

Nietzsche: For Fun and Prophet

!Draft!

**Professor Wolin
Spring 2021
Monday, 6:30-8:30**

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche – never paralyzed by excessive self-modesty – exulted, “*I am no man, I am dynamite.*” He described his books as “*assassination attempts,*” rather than literary works, and he felicitously characterized his intellectual method as “*philosophizing with a hammer.*” Nietzsche joyfully prophesied the advent of “Great Politics,” which, in his eyes, meant “upheavals, a convulsion of earthquakes, a moving of mountains and valleys . . . as well as wars the like of which have never yet been seen on Earth.”

Nietzsche was, unaccountably, the “court philosopher” of the Third Reich as well as the intellectual progenitor of French poststructuralism (Foucault, Derrida, etc.). In interrogating Nietzsche’s legacy, our central question will be: how did it come to pass that generations of intellectuals felt obligated to define themselves and to plot their course forward through a confrontation with Nietzsche’s work?

In order to better understand Nietzsche and his titanic philosophical influence, our seminar will be divided into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will read and assess major texts by Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*, *the Will to Power*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *the Antichrist*. In the second half, we will focus on the major stages in the transatlantic reception of Nietzsche’s work: the political reception of Nietzsche in Germany, the deconstructionist reading of Nietzsche (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault), the aesthetic interpretation of Nietzsche, and finally, recent Anglo-American studies reassessing Nietzsche’s attitude toward Darwinism.

Format for Virtual Class Meetings

- For the most part, the class will strive to approximate – as much as possible – the conditions of an in-person graduate seminar. I will send you, via email, a zoom link prior to each class meeting. In order to encourage discussion, we will also, from time to time, rely on Blackboard’s Discussion Board feature. Ideally, this will also lend greater coherence to our in-class discussions.

- In keeping with the nature and goals of a graduate seminar, participation in class discussions is extremely important. Each student will also be required to give a class report, lasting no more than 10 to 15 minutes. The purpose of the class reports is to provide a helpful overview of the material and relevant issues, as well as to highlight topics and themes for discussion. (The logistics of the individual class reports will be finalized via email following our initial class meeting.)
- Class readings: I have attempted to secure PDF versions of all of the assigned readings. Although you may well have your own editions of Nietzsche's texts, for purposes of class discussion, it will be important to agree to a specific translation. As a rule, I have favored the Kaufman/Vintage editions of Nietzsche's major works, since these are the most readily obtainable. I will make the PDF versions of the assigned texts available to you via a Google Drive link.

Some Important Books on Nietzsche:

Gemes and Richardson, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche* (OHN)

Young, *Nietzsche: A Biography*

Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*

Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*

Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*

Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*

Emden, *Nietzsche's Naturalism*

Cameron and Dombrowsky, eds., *Political Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche*

Weekly Assignments:

Feb. 1: Introduction

Feb. 8: A Preface to Nietzsche

Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, 121-150, 180-210,

Safranski, *Schopenhauer: The Wild Years of Philosophy*, 191-223

Wagner, "Art and Revolution";

Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 173-208

Nietzsche, "The Greek State"; "Homer's Contest," in *Nietzsche on the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge edition), 167-184

Feb. 15: President's Day

Feb. 22: Nietzsche, Wagner, and the Aesthetic State (I):

Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, Part I

Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 1-89

March 1: **Nietzsche, Wagner & the Aesthetic State (II)**

Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, Part II

Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 132-187

Williamson, "Nietzsche's *Kulturkampf*" in *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, 234-284

March 8: **Nietzsche & Epistemology (I)**

Nietzsche, "Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *Philosophy and Truth*

Nietzsche, "The Prejudices of Philosophers," *Beyond Good and Evil*

Nietzsche, "The Will to Power as Knowledge," *The Will to Power*, 247-253, 261-330

Habermas, "Nietzsche's Reduction of Cognitive Interests," *Knowledge & Human Interests*, 274-300

Foucault, "Truth and Power: An Interview"

March 15: **"European Nihilism":**

Nietzsche, "European Nihilism," *The Will to Power*, 3-82

Nietzsche, "The Use and Abuse of History," *Untimely Meditations*, 57-123

Habermas, "The Entry Point into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point," *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 83-105

March 22: **Nietzsche & Naturalism**

Nietzsche, "The Will to Power in Nature," *The Will to Power*, 332-380

Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 1-94, 133 -160, 186-218

Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology, Metaphor*, 1-55, 139-164, 193-212

Leiter, "Nietzsche's Naturalism Reconsidered"

March 29: **Spring Recess**

April 5: **Nietzsche & Morality**

Genealogy of Morals

Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History"

April 12: **Nietzsche and „Great Politics“**

Nietzsche, "Discipline and Breeding," *The Will to Power*, 457-518

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Drochon, *Nietzsche and Great Politics*

April 19: **Nietzsche & Nazism**

Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany*, 17-50, 232-307, 315-330

April 26: **Nietzsche's Aesthetics: Life as a Work of Art**

Nietzsche, "The Will to Power as Art," *The Will to Power*, 419-455

Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*

Foucault, "The Aesthetics of Existence"

Gardener, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Aestheticism," in OHN,

May 3: **Nietzsche & Poststructuralism**

Readings from Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche*:

- Deleuze, "Active and Reactive"
- Deleuze "Nomad thought"
- Derrida, "Question of Style"
- Blanchot, "The Limits of Experience: Nihilism"

Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"

Descombes, "Difference," in *Modern French Philosophy*, 136-167

May 10: **Work on Papers**

Written Assignment: Final papers are due on May 17. You are to choose a syllabus-related topic (in consultation with yours truly) and write a 12-15 page essay. The assignment is meant to be an "interpretive essay" rather than a full-blown "research paper." By the same token, the essay should demonstrate *extensive familiarity with the relevant secondary literature* with respect to your chosen topic— this should be clear in the notes and bibliography – as well as the relevant conflict of interpretations. What matters is your capacity to discern and reconstruct the major interpretive standpoints, to evaluate stronger and weaker arguments and positions, and to arrive at fresh conclusions that, ideally, will advance our understanding of the material.

Incomplete policy: medical authorization required (under most circumstances); make up work will only be accepted until the first day of the fall 2021 semester.