

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIETZSCHE AS THE BASIS FOR THE WORLD VIEW IN GERMANY
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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The article shows that *Nietzsche doubted the goodness of the good and claimed that with the help of the good words the rulers distinguished themselves from the ordinary people, who were called bad. Nietzsche's idea became the basis of the world view of many political leaders in Germany before the Second World War.*

«A philosopher is a terrible explosive from which nothing is safe» – that is one of the famous statements of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844– 1900). He had no intention of offering his readers a comfortable experience, and his contemporaries defended themselves by just not reading him. But soon after his death the tide began to turn, and he became a major-influence on twentieth-century thought, especially on the European continent, and the more so in Germany before the Second World War.

We should not miss the first sentence of Nietzsche's «The Genealogy of Morals» (1887), where the author says, that we know little about ourselves. It is really true. A huge change in European thought is under way. As a teenager, the future philosopher was struck by skepticism and mistrust towards the intellectual diet that his seniors were feeding him. For Nietzsche it was the moral values of nineteenth-century Christianity. Nietzsche reckoned it was time for some questions about value of these «values».

Nietzsche's method was to ask about their history, their pedigree, what he called their «genealogy». Where had they come from, how had people come to hold them? Why had they come to hold them, or in other words: what were these values doing for the people whose values they became?

Many believed, and some still do, that moral values were of similar origin: handed down to human beings direct from God. Nietzsche, who in spite of his clerical home background once described himself as an atheist by instinct, had no interest whatever in that story. He sought the origin of human values in human needs and human psychology. But he wasn't the first to do so. In fact, it was already a tradition of it, and Nietzsche took its central thesis: when humans found certain types of behavior advantageous to them and the smooth running of their society, they called them «good». Where they found them disadvantageous, the reverse.

On the face of it that sounds quite plausible: a society reinforces what is beneficial to it. But Nietzsche regarded it as sentimental, unhistorical claptrap. Drawing on his expert knowledge of ancient languages he told a very different tale. Far from its being those who received benefits from the behavior of others who then called those others «good». It was the upper classes, the aristocracy, the nobility, the rulers of ancient societies who first called themselves good and the ordinary people, the slaves, the subject population, bad. Early good/bad distinctions are perhaps better understood as distinctions between «noble» and «base», free and enslaved, leaders and the led, the washed and the unwashed. They were the words in which the top dogs celebrated themselves, their strength, and their own way of life, and expressed the extent of the gap that they felt between themselves and the weak, impoverished, servile masses.

So this value-system was not God-given, and it was not the outcome of some intuitive perception of its truth, or intrinsic «rightness». It was a vengeful, retaliatory device, born of the weak's resentment of the strong. All that commitment to charity, compassion, and love was actually fuelled by hate. This kind of thought is entirely typical of Nietzsche, who loved to stand popular conceptions on their head.

The German ideology before the war loved that too. No wonder German political leaders reinforced their statements with quotations from Nietzsche. But Nietzsche was wrong, that is why his teaching didn't help to justify the world view of the German officials which they had before the Second World War.