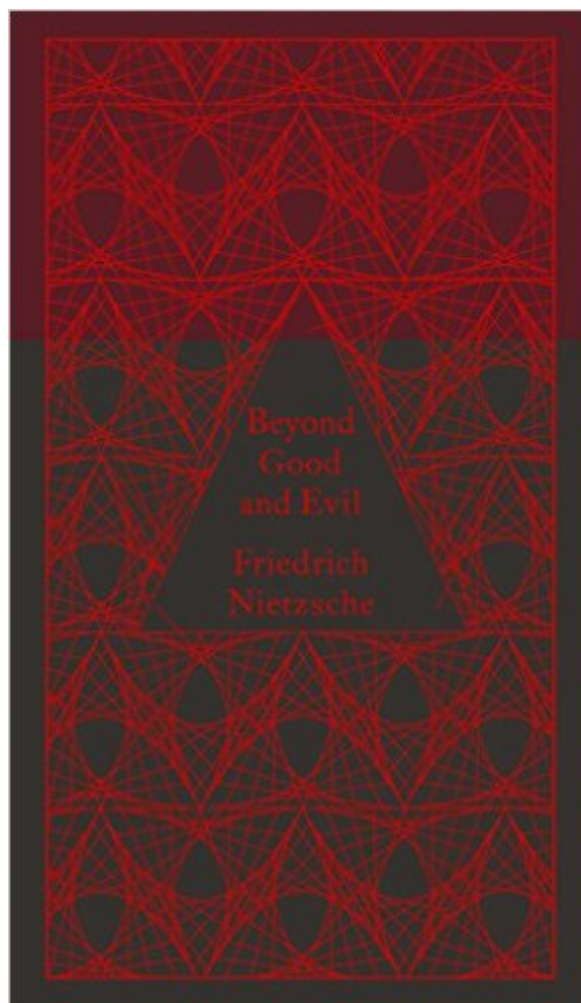


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# Penguin Classics Beyond Good And Evil (Penguin Modern Classics)



## Synopsis

One of the most iconoclastic philosophers of all time, Nietzsche dramatically rejected notions of good and evil, truth and God. *Beyond Good and Evil* demonstrates that the world is steeped in false piety and infected with a 'slave morality'. With wit and subversive energy, Nietzsche demands that the individual impose their own 'will to power' upon the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While *Beyond Good and Evil* is probably the quintessential Nietzschean piece, I would have to say Zimmern's translation lags behind Kaufmann's. Although her use of quaint Elizabethan English is charming, and her edition has a beautifully personal touch to it (Zimmern was Nietzsche's dinner companion and erstwhile friend), the mistakes in her translation, while subtle, detract from it, especially when precision of language is so important for reading this book. Go with Kaufmann.

By Samuel T Goldberg, MD, psychiatrist/psychoanalyst Columbia Maryland sglmn61@aol.com  
In the early chapters of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche in effect wipes the slate clean, showing how previous philosophers and moralities were in their grasp inadequate. There is a "definite fundamental scheme of possible philosophies" (Aphorism 20), as there is of possible moralities (260), and particular philosophers and moralists merely fill in their respective places on these spectrums. Nietzsche offers a comprehensive critique of all such systems. The philosophers are unable to perceive even what in themselves wishes for truth, and they do not see that truth and

virtue may in fact derive from deceptiveness and wickedness, which may be necessary functions for life itself. (Aph. 2-4) The will to truth may be merely a refinement of the will to ignorance. (24) Certain falsehoods may be nourishing and necessary physiologically. Deceptive appearance is necessary for life itself. (34) In a voice of irony, he acknowledges that we might need mathematical science, despite its falsehood. Philosophers and scientists wish to impose their morality, their ideal, their concepts on nature out of their pride, wishing to appropriate nature. Less the truthfulness of their concepts than this underlying will to power motivates the self-deceptively put "will to truth". It is but an old moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance, or even that there is in reality any opposition between "truth" and "falsehood" at all. They may be merely shades of the same thing, "degrees of appearance". (34) The very existence of "stuff" or matter that underlies the "real world" is highly doubtful. Likewise, even the basic assumptions of a unitary "self" that thinks, of an "I", is also but an old falsifying superstition to which we cling for comfort and vanity. Again, "free will" being an illusion shows the importance of intentionality to be illusory. "The decisive value of an intention lies precisely in what is unintentional in it." (32) In this, he anticipates psychoanalysis. Thinking about and questioning morality is itself immoral. (228) We have, after all, pluripotential access within to every barbarism (223). Morals, we've discovered, are a mere phenomenon of nature, not absolute nor above nature; there are no universal goods or values (194). Our modern "scientific", historic, scholarly observations and evaluations of all moralities and cultures, then, puts us in the position at best of being parodists of all moralities, undermining every one. (223) Our "transcendent" position is empty. Thus, our intrinsic, physiological aggression (will to power), manifested as "scientific skepticism", has relentlessly critiqued all that we loved or worshipped, utterly destroying each in turn. Having diagnosed our new condition, that we have assassinated not only the "old soul concept", ie, the "subject", showing that it is a questionable mere appearance as much as the "object", Nietzsche then sketches out the grim consequences. We have sacrificed ourselves, reality, finally even God himself, leaving us with only the Nothing to worship, "the final cruelty." (55) Recognizing that there is no objective foundation for morality in the world, that there is no universal moral law (186), that the inner essence of nature and man is no more than raw will to power, instills profound pessimism. The truth that there is no truth may be deadly, as Leo Strauss put it. It is better that only few people realize that there is no truth; the general propagation of this insight could be calamitous; Thus, it is good that the study of morality is boring. (228) Can there nevertheless somehow be life-affirmation from this insight? Finding or asserting this seems a principle goal of Nietzsche's. The strength of drives per se, of the will to power, which includes the capacity to sublimate, train and cultivate that raw will to higher forms of

"spirituality", may be a way out. But, without any absolute nor objective standard from any source other than the one who wills, the ultimate value of what is willed can derive only from the source of will itself; it is self-positing. The one who wills most strongly creates values, creates the orientation of better and worse, and need not refer nor resort to any standard independently of his own nobility. Nietzsche seems to celebrate this, but he recognizes the dangers, describing even proto-Nazism (208). The "philosopher of the future" , with these insights in hand, creates truth and value, rules and legislates, becoming himself the telos of mankind .(211) Man is both creature and Creator(225), in the image of God most literally; man created God in his own image. The "philosopher of the future" extends the sphere of his responsibility to include the all; he might undertake "audacious and painful experiments" that "the softhearted and the effeminate tastes of democracy could not approve... They will be harder (and perhaps not always only against themselves) than humane people might wish." (210) He raises the question: Is cruelty itself a good, merely a necessity, or merely to be recognized as a primary reality of nature, or of life? Men and values are not equal, and according to the self-positing valuation of the great men, since they are themselves the Whither and Wherefore of mankind, what is right for one is hardly fair for all. Exploitation of others might be necessary; As opposed to Kant's moral imperative, by which each human consciousness must be only regarded always as an end in itself, never a means, this new morality, truer to the nature of things, unhinged from any absolute, has all lower men as only means to the ends of the men with the strongest wills. We can see how this is a "dangerous" book, which, if misinterpreted or misrepresented, as in fact it was for political ends by some Germans in the 1930's, might be used to pervert Nietzsche, making him seem to promote the worst outrages, when in fact he was merely the sad herald.

Nietzsche never advocated any sort of morality as "good morality", nor did he encourage the creation of a "best possible society" by use of a certain morality. Nor is that what this book is about. (Nor did he propose the creation of a new moral standard: his good/evil versus good/bad antithesis is an analysis; Nietzsche was a philosopher, not an ideologue, moralist, or politician). Moreover, he did not find moral complacency to be the greatest fault of his time: rather, the mental complacency and lack of intellectual integrity displayed by many academics and "philosophers." Nietzsche here tries to analyze a range of issues and exposes in the most surprising ways numerous relationships, psychological insights, and types of morality, personality, and so forth. The aphoristic style is not a reflection of discontinuity: it is an embodiment of Nietzsche's ideal of constant questioning. These are thought experiments which develop ideas in unexpected ways, ideas which are retraced through

the entire work. It has structure and continuity for those who know how to find it. The book has some faults and a few remarks which strike the reader as unnecessary drivel: but what great work doesn't? Whether we agree with it or not, like it or dislike it, until we are great critics or philosophers, we have no excuse for giving less than 5 stars to one of the greatest books of all time.

Beyond Good and Evil from the start is a book concerning moral philosophy. The title leads the prospective reader to believe that Nietzsche is dealing essentially with ethical issues, but the scope of the text is much broader, encompassing reflections on religion, and current affairs. Beyond Good and Evil opens with a section on the 'Prejudices of Philosophers', in this he undertakes a critique of the philosophical traditions. Unlike previous philosophers, Nietzsche does not select an issue or notion and analyze it, in the process distinguishing his views from those of the previous writers and erecting a body of concepts that form a system of thought. Instead he calls into question the very basis of philosophizing. His targets are philosophers themselves. He claims that philosophers merely pose as persons seeking the truth. Nietzsche considers religion as 'neurosis', it involves an unnatural self-denial and sacrifice. He is not unaware of the advantages that religion brought to human society, even as it has debased human nature. He believes it has helped create a variable social order. By demanding we love each other. However his attitude towards religion is that it represents a stage in human development that must be overcome. Beyond Good and Evil is not an easy task to read. I admit that there are parts of this I had trouble understanding and often it was a frustrating read.

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