

# **Nietzsche's Ethico-Political Thought for Posterity**

By

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# List of Abbreviations

## Works by Nietzsche

The works Nietzsche himself published are cited using the following abbreviations: Roman numerals refer to major parts of the works, and Arabic numerals refer to sections.

AC	The Anti-Christ
BGE	Beyond Good and Evil
BT	The Birth of Tragedy
CW	Case of Wagner
D	Daybreak
EH	Ecce Homo
GM	On the Genealogy of Morals
GS	Gay Science
HAH	Human All Too Human
TI	Twilight of the Idols
UM	Untimely Meditations
Z	Thus Spoke Zarathustra
W	Wanderer and his Shadow
UH	Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life
TL	Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.

# Introduction:

## For the Birth of a Post-Enlightenment Existence

Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900), one of the greatest philosophers of modern times, was not adequately read, grasped, known, recognized, or respected during his lifetime, primarily due to the unconventional nature of the thoughts he proposed. The titles he has given to his works, such as *Thoughts out of Season* (*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*) and *Twilight of the Idols* (*Götzen-Dämmerung*), suggest that he intended his thoughts to be a toolbox applicable only in a future world. Some of his important works were published only posthumously. Even the works published during his lifetime were not recognized by the contemporary scholars of his time. This was because Nietzsche's views were not in line with the intellectual climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nietzsche's thought began to get widespread appeal mainly by the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of modernist thinking guided by the spirit of the Enlightenment tradition. People of the nineteenth century were not mature enough to accept someone like Nietzsche, who called into question its fundamental ideals of humanism, equality, rationalism, science, progress, nationality, democracy, and moral living. His project aimed to end the ethos of enlightenment-modernity by creating a rupture in it. He sought to inaugurate a new age for Europe, one that was entirely dependent on the persuasion of new goals for humanity. An ethico-political thought different from the existing ethical theories and political ideals was necessary for that. Indeed, Nietzsche has not developed any specific ethico-political theories toward this end. He had not even attempted to develop a well-developed systematic thought as part of his project. His aphoristic style presents a multiplicity of scattered reflections on the working of morality, ethics, culture, and political processes in the present human age. We gain valuable insights into

how they shaped modern civilization and how they must be reinterpreted to sustain a healthy culture in the future. This book is an expedition through his corpus to decipher an ethico-political thought from his writings, which posterity can consider for rebuilding their lives.

He finds that the existing age is a continuation of the Christian-Platonic tradition, which has already worn out and lost its potency to sustain a healthy civilization. Christianity and Judaism played a significant role in shaping modern civilization by replacing the classical Greek culture, which was rooted in myths, arts, and beauty<sup>1</sup>. The lives of the people of Greek antiquity were enmeshed in an aesthetic outlook than guided by moral or religious perceptions. Nietzsche considered it a glorious period in history, but a fall from that occurred with the dethroning of aesthetic existence by Christian morality and Socratic conceptual thinking. This is seen as a turning point in history by Nietzsche, and the new civilization brought about by the Christian-Platonic tradition thereafter continues as the enlightenment-modernity of our present. Nietzsche perceived it as a rupture in history brought about by slave morality, which propagated resentment, guilt, and asceticism among people under the leadership of Christianity, intended to overthrow Greek antiquity and establish the world in the interest of weak and incapable people. For the emergence of a new civilization, a rupture in the present is necessary. Nietzsche, the Antichrist, sought to bring about a shift in history, much like Christ had done two thousand years prior. He believed that he was undertaking a similar mission and destiny in modern times through his thoughts and life, by which he hoped to "break the history of mankind in two. One lives before him, or one lives after him".<sup>2</sup> The purpose of it was to inau-

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1969) "On the Genealogy of Morals" in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans, Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 16. Henceforth cited as GM followed by Roman numerical that refer to the essay and Arabic numerical for aphorism number.

<sup>2</sup> EH, Why I am a Destiny, 8, (Nietzsche, F. (1969). "Ecce Homo, How One Becomes What One Is" in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York), Henceforth cited as EH followed by the essay and aphorism numbers.

gurate a new era for future humanity, one that would be free of resentment and guilt. This venture of Nietzsche must be perceived as an attempt to establish a new ethico-political thought for posterity to adopt.

He did not view world history in the Hegelian model<sup>3</sup> as progress from a lower level to a higher one, bringing newer ages as time passes. His vision of time, expressed in the concept of 'eternal recurrence,' envisioned a repetitive temporality through which he sought to explain that history unfolds through ruptures, accidents, and reversals. Its movement is cyclical rather than linear, which is against the Enlightenment tradition's proposal of continuous development of things and events in history. His concept of eternal recurrence rejects the notion of historical progression, and in its place, he proposes the possibility of repeating the same events and ages that have existed previously. For him, it is the will to power of the agents who participate in history-building activity which is a significant determinant in the formation of events and ages. He holds that the highest cultural stage of human existence flourished during the ancient Greek period, when people perceived the entire world as a beautiful entity.<sup>4</sup> He hoped to achieve the same in the future, so he trained his guns against whatever was hailed as excellent by the modern world.

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<sup>3</sup> Though Hegel is one of the chief architects of the view of world history as a linear progress, this approach to world history and time become the theoretical position of the sciences of enlightenment-modernity tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, F (1967) "The Birth of Tragedy" in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York). Henceforth cited as BT followed by Arabic numerical for aphorism number. Nietzsche in BT sets ancient Greek culture as the model to be followed by present humanity for a revival of their lives by cultivating an aesthetic attitude to existence. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) one of the founders of modern archaeology and art history has assessed ancient Greek art and culture achieved an ideal balance of beauty, harmony, and proportion in their art and architecture. Hegel also viewed Classical Greek civilization as aesthetic where art and beauty were central to their understanding of the world though he did not recognise it as a higher stage of the development of *Geist*. See Hegel, G.W.F (1978), *Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. I, Oxford University Press, pp. 427-516.

Nietzsche saw the Enlightenment ideals as shallow, hollow, and superficial. His comments on German literature, music, and culture contradicted the existing notions about them. The artists and writers of those days, driven by romantic sensibility, took Nietzsche's classical ideals as erroneous. What made it different from the prevalent views was that Nietzsche's observations were a manifestation of an entirely different realm of understanding, which academic scholars often characterised as postmodern sensibility. Nevertheless, when Nietzsche was propounding his ideas at that time, its distinctiveness was not recognized by the intellectual strata of that period. Nietzsche's writings represented the sensibility of an era which is yet to come into being. After his lifetime, many of the prophetic pronouncements he made about his century and the subsequent century have become realities. Many of the things that Nietzsche's prophetic voice proclaimed about the twentieth century have been fulfilled. The twentieth century was a time that was devastated by two world wars, valuelessness, and meaninglessness and this period had witnessed the rise of fascism, mass massacre, ecological degradation, and terroristic attacks. Everywhere, there was a loss of faith in human goodness and reason. Such events were characterised by Nietzsche's as symptoms of nihilism, which has foreshadowed in his pronouncement that nihilism stands at the door<sup>5</sup> and in the warning that the future could descend into a period of meaninglessness, a period of profound crisis for values, leaving humanity without a clear sense of purpose or meaning.

Nietzsche's thought was highly influential in the development of many twentieth-century philosophical thought traditions. Existentialism of Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus; poststructural thinking of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze; Psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan; French

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, F (1968) *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, New York, 1. Henceforth cited as WP followed by Arabic numerals that refer to sections and not page numbers.



feminism of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler are some of the prominent intellectual movements that attempted to bring about a change in the existing episteme prevailed in the modernity. Therefore, it is quite expected that they all have followed Nietzsche's legacy. What united all of them was their suspicious approach towards the promises of enlightenment and modernity, such as its view of human progress through the development of reason.

Though there is no unified thought in Nietzsche, his rejection of modern values as decadent and his call to create a new age are the major underlying themes of most of his works. From his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, to his last work, *Ecce Homo*, one can see a gradual evolution of thought process. The high romantic idealism of *The Birth of Tragedy*, written under the influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner, gives way to a rational analysis of the world and history in the subsequent major work *Human All Too Human*. Regarding *Gay Science*, one can see Nietzsche as a practitioner of a classical style of criticism free from scientific reasoning. Then in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we will hear the prophetic voice proclaiming the realities of the future of humanity. In it, we meet an entirely different Nietzsche who, for the first time, presents his notion of the world process in the theory of 'eternal recurrence'. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Anti-Christ*, which are the works Nietzsche wrote subsequently, are considered his most mature works. They present a genealogy that explores how moral notions such as justice, good and evil, and right and wrong are evolved. Genealogy also exposes that there is no essential human nature, which varies in various epochs. Later, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Will to Power* are the outcomes of Nietzsche's efforts to harmonise and systematically present his diverse thoughts. Nietzsche hoped that he could systematically present the totality of his thoughts in a final work called 'The Will to Power'. He believed that everything written so far would be just an introduction to this work.

Nevertheless, it was never completed. The last work, *Ecce Homo*, is an intellectual and philosophical autobiography. Some scholars perceive Nietzsche's central thoughts as being reflected in the notes he wrote in the last two years before he succumbed to insanity rather than in his published works. They were later posthumously published under the title *Nachlass*.

The first voice of rebellion against the European Enlightenment tradition came from Nietzsche. Nietzsche was born into a period in history where the prevailing viewpoint was one that favoured the centrality of reason in human life. This stance, which originated with the Renaissance movement, reached its full consummation in the modernist philosophies of Descartes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, and Hegel, the influential thinkers of that era. The driving force behind the Enlightenment movement was the hope that a higher culture of peace, happiness, and prosperity could be established in the world if human beings used reason as the guide for action in all spheres of their lives. While enlightenment modernity went on with its claim that everything would be safe in such a world order, no thinker dared to observe that modern human civilization was utterly anti-life, superficial, and hollow until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Nietzsche, however, the higher ideals of modernity were merely a repetition of Christianity and Platonic thought, which had already begun to decay. Nietzsche sought to put an end to those decadent ideals with the famous proclamation, "God is dead".<sup>6</sup> It was a metaphorical statement to indicate the disappearance of belief in God and metaphysical truths from the minds of men. Nietzsche declared that all ideas of modernity, which were founded on the basis of transcendental realities, were shaken by the loss of faith in religion, symbolized through the statement 'god is dead'. He added more fuel to it and paved the way for shattering all

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<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche F (1974) *The Gay Science*, trans. By Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 125. Henceforth cited as GS followed by Arabic numerical for aphorism number.

beliefs and values that have been considered sacred and unquestionable so far. He exposed the hollowness of conceptions such as God, honesty, sociality, brotherhood, equality, and humility. He intended to expose the power interests that work behind these ideals. These values gave rise to the historical condition of modernity that needed to be broken. He said we stand in the twilight zone of modernity that is awaiting its extinction very soon. The new sensibility he wanted to propagate in the aftermath of modernity's disappearance is what we now characterise as the post-modern. For a new world order rooted in this-worldly truths to emerge, the old ones had to be buried. Due to Nietzsche's that stance, many portrayed him as a Nihilist who opposes all values and truths. However, considering Nietzsche to be a nihilist would be a grave mistake and misjudgement. Unlike a nihilist who eliminates everything, his opposition was only to religiously rooted values and truths. He wanted to see new values emerging for a new age that had yet to be downed. The kind of life Nietzsche led was highly influential in inspiring a thought in him that sought to critique the values and truths proposed by the Enlightenment and modernity.

Fritz (Friedrich Nietzsche), who was born in the village of Rocken, in the old Prussian state of Germany on October 15, 1844, lost his sick father early at the age of four. As a result, his upbringing in his maternal ancestral home, where he was solely in the company of women, including his grandmother and her two sisters, his mother, and his sister, played a prominent role in shaping his attitude towards women and feminine ideals. This is observed to be one of the reasons why some derogatory comments about women were frequent in Nietzsche's works. This has led Nietzsche to be known as a misogynist for a long time, until recently, when many women philosophers have recognized his philosophy as a useful one for feminist thought.

After graduating in 1864 with a thesis on German poets, Nietzsche, in an attempt to follow the religious footsteps of his father, joined the University of Bonn to study theology. At this time, Nietzsche came

under the influence of the German epic poet Friedrich Hölderlin, whose works had left a lasting impression and inspired a new vision in him. That led to the uprooting of the Christian faith that had been ingrained in him since childhood and the discovery of a new worldly religion. What made Nietzsche unattractive to Christianity was the fact that Christianity concealed the divinity of this world, advancing a concept of God that transcended this sensual world. In contrast, Hölderlin's poems shed light on an 'immanent' divinity that sees sacredness in every object of this world. Thus, Nietzsche received a new world outlook from Hölderlin, which was the dawn of a new religiosity in him. This was a purely mundane religiosity, which was visible later in his conception of 'eternal recurrence' and aesthetic ideal.

After losing his Christian faith, Nietzsche left theology to study philology at the University of Leipzig. During this time, Nietzsche could read and understand in-depth all the important works of ancient Greek culture. That led to the formation of a worldview in Nietzsche based on the Greek aesthetic approach. This worldview later formed the basis of all of Nietzsche's critiques of modernity. He also had the occasion in Leipzig to read "*The World as Will and Representation*" by Arthur Schopenhauer, which created a lasting impact and a significant turning point in Nietzsche's intellectual life. He became enchanted and obsessed with the magic of Schopenhauer's thought, and wrote that it gave him a second birth. That led Nietzsche to believe that a life rooted in music, literature, and the arts shall be the central ideals of humankind. He believed they only have the potential to deliver humanity from the meaninglessness created by the triad of nihilism, namely resentment<sup>7</sup>, guilt, and ascetic life denial under their grip,

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<sup>7</sup> Ressentiment is a French word used by Nietzsche, which is somewhat equivalent to the English word resentment. However, while resentment is a short-lived feeling of bitterness, ressentiment is a more lasting, unconscious, and self-poisoning attitude. It refers to a deep-seated discontentment that arises when a person feels powerless to act upon their feelings of inferiority.

modern humanity continuously remains in illness. He knew it was his responsibility to produce an ethico-political thought that enables future generations to overcome the nihilism created by the Christian-Platonic tradition for the past two millennia.

The city of Leipzig, which has produced many geniuses of world music, including Johann Sebastian Bach, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Richard Wagner, was also a cultural center of Germany at that time. The evenings of Leipzig, filled with musical concerts, gave wings to the musical genius that lurked within Nietzsche. In addition to forming a music-centric philosophy in him, it also made him a musician of good calibre. Nietzsche composed forty-three tracks and performed them on different occasions. Among them, “A Hymn to Life” and “A Hymn to Friendship” are noteworthy pieces

After being recognized as a brilliant student, in 1869, Nietzsche was appointed chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel. It is noteworthy that Nietzsche never received any formal training or earned a degree in philosophy. He was only twenty-four years old when he received his honorary doctoral degree from the University of Basel, which was awarded to him without needing any dissertation. In addition to teaching in Basel, Nietzsche was responsible for delivering lectures outside the university circle to the public. That initiative was undertaken by his university, aimed at disseminating knowledge to the public and thereby enhancing the university’s prestige. It has been observed that many of the philosophical insights in Nietzsche’s future writings were seeded in these public discourses by Nietzsche.<sup>8</sup>

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 erupted during his teaching period in Basel. Inspired by patriotism, Nietzsche set out to participate in military service. His request to the university to allow him to join the

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<sup>8</sup> Julian Young (2010) *Friedrich Nietzsche, A Philosophical Biography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Prussian army as a soldier or health worker was granted. However, Nietzsche, who witnessed the horrific violence on the battlefield, was physically and mentally exhausted. War created a significant impact on his intellectual outlook. The first-hand experience of brutality and suffering he got from the war led him to become deeply critical of nationalism, militarism, and the glorification of the state. The destructive tendencies of human nature, revealed in war, later led to his critiques of nihilistic forms of the will to power, such as hatred and domination of one person over another. It also contributed to his growing skepticism about the idea of progress and the inherent goodness of human nature, as claimed by Enlightenment thinking. His skepticism toward traditional moral values, particularly those rooted in Christianity, led him to question the very foundations of morality. Ending his military service, he returned to academia, which enabled him to fully immerse himself in intellectual work, helping him slowly erase the deep scars of war from his mind.

At this time, Nietzsche befriended Richard Wagner, the world-renowned composer whose music and thought had been influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy. In addition to being fascinated by Wagner's musical works, Wagner's deep interest in Schopenhauer's philosophy also led to Nietzsche's admiration for Wagner. Nietzsche became a regular visitor to Wagner's Tribstern home during the Basel holidays. Wagner's wife, Cosima, was the daughter of the famous German musician Franz Liszt. Cosima was a lady in whom beauty, intellectual talent, and cultural wisdom amalgamated. Art, literature, and culture were the primary topics of discussion among the three of them during those meetings.

Like Nietzsche, Wagner was a fierce critic of modernity. The boredom of life resulted by indulgence in shallow pleasures of consumerism, the democratisation of taste in a superfluous way due to the mechanical reproduction of works of art, overburdening of human consciousness

by the large-scale manufacturing of unnecessary information by the media, and people's withdrawal into their own self-centric interests due to greed for money and power were some of the major maladies sensed by Wagner in modernity. Wagner argued that only through the revival of the great arts, especially music, could humanity transcend the obsolescence of modernity and create a vibrant cultural atmosphere. Like Wagner, Nietzsche also endorsed Schopenhauer's vision of human salvation through music. Wagner presented his compositions as part of such a project. At that time, Nietzsche believed that it was through Wagner's music that the lost classical Greek aesthetic culture could be rejuvenated in modern times.<sup>9</sup>

One of the main concerns of both Wagner and Nietzsche was how to bring about a rebirth of the decaying modern European culture by reviving the spirit of music. They both considered Schopenhauer's philosophy as the guiding ideology and source for executing such a project. Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, attempted to re-interpret Greek tragedies through Schopenhauer's perspective on music and art. Wagner's music also inspired Nietzsche to compose this work. In that work, Nietzsche argued that the resurrection of the aesthetic life of the ancient Greeks could be accomplished in modern times through Wagner's operas. Nietzsche hoped that Wagner's symphonies would bring about a renaissance in German culture.

The central theme of this book was how the ancient Greeks, through their works of art, could overcome the devastation caused by the ever-changing nature of the world.<sup>10</sup> An ever-changing world has the potential to destroy man's life by taking away the soil from his

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<sup>9</sup> Later, with the development of his own philosophy, Nietzsche began to criticise Wagner as a man of decadence, his music shallow romanticism and his thought equivalent to otherworldly religiosity. See CW 5.

<sup>10</sup> Perpetual changing nature of the world is articulated by Nietzsche in his theory of becoming, as did by Heraclitus in Greek philosophy.

feet, leaving him to tragic situations. The Greeks could overcome this and celebrate their lives by creating works of art instead of resigning themselves to life in the face of the terror and horror of existence. They were not ready to run away from actions by giving up their lives in the face of tragedy. Abandoning the stereotypical way of viewing Greek tragedies as songs of sorrow, Nietzsche saw Greek tragedies as a celebration of life at the abyss of destruction.

Nietzsche's close friendship with Wagner helped him to deepen his aesthetic worldview. The thirteen works Nietzsche wrote before his collapse into insanity in 1889 carried the rhythm of Dionysian dance steps and the ripples of the Wagnerian symphony. Those works remain as poetic marvels in the history of German prose. Works that combine the magic of poetic language with the rationality of philosophy are generally rare in the history of world philosophy. A review of the works of some of the world's foremost philosophers reveals that most were written in dry language, intended to convey knowledge through rational thought. We read them just because of the depth of their thinking rather than due to the sublime nature of their language. Nietzsche's writings remain an exception in this regard. Nietzsche, instead, created movements in philosophical language similar to those produced in dance and music by the artists. '*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*' is such a work by Nietzsche that creates movement with language, and it shall be read as if watching and listening to a play.

He and Cosima became close friends during Nietzsche's association with Wagner's family. Nietzsche's relationship with Cosima was complex, marked by a blend of admiration, friendship, and eventual disillusionment. It is observed that throughout his life, Nietzsche had been tormented by an unrequited love for the intellectual close friendship he had formed with her, who was almost the same age. The bitter experience of his unrequited feelings for Cosima led Nietzsche to become increasingly critical of romanticism and idealism, viewing



these as forms of escapism that prevent individuals from confronting the harsh realities of life. Instead of succumbing to them, it taught him how to transform despair or resentment into sources of strength and creativity as reflected in the life-affirming thought of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

The inspiration Nietzsche derived from Schopenhauer's thought brought him closer to the realm of philosophy, thereby gradually developing apathy towards philology<sup>11</sup>. Nietzsche did not find any great merit in advancing himself as a professor of philology. He wanted to write explosive philosophical books that would help express his original thoughts. This interest has grown intensely in him. During this time, although Nietzsche attempted to secure the position of professor of philosophy at his university in Basel, his application was rejected because he did not hold a university degree in philosophy. Disappointed by this, the desire to quit his university job intensified in him. Nietzsche thought he had a great mission to fulfil in life, beyond just pursuing the hollow life of an academic in philology. He thought that only then would he be able to regain his original self and find fulfilment in life. In addition, Nietzsche became frustrated by the understanding that the sense of duty that the institution and the public expected from a university professor could only be fulfilled by risking one's individuality. He did not want to remain a mere cog in the academic machine for long. Perhaps the only reason Nietzsche did not resign from his job sooner was that he wanted to support his mother financially, as she had no other sources of income.

By this time, Nietzsche had gradually begun to free himself from the earlier romantic worldview of Schopenhauer and Wagner, centered

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<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche's initial enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's philosophy had died out soon when he came to see Schopenhauer's emphasis of pessimism and moralism as counter-productive to man's natural living. The remedy suggested by Schopenhauer for suffering was also very much ascetic, which Nietzsche saw as a symptom of nihilism, weakness and *ressentiment*.

on the belief in the redemptive power of music and the arts. He sought to break free from the influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner, to establish himself as an independent thinker. This culminated in the publication of his second book, *Humans, All Too Human*, in 1878. By this time, Nietzsche's romantic admiration for Wagner's music had begun to recede. He saw Wagner's music as just another copy of the Christian supernatural mentality that devalued worldly life. He then slowly abandoned his friendship with Wagner and embarked on a journey into the depths of his own thinking.

Nietzsche once wrote that he was the loneliest man in Europe. What must have led him to such loneliness? He was neither an introvert nor a maniac who wanted to isolate himself from the others. That is very evident from the accounts his biographers provided of his extensive friendships and dynamic social relations during his childhood and university years in Leipzig.<sup>12</sup> We see him as a person who traveled extensively with his friend Paul Doyson, a theology student in the German capital, Bonn, at the age of 21. About the same time, he stayed for weeks at the home of another friend, Herman Mushake, in Berlin and became close friends with his family. So we can find only two reasons for Nietzsche's intense loneliness in society and academia.

One of them was that Nietzsche, in his works, exposed mercilessly the hypocrisy and the vanity of modern human beings and their cultural life. He was a destroyer of all idols and ideals, like the moral values and conceptions of good and evil that society always kept sacred. Nietzsche shattered the moral veil of the human mind, which no one in European thought has ever been ready to speak openly. Without a proper understanding of the context of his criticism and the intended message of his works, he became very unpopular and provocative to conventional society. He was sure that his writings would invite the wrath of society, which will eventually lead to his expulsion from it.

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<sup>12</sup> Julian Young, (2010).

The reality was that his intellectual honesty did not allow Nietzsche to deviate from the task of exposing the falsehoods of society in order to gain the applause of his time. Nietzsche thought that he had the fate of Christ, who had to be martyred in the attempt to rewrite the world's existing truths. Nietzsche corresponded with only two friends at that time. In an emotional letter to Gerdoff,<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche describes himself as "your crucified" to describe his pain due to his alienation from the society. Another reason for his withdrawal from all relationships is the spiritual/ transcendental experience he got in the revelation of the infinitude of the world, which he articulated in the notion of eternal recurrence, which Pierre Klosowski elaborates.<sup>14</sup>

Nietzsche's declining physical health and poor eyesight were other major crises he repeatedly faced. By the time he reached the age of 31, he was suffering from severe headaches, nausea, and poor eyesight and had to lie down in bed for several days. Nietzsche, who is almost on the verge of blindness, was advised by doctors to avoid reading and writing altogether for several years, which was not an easily acceptable suggestion for him. In 1879, he submitted an illness certificate and resigned from the University of Basel. Klossowski noted that Nietzsche's morbidity, chronic illness, migraines, digestive problems, vision issues, and suffering were not a hindrance but a crucial factor in the development of his profound and revolutionary ideas.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Carl von Gersdorff (1844–1904) was one of the most trusted friends and intellectual companion of Nietzsche's youthful life, particularly before his philosophical break with Wagner and Schopenhauer. Though their correspondence decreased later, Gersdorff remained loyal to Nietzsche even during his mental collapse (1889). He visited Nietzsche in the asylum and later helped Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth with editorial work on his unpublished writings. See Nietzsche, F (1996) *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed & trans., Christopher Middleton, Hakket publishing Company, Indianapolis.

<sup>14</sup> Klossowski Pierre (1997), *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel Smith, Athlone Press. London

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

It provided him with the solitude necessary to delve deeply into his thoughts. Nietzsche's periods of intense suffering were often followed by bursts of productivity, culminating in the writings of books like *Gay Science*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche himself viewed suffering as a means of gaining insight into the human condition, which is expressed in the famous statement, "What does not kill me makes me stronger"<sup>16</sup>

After quitting the job, Nietzsche chose an isolated life in the countryside in the remaining years with a small pension from the university, which he thought would help in writing books. If Nietzsche had lived permanently anywhere for a long time, it was the ten years he spent at the University of Basel as a professor. After resigning, he took turns living in various parts of Europe, surrounded by lakes, mountains, and forests, and immersed himself in the writing world throughout his life. He found satisfaction in the simple life in the rented rooms at these places and was ready to survive with his meagre pension money, feeding on bread, milk, and eggs. Nietzsche chose to stay in the coastal regions of Venice in Italy, Geneva in Switzerland, and the French Mediterranean coast of Nisse in the winter seasons, and used to move to Sils Maria, a beautiful area with lakes in the valley of the Swiss Alps. Nietzsche believed that living away from the hustle and bustle of city dwellers and immersing himself in the mesmerizing beauty of nature could stimulate his creativity and restore his lost health. Even during ill health and loneliness, he used to do long walks to get mountain air, and he thought he could regain health by it. Living in beautiful places allowed Nietzsche to immerse himself in an environment that resonated with his aesthetic sensibilities, enhancing his appreciation for the sublime and the beautiful. This preference of

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<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, F (1990) "Twilight of the Idols" in *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, p.33. Henceforth cited as TOI followed by the section title and Arabic numerical for aphorism number.

his is in line with the aesthetic attitude to the world he held, to which what desires human beings to love life, and desire eternal coming back to life beyond death, is the seductive beauty of nature with its spring flowers, fragrances, moonlight, and gilded sunsets

Diseases continued to be his constant companion throughout his life. Nietzsche spent his days struggling with blindness, severe headaches, indigestion, constant nausea, and sometimes days of bed rest until he collapsed on the streets of Turin in 1889, leading to insanity<sup>17</sup>. During this time, he fulfilled his desire to express himself through writing books, which he considered as an important mission he had to perform in world history. Each of the works he has written in this short ten-year period has become a masterpiece in German literature and world philosophy. It was like deafness helped Beethoven stop listening to music and turn to his inner music; poor eyesight helped Nietzsche stop reading books and find the source of his innermost thoughts.

### **Nietzsche, the first exponent of ‘feminine truth’ in thinking.**

Other than the reversal of values from their rootedness in resentment and guilt to affirmative ones, Nietzsche’s ethico-political thought for posterity also consists of a demand for a turn in experiencing the world from the presently dominant masculine mode to a feminine one. Nietzsche’s philosophy must be seen as expressing the feminine experience of reality, particularly in his suggestion to envision truth

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<sup>17</sup> In Klossowski’s analysis Nietzsche’s madness was not caused by any loss of psychic balance or the result of syphilis as some of the commentators claimed. Rather, he sees it as a mere extension of his philosophical exploration of the limits of reason and the experience of self as multiplicity. His entire critique of traditional metaphysics and his embrace of chaos, contradiction, and the Dionysian aspects of existence, was the outcome of his desire to live multiplicity, which the society that evaluates everything from the criterion of normalcy, mistook it as his madness.

as a woman.<sup>18</sup> His aphoristic writings present a portrayal of the feminine experience of the world that starkly contrasts with the abstract, conceptual frameworks of traditional metaphysical philosophy.

The masculine character of traditional philosophy is not rooted in the biological sex of the philosopher but rather in the structure and nature of thought itself. Approaching truth through abstract reasoning and conceptual frameworks is often viewed as a masculine approach to engaging with reality. By positing truth through abstraction, traditional metaphysics creates a transcendental order that exists beyond the physical, embodied reality of objects. Aristotle, for instance, argued that abstract reasoning is a uniquely male trait, associating men with reason and women with emotion or bodily concerns.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau linked women to emotion and men to logic and reason.<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant also viewed men as more capable of rational and moral reasoning, while he considered women more attuned to feeling and intuition, which he deemed inferior to rationality.<sup>21</sup>

Nietzsche's philosophy, however, marks a departure from this masculine mode of thinking. His emphasis on 'becoming' over static 'being,' beauty over logic, the body over the soul, emotion over reason, the concrete over the abstract, the particular over the universal, and the empirical over the transcendental signals a shift toward a non-masculine approach to thought. His philosophical expressions of natural phenomena—such as mountains, oceans, dance, and music—reflect the Dionysian spirit, celebrating sensory and emotional experiences.

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<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, F (1989) *Beyond Good and Evil, Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, p. 1. Henceforth cited as BGE followed by the Arabic numerical for aphorism number.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle (1998) *Politics*, (trans: CDE Reeve). Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau JJ (1979). *Emile or On Education*, trans: A Bloom, Basic Books

<sup>21</sup> Kant I (2006) *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. ed. RB Louden, Cambridge University Press

In contrast, traditional philosophy seeks the truth of phenomena like mountains, rain, or trees through their universal, abstract essences, which exist beyond their physical forms. This conceptual representation of truth can be seen as a masculine mode of understanding, as it prioritizes abstract essence over embodied, experiential reality.

A major source of the emergence of contemporary poststructural feminist thought is in Nietzsche's philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Much earlier than this, a Nietzsche-inspired feminist thought had already appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> The question is how a thinker infamous for his many comments that demean women can be the driving force of feminine thought. Many of Nietzsche's references against women are infamous. Some of them goes like: "Woman's love involves injustice and blindness against everything that she does not love...woman is not yet capable of friendship: women are still cats and birds, or at best cows...".<sup>24</sup> Nothing has been more alien, repugnant, and hostile to woman than truth—her great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty".<sup>25</sup> His philosophy subtly observes feminine psychology as reflected in his thoughts on the 'eternal feminine'.<sup>26</sup> However, upon examining his personal life, it becomes apparent that he had numerous warm friendships with women. In the early stages of his intellectual development, he appears to have held women in high esteem. For instance, in *Human All too*

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<sup>22</sup> Oliver, Kelly(2016), *Womanising Nietzsche, Philosophy's Relation to the Feminine*, Routledge, London.

<sup>23</sup> Woodward, Ashley (2011), *Understanding Nietzscheanism*, Routledge, London

<sup>24</sup> Z, Nietzsche F (1985) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Penguin Books, London, p. 57. Henceforth cites as Z followed by the section title and Arabic numerical for aphorism number.

<sup>25</sup> BGE, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche uses the idea of the 'eternal feminine' largely to critique and subvert traditional, idealized notions of femininity often used by culture, religion, or philosophy to estimate women as pure, passive, or spiritually redemptive. See BGE, 231, 239,

Human, he writes, "the perfect woman is a higher type of human than the perfect man, and also something much more rare."<sup>27</sup> So it is arguable that many of his pronouncements against women were directed, in fact, to the frailty of average women. The wounds of abandonment in his love affair with Lou Salome must have led to Nietzsche's skepticism about women. His childhood, when he was made to live entirely among women members of the family in his maternal ancestral home in the aftermath of his father's death, also might have accelerated this apathy for women.

Although Nietzsche's remarks may have been derogatory to women, his hardcore philosophy was later found to be anti-patriarchal and very helpful for the cause of feminism. His philosophy had turned into a criticism of metaphysical philosophy and those philosophers who negated sensuality, body, and beautiful experiences of the world in favour of higher truths and supernatural moral values. He considered it a masculine attitude to the world. In contrast, Nietzsche advocated for the affirmation of natural instincts, the body, sensuality, and the beautiful experiences of the world. This stance led observers to claim that he was upholding a feminine perspective of life because women represented these experiences.<sup>28</sup> He produced a new ideal of 'feminine truth' distinct from the conceptual metaphysical truth of the male philosophers. For Nietzsche, it was men's tendency to impose another system of truths and laws above the beauties of this world that blocks all physical and sensual experiences. Nietzsche called this tendency nihilism, which denies the existence of nature and the natural existence of human beings. Nihilism is a negative attitude to life

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, F (1996) *Human, All too Human, A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, 337. Henceforth cited as HAH followed by Roman numerals that refer to major parts of the works, and Arabic numerals refer to sections.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Kofman is one of the prominent among them. See Kofman, S (2000) *Nietzsche and Metaphor, (Nietzsche et la métaphore)*, trans. Duncan Large, Athlone Press, London.



and the world. It can be seen that Nietzsche's critique of life negation is, in effect, a critique of patriarchy. Modern culture, formed on the basis of Western philosophy, rejected intuition in favour of logic, the body in favour of the soul, opted for the supernatural world to deprecate nature, and rejected art in favour of science. Nietzsche reversed this attitude. When he stood for the retrieval of nature, art, the body, and beautiful experiences of this world, he was standing for the cause of redeeming feminine experiences.

Nietzsche's sublime style of writing, which draws closer to theatrical movements, dance, and poetry, also disrupted the propositional language used in traditional philosophy. In those writings, Nietzsche attempted to capture the instinctual experiences, sensuality, and beauty of the world, which were often perceived as feminine experiences. While metaphysics, which was a manifestation of men's perspective on the world, sought to discover transcendental truths, Nietzsche's writings, which aimed to affirm the world, adopted a feminine viewpoint. Thus, Nietzsche's writings can be understood as a feminine operation that comes from a male philosopher. Nietzsche's writings create a rainbow of feminine imagination, while previous philosophies have largely reflected men's worldview throughout their history. Derrida's interpretation of Nietzsche in *'Spurs', Nietzsche's Styles*<sup>29</sup> has established Nietzsche as a precursor to poststructural feminist thinking, as seen in the writings of Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva.<sup>30</sup> He became a major inspiration for poststructuralist feminist thought. Using the theoretical resources of psychoanalytic thought, poststructuralist feminists claimed that gender and sexual identities are arbitrary constructs produced on biological differences seen among humans. In philosophy, Nietzsche's articulation of

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<sup>29</sup> Derrida, Jacques (1986) *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. trans. B Harlow, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

<sup>30</sup> Feder, Ellen K (1997) *Derrida and Feminism, Recasting the Question of Woman*, Routledge, New York.

Dionysian ecstasy should be seen as an expression of feminine desires that challenged traditional male values.

## **Nietzsche's task in Thinking**

Nietzsche was well aware of the great world-historical mission he had to undertake as a thinker, which, in his perception, was to lay the foundation for creating a new world history by erasing its existing Christian-Platonic foundations. The metaphysically founded human civilization that continues has a history spanning more than two thousand years. Nietzsche believed that he had a crucial role to play in changing the course of world history, akin to the one Jesus Christ had created two millennia ago. He might have been considering his mission to establish a new world order based on the time concept of 'infinite repetition of the world', which was exemplified through the doctrine of 'eternal recurrence'. He hoped that in the new era, man would find a divinity within empirical life itself, without resorting to a search for a supernatural realm. Finding a divinity for this world requires rejecting the prevailing Christian worldview, which seeks divinity in the afterlife. His world-affirmative philosophy thus turned its guns against Christianity, which diminished the value of this world and life into nothing.

As seen in the thoughts of other philosophers, Nietzsche did not create a centralized philosophical thought with a monolithic edifice. Nietzsche's writings come to us as innumerable scattered thoughts, which was a departure from traditional philosophy that generally presents ideas in a hierarchical order. If we examine the history of philosophy, we see that philosophers since Plato's time have constructed well-organized systems of philosophy that are structured like a pyramid. They all established organized systems of thought that brought together many interrelated ideas and brought them under a supreme idea. Reading them would feel like climbing a mountain

top. Beginning at its base, the reader is guided to the summit, where they gain ultimate knowledge. However, when reading Nietzsche's works, one feels like traveling through a city that offers diverse views. Each of the verses in Nietzsche's aphoristic style of writing provides a unique perspective. Nietzsche claimed that aphorism was the best way to express the plurality of truths without definite interconnections. They can be called fragments of truth. Each aphorism consists of only one or two pages in length and is presented as manifestations of intensely condensed thought. Nietzsche claims that the thought he expresses in a single aphorism would ordinarily require hundreds of pages for other writers to convey. He believed that people would like to learn them by heart due to the poetic elegance of its style.

Although Nietzsche's works are often presented as scattered, each of the leading Nietzsche commentators has attempted to construct a centralized philosophy by identifying commonalities inherent in all of them. Walter Kaufmann's *'Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist'*; Nietzsche and Philosophy by Gilles Deleuze who promoted poststructuralism; Derrida's deconstructive reading presented in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*; Pierre Klossowski's *Nietzsche The Vicious Circle* ; F A Lea's *The Tragic Philosopher* are some of such significant attempts to find a coherent thought from Nietzsche's scattered writings.

Differing from all these interpretations of Nietzsche, the task assumed in this book is to erect an ethico-political thought from Nietzsche's scattered pronouncements on ethics and politics. The creation of a new age demands a new outlook for humanity that surpasses the existing one, which is centered on human-all-too-human ideals. An ethico-political thought different from the existing one can be made only by overcoming man, whose seeds Nietzsche has already sown in the ideal of *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche argued that the idea of "man", being a product of Christian-Platonic thought, should end here, and the much-debated figure

of Nietzsche, the 'overman' (Übermensch) who could live beyond the values and truths followed by humanity, should come into the world. Nietzsche had in mind a great ethico-political thought that will bring about a radical break in the present existence. With that, he hoped that the evaluations of truth and life's goals in the present world would be changed. His observation was that ideals such as humaneness, human goodness, and progress, which were the inventions of humanism in Europe, had become obsolete, and that the human being, which is the product of resentment, hatred, and reaction, had become a skin disease of the earth. The self-conscious human being brought about by enlightenment-modernity is a product of vengeance, whose disappearance is necessary for the overman to arrive.

For Nietzsche, today's humanism and the sciences that sustain it, such as physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, politics, and psychology, are the products of Western metaphysical philosophy that has existed for the past two and a half millennia. They are the ones who created modern civilization. Nietzsche saw the roots of modern civilization in hatred, enmity, and vengeance. His replacement of metaphysics with the historical philosophizing called 'genealogy' represents a distinct mode of thinking, intended to construct a new civilization that enables human beings to discover 'intensities'<sup>31</sup> of life.

Nietzsche viewed the history of Europe as a remarkable decline from ancient times. The Dionysian worldview, as presented by Nietzsche as an alternative to the Enlightenment and Christian worldviews, is deeply rooted in the aesthetic conception of ancient Greek culture. According to it, the ancient Greek culture, rooted in myth and aesthetic outlook, which existed before conceptual rationality emerged as the guiding principle of humanity, was the most potent period in human history.

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<sup>31</sup> Intensities are preconscious, deeper and bodily experiences emerged through experiencing art, beauty and ecstasies of this world. In the philosophy of Deleuze he uses it as a substitute to deeper emotional states.

The ancient Greek culture, grounded on artistic sensibility and beauty, never excluded colourful experiences from human life. Nietzsche's admiration for the classical Greeks stemmed from their supportive attitude toward heroism, adventurous spirit, love, sexuality, and other marvels of life. That, in turn, created a critical attitude in Nietzsche towards modern culture that bans all beautiful life experiences. Since art was the only domain that provided an abode for the marvels of life, Nietzsche assigned a significant role for art to play in his project of rebuilding humanity's future. Thus, rebuilding a new way of life based on aesthetic thinking has become the ultimate goal of his philosophy. In doing so, Nietzsche was trying to create a new ethico-political outlook that would help humanity to live beyond a life of the present.

Nietzsche envisioned an ideal future society where humans could interact with one another without resentment and guilt, thereby creating a world without ascetic withdrawal from life. Does he propose any definite political program for that? Many view Nietzsche as apathetic to politics. To some interpreters, he does not put forward any explicit political philosophy; if political ideals exist in him, they are more closely aligned with aristocratic elitism. To some, though it is not explicitly seen in his writings, he shall be considered a democratic thinker, as Maudemarie Clark, who traced the democratic strands underlying Nietzsche's writings, has claimed.<sup>32</sup>

Can democracy work without a constitution, legislature, law and order, and governance by a State? Did Nietzsche have any vision for founding a political party? From a Nietzschean perspective, a political party is a necessity for those who are powerless, and its very purpose is to gain power by uniting all the disgruntled and defeated people. It is just like the congregation of the downtrodden people formed by certain religious sects. That is why Christianity became a major object of criticism

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<sup>32</sup> Clark, Maudemarie (2015) *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*, Oxford University Press.

in Nietzsche's thought. The aim behind those who form such religious groups or political parties is to mobilise people to oppose and defeat those who are faring better than them. A group's power is essential for leaders to limit the actions of the active and joyful members.

When people hear about the politics of Nietzsche, the primary thing that comes to their minds is Nazi ideology because some associate his name with that ideology. During the Nazi era in Germany, Hitler and his cohorts sought to turn Nietzsche's thought into the theoretical basis of their ideology. Nietzsche's denial of traditional values, ideals of the will to power, and the 'overman' made it easier for them to carry out this task. Nietzsche commentators who later researched the subject revealed that Nazis had succeeded in distorting Nietzsche in their favour by arbitrarily interpreting his ideas.

How can Nietzsche be responsible for whatever other people have done posthumously to his thoughts, like his sister's twisting of his ideas and Hitler's appropriation of them for his political goals? His biographers have already pointed out how he stood vehemently against the anti-Semitism prevalent during his time,<sup>33</sup> and that he has always preferred to live as a good European rather than limiting himself to a narrow German nationalist.<sup>34</sup> Since Many scholars have already attempted to rescue him from the disgraceful political abyss he had fallen into, we need not delve further into that issue. We shall attempt to find the real political message implicit in his writings rather than disproving his stature as a proto-Nazi. Those who rescued Nietzsche from that ill reputation had pictured him as an apolitical individualist thinker<sup>35</sup> and thereby concealed the great political

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<sup>33</sup> Julian Young (2010), p. 237.

<sup>34</sup> *BGE*, 241.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Kaufman's name is significant here because his work 'Nietzsche, Philosopher Psychologist, Antichrist' played a major role in delivering Nietzsche from the ill reputation of being a Nazi and interpreting as an existential individualist.