



## On the Genealogy of Morals

*Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900 ) Translated by Horace B. Samuel*

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Friedrich Nietzsche set out to dig into “the origin of our moral prejudices” in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, also titled *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*. In doing so he carried forward his thinking expressed first in *Human, All Too Human* (1878) and more deeply in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). Consisting of a preface and three extended treatises, it is the most systematic of his works, and considered as his masterpiece by many scholars. The first treatise outlines two very concepts of good that eventually oppose one another. The first exists paired with “good and bad”, a dualism of pure power characterized by the Roman worldview, while the second exists in the “good and evil” dualism characterized by the “ressentiment” of the meek and power-

less in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The second treatise delves into the roots of guilt and punishment in anger and the need for compensation, and poses the notion of “bad conscience” as will to power unnaturally turned inward. The third treatise deals with ascetic ideals from the several perspectives of artists, philosophers, women, priests, saints, and, more recently, scientists and historians. He fears that the “will to truth” which is fostered by the ascetic ideal may well foster a truth that then imperils its objective. By applying the historical technique of genealogy to the birth, scope and decline of ideologies over time, Nietzsche brings a Darwinian perspective to the evolution of ethics, and, by doing so, gives a deeper understanding of “the value of our values”.

**Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche** (October 15, 1844 – August 25, 1900) was a German philologist, philosopher, cultural critic, poet and composer. He is best known for several works that articulate his call for a radical rethinking of the nature of man, truth and philosophy: Thus Spake Zarathustra, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, and the *Anti-Christ*. The expressions “God is dead” and “the will to power” derive directly from his work.

Nietzsche was born near Liepzig in the province of Saxony, part of Prussia. After his father, a Lutheran minister, died of a brain ailment in 1849, his mother moved the family to Naumburg to live with her mother. His secondary schooling at the prestigious Schulpforta was followed by studies of theology and philology at the University of Bonn and the University of Liepzig. He was appointed professor of Philology at the University of Basel at the unheard of age of 24 in 1868. He renounced his Prussian citizenship before moving to Switzerland. During his tenure at Basel he published regularly and was befriended by composer Richard Wagner, becoming a member of his inner circle. Increasingly beset by illness, he was forced him to resign in 1879 and spent the next ten years as an independent author until suffering a mental collapse in 1889. He was treated at a clinic in Basel and then cared for by his mother and sister until his death in 1900. His condition was initially diagnosed as paresis due to tertiary syphilis, but some hinted that dark forces unleashed by his ideas were at play. Reexamination of his evaluation documents show brain cancer to be the cause of his breakdown and eventual demise.