# CC Final Exam

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### **II.2:** Identify the traces of the “scientific theory” of Darwinian evolution in the writings of Nietzsche and Freud and show how and to what effect they used the said traces.

**The scientific theory of biological evolution through natural selection – put forth for the first time by Charles Darwin in the mid-19th century – is often considered to be one of the most influential ideas in human history, so heavily did it influence all following thought. To understand the influence of Darwinian thought, it is important to note that the evolutionary paradigm, unlike everything before its time, was truly revolutionary simply because it provided compelling evidence to separate humans from mythology and metaphysics, and instead wed them, irrevocably, to history and chance. Furthermore, Darwin grounded his theory against ideas such as variation under domestication (artificial selection) that were intuitive, not only to intellectuals, but to the common public as well. As Darwin’s ideas gained traction, not only did his biological theses become generally accepted, but the evolutionary method of thought more and more became a viable path for philosophical investigation. Of the works we read this semester, we saw this method dominant in Nietzsche’s *Geneology of Morals*, and Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*; let us explore the traces of Darwinian evolution in these two works and examine how they guided the author’s to their conclusions.**

**Even the title of Nietzsche’s work evokes images of morals and values evolving over time. Indeed, Nietzsche, in the preface, emphasizes that his work is not to *define* ideas and ideals (such as good, bad, evil, justice, etc.), but instead to trace the shape and form of such ideas all the way back to their historical roots: “A certain amount of historical and philological schooling… soon transformed my problem into another one: under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? *And what value do they themselves possess?*” [p. 17] Why Nietzsche considers the origin of morality to be so important is not quite clear at this point in the preface, but later we get a sense of desperation: “I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its sublimest enticement and seduction… the beginning of the end, the dead stop, a retrospective weariness, the will turning *against* life… to *nihilism*.” [p.19] But what does this have to do with morals? Nietzsche asks, “Have [morals] hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress… or is there revealed in them… courage, certainty future?” [p. 17] Nietzsche, it seems, is worried for the progress of humankind as a whole; by detaching himself completely from the contemporary moral system and placing the worth of morals in an evolutionary context, he is able to view the struggle for human progress and prosperity in a much broader scope.**

**In fact, much as Darwin might characterize humans as more “adapted” than our genetic relatives in the grand scheme of natural selection, Nietzsche argues that only after the “master-slave morality” forces upon humans ideas of good and evil does the “human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth*… superior to other beasts!” [p. 33] Clearly, then, Nietzsche sees issues of morality crucial to the identity of humans, but more importantly, he does not assume that these ideas were God-given and have instead evolved over time to make us, collectively as a species, who we are. But even within our own species, Nietzsche asserts, we have internal (in the sense of non-biological, short-time-scale) power struggles that crucially shape human identity. We are given Nietzsche’s prime example of the master-slave, Roman-Jewish power struggle, through which oppression and “hatred” crystallize (or are “manufactured,” as Nietzsche might say) into the moral ideals of good, bad, evil, etc., supported by linguistic evidence. This struggle is characterized in a way that is thoroughly analogous to Darwin’s ideas of natural selection, i.e. the “weak” slowly gain formidable “cleverness” until they themselves are elevated as noble, “good,” and morally powerful while the previously powerful are seen as vulgar and “ungodly.”**

**Hence we see that Nietzsche, though often critical of the “naïveté of English biologists” [p. 56] (and of scientific contribution to human knowledge), was remarkably Darwinian in his historico-evolutionary approach to morality and human progress, which allowed him a much more logically sound method of argument than those of many philosophers, so often prone to speculation, we have previously read. Darwinian thought is prevalent in Freud’s *Civilization* as well, but unlike Nietzsche, Freud is fully supportive of evolutionary science, and often backs up his speculative psychological claims by analogizing his ideas to Darwin’s theory. Indeed, in many of Freud’s other essays we see explicit allusions to Darwinian ideas. Take, for example, the highly speculative ideas that Freud introduces in his essay *Totem and Taboo*: his hypothesis has human societies organized similar to those of the great apes, namely patriarchies where the alpha males monopolize the females. It is clear that such a vision of human history must have been inspired by and prospered under the influence of Darwin’s theory.**

**Like Nietzsche, though, Freud also structures many of his arguments historically; let us examine these. Freud starts off his second chapter of *Civilization*, for instance, by quoting Goethe: “He who possesses science and art also has religion; but he who possesses neither of the two, let him have religion!” Here we already see Freud’s conscious urge to separate human progress and happiness from religion and metaphysics, as Darwin (and Nietzsche) would have it, and instead measure the development of the species over time. From this historical and evolutionary attitude emerges Freud’s main thesis (in the third chapter): the two main sources that contribute to human unhappiness are nature and civilization, but since humans will forever be subordinate to nature, what we should be especially cognizant of is the unhappiness brought upon ourselves by accepting to live in human society. This unhappiness, Freud rather vaguely sketches, stems from the alpha male urges that are repressed by general intellectual consent when living in civilized society. Under Freud’s outline, then, human history can be split up into a two-part progression, the first primitive and dangerous but happy (pre-civilization), and the second culturally and technologically advanced and secure but fundamentally chained and unhappy (civilization): “Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security.” [p. 752] Freud is quick to point out, however, that “in the primal family only the head of it enjoyed this instinctual freedom” and thus that civilization is indeed a highly evolved state of human affairs: “when we justly find fault with the present state of our civilization for so inadequately fulfilling our demands for a plan of life that shall make us happy… we are undoubtedly… not showing ourselves enemies of civilization.” Ending with a final, optimistic, Darwinian note of progress, Freud concludes that over time “we may expect gradually to carry through such alterations in our civilization… as will better satisfy our needs” though it is well worth keeping in mind that “there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform.” [p. 752] With this conclusion, we as readers, looking past Freud’s often wildly speculative theories, can see Darwin’s deep influence: by treating human progress as history and subject to chance, Freud is able to momentarily “step outside” civilization and vividly critique its effectiveness, just as Nietzsche so ineluctably coupled the survival of the fittest with morals.**

### **IV.3:** What common concerns do Mill and de Tocqueville share concerning the individual and liberty in a democracy?

Though both works focus on liberty and democracy, de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* and Mill’s *On Liberty* are treatises that approach the subject from very distinct perspectives. de Tocqueville, for instance, was a French political thinker, who aimed to describe the subtleties and weaknesses of American society and its close relation to democracy, while Mill, an English philosopher wished to view democracy in the light of utilitarianism. Regardless of their intentions, the two thinkers had remarkably similar ideas concerning the “dangers” to the individual and liberty as a whole in a democratic society. These concerns focused primarily on the struggle in both power and identity between the individual and the democratic majority, namely the tyranny of the majority.

de Tocqueville argues that “The very essence of democratic government consists in the absolute sovereignty of the majority,” as democracy is constructed precisely in such a way to give those people with the majority of support the majority of the power and influence. He traces this structure back to the ideals of freedom and equality: individuals are equal and have freedom of thought, and hence, it must inevitably come down to a game of numbers (“as the United States was colonized by men holding equal rank, there is as yet no natural or permanent disagreement between the interests of its different inhabitants.”). Additionally, de Tocqueville attributes majority power to the intuitive American notion that “there is more intelligence and wisdom in a number of men united than in a single individual.” Mill agrees historically, claiming in the Introduction that there came a time when rulers were identified with the people, that their interests were the interests of the whole nation, but that “Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread…”

Thus we see that democratic ideals may well lead to tyranny of the majority. “An individual or a party is wronged in the United States, to whom can he apply for redress?” de Tocqueville wonders. There’s no way out:

“If to public opinion, public opinion constitutes the majority; if to the legislature, it represents the majority and implicitly obeys it; if to the executive power, it is appointed by the majority and serves as a passive tool in its hands. The public force consists of the majority under arms; the jury is the majority invested with the right of hearing judicial cases; and in certain states even the judges are elected by the majority.”

Under such majority rule it is clear that individuality and liberty may be suppressed rather easily, as anyone who does not side with public opinion is liable to have “his political career… closed forever, since he has offended the only authority that is able to open it.” Thus de Tocqueville concludes that “there is no sure barrier against” America’s tyranny of the majority and that the only reason there is not frequent use of this tyranny is “to be found in the circumstances and the manners of the country more than in its laws,” i.e. the sociopolitical customs and habits that Americans have developed as a people.

Similarly, Mill worries about the individual caught in the vice grip of majority, especially since he places the individual at the forefront: “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.” Consequently, Mill claims that the majority can often stifle the growth of an individual: “The majority, being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they are now (for it is they who make them what they are) cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody.” Hence Mill sees tyranny of the majority as a force pushing society towards conformity, i.e. a clear threat to individuality and personal liberty.

### **IV.5:** Who was the thinker among those we read this semester whose concern was that his certainty fails to correspond to his truth?

**Hegel, in his *Phenomenology*, beings his inquiry at a very fundamental point: how can we possibly gain knowledge of the world? He starts with what he believes to be the most direct and intuitive way of gaining knowledge of the world: sense-certainty. Sense-certainty is as pure experience as it gets – it is the *this-here-now* of smelling a flower or biting into a freshly-picked apple. Hegel depicts how the concept of sense-certainty is attractive philosophically, as it might be the foundation for more complex knowledge because it is a truly elementary mind-world interaction. Indeed, it also seems to be the richest or truest form of knowledge in that no detail is left out in experiencing an object as it truly is. Hegel goes on to show that the notion of sense-certainty is actually quite problematic, in that any sort of purely “apprehensive” knowledge is inevitably useless: “This bare fact of certainty, however, is really and admittedly the abstractest and the poorest kind of truth.” [p. 34]**

**The problems, Hegel asserts, arise from how basic and ineffable the knowledge derived from sense-certainty is. He demonstrates how this difficulty is inherent in the way we refer to objects, for example. In order to refer to a sense-certainty-recognized tree, one cannot use words such as “tall” or “green,” as that which was sensed was neither the object “tall” nor the object “green.” Indeed, in this sense, it seems rather difficult to express an object qua object, an object in its pure entirety. Thus we use what Hegel calls universals such as “this,” “here,” and “now”. Hegel concludes: “Pure being, then, remains as the essential element for this sense−certainty, since sense−certainty in its very nature proves the universal to be the truth of its object.” [p. 35] Of course, these universals, though they carry the full weight of the “truth,” unlike our previous descriptors, are obviously highly context-sensitive and impossible to articulate or to “write down,” as Hegel worries. Thus, Hegel concludes that though objects as individual, particular, objects can be “apprehended,” but not comprehended, making sense-certainty useless as a source of knowledge.**

**Having sounded the death knell for thinking of objects qua objects, Hegel proceeds to discuss how we “perceive” objects as being intimately related to the characteristics and qualities that they possess. He first describes the view that objects are completely specified by their properties; he contests this, however, in a rather obscure paragraph: a single property “is related to these [other properties] merely by being also along with them, a relation of mere indifference. This ‘Also’ is thus the pure universal itself, the "medium", the ‘Thinghood’ keeping them together.” [p. 40] In other words, Hegel is claiming that, in addition to the properties that the object possess, there is also the universal of ‘Also’, i.e. there is some sort of medium that is present in the object. In this context, then, Hegel concludes that consciousness is unable to grasp the truth of the object; it is confused by the simultaneity of “unity” and “multitude” of the object against its properties:**

**“But these two contradictory extremes are not merely alongside one another, but within one unity; or, what is the same thing, the common element of both, self−existence, is entirely fettered to its opposite, i.e. is, at the same time, not an existence−for−self. The sophistry of perception seeks to save these moments from their contradiction, tries to keep them fixed by distinguishing between "aspects", by using terms like "also" and "so far as", and seeks in like manner to lay hold on the truth by distinguishing** **the unessential element from an essential nature opposed thereto.” [p. 44-45]**