

Isolating and Evaluating Friedrich Nietzsche’s Critique of Morality

SURG | Arts, Humanities, and Performance (AHP) | *Tags: Literary/Composition Analysis, Theory*

*This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal’s structure and content.*



Proposal Strengths	Areas for Improvement
The researcher explicitly identifies gaps in knowledge and makes claims for why it is important to fill these gaps using evidence from past research to support their assertions.	The researcher mentions their GPA in the preparation section toward the end. Your GPA does not qualify you for, or disqualify you from, research. GPA should not be included in your proposal.
The researcher gives a thorough description of how they will approach the readings involved in their study including the actions performed and what will be taken away from different types of readings.	While an aim/objective statement is present, rephrasing into or including an explicit research questions would strengthen the proposal.
The researcher explicitly connects the methodology back to the research aims	
There is a clear output to the project that is connected back to the research question.	



Other Key Features to Take Note Of
Every project that involves the methodology of literary analysis should have a reading list of the selected readings. This list can be organized as this author did, chronologically, or it can be organized thematically, categorically, or in another way that helps a reader understand the project. These reading lists can also be annotated in a way that helps a reader understand what you plan to get out of each reading or subset of readings.
With work that engages heavily with theory, it is often the case that part of your justification relates to the underlying logic/assumptions with which you are starting. It is critical to give the reader a sense of where those established definitions/assumptions/logic came from, citing your sources wherever possible.

Friedrich Nietzsche's revolutionary critique of morality has been surprisingly ignored by many anglo-american moral philosophers. My goal is to evaluate the degree to which Nietzsche's critique, which Nietzsche takes to radically debase moral philosophy, actually succeeds. I will begin this project, which I am pursuing for departmental honors in Philosophy, by reviewing Nietzsche's foundational works on morality, and by studying the central interpretations of those works. Then, I will review the dominant rebuttals to Nietzsche's critique. Finally, I will analyze Nietzsche's critique in light of these responses, to compose an honors thesis that assesses the standing of moral philosophy given Nietzsche's critique. This project will start in spring 2019, before culminating in fall 2019, and a URG will allow me to work on it through summer 2019, which is crucial given the project's breadth. I am qualified to pursue this project because of my background both in Nietzsche's work and in moral philosophy broadly.

The focus of the project is clear within the first paragraph

Identifies gap in knowledge

Among Friedrich Nietzsche's many contributions to contemporary thought is his critique of morality. Nietzsche famously attempted to show that "morality is a way of turning one's back on the will to existence."(Nietzsche, 1901) One might imagine that this charge would cause a crisis for moral philosophy, and at least that Nietzsche's accusations would be seriously assessed by leading moral philosophers. Upon Nietzsche's death, even the New York Times insisted that Nietzsche was "full of revolutionary opinions", and that he embodied "a fearless iconoclasm which surpassed the wildest dreams of contemporary free thought."(The New York Times, 1900) However, until recently, Nietzsche's critique has been somewhat side-stepped by anglo-american academic philosophy.

There is no explicit research question

Identifies gap in knowledge

This oddity was noted by Philippa Foot, one of the 20th century's leading moral thinkers, who asked, "Why do so many contemporary moral philosophers, particularly of the Anglo-American analytic school, ignore Nietzsche's attack on morality and just go on as if this extraordinary event in the history of thought had never occurred?"(Foot, 1991) Foot supposes that Nietzsche's lack of recognition results from the fact that "it is hard for...the plain-speaking school of analytic philosophers to grapple with...[the] amazing richness"(Foot, 1991) of Nietzsche's prose. Additionally, the english-speaking world may carry a personal antipathy against a thinker who once called "English utilitarians" a "mediocre species of man"(Nietzsche, 1886).

Whatever its source, academic moral philosophy's lack of focus on Nietzsche has allowed his critique to hang as a shadow over the discipline. My goal, accordingly, is to contextualize and assess Nietzsche's critique, as too few have. If his work presents a compelling challenge to moral philosophy, that challenge should be acknowledged, and if it does not, then it can finally be dismissed. I hope to look into moral philosophy's closet, to see if Nietzsche's monster is really there. Of course, I will likely find that the truth is more complicated, and that Nietzsche's critique and academic moral philosophy can each be enriched by being put in dialogue with the other. Regardless of my findings, my project will help to bridge a gap that still persists between anglo-american academic philosophy and one of the late modern era's most influential thinkers.

Justifies why gap should be filled

This honors project is a significant one, and I will begin to tackle it by isolating the exact shape of Nietzsche's critique of morality. I will start to do this in the spring of 2019, with the weekly guidance of Philosophy Professor Mark Alznauer, who has agreed to act as my honors advisor. I will start by reading Nietzsche's foundational moral works, including but not

Description of why readings were selected and thorough descriptions of how readings will be approached

necessarily limited to his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Will to Power*, *Human, All Too Human*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. While conducting this reading, I will trace what I take to be Nietzsche’s precise arguments against morality. I will attempt to deconstruct Nietzsche’s fiery prose into discrete lines of reasoning that can be critically assessed.

Alongside my direct reading of Nietzsche, I will reference the leading interpretations of Nietzsche’s work. Walter Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, and Brian Leiter’s *Nietzsche on Morality* will be important resources as I break down Nietzsche’s arguments. Other books and essays on Nietzsche that I intend to review are Richard Schacht’s *Nietzsche*, Martha Nussbaum’s “Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?”, Leiter’s “Nietzsche and the Morality Critics”, “On the Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche”, and “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Reconsidered,” Thomas Hurka’s “Nietzsche: Perfectionist”, and Raymond Geuss’ “Nietzsche and Morality.” Professor Alznauer will continue to recommend additional interpretive works throughout the spring, which will assist me in isolating the precise elements of Nietzsche’s critique.

After clarifying Nietzsche’s arguments, I will turn in the summer towards critically assessing them. To do this, I will first review the dominant rebuttals to Nietzsche that have been produced. These include Foot’s “Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values” and “Nietzsche’s Immoralism”, John McDowell’s “Two Sorts of Naturalism”, and Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*. Additionally, I will review a number of philosophical works that peripherally relate, whether explicitly or implicitly, to Nietzsche’s thought, such as Thomas Nagel’s “The Limits of Objectivity” and Bernard Williams’ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

After reviewing these works, I will attempt to assess the standing of moral philosophy given Nietzsche’s critique. I will specifically evaluate how different prominent schools of moral thought - such as utilitarianism, Kantianism, and Aristotelianism - might respond to Nietzsche. This evaluation will likely extend through the summer, and allow me to begin the fall term with a clear picture of the essay I will ultimately compose for my honors thesis.

I am qualified to pursue this project because of my background in moral philosophy broadly, and Nietzsche specifically. I currently maintain a 3.9 GPA in the philosophy major, and I received an ‘A’ in “Philosophy 360: Topics in Moral Philosophy.” I also hold a 3.82 GPA in the Critical Theory minor, through which I have dealt extensively with Nietzsche’s work. While studying abroad with Northwestern’s program on “Art, Literature, and Contemporary European Thought”, I composed a 10,000-word paper on Nietzsche, titled “A Critique of Nietzsche’s Cynicism and its Place in Contemporary Culture”, which received an ‘A’. Furthermore, in the summer of 2018, I obtained a WCAS grant to research consequentialist moral philosophy with the support of Professor Stephen White. I completed that project with an 8,000-word paper titled “A Defense of Common-sense Deontology”, which was selected to be presented at Pacific University’s 2019 Undergraduate Philosophy Conference. Lastly, my close relationship with Professor Alznauer will ensure that my project remains focused and well-structured.

Obtaining a URG is crucial for my intellectual and academic development, because working on my honors project through the summer will allow me to comprehensively engage with my research topic. This project will be incredibly useful as I consider applying to graduate schools in the coming years, since it will expose me to a newly intense level of research, and help me to clarify my research interests in philosophy.

Gives representative examples from reading list

Clear output & explicit connection to the research question/aims

GPA should not be included in a research proposal

Works Cited

“Prof. Nietzsche Dead.” *The New York Times*. August 26th, 1900. Web.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will To Power*. 1901. Excerpt taken from “Northwestern University Political Science 308: Critical Studies in World Politics, Fall 2018 Course Packet.”

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 1886. Excerpt taken from Louise Mabile’s *Nietzsche and the Anglo-Saxon Tradition*. Bloomsbury Press, 2011.

Foot, Philippa. “Nietzsche’s Immoralism.” From *Moral Dilemmas: and Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Current Project Reading List

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