

GENEALOGY OF MORALS

Friedrich Nietzsche

Summary

On The Genealogy of Morals is made up of three essays, all of which question and critique the value of our moral judgments based on a genealogical method whereby Nietzsche **examines the origins and meanings of our different moral concepts.**

The first essay, "'Good and Evil,' 'Good and Bad'" contrasts what Nietzsche calls **"master morality" and "slave morality."** Master morality was developed by the **strong, healthy, and free**, who saw their own happiness as good and named it thus. By contrast, they saw those who were weak, unhealthy, and enslaved as "bad," since their weakness was undesirable. **By contrast, the slaves, feeling oppressed by these wealthy and happy masters, called the masters "evil,"** and called themselves "good" by contrast.

The second essay, "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the like" deals with (surprise, surprise) guilt, bad conscience, and the like. Nietzsche traces the origins of concepts such as guilt and punishment, showing that **originally they were not based on any sense of moral transgression. Rather, guilt simply meant that a debt was owed and punishment was simply a form of securing repayment. Only with the rise of slave morality did these moral concepts gain their present meanings.** Nietzsche identifies bad conscience as our tendency to see ourselves as sinners and **locates its origins in the need that came with the development of society to inhibit our animal instincts for aggression and cruelty and to turn them inward upon ourselves.**

The third essay, "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" confronts asceticism, the powerful and paradoxical force that dominates contemporary life. **Nietzsche sees it as the expression of a weak, sick will.** Unable to cope with its struggle against itself, **the sick will sees its animal instincts, its earthly nature, as vile, sinful, and horrible.** Unable to free itself from these instincts, it attempts to subdue and tame itself as much as possible. Nietzsche concludes that "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will."

Contextualization

Friedrich Nietzsche was born in 1844 in R cken, Germany, the son of a Lutheran minister. His father went insane and died while Nietzsche was quite young, and

young Friedrich grew up the only boy in a household of women. He was an excellent student, and so impressed his professor at university that he was granted a doctorate and a professorship in philology at the age of 24, before he had even written a dissertation. At this time, he was deeply impressed with the philosophy of Kant and Schopenhauer, though he would later come to criticize both these figures.

In 1870, the young Nietzsche served as a medical orderly in the Franco- Prussian War, where he contracted dysentery, diphtheria, and perhaps syphilis. He suffered from increasing ill health, migraines, indigestion, insomnia, and near blindness for the rest of his life.

While the [newly unified Germany](#) of Nietzsche's day was marked by an unbridled optimism in the future of science, knowledge, and the German people, Nietzsche characterized his age as "nihilistic." **He took the Christianity, nationalism, and anti-Semitism that dominated Germany at the time as signs of a degenerate culture lacking positive values.** Prophetically, Nietzsche predicted that if European nihilism were to run unchecked, the following century would see wars of a kind this earth had never before experienced.

Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was published in 1872, in which he praised Richard Wagner, who he had befriended. Nietzsche's admiration for Wagner cooled during the 1870's, largely owing to Wagner's anti-Semitism, nationalism, and Christianity. Because of Wagner's early influence, and owing also to the influence of Nietzsche's sister who was also a virulent nationalist and anti-Semite, Nietzsche was particularly outspoken against German nationalism and anti-Semitism (not to mention Christianity) throughout his career.

Nietzsche's mature period began with the publication of *Human, All- Too-Human* in 1878, and culminated with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, published in four parts between 1883 and 1885. As Nietzsche's health quickly declined, his writing became more and more prolific, and he wrote *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, *The Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, *Ecce Homo*, *The Case of Wagner*, and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* between 1886 and 1888. In January 1889 he collapsed in the street and became insane. He remained a vegetable for the last eleven years of his life, and died in 1900.

Nietzsche's sister was his literary executor, and she used her brother's fame to advance her own proto-Nazi views, distorting Nietzsche's opinions and publishing selectively to make Nietzsche seem to support her cause. For the first half of the

twentieth century Nietzsche was largely misconstrued as being the primary philosopher of Nazism even though he is quite explicit about his hatred for German nationalism and anti-Semitism in many of his writings.

Nietzsche has influenced twentieth century thought more than almost any other thinker. He has been an inspiration to almost every new movement in Continental philosophy in this century, and his critiques and methodology were far ahead of his time. Among those who owe a debt to Nietzsche are Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Thomas Mann, George Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Overall Analysis and Themes

Nietzsche is difficult to read because he demands that we overturn or suspend many of the assumptions that our very reasoning relies upon. He is one of the Western tradition's deepest thinkers precisely because he calls so much into question. If we can come to understand Nietzsche's genealogical method, his doctrine of the will to power, and his perspectivism as all linked, his arguments will become much easier to follow.

In Nietzsche's distinction between a thing and its meaning, we find the initial doubt with which Nietzsche unravels so many of our assumptions. **We are generally tempted to see things as having inherent meanings. For instance, punishment is at once the act of punishing and the reason behind the punishment. However, Nietzsche argues, these things have had different meanings at different times. For instance, the act of punishment has been at times a celebration of one's power, at times an act of cruelty, at times a simple tit-for-tat. We cannot understand a thing, and we certainly cannot understand its origin, if we assume that it has always held the same meaning.**

Central to Nietzsche's critique, then, is **an attempt at genealogy that will show the winding and undirected route our different moral concepts have taken to arrive in their present shape.** Morality is generally treated as sacred because we assume that there is some transcendental ground for our morals, be it God, reason, tradition, or something else. Yet contrary to our assumption that "good," "bad," or "evil" have always had the same meanings, **Nietzsche's genealogical method shows how these terms have evolved, shattering any illusion as to the continuity or absolute truth of our present moral concepts.**

Because they can have different, even contradictory, meanings over the course of their long life spans, Nietzsche does not believe that concepts or things are the fundamental stuff that makes up reality. Instead, he looks beneath these things to see what drives the different meanings that they adopt over time. **Hiding beneath he finds force and will. All of existence, Nietzsche asserts, is a struggle between different wills for the feeling of power. This "will to power" is most evident on a human level,** where we see people constantly competing with one another, often for no other purpose than to feel superior to those that they overcome.

That a thing has a meaning at all means that there is some will dominating it, bending it toward a certain interpretation. That a thing may have different meanings over time suggests that different wills have come to dominate it. For instance, the concept of "good" was once dominated by the will of healthy, strong barbarians, and had the opposite meaning that it does now that it is dominated by the will of weak, "sick" ascetics.

According to Nietzsche, then, **a belief in an absolute truth or an absolute anything is to give in to one particular meaning, one particular interpretation of a thing. It is essentially to allow oneself to be dominated by a particular will. A will that wishes to remain free will shun absolutes of all kinds and try to look at a matter from as many different perspectives as possible** in order to gain its own. This doctrine that has deeply influenced postmodern thought is called **"perspectivism."**

Nietzsche's inquiries are thus conducted in a very irreverent spirit. **Nothing is sacred, nothing is absolute, nothing, we might even say, is true.** Our morality is not a set of duties passed down from God but an arbitrary code that has evolved as randomly as the human species itself. The only constant is that we, and everything else, are constantly striving for more power, and the only constant virtue is a will that is powerful, and free from bad conscience, hatred, and *ressentiment*.

Nietzsche's main project in the *Genealogy* is to question the value of our morality. Ultimately, he argues that our present morality is born out of a resentment and hatred that was felt toward anything that was powerful, strong, or healthy. As such, he sees our present morality as harmful to the future health and prosperity of our species. While the "blonde beasts" and barbarians of primitive master morality are animalistic brutes, at least they are strong and healthy. On the other hand, **our present ascetic morality has "deepened" us by turning our aggressive instincts inward and seeing ourselves as a new wilderness to struggle against. Nietzsche's ideal is to**

maintain this depth and yet not be ashamed of our animal instincts or of the life that glows within us.

Preface

Nietzsche opens his preface with the observation that philosophers generally lack self-knowledge. Their business is to seek out knowledge, knowledge that takes them away from themselves. They only rarely pay adequate attention to present experience, or to themselves.

Following this preamble, Nietzsche introduces the subject of his inquiry: "the *origin* of our moral prejudices." The thoughts he expresses in this work were first given voice more than ten years before in his book *Human, All-Too-Human*. Since then, he hopes, these thoughts have ripened, become clearer and stronger, become more unified.

Nietzsche suggests that he has long been interested in the question of the origins of good and evil. He recollects his first attempt at philosophy at the age of thirteen, where his search for an origin brought him to God, and so he posited God as the originator of evil. He was not much older when he began to mistrust such metaphysical answers, and began to look for explanations of earthly phenomena on this earth, and not "*behind* the world." That is, he began to ask how we, as humans, came up with our concepts of good and evil, and pondered the value of these values: have our concepts of good and evil been a help or a hindrance to our development?

Nietzsche's interest has never been the purely academic question of the origin of morality: he has pursued this question as a means of understanding the value of morality. In order to understand the value of morality, we need to understand how it arose among us rather than just accepting its dictates as indisputable truths. Until now, we have always assumed that the "good man" is better than the "evil man." But perhaps, **Nietzsche suggests, what we call "good" is actually a danger, by which the present prospers at the expense of the future. Perhaps what we call "evil" will ultimately be of greater benefit to us.**

Nietzsche hopes that **we might gain a broader perspective by seeing morality not as some eternal absolute, but rather as something that has evolved, often by accident, never free from error--much like the human species itself.** When we can see our morality also as part of the human comedy and look upon it cheerfully, we will truly have elevated ourselves.

Nietzsche warns that his work might not be easily understood. He writes with the assumption that his readers have read his earlier works very carefully. Reading carefully is an art he claims is sorely lacking among his contemporaries. And if this warning is leveled against even those who have read his earlier works, perhaps we should take even more careful note: Nietzsche would not be impressed with an attempt to reduce his thought into a SparkNote!

First Essay, Sections 1-9

Nietzsche opens by expressing dissatisfaction with the English psychologists who have tried to explain the origin of morality. They claim to be historians of morality, but they completely lack a historical spirit. Their theories suggest that, originally, people benefiting from the unegoistic actions of others would applaud those actions and call them "good." That is, initially, what was good and what was useful were considered one and the same. Over time, these genealogists suggest, we forgot this original association, and **the habit of calling unegoistic actions "good" led us to conclude that they were somehow good in and of themselves.**

Nietzsche disagrees with this account, suggesting that **those to whom "goodness" was shown did not define "good." Rather, it was the "good" themselves--the noble and the powerful--who defined the term.** They came to see themselves as good when they came to see the contrast between themselves and those who were below them: the common people, the poor and the weak. Their position of power included the power over words, the power to decide what would be called "good" and what "bad."

In support of his argument, Nietzsche remarks on the similarity between the German word for "bad" and the words for "plain" and "simple." By contrast, he notes, in most languages, the word for "good" derives from the same root as the words for "powerful" or "masters" or "rich." In the Greek, Nietzsche notes that "good" is associated also with "truth." The low, poor, commoners, are then associated with lying and cowardice.

Nietzsche also remarks on how "dark" and "black" are used as negative terms, presumably because of the dark-haired peoples of Europe who were overrun by blonde, Aryan conquerors. He notes the association of "good" with "war" and "warlike."

Nietzsche then considers the **change in language that takes place when the priestly caste gains power. Here, "pure" and "impure" become opposites associated with**

"good" and "bad." This "pureness" consists in an abstinence from sex, from fighting, and from certain foods, a renouncement of many of the noble warrior's habits. With these priests, everything becomes more dangerous: they alternate between brooding and emotional outbursts, and their wills are much stronger and sharper. But Nietzsche also remarks that only with the priests do human beings become interesting. With the priests, the human soul first gains those attributes that set it apart from animals: it acquires depth and becomes evil.

Though the **priestly mode of evaluation** springs from the knightly-aristocratic mode, it becomes its opposite, and its most hated enemy. Because the priests are impotent, they learn to hate, and their hate becomes more powerful than any of the warlike virtues lauded by the nobles. Nietzsche identifies the Jews as the finest example of the priestly caste, the most refined haters in human history. The Jews managed to effect a complete reversal in moral valuations, associating themselves, the poor, the wretched, the meek, with "good," and the lustful, powerful, and noble as "evil," damned for all eternity.

This revaluation of values effected by the Jews has happened so slowly that it has not been noticed. **Its crowning achievement was the development of Christianity:** Christian love, created by this burning hatred. **Nietzsche sees Jesus as the ultimate embodiment of these Jewish ideals, and his crucifixion as the ultimate bait.** All the opponents of the Jews might side with Jesus against them, thereby adopting his and their Judeo-Christian moral code. **With the advent and success of Christianity, Nietzsche suggests, the reversal of the moral code became complete: what was once "good" became "evil" and what was once "bad" became "good."**

First Essay, Sections 10-12

Nietzsche suggests that the "slave revolt in morality" begins when *ressentiment*, or resentment, becomes a creative force. **Slave morality is essentially negative and reactive, originating in a denial of everything that is different from it. It looks outward and says "No" to the antagonistic external forces that oppose and oppress it. Master morality, on the other hand, concerns itself very little with what is outside of it. The low, the "bad," is an afterthought and is noticed only as a contrast that brings out more strongly the superiority of the noble ones.**

While both slave and master morality can involve distortions of the truth, master morality does so far more lightly. Nietzsche notes that almost all the ancient Greek words denoting the lower orders of society are related to variants on the word for "unhappy." The nobles saw themselves as naturally happy, and any

misunderstanding rested on the contempt and distance they held from the lower orders. By contrast, the man of *ressentiment* distorts what he sees so as to present the noble man in as bad a light as possible, and thereby to gain reassurance.

The noble man is incapable of taking seriously all the things that fester and build in the man of *ressentiment*: accidents, misfortunes, enemies. In allowing resentment and hatred to grow in him, in having to rely on patience, secrets, and scheming, the man of *ressentiment* ultimately becomes cleverer than the noble man. This constant brooding and obsession with one's enemies begets the greatest invention of *ressentiment*: evil. **The concept of the "evil enemy" is basic to *ressentiment* just as "good" is basic to the noble man. And just as the noble man develops the concept of "bad" almost as an afterthought, so is the concept of "good" created as an afterthought by the man of *ressentiment* to denote himself.**

Nietzsche remarks on **how different the concepts of "evil" and "bad" are**, in spite of both being considered the opposite of "good." He explains this difference by explaining that there are two very different concepts of "good" at work: **The noble man's "good" is precisely what the man of *ressentiment* calls "evil."**

Among their own kind, noble men are respectful and subdued, but when they venture out among strangers, they become little more than uncaged beasts-- "blonde beasts," as Nietzsche calls them. "Blonde" here is a reference to lions rather than to hair color, as Nietzsche bestows this name not only on Vikings and Goths, but also on Arab and Japanese nobility. **The name "barbarian" is often associated with the violence that occasionally erupts from noble people.**

Contemporary wisdom would suggest some sort of progress and refinement from these "blonde beasts" to the humanity of today, but Nietzsche vehemently disagrees. **The overthrow of master morality in favor of slave morality is nothing to be proud of.** These barbarians may have been fearful, but they were also admirable. Today's world of *ressentiment* is neither: it is merely mediocre. Nietzsche characterizes the nihilism he detests in contemporary society as a weariness with humanity. **We no longer fear humanity, but we also no longer have hopes for, reverence of, or affirmation of humanity. Nietzsche fears that our slave morality has rendered us insipid and dull.**

First Essay, Sections 13-17

Section 13 is very complicated, very deep, and very important in understanding Nietzsche. The focus is on a contrast between lambs and birds of prey, in order to

understand the **origin of the concept of "good" as born from *ressentiment***. It is quite natural that lambs may consider birds of prey to be evil, since they kill and carry off lambs. And from this, it may also be understandable that lambs consider everything unlike birds of prey--themselves, for instance--to be good.

While Nietzsche accepts these conclusions as understandable, he denies that they can be used to reproach or condemn birds of prey for killing lambs. It would be as absurd to ask a bird of prey *not* to kill as it would be to ask a lamb to kill. Killing is an expression of strength, and it is only through a misunderstanding caused by language that we manage to see the bird of prey as somehow distinct from its expression of strength.

To illustrate his point, Nietzsche takes as an example the sentence "lightning flashes." Grammar would lead us to conclude that there is a subject--"lightning"--and a predicate--"flashes." But what is the lightning if not the flash? **Nietzsche argues that grammar, and only grammar, has led us to think of actions in terms of subjects and predicates. In reality, he suggests, "'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed--the deed is everything."**

Grammar has thus led us to think of a bird of prey as somehow separate from its expressions of strength, and thereby free either to kill or not to kill. On the contrary, Nietzsche suggests, the bird of prey is the strength is the killing. **The lamb's morality is in no position to hold the bird of prey accountable for killing: that would be equivalent to blaming it for existing.**

When slave morality lauds its conception of "good," praising all those who do not kill, hurt, or offend, it is essentially praising all those who are too powerless to cause any harm for not causing any harm. It interprets the inaction resulting from impotence as a positive, meritorious deed, as enduring ills and leaving revenge to God. **Slave morality depends on the belief in a subject (or a "soul") which is independent of its deeds, so that it can interpret its weakness as freedom, and its inaction as praiseworthy.**

Section 14 is a rather over-the-top depiction of slave morality being forged in a sweaty, smelly hole full of hatred and muttering. It culminates with the claim that "justice" is an invention of slave morality made out as an ideal that masters brazenly disregard. Slave morality does not seek revenge, but waits for the "Judgment of God" that will restore justice.

Section 15 provides textual evidence from early Christian writings, particularly Tertullian, to show hatred and *ressentiment* being paraded as "Christian love." These writers expend a great deal of voyeuristic energy inventing all sorts of tortures for sinners not welcomed into the kingdom of heaven.

Nietzsche concludes with the remark that the struggle between "good and evil" and "good and bad" is one of the oldest and greatest on earth, and that the "good and evil" of *ressentiment* has unquestionably come out on top. **He asks, however, if there might be a resurgence of the overthrown master morality**, suggesting that we might will this with all our might.

Second Essay, Sections 1-7

Nietzsche opens the second essay by **examining the significance of our ability to make promises. To hold to a promise requires both a powerful memory--the will that a certain event should not be forgotten--and a confidence about the future and one's ability to hold to the promise in the future.** This confidence demands that, on some level, we must make ourselves calculable or predictable, and for a people to be predictable, **they must share a common set of laws or customs that govern their behavior.**

Society and morality thus serve the purpose of making us predictable, which in turn serves the purpose of allowing us to make promises. This complicated process has as its end the "**sovereign individual**" who is able to make promises, not because he is **bound by social mores** but because he is master of his own free will. The sovereign individual is then faced with the tremendous responsibility of being free to make claims regarding his own future: **we call this sense of responsibility a "conscience."**

Nietzsche then turns to the **concepts of guilt and "bad conscience."** He identifies a similarity in the German words for "guilt" and "debt," suggesting that, **originally, guilt had nothing to do with accountability or immorality. Punishment was not meted out on the basis of guilt, but simply as a reprisal.** If someone failed to fulfill a promise or pay off a loan they were in debt to the person they let down, and that debt could be balanced by submitting to punishment, cruelty, or torture. If a creditor could not have the pleasure of getting his money back, he could have the pleasure of harming his debtor. The memory that is necessary to our ability to make promises was thus "burned in": all sorts of cruelty and punishment ensured that we would not forget our promise the next time.

Nietzsche remarks that making others suffer was considered a great joy--Nietzsche calls it a "festival"--that would balance out an unpaid debt. **We find the origins of conscience, guilt, and duty in the festiveness of cruelty: their origins were "like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time."**

Nietzsche notes that with the cruelty of older cultures, there was also a great deal more cheerfulness. **We have come to see suffering as a great argument *against* life, though creating suffering was once the greatest celebration of life.** Nietzsche suggests that our revulsion against suffering is, on the one hand, a revulsion against all our instincts, and, on the other hand, a revulsion against the senselessness of suffering. For neither the ancients nor the Christians was suffering senseless: there was always joy or justification in suffering. Nietzsche suggests that **we invented gods so that there was some all-witnessing presence to insure that no suffering ever went unnoticed.**

Second Essay, Sections 8-15

Nietzsche **traces the origins of guilt and conscience to the primitive relationship between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor.** We are creatures who measure and evaluate everything: everything has a price, deeds just as much as goods. This relationship exists also between people and the community they live in. The community provides shelter, peace, security, and much else besides, placing people in its debt. People who break the laws of their community are not only not repaying the debt, but they are assaulting their creditor. No wonder such offenders face the harshest of punishments.

Nietzsche also observes that the more powerful the community becomes, the less it needs to punish offenders. If the community is weak, any attack against it is life threatening, and such a threat must be eliminated. A community that is strong enough to resist all sorts of assaults has the luxury of letting offenders go unpunished. Such a society has overcome its demand for strict justice. **We give the name "mercy" to the expression of power in letting an offender go.**

Nietzsche next turns to the **origin of justice**, suggesting that the reactive affects of revenge and *ressentiment* are the last to be touched by justice. **Very few can truly be just toward someone who has harmed them. Still, the noble man who lashes out against someone who harms him is far closer to justice than the man of *ressentiment*, who is poisoned by prejudice and self-deception.**

Justice and the institution of law essentially take revenge out of the hands of the offended party. If I am robbed, it is justice, and not myself, that has been harmed, and so justice must claim revenge. Thus, Nietzsche suggests, **the concept of justice can only exist in a society that has established laws that can be transgressed: there is no such thing as "justice in itself."**

We have seen that origins and utility are worlds apart. **Anything that has existed for any length of time has been given all sorts of different interpretations, meanings, and purposes by different powers that master and subdue it.** That something has a purpose or utility is only a sign that a "will to power" is acting upon it. **Things and concepts have no inherent purpose, but are given purpose by the different forces and wills that act upon them.**

The concept of punishment, for instance, has an aspect that is enduring and an aspect that is fluid. Contrary to what we might otherwise assume, Nietzsche suggests that the act of punishing is what endures, and the purpose for which we punish is what is fluid. **Punishment has such a long history that it's no longer clear exactly why we punish. Nietzsche provides a long list of different "meanings" that punishment has had over the ages.**

In this list, Nietzsche nowhere mentions the development of "bad conscience," and suggests that **even today, punishment does not awaken a feeling of guilt.** **Punishment arouses the sense of "something has gone unexpectedly wrong" not of "I should not have done that."** **Punishment is treated as a misfortune, and serves to make us more prudent and tame.**

Second Essay, Sections 16-25

Having dismissed punishment as the origin of bad conscience, Nietzsche offers his own hypothesis: **bad conscience came about with the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to permanent settlements.** All our animal instincts of life in the wild became useless, and, **in order to survive, we had to rely on our conscious mind rather than our unconscious instincts.**

Nietzsche suggests that **instincts that cannot be released outwardly must be turned inward.** The instincts of hunting, cruelty, hostility and destruction that characterized our pre-historic lives had to be suppressed when we entered into society. As a result, **we turned all this violence in toward ourselves, made ourselves a new wilderness to be struggled against and conquered.** In so doing, we developed an inner life and bad conscience. Nietzsche characterizes the **war** we

wage against our own instincts as "man's suffering *of man, of himself*," and sees in this struggle the suggestion that "man [is] not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise."

This assessment relies on the assumption that the **transition into settled communities was a violent one, that it was forced upon the majority by a tyrannical minority: the "social contract" is a myth.** Deprived of freedom, the majority had to turn their instinct for freedom inward upon themselves, thus creating the bad conscience. In so doing, they also created the idea of beauty and developed selflessness as an ideal.

Next, Nietzsche **traces the development of the bad conscience beginning with the sense of indebtedness** early tribe members must have felt toward the founders of the tribe. As the tribe became increasingly powerful, there was an increasing debt that had to be paid to these revered ancestors. Given enough time, **these ancestors came to be worshipped as gods.** As "the maximum god attained so far," the Christian God also produces the maximum feeling of guilty indebtedness. **This debt cannot possibly be repaid, and so we develop the concepts of eternal damnation and of all people being born with irredeemable original sin.** The genius of Christianity is then to have God (as Christ) sacrifice himself in order to redeem all our sins: God, the creditor, sacrifices himself out of love for his debtor.

Nietzsche suggests that not all Gods serve to reinforce bad conscience. While the **Christian God is the focal point of bad conscience, self-torture, and guilt, the Greek gods serve as a celebration of their animal instincts, as a force to ward off the bad conscience.**

Nietzsche concludes by suggesting that there might be a way out of the past few millenia of bad conscience and self-torture. If the bad conscience could be turned not against our animal instincts, but against everything in us that opposes those instincts and turns against life itself, we could turn consciousness toward an affirmation of life and against the "illnesses" of Christianity and nihilism.