

On the Prejudices of Philosophers

by Frederick Nietzsche

From *Beyond Good and Evil*

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1 The will to truth tempts us to many a venture. We want truth: why not rather untruth? It seems as if the problem had never even been put, as if we were the first to fix it with our eyes, and risk it.

2 "How could anything originate out of its opposite? Truth out of error or the pure and sunlike gaze of the sage out of lust? Such origins are impossible; whoever dreams of them is a fool. The things of highest value cannot be derived from this transitory, seductive, paltry world of turmoil, delusion and lust." This way of judging constitutes the typical prejudgment and prejudice, which gives away the metaphysicians of all ages.

3 After having looked long enough between the philosopher's lines and fingers, I say that the greater part of conscious thinking must be included among instinctive activities. We have to relearn here, that "being conscious" is not the opposite of being instinctive, and that even behind logic, there stands physiological demands for the preservation of life.

6 Gradually it has become clear to me that every great philosophy so far has been just the personal confession of its author. To be sure, among scientific men, you may find something like a drive for knowledge, a clockwork that, once wound, works without any participation from the other drives of the scholar. But the real "interests" of the scholar lie usually somewhere else, say, in his family, in making money, or in politics.

8 There is a point in every philosophy when the philosopher's "conviction" appears on the stage.

9 Live "according to nature" said the ancient Stoics! What words these are! What is that beyond "live according to life"; how could you not do that? But this is an ancient story: what happened with the Stoics still happens today, as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself, it creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise.

11 Kant was proud of having discovered in man the faculty for synthetic judgements a priori. But "How are synthetic judgements a priori possible?" How did Kant answer? By saying "By virtue of a faculty" (though unfortunately not in five words). But is that an answer? Or rather merely a repetition of the question? How does opium induce sleep? "by virtue of a faculty, namely the virtus dormitiva", replies the doctor in Molière. Such replies belong in comedy. It is high time to replace the Kantian question by another question, "Why is belief in such judgements necessary?" Finally, to call to mind the enormous influence that "German

philosophy" (note the quotation marks) has exercised throughout the whole of Europe, there is no doubt that a certain *virtus dormitiva* had a share in it.

12 One must first, give the finishing stroke to that calamitous atomism which Christianity has taught best and longest, soul atomism- the belief that the soul is something indestructible. Though, between ourselves, it is not at all necessary to get rid of "soul", but the way is open for new versions of the hypothesis.

13 Physiologists should think before taking the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of organic beings. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength- life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the results.

14 It is perhaps just dawning on five or six minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and not a world-description. But insofar as it is based on belief in the senses, it is a sort of explanation. Eyes and fingers speak in its favour, which strikes an age with plebeian tastes as persuasive. Conversely, the charm of the old Platonic way of thinking consisted precisely in resistance to obvious sense-evidence.

16 There are still harmless self-observers who believe that there are "immediate certainties", such as "I think," or as the superstition of Schopenhauer put it, "I will". But I shall repeat a hundred times that "immediate certainty," "absolute knowledge" and the "thing-in-itself," involve a *contradictio in adjecto*. We really must free ourselves from the seduction of words! But from where do I get the concept of thing? Why do I believe in cause and effect? What gives me the right to speak of an ego? Whoever ventures to answer these metaphysical questions by appealing to intuitive perception will encounter a smile and two question marks from a philosopher nowadays. "Sir," the philosopher will say, "it is improbable that you are not mistaken; but why insist on the truth?"-

17 Concerning the superstitions of logicians, I shall never tire of emphasising a small terse fact, namely, that a thought comes when "it" wishes, and not when "I" wish.

21 The desire for "freedom of the will", which still holds sway in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions, to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society, involves nothing less than, with more than Münchhausen's audacity, to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness. Suppose someone were to see through this boorish simplicity, I beg of him to carry his "enlightenment" a step further, and abandon, too, its opposite "unfree will," which amounts to a misuse of cause and effect.

23 All psychology so far has got stuck in moral prejudices and fears. Nobody has yet come close to understanding it as the development of the will to power. If, however, a person should regard even the affects of hatred, envy, covetousness and the lust to rule as conditions of life, as factors essential to the general economy of life (and must be further enhanced if life is to be further enhanced), he will begin to get seasick. On the other hand, if one's ship has drifted into such waters, well! All right!

Let us clench our teeth! Let us open our eyes and keep our hand firm on the helm!
We sail right over morality! Psychology is become again the path to fundamental
problems.