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RELIGION BEYOND RELIGIONS IN NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche is one of those few thinkers who have excited such a wider range of conflicting interests, sordid and spiritual, shallow and profound. To the conventional, a satanic mind—clothed in the abominations of Anti-Christ and deserving secretive bad end. To the progressive a prophet and philosopher of the future.¹ His philosophy is very relevant to our times. Nietzsche does not require much of an introduction to the present. He speaks directly within it. His problems are our problems too. So a concern with his philosophy is not only a matter of intellectual curiosity but an existential necessity as well.

Nietzsche is generally known to be radical in his thinking and that is probably why so many fear him. But only the weak-minded need fear him. To the strong he is either a friend or a "strong enemy." All shades of thinkers therefore will find him a man to be reckoned with, either as friend or foe. Where most of us stammer and meekly accept compromise, Nietzsche strikes out at whatever seems dead and false. It is from the pen of Nietzsche that the mighty impetus for exposing atheism as the noblest creed came. His interpretations convinced the atheistic wing of existentialism that this is a Godless world. His influence in this area reached far beyond the professional philosophical circles to other fields of life.

Nietzschean Mentors

As early as 1840 Feuerbach had proclaimed his rejection of God. Outstripping the "pious atheism" of Feuerbach who still accepted

1. Cf. G. A. Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means* (New York : Harper Books, 1941), pp. 4ff.

the divine essence of man, Nietzsche leans towards Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer argued that the principle of sufficient reason upon which rested rational proofs of God was unwarranted. He also argued effectively against the Kantian access to God by means of practical reason on the ground that practical reason is without any distinctive content. Moreover, a personal God is intolerable because Schopenhauer considers the co-existence of divine freedom with human freedom an impossibility. The concept of freedom is inseparable from the concept of its origins. Free being must also be original being. If our will is free it is also original being (*das Urwesen*), and *vice-versa*.² From this background, Schopenhauer proceeded to announce the ungodliness of existence (*die Ungöttlichkeit des Daseins*). The Kantian theory of knowledge that the human mind is unable to penetrate to the noumenal essence of things and reach God, the supreme noumenal principle, helped Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's Starting Point

Nietzsche's predicament, the given setting in which his thought strikes root, is a world of weakened and fast disintegrating traditions, religious faiths, social structures, moral standards, ideals which give meaning to life—all broken or about to break. His endeavour is to understand and evaluate this plight, to detect causes and foresee its possible outcome, and thus grounded, to build toward a future civilization with a more adequate philosophy. Nietzsche's thought, therefore, is essentially prophetic. Like Feuerbach and Marx, he appeared to be a tripartite mixture of sceptic, critic and experimenter: A sceptic to all traditions, absolutes of past, and unexamined convictions favouring the existence of God; a critic to definite method and standard of value, and as an experimenter he was prepared to take a radically new stance toward the world, himself, and God. He introduced a "dangerous perhaps" about the nature of things.

Human knowledge is devoid of any definite structure and presents itself merely as a constant flux of impressions, a sheer sensuous manifold lacking in any intrinsic unity, meaning and value. What is given as the stuff of individual experience is not simply a formless flow of sensations, but even more fundamentally, a whirling storm of passions and drives.³ Referring to the achievements of modern

2. Cf., Arthur Schopenhauer, *Werke*, Bd, vii, pp. 215 ff.

3. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 36. trans., M. Cowan, 43-45.

philosophy, he describes the individual life as a ceaseless becoming and striving of a sensuous—passional manifold, unregulated by any prior structure and innocent of any inherent, intelligible law as value standard. There is no noumenal essence or intelligible for us to reach. The really real world is nothing more than the sea of becoming with which we are confronted, the undifferential and indifferent morass of passional energy which sluices through us.

In order to justify his generalizations from the individual to the whole of nature, Nietzsche appeals to fields of scientific study. Darwinian theory of evolution testifies to the pervasive becoming, struggle and transiency of structures. He invokes the science of history and classical philosophy as added witnesses to the constant fluidity in the realm of human institutions, concepts and languages. The only reality stable in the sea of becoming is the 'Will to Power.'⁴ The apparent structure and order we observe are the results of man's 'Will to Power.'

Nietzschean Atheism

A predominant reason for his rejection of faith in God lies in his attitude of inordinate pride, the hybris of Greek tragedy. The attitude proper to human reason is that of humble receptivity to truth, which must be pursued long and ardently before it reveals itself. The person in search of truth must subject and subordinate himself to the data of truth. This normal and basic order of procedure is reversed and destroyed when the subject attempts to subordinate truth to his human ego which claims for himself the right to posit truths. By doing so the arrogant ego becomes the source of all being and value. Inevitably true arrogance would refuse to recognize the supremacy of God.

In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: "A new pride my ego taught me and this I teach men: no longer to bury one's head in the sand of the heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates meaning for the earth."⁵ Nietzsche goes on to say that even by classical Greek standards, our whole existence appears to be nothing but hybris and Goldlessness...Hybris our attitude toward

4. Nietzschean "Will to Power" is similar to Schopenhauer's "Cosmic Will to live" but not the same.

5. *The Portable Nietzsche*, selected and translated by Walter Kaufmann, Viking Press, p. 142.

God... Hybris our attitude toward ourselves, for we experiment on ourselves... What do we still care about the well-being of our souls.⁶

Nietzsche's hero is the mythical Prometheus who in his pride rebelled against the Gods. In *Zarathustra*, he wrote: "My proud spirit cannot bear that the Gods...should wield the sceptre...Take courage, heart, for now a fraud must be revealed: whether he ruler be or merely an illusion."⁷

Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity and its Morality

Anti-christ is Nietzsche's most sustained attempt at a critique of Christianity. He criticized Christianity first of all for its unholy alliance with state. Jesus did not institute an organized religion. His essential teaching was no dogma or cult but a way of life, which he practised as a means to inward peace. His good news was that sin is abolished, that kingdom of heaven is an inward state, to be realized by renouncing all the enmity and resistance and by living utterly in love and resignation.

Anyone who lives it is a child of God. Corruption of the teaching of Christ began at once. His own immediate followers misunderstood him and Christianity from the very beginning was opposed to the spirit of Christ. St. Paul completed the perversion. Making an arbitrary selection of a few traits from the life of Christ, he improvised around them the doctrine which later ruled Christendom: sin, atonement by the sacrifice of an innocent victim, resurrection, personal immortality. He introduced dogmas and cult and so prepared the way for priesthood to power. Nietzsche says: "At the bottom there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross."

Nietzsche's central opposition is directed against Christian ethics which he calls slavish. According to him, Christian morality consists in the unquestioned acceptance of certain old customs and practices. Traditional morality always obstructs the creation of new and better ones. It makes man dull. Christianity is like a tranquilizer. Christianity sins against the very principle of life (Will to Power), which demands creativeness. Christian ethics is based on belief in God.

6. Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Werke*, vii, p. 146,

7. *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 142,

It has truth, its only truth is God. If one takes away the belief in God out of it, he can shatter the whole. Christian ethics assumes that man does not know or cannot know what is good for him, what is evil. He believes in God who alone knows. Christian ethics is a command. Its origin is transcendent. It is beyond all criticism or revision. In conclusion, Christian morality, expresses the desire of decadents for revenge against life, it is anti-natural, poisonous and vampiristic. There is no universal moral world-order or absolute good, only plural goods of human aims and the finite sanctions they impose. Man alone is the measure of man.

Nietzschean denial of God

Nietzsche accepted the mandate to become the prophet of his age and proclaim the tidings of the death of God. As we have already stated, will to power is the fundamental value of life and world. Any faith in God is necessarily a formidable obstacle to the will's striving for the absolute realization of its own power. Hence faith in God is a debilitating force which perverts and corrupts man.

Faith denies, cripples and kills man's will to power. Out of cowardice man fails to claim, what he senses to be, the overwhelming power as his own, attributes it instead to a divine person. He said in *Anti-Christ*: "God is the declaration of war against life, against Nature, against the will to live. God the formula for every slander against this world, for every lie about the beyond. God the deification of nothingness."⁸ The origin of religion lies in the strange and extreme sensations of power which take one by surprise. Just as the sick man one of whose limbs feels unaccountably heavy and strange concludes that someone must be sitting on it, likewise the ingenious *homo religiosus* feels himself to be several people.⁹

Religion, therefore, is an abortive offspring of doubt. Religion calls everything pitiful and weak, 'man', everything wonderful and strong, 'God'. He says in *Zarathustra*: "God is a conjecture." Of the power of man Nietzsche writes: "All the beauty and stability with which we have invested real and imagined things I will show to be the property and product of man, and this should be his most beautiful apology. Man as poet, as thinker, as God, as love, as power.

8. Nietzsche, *Antichrist* (Kaufmann, pp. 585-6).

9. F. Wuerzbach, *Das Vermachtnis Nietzsches*, p. 120.

Oh, the royal liberality with which man enriches things in order to impoverish himself and make himself wretched. Hitherto this has been his greatest selflessness, that he admired and worshipped and knew how to conceal from himself that it was he who had created all he admired."¹⁰ Nietzsche believed that if God existed man has no future. So he took upon himself the unpleasant task of announcing the death of God. Nietzsche writes :

“The mad man—have you ever heard of the mad man who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the market place calling unceasingly ‘I seek God’, ‘I seek God’. As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why? ‘Is he lost’, said one. ‘Has he strayed away like a child?’ said another. ‘Or does he’ keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea-voyage? Has he emigrated? The people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. ‘Where is God gone’, he called out. I mean to tell you. We have killed him, ‘you and I’. ‘We are all his murderers.’... ‘Do we not hear the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? For even Gods putrefy, God is Dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed had bled to death under our knife, who will wipe the blood from us? With water could we cleanse ourselves?...’

“Here the mad man was silent and looked again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. ‘I come too early’, he then said, ‘I am not yet at the right time’... The mad man made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his ‘*Requiem aeternam deo*’. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply’, what are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?”¹¹

Nietzschean Superman

Along with the death of God, Nietzsche announces also the birth of Superman (*Overman or Ubermensch*) because he very well knew

10. F. Nietzsche, *Werke* (Klassikerausgabe, IX, p. 120).

11. F. Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom* (New York ; Frederick Ungar 1960), pp. 307–308.

that man would not bear the absolute denudation the death of God would bring. He says: "God is dead—Long Live Superman." Superman then is to be the *ersatz* for the dead transcendent God. He is the new God here below. The hope of mankind lies in the superman.

Superman is not to be confused with one or other individual. It is a stage of existence. It is a future development. It is the realization of what man potentially is (*Du sollst werden der du bist*). He says that when man no longer flows into the sea of God, but like a mountain stream is dammed up to spread to an everwidening lake, perhaps then, when man has cut himself off from the God, he will find the strength to rise to the heights of superman. Of course, this may mean man facing unprecedented night and falling into a void with neither up nor down. Only when man is led to the precipice to confront the chaos in the abyss, he would rise to the level of superman. In spite of the obstacles on the way, Nietzsche insists that superman will come.

Eternal Recurrence

Nietzschean denial of God is complete with his concept of Eternal Recurrence of the same events which slams shut once and for all the door to another world. This world is a closed cosmos complete in itself. There is no sign-post beyond it. This is 'God-proof' world. This world is a 'mass of energy' which repeats itself eternally: What is, has been, and will be. The same events are repeated. Eternity is transferred to this life. This eternal recurrence would give sufficient motivation and a goal, in the absence of any life after death, to man to live. Existence is the absence of God.

Analyzing the background of Nietzsche, his mentors, presuppositions denial of God, superman, and eternal recurrence, it is more than clear that the aim of Nietzschean philosophy was the substitution of the authoritarian or traditional theistic religions with a humanistic one, of the transcendent God with the fully immanent one (superman). Hence, our title is justified.