

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)



Objective: Explore Nietzsche's ideas as a window into revealing the sentiments of the Age of Anxiety, especially how they had moved away from the notions of rationality and progress that had defined European thinking since the Age of Enlightenment.

Background

- Nietzsche often wrote in **aphorisms**, which is the expression of a truth in a substantive sentence or couple sentences.
- Nietzsche believed in **nihilism** = the belief that all values, moral principles are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated ("nihil" is Latin for "nothing").
- **übermensch** = literally, "superman"; Nietzsche's ideal superior man of the future who could rise above conventional Christian morality to create and impose his own values

Questions

1. What are Nietzsche's ideas? What is he "for" and what is he against?

"For"	Against

2. How do Nietzsche's ideas express the Age of Anxiety?

Excerpts from *The Will to Power* (1901)

720 (1886-1887)

The most fearful and fundamental desire in man, his drive for power—this drive is called “freedom”—must be held in check the longest. This is why ethics ... has hitherto aimed at holding the desire for power in check: it disparages the tyrannical individual and with its glorification of social welfare and patriotism emphasizes the power-instinct of the herd.

728 (March-June, 1888)

... A society that definitely and *instinctively* gives up war and conquest is in decline; it is ripe for democracy and the rule of shopkeepers—In most cases, to be sure, assurances of peace are merely narcotics.

752 (1884)

...Democracy represents the disbelief in great human beings and an elite society: “Everyone is equal to everyone else.” “At bottom we are one and all self-seeking cattle and mob.”

753 (1885)

I am opposed to 1. socialism, because it dreams quite naively of “the good, true, and beautiful” and of “equal rights” (--anarchism also desires the same ideal, but in a more brutal fashion); 2. parliamentary government and the press, because these are the means by which the herd animal becomes master.

762 (1885)

European democracy represents a release of forces only to a very small degree. It is above all a release of laziness, of weariness, of *weakness*.

765 (January-Fall, 1888)

...Another Christian concept, no less crazy, has passed even more deeply into the tissue of modernity: the concept of the “equality of souls before God.” This concept furnishes the prototype of all theories of equal rights: mankind has first taught to stammer the proposition of equality in a religious context, and only later was it made into morality: no wonder that man ended by taking it seriously, taking it practically, socialistically, in the spirit of the pessimism of indignation.”

857 (January-Fall, 1888)

I distinguish between a type of ascending life and another type of decay, disintegration, weakness. Is it credible that the question of the relative rank of these two types still needs to be posed?

861 (1884)

A declaration of war on the masses by *higher men* is needed! Everywhere the mediocre are combining in order to make themselves master! Everything that makes soft and effeminate, that serves the ends of the “people” or the “feminine,” works in favor of *suffrage universal*, i.e., the dominion of *inferior* men. But we should take reprisal and bring this whole affair (which in Europe commenced with Christianity) to light and to the bar of judgment.

870 (1884)

The root of all evil: that the slavish morality of meekness, chastity, selflessness, absolute obedience, has triumphed—ruling natures were thus condemned (1) to hypocrisy, (2) to torments of conscience—creative natures felt like rebels against God, uncertain and inhibited by eternal values....
In summa: the best things have been slandered because the weak or the immoderate swine have cast a

bad light on them—and the best men have remained hidden—and have often misunderstood themselves.

997 (1884)

I teach: that there are higher and lower men, and that a single individual can under certain circumstances justify the existence of whole millennia—that is, a full, rich, great, whole human being in relation to countless fragmentary men.

Excerpts from *The Antichrist*, 1888

2. What is good?—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness?—The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome. *Not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue, but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtú*, virtue free of moralic acid). The weak and ill-constituted shall perish: first principle of *our* philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so. What is more harmful than any vice?—Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak—Christianity...
5. One should not embellish or dress up Christianity: it has waged a *war to the death* against this *higher* type of man, it has excommunicated all the fundamental instincts of this type, it has distilled evil, the *Evil One*, out of these instincts—the strong human being as the type of reprehensibility, as the “outcast.” Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life; it has depraved the reason even of the intellectually strongest natures by teaching men to feel the supreme values of intellectuality as sinful, as misleading, as *temptations*. The most deplorable example: the depraving of Pascal, who believed his reason had been depraved by original sin while it had only been depraved by his Christianity! ...
7. Christianity is called the religion of *pity*.—Pity stands in antithesis to the tonic emotions which enhance the energy of the feeling of life: it has a depressive effect. One loses force when one pities....
15. In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point. Nothing but imaginary *causes* (“God,” “soul,” “ego,” “spirit,” “free will”—or “unfree will”): nothing but imaginary *effects* (“sin,” “redemption,” “grace,” “punishment,” “forgiveness of sins”)....
18. The Christian conception of God—God as God of the sick, God as spider, God as spirit—is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: perhaps it even represents the lower-water mark in the descending development of the God type. God degenerated to the *contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes!* In God a declaration of hostility towards life, nature, the will to life! God the formula for every calumny of “this world,” for every lie about ‘the next world’! In God, nothingness deified, the will to nothingness sanctified! ...
21. In Christianity the instincts of the subjugated and oppressed come into the foreground: it is the lowest classes which seek their salvation in it ...