THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER JOHN SEARLE is quoted as having said that “reading Nietzsche was like drinking cognac—a sip was good, but you didn’t want to drink the whole bottle.”* Nietzsche provokes strong reactions; you either love him or hate him, but as Professor Searle implies, you shouldn’t make him a steady diet. What led Nietzsche, the son of a Lutheran minister and a pious godfearing mother, to announce the death of God and provoke such strong reactions among those who read him?

Nietzsche studied Greek language and culture and, in recognition of his extraordinary academic prowess, was given a professorship in Basel at the youthful age of 24. In the selections that follow Nietzsche announces his vision of the future of Western civilization and the impending crisis he thought it would confront. The crisis would be prompted by the breakdown of the metaphysical assumptions that undergirded Western values since the time of the Greek philosophers. Those assumptions were based on the belief that God was in heaven and all was right with the world. But people were not so sure any longer that God was in heaven, and if God is not in heaven, then how can things be right with the world? Belief in transcendent reality had provided the basis for values for Western civilization for over two millennia, first in the form of the transcendent Idea of the Good of Plato and then later in the God of Judaism and Christianity. But when a substantial majority of people no longer believe in God in any really meaningful sense, what happens to the values for which God was the basis?

Nietzsche saw that for much of Western civilization, God is dead. That is, God really makes no difference in how people view themselves or their relation to the world. Oh, they may still go to church on high holy days, be baptized there and buried there. Other than that, God is no longer a relevant fact for most people. Søren Kierkegaard saw among his contemporaries the same lackadaisical attitudes toward God but counseled a leap of faith and

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urged the acceptance of God with passionate inwardness. Nietzsche had a different response. We see it in his parable of the madman in the marketplace who announces that God is dead.

The phrase “death of God” has a startling, rhetorical flair to it. It is not the same thing to announce that God is dead as it is to say that God does not exist. To say “God is dead” conveys the absence of God as a loss and a privation. To say “God does not exist” will not compel the same sense of loss as does the madman’s claim in the following selection, “God is dead! . . . And we have killed him!” But this is just his his starting place. When God is dead, who can take God’s place? Nietzsche has an answer to that question too. The answer? We take God’s place. And we are left only with the “human, all too human,” to use another of Nietzsche’s phrases.

Now, at this point one might expect Nietzsche to embrace a humanistic ethics and urge us to display compassion and concern for the well-being of our fellow human beings. But this is not what he does. Creativity, spontaneity, artistic accomplishment, and the continual overcoming of obstacles—this is what life is all about. And this is what philosophy should be about too. Nietzsche realizes he faces an uphill battle in gaining acceptance for this proposal. He even has to face the fact that traditional values are embedded in our language, which equates meekness and humility with goodness and considers pride and vanity evil. His proposal is the “transvaluation” of these terms. In contrast to the prevailing morality, which he calls “slave morality,” the “master morality” he advocates transvalues the meaning of “good” by defining it as that which arouses fear. Nobility and its values—power, the ability to endure suffering and to inflict it if necessary, hardness, pride—these are the virtues of the master morality. “Faith in oneself, pride in others, a radical irony and enmity toward ‘selflessness,’ belong as definitely to master morality as do scorn and precaution in the presence of sympathy and the ‘warm heart.’”

Nietzsche can be read on many levels. At one level he is the precursor of all the authors of self-help books that urge readers to take charge of their lives and be their own best friends. At another he is a prophet of doom who sees the coming collapse of values and a kind of cultural insanity taking over Western civilization. At still another he is responding to Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s claim in The Brothers Karamazov, “If God does not exist, then anything is possible.” We face either nihilism, the absence of all values, or else we create values ourselves. This emphasis upon individual freedom and the resulting responsibility for choices is a major theme of existential philosophy, though it rarely is expressed with the vigor exhibited by Nietzsche.
As you read through the following selections, ask yourself what Nietzsche would have thought of the new European Community, and why. You might also ponder whether Nietzsche’s attitudes themselves were an attempt to project a strength of purpose he did not have himself. Also, there is the question of whether Nietzsche has been misused by people who justified cruelty in his name, or whether this interpretation is an inevitable consequence of his views.

[Section] 124.
_In the Horizon of the Infinite._—We have left the land and have none aboard ship! We have broken down the bridge behind us,—nay, more, the land behind us! Well, little ship! look out! Beside thee is the ocean; it is true it does not always roar, and sometimes it spreads out like silk and gold and a gentle reverie. But times will come when thou wilt feel that it is infinite, and that there is nothing more frightful than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt itself free, and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Alas, if homesickness for the land should attack thee, as if there had been more freedom there,—and there is no “land” any longer!

[Section] 125.
_The Madman._—Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the marketplace calling out unceasingly: “I seek God! I seek God!”—As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why! is he lost? said one. Has he strayed away like a child? said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea-voyage? Has he emigrated?—the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. “Where is God gone?” he called out. “I mean to tell you! We have killed him,—you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not clash on

unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forewards, in all directions? Is there still
an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does
not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night
come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns
in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the grave-diggers who are bury-
ing God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction?—for even Gods putrefy!
God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we con-
sole ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the
mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our
knife,—who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse
ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not
the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to
become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater
event,—and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher his-
tory than any history hitherto!”—Here the madman was silent and looked
again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At
last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was
extinguished. “I come too early,” he then said, “I am not yet at the right time.
This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling,

   —it has not yet reached men’s ears.
   Lightning and thunder need time,
   The light of the stars needs time,
   Deeds need time, even after they are done,
   to be seen and heard.
   This deed is as yet further from them than the furthest star,
   —and yet they have done it!”
   —It is further stated that the madman made his way into different
churches on the same day, and there intoned his Requiem aeternam deo.
When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply: “What
are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of
God?”

[Section] 260.
In a tour through the many finer and coarser moralities which have hitherto
prevailed or still prevail on the earth, I found certain traits recurring regu-
larly together, and connected with one another, until finally two primary
types revealed themselves to me, and a radical distinction was brought to
light. There is master-morality and slave-morality;—I would at once add,
however, that in all higher and mixed civilisations, there are also attempts at
the reconciliation of the two moralities; but one finds still oftener the confu-
sion and mutual misunderstanding of them, indeed, sometimes their close
juxtaposition—even in the same man, within one soul. The distinctions of
moral values have either originated in a ruling caste, pleasantly conscious of
being different from the ruled—or among the ruled class, the slaves and
dependents of all sorts. In the first case, when it is the rulers who determine
the conception “good,” it is the exalted, proud disposition which is regarded
as the distinguishing feature, and that which determines the order of rank.
The noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the oppo-
site of this exalted, proud disposition displays itself: he despises them. Let it
at once be noted that in this first kind of morality the antithesis “good” and
“bad” means practically the same as “noble” and “despicable”;—the antithe-
sis “good” and “evil” is of a different origin. The cowardly, the timid, the
insignificant, and those thinking merely of narrow utility are despised; more-
over, also, the distrustful, with their constrained glances, the self-abasing,
the dog-like kind of men who let themselves be abused, the mendicant flatterers,
and above all the liars:—it is a fundamental belief of all aristocrats
that the common people are untruthful. “We truthful ones”—the nobility in
ancient Greece called themselves. It is obvious that everywhere the designa-
tions of moral value were at first applied to men, and were only derivatively
and at a later period applied to actions; it is a gross mistake, therefore, when
historians of morals start with questions like, “Why have sympathetic
actions been praised?” The noble type of man regards himself as a deter-
miner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judg-
ment: “What is injurious to me is injurious in itself”; he knows that it is he
himself only who confers honour on things; he is a creator of values. He
honours whatever he recognises in himself: such morality is self-glorifica-
tion. In the foreground there is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which
seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a
wealth which would fain give and bestow:—the noble man also helps the
unfortunate, but not—or scarcely—out of pity, but rather from an impulse
generated by the superabundance of power. The noble man honours in him-
self the powerful one, him also who has power over himself, who knows
how to speak and how to keep silence, who takes pleasure in subjecting him-
self to severity and hardness, and has reverence for all that is severe and
hard. “Wotan placed a hard heart in my breast,” says an old Scandinavian
Saga: it is thus rightly expressed from the soul of a proud Viking. Such a
type of man is even proud of not being made for sympathy; the hero of the Saga therefore adds waringly: “He who has not a hard heart when young, will never have one.” The noble and brave who think thus are the furthest removed from the morality which sees precisely in sympathy, or in acting for the good of others, or in désintéressement, the characteristic of the moral faith in oneself, pride in oneself, a radical enmity and irony towards “selflessness,” belong as definitely to noble morality, as do a careless scorn and precaution in presence of sympathy and the “warm heart.”—It is the powerful who know how to honour, it is their art, their domain for invention. The profound reverence for age and for tradition—all law rests on this double reverence,—the belief and prejudice in favour of ancestors and unfavourable to newcomers, is typical in the morality of the powerful; and if, reversely, men of “modern ideas” believe almost instinctively in “progress” and the “future,” and are more and more lacking in respect for old age, the ignoble origin of these “ideas” has complacently betrayed itself thereby. A morality of the ruling class, however, is more especially foreign and irritating to present-day taste in the sternness of its principle that one has duties only to one’s equals; that one may act towards beings of a lower rank, towards all that is foreign, just as seems good to one, or “as the heart desires,” and in any case “beyond good and evil”: it is here that sympathy and similar sentiments can have a place. The ability and obligation to exercise prolonged gratitude and prolonged revenge—both only within the circle of equals,—artfulness in retaliation, raffinement of the idea in friendship, a certain necessity to have enemies (as outlets for the emotions of envy, quarrelsomeness, arrogance—in fact, in order to be a good friend): all these are typical characteristics of the noble morality, which, as has been pointed out, is not the morality of “modern ideas,” and is therefore at present difficult to realise, and also to unearth and disclose.—It is otherwise with the second type of morality, slave-morality. Supposing that the abused, the oppressed, the suffering, the unemancipated, the weary, and those uncertain of themselves, should moralise, what will be the common element in their moral estimates? Probably a pessimistic suspicion with regard to the entire situation of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man, together with his situation. The slave has an unfavourable eye for the virtues of the powerful; he has a scepticism and distrust, a refinement of distrust of everything “good” that is there honoured—he would fain persuade himself that the very happiness there is not genuine. On the other hand, those qualities which serve to alleviate the existence of sufferers are brought into prominence and flooded with
light; it is here that sympathy, the kind, helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness attain to honour; for here these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence. Slave-morality is essentially the morality of utility. Here is the seat of the origin of the famous antithesis “good” and “evil”:_—power and dangerousness are assumed to reside in the evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety, and strength, which do not admit of being despised. According to slave-morality, therefore, the “evil” man arouses fear; according to master-morality, it is precisely the “good” man who arouses fear and seeks to arouse it, while the bad man is regarded as the despicable being. The contrast attains its maximum when, in accordance with the logical consequences of slave-morality, a shade of depreciation—it may be slight and well-intentioned—at last attaches itself even to the “good” man of this morality; because, according to the servile mode of thought, the good man must in any case be the _safe_ man: he is good-natured, easily deceived, perhaps a little stupid, _un bonhomme_. Everywhere that slave-morality gains the ascendency, language shows a tendency to approximate the significations of the words “good” and “stupid.”—A last fundamental difference: the desire for _freedom_, the instinct for happiness and the refinements of the feeling of liberty belong as necessarily to slave-morals and morality, as artifice and enthusiasm in reverence and devotion are the regular symptoms of an aristocratic mode of thinking and estimating.—Hence we can understand without further detail why love _as a passion_—it is our European speciality—absolutely be of noble origin; as is well known, its invention is due to the poet-cavaliers, those brilliant ingenious men of the “gai saber,” to whom Europe owes so much, and almost owes itself.

_[Section] 261._

Vanity is one of the things which are perhaps most difficult for a noble man to understand: he will be tempted to deny it, where another kind of man thinks he sees it self-evidently. The problem for him is to represent to his mind beings who seek to arouse a good opinion of themselves which they themselves do not possess—and consequently also do not “deserve,”—and who yet _believe_ in this good opinion afterwards. This seems to him on the one hand such bad taste and so self-disrespectful, and on the other hand so grotesquely unreasonable, that he would like to consider vanity an exception, and is doubtful about it in most cases when it is spoken of. He will say, for instance: “I may be mistaken about my value, and on the other hand may
nevertheless demand that my value should be acknowledged by others precisely as I rate it:—that, however, is not vanity (but self-conceit, or, in most cases, that which is called ‘humility,’ and also ‘modesty’).” Or he will even say: “For many reasons I can delight in the good opinion of others, perhaps because I love and honour them, and rejoice in all their joys, perhaps also because their good opinion endorses and strengthens my belief in my own good opinion, perhaps because the good opinion of others, even in cases where I do not share it, is useful to me, or gives promise of usefulness:—all this, however, is not vanity.” The man of noble character must first bring it home forcibly to his mind, especially with the aid of history, that, from time immemorial, in all social strata in any way dependent, the ordinary man was only that which he passed for:—not being at all accustomed to fix values, he did not assign even to himself any other value than that which his master assigned to him (it is the peculiar right of masters to create values). It may be looked upon as the result of an extraordinary atavism, that the ordinary man, even at present, is still always waiting for an opinion about himself, and then instinctively submitting himself to it; yet by no means only to a “good” opinion, but also to a bad and unjust one (think, for instance, of the greater part of the self-appreciations and self-depreciations which believing women learn from their confessors, and which in general the believing Christian learns from his Church). In fact, conformably to the slow rise of the democratic social order (and its cause, the blending of the blood of masters and slaves), the originally noble and rare impulse of the masters to assign a value to themselves and to “think well” of themselves, will now be more and more encouraged and extended; but it has at all times an older, ampler, and more radically ingrained propensity opposed to it—and in the phenomenon of “vanity” this older propensity overmasters the younger. The vain person rejoices over every good opinion which he hears about himself (quite apart from the point of view of its usefulness, and equally regardless of its truth or falsehood), just as he suffers from every bad opinion: for he subjects himself to both, he feels himself subjected to both, by that oldest instinct of subjection which breaks forth in him.—It is “the slave” in the vain man’s blood, the remains of the slave’s craftiness—and how much of the “slave” is still left in woman, for instance!—which seeks to seduce to good opinions of itself; it is the slave, too, who immediately afterwards falls prostrate himself before these opinions, as though he had not called them forth.—And to repeat it again: vanity is an atavism.
A species originates, and a type becomes established and strong in the long struggle with essentially constant unfavourable conditions. On the other hand, it is known by the experience of breeders that species which receive superabundant nourishment, and in general, a surplus of protection and care, immediately tend in the most marked way to develop variations, and are fertile in prodigies and monstrosities (also in monstrous vices). Now look at an aristocratic commonwealth, say an ancient Greek polis, or Venice, as a voluntary or involuntary contrivance for the purpose of rearing human beings; there are there men beside one another, thrown upon their own resources, who want to make their species prevail, chiefly because they must prevail, or else run the terrible danger of being exterminated. The favour, the superabundance, the protection are there lacking under which variations are fostered; the species needs itself as species, as something which, precisely by virtue of its hardness, its uniformity, and simplicity of structure, can in general prevail and make itself permanent in constant struggle with its neighbours, or with rebellious or rebellion-threatening vassals. The most varied experience teaches it what are the qualities to which it principally owes the fact that it still exists, in spite of all Gods and men, and has hitherto been victorious: these qualities it calls virtues, and these virtues alone it develops to maturity. It does so with severity, indeed it desires severity; every aristocratic morality is intolerant in the education of youth, in the control of women, in the marriage customs, in the relations of old and young, in the penal laws (which have an eye only for the degenerating): it counts intolerance itself among the virtues, under the name of “justice.” A type with few, but very marked features, a species of severe, warlike, wisely silent, reserved and reticent men (and as such, with the most delicate sensibility for the charm and nuances of society) is thus established, unaffected by the vicissitudes of generations; the constant struggle with uniform unfavourable conditions is, as already remarked, the cause of a type becoming stable and hard. Finally, however, a happy state of things results, the enormous tension is relaxed; there are perhaps no more enemies among the neighbouring peoples, and the means of life, even of the enjoyment of life, are present in superabundance. With one stroke the bond and constraint of the old discipline severs: it is no longer regarded as necessary, as a condition of existence—if it would continue, it can only do so as a form of luxury, as an archaïzing taste. Variations, whether they be deviations (into the higher, finer, and rarer), or deteriorations and monstrosities, appear suddenly on the
scene in the greatest exuberance and splendour; the individual dares to be individual and detach himself. At this turning-point of history there manifest themselves, side by side, and often mixed and entangled together, a magnificent, manifold, virgin-forest-like upgrowth and up-striving, a kind of *tropical tempo* in the rivalry of growth, and an extraordinary decay and self-destruction, owing to the savagely opposing and seemingly exploding egoisms, which strive with one another “for sun and light,” and can no longer assign any limit, restraint, or forbearance for themselves by means of the hitherto existing morality. It was this morality itself which piled up the strength so enormously, which bent the bow in so threatening a manner:—it is now “out of date,” it is getting “out of date.” The dangerous and disquieting point has been reached when the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life *is lived beyond* the old morality; the “individual” stands out, and is obliged to have recourse to his own law-giving, his own arts and artifices for self-preservation, self-elevation, and self-deliverance. Nothing but new “Whys,” nothing but new “Hows,” no common formulas any longer, misunderstanding and disregard in league with each other, decay, deterioration, and the loftiest desires frightfully entangled, the genius of the race overflowing from all the cornucopias of good and bad, a portentous simultaneousness of Spring and Autumn, full of new charms and mysteries peculiar to the fresh, still inexhausted, still unwearied corruption. Danger is again present, the mother of morality, great danger; this time shifted into the individual, into the neighbour and friend, into the street, into their own child, into their own heart, into all the most personal and secret recesses of their desires and volitions. What will the moral philosophers who appear at this time have to preach? They discover, these sharp onlookers and loafers, that the end is quickly approaching, that everything around them decays and produces decay, that nothing will endure until the day after to-morrow, except one species of man, the incurably *mediocre*. The mediocre alone have a prospect of continuing and propagating themselves—they will be the men of the future, the sole survivors; “be like them! become mediocre!” is now the only morality which has still a significance, which still obtains a hearing.—But it is difficult to preach this morality of mediocrity! it can never avow what it is and what it desires! it has to talk of moderation and dignity and duty and brotherly love—it will have difficulty *in concealing its irony!*
[Section] 263.

There is an *instinct for rank*, which more than anything else is already the sign of a *high* rank; there is a *delight* in the *nuances* of reverence which leads one to infer noble origin and habits. The refinement, goodness, and loftiness of a soul are put to a perilous test when something passes by that is of the highest rank, but is not yet protected by the awe of authority from obtrusive touches and incivilities: something that goes its way like a living touchstone, undistinguished, undiscovered, and tentative, perhaps voluntarily veiled and disguised. He whose task and practice it is to investigate souls, will avail himself of many varieties of this very art to determine the ultimate value of a soul, the unalterable, innate order of rank to which it belongs: he will test it by its *instinct for reverence*.

*Différence engendre haine:* the vulgarity of many a nature spurts up suddenly like dirty water, when any holy vessel, any jewel from closed shrines, any book bearing the marks of great destiny, is brought before it; while on the other hand, there is an involuntary silence, a hesitation of the eye, a cessation of all gestures, by which it is indicated that a soul *feels* the nearness of what is worthiest of respect. The way in which, on the whole, the reverence for the *Bible* has hitherto been maintained in Europe, is perhaps the best example of discipline and refinement of manners which Europe owes to Christianity: books of such profundity and supreme significance require for their protection an external tyranny of authority, in order to acquire the *period* of thousands of years which is necessary to exhaust and unriddle them. Much has been achieved when the sentiment has been at last instilled into the masses (the shallow-pates and the boobies of every kind) that they are not allowed to touch everything, that there are holy experiences before which they must take off their shoes and keep away the unclean hand—it is almost their highest advance towards humanity. On the contrary, in the so-called cultured classes, the believers in "modern ideas," nothing is perhaps so repulsive as their lack of shame, the easy insolence of eye and hand with which they touch, taste, and finer everything; and it is possible that even yet there is more *relative* nobility of taste, and more tact for reverence among the people, among the lower classes of the people, especially among peasants than among the newspaper-reading *demimonde* of intellect, the cultured class.