

Moral in an Amoral World



Friedrich Nietzsche—"the rich rubbish of a writer's workshop."

The Will to Power, by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated by Walter Kaufmann and B. J. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (Random House. 576 pp. \$10), contains aphorisms and random jottings posthumously compiled from the philosopher's last notebooks. Eugen Weber, chairman of the Department of History at UCLA, is author of "Paths to the Present" and "Varieties of Fascism," among other books.

By EUGEN WEBER

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, born in 1844, went mad in January 1889 and died in 1900. Profoundly moral in an amoral world, he had to recreate a structure of morality; deeply religious in a godless world, he had to become god; obsessed by death, he had to discover an immortality of his own in the myth of the eternal return.

He left a welter of posthumous notes, and *The Will to Power* was first put together by his sister in 1901 out of his notebooks for 1883-88, the last and most productive years of his sanity. New material was added in subsequent editions. This present compilation, edited and annotated by Walter Kaufmann, may well become the standard English version.

"Nietzsche is Germany's greatest

prose stylist," Kaufmann writes, "and his language is a delight at every turn like a poet's . . ." But the language of the poet is allusive, elusive, and illusive. The danger in aphorisms is not that they may be misunderstood, but that they may be understood as one pleases. Where there are no qualifications any interpretation is permitted. "All knowledge comes down to communication," Nietzsche wrote, and one wishes he had applied the point. He did, but selectively; those understood who deserved to understand.

Nietzsche was a geologist of sentiment, of convention, uncovering layer after layer of custom, habit, and acceptance. Intending to write a book that would go "beyond appearances," he called it *Beyond Good and Evil*—beyond hollow but powerful assumptions, historically conditioned subterfuges for escaping reality, for denying necessity. He was against guilt and Christianity, Rousseau and Romanticism, softness and vulgarity; against the kind of reasoning that categorizes the world into columns of related opposites. Nietzsche's great strength was his critical and analytical thought—constantly tearing down, abandoning one formula or insight for another that might appear to contradict it.

Religious systems posit values and furnish authority for them. But, Nietzsche added, "man has lost the faith in his own values . . . existence has no value or end . . ." Man loses the habit of seeing himself as the creator of values and religions; as these decay, and he is incapable of forging others, nihilism rises.

"A society is not free to remain young." Roses must be cut so that they may grow; dead blossoms must be cleared before new ones bud. To recognize this is not inhuman, only un-sentimental. "Waste, decay, elimination need not be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life." So is decadence: "its supposed causes are its consequences."

Awareness is good; overfocusing is sick. Clarity is good, yet too much light can dazzle. When perception is all, the disproportion becomes morbid.

"Virtue is our greatest misunderstanding," Nietzsche wrote. But it is language that is our greatest misunderstanding: the ambiguity of words, the way they call for explanation of their sense, the way they lend themselves to distortions when taken out of context and quoted to a public that ignores the whole. Inter-

pretation leads to misinterpretation, and Nietzsche, so aware of this and so concerned, lends himself to it more than most.

"In my own way I attempt a justification of history." Nietzsche did this through ellipses and lyrical terseness. Over and over one nods, "How true!" And over and over one asks, "Then what?"

An eagle pecked to death by chickens before he was torn to shreds by self, Nietzsche denounced what he saw as if it were new rather than ageless: mindlessness; will-lessness; the powerful and the rich ensnared by their possessions; ends abased to means and means becoming ends. No wonder he enthralled and convinced. And was this not because his readers were prepared by their own awareness, as well as by the perceptions he articulated?

HE criticized his time but sprang from it. He analyzed practices camouflaged or ignored by his contemporaries, for whom reason furnished excuses for acquiescence, and religion was not redemption but rationalization. He sensed the fatalism inherent in nineteenth-century attitudes which to their holders seemed to be the acme of self-assertion. Oppressed by environment, the reader welcomes Nietzsche's reaffirmation of self and his denial of the determinism dear to the mechanistic nineteenth century as to the psychological twentieth.

"What do philosophers lack?" he writes. "An historical sense . . ."—and historical knowledge. Some of Nietzsche's most brilliant perceptions are also the most misleading. "Judaism whose principal deed was to associate guilt with misfortune . . ." ". . . the French Revolution . . . its instincts are against caste . . . against the last privileges." Yet the Revolution quite deliberately asserted one caste over another and replaced old privileges with new. And the association of guilt with misfortune is one of the most widespread ideas in the world.

Nietzsche's anti-Semitism was, like Voltaire's, an anti-Christianism ("the anemic Christian ideal"); it is the New Testament he loathes, not the Old. Nietzsche's anger, far more bitter than Voltaire's, is so fierce that it almost drives out humor. Almost, but not quite: "Has it been noticed that in heaven all interesting men are missing? Just a hint to the girls as to where they can best find their salvation."

How many of his remarks, new at the time, are commonplaces now: "The world seems logical to us because we have made it logical." Also absurd, because we have defined that concept too: "You lack the courage to lose yourself and to perish: thus you will never be something new."

"One desires freedom so long as one

does not possess power. Once one does possess it, one desires to overpower; if one cannot do that (if one is still too weak to do so), one desires 'justice,' i.e., equal power." Against the masses Nietzsche evokes élites; against universal suffrage, the right of exceptional men; against democracy, hierarchy—rank determined by power, "the will to power"; against equality, discrimination—the aristocracy of self-awareness and self-assertion; against mediocrity, privilege and strength; against the inferiority of the herd, the value of the great and the rare. "As for heroes, I do not think much of them: all the same it is the most acceptable form of existence when one has no other choice."

Why does Nietzsche wear so well? Because, ahead of his own day, he suits ours. Because, trying to analyze his age, he dissects ours. Because, attempting to be timely, he is timeless. Because he is unsystematic: criticism and analysis

hold up better than system and structure. Rereading Nietzsche one is struck by his wealth of insight, his terrifying consistency. There is no meliorism, no compassion; he is a lesson in tough-mindedness. "Will to life? In its stead I never found anything but will to power."

The editor rightly emphasizes that these are notes and random jottings, some used in other works, some abandoned, the rich rubbish of a writer's workshop, glimpses of moments in his thought, not of the stand he took or of his conclusions. For these last, says Professor Kaufmann, read the books he published in his lifetime. Yet for our scattered minds, perhaps the jottings speak more clearly than the finished works; their tone and their occasional formlessness suit ours. And *The Will To Power* does offer a sketchy compendium of Nietzsche's views, implacable scholarship, and fascinating readings.

The Sage of Königsberg

Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759-1799, translated from the German and edited by Arnulf Zweig (University of Chicago Press, 260 pp. \$7.50), gives insights into both the thought and the personality of a man who, eschewing dogma, created one. Paul Arthur Schilpp, professor of philosophy at Southern Illinois University, is the author of "Kant's Pre-Critical Ethics."

By PAUL ARTHUR SCHILPP

NONE of the several volumes of Kant's letters in the Prussian Academy edition has thus far been available in English. The present work, containing sixty-three letters from Kant's own pen plus thirty-four letters addressed to him, is therefore a welcome contribution to the English-reading student. Moreover, Professor Arnulf Zweig's selection is quite felicitous, although there are a few letters that could scarcely be called "philosophical." But some of these latter give us perhaps an even better insight into the personality of the bachelor Sage of Königsberg.

If, as the editor claims in his preface, he has presented here "translations of virtually all of Kant's philosophical correspondence" over a period of forty years, it is clear that Kant was not much of a letter-writer. In fact, he frequently remarks that he regards letters "as a chore and a distraction from more

serious work." Occasionally some of his correspondents had to wait a year or longer for a reply—if they received any at all.

Only two of Kant's own letters date from before 1770. And, of the thirteen from the decade leading up to the publication of the first *Critique*, no fewer than nine were written to Marcus Herz, a physician, who was Kant's disciple and closest friend. Although as late as 1797 Kant writes that Königsberg's "court preacher and professor of mathematics, Mr. Johann Schultz," is "unquestionably" the one scholar who "has really interpreted at least the main points of my system in the way I want them to be interpreted," there can be no question that Kant's most detailed philosophical correspondence was that with Herz. But it is doubtful whether even these letters cast much additional light on Kant's system.

Perhaps the major value of these writings is their demonstration of Kant's own attitude towards his philosophical works. Usually (like so many of the rest of us) he expects to finish something in a much shorter time than it will actually take him. But there is never the slightest doubt in his mind about his work's far-reaching importance. Kant was not joking when he titled his 1783 work *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*; he really meant it. As a matter of fact, just before the publication of the *Prolegomena*, in a letter to Christian Garve, he ends a footnote with these words: ". . . he will never deduce the

categories from any other source than that which I have indicated, of that I am certain."

And the last part of the very last sentence in this book, from an Open Letter on Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, dated August 7, 1799 (less than three and one-half years before his death), reads: ". . . the system of the *Critique* rests on a fully secured foundation, established forever; it will be indispensable too for the noblest ends of mankind in all future ages." Hume may have awakened Kant from his "dogmatic slumbers"; but the critical philosophy, with all its subtleties and minute distinctions, itself achieves such a degree of certainty and absoluteness as to justify one's dubbing it also dogmatic.

THAT Kant could—under specific circumstances—take a personal interest in a nonprofessional human being appears in his correspondence with Maria von Herbert, the sister of an influential disciple. In 1791 this young lady wrote to Kant in great distress over a broken love affair. Six months later he finally replied in a generally sympathetic and understanding manner. But, despite the fact that Maria clearly indicated she was at the point of suicide, Kant did not answer her later letters. In 1803, at the age of thirty-four, Maria actually did take her own life. Mr. Zweig, quite correctly, draws the conclusion that Kant "was not enthusiastic about women's rights or greatly concerned about the frustration suffered by intelligent ladies in a society that regarded them for the most part as merely useful or decorative ornaments."

There is only one letter to the great German poet Schiller; and, as Mr. Zweig comments, "It is a pity that there are no very serious philosophical exchanges with [J. G.] Fichte in the correspondence."

Two brief statements on religion are revealing, both contained in letters of 1775. In the first Kant writes: ". . . no confession of faith, no appeal to holy names nor any observance of religious ceremonies can help." And in the other he affirms that ". . . no book . . . can substitute for the religion of conscience."

Finally, I cannot refrain from quoting the following brief excerpt from a letter to Marcus Herz dated February 4, 1779: "A certain misology . . . derives . . . from this: that in the first instance one loves philosophy, in the second, people, but one finds both ungrateful, partly because one expected too much of them, partly because one is too impatient in awaiting the reward of one's efforts from the two. I know this sullen mood also; but a kind glance from either of them reconciles us with them again and serves to make our attachment to them even stronger . . ."