

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

that, as Northrop put it, "Western philosophers . . . must give up their prevalent notion that Eastern philosophy at best only says vaguely what Western philosophy says clearly and . . . Oriental philosophers and religious sages must give up their prevalent notion that . . . all the Orient needs to learn from the West are its instrumental, technological values of applied science."

ABRAHAM KAPLAN

*University of California, Los Angeles*

*NIETZSCHE AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS.* By R. MOTSON THOMPSON. New York, Philosophical Library, 1951. Pp. 104. \$2.75.

"This work . . . is an attempt to show the supremacy of the Christian Ideal in face of the strongest attack with which it has ever been confronted" (*sic*; p. 6). In spite of a number of similar attempts, including several German postwar books, there is still room for a solid and perceptive monograph. Mr. Thompson's effort, however, is based on an untenable, though popular, second-hand view of Nietzsche, sheds no new light on the troublesome conception of "Christian ethics," and goes beyond previous studies, if at all, only by establishing a new low in scholarship. Thus this little book might well be shrugged off without detailed discussion; but because its shortcomings are so frequently encountered elsewhere, a critique may serve some purpose.

Chapter One outlines "Nietzsche's Philosophy." The "doctrine of the superman" is understood Darwinistically (an interpretation expressly denounced by Nietzsche) and considered incompatible with the "doctrine of eternal recurrence" which it is falsely held to antedate. Chapter Two culminates in the absurd claim: "There have been two names prevalent in Russia, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche" (p. 32). The tenor of Chapter Three ("The Doctrines of Nietzsche Examined and Criticized") is epitomized by the sentence: "Napoleon did the very things that Nietzsche required of his Superman and was a failure" (p. 39). Mr. Thompson overlooks the fact that Nietzsche called Napoleon "this synthesis of the inhuman and the superhuman [*Unmensch und Übermensch*]" and also said that he was corrupted by the means he used and "lost the nobility of his character." Chapter Three ends with this footnote, cited in full: "Even Aristotle, who takes a very aristocratic view of ethics, concedes that it is not necessary to rule sea and land in order to be virtuous." Again, Thompson seems unaware that Nietzsche wrote: "The Germans think that strength must reveal itself in hardness and cruelty. . . . That there is strength in mildness and stillness, they do not believe easily. They miss strength in Goethe." And in a note of 1888, published in *The Will to Power*: "I estimate the power of a will according to how much resistance, pain, and torture it endures and knows how to transform to its advantage."

Chapter Four ("A Detailed Examination and Criticism of Nietzsche's Attack on Christianity") prefers eleven charges. Some are partially justified, but their strength is sapped by many logical fallacies and errors of fact. Consider the first two charges. (1) Nietzsche "seems completely oblivious of the obvious fact that the word 'Christianity' covers a 'multitude of sins' . . . and that there is more than *one type* of Christianity." An important point, but Nietzsche did *not* overlook it, while Thompson himself might well be asked: What, under these circumstances, do you mean by "Christian ethics" and "the Christian Ideal"? These considerations apply equally to the author's examples, when he urges against Nietzsche: "There is the Christianity which conquered the Roman Empire, a fact for which Nietzsche would be hard pressed to account. [Nietzsche, like Gibbon, did try to account for this.] There is the Christianity which dominated Europe for a thousand years and held the terrors of hell-fire over the heads of the proudest kings. [Again, Nietzsche knew this and made much of it; but one may ask: Was this "Christian ethics"?] There is the Christianity of the Middle Ages, of the Reformers, and of the eighteenth century. And there is the Christianity of today, developing out of modern liberal thought, a more virile, strong type." Still more virile? Mr. Thompson, moreover, shifts ground rapidly. On page 47, Christianity "dominated Europe for a thousand years"; but on page 69, "contrary to Nietzsche's estimate . . . it is actually the Will to Power that has governed the world's ideals in the past and not Christianity. . . . The Christian ideal . . . has had only a nominal influence. . . . Christianity has not ruled, and when, therefore, Nietzsche looks at the triumph of the weak and the vulgar in history he is actually looking at the triumph of his own values." Mr. Thompson apparently assumes that Nietzsche endorsed all expressions of the will to power, which is very much like taking for granted that Freud must have valued rape and *Lustmord*. Nietzsche, of course, insisted that the religion of Jesus was quickly abandoned, or never even understood, by the disciples; and he understood the triumph of their values as a manifestation of the will to power — of slave souls. (2) The second charge in Chapter Four is that "Nietzsche condemns Christianity chiefly [?] on the grounds that its earliest followers misrepresented its teaching." In other words, he did not — as Thompson alleged — assume that there is only one type of Christianity, but distinguished the religion of Jesus from that of his disciples. And to this Mr. Thompson objects: "If the New Testament is not Christ's teaching, then where are we to look for it?" As if it were not the historian's stock in trade to infer what probably happened, by using documents which distort the facts — documents which he thus neither wholly accepts nor wholly rejects.

A final quotation from this chapter will illustrate the author's at-

tempts at philosophic argument: Christ's "ethical principles, like all others, must be judged by ethical criteria and on these criteria, they have been found, not merely to stand unassailable, but to pass judgement on other systems. The pragmatic criterion of Truth must be applied here" (pp. 67 f.). Assuming that this means judging ethical principles by their results, we ask: By what criteria? Thompson replies: "By ethical criteria" — and before we can ask, "Whose?" he goes on, in the same breath: "and on these criteria, they have been found, not merely unassailable, but to pass judgement on other systems." Nietzsche, too, passes judgment on other systems; does that make his principles, too, "unassailable"? Surely, each of two systems (say, N's and T's) might pass judgment on the other and be "unassailable" as long as its own criteria are presupposed; and yet neither might recommend itself to a third person, such as, for example, Karl Barth or J. S. Mill, Torquemada or Luther.

Chapter Five ("The Psychological Implications of Nietzsche's Life") follows Figgis' myopic suggestion: "Christianity to him meant, in all likelihood, the Christianity of his aunts, and we may say therefore that unconsciously he was rebelling against that sort of religion" (p. 74). We are also told that Nietzsche was "often misunderstood except by his devoted sister" (p. 77), though it would be hard to say who misunderstood him more than she did. Chapter Six ("The Points of Similarity between Nietzsche and Christianity") is more laudable in intention than in execution, but refers correctly to the appreciation of the value of suffering. Chapter Seven ("The Christian Ethic: Its Meaning and Contribution") remains at a subphilosophic level: "We can see, therefore, how infinitely superior the Christian ideal is to the type of life Nietzsche advocates, for it finds support and sanction in a Person" (p. 88). Or, to cite the "Conclusion" of this chapter: "The Christian ideal of life need not fear the attack of Nietzsche, for it is not only vindicated by the moral sense of humanity and declared to be, by the ripe test of experience. . . the finest guide to life, and, moreover, develops the highest type of life — but, it is in the position of passing judgement on Nietzsche's system." Instead of this irrelevant preoccupation with "passing judgement" (see also above), one might expect to find in a chapter on the meaning of "The Christian Ethic" some discussion of "Judge not, that ye be not judged," "Resist not evil," "Take therefore no thought for the morrow," and of the relation of faith and works. But the author simply "passes judgement" on what he calls "Nietzsche's unlicensed self-assertion in the name of power and the Superman" (p. 92). Otherwise this chapter is remarkable chiefly for a reference to a nonexistent book by Kant (p. 90; other imaginary references will be found on pp. 13, 20, 75, and 80).

The last two chapters (three pages each) add their share of half-truth, errors, and fallacies, and end with an attempt at rhetoric:

The issue between Nietzsche and Christ...is perfectly clear, i.e. Power versus Love, Nero versus Christ...A power philosophy is bound to fail...The collapse of Nazi Germany revealed this in dramatic fashion; indeed history has a unanimous verdict for us here...The Christian Ethic, which reverences personality and recognizes the individual's right to a full and free life in cooperation with his fellows, is the only hope for a world that subordinates man to collective materialism where he is merely a useful cog in a vast wheel that drives the blind, unprincipled Will to Power along its licentious way.

*Finis.* Even if "Nazi Germany" had in some sense accepted Nietzsche's philosophy, this popular argument is surely unworthy of a serious book: or was it Russian Love that turned back German Power at Stalingrad? And was it Love our bombers rained on German cities? And does history prove "unanimously" that Love conquers all? One may also wonder whether Nietzsche did not "reverence personality" and whether Paul or Luther, with their respective statements concerning slavery and serfdom, "recognized the individual's right to a full and free life." Nor is it an acceptable substitute for argument when Thompson calls his opponent "Nero" and insinuates falsely that Nietzsche was a collectivist and materialist.

This book is also representative of much of the Nietzsche literature in its glaring lack of scholarship, of which a few further examples may be given here. In a "List of Nietzsche's Works" which precedes the text, the *Antichrist* is one of two works omitted, while we encounter, for example, *Ecce Homo and Poetry* (with apologies to Goethe's *Truth and Poetry?*), *Twilight of Gods (sic)*, and *Will of Power (sic)*. In the two-page "Select Bibliography," thirteen of the dates are missing, and those supplied often do not refer to the first edition, though this is not always indicated; we find the author under the impression (also stated on p. 6) that "Nietzsche's *Works*" were all translated by Ludovici (in fact, he made only a few of the translations, not including most of the titles cited by Thompson); and we find only three books about Nietzsche (dated 1908, 1910, 1917), but several items like Hocking's *Types of Philosophy*, not mentioned elsewhere in the book and apparently adduced only to establish the extent of Thompson's knowledge of philosophy. Yet he makes a great show of scholarship, including hundreds of footnotes which abound in cross-references, scarcely needed in so slight a volume, but carried to the point of having one which refers to the top of page 42 and reads, in full: "See p. 41, *supra*."

Confronted with this book, Nietzsche himself might have cited his condemnation of "The Philology of Christianity" in the *Dawn* or even his dictum in *Zarathustra*: "Another century of readers, and the spirit will stink." For he liked to pose as the protagonist of intellectual integ-

rity against what he called "the art of reading badly." But, while it is ironical to see writers who completely misrepresent Nietzsche condemn *him* for misunderstanding Christianity, it seems worth asking whether Nietzsche did not really read Christian documents badly. His conception of Jesus, for example, is very questionable — though, some may feel, no more so than Tolstoy's, Luther's, or John's. Also, even as Plato misrepresented the Sophists — and Aristotle, Plato — Nietzsche occasionally resorted to aphoristic caricatures with pedagogic intent. But without by any means swallowing them whole, we can often learn something from his criticisms of what he took to be the religion of Jesus' disciples, the Christianity of Paul, the outlook of Luther, and the shortcomings of modern Christianity.

Personally, having tried in my *Nietzsche* to give a detailed account of Nietzsche's philosophy and of his critique of Christianity, I would welcome a discerning discussion of Nietzsche's attack from a Christian point of view. The author of such a monograph might safely concede the justice of some of Nietzsche's strictures, and perhaps even add a few of his own. At least he should make up his mind whether he wants to vindicate everything that has ever called itself Christian or whether, like many of the greatest Christian thinkers, and especially Kierkegaard, he wants to reject most of it as really unchristian. He should be clear about what precisely he wishes to defend, and he should differentiate between ethics and moral behavior, and attend to the problematic nature of "Christian ethics." And he should know Nietzsche.

WALTER A. KAUFMANN

*Princeton University*

*THE PHILOSOPHY OF EVIL.* By PAUL SIWEK, S. J. New York, Ronald Press Company, 1951. Pp. ix, 226. \$3.50.

This volume contains in a revised and expanded form a series of lectures delivered at the Gregorian University in Rome and later at the Philosophical Institute of Rio de Janeiro. The author "presumes to present a complete synthesis of the problem of Evil" (p. vi), considering its implications in ontology, theodicy, and moral philosophy.

In the Introduction the problem of the origin of evil and that of the nature of evil are distinguished. Dealing with the latter problem — In what does evil consist? — the author regards evil as a privation rather than as a negation. Evil is an obstacle or barrier to perfection. "Good is that which promotes immanent finality, Evil is that which opposes it" (p. 51). Evil is thus "a disturbance from which the being suffers, a disruption of its harmony, an exhaustion in the face of its destiny" (p. 52). From this Thomistic-Aristotelian functional view of