

FOUR STUDIES ON NIETZSCHE

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1st Edition

Cover: Detail from *Portrait of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1899) drawn by Hans Olde.



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Publisher's Note

The figure of Friedrich Nietzsche casts a grotesque shadow over our current epoch. His thought and work represent the coagulation of reactionary philosophy in the era of imperialism, a philosophy characteristic of a declining imperialist bourgeoisie that lashes out wildly and violently in all directions against the inevitable and advancing World Proletarian Revolution. Nietzscheanism can accurately and succinctly be summed up — as it was by one of Nietzsche's admirers, the liberal literary historian Georg Brandes — as "aristocratic radicalism." Nietzsche's entire philosophical *raison d'être* is to assimilate all the reactionary thought leading up to the transformation of capitalism from its stage of free competition, characterized by the liberalism of the Enlightenment, into a coherent and wholistic system of thought suitable to imperialist reaction. As such, in the last essay of this work Lukács rightly characterizes Nietzsche as "...the leading philosopher of reaction for the whole imperialist period..."

While Nietzsche's philosophy was "...only in its infancy, since those objective socio-economic trends that led to imperialism had not yet developed in Nietzsche's time," we can see Nietzsche's ideas forming the foundation for German fascism. German fascism — with its ideas of the "*Übermensch*" ("overman," or "superman"), the desire to return to the aristocratic and feudal past in the realm of culture while maintaining the most barbarous imperialist exploitation and slavery,

the negation of parliamentarianism, the rejection of the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment, the opposition to socialism and the proletariat — are already present in the thought of Nietzsche. And because of these germinal ideas present in Nietzsche's philosophical system we can say that Nietzsche anticipated fascism in the realm of philosophy.

Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer before him, was a leading thinker of the right-wing section of Romanticism.¹ Romanticism, especially its German variant, was a partial revival of medievalism in the terrain of philosophy. It wanted a capitalism without the eradication of feudal elements, leaving intact feudal hierarchy, privileges, and absolutism. Is this not the same dream as all fascists? To have “modernity” (capitalism) without “modernity” (the ideological, cultural, and political forms engendered by it)? Nietzsche's critique of modernity focused solely on the superstructural forms produced by capitalism while glorifying entirely the economic foundations upon which they arise. Of economic laws, classes, and social formations Nietzsche thought nothing. Nietzsche refused to see, supporter of traditionalist aristocratic reaction that he was, that the culture and ideas of a given society have their roots in the economic structure of society, in the social relations of production between people themselves. These forms, which had arisen with the victorious bourgeoisie were producing, according to Nietzsche, *moral and aesthetic*

¹There was a left-wing section of the Romantic movement, typified by figures like Victor Hugo. However, this trend, instead of representing aristocratic reaction as the right-wing Romantics did, reflected the “radicalism” of the petty-bourgeoisie.

decline, and it is these forms that are “decadent.” Nietzsche’s entire philosophical project was an attempt to overcome this “decadence” from within “decadence” itself (Nietzsche famously claimed that “...apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the reverse of such a creature”)² — meaning that he thought it possible to rescue the imperialist bourgeoisie from itself, its own cultural decay, and to renew it on stronger grounds.

Nietzsche thought that slavery forms the foundation of all human societies, and that therefore, class society is not only inevitable and *permanent*, but in conformity with his opposition to “decadence,” it is *desirable*. For Nietzsche there must always be those who rule over those who toil and for those who rule, they and they alone, must be the carriers of the superior morality, culture, art, etc. Slavery forms the “essence of culture” and exploitation is “a basic function of organic life.” If the plebeian spirit (embodied in leveling religious impulses, democracy, socialism, etc.) gains ascendancy, then decline and death are the only outcomes, opposing as they do Nietzsche’s “philosophy of life.” Nietzsche emphatically stated: “...[I]f it should be true that the Greeks perished because of their slavery, another thing is much more certain: that we will perish because of our lack of slavery.”

Yet, this “decadence,” for Nietzsche, prepares the ground — not for the elimination of the economic roots of cultural decadence through revolution — but for the “renewal” of culture on the basis of these same

²Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 1908.

economic relations. The secret to Nietzsche's appeal is that he *appears* to be supremely radical, but behind this facade conceals the most reactionary of philosophical and political worldviews, hence Nietzsche's apparent attractiveness as a "cultural critic," seemingly "radical" in his virulent critiques of bourgeois culture.

It is only when the "mob," the great teeming working classes, begin to express themselves in history upsurging towards upending the entire "natural" social order that Nietzsche sees cultural decay, hence his opposition not just to socialism but also to democracy in general. Democracy, even in its bourgeois form, is as repugnant to Nietzsche as socialism, because it too contains the seeds of "decadence," as even it contains the "plebeian spirit." It is no wonder then that the world-historic event of Nietzsche's time, the Paris Commune — where the proletariat for the first time held power — struck him as horrific, writing in a letter to a friend that "Beyond the struggle of the nations, that international hydra head frightened us, which suddenly came to light so terribly as an indicator of completely different future struggles." Nietzsche's philosophy is the weapon suitable to the bourgeoisie of the imperialist epoch to combat these "future struggles," *i.e.*, the proletarian revolution.

In the stage of capitalism characterized by free competition, bourgeois apologists of capitalism sought to paper-over the contradictions inherent to capitalism, to deny them outright, to claim that capitalism guarantees "social harmony." However, with the natural development of capitalism, its transformation from the

stage of free competition to the stage of monopoly — imperialism — these apologetics began to prove insufficient, rent asunder as they were by social reality itself. Here Nietzsche's philosophy emerges on the stage of history. Unlike bourgeois apologists of old, Nietzsche *begins* from the social contradictions produced by capitalist society, he does not deny them or seek to hide them, but *glorifies* them, thereby affirming capitalism and exploitation as natural (biological, even) and inevitable. The task of his philosophy is to create a morality sufficient to produce "...a ruling caste — the future masters of the earth."³ He thereby enshrines inequality and exploitation as principles.

Nietzsche's philosophy is also attractive to sections of the petty-bourgeoisie that are imbued with pessimism about revolution and socialism, lacking faith in the masses and falling into political despair, those who see the cultural decay produced by bourgeois society and are disgusted by it, but have no hope in the masses to renew culture through the revolutionary transformation of society, those who take it up relish in the despair and misery of bourgeois society, finding their own safe haven in the comforts that they are the "overman" and promoting the most unabashed individualism and philosophical irrationalism.

Nietzsche's philosophy also prefigures contemporary post-modernist philosophy, today's more refined weapon of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Post-modernism, having assimilated many of Nietzsche's

³Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1910.

concepts, preaches a profound pessimism regarding revolution, upholds philosophical irrationalism and casts doubt on human cognition and science, and focuses primarily on critiquing literature, aesthetics, and culture while largely leaving economics untouched, making peace with capitalism and exploitation. Major proponents of post-modernism sing the praises of Nietzsche and recognize their debt to his thought, with the post-modernist Michel Foucault famously stating that he was “...simply a Nietzschean.” As such, the reactionary philosophy of Nietzsche lives on, concealed within new garb.

We have chosen to publish this work — collected together in a physical format for the first time — because of its value as a criticism of Nietzsche’s philosophy, and because Lukács demonstrates restraint from his normal “creative mania” (right-deviationism) and criticizes Nietzsche solely from the standpoint of Marxism with no added “embellishments.” At the time of the writing of the articles collected in this work, Lukács was living in exile in the Soviet Union; his ideas having been politically defeated in the International Communist Movement, he retreated to his realm of expertise, literary criticism. While nominally claiming the banner of Marxism–Leninism, his ideas as a “theorist” were always marked with right-deviations — particularly evident in his work *History and Class Consciousness* where he accuses Engels of smuggling positivism into Marxism and rejects objective dialectics. Later in life these deviations would be developed into an open repudiation of Marxism–Leninism and an embrace of revisionism.

The first two articles collected in this volume were originally written in 1933–34. The first article, simply titled “Nietzsche,” was published in the Soviet *Literary Encyclopedia*. The second article, titled “Nietzsche as a Forerunner of Fascist Aesthetics,” was published in German in the Soviet *Literaturny Kritik*. The third and fourth articles were written in 1942 and 1943, respectively. “The Destruction of Humanism in German Ideology” was published much later (1982) in *Zur Kritik der faschistischen Ideologie*, and the fourth article “Nietzsche and the Nazis” was published in 1948 in *Schicksalswende*. As Nietzsche is still the preeminent philosopher of imperialist reaction, understanding, critiquing, and opposing all manifestations of his thought retains value for revolutionaries and all progressive-minded people. Nietzsche’s philosophy remains the philosophy of a historically exhausted class, not on the precipice of any possibility of renewal, but only on the precipice of their *demise*. Nietzsche fights in vain against the march of history, against the inevitable proletarian revolution which will sink his thought and the class his thought represents. That “international hydra head” is rising up with terrible and inexhaustible fury day by day, against which Nietzsche stands in terror.

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2025