

How did Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas influence the Nazi regime in the Third Reich?



Adolf Hitler gazing into the bust of Nietzsche, snapshot took in 1934 during one of his visits to the Nietzsche-Archiv in Weimar, Germany.

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Centre Number: FR042

Candidate Number:

Word Count: 4,031

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A. Abstract

This essay investigates the question “How did Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas influence the Third Reich?”

The investigation makes use of a range of primary and secondary sources. “How to Read Nietzsche” by Keith Ansell Pearson.¹ A section from “The Consolations of Philosophy” by Alain de Botton.² “A Beginner’s Guide to Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*” by Gareth Southwell.³ “Nietzsche: Godfather of Fascism?”⁴ by James Golomb, “Forgotten Fatherland” by Ben Macintyre⁵ alongside the BBC2 documentary adaptation of the same name, written and produced by Candida Pyrce-Jones⁶. All these sources include extracts of Nietzsche’s writings, quotes, letters, as well as extracts from his books.

The essay is structured into five main sections, the abstract, introduction, investigation, conclusion and bibliography (in addition with the Appendices). The investigation, the main body of the essay, is divided into three parts; each corresponding to three separate ideas and areas of Nietzsche’s philosophy. These sections are further divided into three sub-sections: ‘Face-value’ how Nietzsche’s work can be interpreted at first glance or more literally (i.e. – word for word), ‘Nazi interpretation’ the way the Nazis interpreted Nietzsche’s ideas and ‘Nietzsche explanation’ a more rational explanation of Nietzsche’s work.

The main conclusion reached in the investigation is that Nietzsche influenced the Third Reich through his sister Elisabeth, who associated his name and philosophy in the name of National Socialism. Friedrich Nietzsche never intended his ideas to be exploited by a fascist regime that would praise him the title of ‘official philosopher of Nazism’⁷.

¹ Ansell Pearson, Keith (2005), “How to Read Nietzsche”, Granta Books London (ISBN: 1-86207-729-0)

² De Botton, Alain (2001), “The Consolations of Philosophy”, Penguin Books (ISBN: 0-140-27661-0)

³ Southwell, Gareth (2009) “A Beginner’s Guide to Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*”, Wiley-Blackwell (ISBN : 978-1-4051-6005-6)

⁴ Golomb, James (2002), “Nietzsche: Godfather of Fascism? On the uses of abuses of a philosophy” Princeton University Press (ISBN: 0-691-60709-8)

⁵ Macintyre, Ben (1992), “Forgotten Fatherland”, Macmillan London (ISBN: 0-333-55914-2)

⁶ Pyrce-Jones, Candida (1992), “Timewatch: The Story of Elisabeth Nietzsche Forgotten Fatherland” (BBC TV Production)

⁷ See appendix 2 – Nietzsche had a premonition about what could have eventually happened with his ideas

B. Introduction

Historical Relevance

When people speak about Nietzsche, what do they really know about him? Is it a positive image: a philosopher who lived to write his dreams and ideas about challenging conformity and proposing an alternative way of thinking? Or is it somewhat a more sinister image of an evil man whose works were the founding bricks for National Socialism?

It is important to comprehend this question for the following reason: Nietzsche would have opposed almost everything the Nazis stood for. Therefore, how come was he “the philosopher of Nazism” and his books placed alongside the bibles of Nazism?

This essay is written with an evaluation of the essential points in Nietzsche’s philosophy. It is with a fundamental understanding of his perception that what the Nazis believed about the same areas of thought and how the Nazis expropriated/interpreted some of Nietzsche’s ideas/concepts were tackled.

Contemporary Relevance

Nietzsche’s works are still relevant today because they have impacted upon countless thinkers and groups of peoples of the past and of the present quite diverse including “anarchists, feminists, Nazis, religious cultists, Socialists, Marxists, vegetarians, avant-garde artists, devotees of physical culture, and archconservatives”⁸.

Also, the fact that Nietzsche used poetry and aphorisms in his work suggests ambiguities. Many intellectuals have interpreted Nietzsche’s work in different ways, showing the nuances in his work. Since Nietzsche was a philosopher and an artist, nobody will ever have the “true” meaning of his work and so his work is still studied today⁹.

⁸ Tanner, Michael (2000) “Nietzsche, A Very Short Introduction”, Oxford University Press (ISBN: 978-0-19-285414-8), p1

⁹ See appendix 3 for a 21st century comedy sketch about Hitler and Nietzsche by Ricky Gervais

Structure of the Investigation

The investigation will firstly consider one of Nietzsche's most popular philosophical ideas: *The Will to Power*. It will then move on to another of Nietzsche's concepts: the "Superman" or the *Übermensch*. Following this, consideration will be given to a broader area of Nietzsche's thought: religion. Each section has a brief introduction about it.

Source Material

The primary sources used in this essay are parts of Nietzsche's works. Quotations from a range of his works such as *The Will to Power*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. However, most of Nietzsche's books were published after Nietzsche's death by his sister Elisabeth Nietzsche. Unlike her brother, she had lived to see the rise of Nazism and so she would revive Nietzsche by making him a tool of propaganda for the Nazis. In doing so, she forged some of Nietzsche's books such as *The Will to Power*, with the intention of promoting her brother as an advocator of Nazism. Also, all of Nietzsche's books were originally written in German, thus through the translation some of the aphoristic meaning may have been lost.

The secondary sources include many close analyses of Nietzsche's work "How to Read Nietzsche"¹⁰, "Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction" by Michael Tanner¹¹, "The Consolations of Philosophy" by Alain de Botton¹² and "A Beginner's Guide to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*" by Gareth Southwell¹³ are all close studies of certain parts of Nietzsche's work. They are very useful in understanding his philosophy; although philosophical ideas have ambiguities. Consequently, these study guides are interpretations of Nietzsche's work and not the 'real truth' behind Nietzsche's work. Another secondary source book is "Forgotten Fatherland" by Ben Macintyre¹⁴ a more broad study of Nietzsche's life along its video with the same name¹⁵. An additional important source is a lecture from Stephen Hicks called "Nietzsche and the Nazis"¹⁶ which gives a comparison

¹⁰ Ansell Pearson, Keith (2005), "How to Read Nietzsche", Granta Books London (ISBN: 1-86207-729-0)

¹¹ Tanner, Michael (2000) "Nietzsche, A Very Short Introduction", Oxford University Press (ISBN: 978-0-19-285414-8)

¹² De Botton, Alain (2001), "The Consolations of Philosophy", Penguin Books (ISBN: 0-140-27661-0)

¹³ Southwell, Gareth (2009) "A Beginner's Guide to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*", Wiley-Blackwell (ISBN : 978-1-4051-6005-6)

¹⁴ Macintyre, Ben (1992), "Forgotten Fatherland", Macmillan London (ISBN: 0-333-55914-2)

¹⁵ Pyrce-Jones, Candida (1992), "Timewatch: The Story of Elisabeth Nietzsche Forgotten Fatherland" (BBC TV Production)

¹⁶ Hicks, Stephen (2006), "Nietzsche and the Nazis", Ockham's Razor Publishing

between what Nietzsche thought and the Nazis thought. Finally, some internet references were used such as <http://www.stephenhicks.org> and <http://www.quotes.dictionary.com>.

Main Disagreements

There are slight disagreements amongst the sources that have been used to fuel this essay. The main area of disagreement is within the secondary sources: the examinations of Nietzsche's work. Authors disagree on certain ambiguities within Nietzsche's writing, so several view-points from different authors were included.

I. The Will to Power

Introduction

*The Will to Power*¹⁷ was the first book published after Nietzsche's death. This book was assembled by Nietzsche's sister; Elisabeth and Peter Gast (a German editor of the time). Together, they worked unused notes that the philosopher had left behind ('nachlass') to create the impression that it was Nietzsche's final masterpiece. However, if Nietzsche had been alive to finish the book (very unlikely as it was abandoned), it would have never taken the same shape given by Elisabeth. Hence, calling *The Will to Power* Nietzsche's most refined work it is not entirely correct or even less, his magnum opus, "but arguably [Elisabeth's] single greatest act of misinterpretation was the publication of *Will to Power*...[Nietzsche] had not prepared it for publication, and thus probably did not want it published"¹⁸.

a) Face-value

Nietzsche's book *The Will to Power* contains many ideas and concepts concerning his philosophy. There are sections about religion, philosophy, morality and furthermore about concepts such as the will to power itself.

At face value, the will to power seems to be a utopian ideal that is applied to the human being. "Only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but – thus I teach you – will to power"¹⁹, "A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength –life itself is will to power"²⁰, "The world seen from within, the world defined and designated according to its "intelligible character" –it would simply be

¹⁷ *The Will to Power* was one of the first books that brought Nietzsche to fame in Nazi Germany. Another of his books, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, became a bestseller during 1914-1919 and 165,000 copies of this book were given to German soldiers during the Great War.

¹⁸ Macintyre, p164

¹⁹ Chapko, Bill (27/10/10) http://www.nietzschespirit.com/files/Will_to_Power_.html – originally from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

²⁰ Ibid. – originally from *Beyond Good and Evil*

“will to power,” and nothing else.²¹ Nonetheless, this concept seems to be unclear. At a first glance of his work, what is Nietzsche implying? Can the will to power be applied to mankind and people in general? Or can it be taken to a biological level to explain the behaviour of animals? Moreover, is the concept referring to a physical form of ‘power’? Or is the will to power an intellectual claim?

b) Nazi interpretation

Within the book there are various sections suggesting that Nietzsche was in favour of Eugenics and breeding a master race. This can be seen at a simple glance at the last part of *The Will to Power* in a section called *Discipline and Breeding*, “[Elisabeth] tailored [*The Will to Power*] by the title that she gave the various sections...in such a way that it suggested that [Nietzsche] was very much in favour of eugenics, breeding an ideal Master Race...it was a perversion of his message and to some extent a forgery.”²²

The Nazis drew a more biological interpretation of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*. This can be seen as a parallel to social Darwinism²³, also known as “survival of the fittest” whereby the stronger animals live to rule out the weaker ones. The Nazis applied this theory to everyday life to fit their brutal ideals of overpowering “mongrel races” and “undesirables” hence the name ‘social’ and ‘Darwinism’.

Similarly, the Nazis drew influence from the *Will to Power* to justify their territorial quests and their ‘will for power’ to take control over neighbouring countries. The phrase ‘the will to power’ was adapted metaphorically for the Nazi ambition to expand territorially, also known as *Lebensraum* (literally – living space). “Above all [Nietzsche] denounced the corruption of German “spirit” by the new practitioners of power politics. Hence it was one of the worst Nazi distortions of Nietzsche’s philosophy to claim that his notion of “the will to power” was consonant with what was being advocated in the Third Reich.”²⁴

A different important point to consider is how Nazi officials, such as Alfred Baeumler (Bäumler) interpreted Nietzsche’s work. Alfred Baeumler was a pseudo-philosopher for the Nazis who played an important role of portraying Nietzsche as the ‘godfather of fascism’. In one of his books called *der Philosoph und Politiker* he writes about the relation (he saw) between the Nietzsche and Nazism, “The German state of the future will not be a continuation of Bismarck’s creation, but will be created out of the spirit of Nietzsche and the spirit of the

²¹ Ibid. – originally from *Beyond Good and Evil*

²² Quoted from Dr Michael Tanner, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In the video “Forgotten Fatherland” (Pyrce-Jones)

²³ Darwinism was discovered by the pioneering biologist Charles Darwin who gave an explanation to how nature works

²⁴ [Golomb, Jacob (2002) Princeton University Press (ISBN: 0-691-00709-8), p7]

Great War”²⁵. Wikipedia claims that he was “one of the few influential philosophers in Nazi Germany”. This leads to believe that the Third Reich would have been more inclined to accept what Nazi philosophers had to say about Nietzsche instead of what Nietzsche actually meant.

c) Nietzsche explanation

On the other hand, what Nietzsche meant by the “Will to Power” was entirely different. The will to power (German – “der Wille zur Macht”) is a model to explain human behaviour, is the driving force of man; ambition for achievement, having a higher position in life. All these are symptoms of the will to power.

In the book, Nietzsche explores both the ‘natural’ and physiological Will to Powers; in the sections “*The Will to Power in Nature*” and “*The Will to Power as society and the individual*”. In Nietzsche’s eyes, the concept can be considered in terms of knowledge, nature, society as to the individual, and as art, “[a human body] is essentially informed by a plastic and adaptive power, one capable of profound change (this is what Nietzsche denotes when he posits life as ‘will to power’ conceived as a desire in all living things for growth and expansion.)”²⁶ In Southwell’s book there is glossary with a résumé for each of Nietzsche’s most popular terms, “*The Will to Power: Nietzsche’s idea that all creatures are driven by a desire to express their essential nature, seek dominance over others, and perpetuate the expression of their own ‘type’*. This may take a physical form (such as the dominance of stronger animals over weaker ones), or an intellectual form (such as the attempt of philosophers and founders of religions to control the way other see the world through systems of thought).”²⁷

II. The Übermensch

Introduction

The *Übermensch* is one of the many concepts that Nietzsche incorporated into his work. The *Übermensch* (translated as the Superman, Overman, Superhuman or Overhuman) is a model that helps explain some of the key points in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Although the *Übermensch* only appears briefly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (German – *Also Sprach Zarathustra*), this concept is strongly recognised by modern day thinkers alongside Nietzsche’s other philosophical ideas such as *The Will to Power*.

a) Face-value

²⁵ (anonymous) (27/10/10) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Baeumler – originally from *Nietzsche, Der Philosoph und Politiker*

²⁶ Ansell Pearson, p46

²⁷ Southwell, p205

At face-value, the *Übermensch* seems to be a form of surpassing oneself. These following quotes are taken from Nietzsche's work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Not 'mankind', but Overman is the goal!"²⁸, "Behold, I teach you the Superman, the Superman is the meaning of the earth."²⁹ "I teach you the superman. Man is something to be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"³⁰

Yet, face-value thinking leaves us with a few questions. First, who could be the *Übermensch*? Has anybody ever been the *Übermensch* before and has Nietzsche ever met anyone he considers an *Übermensch*? Secondly, does Nietzsche consider himself an *Übermensch*? Seen as though he has invented the concept, he might as well auto-proclaim himself "The Superman". Finally, if man is to surpass himself, how is this done? And what changes would that imply after?

c) Nietzsche explanation

What Nietzsche intended behind his imaginary idea of the *Übermensch* was very different to the way the Nazis had interpreted it. Although the *Übermensch* has certain ambiguities, most modern-day thinkers who have reevaluated Nietzsche's work(s) seem to agree on the *Übermensch*'s basic principles.

The *Übermensch* is a goal; it is what man should strive to become. Nietzsche argued that "Man is a rope stretched between animal and the Superman"³¹. Nietzsche thought that 'man' is an incomplete piece of work, waiting to become something more than just man. To do this, man has to reject Christianity "and install his own set of values which are 'Beyond Good and Evil'... who could reject the 'God hypothesis', who could look the truths of pessimism in the face and *still* say 'Yes' to life, would cease to be an ordinary human; such an individual would in fact become a *Superhuman*."³² In the same book there is a definition of the *Übermensch* in the glossary of Nietzschean terms – "Nietzsche's basic intention here is to suggest a progression beyond the current concept of 'man'. The *Übermensch* will therefore go 'beyond good and evil' and establish a new set of values and a new philosophy."³³

One more interpretation of the *Übermensch* is that of Alain de Botton. He believes that the *Übermensch* is more of an artistic uprising in man. De Botton says that the *Übermenschen* are rare people who have lived a life of fulfilment by

²⁸ Hicks, Stephen (20/08/10), <http://www.stephenhicks.org/tag/overman>

²⁹ (Anonymous) (20/08/10)
[http://www.quotes.dictionary.com/subject/superman+\(overman\)](http://www.quotes.dictionary.com/subject/superman+(overman))

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Southwell, p146 – originally from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

³² Ibid, p145

³³ Ibid, p203

surpassing themselves with art, literature or music. He refers to people of society who are rich and influential, individuals of high-class German society. De Botton puts forward whom Nietzsche might have considered *Übermenschen* or Supermen. Montaigne, Goethe, Abbé Galiani and Henri Beyle, four individuals Nietzsche admired would have been men that surpassed themselves with art, literature and music. “What had, besides the food and the air, helped to change Nietzsche’s outlook was his reflection on the few individuals throughout history who appeared genuinely to have known fulfilled lives; individuals who could fairly have been described – to use one of the most contested terms on the Nietzschean lexicon – as *Übermenschen*.”³⁴

The denial of religion was an essential part in becoming the *Übermensch*, as claims Stephen Hicks and American philosopher, “the *Übermensch* would overcome the need for God, which Nietzsche saw as a dead concept.”³⁵ Nietzsche’s philosophy on religion is the next area I have explored for this essay³⁶.

b) Nazi interpretation

During their eleven year rule, the Nazis expropriated Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch*³⁷ to suit their philosophy of ‘Aryan-supremacy’³⁸. “Rarely has an imaginary figure like the *Übermensch* been such a controversial figure”³⁹, claims Eric Dontigney an American philosopher.

As well as being “racially pure”, the *Übermenschen* (Supermen) of Germany were to be racially superior to all other races and ethnics. This meant Slavs, Poles and other ethnicities (other than Northern-European ethnics) were regarded as subordinate. A ‘racial ladder’ was produced by Alfred Rosenberg, a key philosopher of the Nazis⁴⁰. Whereby German-Aryans were at the top of all types of Nordic-Aryans and at the bottom were ethnic blacks and Jews. The Nazis had a term for the races at the bottom: Mongrel races or *Untermenschen*

³⁴ De Botton, p210

³⁵ Quoted from Stephen Hicks in his video “Nietzsche and the Nazis”

³⁶ The idea of rejecting religion was strongly linked with Nietzsche’s view that “God is dead”

³⁷ The etymology of the word *Übermensch* has several origins but it is generally agreed that Nietzsche was the first to have used it in his work

³⁸ The Nazis believed that ethnic Germans were the ‘purest’ people known to man. They used many programs to breed an ideal ‘Master Race’ (*Herrevolk*), to raise blue-eyed, blond-haired Germans that were fit, strong and devoted to the Führer.

³⁹ Dontigney, Eric (20/08/10) http://www.western-philosophy.suite101.com/article.cfm/nietzsches_uebermensch

⁴⁰ See appendix 4 for an example of a racial ladder produced in the Third Reich

(Sub-humans or literally: Underhumans). This term was derived from Nietzsche's writing to depict quite simply the "bad guys" from the "good guys".

These 'Untermenschen' of Germany were to be increasingly mistreated by the Nazis; passing laws against the Jews (Nuremberg Laws) to looting Jewish shops, murdering Jews (Kristallnacht) and eventually the Final Solution (Holocaust). Other laws were made to attack the 'Undesirables' of Germany, most of which were ethnic-Germans although in Nazi eyes were 'weakening the German race'. The Undesirables group included tramps, homosexuals and the disabled. Laws were passed to sterilise these peoples and were slowly being euthanized as part of the T4 Program⁴¹.

III. Religion

Introduction

Nietzsche's philosophy on religion is complex. He was brought up in a Christian family of Lutheran faith, Nietzsche only became disillusioned with the idea of religion later in his life; in one of his books he pronounced a solemn curse on Christianity, "God is dead...and we have killed him...there has never been a greater deed"⁴². The Nazis on the other hand had a different set of values for religion; they despised Judaism and exposed Christianity as the 'purest religion' that existed. However, what the Nazis thought about religion was also complicated and it will be further explained in this section.

a) Face-value

When dealing with Nietzsche's work at face-value, we come across a pattern that suggests he was not in favour of religion, "After coming into contact with a religious man I always feel I must wash my hands."⁴³ It is clear here that Nietzsche does not glorify religious figures, "Is man one of God's blunders? Or is God one of man's blunders?"⁴⁴ This slightly pessimistic quote symbolises how Nietzsche thought religion to be too conceptualised and vague. Also, in some of Nietzsche's work, he criticises religion and even proclaims the death of god ("God is dead"). These texts are a clear indication that Nietzsche was anti-Christian. *The Anti-Christ* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are both texts where

⁴¹ See Appendix 6 for an original propaganda poster for the T4 Program

⁴² Pyrcce-Jones, originally from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*

⁴³ (Anonymous) (20/08/10) http://thinkexist.com/quotation/after_coming_into_contact_with_a_religious_man_i/194727.html

⁴⁴ (Anonymous) (20/08/10) http://thinkexist.com/quotation/is_man_one_of_god-s_blunders-or-is_god_one_of_man/206496.html

Nietzsche criticises religion, “In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point.”⁴⁵

c) Nietzsche explanation

Nietzsche might have been opposed to all religions, although his opinion can be compared to the Nazi view of religion. It is interesting to understand how Nietzsche viewed religion, as supposedly being the ‘godfather of fascism’. Nietzsche believed that Christianity inverses values of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, an example of this can be illustrated with differences in social status, “The ruling classes of Roman-occupied world...held such things as power, wealth, courage, etc. as ‘good’, and weakness, poverty, and cowardice as ‘bad’.”⁴⁶ Though Nietzsche argued that Christianity inverts these values: “for Christians, world power, wealth, etc. are seen as ‘evil’, and meekness, humility, sub-mission, as ‘good’...[the poorer classes] cannot be more powerful *in an earthly sense*, so they must be more powerful *in a spiritual sense*.”⁴⁷ This part of Nietzsche’s work is often referred to as the *master morality* against the *slave morality*. It shows that even if the lower classes are poorly treated by the ruling class, they can overcome this spiritually. “The *slave morality* therefore proposes ‘harmless’ qualities: brotherhood, friendship, love, peace etc.”⁴⁸

A further important issue in Nietzsche’s writing is his views of Judaism and other religions. As stated above, the Nazis simply hated everything Jewish and considered Judaism to be completely diverse from Christianity. Although criticizing the Jews, Nietzsche also praised them; he admired how the Jews had conserved their religion from persecution over the world, “Psychologically considered, the Jewish people are a people endowed with the toughest vital energy, who placed in impossible circumstances...divined a power in these instincts with which one could prevail against the world.”⁴⁹ Nietzsche despised how ordinary Germans felt about Jews and was disgusted with their growing anti-Semitic views⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Moncur, Michael (20/08/10)
http://www.quotationpage.com/quotes/Friedrich_Nietzsche/31 – originally from *The Anti-Christ*

⁴⁶ Southwell, p200

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Quoted from Stephen Hicks “Nietzsche and the Nazis” originally from Nietzsche’s *The Anti-Christ*

⁵⁰ A good example of this can be seen through the breach of Nietzsche’s friendship with Richard Wagner. The Wagner family and Nietzsche had both appreciated each other until Richard Wagner became increasingly anti-Semitic: becoming increasingly nationalistic, writing essays about Jewish decadence on German values etc.

However, Nietzsche's critical analysis of religion did not escape Judaism. Nietzsche saw the same moral dangers of 'self-denial' attitude in both Judaism and Christianity (religions he both viewed as slave moralities). Nietzsche acknowledged that both Christianity and Judaism had both stemmed from the same source, something on the other hand the Nazis denied completely⁵¹. Although he saw the same decadence in both religions, "What most people see as the only morality possible, Judeo-Christian morality, Nietzsche sees as a threat to human development, for that morality damn's the traits of assertiveness, egoism, independence and risk-taking that make human development and greatness possible. That same morality praises smallness, meekness and falling on your knees in shame, all traits that undermine human greatness. Nothing stands more malignantly in the way of mankind's rise and evolution than what in Europe today is called simply: morality."⁵² Hick's evaluation of Nietzsche's thought, shows that the *master* and *slave moralities* are what stops man from evolving intellectually. This is Nietzsche's idea that man has to set himself his own values *Beyond Good and Evil* and beyond *master and slave moralities* and by finally having rejected religion, in order to reach the stage of becoming the *Übermensch*.

b) Nazi interpretation

The Nazis arguably had a divided opinion about religion. Hitler was religious himself but he did not want the Catholic Church to have political power. Hence, in 1933 Hitler signed a contract (Concordat) with the Catholic Church of Germany⁵³, aiming to gradually control the Christian Churches by weakening them with his policies. Hitler once said about religion, "[Christianity] sows seeds of decadence such as forgiveness, weakness, humility and the denial of the evolutionary laws of survival of the fittest [social Darwinism]."⁵⁴

Hitler did not favour the idea of a 'powerful church'; this argument can be supported with point 24 of the National Socialists' 25 point program. The point states, "We demand freedom for all religious faiths in the state, insofar as they do not endanger its existence or offend the moral and ethical sense of the Germanic race."⁵⁵ The first part of the point seems open to all religions but the last part

⁵¹ Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda for the Nazis, had even gone as far as denying that Jesus Christ was a Jew.

⁵² Quoted from Stephen Hicks, "Nietzsche and the Nazis"

⁵³ Hitler agreed to leave the Catholic Church to its duties so long as the Pope kept away from German politics

⁵⁴ Newmann, Hannah (20/08/10) <http://www.freemasonrywatch.org/thenewage.html>

⁵⁵ Gavin, Philip (20/08/10) <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/25points.htm>

clear indicates that IF they 'endanger' the Germanic race, they will not be tolerated⁵⁶.

For more control over religion, Hitler decided to create the Reich Church, an assemblage of 28 different smaller Protestant Churches led by Ludwig Müller, appointed "Reich Bishop" in 1933. Their slogan was "The swastika on our breasts and the cross in our hearts". The intention of the Reich Church was to limit the power that religion could have on the people. Years later, Hitler decided to modify a religion that would match Nazi beliefs, known as the German Faith Movement. A religion Hitler considered being an alternative to Christianity and which he 'customised' to suit Nazi ideals. For example, the swastika replaced the Christian cross and the Bible was replaced by *Mein Kampf*⁵⁷. This was a bold representation of Nazism.

It seems very unlikely that Nietzsche's writing actually influenced religious movements in Germany. If anything, it seems contradictory that the Nazis would have expropriated Nietzsche's work to portray it as pro-Christian. Nietzsche was deeply anti-Christian and therefore portraying his work as the opposite would have been a clear misappropriation of his work.

⁵⁶ This sadly happened to all other 'alien' religions such as Judaism and Jehovah's Witness. Believers of these religions were contained in work camps that eventually became death camps.

⁵⁷ See appendix 5 for a photograph of Ludwig Müller's investiture as Reich Bishop

D. Conclusion

This investigation has sought to answer the question 'How did Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas influence the Nazi regime in the Third Reich?'

The evidence and arguments considered has led me to the conclusion that with the various sections of the investigation, Nietzsche's work was used to encourage violence, racism, fascism, imperialism and White-supremacy within the Third Reich⁵⁸.

Clearly, most of Nietzsche's ideas like the *Will to Power* were misinterpreted by the Nazis; resulting in the Nazis admiration for Nietzsche. The Nazis misinterpreted Nietzsche's work due to a biased perception; Nazi intellectuals were only interested in the sections of Nietzsche's writing that (when out of context) suited Nazi ideals⁵⁹. It seems very doubtful that many Nazis read *Ecce Homo* in which Nietzsche writes his fears about mass organisations exploiting his ideas⁶⁰. Along with a biased perception there is also an issue with language; as Nietzsche's ideas had ambiguities within any phrase. This 'ambiguity problem' is present with modern day intellectuals who try to interpret Nietzsche's work.

An additional point as to HOW Nietzsche's ideas came to influence the National Socialists is the following: Elisabeth Nietzsche. Friedrich Nietzsche turned insane during the last eleven years of his life and he died at the turn of the century (1900). His sister Elisabeth however, lived and took over his publishing rights in 1890 as an opportunity to turn him into a Nazi cult. Elisabeth did not fully understand her brother's work at all and made Nietzsche famous as some sort of 'tribute'. By doing this, she made herself very well known in Nazi Germany⁶¹. Thus, without Elisabeth there would have been no 'Nazi Nietzsche' and he would not be as known today⁶².

An important factor to consider is WHOM exactly Nietzsche might have influenced within the Third Reich. Some Nazi officials such as Alfred Baeumler read Nietzsche, but gaps in historical records can not show whether Nietzsche was popular amongst ordinary people of Germany. Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke*

⁵⁸ Stephen Hicks says Nietzsche and the Nazis has similar philosophies – see Appendix 1

⁵⁹ The *Will to Power* for example, the Nazis saw this as a raging slogan with imperialistic and militaristic connotations as opposed to what Nietzsche really meant

⁶⁰ See Appendix 2

⁶¹ Elisabeth was nominated three times for the Noble prize of Literature and the Nietzsche-Archiv became a landmark for Nazi intellectuals

⁶² If it had not been for Elisabeth, would have Friedrich Nietzsche been as famous as he is today?

Zarathustra became a bestseller during years 1914-1919. Over 165,000 copies of the book were given to German soldiers during the Great War. This is as far as my research can demonstrate whom Nietzsche's work may have influenced.

My studies also demonstrate that there are problems reaching a final answer because there are weaknesses in the source material available. An example this is the fact that I was unable to find any still pictures/leaflets/movies from the Third Reich that explicitly demonstrated something said by Nietzsche. This could have been a quote from Nietzsche on a banner or on a wall or in a film; this would have been solid evidence that Nietzsche influenced certain people in the Third Reich.

Nevertheless, there is one snapshot⁶³ that demonstrates Nietzsche's influence; a snapshot of Elisabeth Nietzsche greeting Hitler at the Nietzsche-Archiv shortly before her death. This snapshot demonstrates that Hitler cared about Elisabeth. This snapshot seems to portray the 'artificial' association of Elisabeth, Hitler and Nietzsche.

To conclude this essay, I would like to raise a further question to be investigated. Hitler may have claimed Nietzsche influenced him, yet as Macintyre says "there is no evidence, to suggest that [Hitler] ever read a single word of Nietzsche's philosophy."⁶⁴ On the other hand, fascist leader of Italy, Benito Mussolini claimed that "he had found in Nietzsche's *Will to Power* a central political truth...He was later expressed that Nietzsche had 'cured' him of his socialism"⁶⁵ Naturally, Mussolini believed in fascist ideals, clearly missing the point in Nietzsche's philosophy. Whether Mussolini misunderstood Nietzsche's most basic points, he was still (in a way) influenced by Nietzsche.

⁶³ See Appendix 7 for this photograph

⁶⁴ Macintyre, photo caption

⁶⁵ Macintyre, p176

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⁶⁶ Note: This documentary is divided into two parts, both which have different names. However, throughout the course of this essay, I have always referred to the DVD as "Forgotten Fatherland", referring to both part 1 and part 2 for sake of simplicity.

[27.html](#)

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F. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Two snapshots from Hick’s video. One shows that some points in Nietzsche’s ideas were very similar to what the Nazis thought. The other snapshot shows that on the other hand, they were very different.



Snapshot from “Nietzsche and the Nazis” by Stephen Hicks. Here a list of philosophies which “the Nazis can and did find inspiration from Nietzsche’s philosophy”⁶⁷ claims Hicks. For example, Hicks claims Nietzsche rejected individualism when it came to ‘sexuality and marriage’. “Marriage [Nietzsche] thought should not be based on an ‘idiosyncrasy’, that is to say; on personal love and sexual attraction, rather he suggests marriage should be state-run for breeding purposes.”⁶⁸



This snapshot resumes similar points whereby Nietzsche and the Nazis were strongly in discordance.

⁶⁷ From video (02:36:25)

⁶⁸ From video (02:36:07)

Appendix 2 – Nietzsche’s premonition about his ideas being recklessly exploited in the future of his existence

*“I know my fate. One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful, of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience”*⁶⁹

Whole excerpt⁷⁰:

Why I Am a Destiny

1

I know my fate. One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful – of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience, of a decision evoked *against* everything that until then had been believed in, demanded, sanctified. I am not a man, I am dynamite. – And with all that there is nothing in me of a founder of a religion – religions are affairs of the rabble, I have need of washing my hands after contact with religious people . . . I do not *want* ‘believers’, I think I am too malicious to believe in myself, I never speak to masses . . . I have a terrible fear I shall one day be pronounced *holy*: one will guess why I bring out this book *beforehand*; it is intended to prevent people from making mischief with me . . . I do not want to be a saint, rather even a buffoon . . . Perhaps I am a buffoon . . . And none the less, or rather *not* none the less – for there has hitherto been nothing more mendacious than saints – the truth speaks out of me. – But my truth is *dreadful*: for hitherto the *lie* has been called truth. – *Revaluation of all values*: this is my formula for an act of supreme coming-to-oneself on the part of mankind which in me has become flesh and genius. It is my fate to have to be the first *decent* human being, to know myself in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia . . . I was the first to *discover* the truth, in that I was the first to sense – *smell* – the lie as lie . . . My genius is in my nostrils . . . I contradict as has never been contradicted and am none the less the opposite of a negative spirit. I am a *bringer of good tidings* such as there has never been, I know tasks from such a height that any conception of them

17 Allusion to the closing lines of Goethe’s *Faust II*, “The eternal-womanly / Draws us on,” to which Nietzsche often refers ironically.

⁶⁹ Pyrcce-Jones, “Forgotten Fatherland” video – originally from *Ecce Homo*

⁷⁰ Copyright material from – Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (2006), “The Nietzsche reader”, Malden, MA; Blackwell Pub. (ISBN: 0631226532), p514 and p515 – originally from Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo*

has hitherto been lacking; only after me is it possible to hope again. With all that I am necessarily a man of fatality. For when truth steps into battle with the lie of millennia we shall have convulsions, an earthquake spasm, a transposition of valley and mountain such as has never been dreamed of. The concept politics has then become completely absorbed into a war of spirits, all the power-structures of the old society have been blown into the air – they one and all reposed on the lie: there will be wars such as there have never yet been on earth. Only after me will there be *grand politics* on earth.

[. . .]

Appendix 3⁷¹ – Ricky Gervais comedy sketch

“As part of the live stand-up show Politics, Ricky Gervais suggests what a meeting between Adolf Hitler and the political philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche might have sounded like”⁷² This video shows that Nietzsche (and Hitler) influenced a modern day comedian’s humour subject.

Here is a transcript (I produced myself) of Gervais’ sketch. However if you can, I strongly recommend you to watch it online. The video can be found in the following link ⁷³

[Introduction]

Gervais: Politics, is the art or science of governing. Governing people or governing society, ‘what’s the best way to live? How do we live in harmony?’ That’s what we’re looking for. Democracy is the closest thing we’ve to everyone sort of chipping in, but even that’s got problems: who gets the vote? Should everyone get the vote? Dangerous question, the political philosopher Nietzsche said that ‘not all people do deserve the vote and that not all people are born equal’. This was classically misinterpreted by Hitler, who went way too far... Imagine that! Your great scholar Nietzsche and you write that and you get called to Hitler.

[Imaginary conversation between Nietzsche and Hitler]

Hitler: Alright Nietzsche’?

Nietzsche: Alright Adolf?

Hitler: Yeah yeah, I’ve just been reading your book.

Nietzsche: Do you like it?

Hitler: Brilliant! Love all that love all that. Man and superman, not everyone’s equal, kill all the Jews...

Nietzsche: Sorry? Sorry? What?

Hitler: Not everyone’s equal, kill all the...

Nietzsche: I didn’t write that!

Hitler: Nah, I read between the lines.

Nietzsche: You’ve totally misinterpreted the whole point of it.

Hitler: Yeah?

Nietzsche: Definitely is. That’s awful.

Hitler: Hmm.

Nietzsche: It’s dreadful, have you been killing Jewish people?

Hitler: Pfff!...[long silence] what?

Nietzsche: Have you been killing Jewish people?

Hitler: Awn...

Nietzsche: How many have you killed?

Hitler: [thinks] 6 million...

Nietzsche: 6 million!

Hitler: Yeah alright, don’t go on about it, I’m not gonna’ do any more, that’s it. Leave it at 6, leave it at 6, move on, its time for tea anyway.

Nietzsche: Yeah but be careful in future.

Hitler: I will... You writing any other books at the moment?

Nietzsche: Well I am but I’m scared to tell you about them.

Hitler: No, I won’t do anything. What’s your new book called?

Nietzsche: My new book’s called ‘The Gypos’, do we need them?’

⁷¹ The transcript is taken from Ricky Gervais’ comedy sketch “Hitler interprets Nietzsche” from the DVD “Politics” – Ricky Gervais Live 2 – Politics [DVD] [2004]

⁷² Lane, Terry (24/10/10) <http://www.britishcomedyclassics.co.uk/ricky-gervais-hitler-interprets-nietzsche/180/>

⁷³ <http://www.britishcomedyclassics.co.uk/ricky-gervais-hitler-interprets-nietzsche/180/>

Appendix 4⁷⁴ – Racial ladder from the Nuremberg Laws discriminating Jews in particular



Title: *The Nuremberg Laws*

“1935 Chart from Nazi Germany used to explain the Nuremberg Laws. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 employed a pseudo-scientific basis for racial discrimination against Jews. People with four German grandparents (white circles) were of “German blood,” while people were classified as Jews if they were descended from three or more Jewish grandparents (black circles in top row right). Having one or more Jewish grandparents made someone a Mischling (of mixed blood). In the absence of discernible external differences, the Nazis used the religious observance of a person’s grandparents to determine their race.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ (Author: Nazi government) source from – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_policy_of_Nazi_Germany

⁷⁵ (Anonymous) (24/10/10) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_policy_of_Nazi_Germany

Appendix 5⁷⁶ – Photograph of the Reich Church, movement led by Ludwig Müller



A photograph of Ludwig Müller's investiture of "Reich Bishop" Ludwig praised the ideology of "one mighty, all-embracing German people's church." At the bottom right of photograph, there is a swastika, showing that the Reich Church was strongly linked with Nazism. Ludwig Müller is the bald man near the swastika.

⁷⁶ (Anonymous) photograph source from (24/10/10) <http://www.nobeliefs.com/nazis.htm>



The English translation of the poster reads: “60000 RM this is what this person suffering from hereditary defects costs the Community of Germans during his lifetime Fellow Citizen, that is your money, too Read '[A] New People' The monthly magazines of the Office for Race Politics of the NSDAP”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ (Anonymous) source from (24/10/10) – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T-4_Euthanasia_Program

⁷⁸ (Anonymous) (24/10/10) – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T-4_Euthanasia_Program

Appendix 7: Photograph of Elisabeth Nietzsche and Adolf Hitler



Snapshot of Elisabeth Nietzsche (centre) greeting Adolf Hitler (left) at the Nietzsche-Archiv. This photograph portrays the relation that Elisabeth and Hitler had; Hitler only associated Nietzsche with a favourable woman who was devoted to Nazism. This was one of the reasons why Hitler genuinely believed that Nietzsche wrote for the for-coming National Socialist spirit⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ Snapshot from video "Forgotten Fatherland" (Pryce-Jones).