

# Nietzsche's Critique of State Universities

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## Abstract:

During his short tenure at the University of Basel, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote several lectures containing negative critiques of university life, reflecting his student experiences at the Universities of Bonn and Leipzig. He saw the state universities as extensions of the public schools, teaching narrow specializations to students who were poorly prepared and ill suited for more comprehensive, traditional introductions to the larger culture. It was, he believed, a conscious political and economic strategy of the state, designed to produce greater numbers of obedient workers, and portrayed to the public dishonestly, with an eye to stimulating greed among the masses. Ignoring the traditional canons of learning, the universities adopted a journalistic-like focus on the present, producing what he called "the tyranny of the moment," a clear mark of modern barbarism. The poverty of spirit and the quasi-Hegelian elevation of the State as the only public entity that mattered suggested to Nietzsche that a warlike age lay ahead. More narrowly, Nietzsche was critical of professors within specific disciplines whose inept approach to their topics were self-defeating—such as writing teachers who assigned creative projects but criticized them for not being ordinary as well as philosophers who taught philosophical systems instead of philosophical thinking oriented toward life.

When Nietzsche characterized alternatives for university education, he was less concrete than he had been with his negative critiques; three categories are prominent. Culture of the sort that depends on understanding one's historical roots in addition to a philologist's proficiency in modern and classical languages was an early favorite, reflecting his own paths in academia. Life, as a broader characterization, less dependent on educational institutions, seemed more amenable for the recovery of whatever is natural to humans. Solitude, such a central aspect of his own life, allowed for contemplation and writing that could spring out of one's own nature rather than utilitarian demands within the state. In the face of Nietzsche's inability to affirm any institution, state, or other community, Christian universities have an opportunity to respond to the still relevant Nietzschean critiques by expressing accounts of culture and life that are grounded in or amenable to Christian tradition.

## Nietzsche's Works Cited:

*On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (1872)

[Second] *Untimely Meditation: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1873)

[Third] *Untimely Meditation: Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874)