

The Life & Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

Philosophy Class Essay

Born: 1844. Rocken, Germany

Died: 1900. Weimar, Germany

Major Works: The Gay Science (1882),

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885),

Beyond Good & Evil (1886),

On the Genealogy of Morals (1887),

MAJOR IDEAS

Self deception is a particularly destructive characteristic of West Culture. Life is The Will To Power; our natural desire is to dominate and reshape the world to fit our own preferences and assert our personal strength to the fullest degree possible. Struggle, through which individuals achieve a degree of power commensurate with their abilities, is the basic fact of human existence. Ideals of human equality perpetuate mediocrity -- a truth that has been distorted and concealed by modern value systems. Christian morality, which identifies goodness with meekness and servility is the prime culprit in creating a cultural climate that thwarts the drive for excellence and self realization God is dead; a new era of human creativity and achievement is at hand.

-- Great Thinkers In The Western World.

By: Ian P. McGreal, 1992

PREFACE

Much information is available on Mr. Friedrich Nietzsche, including many books that he wrote himself, during his philosophical career. I took this as a good sign I would find a fountain of enlightened material produced by the man. I've had to go through a bit of my own philosophical meditations to put my own value judgements aside, and truly look for the contributions Nietzsche gave to philosophy. Much of my understanding came only after I had a grasp of Nietzsche's history; therefore, I encourage you to read-up on his history before diving into his philosophy (see Appendix I). The modern Westerner might disagree with every aspect of his philosophy, but there are many things one must unfortunately admit are true (only if you put your morality aside). So, from here, I will present his contributions to philosophy, and do my best to delete my own opinions, other than to say that he was not the chosen topic of this paper out of any admiration.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Sometimes philosophy is called "timeless," implying that it's lessons are of value to any generation. This may be hard to see in Nietzsche's work; but, we are assured that it was appropriate thought for his time. However, even Nietzsche's critics admit that his words hold an undeniable truth, as hard as it is to accept. Perhaps this is why his work is timeless, and has survived 150 years in print.

Christianity "God is Dead!" announced Zarathustra (better known as Zoroaster), in Nietzsche's proudest book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885). Unlike many philosophers, Nietzsche never tried to prove or disprove the existence of God, just that belief in God can create sickness; and to convince that highest achievements in human life depend on elimination of God. Whether God existed had no relevance in his goal. Proclamation of the death of God was a fundamental ingredient in the revaluation of values Nietzsche advocated.

"Nothing has done more than Christianity to entrench the morality of mediocrity in human consciousness."

"Christian love extols qualities of weakness; it causes guilt. Charity is just teaching hatred and revenge directed toward nobility."

"Belief in God is a tool to bring submission to the individual of noble character."

-- F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Hero Morality

Nietzsche had an ideal world in mind, with an ideal government and an ideal God: the "Overman" or "Superman." These Gods were a product of natural selection, or social Darwinism. He felt, very strongly, that any kind of moral limitations upon man would only stand in the way of The Overman. "The Will To Power," his strongest teaching, meant that The Overman should and would do anything possible to gain power, control and strength. If one showed the smallest bit of weakness or morality, he would be killed by the stronger Overman, and taken over. Thus, the advancement of The Master Race (Nietzsche's "Master Race" will be discussed later).

"Not mankind, but superman is the goal. The very last thing a sensible man would undertake would be to improve mankind: mankind does not improve, it doesn't even exist - it is an abstraction."

"... his superman as the individual rising precariously out of the mire of mass mediocrity, and owing his existence more to deliberate breeding and careful nurture than to the hazards of natural selection."

Master Race

Nietzsche is often referred to as a pre-Nazi thinker, by his idealism of The Master Race. He was, in fact, a prime influence on the writing of Hitler's highest men, and quoted in Hitler's speeches. But, his writings were mostly taken out of context, because he was very open about his distaste for "those anti-semites." If one is able to come from a more intelligent place, regarding the breeding of best-fit humans, Nietzsche was far beyond Hitler. Nietzsche understood the necessity for variation in a population, and especially was able to appreciate the contributions of other races and cultures. His

ideal society would be a race that included select bits from many races/cultures. The only culture that he seemed to have a special appreciation for were the Polish. He wrote, "The Poles, I consider the most gifted and gallant among Slavic people..." Still, he wrote about his value for the Jews, as response to the growing anti-semitic culture in Germany during his time:

"The whole problem of the Jews exists only in nation states, for here their energy and higher intelligence, their accumulated capital of spirit and will, gathered from generation to generation through a long schooling in suffering, must become so preponderant as to arouse mass envy and hatred. In almost all contemporary nations, therefore -- in direct proportion to the degree which they act up nationalistically -- the literary obscenity of leading the Jews to slaughter as scapegoats of every conceivable public and internal misfortune is spreading. As soon as it is no longer a matter of preserving nations, but of producing the strongest possible Euro-Mixed race, the Jew is just as useful and desirable as ingredient as any other national remnant."

War Mentality

Nietzsche had an incredible infatuation with evil and violence. He did so much to find evil and cruelty in the world, that he seemed to have a sadistic pleasure in celebrating it; "man is the cruelest animal," he states in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In his book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, he really aims at changing the reader's opinion as to what is good and what is evil, but professes, except at moments, to be raising what is "evil" and decrying what is "good." It is necessary for higher men to make war upon the masses, and resist the democratic tendencies of the age, for in all directions mediocre people are joining hands to make themselves masters. "Everything that pampers, that softens, and that brings the 'people' or 'woman' to the front, operates in favor of universal suffrage -- that is to say, the dominion of 'inferior' men."

Women & The Family

This brings us to Nietzsche's view of women. At this point, I believe it's important to note Nietzsche's experience with women, because his writings about them seemed to begin closely after being rejected by the only woman he admitted to love. She rejected him as he asked her hand in marriage.

"Men shall be trained for war and woman for the recreation of the warrior. All else is folly."

"The patriotic member of a militant society will look upon bravery and strength as the highest virtues of a man; upon obedience as the highest virtue of the citizen; and upon silent submission to multiple motherhood as the highest virtue of woman."

"Thou goest to woman? Do not forget thy whip."

From Nietzsche's experience with women, as author Bertrand Russell

said, "Nine out of ten women would get the whip away from him, and he knew it, so he kept away from women, and soothed his wounded vanity with unkind remarks." Many of his comments toward women reflected what a lonely and unloved person he was. In some poems he wrote after his prospective wife left him, he wrote this lonely line: "I could sing a song, and I will sing it, although I am alone in an empty house and must sing it to mine own ears." So, he added appropriately to his beliefs the following:

"How absurd it is, after all, to let higher individuals marry for love -- heroes with servant girls and geniuses with seamstresses! When a man is in love he should not be permitted to make decisions affecting his entire life. We should declare invalid the vows of lovers and should make love a legal impediment to marriage."

The Aristocracy

Nietzsche loved his aristocratic anarchism, and had such a hate for democracy, that it consumes nearly every bit of his philosophy. His ideal society was divided into three classes: producers (farmers, merchants, business men), officials (soldiers and government), and rulers. The latter would rule, but they would not officiate in government; the actual government is a menial task. The rulers would be philosopher-statesmen rather than office-holders. Their power will rest on the control of credit and the army; but they would live more like the proud-soldier than like the financier.

Nietzsche believed that some people were inherently more important than others; their happiness or unhappiness counted for more than the happiness of average people. He dismissed John Stuart Mill as a "blockhead" for the presupposition that everyone was equal. He wrote about Mill:

"I abhor the man's vulgarity when he says "what is right for one man is right for another. Such principals wild fain establish the whole of human traffic upon mutual services, so every action would appear to be a cash payment for something done to us. The hypothesis here is ignoble to the last degree; it is taken for granted that there is some sort of equivalence in value between my actions and thine."

Nietzsche, as I said before, hated democracy, but he recognized Christianity as a greater risk. Perhaps this was because people are always more loyal to their god, than their government. He felt that democracy began with Christianity: "...holy epileptics like saint Paul, who had no honesty. The new testament is the gospel of a completely ignoble species of man. Christianity is the most fatal and seductive lie that ever existed." So, before stripping people of their choice and equality, their God had to be taken first, Then the government.

"Consequently, the road to the superman must lie through aristocracy. Democracy -- this manner for counting noses -- must be eradicated before it is too late. The first step here is the destruction of Christianity so far as all higher men are concerned."

Conclusion

As Will Durant stated Nietzsche's faults so eloquently, "we can see him suffering at every line, and we must love him even where we question him," I couldn't agree more. I always ask the supremacist the question, "why do you support a supremacist government that would probably reject you into it's lower class?" I have no doubt, that if Nietzsche lived in his ideal society, he would have no honor, as he misses every requirement, being a sickly man who was rejected from the army, and lacking the strength to compete with his own "superman."

Word Count: 1,878