

# **The Champion of English Section**

## **Junior Division**

**Name of Winner : Kwok Sum Yuet Keisha**

**Name of School : Diocesan Girls' School**

**Book Title : *Beyond Good and Evil***

**Author : Friedrich Nietzsche**

**Publisher : Cambridge University Press**

### **Introduction and Background**

Friedrich Nietzsche was a renowned 19th century German philosopher and critic. Throughout his lifetime, he suffered from severe cognitive decline, dementia and stroke. This had caused the author to attempt to oppose the negative effect of his illnesses. As a defense mechanism, he came to develop a positive attitude in life, and challenges violently the ideals of pessimism.

This book *Beyond Good and Evil* is one of Friedrich

Nietzsche's most well-known books. It is a non-fiction book about the author's opinions of pre-existent constraints in philosophy. This 195-page book comprises of nine chapters. Each paragraph in the chapters is assigned a section number. In total, there are 296 sections. Beyond Good and Evil is one of Nietzsche's books which indirectly reflects his struggle. In his times when not many people knew philosophy, he insisted in writing about his interest, and hoped that there would be future readers who would understand his work.

## **Summary**

As the title of the book suggests, Nietzsche spent much effort exploring penetrating the misconceptions laid down by famous philosophers in history – from Plato and Aristotle, to Kant and Schopenhauer. He wanted us to not only to free ourselves from the shallowness and ignorance in our daily lives, but also to abandon conventional ideas. There is first and foremost

the mention of the “will to power”, the ultimate core and meaning of life, according to Nietzsche (instead of Schopenhauer’s description of Will being the origin of all suffering, and life being suffering itself).

From chapter 1, “On the prejudices of philosophers”, one could immediately spot the strong arguments Nietzsche was making. He often pointed out the paradoxes in previous philosophers’ ideologies, and thus proving each ideology invalid in a very convincing manner. For example, on stoicism, Nietzsche wrote that it is ridiculous to “live according to Nature”, because the discipline of stoicism – to execute self-tyranny, that is to say, restricting our own desires – does not comply with the basis of Nature, which is without mercy, justice or order. Nietzsche followed by saying every philosophy would ultimately create its indisputable world view, that is, in its own terms.

In Chapter 2, “The Free Spirit”, Nietzsche suggested that the expression of our knowledge relies on language, which is a simplified form of truths. Language comprises of mostly linearly or otherwise multi-layer structures; it is constructed in a way such that everyone can understand it. Language fails to convey the true complexity of truths and their relationships. Next, Nietzsche told the readers about our free spirits, and how much difficult a life those who prefers isolation and independence would follow. There are unknown dangers presented in unexpected ways which nobody could share with us.

Moving on to Chapter 3, “The religious character”, where Christianity is the focus, Nietzsche analysed the saintliness in Christianity. “Good” Christians should, under the command of the Lord, deny any material desires and subject themselves to humility, chastity and isolation. The saints would make their self-debasement

the grand virtue that should be followed; Nietzsche opined that the saintly power originates from the mystery of the value of the self-denial. He also doubts the distinction of “I” from fellow predicates, and thus the existence of a “soul” is also questioned. As a conclusion, Nietzsche suggested that Christianity is merely stoicism for the people, with the same ridicule as stoic ideals.

Chapter 4, “Epigrams and entr’actes”, is a collection of interesting quotes that are both witty and thought-provoking. For instance, BGE 164, “Jesus said to his Jews: ‘The law was for servants, – love God as I do, as his son! Why should we care about morals, we sons of God?’” This depicts the underlying sarcastic contradictions of the gospel. Another example: BGE 182 “The confidences of our superiors enrage us because they cannot be reciprocated.” This is an explanation of jealousy, a shunned aspect of human nature.

Chapter 5 sees the return of longer paragraphs. “On the natural history of morals” asserts us that we know much less than we believe we do – what we see is the general appearance of objects, leaving behind the details which we construct instead of observe. Our said knowledge is what we make-up for ourselves, because we want to believe that we understand. In a way, any knowledge per se are inventions, and any claims of being knowledgable are lies.

In Chapter 6, “We scholars”, Nietzsche criticised the scholars of his time. He wrote that scholars lack creativity and strong passions, and merely searches for unusual or irregular to eliminate. Quoting him, a true genius is “one who either begets or gives birth”, meaning that intellectuals are those who create instead of adopt. Philosophers should not be philosophical laborers, as he put it; and they should instead be legislators, in the act of making their own laws, and creators, through forging

their own ideals.

Chapter 7 “Our virtues” is built on the idea of “the spiritualisation of cruelty”. Nietzsche wrote that the search for knowledge is the highest form of cruelty, because we reveal truths that we would be happier if we do not know them. It is cruel to oppose the superficial and shallow instinct of ours. To be willing to perform this cruelty is the key virtue of Nietzsche’s picture of an ideal philosopher, who will go beyond the popular and shallow interests in pursuit of the depths.

Chapter 8 “People and fatherlands” explores nationalistic sentiments. Nietzsche categorized races as being masculine or feminine, where masculine races induces creative drives into the cultures they come into contact, and feminine races absorb these forces and crave beautiful cultures. Interesting, Nietzsche wrote about German anti-Semitism. He believed that Germans liked

to believe that they are the profound race, whilst their strength is incomparable to that in the Jewish race – for the Jews composed “the grand style of moralising”, the most outstanding act of creativity in the history of Europe and beyond.

Chapter 9, “What is noble?”, is the last chapter of the book. Nietzsche deduced that “an aristocratic caste is fundamental to the ennoblement of the human species”. Consequently, humans will form a society, in which few will rise to glory and reputation, and rationalised adversities within that society. According to Nietzsche, life is will to power, and will to power is no less than exploitation. BGE 260 highlights Nietzsche’s views on slave and master moralities. The master morality represents health, strength, and power; the slave morality represent weakness and despair. From these spring the concepts of “good” and “evil”. Masters would see themselves as “good” and look down upon their slaves.



On the other hand, slaves would see their masters as “evil”.

## **Thoughts and Reflections**

As Nietzsche did once said not to blindly follow any person or idea – when he contrasts the fact that the Lord called for disciples to follow whilst he, as a philosopher, would urge readers of the book not to follow, and instead, construct their own mindset – I would like to express some of my reflections and deductions which I put down as I read BGE. The first three thoughts are related to Chapter 1, since it is the chapter which I read repeatedly. The fourth thought is related to BGE 211, which, as mentioned, is a vital paragraph where many of the other sections were built upon.

My first reflection is based on 9 and 14. Let us define that to be fundamental is to know this reality without applying traditional interpretations, which is what

Nietzsche tempted us to do. In learning science. And perhaps in other subjects as well, we are in the act of determining, in order gain some level of certainty. But at the same time, we abandon some level of fundamentality. Indeed, we tend to pursue certainty because we want the sense of accomplishment by being certain and by making the uncertain certain. We lose fundamentality in the process of learning science – is the loss worth it? This is a question worth thinking about. Referring to 9, that living is to assess, to prefer, and to be limited – one could say the desire to study science, for example, originates for these desires, for it is these desires that encourage us to seek uncertainty and give up fundamentality.

My second reflection refers to 15 and 21, which is a theoretical afterthought of what the author wrote. Nietzsche claims that cause and effect is only a concept – a conventional interpretation – as such, “production”, in which the producer is the cause and the product is the

effect, is only a conventional interpretation as well; production of any thing is simply a concept. We land in a conclusion, this is that all things (e.g. “objects”, “forces”, “impacts” of one object on another) do not produce one another, that all of these exist as separate realities. Inevitably, because these things can neither be produced or annihilated (un-produced) in any sense, they must exist infinitely. The other seeming conclusion we may draw, is that all things are in fact one system, and that this system of reality acts of itself and changes its form... but this again is invalid, because “change” already implies the cause and effect of before and after, and is again, a concept. In this case, we could only say that the change is merely another existent reality replacing this reality at some point among infinity, but this contradicts the seeming conclusion that everything is one system. In such a way, neither materialism nor idealism would work, for both rely on the concept of “creation” – either the reality creating consciousness that interprets it

(materialism) or consciousness creating reality (idealism). Because both materialism and idealism claim that one thing causes another (in materialism, reality is the cause of consciousness and in idealism the reversed), neither ideology survives the fact that cause and effect is a mere concept.

My third reflection is based on 21 about my thoughts on power. There was a time when I despise power, but this book changes this sentiment. Everyone wants power because they want to feel powerful – there is no denying that. In a way, all of us are living for this will to power. It is just that in the process of desiring power, we could too influence others. Now I think I know what it means when people tell us not to try to change others. Influencing others is merely a result of our strive. And a healthy strive will lead to a said good influence. Nobody is born with the saintly desire to save the world, though I think that is at times cognitively added on as a cause, and a

motivation of sorts... At the end of the day, however, this cognitive desire to save the world is the will of being the saviour of this world. There is absolutely no problem in this desire in itself.

The fourth reflection is the longest, and is largely about independence of the mind which Nietzsche mentioned in BGE 211. The thoughts will take quite a lot of paragraphs to be recorded thoroughly. Some personal reflections are involved which will bring about a demonstration of this independence in real life. It is common that some teenagers have few achievements to bind themselves to their self-value. However, some, such as myself, have already some achievements from when they were younger (and without a solid judgment belonging solely to themselves) that would have bound them to certain self-value and decisions of my goals. In the past, I have followed what the world presents to me as “grand” or “estimable”. The field of sciences is often,

at least in my knowledge, perceived as a respected field; being a scientist is honoured. Scientific achievements are appreciated. As a result, I decided that I would study science; I claimed I wished to contribute to the world. Of course, there are other intentions, unknown to my conscious thought (for, as aforementioned, nobody is born nor will act on a merely saintly purpose). For instance, I wanted to be a scientist in conferences where experts discuss about the future of the world. I wanted to gain recognition.

As I grow up however, and in the dawn of having a judgment of my own, and obtaining fewer achievements than before, I have been exposed to – or, have engaged myself in – other subjects and other ideas. Beyond Good and Evil played a huge role here. These new ideas have broadened my scope. They have led me to question, intensely, the basis of the former decisions of mine, such as the decision of a career as a scientist, I have

discovered that, at least for me, all of my abilities would burn down to the ability to think. Philosophy seems like something that I could not abandon even if much is taken away from me, because philosophy is thinking, thinking about thinking, thinking about thinking about thinking... There is no end in philosophy at which the ability to think is repressed.

As I see those who achieve high rankings and scores in fields like mathematics or science – those are the people who continuously had these achievements which would lead them to certain directions of self-value. Some possibly have a “narrower” scope, engaging more in a rather pre-determined direction; some would have a “broader” scope, and have decided to study still according to those directions. Whether they have a broader scope and thus are able to question their decisions, I do not know, though their achievements in the past nonetheless brings them into towards these

preferred fields of study.

I have learnt through Nietzsche's point that I will cease to compare myself with others. One may have different ways of using my abilities, and perhaps in less conventional ways, for these are only things that are popularly regarded as successes, such as getting outstanding grades and winning top awards. I think I know what Nietzsche meant now. We need to decide our own paths for ourselves in a truly independent way – we must analyse what sources would have affected our decisions of our goals and dreams. We need to create our own values for ourselves. Independence is something that we should uphold. Do not let the popular beliefs be walls that encircle our decisions of who we are, or who we will be.

As a side note, some may argue that this is self-obsession. In fact, I think that self-obsession has no



borders with the action of making a unique decision about one's own ego and values and distancing oneself from the popular world values. But self-obsession has a negative meaning in general; self-obsession is when one's decisions involve the establishment of their superiority. There are extreme examples such as political leaders – dictators – who believes that in order for their ego to rise, others' needs must be neglected, their brilliance must fade and any opposition must be suppressed. These will harm the well-being of others.

As such, I will avoid this effect, because I don't find declaring superiority necessary for myself. Just for the sake of solving the issue, I would introduce another value, which could be called "equality" in an inaccurate manner. Comparisons of the characters and capabilities within people should not be thought of or suggested, since the variability is so high, there can be no ultimately good basis for comparisons. Though if some adjective must be

used, then we should say that everyone is “equal”. Though more definitions and derivations from this said “equality” are necessary, I have not insights which could help with these at the moment. Moreover, clashes of interests (which are caused desires for influence over others for the benefit of oneself) are the matter of another day, so allow me to not discuss that now. Perhaps it is true that those who actually analyse the popular believes will not end up desiring superiority, but again, I do not have any helpful insights about this yet.

### **Recommendation and conclusion**

In my opinion, Nietzsche, being a thinker and a poet, is one of the best philosophers of all times. Here in *Beyond Good and Evil*, his qualities as an intellectual critic is displayed at its full scale. His explanation of the nature of life and the human mind was excellent. Not only was Nietzsche very much a rebel in the field of philosophy, he was also the prominent advocate among

the revolutionaries. We could glimpse at his poetic side in the aftersong of the book, *From High Mountains*, a free verse poetry of fifteen stanzas. This poetic side could be observed in other books, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

I think that there is so much more worth exploring in philosophy, that I would recommend Nietzsche's book to any thoughtful readers out there. You will find this book interesting, given that you are a keen thinker, no matter where your interests lie, what your areas of expertise are, or which age group you belong to. As I mentioned, I am myself a science enthusiast; yet I find that the content and ideas from this book extended my scope of thinking and brought significant changes to my values. Indeed, in this new age of technological advances in which a humongous amount of information is potentially what we have to face every day, we must search for and crave our own unique identities, while reducing the influences

trends and opinions have on us.

Nietzsche time and again preached his readers not to be his follower – because, in order to “follow” his ideals, we must not follow him. Quoting Nietzsche’s main character Zarathustra in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “I now go alone, my disciples! You too go now, alone! Thus I want it. I advise you: depart from me, and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you.” In a letter to his sister, Nietzsche wrote, “If you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire.” Therefore, if you wish to collect more insights on your way, I would recommend searching online for analyses and even criticisms of Nietzsche’s works. I strongly suggest that readers of his books seek to investigate the interpretations of the ideas presented to you and derive your own. It is throughout this process that your thinking

can undergo unprecedented advancements and transformations.