforming to Christian ideals, therefore *embracing* human instinct instead of condemning it as sinful.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE TRODDEN WORM

The trodden worm symbolizes humility and submission—qualities that Nietzsche associates with the life-effacing systems of traditional morality he challenges in *Twilight of the Idols*. Nietzsche first references the trodden worm in "Maxims and Arrows." Maxim #31 of this section reads as follows: "When it is trodden on a worm will curl up. That is prudent. It thereby reduces the chance of being trodden on again. In the language of morals: humility." Nietzsche adapts this maxim from the old expression "even the worm will turn," which means that even the meekest, most submissive creature (the worm) will strike back in revenge if its aggressor oversteps a boundary and beats it one time too many. But Nietzsche (in the original German) is playing on this expression, changing "will turn" to "will curl up" so that the expression takes an opposite meaning. In Nietzsche's variation, the meekest creature (or the creature made meek by traditional morality) doesn't "turn" to fight back against its oppressor—rather, it "curl[s] up" out of self-defense and "humility," too submissive and afraid of punishment or retribution to defend itself. Nietzsche is suggesting, then, that the "humility" that traditional systems of morality (such as

Christianity) teaches its followers is not for moral improvement but for control.

THE HAMMER

The hammer symbolizes the central project of *Twilight of the Idols*: to challenge and destroy the idols of the past that people worship, but which, according to Nietzsche, are destructive to society and human life. The hammer appears in the subtitle of *Twilight of the Idols* (the book's full title is *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer)*, and Nietzsche references the hammer a number of times throughout the work. The first time Nietzsche references the hammer is in the foreword, when he declares war on society's antiquated idols, vowing to "pose questions here with a hammer," interrogating ideas and moral values that society considers fundamentally true until "there are no more ancient idols in existence." Nietzsche believes that the idols (or ideals) that philosophers and moralists have preached and placed on a pedestal have made society nihilistic, decadent, and weak. He believes that the only way we can return society to a state of strength, intellectual integrity, and vitality is to stop aspiring to moral ideals and instead live life in accordance with nature and human instinct. Thus, it's significant that Nietzsche evokes a tool (or weapon) like a hammer to illustrate his project of debunking idols, for it evokes physicality, strength and violence—he's effectively arguing that humanity must strike back against theoretical, unattainable ideals with brute, physical force.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ* published in 1990.

Foreword Quotes

Nothing succeeds in which high spirits play no part.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

In the Foreword to *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche lays out the book's central purposes. "Nothing succeeds in which high spirits play no part," he states here, giving an implicit nod to the despairing, nihilistic culture out of which *Twilight of the Idols* emerged—and which motivated him to write it in the first place. Nietzsche believes that conventional systems of morality—namely Christian morality—have made society nihilistic and decadent. Moreover, he thinks that these unnatural rules of conduct—right and wrong—have made people distrust themselves and the world around them. In short, morality has instilled a sense of self-hatred in them and made them weak and unhappy.

So when Nietzsche claims that "Nothing succeeds in which high spirits play no part," he's saying that humanity will continue to suffer and degrade unless it rejects the moral ideals that have caused this suffering and degradation. Nietzsche's purpose in *Twilight of the Idols*, then, is to introduce the reader to his philosophical ideas that challenge and critique these systems of morality and offer alternative ways to live that affirm life and revive humanity's "high spirits," which will allow them to "succeed[]."

Another form of recovery, in certain cases even more suited to me, is to *sound out idols*. ...There are more idols in the world than there are realities: that is my 'evil eye' for this world, that is also *my* 'evil ear'. ... For once to pose questions here with a *hammer* and perhaps to receive for answer that famous hollow sound which speaks of inflated bowels—what a delight for one who has ears behind his ears—for an old psychologist and pied piper like me, in presence of whom precisely that which would like to stay silent *has to become audible*...

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

In the Foreword, Nietzsche identifies his purpose in writing *Twilight of the Idols*. He thinks society's degraded state is the consequence of centuries of philosophers and moralists idolizing unattainable standards of moral conduct. In the book, he examines why the worship of ideals is destructive and sets in motion a plan to help society recover from the decadent, nihilistic state it's fallen to. This passage contains Nietzsche's proposed plan for "recovery."

Nietzsche states that he will "sound out idols" by "pos[ing] questions here with a *hammer*." Striking the idols with a hammer, he argues, will create a "hollow sound," meaning

that scrutinizing the idols we have come to accept without question will reveal that they are actually hollow and meaningless—not the high, noble standards of conduct that their proponents claim them to be. By revealing how flimsy and "hollow" these idols are, Nietzsche hopes to persuade his audience that they—like he—ought to abandon and reject ideals and invent a new code of conduct by which to live.

Finally, when Nietzsche specifies that he will "sound out idols" with a hammer—a weapon—he establishes a binary between force and vitality (things idols snuff out) and weakness and submission (things idols instill in people). He's saying that to regain the strength and vitality that idols have robbed people of, we must strike back at them with strength and vitality.

Maxims and Arrows Quotes

31. When it is trodden on a worm will curl up. That is prudent. It thereby reduces the chance of being trodden on again. In the language of morals: *humility*.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from "Maxims and Arrows," which (as the title suggests) consists of 44 numbered maxims related to the core ideas of *Twilight of the Idols*. Maxim #31 is a play on the common saying, "even the trodden worm will turn." Unaltered, the phrase expresses the sentiment that even the meekest, most unassuming creature (the worm) will fight back if it's pushed down enough. But Nietzsche alters the saying, swapping "turn" with "curl up." Thus, the phrase becomes not an expression of strength and resilience but an illustration of how creatures that are beaten down enough really just sink into submission. Nietzsche criticizes conventional morality's tendency to portray humility as something good and virtuous.

Nietzsche doesn't find anything positive about humility. He doesn't think that trodden worms turn to fight back—he thinks they "curl up" into themselves to avoid getting stepped on again. They compromise their agency, values, and pursuits in a last-ditch effort at self-preservation. In this maxim, Nietzsche points toward what he sees as the biggest problem with morality and religion: that it weakens people and makes them subservient followers.

39. *The disappointed man speaks.* – I sought great human beings, I never found anything but the *apes* of their ideal.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from "Maxims and Arrows," which (as the title suggests) consists of 44 numbered maxims related to the core ideas of *Twilight of the Idols*. As is characteristic of Nietzsche's writing, the maxims have a distinct style and employ lots of figurative language. In this maxim, Nietzsche, embodying the consciousness of "The disappointed man," describes his search—and failure—to find "great human beings." Rather than "great human beings," he found only "the apes of their ideal." A few things are going on here. First, when Nietzsche states that he looked for "great" or strong or vital human beings, he's referring to people who are strong-willed, spirited, and who value individualism. In Nietzsche's worldview, great humans answer to themselves—not to arbitrary ideals that traditional morality has imposed on them.

When Nietzsche claims not to have found any "great human beings" but only "the apes of their ideal," he's saying that the humans he saw were weak-willed, submissive followers. The implicit cause for this weakness, as Nietzsche suggests in this quote, is that humans are acting as "apes of their ideal." Aping is another word for mimicking. So, Nietzsche is suggesting that trying—and failing—to mimic what morality views as greatness prevents people from achieving *actual* greatness. Nietzsche believes that humanity will never ascend from the ruins of decadence and nihilism if it doesn't first destroy the old idols that suppress the human spirit and promote subservience over individualism.

The Problem of Socrates Quotes

In every age the wisest have passed the identical judgement on life: *it is worthless*. … Everywhere and always their mouths have uttered the same sound—a sound full of doubt, full of melancholy, full of weariness with life, full of opposition to life.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In "The Problem of Socrates," Nietzsche lays out the origins of society's obsession with unattainable idols/ideals, which he traces back to Socrates. Nietzsche blames Socrates for introducing logic and rationality into mainstream philosophical thought. Reason and rationality, Nietzsche argues, have taught humanity to be skeptical of the observable world and human instinct. This skepticism, in turn, has made people "full of doubt, full of melancholy, full of weariness with life, full of opposition to life." And all this is to blame for the nihilism and decadence that characterizes the modern world. This passage is important because it outlines the traits of modern morality and philosophy that Nietzsche thinks are most negative. Nietzsche thinks that we need to destroy old values and make new ones because the old values instill in people a disregard for life, and they also make people drastically worsen other people's quality of life.

Finally, this passage lays the groundwork for the binary at the heart of *Twilight of the Idols*: reason versus instinct. Whereas to Nietzsche, instinct is natural and life-affirming, reason is unnatural and "full of opposition to life."

> Judgements, value judgements concerning life, for or against, can in the last resort never be true: they possess value only as symptoms, they come into consideration only as symptoms—in themselves such judgements are stupidities. One must reach out and try to grasp this astonishing *finesse*, *that the value of life cannot be estimated.*

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In "The Problem of Socrates," Nietzsche describes how the nihilism and decadence that characterize the modern world came to be. He attributes their hold on modern intellectual culture to Socratic philosophy, which values argumentative discourse and reason, and which taught humanity to use logic and rationality to view themselves and the surrounding world with skepticism and doubt. By examining the world critically and rationally, Socrates held, people could make "value judgments concerning life" and decide what is right versus wrong, good versus evil. Socrates also proposed that reason, virtue, and happiness are interconnected.

But Nietzsche disagrees with this perspective. He thinks that rationality isn't as objective and universal as Socrates claimed. States Nietzsche, "Judgements, value judgments concerning life, for or against, can in the last resort never be true: they possess value only as symptoms, they come into consideration only as symptoms." Nietzsche suggests that value judgments—deciding whether something is right or wrong according to a moral framework—are never reliable. This is because value judgments are only "symptoms" of the morality from which they emerge; they do not exist in themselves. Furthermore, everything we believe about the world—even the things we can observe with our eyes—is filtered through whatever moral frameworks we possess. So, Nietzsche suggests, it's misleading of philosophers to claim that rationality can bring us closer to the truth since it's impossible to scrutinize a moral framework without appealing to an *existing* moral framework.

"Reason" in Philosophy Quotes

> All that philosophers have handled for millennia has been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has escaped from their hands alive.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In "'Reason'" in Philosophy," Nietzsche expands on his critique of reason in western philosophy. In this passage, which occurs at the beginning of "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche critiques philosophers' idolatry of the past. When Nietzsche claims that philosophers have only dealt with "conceptual mummies," he's alluding to the way that philosophers uphold and idealize old values—in particular, Socrates' obsession with reason—instead of creating new ones. Nietzsche's opposition to worshipping past values is the central theme of *Twilight of the Idols*. He thinks that worshipping unexamined old ideas is bad for humanity

because it suppresses humanity's natural instinct to evolve and progress. Because change and evolution are natural parts of life, then, Nietzsche argues that worshipping ideals devalues life itself. So, in the mummy imagery Nietzsche evokes in this passage, Nietzsche touches on the problem of holding on to antiquated values and the consequence of upholding old ideas instead of creating new ones—devaluing, killing, and symbolically mummifying life.

❝ We possess scientific knowledge today to precisely the extent that we have decided to *accept* the evidence of the senses—to the extent that we have learned to sharpen and arm them and to think them through to their conclusions.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

In "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche debunks the idea proposed by Socrates (and which has been a core idea of western philosophy ever since) that reason—and not the senses—gives way to absolute truth. Nietzsche doesn't think that empirical "scientific knowledge" and "the senses" are mutually exclusive. Rather, he sees reason as a consequence of the senses: "We possess scientific knowledge today to precisely the extent that we have decided to accept the evidence of the senses," argues Nietzsche. Put simply, our senses are what give us the ability to reason and think critically. Reason doesn't happen outside of the body: it is the consequence of us "hav[ing] learned to sharpen and arm [the senses] and think them through to their conclusions." Nietzsche rejects the existence of an immaterial being (a soul or an objective morality, for instance) that guides reason. Instead, he sees reason as wholly material—as just another bodily function.

❝ To talk about 'another' world than this is quite pointless, provided that an instinct for slandering, disparaging and accusing life is not strong within us: in the latter case we revenge ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of 'another', a 'better' life.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Plato, Socrates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

In "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche challenges the idea put forth by ancient philosophers like Plato (and embraced by many western philosophers thereafter) that there exist two kinds of being: material and immaterial. The material world is that which we can discern with our senses, and the immaterial world is the world of ideals. Whereas pre-Socratic philosophers mostly trusted the senses, Socrates's introduction of dialectical thinking into western philosophy taught people to distrust their instincts and, by extension, question the reality of the physical, material world. This kind of thinking also taught them that the immaterial world of ideas and knowledge was superior and more real—but also less attainable—than the material world. Nietzsche ends this section by proposing four theses that challenge this worldview. This quote is Nietzsche's third proposition.

Nietzsche thinks it's "quite pointless" to consider the reality of an immaterial world (by which he means the Christian idea of Heaven). Not only is it pointless, but it's also an act of "slandering, disparaging and accusing life" to fixate on a hypothetical, immaterial world and forget and devalue the world around us. For Nietzsche, distrusting the senses, which are a fundamental and natural part of human existence, is an act of defiance against life. "[W]e revenge ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of 'another', a better life," argues Nietzsche. Put simply, Nietzsche thinks we are actively devaluing life when we turn our back on the material world in pursuit of some imagined, immaterial ideal like Heaven.

How the "Real World" at last Became a Myth Quotes

❝ 6. We have abolished the real world: what world is left? the apparent world perhaps? … But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!*

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Plato

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Nietzsche provides six numbered steps to explain (as the title suggests) "How the 'Real World' at last

Became a Myth," or how ancient philosophers taught humanity to distrust the observable world and aspire to an unattainable, idealized version of that world instead. This passage comes from the final step of that process, in which people not only doubt their senses and scrutinize the material world—but destroy it altogether.

The distinction between the "real" and "apparent" world that Nietzsche articulates here comes from Plato's Theory of Forms. In this philosophical theory, there exists a "real" world of ideals and an "apparent" world (the imperfect, unideal version of that "real" world that humans can discern with their senses). Throughout history, western philosophers have taught humanity that the ideal world is something humans should aspire to—but not something they can attain with their sensory, limited consciousness. Because philosophers have taught people that they can neither attain/understand the real world nor trust the apparent world, existence as a whole becomes meaningless. This is why Nietzsche puts forth that *"with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!"* Because when people can neither trust themselves nor the world around them, nothing matters.

Morality as Anti-Nature Quotes

> To *exterminate* the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences—this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly. We no longer admire dentists who *pull out* the teeth to stop them hurting.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In "Morality as Anti-Nature," Nietzsche shifts his critical gaze to Christianity. He argues that Christian morality has taught people that human instincts—"passions and desires"—are base and immoral and that we need to "exterminate" these instincts if we want to live an improved, moral life. Nietzsche thinks that being taught to hate and devalue human instinct and other sensory experiences has made humans view life as meaningless and worthless.

In this passage, Nietzsche specifically takes issue with morality's proposed method of correcting humanity's base impulses—resisting and repressing them at all costs. "To exterminate the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences—this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly." Nietzsche thinks that the whole logic of suppressing the "folly" of sinful behavior is outrageous because nobody would accept that kind of logic under any other circumstances. To solve the "folly" of the problem by elimination rather than restoration is an unnecessarily destructive, extreme measure of problem-solving.

As an example, he cites dentistry. Nobody (in the 1800s when Nietzsche was writing or today, for that matter) would be happy if their dentist solved the "folly" of a toothache by simply pulling the tooth—they'd much prefer that the dentist heal it and stop the pain. Much like a good dentist solves a toothache by saving the tooth and eliminating pain, Nietzsche thinks we needn't eliminate our supposedly immoral impulses—we just need to change how we think about them. If we just embrace our instincts as natural and accept them, they'll no longer be follies and they'll no longer hurt us.

> But to attack the passions at their roots means to attack life at its roots: the practice of the Church is *hostile to life*…

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In "Morality as Anti-Nature," Nietzsche examines how morality (and Christian morality in particular) devalues life. This quote explicitly spells out why Nietzsche thinks this is the case. "But to attack the passions at their roots means to attack life at its roots," argues Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, the primary way Christianity attacks life is through "attack[ing] the passions," construing natural human instincts like lust as sinful and incompatible with living a happy, meaningful life. The Church argues that people need to use willpower and higher reasoning skills to stop themselves from acting on their sinful urges. They say that the key to happiness and fulfillment is to go against nature—for a person to suppress their instincts and live in a way that is contrary to how nature created them.

Nietzsche, though, thinks that human instincts are the "roots" of life—they give life meaning at the most elemental level. So for the Church to suggest that these things that

humanity is instinctually programmed to do are, in fact, incompatible with living a good, meaningful life is to say that life itself is meaningless. It follows, then, that "the Church is hostile to life." Nietzsche's perspective upends conventional understandings of Christian morality, which is often construed as affirming and giving meaning to life.

❝ All naturalism in morality, that is all *healthy* morality, is dominated by an instinct of life—some commandment of life is fulfilled through a certain canon of 'shall' and 'shall not', some hindrance and hostile element on life's road is thereby removed. Anti-natural morality, that is virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, reverenced and preached, turns on the contrary precisely against the instincts of life—it is a now secret, now loud and impudent condemnation of these instincts. By saying 'God sees into the heart' it denies the deepest and the highest desires of life and takes God for the enemy of life....The saint in whom God takes pleasure is the ideal castrate....Life is at an end where the 'kingdom of God' begins...

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

In "Morality as Anti-Nature," Nietzsche examines how morality (and Christian morality in particular) devalues life. The primary way that morality does this is through condemning natural human instincts as sinful. In this passage, Nietzsche distinguishes between "healthy" morality (which he condones) and unhealthy morality (to which "virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, reverenced and preached" belongs). Healthy morality, which emphasizes "naturalism" (the belief that everything exists out of natural causes, and spiritual elements don't exist), has "an instinct of life" because its focus is on removing "hindrance[s] and hostile element[s] on life's road" and preserving human life. For Nietzsche, a healthy morality is about self-preservation and honoring the sensory life and instincts. Everything a person does, they do for the express purpose of extending—and therefore valuing—their life.

By contrast, "anti-natural morality," a category that encapsulates nearly every moral code humans have created (though Nietzsche focuses on the Church in this instance), rejects the senses. This kind of morality goes "against the instincts of life" and argues that human instinct is sinful and antithetical to living a good, moral life. When Nietzsche claims that this kind of morality "takes God for the enemy of life," he's referring to the way that these moral frameworks claim that indulging in human instincts—which is the most natural, harmless part of life—goes against God's plan. A God that condemns the sensory experiences humans were put on this earth to do, suggests Nietzsche, can't be anything other than an "enemy of life."

Finally, when Nietzsche claims that "[t]he saint in whom God takes pleasure is the ideal castrate," he's emphasizing how this anti-natural morality is all about power and control. The point of Christian morality, suggests Nietzsche, is to make people self-hating and subservient. "Life is at an end where the 'kingdom of God begins" solidifies Nietzsche's central claim in this passage: that life becomes meaningless and unfulfilling the moment one decides to organize their life around a Christian moral code.

The Four Great Errors Quotes

❝ There is no more dangerous error than that of *mistaking the consequence for the cause*. I call it reason's intrinsic form of corruption. None the less, this error is among the most ancient and most recent habits of mankind: it is even sanctified among us, it bears the names 'religion' and 'morality'.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Luigi Cornaro

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

In "The Four Great Errors," Nietzsche identifies and examines what he considers to be the four main errors that philosophy has made throughout history. In this passage, Nietzsche discusses the first of these errors: the error "of mistaking the consequence for the cause," or the error of confusing cause for effect, and vice versa. For Nietzsche, this error is the foundation of all commonly accepted moral codes. It's also the most serious error. The way this error works is that the philosopher (or moralist or theologian) identifies a belief they want to uphold or condone. Then they manufacture a logical framework to support that belief.

Nietzsche cites a book by Luigi Cornaro, an Italian nobleman who, in his book *Discorsi sulla vita sobria*, or "Discourses On the Temperate Life" (1588), argued that a restrictive diet was the key to a long life. In reality, Cornaro's

slow metabolism necessitated a meager diet and ensured (or at least supported) his long life. Put simply, he was going to live a long time anyway, and other people without a similarly slow metabolism aren't going to experience the same long life that he did just by copying his diet. Philosophers and moralists fall victim to the same error when they make value judgments about which behaviors are virtuous and which are not. For instance, the Church might claim that behaving virtuously will make a person happy and fulfilled. But this formula ignores the possibility that happy and fulfilled people are in a better position—and therefore more likely—to behave virtuously than people whose lives are in ruins.

❝ Everywhere accountability is sought, it is usually the instinct for *punishing and judging* which seeks it.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

In "The Four Great Errors," Nietzsche unpacks the four main errors that philosophy has made throughout history. In this passage, Nietzsche discusses the fourth error: the error of free will. Nietzsche thinks that free will—the idea that humans can control (and are therefore accountable for) their thoughts and actions—was created to "punish and judge" people.

Christian morality, in particular, uses free will to condemn human instincts. If people have free will, then they have the power to suppress and eliminate instinct that is (according to the Church) sinful. So people who act on instinct, then, are fully responsible for their actions and actively choose to go against God and live in sin. The second part of free will that the Church exploits is its aftermath. When people are led to believe that they have actively chosen to sin and go against God, then they need someone to forgive them. This is where the Church comes into play. Not only does the Church make people feel responsible for their immoral behaviors, but it also offers them the opportunity for redemption. So the Church advances the error of free will to make people feel in control of their actions—while making them wholly indebted to the Church for redemption. It's a way for the Church to make people subservient and afraid.

The "Improvers" of Mankind Quotes

❝ In physiological terms: in the struggle with the beast, making it sick *can* be the only means of making it weak. This the Church understood: it *corrupted* the human being, it weakened him—but it claimed to have 'improved' him…

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In "The 'Improvers' of Mankind," Nietzsche criticizes the moralists—primarily religious moralists—who exploit morality to control their followers. Nietzsche argues that philosophers and moralists throughout history have argued that good morals improve the human condition, when they really do just the opposite.

For example, Nietzsche likens humans who answer to moral codes to animals beaten and tamed into submission. "in the struggle with the beast, making it sick can be the only means of making it weak." Nietzsche suggests morals are the weapon moralists use to weaken people and make them subservient, loyal followers. Nietzsche thinks that morals make people weak-willed and unable to think for themselves and honor their convictions.

The Church, Nietzsche argues, "corrupted the human being, it weakened him—but it claimed to have 'improved' him." Nietzsche outlines the duplicitous logic the Church has used to brainwash people into following their moral codes. The Church claims that living a good, moral life will improve a person's quality of life, make them happier, and grant them entry into Heaven—the ideal world, of which Earth is only a flawed, imperfect copy. But while the Church suggests that morals improve people, what they really do is "weaken[] them." They do this by making people unable to trust their instincts and personal conviction. They make people weak-willed and in need of a moral authority to answer to and turn to for guidance and help about the best way to live. When people can no longer trust themselves, they'll turn elsewhere for guidance.

❝ Expressed in a formula one might say: every means hitherto employed with the intention of making mankind moral has been thoroughly *immoral*.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

In "The 'Improvers' of Mankind," Nietzsche argues that there is no such thing as absolute, objective morality. To prove his point, he examines how moralists (primarily religious leaders) have imposed moral codes on humanity through immoral means. The lines in this passage are the final lines of this section. They contain the conclusion that Nietzsche ultimately reaches: "every means hitherto employed with the intention of making mankind moral has been thoroughly immoral." Nietzsche is saying that the moral codes of these supposed authorities on objectively high morality aren't as clear-cut and objective as they might seem.

Instead, every initiative they have employed to supposedly improve and make more moral people's lives has either made people's lives worse or has improved certain people's lives at the expense of others. Some examples that Nietzsche calls on to prove this point include the caste system as outlined in Hindu scripture, which calls for the social ostracization of the lower classes and prohibits interclass marriage and procreation in the name of moral purity; and the forced conversion of non-Christian people in the Middle Ages, which was supposed to make their lives better but which only made the converts hate themselves. Both of these examples offer instances where religious authorities have acted on their "the intention of making mankind moral" through immoral means—both cases involving inflicting needless suffering and dehumanization onto innocent people. So, this passage points out the hypocrisy of moral authorities. But it also shows that objective morality can't exist since moral "improvement" (if it even is achieved) always (or often) comes at the cost of someone else.

What the Germans Lack Quotes

"'Are there any German philosophers? are there any German poets? are there any *good* German books?'—people ask me abroad. I blush; but with the courage which is mine even in desperate cases I answer: 'Yes, *Bismarck!*'

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

In "What the Germans Lack," Nietzsche redirects his critical gaze toward the Germany of his present day. Nietzsche's most significant gripe with contemporary German culture is that it prioritizes political influence and economic power and, as a result, its cultural output stalls and suffers. Nietzsche thinks it's impossible to focus on politics *and* culture. They are mutually exclusive pursuits. And when a nation becomes too fixated on political influence, it denies itself the ability to make good art.

Here, Nietzsche describes his response when people abroad ask him about the current state of German philosophy, poetry, and literature. When people ask him if there exist any artists in Germany producing work worth exploring, he "blush[es]" and then responds, "'Yes, *Bismarck*!'" Nietzsche's response is funny. Bismarck refers to Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of the recently unified German Empire. Under Bismarck's leadership, and following Germany's unification in 1871, the nation expanded its political influence and strengthened its military presence. But, Nietzsche argues, its intellectual scene and cultural output suffered. So when Nietzsche claims that "Bismarck" is Germany's most significant poet/philosopher/novelist, he's implying that Germany's political projects have replaced its intellectual pursuits. Bismarck is Germany's only artist because a nation that funnels all its energy into politics cannot produce great art.

Expeditions of an Untimely Man Quotes

"The most spiritual human beings, assuming they are the most courageous, also experience by far the most painful tragedies: but it is precisely for this reason that they honour life, because it brings against them its most formidable weapons.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

In "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," Nietzsche examines (mostly critically) various intellectual figures of his day. He also offers psychological insight into the problems that plague modern society. In this passage, Nietzsche establishes a connection between "[t]he most spiritual human beings" and people who "experience the most painful

tragedies." In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche criticizes philosophy for instilling an intolerance for suffering, discomfort, and uncertainty in humanity. This intolerance, in large part, is why philosophy has come to place such a high value on reason: it sees reason as a way out of suffering and uncertainty. But Nietzsche thinks that suffering is an essential and unavoidable part of life. Therefore, eliminating suffering is just as life-devaluing as eliminating human instinct. Nietzsche values people who can confront tragedy and suffering—and *grow* from it. He thinks it takes strength and conviction to do this. These people's lives are ultimately more meaningful than those who do not confront suffering since they allow themselves to come face to face with all natural elements of life, even life's "most formidable weapons."

This idea that people who confront tragedy have more meaningful lives resonates with Nietzsche's concept of the Apollonian and Dionysian. Nietzsche argued that a tension between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses (which represent order and chaos, respectively) exists in all Athenian tragedy. He argued that this tension was life-affirming and allowed audiences to find meaning and purpose in suffering. So, when Nietzsche here contends that the most spiritual beings are those who can confront tragedy and grow from it, he's suggesting that facing tragedy directly and not turning to religion or other moral ideologies to explain away or quell uncertainty is how one achieves true spirituality and depth of experience.

> An 'altruistic' morality, a morality under which egoism *languishes*—is under all circumstances a bad sign. This applies to individuals, it applies especially to peoples. The best are lacking when egoism begins to be lacking. To choose what is harmful to *oneself*, to be *attracted* by 'disinterested' motives, almost constitutes the formula for *décadence*.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

In "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," Nietzsche examines the philosophical worldviews of an array of his contemporaries, mostly from a critical perspective. He also scrutinizes contemporary political and social trends. Here, he critiques society's embrace of "'altruistic' morality." Altruism is a "disinterested" or selfless concern for the welfare of others, and Nietzsche sees this selflessness as directly contradicting humankind's instinct for self-preservation. Because true altruism involves a total indifference to one's personal welfare in pursuit of the wellbeing of others, it can be antithetical to the preservation of one's own life. And since humankind has an instinct for self-preservation or survival, altruism goes against human instinct and thus "almost constitutes the formula for *decadence*." Nietzsche thinks that a basic value of a society should be that people care about their lives and goals. Altruism forces people not to care about these things—it demands indifference. Nietzsche's view upends conventional (and especially Christian) morality's positive view of altruism.

> For what is freedom? That one has the will to self-responsibility. That one preserves the distance which divides us. That one has become more indifferent to hardship, toil, privation, even to life. That one is ready to sacrifice men to one's cause, oneself not excepted.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

In "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," Nietzsche examines the popular philosophical worldviews of his day, often through a critical lens. Here, he considers how contemporary society weaponizes morality and religion to rob people of personal freedom. Nietzsche defines personal freedom as "the will to self-responsibility." As Nietzsche sees it, the more "distance" that exists between people, the freer they are. Because of this, moral codes that advocate for selflessness and altruism, and social movements that prioritize equality, actively threaten a person's freedom. In particular, Nietzsche believes that his contemporary world's trend toward equality lifts up the weak at the expense of the strong. He sees this as a negative thing for society in the long run, since humanity has an innate will to power—to set themselves apart from the masses—so equality suppresses instinct much in the way that Christian morality does. And this trajectory, he insists, will weaken society on the whole.

The criminal type is the type of the strong human being under unfavourable conditions, a strong human being made sick. What he lacks is the wilderness, a certain freer and more perilous nature and form of existence in which all that is attack and deference in the instinct of the strong human being *comes into its own*. His *virtues* have been excommunicated by society; the liveliest drives within him forthwith blend with the depressive emotions, with suspicion, fear, dishonour.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In Expeditions of an Untimely Man, Nietzsche often critically examines the figures and ideas of his contemporary world. He offers keen psychological insight into social and intellectual trends and analyzes how these trends either uphold or suppress human instinct. Here, Nietzsche considers criminality. He looks on the criminal favorably, seeing the criminal as "the strong human being under unfavourable conditions, a strong human being made sick." Nietzsche sees criminality as an external rather than an internal problem. He doesn't think that people have an inherent drive toward criminality; instead, he argues that "unfavourable conditions," and in particular, imposed social conditions that prohibit a person from tapping into their instincts, are to blame for criminality.

Nietzsche suggests that the criminal's "virtues have been excommunicated by society." In this passage, Nietzsche upends conventional morality's understanding of crime and transgression. Instead of seeing criminals as a threat to society, he sees society as a threat to criminals. This is because Nietzsche sees human instinct and passions—even negative passions, like violence or suffering—as life-affirming; meanwhile, he sees society and moral codes, which stifle human instinct, as life-threatening. Unless we fundamentally alter society to allow people the freedom to realize their instincts, society will continue to degrade.

What I Owe to the Ancients Quotes

Ultimately my mistrust of Plato extends to the very bottom of him: I find him deviated so far from all the fundamental instincts of the Hellenes, so morally infected, so much an antecedent Christian—he already has the concept 'good' as the supreme concept—that I should prefer to describe the entire phenomenon 'Plato' by the harsh term 'higher swindle' or, if you prefer, 'idealism', than by any other.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker), Plato

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

In "What I Owe to the Ancients," Nietzsche considers the ancient world—mainly through a critical lens, as he does here with his analysis of Plato. Nietzsche condemns Plato for "deviat[ing] so far from the fundamental instincts of the Hellenes." Nietzsche sees a tension between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses (order and disorder, rationality and impassion) as the foundation of Greek drama. He thinks that Plato has strayed from this ever since he became "morally infected" and obsessed with the idea that the apparent world can't be trusted and that an ideal, unattainable world exists elsewhere that is more real than the apparent world. Plato's focus on the ideal—on "the concept 'good' as the supreme concept"—disrupts the balanced tension between Apollonian and Dionysian forces that were the foundation of Greek tragedy and, to Nietzsche's mind, give life itself meaning.

Nietzsche also hates Plato because he's "an antecedent Christian." Nietzsche thinks that Platonic philosophy laid the groundwork for Christianity's condemnation of human instinct and hostility toward life. Rather than embrace disorder as an essential aspect of life as the Hellenes who came before him did, Plato aspires to "idealism," to a world free from chaos and disorder. And Plato thinks that living virtuously—not instinctively—is how people can get there. Nietzsche dislikes this because it's unnatural. It also devalues life. It teaches people to see their lives as lesser and less real than the unattainable, immaterial world—or, from a Christian perspective, less real than Heaven. It's why the current world is so nihilistic: Plato taught people that this world doesn't matter compared to the ideal world. So what's the point of caring at all?

Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—*that* is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion and through its vehement discharge—it was thus Aristotle understood it—: but, beyond pity and terror, *to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*.

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

In "What I Owe to the Ancients," Nietzsche examines the ancient world. While he has no use for much of antiquity (the whole point of this book is to rethink all values and to break free from the philosophies of the past), there are a handful of thinkers and concepts he draws on in his own philosophy. One example is the Dionysian force or impulse. Nietzsche's earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, discusses how Greek tragedy relies on a tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces or impulses. Apollo is the god of light, reason, and balance; by contrast, Dionysus is the god of wine, religious ecstasy, fertility, and insanity. Conventional morality embraces order and rationality and sees this as the way to organize one's life to ensure happiness and fulfillment. It condemns passion and impulse and thinks these things lead to moral ruin and meaninglessness.

But Nietzsche thinks differently. He sees the Dionysian force—which represents instinct and human passion and disorder—as just as essential a part of life as the Apollonian. So he's extending his examination of Greek drama to life. Nietzsche thinks that "pity and terror" are just part of life, and that morality that tries to eliminate "destruction" and "pity and terror" are cutting off an essential aspect of life. In this way, these moral frameworks devalue life. Just as a tension between order and disorder, rationality and passion, creation and destruction (represented by the Apollonian and Dionysian binary) are the foundation of Greek drama, so too are they the foundation of a meaningful life. Nietzsche uses his concept of Apollonian and Dionysian to explain the new morality he wants instead of the old morality. He wants people to embrace all instincts—even that which leads to pain and suffering and discomfort—as a necessary part of life. If we do this, we don't have to turn to flawed moral codes to redeem ourselves and return to a state of comfort. We can relish in the joy of becoming and destruction instead.

The Hammer Speaks Quotes

❝ *And if your hardness will not flash and cut and cut to pieces: how can you one day—create with me?*

Related Characters: Friedrich Nietzsche (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

The final section of *Twilight of the Idols* depicts a conversation between a piece of charcoal and a diamond. Nietzsche derives the section's themes from Part III, "Of Old and New Law-Tables," of his famous work of philosophical fiction, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In "Of Old and New Law-Tables," the book's protagonist, a prophet named Zarathustra, contemplates what is required to create a new value system. Zarathustra decides that creating a new value system requires destroying the old value system.

In *Twilight of the Idols*, this conversation between the charcoal and diamond reaches the same conclusion. The charcoal asks the diamond why it (the charcoal) is soft when the diamond is so hard—after all, they are so closely related. Nietzsche then, speaking as the hammer, interjects to give the moral of the story. "And if your hardness will not flash and cut to piece: how can you one day—create with me?" he asks his audience. Put simply, Nietzsche is telling his audience to be the diamond, not the charcoal. Humanity aspires to be hard like the diamond, Nietzsche believes, but morality (and religion in particular) has made humanity soft and weak like charcoal.

If humanity wants to become the most fulfilled and meaningful version of itself, it has to "become hard" by abandoning and destroying the moral systems that soften it. Only by eliminating the old moral frameworks can humanity move forward and "create" power and meaning with Nietzsche. Finally, this passage is important because it resurrects the hammer imagery that Nietzsche introduced in the book's foreword. There, he vowed to destroy idols (ideals/values/morals) with a hammer. Now, as he urges his audience to "become hard" and "create with [him]," he's telling them to do the same: to take a hammer to the old morals/idols that make them soft—to smash and destroy these old morals/idols—and create new ones.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

FOREWORD

Nietzsche bemoans the necessary struggle to remain happy in increasingly dismal times, saying, "Nothing succeeds in which high spirits play no part," and, "Only excess of strength is proof of strength." Next, Nietzsche states *Twilight of the Idols*'s core purpose: to "sound out idols," since the world now contains more idols than "realities." It's only through eliminating these idols that humanity will recover its lost state of happiness.

One of the major claims Nietzsche makes in Twilight of the Idols *is that the modern world is exceedingly nihilistic. So when Nietzsche claims, "Nothing succeeds in which high spirits play no part," he's saying that unless we overcome this nihilism and regard life and the world with "high spirits," we'll never feel fulfilled or energized. When Nietzsche argues that "excess of strength is proof of strength," he's implicitly critiquing the abstract ideals that philosophy and conventional (Christian) morality have taught humans to aspire to. He's saying that only physical, demonstratable strength matters—not some abstract, idealized notion of virtuous strength. Finally, this passage identifies the book's core theme: to "sound out idols" and reclaim life's "realities." Nietzsche states that he's going to debunk and eliminate the false idols—the idealized abstracts—that have systematically devalued life and killed people's "high spirits" by making their lives seem meaningless.*

Nietzsche promises to "pose questions here with a **hammer**," and he hopes his questions will stimulate his dampened, disillusioned audience. He ends the preface by declaring this book to be a "grand declaration of war."

Nietzsche's promise to "pose questions here with a hammer" reaffirms the idea that humanity needs to destroy abstract ideals with actual, physical strength. He's implying that the way to defeat the abstract *ideals that have weakened humanity is with strong acts of* physical *violence.*

MAXIMS AND ARROWS

"Maxims and **Arrows**" is a series of 44 numbered maxims (short phrases that express a principle or general truth) that relate to the central themes Nietzsche will explore in his work. This guide includes a selection of these maxims, all of which drive at Nietzsche's core themes. Maxim #1 describes idleness as the "beginning of psychology" and claims that psychology is a "vice." In Maxim #6, Nietzsche asks if being "natural" helps people transcend their "unnaturalness."

This guide only contains a selection of the maxims Nietzsche puts forth in Twilight of the Idols, *since most of them serve the same purpose: to reinforce (with style, wit, and humor) the book's main themes. One thing to note in this section is that its distinct style and use of figurative language is characteristic of Nietzsche's philosophical writing—he frequently uses maxims (also called aphorisms) in his writing. Finally, key ideas that Nietzsche gestures toward in this section include the notion of a binary between the "natural" and the "unnatural[],"and a disdain for psychology.*

Maxim #8 reads, "What does not kill me makes me stronger." Maxim #9 states that if a person helps themself, then others will help them, too. In Maxim #10, Nietzsche urges people to stand behind their actions and have no remorse. Maxim #15 argues that people understand "timely men" but misunderstand "posthumous men" like Nietzsche. In Maxim #18, Nietzsche argues that a person who chooses "virtue and the heaving bosom" shouldn't be jealous of those who "live for the day."

The reader may recognize the gist of Maxim #8, "What does not kill me makes me stronger," whose basic message has entered into the mainstream culture. The gist of this maxim is that human suffering can be a positive, restorative experience—it can make a person wise and resilient. Throughout the book, Nietzsche will argue that pain and suffering are valuable and necessary aspects of the human experience—and that to reject or eliminate suffering is to devalue and misunderstand the meaning of life. When in Maxim #10 Nietzsche calls on people to defend their actions, he's arguing another of the book's central points: that we should affirm and embrace human instinct—not condemn it as sinful. Maxim #15 proposes a binary of "timely men" and "posthumous" men. Nietzsche examines this binary greater detail in a later section of the book, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man."

In Maxim #22, Nietzsche wonders how, if "'bad men have no songs," the Russians have songs. Maxim #23 boldly declares the concept of a "'German spirit" to be a contradiction. Maxim #24 argues that historians who look to the past too often will start to think backward, too. In Maxim #29, Nietzsche claims that the conscience used to have so much "to bite on," but now it no longer has "good teeth."

Maxim #22 critiques Russian people and culture (Nietzsche is insinuating that the Russians are bad people). But it's also an apt example of the humor that Nietzsche interjects throughout this book and his other works. The "spirit" that Nietzsche references in Maxim #23 is a loose translation of Geist, *the central concept of German philosopher Hegel's* The Phenomenology of Spirit. *Geist a notoriously complex, untranslatable term that loosely refers to the human spirit or mind. Nietzsche is riffing on the term to humorously accuse German people and culture of being devoid of spirit, a serious critique he'll address in more detail later on. Put simply, Nietzsche thinks contemporary German culture is degraded and nihilistic and spends too much energy on politics to have a strong intellectual culture.*

"When it is trodden on a **worm** will curl up," Nietzsche states in Maxim #31. He continues, explaining that this curled-up worm is what humans call "*humility*." Maxim #32 states that people who hate lies think they're being honorable. These same people hate cowardice, too. Ironically, though, they're too cowardly to lie. Maxim #36 claims that "Immoralists" like Nietzsche don't threaten virtue any more than "anarchists do princes." Being shot at only makes princes hold more tightly to their power, so we should all "shoot at morals." Maxim #39 argues that only "disappointed" people complain. Maxim #44, the final one, reads as follows: "Formula of my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*…"

The worm is another key symbol. Nietzsche is riffing on the expression "even the trodden worm will turn," which means that even the meekest creature (the worm) will fight back if it's pushed around enough. Nietzsche tweaks the saying to suggest that the trodden worm actually "will curl up" and become meeker *to protect itself against future harm—in other words, it humbles itself as an act of self-preservation. Nietzsche thinks that conventional morality (and Christian morality in particular) weaponizes humility. Morality likes to pretend that humility is a positive, virtuous trait to have—when in reality, morality preaches humility to keep people meek, subservient, and in need of a moral authority to guide them. The other Maxims in this section further hint at the book's central themes of rethinking and destroying old, problematic morals/ideals, the counterintuitive or hypocritical aspects of morality, and the false claim that "immoralists" are bad for humanity.*

THE PROBLEM OF SOCRATES

1. Throughout history, Nietzsche argues, the wisest people—even Socrates—have claimed that life is "worthless." But what's the point of this? Pessimistic followers of Schopenhauer claim that if people throughout the ages have decided that life is worthless, then it must be so. But Nietzsche disagrees.

From antiquity to modern era, philosophers have deemed life "worthless." But Nietzsche rejects this view of the world. Also note that "pessimism" here doesn't refer to a negative disposition, but to philosophical pessimism. *The core idea of philosophical pessimism is that life itself holds a negative value.*

2. Nietzsche considers Socrates and Plato to be symbols of a fallen ancient Greece. In particular, Nietzsche takes issue with these thinkers' value judgements. Nietzsche thinks that nothing, where life is concerned, can ever be proven "to be true," since such judgments are meaningful "only as symptoms." Nietzsche questions the wisdom of philosophers who think they can know "the *value* of life" absolutely.

Value judgements (assessing an idea or behavior's worth according to a given moral framework) are bad because they assume that there is an objective, infallible way to judge anything. In reality, all moral frameworks are subjective and flawed, so all value judgements derived from them are equally flawed and flimsy. When Nietzsche calls value judgements "symptoms," he's saying that value judgments are only symptoms of a person's or moral authority's personal values—not an indication of absolute, actual truth.

3. Socrates came from a lower social class, and he was ugly, too. Anthropologists and criminologists state that criminals are often ugly, their ugly exteriors symptomatic of an ugly soul. Nietzsche describes criminals as "decadent." Once, a foreigner who knew how to read faces passed by Socrates on the streets of Athens and told him his soul was full of "vice and lust," and Socrates agreed with the assessment.

Following the logic of anthropologists and criminologists, Socrates's ugly exterior is evidence of an ugly soul. This passage establishes Socrates as Nietzsche's philosophical enemy. When Nietzsche calls Socrates an ugly, decadent criminal, he's implying that Socrates's contributions to western philosophy have been so harmful and destructive that it's as though he's committed a crime.

4. It's not just Socrates's lustfulness that makes him decadent—it's also his poor logic. Nietzsche strives to understand the origins of the Socratic equation "reason = virtue = happiness," a formulation that Socrates's predecessors would have abhorred.

Nietzsche blames Socrates for the decay of Greek intellectual culture. Socrates's equation of "reason = virtue = happiness" broke with his predecessors' views—presocratic philosophers tended to believe that there were some forms of knowledge that only divine nature—not humans—can understand. Socrates saw reason as a path toward higher understanding. He valued reason and saw it as interconnected with virtue and happiness.

5. Socrates brought dialectics—a method of intellectual investigation that draws on dialogue and discussion—to Greek philosophy. Nietzsche argues that this marks the end of "a nobler taste." Before Socrates, society denounced dialectics as "bad manners," distrusted those who believed in it, and thought dialecticians to be "buffoon[s]." So why did the Greeks take Socrates seriously?

Dialectical logic, with its emphasis on reason, is the basis of Socrates's "reason = virtue = happiness" that Nietzsche outlines in the above passage. Nietzsche dislikes dialectical reasoning because he sees it as a threat to "nobler taste[s]," or superior philosophical positions. Put simply, he thinks that the dialectic gave weaker, inferior philosophical positions a platform they didn't deserve. This, in turn, weakens stronger, more logically sound philosophical positions.

6. Nietzsche claims that dialectics are dubious and unconvincing, and that people only resort to them when they have no other options. They're used by people who have to fight for their rights.

Nietzsche thinks that the dialectic method only benefits philosophical positions that aren't logically sound enough to hold up on their own. If the only way a person can defend their idea is by poking holes in another (stronger, superior) idea, then that initial idea probably isn't great to begin with. Nietzsche's main gripe with the Socratic method is that it allowed common, intellectually unqualified people to participate in the intellectual sphere. Over time, this degraded western intellectual culture.

7. Nietzsche wonders whether Socrates used dialectics as an act of "revenge" against the aristocrats. Dialectics allow the dialectician to be a tyrant, placing the onus on their *opponent* to prove their (the opponent's) intelligence.

Nietzsche expands on the point he made earlier about dialectics being for desperate people, framing dialectics as an act of intellectual manipulation and revenge. Nietzsche thinks Socrates advanced the dialectical method to undermine the aristocrats who shunned him for his humble origins.

8. Socrates fascinated his contemporaries. He created "a new kind of agon" and transformed the practice of wrestling in ancient Greece. He was also very "erotic."

Agon *comes from ancient Greek and refers to a competition; in Greek drama especially, it refers to a dramatic conflict between characters. In describing dialectics as "a new kind of agon," Nietzsche is reaffirming how Socrates weaponized reason and rationality to gain power over his intellectual opponents. So, Nietzsche is suggesting, it wasn't the pursuit of truth that drove Socrates, but the pursuit of power.*

9. Socrates saw through the veneer of aristocratic Athens. He recognized that anarchy and rebellion were in the air, and he knew that he could usher in a new age. Nietzsche recalls the story about Socrates and the face-reader from section three. In a time of social and political upheaval that saw human instinct as "antagonistic," or a threat to law and order, how had Socrates managed to know himself?

Nietzsche argues that Socrates took advantage of an unstable political climate to advance his dialectical method. In 404 B.C.E., not many years before Socrates went on trial for corrupting the youth, Athens had just been defeated by Sparta in the Battle of Aegospotami, and Spartan oligarchs (known as the Thirty Tyrants) held control of the formerly democratic Athens. Though the Athenians eventually managed to overthrow Spartan leadership and regain control, this period of political instability played a role in Socrates's success.

10. In order "to make a tyrant of reason," as Socrates did, an *opposing* threat must also exist. Thus, Nietzsche suggests, Socrates convinced the Greeks that they and their culture would "perish" if they didn't become "absurdly rational." Nietzsche regards the "moralism" and subservience to dialectics of Greek philosophers from Plato onward as "pathologically conditioned." All that "reason = virtue = happiness" means is that people should imitate Socrates instead of their own destructive instincts.

Nietzsche suggests that Socrates convinced the Greeks that "reason" held the key to their survival—that they would go extinct without it. This recalls Nietzsche's earlier claims that the dialectical method is for desperate people who have no other option. Finally, in framing Greek philosophers' embrace of the dialectical method as "pathologically conditioned," Nietzsche suggests that reason's entrance into Western philosophy coincides with a loss of freedom. People didn't originally turn to reason out of a pursuit for pure knowledge—they did so because they felt they had no other choice.

11. Nietzsche explains the error of Socrates's commitment to extreme rationality. He thinks that philosophers and moralists are fooling themselves if they think that condemning decadence allows them to *avoid* decadence. In reality, their disapproval of decadence is itself an act of decadence. Nietzsche thinks that Socrates—and "the entire morality of improvement," which includes Christianity—is a "misunderstanding."

Nietzsche thinks it's an oversimplification to suggest that eliminating instinct automatically eliminates decadence (moral decline). This oversimplified view assumes that human instinct is the only (or most powerful) destructive, degrading force in existence. This view also assumes that moral decline is the worst fate humanity could meet. Nietzsche contends that the extreme commitment to rationality that Socrates forced upon western philosophy only replaced one form of decadence with another.

12. Had Socrates realized his self-deception? After all, he "handed himself the poison cup," which Nietzsche takes as evidence that Socrates recognized his mistakes and wanted to die.

Socrates was famously sentenced to die by drinking poison hemlock after he was charged and found guilty of impiety and corrupting the youth. The day before he was set to die, his followers gave him a chance to escape, but he refused their offer and drank the poison willingly. So, Nietzsche is suggesting that Socrates realized the hollowness of his pursuit of reason and so felt that he deserved to die.

"REASON" IN PHILOSOPHY

1. Nietzsche discusses "the idiosyncrasies of philosophers." One idiosyncrasy is their "Egyptianism." Nietzsche claims that philosophers have killed and degraded the ideas they encounter, turning them into "conceptual mummies." In this way of thinking, all aspects of life—"death, change, age"—become subject to debate. Philosophers these days think everything is "an illusion." They claim that their "senses" deceive them and that it's morally superior to deny the senses and reject the instincts of the body.

Socrates and other ancient Greek philosophers weaponized reason and taught people to doubt their "senses." Because of this, people could no longer rely on sensory experience to navigate reality—this perspective renders human instinct meaningless. Put simply, seeing is no longer believing. When Nietzsche accuses philosophers of "Egyptianism" and turning the ideas they encounter into "conceptual mummies," he's criticizing the way that philosophers continue to uphold and idealize this Socratic, skeptical view of the world. Nobody is thinking anything new anymore, Nietzsche argues—they're just continuing to worship the flawed ideas of the past.

2. For Nietzsche, the philosopher Heraclitus is the worst of his (Heraclitus's) contemporaries. Whereas other philosophers distrusted the senses because they "showed plurality and change," Heraclitus rejected the senses because they configured the world as "possess[ing] duration and unity." But Nietzsche thinks that Heraclitus, his contemporaries, and the Eleatics who came before them are all wrong. Nietzsche argues that the senses don't lie—rather, people insert lies into the senses when they project ideas like "the lie of unity" or "the lie of materiality" onto them.

Nietzsche respects Heraclitus for the reason Heraclitus distrusted the senses: they gave the illusion that the world "possesses duration and unity" when the world is actually subjective and everchanging. Overall, though, Heraclitus and his predecessors (the Eleatics were pre-Socratic philosophers of the ancient Italian Greek colony of Alea) were all wrong for the same overarching reason: they distrusted the senses. Nietzsche thinks the senses never lie—the senses are only misleading because people project flawed ideas onto them. Once more, Nietzsche suggests that instinct is superior to reason.

3. Nietzsche considers the senses, scoffing that no philosopher has ever considered the nose in any of their treatises, despite the fact that it's our most powerful sense. He continues, arguing that we owe all scientific progress to the senses.

Philosophers act as though empiricism and scientific progress are separate from the senses—but Nietzsche argues that this is wrong, because we need our senses to undertake the observation and reflection involved in scientific progress.

4. Another idiosyncrasy of philosophers is "mistaking the last for the first." Nietzsche attacks foundational concepts of philosophy, such as the idea that "that which is, the unconditioned, the good, the true, the perfect" are "*causa sui*" (the cause of themselves). Nietzsche also attacks the idea that God is the first and most real being. Nietzsche thinks these foolish philosophers have harmed society.

*Philosophers and moralizers claim that values and morals are "*causa sui,*" or self-evident. But they fail to recognize that identifying which values or morals are self-evident is an impossible task. People must choose which truths are true, which logical paths to truth are most logical. So, ideals cannot exist independently of human subjectivity and human instinct.*

5. Before, Nietzsche relates, people saw "change, mutation, becoming" as evidence that something had "led [society] astray." Now, society sees reason as an antidote to this disorder. Nietzsche identifies language as the cause of philosophers' misunderstanding of the world. Language makes us see the world in terms of "deed and doer," in the self among the rest of the world—in the ego as being. This causes us to project ego onto everything we engage with in the world. And at some point, philosophers decided that reason couldn't have come from the physical world—that it had to come from a higher place. Nietzsche blames this misguided thinking for the decline of intellectual culture.

Nietzsche suggests that that there was a turning point in history when humanity decided that reason wasn't a fallible, imperfect human phenomenon, but rather something that came from a higher place. We used to be skeptical of reason and inquiry, thinking that "change, mutation, becoming" and interfering in the world's natural order was bad. Then language changed this by teaching people to see themselves as separate from the rest of the world—as "deed and doer" (action and actioner, or object and subject). Once we accept that we are separate from the external world, we must also accept that there are things about the external world that we simply can't know—and that everything we think *we know comes not from the external world but* from within ourselves. *Thus, everything we know about the world is innate, subjective, and biased. The appeal of reason, thus, was that it offered a means for outsider humans to uncover objective, outside—higher—knowledge about the world.*

6. Nietzsche offers four propositions. The first states that the only reality that exists is that which we can discern with our senses. The second proposition states that concepts that past philosophers have labeled "real being" are in fact "non-being." The third proposition holds that it's pointless to consider the existence of "another" or "better" world. And the fourth proposition holds that dividing the world into a "real" and an "apparent" world—as in Christianity or as in Kantian philosophy—is a sign of a "declining life."

With these four propositions, Nietzsche challenges the idea that reason allows for a higher, more truthful understanding of the world. Since we need our senses to apply reason (even empirical, objective research requires sight, hearing, touch, etc.), it's impossible to claim that reason gives us a more truthful understanding of reality than the senses. Using this logic, then, Nietzsche argues that philosophers' idea that "real being" (the reality we discern through reason, not the senses) is in fact no more real than the reality we discern with our senses. And then, because the reality we discern through reason isn't any more truthful or "real" than sensory reality, there simply doesn't exist "another" or "better" or more ideal world (i.e. Heaven). Finally, Nietzsche suggests that prioritizing a "real," idealized world over the "apparent" world (the physical world that we experience with our senses) is bad for society because it encourages people to care more about a hypothetical (and unattainable) reality than the one we actually have to exist in.

HOW THE "REAL WORLD" AT LAST BECAME A MYTH

This section consists of a series of six maxims to summarize how philosophy came to reject the "real world." Maxim #1 states that wise people exist in and are *themselves* the real world (Nietzsche cites Plato's "I, Plato, *am* the truth" as an example of this idea). Maxim #2: the real world exists but is unattainable. Only the wise can hope to one day find it. Maxim #3: because the real world is unattained, people call its existence into question. Maxim #4: the real world ceases to be a relevant concept, and people no longer have a "duty" to attain it. Maxim #6: society abandons the real world and replaces it with the "apparent world." This is where Zarathustra begins.

In this brief section, Nietzsche sketches out the process through which humans went from trusting their senses (knowing that the world they could touch, see, hear, etc. was real and meaningful) to distrusting their senses and giving in to nihilism. Nietzsche is suggesting that intellectual culture (in the western world) has deteriorated ever since Socrates taught people to prioritize reason over human instinct. The final line of this passage alludes to Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, a work of philosophical fiction about Zarathustra, a hermit and prophet who returns to the world to spread the word that God is dead (that humanity is no longer beholden to the old moral system). When Nietzsche states that Zarathustra begins where people have learned to doubt the world as it appears to them, he's saying that contemporary society's skepticism justifies a complete overhaul of the old values.

MORALITY AS ANTI-NATURE

Nietzsche criticizes Christian morality, which calls for the elimination of all passions. He cites the Sermon on the Mount (from the New Testament) as an example of this type of morality (on sexuality, the Sermon states: "'if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out.'"). The Church deals with passions by eliminating or "castrat[ing]" them rather than trying to see the good in them. Nietzsche suggests that attacking passions is "to attack life at its roots," therefore "the practice of the Church is *hostile to life…*"

This section is titled "Morality as Anti-Nature," but Nietzsche's primary target is Christian morality, which condemns passions—human instincts—and tells its followers that they must exterminate passion to live a happy, fulfilled, and virtuous life. Nietzsche thinks Christianity is "hostile to life" because, as Nietzsche has already established, the only life humanity can know is the sensory life. So, by condemning the senses as sinful, the Church is arguing that life itself is sinful.

2. The idea that a person can control their desires by eliminating them completely is for "weak-willed" people who can't practice moderation. The Church holds that people who can't control their desires are "degenerate." And yet, Nietzsche notes (citing as examples the moral views of pleasure held by priests, philosophers, and artists), we may observe that anti-pleasure views come not from "the impotent, nor the ascetics," but from people incapable of controlling their impulses.

Nietzsche also dislikes the Church because it sells humans short—it thinks that they are incapable of moderating their instincts. Nietzsche thinks moralists who preach these claims are projecting their own base instincts—he implies that people who think that all sexuality is bad, for instance, are the ones who have issues controlling their own sexual urges. So Nietzsche condemns the Church not only for its hostility to life, but also for its hypocrisy.

3. Nietzsche defines love as "the spiritualization of sensuality." To Nietzsche, this formulation "is a great triumph over Christianity." Another triumph is "our spiritualization of enmity." Throughout history, the Church has sought to eliminate its enemies (the immoralists and non-Christians, for instance). But there's an advantage to having an enemy: it gives a person meaning and purpose. Life would be boring and pointless if there were no conflict. This type of thinking is relevant to politics, too—there's a "self-preserv[ing]" advantage to having an opposing party. For example, the newly formed Reich needs an enemy to make its existence necessary.

"The spiritualization of sensuality" means to elevate—rather than condemn—sensory experience. This is how humanity can undo the damage the Church has inflicted upon life—how humanity can reattach meaning to life on Earth. The "spiritualization of enmity" gestures toward another of Nietzsche's core ideas: the will to power. Nietzsche thinks humans have an innate drive for power. And having an enemy to fight against in the battle for self-preservation fuels that instinct.

4. Nietzsche argues that "an instinct of life" propels "[a]ll naturalism in morality, that is all *healthy* morality." This natural morality is a positive force driven by the senses—by human instinct. By contrast, "anti-natural morality" (which encompasses nearly all commonly taught views of morality) views human instinct as sinful and ultimately places God as life's enemy.

Nietzsche wants people to abandon the "anti-natural morality" that the Church teaches and replace it with a "natural" morality. It's only through reassigning meaning and value to our sensory experiences that we can make life on Earth—the apparent life, and the only life we can truly know—meaningful.

5. To Nietzsche, Christian morality's hostility toward life is laughable. For in order to say anything about the value of life, a person would need to have lived beyond life—which no living person who makes value judgments about life has done. An anti-nature view of morality (as espoused by Christianity and philosophers like Schopenhauer) that places God in opposition to life values a life that is "declining, debilitated, weary, [and] condemned." In this way, anti-natural morality is "the *instinct of* décadence itself."

Not only is Christianity's hostility to life hypocritical (Christianity pretends to be about life and compassion, yet it condemns life and passion) but it's also totally illogical. In order to make a comparison between the apparent world (earth) and the real/ideal world (Heaven) one would need to have gone to heaven. But no human moralist, theologian, or philosopher has done this, so their value judgements are illegitimate and biased.

6. Nietzsche criticizes moralists' insistence that people conform to a standardized mode of behavior that is unnatural and harmful to life. By contrast, immoralists are more accepting of variable behaviors and belief systems.

Nietzsche upends the conventional understanding that moralists are good and immoralists are bad. In reality, he sees that moralists are far less accepting of life since they have a very narrow, biased view of what kind of life is meaningful and good and a wide view of what kind of life is worthless and bad; by contrast, immoralists are more openminded to different behaviors and experiences.

THE FOUR GREAT ERRORS

Nietzsche proposes four great errors philosophy has made throughout history. The first (and the most dangerous) is "mistaking the consequence for the cause." Nietzsche claims that all rules of religion and morality fall victim to this error, and priests and moralizers are responsible for preaching it. He cites an example from the *Book of Cornaro*, in which Cornaro argues that a "meagre diet" leads to a happy, moral life. But Cornaro mistakes the consequence for the cause, misunderstanding that it was really his slow metabolism that necessitated a meager diet (and thus, what allowed him to live longer).

Moralists like to prove the goodness or rightness of their moral worldview by suggesting that good things (consequence) happen to people who have good morals (cause). But is this so? As an example, Nietzsche cites a book by a 15th-century nobleman named Luigi Cornaro. In his book, Cornaro erroneously claims that a scant diet caused him to live longer; in reality, Cornaro's slow metabolism (and slow-beating heart) meant that he required less food to survive and also meant that he would live a longer life anyway. Nietzsche thinks that the Church, like Cornaro, is using a set of pre-existing conditions to justify a set of actions or moral framework.

Most religious principles hold that if a person does certain things and avoids doing other things, they'll be happy—that happiness comes from virtue. Nietzsche proposes an alternative formula, one that does not mistake consequence for cause. In this alternative formula, virtue comes from happiness. Nietzsche argues that virtuousness is only possible when a person has had a long, happy life. Whereas the Church claims that vice ruins a person, Nietzsche proposes that vice is a *symptom* of ruin and unhappiness. Unhappy people need vice to forget their unhappiness. For example, a young, sickly man's friends might argue that an illness is to blame for his demeanor. And yet, the man only fell sick in the first place because he was impoverished and tired.

Nietzsche further unpacks the Church's error of mistaking cause for consequence. For instance, the Church argues that a person who behaves morally (the cause) will be happy (the consequence). In fact, though, the opposite is more likely true. Nietzsche argues that only people who are already *happy and fulfilled in their lives have the freedom and opportunity to behave virtuously. Likewise, people who resort to acts of violence and criminality aren't ruined because they behaved badly/immorally—rather, these people* have to *resort to violence or crime because their lives are already ruined. They do bad things because they're desperate—not the other way around.*

The second great error is "false causality." People misguidedly believe that they are in control of and can understand why they behave the way they do—that they understand their motives. Today, we understand that the "inner world" is a complicated, mysterious place full of "phantoms and false lights," one of which is the *will*. Today, the will no longer explains behavior. Similarly, we can no longer maintain that "motive" and the "ego" cause or explain behavior. Nietzsche thinks that humanity's belief in the three "inner facts" of *will*, *spirit*, and *ego* have corrupted empiricism. That is, humanity's supposedly empirical, objective understanding of being is in fact the ego projecting itself onto the world.

Nietzsche argues that rationality is more subjective and flawed than the ancient philosophers had once thought: we can never know the full truth of the world, since everything we know is filtered through our subjective ego. Nietzsche blames the error of "false causality" for society's worship of the three "inner facts," the will, the spirit, and the ego. Put simply, Nietzsche thinks that unknowingly projecting the ego onto experience has led people to create the false concepts of being (immaterial existence) and God, for instance.

The third great error is the "error of imaginary causes." Nietzsche offers as an example somebody hearing the sound of a distant cannon shot and constructing a story to explain and give meaning to the sound. But what the person is actually doing is using their *reaction* to the shot to explain its cause. Nietzsche thinks we can blame most physical feelings—"every sort of restraint, pressure, tension, explosion"—for humanity's "cause-creating drive." We want to know why stimuli make us feel the way they do—it's not enough simply to acknowledge that we feel a certain way. In fact, we only become aware of our feelings once we identify a cause for those feelings. And our memories of feelings influence the motivations we assign to new stimuli. In this way, we replace "habituation" with "investigation."

People are so uncomfortable with uncertainty that they look for explanations and construct stories to give events meaning and alleviate that discomfort. They then falsely identify these made-up stories as the causes of those events. Yet again, our sensory experience determines our reality (we respond to the feeling *of discomfort by making up a story to alleviate that discomfort), yet we mistake sensory experience for rationality. Though we might think we are using reason to explain events, we're really just instinctually responding to physical sensation. Instinct fuels humanity's "cause-creating drive."*

Nietzsche defines a "psychological explanation" as a person's efforts to assign a cause to something to comfort themselves and regain a sense of power. When we feel afraid, our instinctual response is to eliminate danger. We think that any explanation—even a false one—is better than none. To alleviate fear, we don't seek out the best explanation, but the explanation that will best assuage our fear. Over time, we get used to accepting this kind of explanation. For instance, the banker always thinks about business, and the Christian always thinks about sin.

For Nietzsche, it all circles back to power. People—and institutions that create and enforce moral codes, like the Church—create moral codes to gain or maintain a sense of power and control. Certain stimuli imperil and discomfort us, and we create explanations to suppress or subdue those stimuli to assuage our fears. These explanations gain traction with repetition, and eventually nobody questions their legitimacy.

All of morality and religion is based on this error of imaginary causes. For instance, morality and religion create imaginary "evil spirits" to explain all manner of "unpleasant general feelings." We create reasons to assign "punishment" to things that morality tells us we shouldn't do. Nietzsche derides Schopenhauer's assertion that we in fact *deserve* every physical or mental discomfort we feel.

Morality and religion assert that people who experience "unpleasant general feelings" must be sinners who invite the attention of "evil spirits." But in fact, morality has only invented the concept of "evil spirits" as an excuse to get people to change their behavior. The idea is that people will stop behaving badly if they think that doing so will bring them closer to God and will bring an end to their suffering.

The fourth great error is "the error of free will." Nietzsche condemns free will as something theologians made up to make people "'accountable'" for their immoral actions and dependent on religion for redemption. Free will also makes people feel guilty.

The Church invents free will to make people feel accountable and guilty for their sins—and dependent on the Church to assuage that guilt.

Nietzsche argues that nobody "gives" us our qualities and behaviors: "not God, not society, not [our] ancestors." Nor is any person accountable for their own actions or existence. Nietzsche derides the idea of "intelligible freedom" put forth by Kant and Plato. People aren't the consequence of "a specific design, a will, a purpose," therefore they ought not be expected to strive to achieve an "ideal of morality" as put forth by religion. We are all part of the greater whole. To judge one person would be to judge the whole, and we can't judge the whole, since "nothing exists apart from the whole." Finally, Nietzsche sees the concept of "God" as "the greatest objection to existence." It's only through denying God that we may redeem the world.

Nietzsche criticizes the notion that people should strive to—or are even able to—understand how and why they do the things they do. Furthermore, the whole idea that any person (i.e., a moralist, theologian, or philosopher) can determine which behaviors are worthy of punishment is illogical, since no individual person can observe and assess "the whole" of existence as an objective and unbiased outsider. Nietzsche sees human existence and behavior as random and uncontrollable—it's not part of "a specific design." As such, there's no "specific" moral framework against which we can objectively judge human behavior.

THE "IMPROVERS" OF MANKIND

1. Nietzsche thinks philosophers should be "*beyond* good and evil." This is in keeping with a formula he created: "that there are no moral facts whatever." Like religion, moral judgment believes in a version of reality that doesn't exist. Both moral and religious judgment mistake interpretation with fact.

*To go "*beyond *good and evil" is to reimagine a world where an overarching system of morality doesn't exist. There's no absolute moral authority to tell us right from wrong, and we have only our instincts to guide us.*

2. Throughout history, society has wanted to "improve" human behavior. But the notion of "improvement" often conceals more nefarious intentions. Nietzsche argues that "taming" or "breeding" are more suitable terms; if one referred to the act of "taming" an animal (which only serves to make it weak and sickly) as "improvement," people would laugh.

Historically (and into Nietzsche's present) society has used morals to "improve" human behavior. But Nietzsche thinks the external goal of "improvement" is simply a front. In reality, society just wants to "tam[e]" and "breed" people to follow a set of rules (morals) and be subservient.

Taming an animal is no different than what priests did to humans in the Middle Ages. Nietzsche relates how the Church hunted down the Teutons to improve them. When an improved Teuton was presented at the monastery, he was "like a caricature of a human being," made into a "'sinner'" and placed in a cage, imprisoned literally and by "terrifying concepts." The Church taught the Teuton to hate himself and life—in other words, they made him a Christian.

The Teutonic Order was a Catholic crusading religious order founded in the 12th century to aid Christian Crusades to the Holy Land. When Nietzsche talks about improved Teutons, then, he's talking about the non-Christian people whom the crusaders converted during Church-sanctioned crusades. Though the Teutonic order claimed that forced conversions would reform and improve the lives of "sinner[s]," these conversions did just the opposite: converts became less—not more—human, and their quality of life deteriorated.

3. Nietzsche considers the second aspect of morality: "the breeding of a definite race and species." The best example of this comes from Indian morality, specifically the "*Law of Manu*," which calls for the breeding of no more than four races: a priestly race, a warrior race, a trading and farming race, and a menial race (the Sudras). The *Law of Manu* also identifies a non-bred human, the Chandala. The *Avadana-Shastra I* holds that these people may receive only garlic and onions to eat (holy scripture forbids them corn, seed-bearing fruits, water, and fire). They can only drink water that comes from swamps or holes made by animals' feet. They're not allowed to wash their clothes or their own bodies, and Sudra women can't help Chandala women with childbirth.

The Laws of Manu *(also known as the Manusmriti or* Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*) is a Hindu text that covers juridical and spiritual matters. It's been used to justify the caste system, as Nietzsche outlines in this passage. Chandala refers to a Hindu lower caste. Nietzsche here evokes the caste system as outlined in the* Laws of Manu *to illustrate how religion uses morality to justify (and directly contribute to) human suffering.*

4. The regulations imposed by the Law of Manu show us that "pure blood" is a destructive concept. He sees this concept repeated in other religions' texts, too, such as an ancient Hebrew text called the Law of Enoch. Nietzsche thinks that Christianity is a clear rejection of the caste system put forth in the Law of Manu—a ""revaluation of all Aryan values," and embrace the Chandala "religion of love."

The Laws of Manu *sought to preserve "pure blood" by forbidding marriage and reproduction among people from different castes. Similar prohibitions exist in the Law of Enoch, and ancient Hebrew religious text. Nietzsche offers a rare moment of appreciation (rather than condemnation) for Christianity, which rejected the dehumanizing fixation with "pure blood."*

5. Creating morality requires a person to have "the unconditional will to the contrary." This idea represents the core of Nietzsche's intellectual pursuits. Nietzsche considers the idea of "*pia fraus*," or pious fraud, noting how many religious teachers and philosophers haven't "ever doubted their right to tell lies." This shows how *immorality* has in fact supported society's quest to moralize humanity.

Nietzsche is arguing that people who construct moral frameworks (such as the Church) enforce morality for immoral ends and by immoral means. For Nietzsche, morality is about power and control—not about improving and giving meaning to life.

WHAT THE GERMANS LACK

1. Today's German people not only have "spirit" but also "the *presumption* to possess it," argues Nietzsche. They have inherited their ancestors' skills, and though they are confident, industrious, and strong, their culture "is not a high culture." Nietzsche argues that power makes one stupid, and this is exactly what has happened to the Germans, who abhor intellect and funnel all their energy into politics.

*Nietzsche's remark about today's German people having "spirit" alludes to Hegel's concept of "*Geist*" or "spirit." Nietzsche sees Germany's cultural influence as less a consequence of a rich, meaningful culture than a side effect of having political power and influence.*

2. Nietzsche mourns what the German spirit could be, were it not so absorbed in politics. He derides Germans for being intellectually lazy and drinking too much beer. He caustically mourns the "degeneration" of David Strauss, "our first German free-thinker," who fell to preaching "ale-house gospel."

For Nietzsche, political power and cultural development are mutually exclusive: a nation that pursues political projects suffers cultural and intellectual decline. Nietzsche will criticize David Strauss later on in greater detail. His main reason for insulting Strauss is that he wrote books that sought to use rationality and historical research to legitimize religion (and religion and the worship of rationality are Nietzsche's two main targets in this book and elsewhere).

3. Nietzsche bemoans what he sees as the "decline" of "German *passion* in spiritual things." In short, German "pathos" is just as threatened as German intellect. German universities bore Nietzsche. For nearly two decades, he blames "the despiritualizing influence of our contemporary scientific pursuits" for the deficit of serious intellectual scholarship and art.

When Nietzsche criticizes contemporary Germany's lack of "passion," he's suggesting that they have sacrificed instinct for rationality and "contemporary scientific pursuits." He sees German culture as a casualty of a morality that values rationality over human instinct.

4. For Nietzsche, the cause of German culture's decline is obvious: he blames Germany's overinvestment in politics, economic affairs, and the military for the degradation of its culture. "Culture and the state," proclaims Nietzsche, "are antagonists." Modernity's notion of a "cultural state" is absurd, and all good art comes out of nations in "political decline." It was Napoleon's pursuits that inspired Goethe, for instance. Today, as Germany's political power increases, France's *cultural output* increases, and all of Germany's serious intellects and artists have fled to France.

Again, for Nietzsche, culture and politics are mutually exclusive. In Nietzsche's contemporary Germany, nationalism had been on the rise ever since the unification of Germany in 1871 following German victory in the Franco-German War. And ever since then, its cultural output has suffered. By contrast, France, which suffered a decisive loss to the Kingdom of Prussia (Prussia would combine with other German nation states to form the unified German Empire) in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, has a comparatively rich intellectual culture.

5. German higher education has lost sight of both "the end, as well as the means to the end." Educators are inferior and need educators themselves. Schools' purpose now is to prepare students for military service. Another reason higher education is failing is because it's no longer reserved for the best students—it's become more democratic. As such, Germans are no longer "free" to give their kids "a noble education."

By all accounts, higher education in Germany in the 19th century was highly regarded for its emphasis on the pursuit of truth and knowledge for its own sake. Nietzsche seems to take issue with the fact that following Germany's unification in 1871, the school system became more centralized and inclusive. Nietzsche has already made it clear that politics and culture are mutually exclusive, so he'll automatically be skeptical of any political/governmental meddling in education.

6. Nietzsche proposes three methods to restore Germany to its formerly noble culture: educators must "learn to see, […] to think, […] and to speak and write." Seeing involves critical thinking: investigating an issue analytically before passing judgment. Learning to see is similar to what society would refer to as having "strong will-power."

Put simply, Nietzsche thinks German culture needs to return to a time when it valued "strong will-power" rather than equality and accessibility. He sees the democratization of the higher education system as indicative of a culture that wants to uplift weak and disadvantaged people—at the expense of strong, smart, and powerful people. And in the end, he believes, this initiative hurts everyone.

7. German higher education no longer understands what it means to think. They no longer teach how thinking takes practice—that it's a learned technique, like dancing. Germans have become clumsy dancers who can no longer dance with "intellectual light feet" and "nuance[]."

Nietzsche uses this dancing metaphor to illustrate how Germany's prioritization of politics and social initiatives have made their culture suffer. As Germany's political presence grows stronger, their cultural muscles grow clumsy from disuse and inexperience.

EXPEDITIONS OF AN UNTIMELY MAN

1. *My impossibles*. Nietzsche derides various philosophers, assigning them scathing and insulting titles. He calls Seneca "the toreador of virtue." He calls Rousseau "the return to nature *in impuris naturalibus*." And so on.

Seneca (c. 4 B.C.E. – 65 C.E.) was a Roman Stoic philosopher. The Stoics believed that virtue is the highest good, and that virtue is based on knowledge and reason. The Stoics also condemned human passions as the effects of poor judgment or moral/intellectual inferiority. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was an important Enlightenment philosopher. In this section, Nietzsche undermines philosophers whose concepts contradict his own. So here, he's attacking philosophers who prioritize reason and virtue over instinct and sensory experience. This sets the stage for the project of "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," the book's longest chapter. Nietzsche is going to attack influential thinkers whose ideas, he feels, have contributed to the degradation of culture in the modern world.

2. *Renan*. Nietzsche attacks the writer Renan, who gets more positive praise than he deserves. Renan aspires to be a serious intellectual, but he is unable to leave Christianity out of his work. Nietzsche compares Renan to a Jesuit or "father confessor," referencing how Renan "becomes dangerous only when he loves." He implies that Renan's work endangers France's "poor, sick, and feeble-willed."

French rationalist writer Ernest Renan was a popular historian of religion. He also held racist and nationalist views. Nietzsche is suggesting that Christianity is what prevents Renan from being a serious scholar and what shapes his more problematic views.

3. *Saint-Beuve*. Nietzsche calls Sainte-Beuve effeminate, a gossip, and accuses him of having no taste. He longs to be a revolutionary but is too constrained by fear. He is "embittered against" great men, and "like the celebrated **worm**, […] constantly feels himself trodden on." He aspires to be a libertine but is too cowardly to admit it.

In his attack on popular literary critic Sainte-Beave, Nietzsche recalls the trodden worm metaphor he first mentions in "Maxims and Arrow." Here, Nietzsche is suggesting that Sainte-Beave's literary scholarship draws on his feeling embittered by writers who are more successful than him, or that his opinions are all reaction and projection.

4. Nietzsche can't stand *The Imitatio Christi*, which reeks of what he calls the "eternal feminine." Its author's views on love would confound even the French, he asserts.

The Imitatio Christi *(The Imitation of Christ) is a Christian devotional book by Thomas à Kempis, published c. 1418-1427. The book argues that Christians should imitate Christ (acting Christlike is a foundational principle of Christianity) inwardly and renounce external vices. The "eternal feminine" is a concept imagined by Goethe in his play Faust. It's the idealization of abstract (stereotypically) feminine qualities. Nietzsche calls on the term here to, in modern (and still sexist) parlance, insult Kempis by calling him effeminate.*

5. *G. Eliot*. Nietzsche sees Eliot's work as indicative of the English move to get rid of "the Christian God" only to hold tightly to Christian morality. Nietzsche thinks this is impossible. Because Christianity is a system, breaking free of one component (God, for example) shatters the entire system. Christianity centers around the idea that humans don't know what's good for them and only makes sense if one assumes the existence of God. For the English to stop believing in God but continue subscribing to Christian values in counterintuitive.

It's illogical to stop believing in God but continue to uphold Christian values, as Nietzsche claims the author George Eliot (and the English as a whole) do. The whole purpose of Christianity is to give moral guidance to people who don't know right from wrong. And in Christian doctrine, God is the only being that can know right from wrong. So, to assess the rightness or wrongness of Christian morals while simultaneously denying the existence of God doesn't make sense, since the morals only hold up if there's a transcendent, infallible God to enforce them. Again, this scenario just illustrates Nietzsche's main point: we can't adapt and amend old idols and moral codes, we have to destroy them and create new ones.

6. *George Sand*. Nietzsche criticizes George Sand. He's read the first *Lettres d'un voyageur* and finds it just as "false, artificial, fustian, [and] exaggerated" as everything else inspired by Rousseau. He also attacks Sand for "coquetting with male mannerisms."

Nietzsche uses stereotypically feminine traits as insults throughout this book, and he also criticizes women who participate in conventionally male spheres. Nietzsche's stance on women is a controversial subject among scholars. Some claim that Nietzsche is only "anti-feminist" rather than an outright misogynist. Others believe his perceived misogyny is merely a rhetorical strategy.

7. *Moral code for psychologists*. Nietzsche attacks psychology's effort to "observe for the sake of observing," which he claims leads to a "false perspective." When we experience things, we can't redirect our gaze back toward ourselves, or else "every glance becomes an 'evil eye.'" Nietzsche compares born psychologists to born painters. Neither actually works "from nature," instead turning to their instinct to inform their painting/observing. They care about "the universal, the conclusion, the outcome" but can't see the "individual case" at hand. Artistic nature "exaggerates, […] distorts, [and] leaves gaps."

Nietzsche sees the error of false causality in the discipline of psychology, too. Psychology purports to be the objective study of the human mind, to "observe for the sake of observing," yet it's impossible to judge the human mind without attaching one's subjective moral perspective onto it. Psychology tries to work "from nature" to discover a "universal" way of understanding the human mind, but Nietzsche thinks this is simply not possible.

8. *Towards a psychology of the artist*. Art can't exist without intoxication, claims Nietzsche. Intoxication can be sexual, but it can also be an intoxication of other strong emotions—of bravery, victory, anger, cruelty. Nietzsche defines intoxication as a state of "feeling of plenitude and increased energy." Intoxication leads to "idealizing," which—contrary to popular belief—isn't about creating a better version of "the petty and secondary." Instead, it's an "expulsion of the principal features."

Nietzsche's argument about the necessity of intoxication in art prioritizes the senses over rationality. Good art isn't the product of deft skill alone—it must come upon the artist in a moment of passion or "increased energy." This section also offers another lens through which to understand "idealizing" and idols. Instead of conventional morality's view of the ideal, which sees the ideal as a perfect (and unattainable) version of reality, Nietzsche sees the ideal as coming from within the artist. Humans shouldn't aspire to ideals—they should create them. Intoxication's role in art also gestures toward Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian impulse, which he will discuss in greater depth later on.

9. Intoxication magnifies the artist's senses, transforming their surroundings to mirror their powerful inner state. Art, then, is a "compulsion to transform into the perfect." An anti-artist, by contrast, "impoverishes and attenuates things and makes them consumptive." These artists replicate existing styles of art—they don't create anything new. As an example of this type of artist—of which there are many throughout history—Nietzsche points to Pascal, a Christian, arguing that one can't be a Christian and an artist because Christians are incapable of celebrating life. By contrast, Raphael, who was not a Christian, was an artist.

Good art expresses the artist's powerful, larger-than-life inner state—the creation of good art is a positive, energizing means through which the artist acts out their will to power, their aspiration to "the perfect," or the ideal. By contrast, anti-art is "consumptive." Making it drains the artist of energy because it's an act of labor, not of vital, life-affirming creation. Nietzsche doesn't think Christians can be artists because he thinks that Christians are too self-effacing and weak to experience the intoxication required to create good art.

10. Nietzsche considers Apollonian and Dionysian, opposing "forms of intoxication" he created and introduced in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Apollonian intoxication—which affects visual artists and poets— involves sight, while Dionysian intoxication involves all the senses and is impossible to resist. The Dionysian is also intuitively wise and aware of their emotions. Music is a kind of art that requires Dionysian intoxication.

Nietzsche adapts the rationality vs. instinct dichotomy to an examination of art. In so doing, he further develops the argument he's been getting at all along: that human instinct is a positive, beautiful, and life-affirming force—not a negative, sinful flaw that we need to transcend through rationality and control.

11. Nietzsche lists actors, mimes, dancers, musicians, and lyric poets among artists whose crafts involve the instincts. These crafts were once one but have become more distinct and specialized over time. The architect, by contrast, is neither Dionysian nor Apollonian. Instead, the "act of will" inspires them. Only the most powerful men have inspired architects, who have historically been inspired by "power." Architecture is a power so mighty it speaks for itself.

With his examination of architecture, Nietzsche draws on another key element of his philosophy: the "act of will" and the will to power. Nietzsche is fairly vague about why architecture is more inspired by "power" than other art forms, but the visual appearance of architecture—the way a building looms over a city and its people—suggests a very literal presence of power in addition to whatever powerful, intoxicating impulses inspired the architect to create in the first place.

12. Nietzsche attacks Thomas Carlyle, referring to him as an "involuntary farce." He claims that Carlyle was both a man who wanted a strong faith and "the feeling of incapacity for it," and in this way he's "a typical Romantic." In fact, wanting a strong faith isn't "proof of a strong faith," but, in fact, the opposite.

Scottish essayist, historian, and philosopher Thomas Carlyle lacked but longed for a strong religious faith. Nietzsche suggests that Carlyle internalized Christianity's self-effacing message without being a Christian. His internalized guilt speaks to the pervasiveness of Christian ideals in the modern world.

13. *Emerson*. Nietzsche argues that Emerson is "happier" and "more refined" than Carlyle. He also has better taste, and his "cheerfulness [...] discourages all earnestness."

American transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson was an avowed individualist; he wrote a famous essay about self-reliance (aptly titled "Self-Reliance). Nietzsche respects him because he's transcended institutions. He trusts his instincts and doesn't need an outside authority to tell him right from wrong.

14. *Anti-Darwin.* Nietzsche challenges the "struggle for life" Darwin outlines in his theory of evolution. Nietzsche argues that this struggle isn't for *life* but for *power*. Nietzsche thinks that it's not the strong who defeat the weak, as Darwin suggests, but the weak who rule the strong. Nietzsche thinks that the weak rule the strong because they outnumber them. He also thinks that the strong suffer (even as they survive) because rote survival doesn't fulfill their innate drive for power and creation. Meanwhile, the weak are content to survive and not aspire to more.

Nietzsche takes issue with Darwin's theory of evolution because it suggests that humans come from animals and, as such, doesn't place humanity and human creation on a pedestal. Nietzsche also prefers a model where human progress is driven by the individual strength and achievement of those who rise above the masses. Darwin's evolutionary theory, by contrast, is purely about survival and says nothing about the human desire to create and exercise power.

15. *Psychologist's casuistry.* Nietzsche compares psychologists to politicians—both desire leverage and power over their patients. This is true even of "impersonal" psychologists, for it's just as bad—worse, even—"to have the right to look down on them" and feel oneself better or superior.

Nietzsche thinks that psychologists analyze patients to feel better about their own mental states. He sees the relationship between doctor and patient as a power struggle—to Nietzsche, the way psychologists assess their patients is analogous to the way moralists and religious leaders judge their followers. Both are based on an arbitrary, subjective standard of behavior.

16. Nietzsche criticizes Germans' "psychological taste." He hates how they've wrongfully elevated the "backdoor philosophy" of Kant.

Nietzsche thinks that 19th-century advancements in psychology (which strove to apply empirical reasoning to the study of human behavior) are flawed in the way they've drawn from Kant. Nietzsche wants us to revere and celebrate human passion, not try to dissect it like it's something we can solve with rational, critical thinking.

17. Nietzsche asserts that "the most spiritual human beings" (who are also "the most courageous") feel tragedy more acutely than others. This is also why they have greater respect for life.

People who feel tragedy more acutely embody Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian impulse. These people accept and revere passions—even negative passions like suffering and tragedy—instead of trying to eliminate them. To deny or condemn any experience or emotion, to Nietzsche, is to condemn life itself.

18. *On the subject of 'intellectual conscience'.* Nietzsche thinks that "genuine hypocrisy" is absent from today's culture. He thinks that hypocrisy arises from "strong belief," which today's people lack. He attributes this to "self-tolerance," which allows people to "possess several convictions," more so than they'd been able to have before. Nietzsche is afraid that contemporary humanity is "too indolent for certain vices," and that humanity will die out as evil (which requires strong will) gives way to virtue.

Nietzsche thinks that "genuine hypocrisy" requires a strong personal conviction. And because nobody today knows how to think for themselves (they see everything through the lens of morality), nobody holds any strong convictions. He also implies that dialectical thinking contributes to people's lack of strong opinions, since dialectics encourages people to consider different perspectives before they commit to one. Nietzsche thinks this gives credence to bad ideas that don't deserve anyone's time of day. Nietzsche prefers moral hypocrites to weak-willed people who consider multiple perspectives.

19. *Beautiful and ugly.* Nietzsche thinks that our attitudes toward beauty are "conditional." There's no such thing as "beautiful in itself," since people judge beauty against "a standard of perfection." They tie beauty to humanity's self-worship, which reflects their instinct for "self-preservation and self-aggrandizement." When humanity basks in beauty, they forget *they* were the ones who created those standards of beauty in the first place.

Like morality, beauty is subjective and "conditional," based on a set of standards that a culture has decided on, but which aren't true in and of themselves. Thus, just like no moral code is true itself, neither is anything "beautiful in itself." So morality and the worship of ideals is at play in our ideas about beauty, too.

20. Nietzsche criticizes the aesthetic view that "only man" is beautiful. As well, aesthetics suggests that "nothing is ugly but *degenerate* man." Humanity tends to associate ugliness with anything that feels dangerous and uncomfortable, and beauty with anything it finds pleasurable. Nietzsche thinks that ugliness inspires hatred because a person equates ugliness with "the *decline of his type*."

This recalls Nietzsche's much earlier remark about anthropologists and criminologists' claim that criminals are often ugly. To revisit this idea in light of Nietzsche's examination of morality, we can claim that it's not that criminals are ugly, it's that society has imagined a correlation between crime and ugliness—two characteristics it associates with degeneracy—that doesn't actually exist. This passage illustrates the idea that Nietzsche put forth in the above passage—that humanity creates a standard of beauty based on its values. So here, Nietzsche argues that moral codes directly influence a culture's standard of beauty.

21. *Schopenhauer.* Nietzsche identifies Schopenhauer as Germany's most recent significant intellectual figure. Still, Nietzsche argues that Schopenhauer misinterpreted every subject he covered, from knowledge, to art, to "the will to truth," to genius. Only Christianity has escaped Schopenhauer's intellectual gaze. Yet Nietzsche also claims that Schopenhauer is merely "the heir of the Christian interpretation," since he took the ideals that Christianity rejected and reinterpreted them through a Christian lens.

As a young philosopher, Nietzsche was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer, though he diverged from Schopenhauer's pessimism as he matured. Nietzsche dislikes Schopenhauer's nihilism, which he considers just as life-devaluing as Christianity.

22. Nietzsche continues his tirade against Schopenhauer. He cites Schopenhauer's "melancholy" take on beauty, which Schopenhauer sees as both a "redeem[ing]" force against the baser instinct of sexuality and "the 'focus of the will.'" Nietzsche heckles Schopenhauer, claiming that the existence of nature, which is full of beauty (and procreation) disproves this assertion. Nietzsche adds that Plato, too, discredits Schopenhauer's claim (Plato argued that beauty encourages procreation).

Society's standard of beauty, which equates beauty with virtue and ugliness with sin, falls apart once a person brings nature into the equation: society thinks that nature is beautiful—yet nature is full of things like procreation and violence, which society claims are immoral and bad.

23. Nietzsche expands on Plato's views on beauty. Plato argued that Platonic philosophy would not exist had Athens "not possessed such beautiful youths." Nietzsche scoffs at this erotic assertion. Still, Nietzsche appreciates Plato's eroticism, for today's philosophy is devoid of the erotic. Nietzsche also argues that dialectics came from Plato's eroticism.

For Nietzsche, Plato's unwillingness to separate his philosophical views on beauty from his "erotic" appreciation for young boys is a thinly veiled attempt to justify his immoral pursuit of the erotic. So, Plato is using reason to suit his personal interests, just as Socrates had before him. Still, Nietzsche prefers Plato's public, honest eroticism to the virtue-driven, anti-passion philosophy that would develop out of Platonic philosophy.

24. *L'art pour l'art*. Nietzsche equates the struggle to find purpose in art with the struggle against moralizing art. Furthermore, Nietzsche claims that the sentiment "art for art's sake" only reaffirms morality's hold on art. To claim that art does nothing if it doesn't moralize is to discount how art praises and glorifies, for instance.

"Art for art's sake" (the idea that art shouldn't moralize or preach—it should only be appreciated for its aesthetic value) was a popular idea when Nietzsche was writing Twilight of the Idols. *Nietzsche disagrees with the sentiment, though, because it suggests that art is useless outside of its ability to moralize. Nietzsche thinks that stirring the human spirit, for instance, is something that art does that's highly valuable.*

Not only is art "the great stimulus to life," art also sheds light on all that is ugly and hard about life. But does this mean that art "suffer[s] from life?" Schopenhauer seemed to think so—he thought that art's purpose was to "liberate from the will." But Nietzsche rejects this "pessimist's perspective" on art and wants the artist more involved in ideas about art.

When Nietzsche calls art "the great stimulus to life," he's referring to the way art stirs the human spirit. His appreciation for art's ability to illuminate life's suffering is important. Unlike morality, which argues that living virtuously eliminates suffering (and thus devalues human suffering—seeks to extinguish it) art sees and elevates human suffering. It gives it value and a voice.

25. Nietzsche argues that "keeping open house in one's heart" is "liberal." For even open houses "capable of noble hospitality" keep certain rooms closed to guests. This is because they have more desirable guests they'd like to invite into those rooms.

Nietzsche seems to imply that there's something disingenuous or performative about modern virtue/generosity. People act like they're helping people for the sake of helping them, but they're really doing so because there's something in it for them—they're not being genuinely altruistic. By extension, then, modern morality, too, is disingenuous and performative.

26. People today don't know how to communicate what they really mean—they've "grown beyond whatever we have words for." Words are for basic ideas and speaking only "vulgarize[s]" the speaker.

Nietzsche argues that the most profound human experiences can't be expressed with language. By extension, there are passions that rationality (language as the rational translation of passion into communicable, understandable terms) can't explain.

27. Nietzsche quotes the opening line of Tamino's aria in *The Magic Flute*: "This picture is enchanting fair!" Then Nietzsche mocks "The literary woman," who anguishes over having to choose between "*aut liberi aut libri*," (freedom or books) and who praises (in French) her own intellectual abilities.

The Magic Flute *is an opera by Mozart. In it, Prince Tamino must rescue Princess Pamina from the high priest Sarastro. In the process, though, Tamino becomes enchanted by Sarastro's high ideals. Nietzsche is mocking Tamino's fascination with these ideals, which he finds "enchanting fair!" Nietzsche also mocks well-read women. He thinks they're vain and self-satisfied. If Nietzsche is otherwise such a proponent of self-reliance, individualism, personal freedom, and noble pursuits, it's unclear why he mocks women for pursuing these things. At any rate, this is more evidence against Nietzsche in the long-winded, controversial debate over his contested misogyny.*

28. *The 'impersonal' take the floor.* People have no trouble "being wise, patient, superior," and sympathetic to the less fortunate. Nietzsche thinks we ought to redirect some of this energy toward the occasional "emotional vice," since this is the only way to overcome "the virtue of the 'impersonal.'"

Nietzsche mocks "impersonal" moralists who claims it's easy to have compassion for the less fortunate—and hard to exercise "emotional vice," so we ought to let loose from time to time and exercise these hard "emotional vices." He thinks these people are just trying to justify their own vices that their own moral frameworks condone. They're acting like it's a chore for them to indulge in vices when really…they want to indulge in vices and just want a logic to justify it.

29. *From a doctorate exam.* In a mock question-and-answer format, Nietzsche argues that the purpose of a higher education is to "turn a man into a machine." Higher education does this by making learning boring and by instilling in students "the concept of duty." Kant's philosophy is most effective at turning students into obedient "civil servants."

Nietzsche thinks higher education has shifted away from knowledge for knowledge's sake and personal fulfilment. Now, knowledge is for a specific end: to "turn a man into a machine." He thinks contemporary society uses education as a tool to push (moral) agendas onto students instead of giving them the noble, intellectual tools they need to think for themselves.

30. *The right to stupidity.* In our "Age of Work," we see the "good-natured" and tired worker in all economic and social classes. Today, the worker intrudes upon our culture's art, too. This "man of the evening" has (in the words of Faust) his "wild instincts lulled to sleep." He likes to vacation at the seaside or Bayreuth. Today, Nietzsche argues (as, he suggests, Wagner knows) that "art has a right to *pure folly*—as a kind of holiday for the spirit, the wits and the heart."

Nietzsche argues that art suffers because the "good-natured" and tired worker only wants to be entertained—to have his "wild instincts lulled to sleep" by art that entertains but doesn't stimulate. Nietzsche makes subtle (and unsubtle) digs at the composer Richard Wagner here—Wagner built an Opera house in Bayreuth (a town in Bavaria) at which to perform his operas. Nietzsche used to be friends with Wagner but cut ties with him in response to Wagner's German nationalist views.

31. *Another problem of diet.* Julius Caesar used "tremendous marches" to protect himself against sickness. To Nietzsche, this is the most ingenious way to protect oneself against ruin.

Nietzsche commends Caesar's marches because he sees suffering and physical endurance as signs of strength and life-affirmation.

32. *The immoralist speaks.* Philosophers are most offended by people who express desire. They like to see people being shrewd and cunning, but they despise it when people stoop to desire. But what's so bad about desire? Why do we need to pretend, absurdly, that desire does not exist?

Nietzsche reaffirms one of the book's most important themes: that desire is a natural part of life, and so when moral codes condemn desire, they also condemn and devalue life.

33. *The natural value of egoism.* Egoism's value varies from person to person. The value of a person's ego depends on whether they have an "ascending or descending line of life," and all people are one or the other. People on an ascending line preserve and advance themselves, which makes their ego valuable. Meanwhile, people on a descending line are sickly and decaying, which makes their ego worthless.

Nietzsche thinks that affirming life and practicing self-preservation is important, but he doesn't think that all lives are equal. In this passage, he explicitly states that only "ascending" lives are worth preserving; degraded, pitiful lives, by contrast, don't advance society in any way and matter less. This logic contributes to Nietzsche's broader dismissal of modern liberalism and democracy. He thinks that such institutions prop up the weak at the expense of the strong and, thus, degrade society.

34. *Christian and anarchist.* Anarchists who demand "'rights'" and "'justice'" are only bitter over their "want of culture." They don't understand why they suffer and feel unfulfilled. They also find value in the "cause-creating drive," since it gives them a reason for their suffering. Whether or not a person complains about themself or others makes little difference (Christians complain about themselves, Socialists complain about others). In either case, the complainer seeks to alleviate suffering with "revenge" instead of "pleasure."

Nietzsche likens anarchists (and socialists) who rally against injustice to Christians. He sees in both groups an aversion to human suffering, though while socialists think that corrupt institutions, for instance, cause suffering, Christians argue that personal sin causes suffering. But in both cases, Nietzsche identifies a resistance to human suffering and, by extension, a devaluation of human life (since suffering is as much a part of life as pleasure).

35. *A criticism of décadence morality.* Nietzsche asserts that "altruistic" morality dampens the ego. To seek out "disinterested" motives is almost decadent. But to not "seek one's own advantage" more accurately points to *not knowing* what one's advantage is. Nietzsche sees this as a "[d]isintegration of the instincts!"

Humankind has an instinctive drive to survival/self-preservation. So, morality's praise of "altruistic" behavior (altruism is "disinterested" or selfless care for the welfare of others)—which explicitly asks people not to act out of self-interest—is a "[d]isintegration of the instincts" and a rejection of life.

36. *A moral code for physicians.* "The invalid is a parasite on society," asserts Nietzsche. Physicians ought to be disgusted by patients who continue to live despite their lives no longer being worth living. The job of physicians is to maintain "ascending life" and "suppress[] […] degenerating life." To Nietzsche, it's more noble to die when it's one's time to die than to prolong the inevitable.

#36 expands on the point Nietzsche makes in #33 about "ascending" egos being worth more than "descending" egos. He thinks doctors should focus on saving only lives that are worth living. One could argue that Nietzsche's point here seems somewhat hypocritical, though—Nietzsche multiple times argues that society should embrace human pain and suffering as important, meaningful elements of life—and that to reject suffering is to reject life.

Nietzsche thinks we need to determine what makes a death "natural" versus "unnatural." We should also stop thinking of suicide as a shameful thing. The only proud, free, and natural death is death by suicide. We might not be able to control the circumstances of our birth, but we can control the circumstances of our death through suicide.

The Church condemns suicide, but Nietzsche embraces it, since dying by suicide is a way that people can exercise control over the trajectory of their lives. He sees suicide as empowering rather than shameful. It's a way people can exercise their natural will to power.

37. *Whether we have grown more moral.* "Moral stupidity" (or just plain morality in Germany) has demonized Nietzsche's concept of "beyond good and evil." His critics accuse him of trying to eradicate "all decent feeling." The backlash has prompted Nietzsche to reflect on the notion that today's moral judgment is the greatest in history. People think society has achieved a new height of morality. But Nietzsche insists that contemporary people's "nerves" couldn't survive under Renaissance circumstances. And this isn't a good thing. Nietzsche thinks our sensitivity has made us weak, not moral.

Nietzsche challenges critics who claim that his immoral position eradicates "all decent feeling." He thinks that life is about more than feeling comfortable—it's about rising to challenges and reaching new creative heights. People who think that today's world is better than the past are prioritizing comfort over greatness, power, and intellectual rigor.

Our loss of "hostility" reflects an inner "decay of *vitality*." To Nietzsche, everyone today is either an "invalid" or a "nurse." What we today call "virtue," men of another time would call "cowardice" or "old woman's morality." Furthermore, equality is not compatible with greatness. A widening of the distance between individuals, classes, and types is one characteristic of a great age. By contrast, becoming more equal reflects a civilization in decline.

Nietzsche thinks humanity has grown too soft and sentimental. This goes against (what Nietzsche sees as) humanity's instinctive drive for power. So, modernity continues to coerce people into suppressing their natural impulses.

38. *My conception of freedom.* A thing's value isn't in what it gives us, but in what it costs us. Nietzsche argues that liberal institutions imperil freedom. They dampen "the will to power" by leveling the playing field. Liberalism makes "*herd animal*[s]" of people. By contrast, freedom is the consequence of the "manly" instincts to war overcoming other instincts, such as the "instinct for 'happiness." A free person has risen beyond the feeble wants of "shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats."

Nietzsche thinks that his contemporary world's emphasis on equality and justice elevate the weak at the expense of the strong. This is bad for humanity in the long-term. He thinks that equality makes herd animal[s]" of people and suppresses humanity's innate drive to rise above the masses and revel in creative power. As he sees it, catering to the masses holds back great people, and great people are the ones who advance society in the long run.

39. *Criticism of modernity.* Democracy is what a society becomes when it lacks "the power to organize." For an institution to exist, it must be "anti-liberal to the point of malice" and possess "the will to tradition, to authority, to centuries-long responsibility, to solidarity between succeeding generations backwards and forwards *in infinitum*." This is the only way a nation can become as great as the Roman Empire.

Nietzsche goes into greater detail about the systemic issues of modern government. He thinks that democracy is not effective because it has abandoned tactics of governance that work. Though much of this book is about breaking from past traditions, there are certain institutions of antiquity, such as the Roman Empire, that Nietzsche thinks modern society should emulate.

It's a critical time for the German Reich. In contemporary Germany, people live in the moment and advance ideas that lead to "dissolution" rather than progress. Marriage used to have a man at the center, which gave it a "centre of gravity." But now that women have more agency, marriage "limps with both legs." Indulging love as part of romance is also destructive. Formerly, the institution of marriage rested on sexual drive and the desire to own property (women and children). Thus, today, marriage is meaningless.

Nietzsche's opposition to equality extends to women's rights, as well. Nietzsche thinks it subverts the natural order of things and offsets the "centre of gravity" for women to have agency in marriage. He thinks that catering to meet the desire of women, who are physically weaker, goes against the will to power. Scholars who defend Nietzsche against claims of misogyny argue that his derogatory remarks about women are only rhetorical.

40. *The labour question.* We can blame the labour question for today's social ills. The contemporary European worker feels comfortable enough to ask questions, which implies that he feels dissatisfied with his current life. This is bad for society. Nietzsche argues that "if one wants slaves, one is a fool if one educates them to be masters."

Nietzsche thinks society is willfully giving too much power to common people, much like Socrates's dialectics gave a platform to common, inferior ideas. Nietzsche sees something self-destructive about giving power to people who shouldn't naturally (in Nietzsche's mind) have it.

41. "Freedom as I do not mean it," begins section 41. Today, Nietzsche argues, one can no longer rely on one's instincts, for the various instincts contradict and confuse one another. Nietzsche argues that the central defining characteristic of modernity is "physiological self-contradiction." Education today encourages people to dampen one instinct to entertain another, and society makes individuals by "pruning" them. But, Nietzsche insists, it takes strength—not suppression—to make an individual.

Today, as in antiquity, people are taught to doubt their convictions. This is a long-term consequence of prioritizing reason over instinct; it's taught people that there is no end to the ways they can undermine and degrade their personal convictions. Nietzsche thinks that self-doubt makes a person—and by extension, society—weak.

42. *Where faith is needed.* Saints and moralists mostly lack integrity. But many people believe the opposite, for "faith is more useful, effective, convincing than *conscious* hypocrisy." Faith works only because its preachers emphasize certain truths while concealing others.

Moralists are hypocritical; they pretend to be virtuous in public, since nobody would follow their teachings if they didn't maintain a pious public image.

43. *In the ear of the Conservatives.* Priests and moralists have long wanted to force society back to a time that enforced "an earlier standard of virtue." Some politicians also want this. But the only direction to move is forward.

People who want to return to an earlier, better time are idolizing the past. While there are certain aspects of antiquity that Nietzsche admires (such as the intellectual culture of ancient Rome) Nietzsche sees the future of society as dependent on progress and creation.

44. *My conception of the genius.* Great men contain "explosive material." Genius happens when great men conserve their energy over time. When the tension inside of them grows too intense, a stimulus sets it off and they release their genius into the world. Nietzsche argues that neither "circumstances," nor "the *Zeitgeist*," nor "public opinion" can stop this eruption.

For Nietzsche, great men aren't part of some big plan—they're not divinely sanctioned or fated to exist during a certain time for a certain purpose. They exist arbitrarily, and they rise above the masses by virtue of their innate power alone.

While the world needs great men, "the epoch" in which great men appear is arbitrary. Nietzsche cites Napoleon as an example of a great man. Revolutionary France, had it the choice, would have created a much different great man than Napoleon. And yet, Napoleon is what it got. The relationship between the genius and their epoch is much like "that between strong and weak." The genius is older than their epoch and more mature. People in contemporary France have an opposite stance on this idea.

Nietzsche sees great men, such as Napoleon, as existing outside of time and circumstances. They are a product of their own vitality and capacity for creation—not a product of circumstance or necessity. For this reason, Nietzsche believes, it's common for the epoch out of which great men arise to misunderstand or undervalue great men.

England, too, has bad ideas about great men. The English think greatness comes from democracy (like Buckle) or from religion (like Carlyle). But Nietzsche argues that society (mainly Christianity and moralists) misunderstand the sacrifices that great human beings make. The great human being doesn't sacrifice himself and demonstrate an "indifference to [his] own interests." Rather, he has a "devotion to an idea," and so "he uses himself up."

Christianity and other systems of conventional morality think that great men make personal sacrifices for the welfare of others—like Christ, for example. But Nietzsche thinks that the opposite is true. The great man isn't "indifferen[t] to [his] own interests." Rather, he cares so much about his interests and creations that "he uses himself up" to propel them into existence.

45. *The criminal and what is related to him.* Nietzsche defines the criminal as a "strong human being under unfavorable conditions, […] being made sick." The criminal needs the freer state one finds in "the wilderness" to recover, for society has rejected his virtues. He must do what he does and likes to do best in secret, and this hurts him. As an example, Nietzsche cites Dostoevsky's surprisingly positive experience living among criminals in Siberia.

While circumstances don't make great men great, circumstances can make great men weak. Here, Nietzsche suggests that "unfavorable conditions" can make an otherwise "strong human being" weak and "sick." This is one consequence of society misunderstanding and rejecting great men. Nietzsche isn't the only 19th-century intellectual figure to think this way—the Russian novelist Dostoevsky, too (who wrote about the time he spent in a Siberian work camp), was sympathetic to the ways that society can deflate and "ma[k]e sick" otherwise great people.

46. *Here is the prospect free.* Nietzsche lists a series of contradictions. For instance, sometimes a silent philosopher is evidence of an inner "loftiness of soul." And sometimes good manners can conceal lies.

This passage recalls #26 of this section, in which Nietzsche argues that the deepest human experiences evade language. He thinks the wisest philosophers are those who know to keep silent about things they don't understand rather than grasp at straws and create shoddy frameworks to explain them (morality being one of these shoddy frameworks).

47. *Beauty no accident.* A people or a race must work for their good fortune—it's not just given. "Good things are costly beyond measure," argues Nietzsche. Maintaining beauty and goodness takes physical effort and involves the body. This is why German culture has failed at this endeavor, and why the Greeks "remain the supreme cultural event of history." Because the Greeks "knew [and] did what needed to be done." Christianity, in contrast, rejects the body.

Nietzsche identifies Christianity's rejection of the physical body as another reason that humanity needs to break its ties to Christian morality. Nietzsche sees human progress and power as inexorably linked with physical strength and vitality. It's not enough to have immaterial strength (virtue)—humanity needs to undergo physical effort to save itself from the ravages of decadence and nihilism.

48. *Progress in my sense.* Nietzsche wants to "return to nature," but his return is a "going-up" rather than a "going-back." Napoleon wanted to return to nature in the way Nietzsche understands it. Rousseau, however, suffered from "unbridled self-contempt" and preached equality—both of which Nietzsche condemns.

Again, Nietzsche emphasizes that humanity will improve by creating and moving forward—not trying to recapture some lost, more virtuous past. We need to break with the old idols and create new ones.

49. *Goethe.* Nietzsche praises Goethe's "grand attempt to overcome the eighteenth century through a return to nature[.]" Goethe has all the "instincts" that Nietzsche values, such as the "anti-historical" instinct and the "idealistic" instinct. Nietzsche considers Goethe's "joyful and trusting fatalism" to be Dionysian, since it's "the highest of all possible faiths."

Goethe was a hugely influential cultural force in Europe. He ushered in a new cultural preoccupation with the senses. His most famous work, the play Faust, sought to synthesize Enlightenment ideals and Romantic ideals. It also grapples with humanity's struggle to find meaning in life and connect with nature—with the broader existing world. These are some of the elements of Goethe's work and intellectual philosophy that Nietzsche is praising when he compliments Goethe's "idealistic" and "anti-historical" instincts as "joyful and trusting fatalism." For Nietzsche, Goethe was so great because he was a freethinker who examined the world as it was and wasn't restrained by morality or ideology.

50. Nietzsche contends that 19th-century society has, to a degree, wanted some of the same things Goethe wanted, such as "universality in the understanding and affirmation," and "reckless realism, reverence for everything factual." How, then, has society become so chaotic and nihilistic? Nietzsche thinks the chaos is the result of society wanting to return to the 18th century.

Goethe was writing during the Enlightenment Era, which wanted to return to the "understanding and affirmation" and "reverence for everything factual" of antiquity (as influenced by Socratic philosophy). But the reason that Goethe was great and wrote works that celebrated life and passion and sought to find meaning (while today's society is chaotic and nihilistic) is that Goethe was interesting in understanding and giving meaning to human pursuits. Today's society, on the other hand, is driven by these same things because they want to return to the past. This divide hearkens back Nietzsche's earlier praise for Goethe's "anti-historical" impulse.

51. In response to people who have asked Nietzsche why he writes in German if nobody reads him there anyway, Nietzsche jokes that nobody even knows if he wants to be read in the first place.

Nietzsche ends a long section of scathing critiques of culture and its ambassadors with a tongue-in-cheek nod to criticism directed toward his own work. It's played for comedic effect and demonstrates Nietzsche's use of style and literary elements in his writing.

WHAT I OWE TO THE ANCIENTS

1. Nietzsche hopes his new ideas will lead society to "the ancient world[.]" In his writing, readers might recognize "a very serious ambition for Roman style," and Nietzsche himself experienced this the first time he read Horace.

Nietzsche wants his ideas about embracing life and the senses to encourage people to return to a time in antiquity before Socrates made philosophy center around rationality. He thinks ancient Roman philosophers and poets like Horace offer a better alternative model around which to design a new set of values.

2. For Nietzsche, the Greeks simply can't compete with the Romans. We can't "learn from the Greeks," for their ways are "too strange," and they don't know how to write. Nietzsche can't bring himself to admire Plato the way most scholars do, and he calls Platonic dialogue a "frightfully self-satisfied and childish kind of dialectics." Nietzsche also thinks Plato has strayed so far from Hellenic instinct that he became a precursor to Christianity. Nietzsche blames Plato's focus on "the good" for western philosophy's destructive fixation on the "'ideal.'"

Nietzsche reinforces his disdain for the ancient Greeks and their fixation on reason. He insults and demeans Platonic dialogue by calling it "frightfully-self-satisfied and childish," both for comedic effect and to drive home his point. Formally, he's also tying up loose ends here by bringing the focus back to the breakdown of ancient Greek philosophy he began with.

3. Nietzsche sees Greek philosophy as consumed by the desire to protect the self from "the *explosive material* within them." But this "internal tension" exploded nonetheless, resulting in warring city states. People needed to be physically fit to protect themselves—they weren't that way naturally—and so, explains Nietzsche, "It was produced, it was not there from the beginning." And this necessity to be strong shifted art's purpose—the Greeks began to use art to "feel [...] dominant," and, this led to cultural decline. They then turned to Socratic philosophy to regain their lost virtue.

Nietzsche thinks that the desire to repress human instinct ("the explosive material within") is the foundation of ancient Greek philosophy. In this way, Greek philosophy (and the moral frameworks it inspired) is based on a desire to control and subdue human vitality. When philosophy/morality couldn't subdue human instinct and violence broke out nonetheless, people's concerns shifted away from art and toward self-preservation. So in this way, ancient Greek philosophy is both the cause and the consequence of cultural decline.

4. Nietzsche was the first person to suggest that Dionysus could explain "the older Hellenic instinct," which is today conceivable only as an "*excess* of energy." Any serious scholar of the Greeks will know that Dionysus is a figure who deserves serious scholarship. Lesser scholars dismiss Dionysus as a foolish character associated with orgies, drunkenness, and pagan spring festivals. Lobeck claims the Greeks worshipped him because they had nothing better to do. Nietzsche sees things differently, recognizing in Dionysus "the fundamental fact of the Hellenic instinct," which is its "will to life." Dionysus celebrates the sensuality that Christianity rejects.

Nietzsche examines the Dionysian "Hellenic instinct" in his The Birth of Tragedy. *The book explores how classical Athenian tragedy transcends life's meaninglessness. With the Greek tragic form as a starting point, Nietzsche examines an intellectual binary between the Dionysian and the Apollonian forces (Dionysian represents abstract forces while Apollonian represents ordered forces). In the context of* Twilight of the Idols, *the Dionysian force represents natural, unordered human instinct. This is why Nietzsche thinks that the "Hellenic instinct" (Greek culture prior to Socrates) captures a "will to life" that the culture has since lost (and which modern Christianity rejects).*

5. Understanding the orgy as "an overflowing feeling of life and energy" (even negative types of energy like "pain") that is central to "the concept of the tragic feeling" is something Aristotle could not grasp. Unlike the Hellenes (as Schopenhauer sees them), who see tragedy pessimistically, Nietzsche sees all intense feeling (even suffering) as an affirmation of life. For Nietzsche, the Dionysian is all about recognizing "in oneself the external joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses joy in destruction."

Nietzsche praises Greek tragedy for the way it saw "tragic feeling" (suffering and passion)—as life-affirming rather than evidence of life's meaninglessness. Where the ancient Greeks beautified passion and suffering, modern moralists, philosophers, and theologians reject passion and suffering.

THE HAMMER SPEAKS

In this closing section, the charcoal asks the diamond why it's so hard and the coal why it's so soft—after all, diamonds and coal are closely related. Speaking as the **hammer**, Nietzsche asks his audience why they are "so soft." Why have they abandoned faith and fallen into a state of distress and uncertainty? He urges the reader to "become hard," or else they won't be able to "create" with him.

Nietzsche adapts this final section's premise from his book Thus Spoke Zarathustra. *In Book III of* Zarathustra, *"Of Old and New Law-Tables," Zarathustra tries to create a new value system that can replace traditional value systems, and he determines that the creator of new values must destroy the old to "create" the new. In* Zarathustra *and here, as well, Nietzsche is urging his audience to reject the traditional morality that has made them "soft" and subservient and "become hard" and strong to "create" a new value system that affirms life and human passions.*

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