

Discussion Questions for “Beyond Good and Evil” by Friedrich Nietzsche
October 28, 2017

1. Why does Nietzsche begin by asking his readers to consider whether truth is a woman?
2. Nietzsche asks the reader to check your assumptions at the door. He will not accept objections based on dogmatism. Yet, the entire book is projecting his dogmatic views. Does he convince you that taking an entirely fresh view of the world is right?
3. What does Nietzsche mean by prejudice, perspective, and interpretation? Does Nietzsche establish or presuppose perspectivism (there is no objective truth)? Does this perspectivism diverge from absolutism (there is absolute truth), relativism (truth exists in context, but not as a standalone), or objectivism (rational individualism as seen in Ayn Rand’s works)? Why or why not?
4. Nietzsche rails against various philosophers from Plato to Kant. Yet, he is less critical of Socrates. Compare Nietzsche’s response to the Socratic demand to “know thyself” with that of other philosophers. Do you think Nietzsche supports his criticisms of his philosophical forefathers, thus supporting his views?
5. In the Preface, Nietzsche describes himself as a good European and a free spirit. What do these terms mean, what are they contrasted with, and how are they developed in later sections?
6. Nietzsche was surrounded by women and struggled with physical weakness throughout his life. These illnesses prevented him from fulfilling his dream of serving in the army. Yet, Dionysus, god of wine and revelry, is the central metaphor for Nietzsche’s philosophy. You may remember George Emerson of “A Room With a View” as a follower of this philosophy and proclaiming the everlasting “YES!” throughout the book. Does Nietzsche follow his own philosophy?
7. Nietzsche states that moral systems are against nature and reason because they constrain freedom and narrow perspectives. Moral systems support “herd mentality” and lead to weakness by crippling the strong; you are either empowered or overpowered in the master and slave morality. Do you agree with this “will to power” philosophy? Is it absurd to think that one moral code applies to all people?
8. Does Nietzsche’s critique of morality and his call to move “beyond good and evil” imply a rejection or a redefinition of the ethical? Based on this work, can there be a Nietzschean ethics or is he simply an unethical nihilist as some critics claim?
9. Nietzsche despises Christianity, yet has great respect for Jesus. Does this view make sense and does he explain why he holds the religion and the man separate?
10. Nietzsche states that his work addresses the “philosopher of the future (POTF).” Is the POTF an individual, a member of society, or a group? Could there be a Nietzschean society or community, or is a collective in direct opposition to his philosophy? What can Nietzsche teach us about political institutions and social life?