

How Nietzsche loved fate

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One of the core concepts in the work of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is amor fati: the love of one's fate. PhD candidate Hedwig Gaasterland analysed the term and concluded that Nietzsche did not favour a stoical interpretation of the concept. PhD defence 1 March.

In all his works, the term amor fati occurs only ten times. Nonetheless, 'the love of one's fate' is one of the core concepts in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900). Researchers have been trying for many years to understand how the concept should be understood, not least because the notion seems to come directly from the Stoics, a philosophical movement that flourished in Greece in the centuries before Christ.

Predetermined

PhD candidate Hedwig Gaasterland now concludes that the concept was most likely not derived from the Stoics. It's a surprising conclusion because although the term amor fati does not occur in so many works at that time, the idea correlates strongly with the works of well-known Stoics like Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. These philosophers were convinced that everything in the world is predetermined, and that the only freedom man has is in how we accept our fate.

Staring blindly

'When Nietzsche first wrote down the term, in 1881, he had already rejected the philosophy of the Stoics,' Gaasterland explains. 'He had previously studied their work, but he ultimately came to the conclusion that the Stoics were staring blindly at just one interpretation of the truth, and they adhered closely to that truth. As a result, the ascetic Stoics were in fact just as slavish and constrained as the Christians in Nietzsche's time, against whom he reacted so strongly. He believed that putting too much emphasis on suppressing emotions would lead to an apathetic, ossified form of morality.'

Search for knowledge

From 1881 Nietzsche warned against suppressing emotions, because they are essential in the search for knowledge. Gaasterland: 'The thirst for knowledge demands that you examine the truth from as many perspectives as possible. It's the only way to make clear which characteristics you need to incorporate to be a strong person, able to bear inhuman truths. At that time, fate (fatum) was not a totalitarian concept.'

All-embracing

Nietzsche changed his ideas in around 1888, as the somewhat capricious [philosopher](#) was prone to do. In his last mentions of amor fati, 'fate' is no longer a collection of different perspectives, but was more all-embracing. It encompasses the whole of world history (including the most horrific episodes), and Nietzsche's own role in this history, which in his view was crucially important. In this context, amor fati means embracing - or accepting - all of this.

As part of her research, Gaasterland studied the works of Nietzsche in the minutest detail. She looked not only at the term amor fati, but also at all German and Latin equivalents, such as fatum, Schicksal Liebe. By putting these terms in a broader context, she was able to connect up historical and textual references. Gaasterland: 'Nietzsche is constantly challenging you; his writing is provocative and often contradictory. As a result, there are different layers to his work, which at times makes it almost incomprehensible. That's what makes Nietzsche such a fantastic writer, both to read and analyse.'

Provided by Leiden University

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