

Lecture 8: Liberal or Anti-Liberal?

Enlightenment's resilience, Darwin's shock, Mill's liberty, Nietzsche's attack

1859: A hinge year

- **Science & medicine:** Pasteur's germ theory; anesthesia & antisepsis → soaring life expectancy.
- **Biology:** Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* → evolutionary, historical thinking spreads beyond science.
- **Reform currents:** Abolitionism (e.g., John Brown's raid), early women's liberation, expanding education—ongoing **Enlightenment** momentum.

Philosophical fallout of Darwin

- Challenges static, creationist pictures of nature and man.
 - Fuels debates about:
 - **Eugenics/state breeding** vs **plasticity/malleability** of human nature.
 - **Struggle/selection** analogies for markets ("let the weak firms fail").
 - Whether policy should **engineer** society or **liberate** adaptation.
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Mill: The liberal case for individuality & free speech

Liberal peace & commerce

"Commerce ... renders war obsolete." — J.S. Mill

- Free trade entangles interests; liberal societies tend toward peaceful

coexistence.

***On Liberty* (1859), Ch. 2 – Why speech must be free**

Principle: Even if **all** disagree with **one**, silencing the one is unjustified.

Mill's three-way test for any opinion

- 1) **Opinion is true** → suppression robs us of truth.
- 2) **Opinion is false** → its clash with truth sharpens our grasp of truth.
- 3) **Mixed/uncertain** → debate helps sift and recombine partial truths.

Against dogma; for education by live controversy

- “He who knows only his own side knows little of that.”
- Students must hear **the best version** of opposing views from **true believers**, not caricatures from friendly teachers.

Two soft departures from earlier Enlightenment notes

- **Utility over “abstract right”:** Mill brackets innate rights-talk; defends liberty on **pragmatic/utility** grounds.
- **From individuality to aggregates?** In *Utilitarianism* (1861), “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” risks subordinating minorities; tones of “miserable individuality” hint at a tilt away from robust individualism.

Nietzsche: The Counter-Enlightenment intensifies

“They are no philosophical race, these Englishmen ... old, cold, tedious frogs.”
– **Nietzsche**

Genealogy, naturalism, and revaluation

- **God is dead** → moral codes must be **historically/naturally** explained, not theologically justified.
- **Genealogical method:** ask **when/why** values emerged; measure them by whether they **further life**, strength, creativity.

Master vs slave moralities

- **Master morality**: noble, proud, strong, life-affirming; “good” = excellence, power, high station.
- **Slave/priestly morality**: born under domination; elevates pity, humility, obedience, self-denial.
- Philology: ancient languages tie “good” to **noble**; later Judeo-Christian inversion makes the **lowly** “good” and the **strong** “evil.”

Target of critique

- Pity, self-abnegation, chastity, anti-worldliness as **life-denying** (nihilistic) when universalized.
- Utilitarianism’s “greatest number” → moral deference to the herd; replaces creators’ standards with recipients’ preferences.

Civilizational drama

- “Rome vs Judea”: aristocratic vitality vs priestly resentment.
- Symbol: Rome’s seat occupied by the Vatican—Judeo-Christian victory over pagan vigor.

A provocative horizon

- Late Nietzsche toys with a synthesis: **“a Caesar with the soul of Christ”**—strength fused with depth/compassion, without herd morality.

Mill vs Nietzsche (at a glance)

Topic	Mill	Nietzsche
Foundation	Utility, harm principle, individuality	Life, power, creativity, rank
Speech	Maximal tolerance for error to serve truth	Truths/values are creations; debate ≠ herd veto

Education	Hear strongest opposing arguments	Cultivate higher types, not leveling
Morality	Universalizable, aggregate-oriented	Plural, genealogical, rank-ordered
Politics	Liberalism, commerce → peace	Distrust of democracy/egalitarianism; anti-herd

Key terms & ideas

- **Darwinism** (scientific) vs **Social Darwinism** (contested social extrapolations)
 - **Liberal Peace Thesis** (commercial interdependence)
 - **Marketplace of ideas** (Mill's epistemic defense of free speech)
 - **Genealogy** (historical-natural origin of morals)
 - **Slave/Master morality, resentment, revaluation of values**
 - **Nihilism** (life-denying moral-political drift)
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Study prompts

1. How does Darwin's historical biology reshape moral and political theorizing on both liberal and anti-liberal sides?
2. Reconstruct Mill's three-case argument for free speech and give a modern example of each case.
3. Why does Mill think dogma—even true dogma—harms knowing?
4. Where do Mill's later utilitarian commitments strain against his earlier individualism?
5. Explain Nietzsche's philological case for the **inversion** of "good/bad" into "good/evil."
6. Can Nietzsche's ideal ("Caesar with the soul of Christ") be squared with liberal institutions—or is it inherently anti-egalitarian?

