

Daniel Conway:
Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil

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In 1974, the French philosopher and Nietzsche commentator Paul Valadier remarked that the phrase “beyond good and evil” was an expression that had become celebrated, perhaps “(*trop*) célèbre,” pointing as evidence of a wider impact of Nietzsche to an article on economics — published in *Le Monde* on 30 May 1969 — that had been placed under the sign of that eminently mystical figure, Zarathustra (Valadier 1974, 121). Indeed, Nietzsche himself, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* described the title of *Beyond Good and Evil* as a “dangerous slogan,” while at the same time characterizing this later work as a “clarification and supplement” to the earlier one (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, first essay, § 17). In this study, another installment in the ongoing project called Edinburgh Critical Guides to Nietzsche, Daniel Conway considers this work, whose title Nietzsche described in a letter to Irene von Seydlitz of 7 May 1886 as “malicious” (*bösartig*) (Nietzsche 1986, 189), both as a stand-alone text and a part of the unfolding trajectory of Nietzsche’s intellectual and philosophical development. After all, as Nietzsche told Jacob Burckhardt in a letter of 22 September 1886, *Beyond Good and Evil* “says the same things” as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “but differently, very differently.” (Nietzsche 1986, 254) Thus *Beyond Good and Evil* has the twin-task of looking back to *Zarathustra*, on which it is “a kind of commentary” (as Nietzsche told Reinhart von Seydlitz on 26 October 1886), as well as being a “*Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*” (or “fore-play to a philosophy of the future”) (Nietzsche 1986, 270 and Nietzsche 1968a, subtitle), a description whose echoes of sexual arousal Conway is rightly swift to minimize, while acknowledging that Nietzsche is “certainly intent on enrolling his best readers in a discipline of affective-somatic practices that he regards as productive of (and continuous with) a meaningful worldly existence beyond good and evil” (Conway 2024, 3).

Because each volume of the Edinburgh Critical Guides to Nietzsche is dedicated to an individual text, Conway has the time and the space to devote a chapter to the Preface of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Although Jacques Derrida

was fascinated by Nietzsche's opening speculation, "Supposing truth is a woman — what then?" relating it in *Éperons* (or *Spurs*, trans. 1978) to what he termed "La question du style," Conway chooses to pursue Nietzsche's ongoing engagement in *Beyond Good and Evil* with Plato and his "dogmatism" (Conway 2024, 27). "All great things," Nietzsche writes, "in order to inscribe themselves with eternal demands upon the heart of humanity, must first stalk the earth as colossal and fear-inducing masks" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface), a passage which, for Conway, raises such questions as, "a mask of *what?*", and "what is the 'great thing' that sought shelter from within the recently vacated mantle of philosophical dogmatism?" (Conway 2024, 27). The postponement of the answers to the questions is, he adds, "mercifully short," for in Part One, § 1, Nietzsche reveals that "the will to truth" is the "great thing" which, "until very recently, lay hidden and coiled at the heart of philosophical dogmatism" (Conway 2024, 27). Or as Nietzsche puts it in his Preface, Plato's "invention of the pure spirit and of the Good in itself" was "the worst, longest lasting and most dangerous of all errors so far," obliging Plato (and his epigones) to "stand truth on its head" and to "deny the *perspectival*, the basic condition of all life" (Conway 2024, Preface).

In order to vouchsafe his "promise spanning the millennia," Platonism and its later popular form, Christianity as "Platonism for the people," defamed life itself (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface): yet, in Conway's words, Nietzsche's overarching goal" in *Beyond Good and Evil* is to show how "Plato's error...produced (unintended) positive consequences in excess of the extensive damage it has caused" (Conway 2024, 28). For Nietzsche goes on to speak about how "the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia...has created a magnificent tension of the spirit in Europe, such as never existed on earth" (Conway 2024, Preface). (Incidentally, this passage caught the attention of C. G. Jung who, in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, reflected on the historico-intellectual significance of such theological debates as how many angels could dance on the point of a pin or whether Christ could have carried out his work of redemption just as well if he had come into the world as a pea with reference to Nietzsche, saying that he "had guessed, however, at the biological background of this phenomenon when he spoke of the 'beautiful tension' [*prachtvolle Spannung*] of the Germanic mind which the Middle Ages created," and adding: "Taken historically, Scholasticism...is the mother of the modern scientific attitude, and a later time will see clearly how and in what Scholasticism still furnishes living undercurrents to the science of today" (Jung 1991, § 30).

Of course, Jung saw himself as part of the tradition of psychology emerging from Nietzsche, who saw the discipline as having “got stuck in moral prejudices and fears,” as a consequence of which it had “not dared to descend into the depths” (Jung 1991, § 23). As Conway explains, however, Nietzsche undertook to rescue the discipline of psychology, so that it may “be recognized again as the queen of the sciences” and as “the path to the fundamental problems” (Jung 1991, § 23; cf. 49 – 53). In order to do so, Nietzsche reconceived psychology as “morphology and *the doctrine of the development of the will to power*” (Jung 1991, § 23), a notion first introduced in *Beyond Good and Evil* and elaborated in Part Two of *Zarathustra* (Conway 2024, 44 – 49). One of the major strengths of Conway’s study is the way it allows the reader to see how Nietzsche’s argumentation arises from the structure of this work: in Part One, for instance, we can see how Nietzsche exposes the tradition of German Idealism as a dead end (Nietzsche 1968a, § 11), expands his survey to account for the “prejudices” shared by philosophers and natural scientists (Nietzsche 1968a, § 12), then pivots from a critique of “materialistic atomism” to an introduction and elaboration of the doctrine of the will-to-power (Nietzsche 1968a, § 13 – 23), an alternative to materialism and the “soul-hypothesis” (Nietzsche 1968a, § 54 – 55) alike (Conway 2024, 44 – 45). The kind of close reading proposed by Conway allows us to appreciate how, in Nietzsche, argument and architecture are carefully aligned, in a way that more superficial approaches to reading Nietzsche fail to achieve. Consequently, Nietzsche’s discussion of how the doctrine of the will-to-power in relation to the questions and dilemmas of idealism (Nietzsche 1968a, § 15), immediate certainties (§ 16), agency (, § 17), free will (§ 18 – 19), the origin of ideas (§ 20), the *causa sui* (§ 21), and the conformity of nature to law (§ 22) (cf. Conway 2024, 45) looks less like a random list of philosophical topics and instead is revealed as a careful shoring-up of a coherent philosophical position.

Then again, in Part 8 Nietzsche picks up his earlier account of the “labyrinths” of the late modern soul (Nietzsche 1968a, § 214) by describing the “passages and inter-passages,” the “caves, hideouts, and dungeons,” and the “secret paths to chaos” (Nietzsche 1968a, § 244) of the German soul, a codeword for the Germans’ gift for “translat[ing] its capacity for internal conflict into excess creative energy, to which its most significant cultural triumphs bear enduring witness” (Conway 2024, p. 173). As Conway astutely observes, this idealised depiction of the German soul anticipates his great passage of encomium in *Twilight of the Idols* in praise of that person whom Nietzsche describes as “the last German for whom I have any respect”

(Nietzsche 1968c, Forays § 51), namely: Goethe (Conway 2024, 173 – 174). As someone who was, in Nietzsche's famous estimation, "not a German event, but a European one" (Nietzsche 1968c, Forays § 49), Goethe was well placed, as Nietzsche recalls in *Beyond Good and Evil*, to "denounce as if from abroad, with impatient hardness, what Germans embrace with pride: the famous German *Gemüt* he once defined as 'indulgence toward the weaknesses of others and oneself'" (Nietzsche 1968a, § 174; cf. *Maxims and Reflections*, § 340). This refusal to tolerate, let alone "indulge," these "weaknesses" show us Goethe "calling [his fellow Germans] to order and account, while also evincing the clarity of perspective of an under-impressed foreign observer" (Conway 2024, 174 – 175)! Moreover, Goethe's intuition is confirmed by Nietzsche, who declares that "Germans themselves *are not*, they *become*, they 'develop,' and 'development' is therefore the real German find and coup in the great realm of philosophical formulas..." (Nietzsche 1968a, § 244). This process of "development" can, in the best cases, lead the Germans (as Conway puts it) "upward and onward," "reveal[ing] themselves to be responsive to the examples set them by their leading contributors to a national culture that is simultaneously pan-European" (Conway 2024, 175) – or, to use Nietzsche's expression, achieving the cosmopolitanism of the "good European." Part of that "good European" cosmopolitanism involves creating a home for European Jewry (see Nietzsche 1968a, § 250 – 251), and this section of Conway's study forms an important contribution to a discussion about Nietzsche's attitude to Judaism led by such commentators as Robert Holub and Hugo Drochon, among others (Conway 2024, 176 – 185), and indeed about Nietzsche's view of European unification.

Not the least rewarding part of Conway's study is its conclusion, consisting of a forensic analysis of the "Aftersong," which concludes *Beyond Good and Evil*, entitled "From Lofty Mountains" (Conway 2024, 209 – 228). Conway delicately teases out the significance of this enigmatic poem, which announces – as does the shorter text in *The Gay Science*, "Sils Maria" – the advent of Zarathustra. In its final stanza, there is a moment of epiphany, when at midday "One turns into Two," "friend Zarathustra" arrives, and "the wedding is at hand of dark and light" – taking us not simply beyond "good and evil" but beyond all binaries and oppositions. "The wedding announcement that appears in the final line of the 'Aftersong,'" Conway writes, "heralds in Nietzsche the long-awaited merger of the 'light' and the 'darkness' he carries within himself" (Conway 2024, 227). A more beautiful conclusion would be hard to imagine...

In his letter to Malwida von Meysenburg of 24 September 1886, Nietzsche invites her to join him in making the assumption — whether seriously or, as Conway speculates, “in jest,” is hard to tell — that “people will be *allowed* to read it in about the year 2000” (cited Conway 2024, 12; Nietzsche 1986, 257). So it is surely one of the great ironies of history that, precisely at the time when the support available for those wishing to read and engage with Nietzsche has never been more useful or insightful (whether in the form of these Edinburgh Critical Guides to Nietzsche, the monolithic volumes of the *Historischer und kritischer Kommentar zu Friedrich Nietzsches Werken* edited by the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften and published by Walter de Gruyter, or the forthcoming series of Cambridge Elements on the philosophy of Nietzsche), his position within the academy seems more precarious and controversial than ever, especially in the context of the UK. Hence these publications acquire the vital role of helping Nietzsche find informed readers outside the academy, and Daniel Conway’s study of *Beyond Good and Evil* is a notable example of how contemporary academic commentators can address a specialized, academic audience while also reaching out to the “free spirits” of a much wider, global readership.

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