

THE DEATH OF GOD AND THE REVALUATION

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Not only the reason of millennia—their insanity, too, breaks out in us.—Z I 22.

I

Nietzsche himself has characterized the situation in which his philosophic thinking started by giving it the name of nihilism. This feature of his age struck him as a challenge he meant to meet, and we must not ignore the historical juncture at which he enters the philosophic stage. Speculative philosophy seemed to have spent itself in the ambitious systems of Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer; and Darwin's doctrines were conquering the world. At the same time, Prussian arms established Germany's political supremacy on the continent; science and technology were making the most spectacular advances; and optimism was common. Nietzsche, however, stigmatized this age as nihilistic.

All the material improvements of his time meant as much to Nietzsche as the luxuries and comforts of their generation had meant to Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah: they disgusted him. Only one thing seemed to matter, and it was incomprehensible that anyone could have eyes or ears for any other fact. What else avails? "God is dead!"

Nietzsche invented a parable from which, some eighty years later, a few American Protestant theologians derived inspiration—and this slogan.

The Madman. Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Why, did he get lost? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you.

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We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while? . . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. . . . What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? . . ." Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. "I come too early," he said then; "my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way . . . —it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves."—It has been related further that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said to have replied every time, "What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and speculchers of God?" (GS 125; cf. Z Preface 2).

Nietzsche prophetically envisages himself as a madman: to have lost God means madness; and when mankind will discover that it has lost God, universal madness will break out. This apocalyptic sense of dreadful things to come hangs over Nietzsche's thinking like a thundercloud.

We have destroyed our own faith in God. There remains only the void. We are falling. Our dignity is gone. Our values are lost. Who is to say what is up and what is down? It has become colder, and night is closing in. Without seeking to explain away Nietzsche's illness, one can hardly fail today to consider it also symbolical. "Not only the reason of millennia—their insanity, too, breaks out in us" (Z I 22). We cannot distinguish what sense he may have had of his own doom from his presentiment of universal disaster.

The prophet Hosea was married, and when his wife became unfaithful to him, he experienced his relationship to her as a simile of God's relationship to Israel. Was not his wife as faithless as his people? Yet he loved her as God must love his people. Who can say if his anguished outcries, his protes-

tations of his love, and his pleading for the loved one to return are meant for his wife or his people? Sometimes prophecy seems to consist in man's ability to experience his own wretched fate so deeply that it becomes a symbol of something larger. It is in this sense that one can compare Nietzsche with the ancient prophets. He felt the agony, the suffering, and the misery of a godless world so intensely, at a time when others were yet blind to its tremendous consequence, that he was able to experience in advance, as it were, the fate of a coming generation.

If the doctrines of sovereign Becoming, of the fluidity of all . . . species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal . . . are hurled into the people for another generation . . . then nobody should be surprised when . . . brotherhoods with the aim of robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers . . . will appear on the arena of the future (U₂ 9).

Yet educated people everywhere were surprised when these unholy brotherhoods did appear. It seemed an incomprehensible relapse into the Dark Ages. Nietzsche's writings abound in similar "prophecies"—yet we should lay stress on the conditional character of his visions: "if the doctrines . . . of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal . . . are hurled into the people for another generation," if mankind realizes that the unique worth of the human being has evaporated, and that no up and down remains, and if the tremendous event that we have killed God reaches the ears of man—then night will close in, "an age of barbarism begins" (XI, 120), and "there will be wars such as have never happened on earth" (EH iv 1). Insofar as Jeremiah's criterion of prophecy is valid and the false prophet is he who cries "peace, peace, when there is no peace," while the true prophets have ever spoken "of evils, and of pestilence, and of wars," one may feel inclined to consider Nietzsche a prophet in the true sense.

The content of Nietzsche's message, however, no less than the form it entails, offers the most striking contrast to the Biblical prophets. He lacks their humility which, while defying the judgment of mankind, yet knows itself no more than a mouthpiece of God. Nietzsche seems less appealing than the ancient prophets because his outrageous conceit steps between him and us. Yet if there is any sense in which he seems more appealing, it is that he thus appears more wretched, more forsaken, and more tragic. Perhaps we should go back to the Greeks rather than to the Bible to find his like: Cassandra.

prophets of doom without promise and nemesis without love. Here we are confronted with ineluctable fate, unmitigated by salvation; here, among the Greeks, we find tragedy—and it does not seem strange that Nietzsche should have had such a feeling for tragedy.

Does it follow that Nietzsche was not a great questioner after all? If he proclaimed the death of God, it may be said, he did not question all that is questionable. And Morgan has said that “beyond question the major premise of Nietzsche’s philosophy is atheism.”¹

This is often assumed, and authors have not been lacking who have sought to explain Nietzsche’s atheism as a reaction against the narrow-minded Christians of his provincial home town. John Figgis, in particular, has given us a moving description of the aunts who shook their heads when the young man took a walk instead of going to church, and the uncles who were shocked to see him read Voltaire and offered him “good” books.² One gathers that if Nietzsche had only been confronted with a more liberal outlook, he might have been spared a lot of trouble. Any such psychological trivialization of Nietzsche’s ideas—even if less patronizing than this one—quite misses the point. It is generally rather easy to discover a connection between an author’s background and his work; but if the author is worth his salt, his own experience has usually become the occasion for a more general insight. Nietzsche is not opposing claim to claim. He is not saying, as it were: you have been told that there is a God, but verily I say unto you, There is no God. What he does say is “God is dead.”

This is the language of religion, and particularly of Christianity: the picture is derived from the Gospels; and one may note that Hegel, certainly not an atheist, had frequently spoken and written of the death of God. Nietzsche infuses a new meaning into this old image, while yet implying clearly that God once was alive. It seems paradoxical that God, if ever he lived, could have died—and the solution is that Nietzsche’s pronouncement does not at all purport to be a dogmatic statement about a supernatural reality: it is a declaration of what he takes to be a historical cultural fact. “God is dead”; “we have killed him”; and “this tremendous event . . . has not yet reached the ears of man”—that is an attempt at a diagnosis

¹ Morgan, *op. cit.*, 36.

² *The Will to Freedom, or the Gospel of Nietzsche and the Gospel of Christ* (1917), 50. “He was in reaction against his aunts” (51).

of contemporary civilization, not a metaphysical speculation about ultimate reality.³

It may yet seem that Nietzsche assumes as a premise what is merely a growing belief—or disbelief—in Western society. He may appear to accept as an absolute presupposition the claim that there is no God—and in that case we should have laid our hands on a questionable assumption he failed to doubt. This construction, too, is untenable. Because Nietzsche did *not* start with any premises that he consciously failed to question, he *could* not base his philosophy on the assumed existence of God. This is overlooked when it is claimed that he never questioned atheism seriously: “rather he describes himself as an atheist ‘by instinct.’”⁴ The very passage in which Nietzsche does describe himself in this manner confirms what has been said of his method:

It is a matter of course with me, from instinct. I am too inquisitive, too *questionable*, too exuberant to stand for any gross answer. God is a gross answer, an indelicacy against us thinkers—at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think! (EH II 1; cf. GM III 27).

Nietzsche’s atheism is thus a corollary of his basic commitment to question all premises and to reject them unless they are for some reason inescapable.

The issue has been confused by the invective which Nietzsche poured on Christianity and the Christian conception of God: “What differentiates *us* is not that we find no God—neither in history, nor in nature, nor behind nature—but that we do not feel that what has been revered as God is ‘god-like’” (A 47). Nietzsche is in revolt against the Christian God and the state of mind and the moral attitude that seem to him insepa-

³ Heine, whom Nietzsche admired fervently (e.g., EH II 4), had used the image of the death of God in much the same way in *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*. At the end of Book II, Heine commented on the publication of Kant’s first *Critique*: “Do you hear the little bell tinkle? Kneel down—one brings the sacraments for a dying God.” Beyond this, the conception of “the history of religion and philosophy in Germany” as a unit, and the treatment of Luther as the background for Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel, may have impressed Nietzsche. But Heine’s picture of Luther, while ironical, is incomparably more appreciative than Nietzsche’s and clearly influenced by Hegel under whom Heine had studied.

⁴ Morgan, *op. cit.*, 36.

rably connected with the Christian faith. His anti-Christianity is taken up in detail in Chapter 12 of my *Nietzsche*.

Nietzsche was more deeply impressed than almost any other man before him by the manner in which belief in God and a divine teleology may diminish the value and significance of man: how *this* world and life may be completely devaluated *ad maiorem dei gloriam*. Yet Nietzsche did not proceed to postulate—as others have done since, partly under his influence—the nonexistence of God or of any divine purpose. We must not attribute to him “the postulated atheism of seriousness and responsibility” that is meant to assure human responsibility.⁵ The roots of this attitude can be found quite unmistakably in some of Nietzsche’s epigrams; but while he was keenly aware of the sense in which the existence of God might diminish the value of man,⁶ he was no less aware of, if not altogether overwhelmed by, the manner in which the nonexistence of God would threaten human life with a complete loss of all significance.

This sense of the utter bleakness of life and the “devaluation” (WP 2) of all values, which is the immediate consequence of the modern loss of faith in God, is not just a casual insight which can be illustrated by the parable of the madman or by some other scattered aphorisms: most of the drafts for the *magnum opus* envisage as the contents of the first book a development of this theme to which Nietzsche gave the name of nihilism. In fact, one plan would have devoted three out of four books to this conception (xviii, 345). To overcome nihilism—which seems involved both in asserting the existence of God and thus robbing *this* world of ultimate significance, and also in denying God and thus robbing *everything* of meaning and value—that is Nietzsche’s greatest and most persistent problem.

When the problem is phrased differently, Nietzsche’s experimental attitude becomes more apparent. He opposed the kind of naturalism that he put within quotation marks, i.e., the literary movement associated with Zola (WP 864); and he crystallized his objection in one of his late, and characteristically provocative, epigrams: “Zola, or ‘the delight in stinking’” (Twilight ix 1). In philosophy, however, the word “naturalism” has another sense, which J. M. Baldwin defines in his

⁵ Max Scheler, *Mensch und Geschichte* (1929), 54–60. Scheler claims the concurrence of Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethik* (1926), 185.

⁶ Cf. the entire polemic against otherworldliness; e.g., M 464; G vi 8; WM 243, 245; EH II 3.

Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology as "a view which simply limits itself to what is natural or normal in its explanations, as against appeal to what transcends nature as a whole, or is in any way supernatural or mystical"—and Nietzsche's problem was whether it might be possible to put "in place of our 'moral values' only *naturalistic values*" (WP 462). This experiment does not require the premise that God does not exist. It demands no more than that we agree not to invoke God to cut discussion short.

The account which has been given above of Nietzsche's method is thus consistent with his proclamation that "God is dead" and with his effort to establish values that are not based on any supernatural sanction. Yet the admission that Nietzsche was something of a prophet, and his opposition to the acceptance of current valuations may still suggest that his works cannot be studied philosophically. To answer this charge, it may be well to consider first Nietzsche's attitude toward the philosophical rationalization of prevalent valuations and then the meaning of his own "revaluation of all values."

II

Nietzsche's difference from other naturalistic philosophers must be sought first in his profound concern whether universally valid values and a meaningful life are at all possible in a godless world, and secondly in his impassioned scorn for those who simply take for granted the validity of any particular set of values which happens to have the sanction of their religion, class, society, or state. He did not consider it the philosopher's task to develop his ingenuity, or his disingenuousness, in "the finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct."⁷ Nietzsche himself considered his opposition to rationalization a major point of departure from traditional philosophy; and it is undoubtedly the source of many of his most far-reaching differences with Kant and Hegel. Kant's moral philosophy appeared to him a prime instance of the finding of bad reasons for what one believes on instinct—or, in Nietzsche's words: "Kant wanted to prove in a way that would dumfound the 'common man' that the 'common man' was right" (GS 193).

To put it more technically: Kant, as is well known, seems

⁷ F. H. Bradley's famous definition of metaphysics to which he himself added: "but to find these reasons is no less an instinct." *Appearance and Reality* (1891), xiv.

never to have questioned the existence of the moral law as a synthetic judgment *a priori*—i.e., as a proposition which is neither tautological nor dependent on empirical observation, and yet knowable by, and binding on, all rational beings. On the basis of this moral law, Kant sought to establish the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God and a moral world-order—all the while assuming the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori* as an unquestioned premise. His problem was only *how* such judgments were possible. Thus he skipped the very question with which Nietzsche's thinking about moral values started—and this is the clue to Nietzsche's incessant polemics against Kant.

Nietzsche was not blind to Kant's merits: in his first book he spoke of the "tremendous courage and wisdom of Kant and Schopenhauer" (BT 18); and later he sided with Kant against Schopenhauer on other questions (Dawn 132) and admitted Kant's decisive contribution to philosophy (GS 357). His own philosophy even shows many decided affinities to Kant's; but Kant's failure to question the existence of a universal moral law provoked Nietzsche's attacks which further illustrate his reasons for opposing systems and his "existential" identification of any failure to question with a desire not to experience fully. The merciless personal quality which is thus introduced into Nietzsche's polemics is apparent when he charges Kant with a lack of "intellectual conscience" (A 12) and of "intellectual integrity" (EH-CW 2); nor can Nietzsche resist the temptation of making a pun on "cant" (Twilight ix 1). Nietzsche's conception of "intellectual conscience" is explained by him elsewhere:

The Intellectual Conscience. . . . By far the most lack an intellectual conscience . . . by far the most do not find it contemptible to believe this or that and to live according to it, without first having become conscious of the last and surest reasons pro and con, and without even taking the trouble to consider such reasons afterwards—the most gifted men and the most noble women still belong to these "by far the most." Yet what is good-heartedness, refinement, and genius to me, when the human being who has these virtues tolerates slack feelings in his faith and judgments, and when the demand for certainty is not to him the inmost craving and the deepest need—that which distinguishes the higher from the lower men. . . . Not to question, not to tremble with the craving and the joy of questioning . . . that is what I feel to be contemptible, and this feeling is the first thing I seek in everyone: some foolishness persuades me ever and again that every human being has this feeling, as a human being. It is my kind of injustice (GS 2).

Just as characteristic is the manner in which Nietzsche seeks to explain why Kant failed to question the moral law. His first answer is that "Kant clung to the university, submitted to governments, [and] remained within the appearance of a religious faith" (U₃ 3). He was, "in his attitude toward the State, without greatness" (U₃ 8).

The gist of this argument is that one compromise with the existing order leads to another. *Even* Kant, that is Nietzsche's point, was led to clip the wings of his own spirit. *Even* Kant, whose reasoning power was second to none, stopped short of questioning the moral law, ceased prematurely to think, and thus vitiated his moral philosophy. "A university scholar [*ein Gelehrter*] can never become a philosopher; for even Kant could not do it and remained to the end, in spite of the innate striving of his genius, in a quasi cocoon stage" (U₃ 7). A philosopher, says Nietzsche in this context, must not allow "concepts, opinions, things past, and books" to step "between himself and things." He must not rationalize the valuations of his own society. As Nietzsche sees it, the temptation to do this is particularly great for the German professor who is an employee of the State. Of course, that is a chief reason for his choice of Schopenhauer as his protagonist in the essay in which he attacks the State so fiercely; for Schopenhauer was, unlike Kant and Hegel, no university professor.

As a matter of fact, one may note that Schopenhauer attempted to teach at the university of Berlin, Hegel's stronghold, and that he was a failure—largely because he deliberately chose to deliver his lectures at times when he knew that Hegel would be lecturing, too. In this self-chosen contest he lost out; and his later diatribe *Über die Universitätsphilosophie* (in *Parerga und Paralipomena*) might be considered "sour grapes." Yet the repudiation of universities and of civic life generally as irreconcilable with the life of a thinker is characteristic of the reaction against Hegel. Hegel had taught: "Whoever wants something great, says Goethe, must be able to limit himself"; and Hegel had concluded that political freedom must be sought within the limitations of a responsible role in the civic life of the community. That there was more than this to freedom, he had never dreamed of denying: absolute freedom could be achieved only in the realm of Absolute Spirit, i.e., in art, religion, and philosophy. Such pursuits, however, did not seem to him to involve the rejection of civic life, but only its completion. The living example was Goethe who combined a civic career of public service as a

cabinet minister in Weimar with artistic creation of the highest order.⁸

Schopenhauer marked only the initial reaction against this ideal. Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge, Bruno Bauer, and Eugen Dühring lost their positions at various universities; Max Stirner struggled along in enforced privacy; Marx, although a doctor of philosophy, did not teach, and spent his life in exile; and Kierkegaard never made use of his theological degree to become a minister.⁹ The political views that led to the early retirement of some of these men are, of course, themselves expressive of a historic change. Kant, instead of resigning, got along with a mediocre and impertinent king; and Fichte had an illustrious civic career after the *Atheismus-Streit*.

Nietzsche, who wrote his most important books in privacy, had given ill health as his reason for resigning his professorship at Basel; but his state of health was connected with his inability to reconcile his university career with his writing. The essay on Schopenhauer was published when he was still a professor, and he made it clear then and there that he felt that any compromise with the existing order prevented a thinker from "following the truth into all hide-outs" (U₃ 8).

Thus we find some methodological significance even in

⁸ Cf. *Rechtsphilosophie*; the quotation is from §13 *Zusatz*. The sphere of Absolute Spirit is the topic of *Phänomenologie*, Parts VII and VIII, and of *Encyclopädie*, §§553-77. The popular view that the political sphere was for Hegel the highest, and that the State was his God, is quite untenable, as any reference to his system as a whole (*Encyclopädie*) shows readily enough. Much damage has been done by an oft quoted sentence which is ascribed to Hegel: "the State is the march of God through the world." The sentence is from Scribner's *Hegel Selections*, represents a plain mistranslation, and was not even in its German form written by Hegel. Though there is no indication whatever of this in the *Selections*, the sentence is taken from a *Zusatz* (addition) to §258; and the *Zusätze* were added by Eduard Gans in the posthumous edition, with the explicit admission: "the stylistic order, the connection of the sentences, and sometimes the choice of words as well are mine." The notorious sentence reads in German: "*es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, dass der Staat ist.*" The word *dass*, of course, is neither the same gender as *Gang* nor any pronoun at all; and the sentence fragment means merely that it is the way of God with this world that there should be the State—i.e., the State is not an accident, and we must seek to understand its "reason" (in a double sense) which Hegel finds in its being a prerequisite of art, religion, and philosophy. Thus Hegel begins his discussion of the State with the definition, "The State is the actuality of the ethical idea" (§257)—this idea being freedom, i.e., the positive and constructive freedom which culminates in art, religion, and philosophy, while depending on techniques, traditions, and education which, according to Hegel, can be maintained only in the State.

⁹ Cf. Löwith, *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche* (1941), 95 f.

Nietzsche's personal attacks. They are prompted by the same reasons which led him to oppose systems.

Kant as well as Hegel and Schopenhauer—the skeptical attitude as well as the historical and pessimistic—have a *moral* origin. I saw no one who had ventured a *critique of moral value-feelings*. . . . How is Spinoza's position explainable, his . . . rejection of moral value judgments? (It was *one* consequence of his theodicy!) (WP 410).

The point is as much *ad hominem*, but also as significant methodologically, as the claim that Kant rationalized his personal psychological inclination (WP 424) and that he invented the transcendent world to leave a place for moral freedom (WP 578). Error is spread unnecessarily when moral doctrines, which are vitiated by personal bias or a compromise with State or Church, are allowed to become the basis for metaphysical or epistemological considerations. That this, however, has been the case in almost all philosophies up to now, Nietzsche never tires of insisting (e.g., BGE 6; WP 413, 428).

One may question Nietzsche's assumption that Kant assumed the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori* only because he took the moral law for granted *a priori*: while there are passages even in his first *Critique* in which Kant himself suggests that his theory of knowledge was inspired by a moral purpose,¹⁰ Kant also thought of mathematics as presenting us with synthetic judgments *a priori*. He did, however, carry to extremes the solving of problems by reference to conceptual analogies, parallels, and symmetries. One might therefore raise the Nietzschean objection precisely against the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* which seem indeed unnecessarily vitiated by forcible parallels to the first *Critique*. Reading them, one often feels that Kant abandoned a rigorously questioning attitude and an analysis of actual experience for the sake of symmetry and repetition of the neat schemes of his *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹¹ We may be far more readily inclined to forgive Kant's belief that mathematics contains synthetic judgments *a priori* than we would be to pardon his failure to question or discuss his assumption that

¹⁰ E.g., 2nd ed., xxvii ff., 825 ff.

¹¹ The classical, very detailed and well documented, account of the vitiation of Kant's thought by the desire for symmetry is given in Schopenhauer's *Kritik der Kantischen Philosophie*. (Appendix of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* 1.)

there is an *a priori* "moral law." If this assumption can be established by cogent argument, Kant certainly did not show this.

If some light has been shed on Nietzsche's opposition to any rationalization of current valuations, the question remains what alternative he would offer instead. It is at this point that he is often taken to have presented himself as the legislating "prophet" and revaluer of values. Fortunately, we do not have to rely on the stylistic peculiarities of *Zarathustra* to settle this point, for Nietzsche furnishes us with quite explicit statements about the meaning of his "revaluation."

In *Beyond Good and Evil*—the first book he published after *Zarathustra* to explain its often obscure suggestions—Nietzsche argues at some length that we should distinguish "philosophic laborers" from philosophers proper. The laborers' "tremendous and wonderful task, in whose service every subtle pride, every tough will, can surely find satisfaction," consists in compressing into formulas former "value-creations that have become dominant and are for a time called 'truths.'" Thus previous valuations can be more readily surveyed. The task is important, and those who dedicate themselves to it are to follow "the noble model of Kant and Hegel." The real philosopher, however, has another task. He, too, must stand at one time on all the steps "on which his servants, the . . . laborers of philosophy . . . must remain standing." For that matter, however, he must also be a "poet and collector and traveler . . . moralist and seer and 'free spirit' and almost everything to traverse the range of human values and value-feelings and *to be able* to look with sundry eyes and consciences" at all valuations. All these are only "preliminary conditions of his task." "*Genuine philosophers, however, are . . . legislators*" (BGE 211). This may seem to be an unequivocal statement of Nietzsche's conviction that men like Kant and Hegel were merely his "servants" and "laborers," while he himself had a task even far nobler than theirs: value-legislation. Any such construction, however, would have to be based on a complete disregard for the further development of the argument. The aphorism concludes: "Are there such philosophers today? Have there been such philosophers yet? *Must* there not be such philosophers?" The next aphorism answers these questions; for *Beyond Good and Evil* is much more continuous than its aphoristic form would indicate. Thus the argument in question is continued with the assertion

that such philosophers have not existed so far and do not exist yet.

Nietzsche then develops his conception of the utmost that philosophers have achieved to date and can achieve now. For that reason, this particular aphorism (BGE 212) is of unique importance. The model philosopher is pictured as a physician who applies the knife of his thought "vivisectionally to the very virtues of the time." As a paragon of such a philosopher Nietzsche pictures Socrates whom he would emulate by uncovering "how much hypocrisy, comfortableness," and lack of self-discipline is really "hidden under the best honored type of contemporary morality."¹²

Nietzsche's conception of his own relationship to the legislating philosophers is expressed quite clearly in an earlier aphorism of the same work where he speaks of himself as a "herald and precursor" of "the philosophers of the future" (BGE 44). Instead of rationalizing current valuations which appear to him as previous "value creations that have become dominant and are, for a time, called 'truths,'" he offers a critique and thus prepares the ground for a new "value-creation" or "value-legislation" in the future.

Now it may be asked: if Nietzsche thus criticizes and helps to destroy prevalent values, does he not hasten the advent of nihilism? does he not seek to shatter our faith in God before he adds his "woe is us"? does he not help to bring about that catastrophic vacuum which he is prophesying? Perhaps the most precise answer to these questions is to be found in a line from *Zarathustra*: "what is falling, that one should also push!" (Z III 12). Nietzsche is not speaking of "mercy" killings of the crippled and insane, but of all values that have become hollow, all creeds out of which the faith has gone, and all that is professed only by hypocrites. The New Testament picture is that one should not pour new wine into old skins, nor put new patches on an old garment.

Traditional morality seems to Nietzsche ineluctably moribund—a dying tree that cannot be saved by grafting new fruit on it. We may recall his conception of the philosopher as a doctor—a surgeon. The health of our civilization appeared to him to be severely threatened: it looked impressively good,

¹² The importance of the ideal of the doctor for the shaping of Socrates' and Plato's conception of the ideal philosopher has been developed by Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* III (1943). Instead of recognizing Nietzsche's kindred remarks, however, Jaeger—like almost everybody else—takes for granted "Nietzsche's hatred" of Socrates (II, *passim*).

but seemed to Nietzsche thoroughly undermined—a diagnosis which, though trite today, was perhaps no mean feat in the eighteen-eighties. Under the circumstances, one could humor the patient and let him die, or put hypocrisy and flattery aside, speak up in behalf of one's diagnosis, and "apply the knife."

In other words, Nietzsche believed that, to overcome nihilism, we must first of all recognize it.

III

There still remains the question what the "revaluation" amounts to, seeing that Nietzsche speaks of himself as a mere "herald and precursor." Does Nietzsche offer us new values? It would of course be easy to show that the virtues praised by him are all to be found in previous writers. In that sense, however, it would be altogether questionable whether there is novelty in the history of ideas. Hence we should change our question and ask not whether Nietzsche's wine was new, but whether it was his intention and his own conception of the "revaluation" to pour us new wine. The answer is: No.

Those who would make good their claim that our question must be answered in the affirmative have to rely on their imagination to produce Nietzsche's "new" virtues. The virtues he praises are honesty, courage—especially moral courage—generosity, politeness, and intellectual integrity. In his later writings, Nietzsche placed increasing emphasis on self-discipline and hardness—but unlike some of his critics, he knew the Stoics; he did not regard Spinoza as a sentimentalist; and he did not consider Kant's ethics one of softness. It is often charged that Nietzsche exhorted us to be ruthless against others—and up to a point that is true, although he also insisted up to the very end that to treat those who are weaker than oneself more tenderly than oneself or one's peers is "not just a courtesy of the heart,"¹⁸ but a "duty" (A 57). That one must occasionally be hard against others for the sake of the perfection of one's own soul—though not as hard as one must be against oneself—that is a truth which was not discovered by Nietzsche. Perhaps the command to leave one's father and mother gives symbolic expression to this insight.

The "revaluation" is then still unaccounted for. It does not mean a table of new virtues, nor an attempt to give us such

¹⁸ The phrase "courtesy of the heart" Nietzsche borrowed from Goethe, *Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), II, 101: "There is a courtesy of the heart; it is related to love. It gives rise to the most comfortable courtesy of external behavior."

a table; and it is one of Nietzsche's most serious faults that, in his great loneliness, he injected into his writings elements that aroused such expectations. What he really meant by his "revaluation" was clearly nothing of the sort, as is shown by the few passages in which Nietzsche explains his conception. The notes and the finished works of 1888 present a perfectly consistent picture in this respect.

One of the most revealing characterizations of the "revaluation" occurs in *Ecce Homo*:

After the Yes-saying part of my task had been solved, the turn had come for the No-saying, *No-doing* part: the revaluation of our values so far, the great war—conjuring up a day of decision. This included the slow search for those related to me, those who, prompted by strength, would offer me their hands for *destroying* (EH-BGE 1).

In other words, the "revaluation" means a war against accepted valuations, not the creation of new ones. Later in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche elaborates:

Revaluation of all values: that is my formula for an act of ultimate self-examination by mankind which in me has become flesh and genius. My lot is that I must be the first *decent* human being, that I know myself to be in opposition against the mendaciousness of millennia (EH iv 1).

Without denying the touch of madness in the uninhibited hyperbole of Nietzsche's phrasing, one can use this statement as a clue to Nietzsche's meaning. The "revaluation" is essentially "a courageous becoming conscious" (WP 1007); in other words, the diagnosis itself is the revaluation, and this consists in nothing beyond what Socrates did: "applying the knife vivisectionally to the very *virtues of the time*" and uncovering "how much hypocrisy, comfortableness, letting oneself go and letting oneself drop, how many lies were concealed under the most honored type of their contemporary morality, how much virtue was *outlived*" (BGE 212). The "revaluation" is not a new value-legislation but a reversal of prevalent valuations—not from a new vantage point, nor arbitrary,¹⁴ but an *internal* criticism: the discovery of what Nietzsche variously refers to as "mendaciousness," "hypocrisy," and "dishonesty."

¹⁴ Almost all of Nicolai Hartmann's criticisms of Nietzsche in his famous *Ethik* (1926) depend on this misunderstanding. Of course, he is not blind to Nietzsche's merits and even suggests in the preface that the task of ethics today consists, at least to a considerable extent, in achieving a synthesis of Nietzsche and Kant. [Footnote 15 has been omitted—Ed.'s Note.]

The conception of the revaluation is characteristic of the late Nietzsche who never tires of reiterating that his "inmost nature" is "amor fati" (EH-CW 4), that "nothing that is may be subtracted, nothing is dispensable" (EH-BT 2), and that he "wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity" (EH II 10). The revaluation is not the accomplishment of the individual philosopher who enters the arena to tackle ancient valuations and to reverse them as a sport; rather, "the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence" (WP Preface 4); "the highest values devalue themselves" (WP 2). This Nietzsche can call the revaluation—in the same note in which he defines it as "a courageous becoming conscious"—a "saying Yes to what has been attained" (WP 1007). On the face of it, this contradicts the passage in which Nietzsche associates the revaluation with "no-saying" (EH-BGE 1); but the contradiction is merely verbal. Thus Nietzsche himself can say: "I contradict as has never been contradicted before and am nevertheless the opposite of a no-saying spirit" (EH IV 1). In Hegelian terms, Nietzsche's attitude is positive insofar as he negates a negation—for he considers Christianity as the "revaluation of all the values of antiquity" (BGE 46). More judiciously put, he points out how our accepted morality is dying of internal inconsistencies. His No consists in the acceptance of a *fait accompli*. The philosopher only lays bare the cancerous growth.

Against this background one may also understand the title of one of Nietzsche's last works: "*Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert.*" It is usually assumed that the hammer with which Nietzsche philosophized was a sledge hammer. As a matter of fact, he had planned to call the book *Müssiggang eines Psychologen* (The Idleness of a Psychologist) and substituted *Götzen-Dämmerung* only after the work was finished—at Gast's insistence; and the simile of the hammer is explained in the Preface:

There are more idols than realities in the world: that is my "evil eye" for this world; that is also my "evil ear." For once to pose questions here with a hammer and perhaps to hear as a reply that famous hollow sound . . . what a delight for one who has ears even behind his ears—for me, an old psychologist and pied piper before whom just that which would remain silent *must become outspoken*. This essay, too—the title betrays it—is above all a recreation . . . the idleness of a psychologist. . . . This little essay is a *great declaration of war*; and regarding the sounding out of idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but *eternal* idols which are

here touched with the hammer as with a tuning fork [!]-there are altogether no older ones . . . Also none more hollow.

And this was written "on the day when the first book of the *Revaluation of All Values* was completed."

The hyperbolic epithets associated with the revaluation in *Ecce Homo* bear out our interpretation. Nietzsche speaks of "the hammer blow of historical insight (*lisez: revaluation of all values*)" (EH-HAH 6); and he calls the three inquiries which constitute the *Genealogy* "Three decisive preliminary studies by a psychologist for a revaluation of all values" (EH-GM). In other words, the *Genealogy* is now viewed as a prelude to the *Antichrist*-and Nietzsche thinks of his account of the genesis of Christianity as a "historical insight." When he speaks of "the smashing thunderbolt of the *revaluation*" (EH-CW 4), this picture of the destructive *Blitzschlag* is similarly suggested by what Nietzsche takes to be a sudden and terrifying illumination about the true nature of our traditional values-an illumination which these values cannot survive.

The revaluation is thus the alleged discovery that our morality is, by its own standards, poisonously immoral: that Christian love is the mimicry of impotent hatred; that most unselfishness is but a particularly vicious form of selfishness; and that *ressentiment* is at the core of our morals. . . .

Finally, Nietzsche himself clearly wanted to be a philosopher and not the founder of a new religion. His scorn for the unquestioning disciple is one of the persistent motifs of his thought. In *The Gay Science*-the work that immediately preceded *Zarathustra*-this theme is aired a great number of times, beginning with the Proem (7 and 23).

Since this side of Nietzsche's thought has been unduly neglected, it may be well to quote a few characteristic passages:

Let us remain faithful to Wagner in that which is true . . . in him-and especially in this that we, as his disciples, remain faithful to ourselves in that which is true . . . in us. Let him have his intellectual tempers and convulsions. . . . It does not matter that as a thinker he is so often wrong; justice and patience are not his strength. Enough, if his life is justified, and remains justified, before itself: this life which shouts at every one of us: "Be a man and do not follow me¹⁶-but yourself! But yourself! (GS 99).

¹⁶ Goethe added this motto in the later editions of his *Werther* because the hero's suicide had inspired many readers to follow his example.

Nietzsche recognized his self-portrait no less than we do today. He knew of his own "intellectual tempers and convulsions"; he was aware of the fact that "as a thinker he is so often wrong"; and he had no illusion that "justice and patience" were his strength. Nor did he crave slavish adherence to his pronouncements any more than he could respect such uncritical acceptance of Wagner's ideas. A few pages later we find Nietzsche's picture of the ideal disciple:

When he had said that, his disciple shouted . . . : "But I believe in your cause and consider it so strong that I shall say everything, everything that I can find in my heart to say against it." The innovator laughed . . . : "This kind of discipleship," he said then, "is the best . . ." (GS 106).

One may also cite two other passages from *The Gay Science*:

Everybody knows that to be able to accept criticism [*Widerspruch*] is a high sign of culture. Some even know that the higher man invites and provokes criticism of himself to receive a hint about his injustices which are yet unknown to him (GS 297).

A kind of intellectual integrity [*Redlichkeit*] has been alien to all founders of religions and their kind: they have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge. "What did I really experience? What happened then in me and around me? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will turned against all deceptions . . . ?"—none of them has raised such questions; all the dear religious people still do not raise such questions even now: rather they have a thirst for things that are *against reason*, and they do not want to make it too hard for themselves to satisfy it. . . . We, however, we others who thirst for reason want to look our experiences as straight in the eye as if they represented a scientific experiment . . . ! We ourselves want to be our experiments and guinea pigs [*Versuchs-Tiere*]! (GS 319).

Even so it may seem that when Nietzsche wrote *Zarathustra* a little later, he changed his mind and mood. It is undeniable that—if we are to use Nietzsche's own play on words—*Zarathustra* was not only an experiment and an attempt but also a temptation. Man often craves religious certainty in direct proportion to his profound and tormenting doubts. Like Pascal and Kierkegaard and many another, Nietzsche, too, knew the temptation to let doubt be bygone and to "leap"—as Kierkegaard himself would put it—into faith. What distinguishes Nietzsche is not that he experienced this attraction, but that he felt obliged to resist it to retain his integrity (WP 1038). He did resist it to the end and retained an open mind and

the will to hold his own "in an unfinished system with free, unlimited views" (xvi, 51 f.).

Nietzsche knew that he was, "no less than Wagner, a child of this age"; but he insisted that he had "fought against this" (CW Preface): in the pose of Zarathustra we recognize Wagner's contemporary; but when we see the far more melodramatic notes (xiv) which were not utilized in the completed version, we see how Nietzsche fought his temptation; and the final speech of the first part—which Nietzsche himself considered so important that he quoted it at length in the Preface to *Ecce Homo*—shows Nietzsche overcoming Wagner in himself and turning to Socrates:

Go away from me and resist Zarathustra. . . . Perhaps he deceived you. . . . One repays a teacher badly, if one always remains a pupil only. Why do you not pluck at my wreath?

One may agree with Nietzsche that this is not the language of prophets and founders of religions: "he does not only speak differently, he also is different" (EH Preface).

Even in *Zarathustra* where Nietzsche chooses the founder of a great religion to be his protagonist, and even in *Ecce Homo* where his claims of his own greatness reach their incredible climax, Nietzsche-Socrates overcomes Nietzsche-Wagner. To be sure, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche attempts what might be called a deliberate self-mythologization; some of his statements obviously make no claim to literal correctness; and poetic license is in places extended beyond all boundaries of reason and good taste. The mythological mask, however, that Nietzsche seeks to create for himself is not that of a prophet who establishes a new religion; it is the antithesis of Zarathustra and of the legend that his sister and her associates cultivated later while advisedly withholding *Ecce Homo*:

I want no "believers"; I think I am too sarcastic [*boshaft*] to believe in myself; I never speak to masses. I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced *holy*: You will guess why I publish this book *before*; it shall prevent people from doing mischief [*Unfug*] with me (EH iv 1).

The bombast is indeed harnessed by irony; the prophetic pathos is employed in the service of Nietzsche's proclamation that he is not a prophet; and the insane pride is based in large part on his triumph over any dogma, on his sense of a new freedom, and on his enjoyment of unprecedented wide and open vistas. A few weeks earlier, in *The Antichrist*, it had not

been a new faith that Nietzsche had pitted against Christianity, but the "gay science" of the open mind, a fanaticism for truth, and a new *skepsis* (A 54).

It may be asked whether Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* was really designed to prevent posterity from using him to bad ends. Was it the kind of book that, if published and read earlier, might have counteracted the growth of the legend or the Nazis' later *Unfug*? If one examines the book with such questions in mind, one cannot help concluding that Nietzsche, who announced in this work "I am no man, I am dynamite" (IV 1), was honestly concerned lest this explosive might be employed in the service of the very things he had fought.

He went to extremes to counteract the potential influence of *Zarathustra*; he denounced, vehemently, those who might interpret his conception of the overman Darwinistically, though his own Zarathustrian allegories had plainly invited such misunderstanding; and he missed no opportunity to heap scorn upon German nationalistic aspirations, racism, and the irresponsible reinterpretation of past history which was even then becoming fashionable. For all its obvious and glaring faults, *Ecce Homo* repudiated in advance the forces that were later to claim Nietzsche as their own. The explicit denunciation of his sister, which one might expect to find in the book, was apparently included in the manuscript, but obliterated by her at an early date—because she then expected that he would recover from his madness, and she was eager to save *him* the embarrassment of seeing what terrible things he had written!¹⁷

The Förster-Nazi attempt to find a new religion in *Zarathustra* or a finished system in *The Will to Power* is as opposed to Nietzsche's own basic intentions as was the hallowing of his name at his funeral and the subsequent attempt to make a saint or a prophet of the new Germany out of him. We need not look at Nietzsche through the warped glasses of those whom he himself dubbed "Zarathustra's apes." The Wagnerian pose of his most famous book, its similes which have struck popular fancy and invited misunderstanding—"those were steps for me, and I have climbed up over them: to that end I had to pass over them. Yet they thought that I wanted to retire on them" (Twilight I 42).

¹⁷ Podach, *Gestalten um Nietzsche*, 201 f.