Twilight of the Idols - Friedrich Nietzsche

*General*

Nietzsche urges us to maintain cheerfulness in the middle of gloomy affairs and praises prankishness as a positive thing.

Wisest men have always agreed that life is bad, even that it is better not to be born. But Nietzsche questions this wisdom. He asserts that any judgement concerning life, either for or against, can never be true, ‘*the value of life cannot be estimated*’ (p474), especially by those living because they cannot be impartial.

There are no moral facts; man must stand *beyond* good and evil and ‘leave the illusion of moral judgement’ (p501). Morality is an interpretation of certain phenomena.

Those who wish to ‘improve’ mankind (priests) actually weaken him and make him fearful and hateful towards all that is willful and uplifting.

Christianity is a *whole* system. If you break one concept, i.e. the belief in God, the whole structure falls. Nietzsche is particularly talking about the attempt to retain Christian morals even after dropping the faith. Christianity ‘stands and falls with faith in God’ (p516).

Idealising, in opposition to Schopenhauer, is not the removal of the petty or inconsequential details, rather it is a ‘tremendous drive to bring out the man features so that the others disappear in the process’ (p518).

Hypocrisy is a positive trait in people who even though constrained to display another faith, do not abandon their own faith. These days people too easily abandon their faith or even worse, adopt a second or third and remain *honest*.

Egoism or self-interest is worth as much as the person who has it. It can be worth a great deal in someone with a strong will to power but the exact opposite in someone who has a descending life.

Complaining is never good. It always stems from weakness. It is nothing more than revenge against someone (or oneself) for them creating some kind of suffering. It is common and unworthy inasmuch as it is searching for someone to blame for one’s suffering.

Altruism (the lack of self-interest) is always negative. Nietzsche sees this as choosing what is harmful for oneself or at least to feel attracted to disinterested motives. Those who claim they don’t seek their own advantage, in reality are *unable* to find their own advantage.

Nietzsche believed in cultivating and respecting our instincts. Hostile and mistrusting instincts are to be valued as a consequence of a strong, competitive culture; ‘the hardness and terribleness of morals, conversely, can be a consequence of an excess of life’ (539). Modern man is too sensitive and easily hurt offering as well as receiving far too much consideration and sympathy for each other. Neighbourly love, pity, equality, virtues of work, modesty, machinelike, etc are all manifestations of a weak age. The strong will to be oneself, to stand out, the division between man and man, status and status; the *pathos of distance* that is the strong culture Nietzsche envisions.

Democracy is the antithesis of everything Nietzsche believes in. People fear institutions because they fear a new slavery, the moment the word ‘authority’ is mentioned.

Modern institutions are no good because we have lost the instincts (anti-liberal, the will to tradition and to authority) out of which strong institutions (like the Roman Empire or Russia) grow. Modern people live for the day, irresponsibly, with no thought for the future and enduring; institutions cannot emerge from this.

Nietzsche supported the division of society into classes and ranks but modernity has granted the working class / slave (Chinese type) things such as military service, the right to organise, the right to vote and so on, which only serve to destroy the possibility of creating a separate class of workers. ‘If one wants an end, one must also want the means: if one wants slaves, then one is a fool is one educates them to be masters’ (p545).

The criminal is a strong human being developed under unfavourable circumstances. In this case, their values are ostracised by society and their values emerge with a strong depressing slant; suspicion, fear, dishonour, and so on. These people feel that they lack public approval and do not feel useful. But every form of existence that we value today (scientist, artist, free spirit, etc) was once treated this way, because the priests devalued everything unlike them.

Nietzsche respects people like Goethe, Napoleon, the poet Horace, and Caesar. He admires the Greeks but the Romans, 18th century French aristocracy and Russia more. He particularly dislikes Socrates, Plato, Spinoza, Kant and Schopenhauer.

*The Hellenic Instinct*

The Dionysian aspect to the Greeks was the key to their strength. They granted themselves eternal life, the eternal return to life and a triumphant yes to life beyond all death and change. Procreation and sexuality played an important role in Dionysian attitudes. The highest and most solemn feelings were associated with procreation, pregnancy and birth. Accordingly, pain was holy as the pain of the woman in childbirth hallows all pain. All change and growing involves pain, that is to say, all things that promise a future demand a payment in the currency of pain.

Tragedy must also be seen in this Dionysian light, as the will to power affirming life even in the face of terrible pain and the most difficult problems. It should not be seen the way Aristotle did, as a means of purging terror and pity by discharging it on stage. Tragedy reflects the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity, joy felt even in the joy of destroying.

*Genius*

Great men, like great ages, are explosives which detonate after the building up of a tremendous amount of force, stored up, saved up for them. Once there has been no explosion for some time the smallest accident can trigger it. So Napoleon appeared in a France where he was different to the masses.

After the genius follows a period of exhaustion or sterility. The great human being or age (see the Renaissance) is a finale. The genius is a squanderer in that he gives of himself all that he has and ignores the self preservation instinct in order to achieve the greatness that has been building up.

*Marriage*

The husband should have sole juridical responsibility; this gives a marriage a strong centre of gravity. The family’s choice of a spouse guaranteed that the marriage would be based on more than a temporary feeling or momentary passion. An institution (marriage) can never be founded on an idiosyncrasy (love). It can be founded on the sex drive, property drive, or the drive to dominate, but never on something as weak as love. Marriage is an institution in every sense of the word.

*Freedom*

Liberal institutions cease to be liberal as soon as they are attained. After liberalism is attained, ‘they undermine the will to power; they level mountain and valley, and call that morality… every time it is the herd animal that triumphs with them’ (p541). It is war, the war for liberal institutions that contains their value and promotes freedom. Freedom means that ‘one has the will to assume responsibility for oneself. That one becomes more indifferent to difficulties, hardships, privation, even to life itself. That one is prepared to sacrifice human beings for one’s cause, not excluding oneself. Freedom means that the manly instincts which delight in war and victory dominate over other instincts, for example, over those of “pleasure”… The free man is a *warrior*’ (p542).

Freedom is measured according to the resistance which must be overcome to remain on top. ‘The highest type of free men should be sought where the highest resistance is constantly overcome’ (p542). The people who have attained value, never attained it under liberal institutions; only great danger built their merits. ‘Danger alone acquaints us with our own resources, our virtues, our armour and weapons, our spirit, and *forces* us to be strong’ (p542). Only those who *are* strong can *become* strong.

*Dying at the Right Time*

We should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Nietzsche’s whole philosophy respects and commands power. In line with this, if one is ‘no longer possible to live proudly. Death freely chosen, death at the right time, brightly and cheerfully accomplished amid children and witnesses’ (p537), is the perfect ending to a strong life. In this way death is purchased from a love of life. ‘It is not in our hands to prevent our birth; but we can correct this mistake’ (p537).

*Beauty and Ugliness*

Ugliness is often the result of mixing races or declining development, the typical criminal is ugly.

Beauty is completely conditional. It is conditional on us because we cause the beauty in the world. Man mirrors himself in all things and he considers everything beautiful in which he sees his own image reflected, ‘the judgement “beautiful” is the *vanity of his species*’ (p525). “Beautiful in itself” is just a phrase and means nothing. However, Nietzsche counters this by asking whether the world is really beautified by man thinking it beautiful, rather maybe man has merely *humanised* the world. There is nothing to say that we are the model of beauty. He considers what we look like in the eyes of a higher judge of beauty.

Nothing is beautiful except man alone. And nothing is ugly except the degenerating man. This is shown in the fact that whenever man is depressed, he senses the proximity of something ‘ugly’, but his will to power, courage and pride all rise in the presence of the beautiful. What we call ‘ugly’, we do so only because it reminds us of degeneration and weakness.

Nietzsche’s Lamarckian beliefs come out again when he stresses that ‘All that is good is inherited’ (p551) and those who *have* good things are different from those who *acquire* them. All beauty (culture) needs to be breed and occurs only over time, but overall it must begin in the body (diet, gesture, physiology, etc) and not the soul (like priests suppose). Breeding feelings and thoughts is almost nothing if the body is not bred as well.

*Germany*

Nietzsche liked a lot about Germans but also thought there was much wrong with it. In particular, he disliked the ‘two great European narcotics, alcohol and Christianity,’ (p507) as well as the state of German music. He also frequently disparages the despiritualising influence of the science-industry. Education doesn’t escape his condemnation as being designed to prepare huge numbers of men as quickly as possible to become usable in government service. Despite the fact that there are many scholars there are no *educators*. Higher education and huge numbers is a contradiction. Higher education belongs only to the exception, in fact, all great and beautiful things cannot be common property. He expresses remorse at the fact that there are no more genuine German philosophers anymore. The state and culture are opposites and as one rises the other falls. He says all great cultural ages are *anti-political*.

*Education*

Nietzsche mentions three aspects of education:

1. Learning to see – this involves not reacting immediately, following every impulse, but letting everything come to one and analysing a thing from all sides before making a decision.
2. Learning to think – this requires a technique.
3. Learning to speak and write.

*People*

Socrates

Socrates was ugly and was a plebeian. He made dialectic popular in Greek society. With dialectics, the person of low rank could argue just as effectively as those higher. Nietzsche sees dialectics (reasoned argumentation) as something mistrustful and underhanded; also as being the self-defence for those who have no other weapons. It is far better than giving reasons to give commands. He criticises Socrates for wielding dialectic as a tool of plebeian *ressentiment* and making it a form of revenge. With dialectics, rationality becomes all important and the instincts are disregarded in favour of it. To have to fight the instincts is what Nietzsche calls *decadence*. He argues that happiness equals instinct.

Darwin

Nietzsche was completely against Darwinism and the “struggle for existence.” He felt that if Darwin’s theory was right (survival of the fittest) then we should see the progeny gradually increasing in strength and power but instead we have seen that the species has not grown in perfection. In fact, we frequently see the weak prevail over the strong because they are the majority. He also notes that only those who need spirit can acquire it and so when someone has strength they lose their spirit and thence the weaker have an opportunity. The weaker (the majority) also tend to be more *intelligent* (cunning) and they have more spirit fuelled by their hatred for the elite.

Where there is struggle, Nietzsche believes, it is a struggle for power; not existence.

*Being and Becoming*

Philosophers have been unable to find being and so they sought a reason for this failure. They concluded that it is our senses which are unreliable and deceive us concerning reality so we should turn from those senses to reason. Nietzsche reminds us that the senses don’t lie; what we make of their testimony alone, introduces lies. Ultimately reason is the cause of all falsifications of the testimony of the senses. Nietzsche irrevocably sides with Heraclitus here in affirming that the apparent world full of change, becoming and passing away is real. Being, he claims, is an empty fiction.

Four propositions:

1. The reasons for which this world is called ‘apparent’ are the reasons which indicate its reality.
2. The attributes of the ‘true world’ are the attributes of not-being, the ‘true world’ has only been constructed out of opposition to the real world.
3. To invent fables about a world other than this one has no meaning at all.
4. Any distinction between a ‘true’ and ‘apparent’ world (be they Christian or Kantian) is merely decadence (symptomatic of a decline of life).

*God*

Nietzsche also claims that philosophers have taken things backwards and placed that which comes last as first and giving it priority. All of the highest concepts then must be *causa sui* and the highest of all these (which as Schopenhauer claimed) is also therefore the most general and emptiest concept (God) becomes the greatest.

*The Passions and Morality*

Nietzsche claims that all passions have two phases. In the first, earlier phase, the passions are destructive to the possessor of them (they cause us to make stupid decisions) but in the later phase, they work with spirit to ‘spiritualise’ themselves. Hence most philosophers (paying attention only to the first phase) have tried to get rid of the passions but this is a mistake; the people who have to try to extirpate a craving are the most weak-willed, unable to impose moderation upon themselves.

The spiritualisation of sensuality becomes love, while the spiritualisation of hostility becomes an appreciation of the value of having enemies. Only with opposition can something feel itself as necessary and actually become necessary. This extends to internal opposition too. There must be constant internal war for there to be growth and development.

The instincts of an individual if given free reign will contradict, disturb and destroy each other, but in the hands of a strong person, one or more of these instincts is paralysed so that another can become master. In this way an individual truly becomes an individual.

As mentioned earlier, Nietzsche thinks that passion and instinct are vital to growth. He links this to morality be claiming that every healthy, natural, moral recommendation (“shalt” and “shalt not” that affirm life) is dominated by some instinct of life. All *anti-natural* morality turns against the instinct to life and is a condemnation of these instincts.

Nietzsche again notes the futility of attempting to place a value on life, in particular, the negative one given by the ‘moralists’. ‘A condemnation of life by the living remains in the end a mere symptom of a certain kind of life… One would require a position *outside* of life, and yet have to know it as well as on, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the *value* of life… When we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values’ (p490). So even the anti-natural morality is only a value judgement of life – the question is of what life? The answer? A declining, weakened, weary, condemned life.

It is naïve for someone to demand that man, out of all the wealth of types he has at his disposal, ‘ought to’ be such and such, ‘ought to’ be different, because even a single human is fated ‘from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be. To say to him, “Change yourself!” is to demand that everything be changed, even retroactively’ (p491).

The immoralists (natural morals) are affirming life in all ways while the ‘moralistic’ are condemning life at all times. They even see an advantage in the priests and the ‘virtuous;’ that the immoralists can exist in opposition to them!

*The Four Great Errors*

1. The error of confusing cause and effect. Nietzsche argues that everybody has argued for doing something (or not doing something) to derive happiness. Nietzsche thinks that it is actually the case that a happy person will naturally perform certain actions and refrain from others. His virtue *is* the effect of his happiness, not the other way around. ‘All that is good is instinct – and hence easy… Laboriousness is an objection’ (p494).
2. The error of a false causality. Nietzsche thinks we base our world of cause and effect on three inner facts, none of which have been shown to be factual. First, we think of ourselves as causal in the act of willing. We also believe that motives (in consciousness) comprise the causes of an act and of course the ego (subject) causes the thought. These ‘facts’ of the internal world are myths according to Nietzsche. He advocates a kind of epiphenomenalism where the will ‘merely accompanies events; it can also be absent’ (p495). Motive is just a ‘surface phenomenon of consciousness’ (p495). He thinks we created our world of causality on the back of this mistaken identification of a causal chain within ourselves.
3. The error of imaginary causes. Closely related to the second error, Nietzsche points out that we are never satisfied merely saying that we feel a certain way. We only admit the point when we have identified some kind of motivation. This acceptance of a particular causal interpretation becomes a habit and precludes any investigation into the real cause. We do this because deriving something unknown from something familiar is comforting and gives us a feeling of power and control. Because the causal instinct is just to relieve ourselves of discomfort and excited by fear, any explanation is better than none. Since these are not ‘real’ causes, just what we have imagined, we tend look for causes that are comfortable and familiar, so we fall into standard patterns of causes and explanations. The banker thinks of ‘business,’ the Christian of ‘sin’ and so on. All of morality and religion belong under this concept of imaginary causes; the explanation of disagreeable feelings.

In Christianity these bad feelings are explained by evil spirits or produced by sinful acts or as a punishment or poorly considered actions.

Good feelings are explained also; by appeal to God or by performing good deeds.

1. The error of free will. Nietzsche claims that free will is an invented doctrine by those (theologians) who wanted to make us responsible and thereby dependent on them. After responsibility is decided, one can then punish and assign guilt. ‘Men were considered “free” so that they might be judged and punished – so that they might become *guilty*’ (p499). Nietzsche’s doctrine is centred on the fact that ‘no one *gives* man his qualities – neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself… No one is responsible for man’s being there at all, for his being such-and-such’ (p500). ‘One is necessary, one is a piece of fatefulness, one belongs to the whole, one is in the whole; there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare or sentence our being because that would mean judging the whole, but there is nothing besides the whole.’ (500-01). This idea, Nietzsche calls the great liberation.

*Art*

Imitating nature in art, to Nietzsche, is not good because nature is chance. It distorts, leaves gaps and exaggerates. Artists must first court a kind of frenzy (frenzy of feasts, cruelty, destruction, cravings, sexual excitement, will, etc, in short, everything Dionysian) which excites the whole being and enriches everything out of one’s own fullness. In this state one sees things as reflections of one’s own power, ‘this *having to* transform into perfection is – art’ (p518).

Nietzsche considers the opposite case, the *anti-artist* who embraces a ‘mode of being which would impoverish all things, making them thin and consumptive’ (p519). All Christians are anti-artists. People like Raphael ‘said Yes, Raphael *did* Yes; consequently, Raphael was no Christian’ (p519).

The Apollonian frenzy excites the eye through painting, sculpture, and poetry. The Dionysian frenzy affects the whole system through imitation, transformation and acting.

The tragic artist shows (not resignation as per Schopenhauer) the hero in a state without fear, courageous before a powerful enemy.