

# BEYOND GOOD and EVIL



*Prelude*  
*to a*  
*Philosophy of the Future*

by  
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Translated, with Commentary,  
by  
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## Preface

Supposing truth is a woman—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far<sup>1</sup> have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman's heart? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won—and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. *If* it is left standing at all! For there are scoffers who claim that it has fallen, that all dogmatism lies on the ground—even more, that all dogmatism is dying.

Speaking seriously, there are good reasons why all philosophical dogmatizing, however solemn and definitive its airs used to be, may nevertheless have been no more than a noble childishness and tyronism. And perhaps the time is at hand when it will be comprehended again and again *how little* used to be sufficient to furnish the cornerstone for such sublime and unconditional philosophers' edifices as the dogmatists have built so far: any old popular superstition from time immemorial (like the soul superstition which, in the form of the subject and ego superstition, has not even yet ceased to do mischief); some play on words perhaps, a seduction by grammar, or an audacious generalization of very narrow, very personal, very human, all too human facts.

The dogmatists' philosophy was, let us hope, only a promise across millennia—as astrology was in still earlier times when perhaps more work, money, acuteness, and patience were lavished in its service than for any real science so far: to astrology and its “supra-terrestrial” claims we owe the grand style of architecture in Asia and Egypt. It seems that all great things first have to bestride

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<sup>1</sup> *Bisher* (so far) is a word that recurs constantly throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*. It helps to color the word “beyond” in the title.

the earth in monstrous and frightening masks in order to inscribe themselves in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands: dogmatic philosophy was such a mask; for example, the Vedanta doctrine in Asia and Platonism in Europe.

Let us not be ungrateful to it, although it must certainly be conceded that the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatist's error—namely, Plato's invention of the pure spirit and the good as such. But now that it is overcome, now that Europe is breathing freely again after this nightmare and at least can enjoy a healthier—sleep, we, *whose task is wakefulness itself*, are the heirs of all that strength which has been fostered<sup>2</sup> by the fight against this error. To be sure, it meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective*, the basic condition of all life, when one spoke of spirit and the good as Plato did. Indeed, as a physician one might ask: "How could the most beautiful growth of antiquity, Plato, contract such a disease? Did the wicked Socrates corrupt him after all? Could Socrates have been the corrupter of youth after all? And did he deserve his hemlock?"

But the fight against Plato or, to speak more clearly and for "the people," the fight against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia—for Christianity is Platonism for "the people"—has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which had never yet existed on earth: with so tense a bow we can now shoot for the most distant goals. To be sure, European man experiences this tension as need and distress; twice already attempts have been made in the grand style to unbend the bow—once by means of Jesuitism, the second time by means of the democratic enlightenment which, with the aid of freedom of the press and newspaper-reading, might indeed bring it about that the spirit would no longer experience itself so easily as a "need." (The Germans have invented gunpowder—all due respect for that!—but then they made up for that: they invented the press.)<sup>3</sup> But we who

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<sup>2</sup> *Grossgezüchtet*: *züchten* means to breed, grow, or cultivate animals, plants, or qualities. Nietzsche uses the word frequently, and in these pages it is most often rendered by "cultivate." In his usage the connotation is generally spiritual.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the Preface to *The Antichrist*: "One must be skilled in living on moun-

are neither Jesuits nor democrats, nor even German enough, we *good Europeans*<sup>4</sup> and free, *very* free spirits—we still feel it, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow. And perhaps also the arrow, the task, and—who knows?—the *goal*—

*Sils Maria*, Upper Engadine,  
June 1885.<sup>5</sup>

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tains—seeing the wretched ephemeral babble of politics and national self-seeking *beneath* oneself" (*Portable Nietzsche*, p. 568). In the daily newspaper the concern with ephemeral matters is institutionalized and cultivated at the expense of genuine "spirituality."

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche's coinage, initially introduced by him in *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878), section 475 (*Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 61-63).

<sup>5</sup> The book was written "summer 1885 in the Upper Engadine and the following winter in Nizza" (letter to Georg Brandes, April 10, 1888). This is borne out by other letters, except that additions and revisions were made until June 1886. The book was printed in June and July and published the beginning of August 1886.