INDIVIDUAL, TRUTH AND AUTHENTICITY:

A CRITICAL STUDY OF KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

VARUN SHARMA

CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI- 110067

INDIA

2017

DECLARATION

I, Varun Sharma, declare that the thesis entitled "**INDIVIDUAL, TRUTH AND AUTHENTICITY: A CRITICAL STUDY OF KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE,**" submitted by me in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work and has not been submitted by me in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of this University or any other university.

Varun Sharma

CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI-110067

Dated. 21/7/17

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**INDIVIDUAL, TRUTH AND AUTHENTICITY: A CRITICAL STUDY OF KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE,**" submitted by Varun Sharma in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is his original work and has not been submitted by him in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of this University or any other university.

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the Examiners for evaluation.

Professor Bindu Puri

Chairperson

Chairperson
Centre for Philosophy
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, INDIA

Professor Bhagat Oinam

Supervisor

21/7/17

SUPERVISOR
Centre for Philosophy
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The present work centerson the thought of two seminal nineteenth century philosophers, namely Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Through their life as well as their writings, these two thinkers have exerted a significant influence on the modern as well as the postmodern philosophical enterprise. Both of them realized that Christian ethos and modes of existence were waning and that this was bound to impact each and every strand of European worldview. Both of them tried in their own ways to encourage men to search for new ways of life as well as new modes of expression. Rebelling against the subordination and subsumption of individual existence to impersonal, objective and universal systems, not only did they introduce into philosophy the concerns of the individual human being, but they also provided a critique of the dominant discourse and reinterpreted its meta-narratives, deflating the monopoly of reason and emphasizing passion as an under-appreciated agency in human projects and endeavours. That Kierkegaard and Nietzsche could embark on an identical enterprise in spite of such apparent divergences in their religious, ethical and teleological worldviews in itself is significant and meaning-laden. My aim in this dissertation is to bring into focus the genesis, the *modus operandi* and the *telos*of such a project in their philosophies, stressing at the same time the divergences in their approach and the implications of these divergences for the subject at hand.

The aforementioned project revolves around the three main conceptions that are significantly intertwined with the kernel of their thought as well as with the existentialist and the postmodern school of thought that followed them. These are, namely: “individual,” “truth” and “authenticity.” In my dissertation, I have tried to show that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche imbue these terms with new found poignancy and significance, and from objective philosophical categories, they are transmuted into subjective milestones which have to be traversed in the way of self-realization.

The present work is thus a three-pronged examination of the kernel of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's philosophies, and it signifies the concepts of individual, truth and authenticity as rendezvous points for the two philosophers. The way the present work is structured is to purposely emphasize that the journey from an inauthentic to authentic life requires a step by step realization of these three milestones on part of the subject. At the first step, the subject discovers not only that he or she is an individual before anything else, but paradoxically also that he or she has to take pains to become an individual, what they thought they already were. The way to achieving genuine identity as person necessitates a breaking away from the crowd and the subtle and explicit requirements it puts before human beings. This is achieved by, and in turn aids, the repudiation of absolute, objective and universal truth, and a passionate embrace of one' own subjectivity as truth. Last but not the least, the realization of oneself as a "concrete individual" anchored in his subjective truth ultimately prompts man to choose and commit to an authentic, or at least a more authentic manner of existence. This is the pathway and the milestones which I claim our two philosophers intend their readers to follow and stand true to, if they want to live an authentic life, and the present work mostly revolves around this schema.

It is not out of order here to mention the greatest influences on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, more so because they generally reacted to this influence by rebelling against it. Hegel claimed to have created an all-encompassing philosophical system based on reason, and aimed to reconcile religion with reason. He offered an evolutionary system of human reason wherein there occurred a dialectical movement from levels of truth until the ultimate truth was arrived at, which Hegel equated with God. Reducing God to a rational concept, even the supreme one, was an affront to Kierkegaard's deeply Christian mind. But Kierkegaard was opposed to Hegel on a number of more significant fronts. Philosophy for Kierkegaard should be concerned with ethical practice rather than theorizing and system-building, and instead of valuing and aiming for universality, should speak directly to individuals and address their particular situations. Secondly, Kierkegaard saw Hegel's absolute system as putting everything in its place and destroying the role of possibility and of individual choice in the process. Again, Kierkegaard questioned Hegel's assumption that oppositions between different stages or choices in life could be rationally resolved in some kind of higher synthesis; he instead stressed that there were inevitable paradoxes and

irresolvable contradictions between different forms of life that called for ethically unjustifiable choices. Thus Hegel's system was over-abstracted, impersonal and induced a kind of existential apathy.

Nietzsche was greatly inspired by Schopenhauer, Hegel's lifelong critic. Schopenhauer proposed a philosophy of resignation akin to that of Buddhist thought. While Nietzsche in his early career made use of Schopenhauer's thought to fill the vacuum that had resulted due to his disillusionment from Christianity, later he came to have a position contrary to Schopenhauer's. Characterizing the latter's resignation as "decadent," Nietzsche instead proclaimed as his ideal a hero who makes light of life's miseries, does not disparage earthly existence and has full zest for life in spite of its horrors. For some time, the composer Richard Wagner seemed to him to be an example of such a personality, but soon he fixed his eye beyond his contemporaries into the future, hoping that a new breed of humans would one day arise, and carve out their own ideals. This is the idea of the Overman, which returns again and again in the thesis to give a thematic unity to Nietzsche's thought, and which is presented as a foil to Kierkegaard's authentic Christian.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters having three sections each.The first chapter is titled 'Contextualizing the Debate,' and I have attempted in it to situate the two philosophers against the backdrop of preceding philosophy so as to find out who their thought arose in response to. Kierkegaard, for instance, was spurred onto his philosophical journey by the philosophy of Hegel. In Hegel's writings too, we find a conjoining of Christian and philosophical themes which inspired Kierkegaard to seek out the exact relationship between them. He detested Hegel's efforts to map out Christianity as a mere resting point in the constant unfolding of the history of thought, and concluded for himself that a paradox like Christianity could never be made sense of through logical thought. In place of Hegelianism, Kierkegaard presented his own subjective philosophy wherein the chief concern was to be an individual's experience and values, and these were to be postulated as motivating the individual's actions and decisions. All this is covered in the first section having the self-explanatory title – "Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegelianism."

The second section is an analysis of Nietzsche's crusade against Christian values and influence.Responding to the cultural situation in nineteenth-century Europe

wherein the advance of the natural sciences led by Darwinism was eroding the faith people had in traditional value systems, Nietzsche could see that the Christian values which had given to the Western man all his basic moral and political ideals were on the verge of demise. He criticized Christianity as responsible for the desecration of worldly life due to its positing of a dual-world structure wherein earthly existence was deemed inferior, and real or true existence was postulated as beyond this world through a system of ideals like sin, grace, heaven, hell, soul, divine will and the like. In short, Nietzsche shared Kierkegaard's disgust against a system's claim to universality.

The full consequences of this attitude towards objectivity and universality are explored in the final section of the first chapter. Titled "Philosophy as Autobiography," the section makes the case that they more than any other philosophers constructed their philosophy out of the very rubrics of their own lives. Their philosophy was characterized by self-reference not in content alone, but in structure too. They used a vast array of textual devices to undermine their authority as an author and to place responsibility for the existential significance to be derived from their texts squarely on the reader. It is in their work that we find philosophy taking a new and welcome turn towards a category of concepts (such as anxiety, choice, nothingness, commitment and the like) relating to the concrete individual rather than treating him merely as an abstraction, a number or a cog in the communal wheel.They wanted to set philosophy aside from all systemic presuppositions and concentrate it on the problem of the individual's existence in this world. This they sought to achieve by analysing the lives of the closest-known individuals to them: they themselves. Thus the first chapter sets the tone for how the thesis is going tobe structured – a kind of back and forth between the person and the philosopher.

The second chapter of my dissertation focuses on the existential category of the single individual contrasted with the multitude around him. Kierkegaard refers to this multitude as the 'crowd,' and Nietzsche as the "herd." The first section of the second chapter titled "Nietzsche's Master-Slave Dichotomy" looks into Nietzsche's analysis of the herd. The latter understands human beings essentially as herd creatures, the herd values arising out of a historical struggle between what Nietzsche refers to as the masters and the slaves. The epitome of herd mentality for Nietzsche is European

modernity, which is nothing but the realization of Christian ideals in politics, ethics and economy.Here I have attempted to find out whether all Christians without exception would be classified as herd creatures, considering Kierkegaard himself was a devout Christian. The second section looks at Kierkegaard's conception of the solitary individual by way of contrast with the master morality in Nietzsche. Kierkegaard introduces into modern philosophy the idea that one has to become an individual; individuality is not something one is born with. Setting forth an opposition between individual and the crowd, Kierkegaard necessitates an honest acknowledgement and consequent repudiation of the crowd as the starting point of the process of individuation. The third section focuses on the politics of the individual, and examines Kierkegaard's as well as Nietzsche's philosophy to ascertain the nature and extent of their political engagement.

As a prerequisite in their crusade against the systemic subordination of the individual, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche challenge the very notion of an objective truth and propound in its place their own understanding of the conception of "truth." This is the chief subject matter of the third chapter of my dissertation titled "The Axiology of Truth." The first section here is called "A Critique of the Objectivist Model" wherein I attempt to provide a background to their views on truth in the light of the Enlightenment vs Romanticism debate. In the second section, I explain Kierkegaard's notion of subjective truth wherein truth and untruth – rather than being the property of assertions – respectively refer to the sincerity or insincerity with which one lives one's life. The highest truth is one that is sincerely held in the face of objective uncertainty of the highest degree, and Kierkegaard holds absolute faith in the Christian God to be an epitome of such truth. The third section focuses on Nietzsche's espousal of a pragmatic and perspectival theory of truth. All truths for him are "useful fictions" which have been invented to ease human existence in the world by imposing names and concepts on the constant flux of phenomena. Untruths, or "errors" for him are simply those fictions which have over time proved less useful to human beings; the rest have been embedded and internalized as truths. I have tried to prove that it is this dissociation of truth from fact and its association with attitude or interpretation that makes it possible for individuals to reject as mere tradition the dogma of the crowd and cultivate such truths as would assist them in the process of individuation. The significance of this anti-foundational move and its consequences for philosophy in

general are a primary subject of analysis in the third chapter. I also attempt to situate in this chapter Nietzsche's attack on the positivistic notion of science in particular and his critique of values in general.

The fourth and final chapter titled "Authenticity as Self-Becoming" concludes the dissertation with its focus on authentic life as the *telos* of human existence. The repudiation of the mass and the disavowal of objective truth lead an individual to the realization that the responsibility of reconstructing one's existence lies exclusively with oneself. This may open an axiological vacuum before the individual wherefrom he is called forth to formulate his own truth and forge his own ideals. A successful accomplishment of this project completes the process of individuation, imbuing the individual's life with "authenticity," a sort of self-becoming. In the last chapter I attempt to explain how this involves wrestling with different alternatives, caring about the significance of each choice as a kind of self-definition, and having an attitude of complete commitment towards each such choice. I do this by doing a comparative study of Kierkegaard's "knight of faith" and Nietzsche's "Overman" as two authentic ideals respectively in the first and second section. The third section looks at the notions of choice and commitment and explores the similarities and distinctions in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's treatment of these. Kierkegaard's discussion of the three forms of life: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious is invoked in this regard, and his championing of the "knight of faith" as the epitome of an authentic existence is discussed. I also focus on Nietzsche's understanding of "nihilism" as the aforementioned "axiological vacuum" and his offering of "Overman" as a remedy, not only for our age, but for all ages.

A common thread going through all four chapters is the major point of divergence between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, that is, the former's emphasis on a genuine acceptance of God as the foundation of an authentic individual existence and the latter's espousal of a thoroughgoing denial of religion as the prerequisite for a new and reformed individuality. This is a significant point of concern in my dissertation. It is not a trivial question if one inquires whether Nietzsche would have condoned the reformed Christianity professed by Kierkegaard had he come into contact with it. I have attempted to pursue this line of inquiry by a close reading of Kierkegaard's views on Christianity and examining them in the light of Nietzsche's general critique of

religion. This along with the aforementioned three concepts, viz. individual, truth and authenticity are the primary keywords in my dissertation and the understanding of my dissertation resides primarily in the comprehension of my treatment of these concepts.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALIZING THE DEBATE

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are both held to be counter-Enlightenment writers. The Enlightenment worldview was informed largely by science and rationality, and both of them were concerned with how the new reliance on reason for all answers was affecting the traditional ways of understanding. Going counter to the established understanding, they postulated that rather than being creatures of rationality, human beings were primarily governed by feelings, emotions and desires, and consequently their actions and decisions were more passionate than rational.

Kierkegaard's philosophy arose in direct response to the most influential thinker of his time, that is, Hegel. Hegel claimed to have created an all-encompassing philosophical system based on reason, and aimed to reconcile religion with reason. He offered an evolutionary system of human reason wherein there occurred a dialectical movement from levels of truth until the ultimate truth was arrived at, which Hegel equated with God. Reducing God to a rational concept, even the supreme one, was an affront to Kierkegaard's deeply Christian mind. But Kierkegaard was opposed to Hegel on a number of more significant fronts.[1] Philosophy for Kierkegaard should be concerned with ethical practice rather than theorizing and system-building, and instead of valuing and aiming for universality, should speak directly to individuals and address their particular situations.[2] Secondly, Kierkegaard saw Hegel's absolute system as postulating a predetermined place for everything and destroying the role of possibility and of individual choice in the process. Again, Kierkegaard questioned Hegel's assumption that oppositions between different stages or choices in life could be rationally resolved in some kind of higher synthesis; he instead stressed that there were inevitable paradoxes and irresolvable contradictions between different forms of

[1]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 143, 181, 249, 256, 470, 524.

[2]Ibid.,p. 260.

life that called for ethically unjustifiable choices. Thus Hegel's system was over-abstracted, impersonal and induced a kind of existential apathy. In its place, Kierkegaard presented his own subjective philosophy wherein the chief concern was to be an individual's experience and values, and these were to be postulated as motivating the individual's actions and decisions.

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche too was a child of his times. Responding to the cultural situation in nineteenth-century Europe wherein the advance of the natural sciences led by Darwinism was eroding the faith people had in traditional value systems, Nietzsche could see that the Christian values which had given to the Western man all his basic moral and political ideals were on the verge of demise. He criticized Christianity as responsible for the desecration of worldly life due to its positing of a dual-world structure wherein earthly existence was deemed inferior, and real or true existence was postulated as beyond this world through a system of ideals like sin, grace, heaven, hell, soul, divine will and the like. In short, Nietzsche shared Kierkegaard's disgust against a system's claim to universality. In this chapter, an attempt is made to look at the background of this opposition, the sources and influences which moulded the respective philosophies of these thinkers into the forms we witness.

Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegelianism

Kierkegaard was of the opinion that Hegel's idealism had such impact on the contemporary philosophy that there was a general misunderstanding regarding the way thought and reality were related, wherein reality was to be assimilated to thought and not the other way round. This was significant because it said something about the contemporary age too – where due to abstract speculation and general passivity, the people had become complacent as regards their true interests as individuals who were responsible for their own character and destiny. Kierkegaard worked at opposing these trends, by means of an exploration of life and the different approaches to it. His explorations were aimed at making his readers realize their *locus standi* regarding the

really important things in life, and he wanted them to explore their possibilities for a radical transformation. Radical transformation for him rested on choices that were not made on the basis of general directives; each situation and its resolution was different for different individuals and each individual had to face it alone.

The Hegelian system conceptualized a science of logic to disseminate the knowledge of the absolute, or absolute knowledge in other words. For Hegel, God's mind was another name for the logical structure of the universe, and people only needed to be capable of following the advance of the dialectic he had devised to know it. Hegel also believed that the contents of his dialectic were transparent and open to everyone. To Kierkegaard, the ever ascending stairs of the dialectic were reminiscent of the Biblical tower of Babel whereby humans could have access to the heavenly portals. Kierkegaard aimed at an inversion of this dialectic and wanted – unlike Hegel – to make the contents of his dialectic opaque to everyone but a small esoteric community who had the passion and the existential fervour required to cultivate an interest in it. Kierkegaard did not believe that objective knowledge as represented in his age by the advances in science, politics, economics, etc. could contribute in any way towards redeeming human beings; rather it closed their way to redemption. He did not desire to give more knowledge to the people; instead he wanted them to question the value of the knowledge they already had. Hegel had attempted to make God and Christianity accessible and legible to everyone; Kierkegaard believed this to be an abomination since God transcended all human categories and hence was beyond the pale of knowledge and rationality.

Hegel's attempt to think in an all encompassing way made him a difficult opponent. He tries to appropriate the insights of other philosophers, to show how their views can be understood as a partial expression of the truth that is adequately expressed only when all of reality is understood systematically. Kierkegaard thus fears that any objection made to Hegel will simply be accepted as another "moment" in this vast system; he fears becoming a "paragraph in the system."[3] The solution is to draw out the inherent comedic potential in the situation of the speculative philosopher. Kierkegaard thinks the problem is not that Hegel's system is the wrong system, and thus needs to be corrected with a better one. The problem is that such a system is

[3]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p.200.

impossible, and it is even more impossible for such an intellectual system to produce existential wisdom. A direct attack on "the system" would not be nearly so effective as humorous satire. He jokes,

> I assume that anyone I may have honour to talk with is also a human being. If he presumes to be speculative philosophy in the abstract, pure speculative thought, I must renounce the effort to speak with him; for in that case he instantly vanishes from my sight.[4]

Only in his second major work *Either/Or,* Kierkegaard tried to offer a philosophical alternative to established Hegelianism.The work portrays two alternative worldviews: one was consciouslypleasure-seeking, the other was ethical, but it was different from the Hegelian understanding of the ethical. For Kierkegaard, being ethical was always the outcome of a personal choice; it could not be manufactured, as the Hegelians thought, out of a philosophical insight:

> I think of my early youth, when without clearly comprehending what it is to make a choice I listened with childish trust to the talk of my elders, and the intent of choice was solemn and venerable, although in choosing I was only following the instructions of another person. I think of the occasions in my later life when I stood at the crossways, and my soul was matured in the hour of decision. I think of the many occasions in life less important but by no means indifferent to me, when it was a question of making a choice. For although there is only one situation in which either/or has absolute significance, namely when truth, righteousness and holiness are lined up on one side, and lust and base propensities and obscure passions and perdition on the other; yet it is always important to choose rightly.[5]

In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), he accused the Hegelians of absorbing themselves in a world of pure thought and forgetting their own real-life existence. Hegel writes, for example, in *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences:*

> The significance of that 'absolute commandment', know thyself — whether we look at it in itself or under the historical circumstances of its first utterance — is

[4]Ibid., p. 135.

[5]Kierkegaard,*Either/Or, p. 35.*

> not to promote mere self-knowledge in respect of the particular capacities, character, propensities, and foibles of the single self. The knowledge it commands means that of man's genuine reality — of what is essentially and ultimately true and real — of spirit as the true and essential being.[6]

Kierkegaard criticizes this negation of the subjectivity of the individual. He laments:

> Being an individual man is a thing that has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher confuses himself with humanity at large, whereby he becomes something infinitely great – and at the same time nothing at all. [7]

In contrast, Kierkegaard drew a series of sharp contrasts between thought and existence; possibility and actuality; objectivity and subjectivity; the speculative and the ethical; the perspectives of crowd and the individual; and between disinterestedness and the interest or passion of a subject who is always confronted with the demands of choosing himself in one or other concrete situation. In an early entry in his journals, written when he was still a student, Kierkegaard gave vent to his concern when he felt torn between his calling as a philosopher and his dismay at his contemporary philosophers who held dispassionateness and objectivity as the hallmark of the discipline. "What good would it do me," he then asked himself, "if truth stood before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I recognized her or not?"[8] Herein we find the germs of ideas which were later articulated throughout his writings wherein he launched a scathing criticism of the empty speculation of armchair philosophers who were all engaged in formulating systematic explanations of everything, each one grander than the previous one. This does not mean that Kierkegaard was a rabid anti-objectivist and that he had issues with the dispassionate approach even in case of scholarly academic studies or scientific disciplines; he had no problems with the objective approach when it was employed in fields of inquiry relevant to it. However the philosophers of his time, led by Hegel, were mostly concerned with formulating all-explaining ontological systems that could account for all aspects of human thinking

[6]Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences,* p. 62.

[7]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p.132.

[8]Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard,* p. 47.

and interpret every human experience through universal and absolute categories, and this attitude Kierkegaard felt was full of hubris. Impersonal and dispassionate thinking could not do justice to specific concerns and worldviews, and Kierkegaard disparaged of the philosophers' attempts to make this happen. Hegel's system, which was the epitome of this line of thought, therefore, appeared fundamentally flawed to him.

We can gain valuable insights into Kierkegaard's own philosophy through his pertinent observations and sharp criticisms of what he found problematic in Hegel's system. He argued that Hegel's fundamental error was his muddling of essence and existence. For Hegel, reality could be identified with and ultimately reduced to thought. Hegel's system was constituted of an ever-evolving series of logical categories which sought to explain the world, and humanity's *locus standi*in it from the dispassionate standpoint of the Absolute. As far as this system was construed as a "thought-experiment," Kierkegaard had no issues with it and admired its structural ingenuity to the extent of incorporating it in his works also. Thought and reality however were not the same, and the grandest system of thought could not yield a shred of reality by itself. Kierkegaard was particularly incensed by Hegel's suggestion that transformations and transitions faced by concrete existing individuals could be made sense of through dialectical evolutions of eternal concepts. Conjuring a self-contained science of logic was one thing; it was impossible to construct a similar science of existence. He warns:

> We must therefore be wary of abstract thinkers and their wish to remain forever in the pure being of abstraction, which they regard as the highest of human attainments, while abstract thought – which leads to the neglect of the ethical and misunderstanding of the religious – is treated as the highest form of human thinking.[9]

These objections reflect Kierkegaard's concern over Hegel's philosophical mishandling of human existence in particular. Hegel in his philosophy assumes for himself the highest point of view, not entirely unlike God, from where the world looks like a totality – which is determined by reason and whose components gel with each other perfectly – and there is nothing in the world that does not contribute to maintain

[9]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p. 113.

and perpetuating this totality. This leads to everything being reduced ultimately to an abstraction. Human essence is abstracted and so is the individual; diverse and different lives assume significance only in their role as grist for the impersonal mill of the all-subsuming dialectic which becomes bigger and greater than everything else.

At the same time, Kierkegaard suggested that the notion of an impersonal "knowing subject" of the type postulated by thinkers of the Hegelian school was symptomatic of a corresponding inclination to forget that the speculative philosopher was himself an "existing human being" whose status and situation imposed necessary limits upon his outlook and cognitive credentials. Far from his viewpoint on the world being from nowhere within it, such a philosopher inescapably belongs to it in his capacity as a finite empirical individual who "sleeps, eats, blows his nose" and who has "to face the future."[10]

It goes without saying that Hegel's worldview is systematized par excellence with determined role for everything and interconnections between various concepts. It goes from abstract to concrete, starting from the most basic abstractions there are – Being and Nothing – and evolving out of them the idea of Becoming. Then Becoming unfolds in myriad ways in different epochs through which the Absolute Spirit realizes itself via the onward march of history. Each of these historical epochs marks the realization of an ideal framework, wherein the postulation of ideas brings into profile their shortcomings and mutual incompatibilities, which leads to one schema of ideas being followed by a higher and better one, till the time the Absolute Spirit realizes itself via this historical process in a single logical comprehension. This self-understanding is the full stop of the evolution, and Hegel thought his own philosophy effectively fulfilled this role. He therefore saw himself as putting to paper God's ideas rather than his own thoughts, where God was another name for the Hegelian idea of the Absolute.

Kierkegaard was disgusted by Hegel's transmutation of God into the Absolute. Christianity was not, as Hegel understood it, a mere stage in the historical unfolding of man's religious and ethical ideas; it was much bigger and more significant than that. It was related to the core question of whether or not one must accept and follow the

[10]Ibid.,p. 132.

divine commands. The Hegelian schema of logical evolution within conceptual categories did not do justice toit, like it did not do justice to many other constituents of the subjective realm. It is not just that the schema did not lead to truths; it rather went one step ahead and muddled the truths. It led to the false conclusion that before the System was formulated, the only viewpoints available for man to comprehend his existence were partial, the System being the final consummation of knowledge. For Kierkegaard, such a position was akin to trying to put oneself in place of God. It was not merely an intellectual error; it gave its followers excuses for casting off all accountability and responsibility, and interfered with their freedom to choose for themselves. For Kierkegaard, human existence was irremediably finite, its standpoint incorrigibly partial and limited. To think otherwise was to succumb to hubris.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript can thus be primarily understood as a critique of Hegelianism. The main problem Kierkegaard deals with here is that as a philosophy, Hegelianism is incomplete, and the *locus standi* of the philosopher here is external to the System. Kierkegaard questions Hegel's over-rational approach. It is not just Hegel's system he is against; any systematic approach to knowledge appears to him as fundamentally flawed. This radical anti-systemic shift makes the *Postscript* a seminal text in the history of philosophy.

Hegel sought to create a comprehensive system of thought based on reason or abstraction. In Hegel's system, human reason evolves from one level of truth to another until absolute truth is reached. In Hegel's view, the Absolute Truth is nothing but God. All existing things are permeated by immanence of God. It is in terms of others that an individual's existence is conceptualized, and it is social interest that man's interest lies. The part is subjugated to the whole. Kierkegaard seeks to negate all these assertions.

Kierkegaard mocks the incompleteness of the System. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* he writes, "Tell me now sincerely, is it entirely finished; for if so I will kneel down before it, even at the risk of ruining a pair of trousers (for on account of the heavy traffic to and from the system, the road has become quite

muddy)."[11]Since the System is not complete, it cannot contain the truth, since truth is related to wholeness.He questions the genesis of the System:

> How does the System begin with the immediate [given]? That is to say, does it begin with it immediately?.... With what do I begin, now that I have abstracted everything?....[W]ith nothing. And it is indeed true, as the system says, that it begins with nothing…. How do I begin with nothing?[12]

In Hegel's system, the thinker – which is Hegel himself – occupies a position external to the System; Kierkegaard takes up issue with this: "But who is this systematic thinker?....It is he who is outside of existence and yet in existence, who is in his eternity forever complete, and yet includes all existence within himself—it is God."[13]In his system, Hegel has kept for himself the role God has in relation with his creation. Any such system however where the thinker has a position external to it comes with some in-built shortcomings.

There are, for instance, drawbacks of the dominance of rational or abstracted thinking. Kierkegaard writes, "Abstract thinking is conducted sub specie æterni [from the point of view of eternity], and therefore disregards the concrete and the temporal, the becoming of existence." Abstraction gives a misleading picture as to the nature of things: "Existing under the guidance of pure thought is like travelling through Denmark and relying on a small map of Europe, on which Denmark is no larger than a dot."[14]The Hegelian worldview has a definite place for everything, which leaves nothing to chance or possibility, and undermines or rather negates the human propensity to make choices for oneself.For Kierkegaard, the significance of choices in framing a person's life and actions cannot be overemphasized. In view of all this, he rejects Hegel's objective, impersonal and absolute truths, and offers another view of truth – truth as subjective.

[11]Ibid., p. 213.

[12]Ibid., p. 231.

[13]Ibid., p. 233.

[14]Ibid., p. 201.

It is chiefly in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that we encounter his most extensive critique of Hegelianism. Yet in many of his other writings too are scattered - in a plethora of backgrounds – his observations on its shortcomings and errors. This signifies that for Kierkegaard, the dangers of Hegelianism were not related merely to its contemporary academic dominance or its acceptance among the thinkers of his age; it was significant because it posited false ideals and those ideals in turn had a corrupting influence on the ethos of his age. It made individuals forsake accountability for the way they lived, behaved and thought, and gave them all a general identity not of their making or choosing. Rather than forge their own identities in response to their needs and personalities, they thought it easier to hide behind movements and trends that rendered them anonymous. It became much more comfortable for them to visualize themselves as nothing but their social roles, and their words or actions very conveniently never strayed far from or antagonized those roles. They followed Hegel in thinking themselves as part of this "world-process" where historical forces determined their existence, rather than they themselves. They lost sight of what it meant "for you and me and him, each for himself, to be human beings"[15] and subsumed themselves under the abstraction of equality which the anonymity and the quantitative nature of the crowd granted them, sacrificing their spirit and freedom in the process.

Kierkegaard did not however despair of them and concentrated all his energies as a writer to oppose all those tendencies and ways of thinking that choked spontaneity, disparaged commitment and fomented passivity. Being a deeply religious thinker, he was aware of the hazards such thinking posed for Christianity; Hegel had been very influential in his objective interpretation and rational justification of the basic Christian themes in his system, and this reflected the complacency of his contemporaries for whom deep thinking, inward conviction, and practical engagement was inimical. They were content to place religion and morality within grand speculative edifices so that they could then live their life undisturbed by them. Kierkegaard called this "levelling:"

> "Levelling" is a process, which not only levels off the distinctions between ranks and offices within society but also affects man's capacity for authentic

[15]Ibid., p. 210.

> subjectivity. Real passionate selfhood, Kierkegaard believes, depends on tensions engendered by dynamic contradictions and oppositions within experience—the sort of tensions, which inspire tragic conflict and make demands on human greatness. In the world produced by levelling, however, all the vital contradictions become ironed out and life becomes "one-dimensional".[16]

Kierkegaard, like Socrates, saw his vocation as that of the gadfly; he wanted to bring awareness to people so that they could wake up to the shortcomings of their situation and jolt them into the realization that they were self-determining agents capable of transformation which was both imperative and desirable. A commentator observes:

> Kierkegaard fears the advent of the world in which there will be a terrifying surplus of theory over practice, in which more energy will be spent on understanding life than living it, and in which the institutionalized organization of ways of satisfying human needs will drown out the real subjective sense of what is actually needful as life is reduced to a 'shadow existence'.[17]

In the next section, I will try to present the case that Nietzsche is on the same page with Kierkegaard as far as the pernicious effects of system-building and objectivism are concerned. In fact, for Nietzsche, valuation to the tune of appreciation or condemnation of life is just not possible. The value of life cannot be grasped because for that one would have to be placed outside life. Nietzsche fervently holds that

> one is in the whole – there is nothing that could judge, measure, compare and condemn our existence, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing and condemning the whole. *But there is nothing outside the whole!*[18]

Moreover to make such a valuation, one ought to know life as well as one, as many, as all in fact, who have lived it. This discredits the philosophers who are concerned with problems in the value of life. They are not equipped or authorized to

[16]Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith,* p. 18.

[17]Ibid.,p. 17.

[18] Nietzsche*, Twilight of the Idols*, p. 36.

do so because they are a contending party. Since their very life is the very object of dispute, this bars humans from putting an estimate on the value of life.

Nietzsche would abhor Hegelianism, for he did not believe that progress is the standard by which history can be evaluated. Rather it is individual endeavours that constitute history. The Hegelian Absolute is a supra-human phantasm designed to safeguard the dual-world metaphysics which has held sway over Western philosophy since the Greeks. However, Nietzsche held that it was not Hegelianism that was the epitome of objectivity and universality; it was rather the religion that Hegel had tried to rationalize, viz. Christianity. And it was the latter that provoked his ire the most.

Nietzsche's Polemic against Christianity

Nietzsche was above all interested in two intellectual traditions: Greek philosophy and Judaeo-Christian thought. These two traditions have served as a treasure-trove for almost every seeker in Western philosophy, but Nietzsche had a special relationship with them. It was the former tradition, and within that, particularly the Pre-Socratics, for which Nietzsche reserved his greatest applause and admiration; and it was the latter tradition, particularly of the period after the death of Jesus, for which he had the most vehement loathing and abhorrence. He upheld the value-system of the former and denounced the values of the latter. However, it should not be thought that Nietzsche found no ills in the Greek and no good in the Christian; we indeed find him appreciating and even praising Christianity in some places. But an overview of his work permits for the aforementioned generalization. The significance of these two traditions in relation to Nietzsche's work cannot be overemphasized. He fervently believes that most of modern values have developed out of one of these two traditions. He judges and condemns/applauds them and postulates his thought as sometimes a continuation, sometimes a reversal and sometimes as an anti-thesis to them.

For Nietzsche, Christianity was the latest and most dangerous stage of the particular way of thinking that began with Socrates. It was Socrates who first postulated the belief in an immortal soul and an absolute truth. Then came into being

the "two-world" system of Plato according to which the everyday material world was an inferior copy of a perfect world *beyond.* These beliefs in transcendent truths and realities blended easily into the subsequent theology of the Christian Church, from where the virus spread into Western philosophy. In Nietzsche's opinion, therefore, the ills of the Western civilization could all be traced back to one root: Christianity.

It is not difficult to read Nietzsche's insistence in his works to characterize Jesus as a Jewish figure and similarly to emphasize that Christianity is in a way a continuation of Jewish values. Consider the following statement:

> … just consider to whom you bow down in Rome itself, today, as though to the embodiment of the highest values – and not just in Rome, but over nearly half the earth, everywhere where man has become tame or wants to become tame, to *three Jews*, as we know, and *one Jewess* (to Jesus of Nazareth, Peter the Fisherman, Paul the Carpet-Weaver and the mother of Jesus mentioned first, whose name was Mary).[19]

At another place, he stresses that "Christianity can only be understood in terms of the soil from which it grew—it is *not* a counter-movement against the Jewish instinct, it is its logical consequence itself, a step further in its awe-inspiring logic."[20]

I just want to mention in passing that Nietzsche's criticism of the Jewish tradition does not lend itself to an anti-Semitic interpretation, as was later fabricated by the Nazis. In fact, Nietzsche had a high regard for Jews and the harshest words for his contemporary anti-Semites. In support, I would like to mention one extract from his *Human, All Too Human* as an example wherein he praises the Jews as

> a people who, not without us all being to blame, have had the most grief laden history of any people and whom we have to thank for the noblest human being (Christ), the purest sage (Spinoza), the mightiest book and the most efficacious moral code in the world. Moreover: in the darkest periods of the Middle Ages, when the cloudbanks of Asia had settled low over Europe, it was the Jewish freethinkers, scholars and physicians who, under the harshest personal constraint, held firmly to the banner of enlightenment and intellectual independence and

[19] Nietzsche*, On the Genealogy of Morality,* pp. 32–3.

[20] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist,* p.122.

> defended Europe against Asia…. If Christianity has done everything to orientalize the occident, Judaism has always played an essential part in occidentalizing it again.[21]

As is evident from this extract, Nietzsche has more problems with the Christian succession of Judaism than with Judaism itself. I have taken the example of Paul to bring out the distinction Nietzsche holds there to be between what he thinks was *really* taught by Jesus and the way in which Christianity *actually* developed after the death of Jesus. Thus Paul here serves as a symbol for the general class of priests whom Nietzsche accuses of distorting the real message of Jesus.

It is evident that like many other thinkers, Nietzsche distinguishes between Jesus himself and the religion that arose out of him. He presents Jesus as a rebel against the traditional order within Judaism for which he had to ultimately pay with his life.

The real message of the Gospels, "the glad tidings," is that any sort of aloofness between God and man henceforth stands absolved; that there is no such thing as Sin, or forgiveness of sin or faith or salvation through faith. Real Christianity constitutes in "a differentmode of life and action" rather than "a different faith." The real Christian is not to resist his enemy in letter or in spirit; he was to embrace all, Jews and Gentiles alike. He would not be angry or despising towards others. He does not require any rites for his relation with God – not even prayer. This was the essence of the life of Jesus. He believed only in *inner facts* as "truths"; the rest comprised only of signs, as opportunities for parables. He preached nothing but the *evangelical mode of life.* By observing this mode of life, one feels as if "in Heaven," one feels "eternal," and this only is "Salvation." The "Kingdom of Heaven" is a state of the heart; "*it is everywhere, it is nowhere.*"[22] All these concepts were thus in essence psychological; they had no ontological existence. Thus "the history of Christianity—and that beginning in fact with the death on the cross—is the history of the step by step, ever cruder misunderstanding of an *original* symbolism."[23]

---

[21] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, pp. 174–5.

[22] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p.136

[23] Ibid., p. 137.

The misunderstanding began with the incident of the Crucifixion itself. The despicable manner of death of Jesus perplexed his followers. They suspected, rather willed that there must be some higher meaning to it all lest their cause be refuted. Jesus had died as an example of freedom and without resentment; it was in this that the higher meaning lay. The disciples however were ill-equipped to grasp such subtle truths. True disciples would have had either "forgiven" or "offered" themselves for a similar death. But the disciples chose precisely the most unevangelical feeling: *revenge.* The death of Jesus bore in them a feeling of revolt against established order; they in turn understood Jesus too, as "in revolt against established order." In the words of Nietzsche, "Only now was all the contempt and bitterness toward the Pharisees worked into the type of the master—they made a Pharisee and theologian out of him thereby!"[24]

Nietzsche asserts that as far as the true Christianity is concerned, Jesus was the first and the last Christian. The "written" gospels are nothing but an overturning of the "lived" gospel. In the former, Jesus was elevated in a manner beyond all reason, and separated from his fellow-people, although he himself did not claim any privilege. The death of Jesus is misinterpreted as "the sacrifice of the innocent for the sins of the guilty," although Jesus had done away with the concept "guilt" by denying any gulf between God and man. Similar misunderstandings followed:

> And from then on there entered into the type of the Saviour step by step: the doctrine on judgment and on the Second Coming, the doctrine on death as an expiatory death, the doctrine on the *Resurrection*, with which the whole concept of "blessedness," the whole and sole reality of the Evangel, is juggled away—in favour of a condition *after* death![25]

Thus Nietzsche fights against the way in which Christianity has become an ideology set forth by institutions like churches. He thinks that the life of Jesus is misrepresented by the Church. The early Christians, in order to exert themselves over the gullible masses, made a martyr of Jesus and presented his life as the meta-narrative through which mankind could redeem itself. He complains:

[24] Ibid., p. 141.33

[25]Ibid., p. 142.

> The Church later falsified even the history of mankind into the prehistory of Christianity.... The type of the Savior, the doctrine, the practice, the death, the meaning of the death, even the aftermath of the death—nothing remained untouched, nothing remained even close to the reality. Paul simply shifted the emphasis of that whole existence *beyond* this existence—in the *lie* of the "resurrected" Jesus. He really could not use the life of the Savior—he had need of the death on the cross *and* something else besides...[26]

The Christians are equally guilty of propagating *life-denying* ideals under the pretext of service to Christianity. Nietzsche here sees himself in the role of a Prophet who exposes the hollowness of all such pretentions and the self-deception to which they lead. He has to wake up his fellow men, who are still sleeping, or more aptly are pretending to sleep.

Nietzsche thought that Europe had turned against Christianity a long time ago but did not have the heart for the confession to this purpose. It therefore continued to pay lip-service to it as an ideal while actually governing its life by quite other considerations. He saw its manifestation in the hypocritical and lukewarm attitude towards religion on the part of the Christians themselves, an attitude which he regarded as infinitely more demoralizing than honest downright atheism. To call ourselves Christians, when the whole of our life is one continuous refutation of Christianity in practice is just the height of indecency and also of moral cowardice at its worst, which Nietzsche could not but despise. He laments:

> Our age is *aware.... And here begins my disgust*…. Even with the most modest claim to integrity one *must* know today that a theologian, a priest, a pope, with every sentence he speaks, not only errs, but lies.... that there is no "God" anymore, no "sins," no "Saviour"—that "free will," "moral world-order" are *lies*…. All the concepts of the Church are recognized for what they are, the most *malicious* counterfeiting there is, for the purpose of *devaluing* nature and natural values; the priest himself is recognized for what he is, the most dangerous kind of parasite…We know, our *conscience* knows it today—,*what*those sinister inventions of the priest and the Church are generally worth, to what end they have served…. Everybody knows this: *and in spite of this everythingremains as before*…. every practice of every moment, every instinct, every valuation which

[26]Ibid., p. 143.

> becomes *deed* is today anti-Christian*:* What a *monstrosity of falsity* the modern man must be, that in spite of this he is still *not ashamed* to call himself a Christian![27]

Nietzsche grasps the fact that everything has changed in the event of the "Death of God." The truth of Christian morality was incumbent upon the truth of the Christian God. Now that God is no longer there, there is no point of adhering to Christian morality. It is time for man to accept his new responsibilities as the only divinity in the universe. The old values have lost their force. Nothing beyond man is now available to give him new values. He must therefore give them to himself. But men have to be convinced that the old values are worthless before they will consider new ones, and it is precisely this task that Nietzsche sets out to do. It is to his criticism of successive Christian ideals that we now turn.

The Church and the philosophers have permeated the *lie* of "a moral order of the universe" which means

> That there is, once and for all, a will of God as to what man is to do and what he is not to do; that the value of a people, of an individual himself, is measured according to how much or how little the will of God is obeyed; that in the fate of a people, in an individual himself, the will of God proves to be *commanding,* that is, punishing and rewarding, according to the degree of obedience.[28]

Nietzsche seeks to expose this lie by putting everywhere in the place of God the name of the priest – *a parasitical man who can flourish only at the cost of all the healthy elements of life.*[29] The "kingdom of God" is merely the state in which the priest determines the value of things; the means whereby such a state is to be achieved is called by him the "will of God." Disobedience to God, that is to say, the priest, receives the name of "sin." The ways of "reconciliation with God" are nothing but measures devised to render subordination to priesthood all the more fundamental. The priest thus *lives upon* sins, for they are a prerequisite to his monopoly to *save.* The reality of religion is thus exposed, as exemplified by this phrase of Nietzsche:

[27]Ibid., pp. 138–9.

[28]Ibid.,p. 125.

[29]Ibid., pp. 153, 174.

"Highest precept: "God forgives those who do penance"—in plain English: *those who subjectthemselves to the priest.*"[30]

This is achieved by the priests through the agency of concepts like "sin" and "free will." For Nietzsche, sin is antithetical to science. He defines science as *the healthy concept of cause and effect.* The priest can have his power only under a false causal schema and so he detests science. Happiness, energy and leisure are a prerequisite for scientific pursuit, so the priest devised a notion to make man unhappy – the notion of sin. Sin was constituted from a mishmash of the notion of guilt and punishment, including the doctrine of grace, of salvation and of forgiveness. Nietzsche holds all these notions as violations of man's sense of causality. He warns:

> When the natural results of a deed are no longer "natural," but thought to be caused by the concept-ghosts of superstition, by "God," by "spirits," by "souls" as merely "moral" consequences, as reward, penalty, a sign of affirmation, an aid to education, then the precondition for knowledge is destroyed—then *the greatest crime against humanity has been committed.*[31]

Man was here told to divert his gaze from outwards to inwards; he was discouraged to inquire into the nature of things; he was advised against doctors and in favour of the Saviour! In short, all the propaganda of the priest was directed towards one end: *to make science, culture, every elevation and distinction of mankind impossible!*[32]

Thus Christianity represents a war against the higher type of man, the strong man. It sides with everything that is weak and low and has made an *ideal* out of opposing the self-preservative instincts of strong life. The Christian worldview is un-real to its very core; it compares unfavourably even with the world of dreams. The latter "reflects" reality, whereas the former falsifies, depreciates and denies it. In taking the concept "nature" as antithetical to the concept "God," Christianity made way for the slandering and belittling of nature. What else is nature than another name for reality? And what else is the Christian philosophy other than *the expression of*

[30]Ibid., p. 127.

[31]Ibid., pp. 153–4.

[32]Ibid., p. 154.

profound discomfiture in the presence of reality? The Christian worldview thus offers an insight into the nature of Christian priest. Nietzsche asks, "Who alone has reasons *to lie his way* out of reality? He who *suffers* from it. But to suffer from reality means to be a *failed* reality."[33]

Nietzsche admonishes the theologians for taking a false and dishonest stand in relation to everything. Their *faith* is nothing but the process of shutting one's eyes so as *not to suffer at the sight of incurable falsity.* Not only do they make this faulty view into a moral virtue, but they go one step further in proclaiming this view as the only *valuable* view. Wherever theology is in ascendancy, valuations are turned upside down, and "what is most destructive to life is here called "true," what exalts, elevates, affirms, justifies, makes triumphant, that is called "false"."[34]

Everything preached by the Christian priests has been an abomination of the natural: contempt towards all the principal instincts of life, the postulation of a false "soul" so as to be able to defy the body, the declaration of sex – the very prerequisite of life – as impure, and the seeing of a higher moral value in the typical signs of decline, i.e. in altruistic instincts. This morality of self-renunciation which has been made into morality *per se* is a will to nothingness; it is anti-life! For Nietzsche, "The morality of unselfing oneself is the morality of decline par excellence, the fact that 'I am being destroyed' translated into the imperative: 'you *should* all be destroyed'—and *not only* into the imperative!"[35]

Nietzsche expresses the hope that this degeneration has not yet become an epidemic, that it is still limited to the parasitical priests who saw in Christian morality a staircase to the podium of power. They and the philosophers (he calls them *priests in disguise*) have made a decadent morality into morality *per se.* A diseased organ is inimical to the well-being of the whole body, and so a good physiologist would insist upon its removal without any pity. But the priest protects and preserves precisely that which is degenerate in mankind. Nietzsche bitterly opposes this attitude: "If you distract from the seriousness of the self-preservation, the energy increase of the body,

[33]Ibid., p. 114.

[34]Ibid., p. 109.

[35] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 94.

in other words of life, if you construct an ideal out of anaemia, "the salvation of the soul" out of contempt for the body, what else is that if not a *recipe* for *décadence*?"[36]

Nietzsche thus accuses Christianity of turning into an ideal the sick, decadent man. The triumph of Christianity was not due to the corruption of the noble Roman aristocracy; it was rather due to the assembly into the Christian ranks of all the disinherited forms of life from everywhere who won because of their sheer number! And the Christian doctrine is based upon the resentment of these masses against the noble ones; the rancour of the sick against the healthy! This gives an insight into the ulterior motive of the symbol that is the Christian cross: "All that suffers, all that hangs on the cross, is *divine*.... We all hang on the cross, therefore *we* are divine.... We alone are divine."[37]

What are the Christians promised in return for this suffering? The fable of "Personal Immortality." It is important to note how Nietzsche offers a criticism of this doctrine based not on its falsity, but its consequences. Firstly it represents a morbid shift of the centre of gravity of life from existence to non-existence. Henceforth every instinct that promotes life is undervalued. "Better future" as an incentive is laid waste. The very meaning of life is construed as one with no justification in life. Public spirit, social hierarchy, cooperation, and confidence – all go to the dogs. Secondly, the doctrine of personal immortality fosters a lie: the equality of all. It preaches that everybody is entitled to an equal rank as an "immortal soul," that the "salvation" of each individual has equal importance. This "miserable flattery of personal vanity" has helped Christianity garner the following of the crass multitude who have been lured by its promises. Nietzsche believes that the feeling of reverence and distance between man and man is the prerequisite of all growth; Christianity, using the resentment of the masses as its weapon, has waged a war on precisely this *pathos of distance.* And its influence shows even in the political sphere where the aristocratic values are constantly being undermined by the poison of the lie "equal rights for all" as well as by the doctrine of "privilege of the greatest number."

[36]Ibid., p. 63.

[37] Nietzsche*, The Antichrist,* p. 157.

Thus we see that Nietzsche's attack on Christianity is focused more on the harmful nature of Christian ideals rather than their falseness. It is to the use these values are put to by the priests that he is objecting. This explains the paradox wherein in his anti-Christian campaign, he has expressed in many places, his admiration for the personality of Christ as well as for sincere Christian ascetics. He says in one of his aphorisms:

> I have every respect for the ascetic ideal *in so far as it is honest*! so long as it believes in itself and does not tell us bad jokes! But I dislike all these coquettish bedbugs, with their insatiable ambition to smell out infinity until finally infinity smells of bedbugs.[38]

Nietzsche observes that this ascetic mode of valuation is not typical of a particular age; ascetic ideals are to be found across time and culture. Indeed, he finds them in the thinkers of his own age, in Kant, for example. Nietzsche frequently reveals a vehemently critical attitude towards those philosophers who seek to develop objective and universal theoretical systems. He accuses Kant with his invention of practical reason of postulating universal and absolute moral laws that were supposed to be eternally true and therefore compulsory for everyone. It is Nietzsche's firm belief that existence is not "systematic" and hence it cannot be systematized. We can take this as the starting point to understand his divergence from Kant.

The chief aspects of Kantian philosophy which come under Nietzsche's criticism are to be found in Kantian epistemology and moral theory. First of all, Nietzsche takes contention with Kant's claim that one can derive the objectivity of our knowledge of the *a priori* from its necessity. The *a priori* categories that are granted universal validity by Kant, who thereby bestows objectivity on them too, are uncovered by Nietzsche as having everything to do with human interests and aspirations; therefore he accords no absolute necessity or universal validity to them. If they are *a priori* in any way, they must be psychologically *a priori.* Human beings are the kind of animals that are in need of regulative beliefs. All our views of the world are no more than attempts to schematize and organize experience for the sake of control and power over

[38] Nietzsche*, On the Genealogy of Morality,* p. 117.

our environment. Therefore, they only have a pragmatic necessity if they have one. Hence

> the time has finally come to replace the Kantian question "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?" with another question, "Why is the belief in such judgments *necessary*?" – to realize, in other words, that such judgments must be *believed* true for the purpose of preserving beings of our type; which is why these judgments could of course still be *false*![39]

Nietzsche does not take kindly to Kant's notion of the "thing in itself" either. In the section "How the 'True World' ultimately became a fable" in his *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche stresses that if the real world is not attained, then it is unknown. Therefore there is no duty to such a world and no consolation derived from it. In Kant's assertion of a noumenal reality, Nietzsche sees a hidden moral agenda which is reminiscent to him of Platonic metaphysics. In Kantianism, Plato's separation between the world of experience and the world of concepts is maintained, which in Nietzsche's view is a damaging fantasy, since it tempts us to believe that there is a reality beyond our lived concrete concerns. That is why for him

> There is no sense in spinning yarns about another world, provided, of course, that we do not possess a mighty instinct which urges us to slander, belittle, and cast suspicion upon this life: in this case we should be avenging ourselves on this life with the phantasmagoria of 'another', of a 'better' life.[40]

Thus the Kantian thing in itself is nothing more than a vestige of the conceptual fetishism that has infected the philosophical tradition since the time of Socrates.

Nietzsche accuses Kant of being an instrument of Christian theology, who uses his faith in rational thought and autonomy to reinforce Christian ethical beliefs. He does not believe that Kant's philosophy in any way posed a danger to Christianity; he rather considers it as the sublimation of the latter. By proving that the noumenon or the world beyond was not demonstrable, that in effect it was beyond the reaches of reason, Kant actually rendered it no longer refutable. Thus an utterly false world was declared

[39]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 13.

[40]Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 21.

to be a reality. That is why Nietzsche calls Kant's success as merely a "theologian's success."

Nietzsche is against the idea of *categorical imperative* as a general/universal virtue. Morality for Nietzsche, is not about universality, for morals are always a matter of interest and hence particularity. His definition of a virtue is that which constitutes a condition of our life, which is cultivated in response to *our* most personal requirements. It is only such virtues that are in conformity with the most fundamental laws of preservation and growth. He accuses Kant of *devitalizing* life by putting forward the notion of an impersonal feeling of duty, of "Goodness in itself." Kant would lead us to a decadent future. Nietzsche asks: "What destroys more quickly than to work, to think, to feel without inner necessity, without a deep personal choice, without *pleasure*? As an automaton of "duty"? It is straightaway the *recipe* to *décadence,* to idiocy even."[41]On the contrary, for Nietzsche, an action which is spurred by the instinct of life produces happiness and that happiness alone proves it to be a proper action and thus is its justification.

Nietzsche condemns Kant's concept of "practical reason" as a hypocritical invention. It is a kind of reason which in certain circumstances allows for irrationality, particularly in matters moral. The Kantian system ensures that

> all the highest questions, all the highest problems of value, are beyond human reason.... Why did God give man revelation?.... Man is not *capable* of knowing good and evil by himself, therefore God taught him His will.... Moral: the priest does *not* lie—the question of "true" or "untrue" does not *exist* in those things of which the priest speaks; these things do not permit any lying at all. For in order to lie, one must be able to decide *what* is true here. But that is just what man is not *able* to do; the priest is thus only the mouthpiece of God.[42]

Thus the priest is beyond the pale of reasonable valuations; he stands too high for science! And until now it is he who has been formulating what is true and what is false.

[41] Nietzsche*, The Antichrist,* p. 110.

[42]Ibid., p. 162.

In short, Kant, no less than Christian metaphysics, conceals moral principles in a realm beyond experience and thus tucks them away safely beyond criticism. He is an illustration of Nietzsche's thesis that almost everywhere the philosopher is a further development of the priestly type.

Nietzsche's concern is that the way in which the modern man thinks, feels and acts is still rooted deeply in Christian-Platonic-Kantian philosophy. Through claims to transcendence, the Christian-Platonic tradition renders the value of this world derivative, as finding the source of its value in a superior transcendent world – heaven, God, the forms, the ideal communist utopia. We can see even in science thatthe tradition propagates a desire and a longing for an absolute, fixed, universal, consistent and incorrigible truth. The impossibility of achieving a universal, objective, single truth for all humankind ultimately wears us out and leads us to reject truth and value of *any* kind – even of a more human, provisional and partial kind. In short, Christian-Platonic culture leads us to self-hating, life-thwarting, world-consuming nihilism.

Philosophy as Autobiography

In one of his essays, F.C.S. Schiller provides an important insight into the nature of philosophical workmanship. Distinguishing philosophers from scientists, he observes the following regarding the relationship of philosophers and their philosophy:

> Actually every philosophy was the offspring, the legitimate offspring, of an idiosyncrasy, and the history and psychology of its author had far more to do with its development....The naive student insists on viewing the system from the outside, as a logical structure, and not as a psychological process extending over a lifetime. And he thereby throws away, or loses, the key to understanding.[43]

With regards to the above, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can – with few reservations – be called the most interesting philosophers of the nineteenth century. Their philosophies present resemblances and contrasts too significant to remain

[43] Schiller, *Must Philosophers Disagree?,* pp. 10–11.

unnoticed – betraying influences from their respective lives – with implications evident enough to merit independent research. This may however seem trivial, as no thinker of substantial worth can fail to be influenced or moulded in his thoughts by his own life or those of others around him, as thinkers before them have also attested.[44] The difference, however, between this pair and the thinkers preceding them seems to be the importance given by them to and their admittance of the role played by the thinker's passions, sentiments, prejudices, relationships, ambitions – indeed his total outer and inner circumstances – in moulding and directing his thoughts into the form of a philosophy.

The history of Western philosophy hitherto shows itself to be dominated by a rational approach towards issues. The philosopher's ideal has been a dispassionate, impartial and detached analysis/synthesis, and any intrusion of one's personal emotions or attitudes is seen as a tampering with the truth, which is held to be universal, objective and abstract. The tendency to uphold the rational order of things – a rational totality encompassing the external as well as the internal world – comes to its fruition in Hegel with his dictum, "The real is rational, and the rational is real."[45]Kierkegaard and Nietzsche announce the collapse of this edifice with their introduction into contemporary philosophy of such notions as "the concrete individual," "the dilemma of choice," "indirect communication," "subjective truth," "value of suffering" and so on. This section aims to inquire to what extent such notions were composed out of the very rubrics of their own lives. It also purports to highlight their admission of consciously adopting this peculiar and highly personal way of philosophizing, and their arguments in favour of its being superior to the dominant rational approach characterized by impersonality and detachment. It is this self-conscious embrace of their personality and its overflow into their thought that distinguishes them not only from most preceding thinkers but many successors as well. They believe that

[44] Fichte, for example, says in his *The Science of Knowledge, "*What sort of philosophy one chooses depends, therefore, on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we accept or reject as we wish; it is rather a thing animated by the soul of the person who holds it." See Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge,* p.16.

[45] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 20.

> …all great problems demand great love, and of that only the strong who have a firm grip on themselves are capable. It makes the most telling difference…whether a thinker has a personal relationship with his problems, finding in them his destiny, his distress and his great happiness, or an 'impersonal' one, merely touching them with the antennae of cold, curious thought.[46]

With Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, moreover, philosophy is not simply a matter of "what to say." "How to say" is equally important, if not more. Philosophers prior to them appear to write and tone their thoughts in the dry, dispassionate manner that characterizes academia. They bring with them a new way of writing – characterized by a plethora of literary devices such as aphorisms, pseudonyms, contrarieties, hyperbole, rhetoric etc. Part of this section tries to locate the reasons for the same in the individual circumstances of each of them, strengthening the case of the main argument of the section – that with these two thinkers, philosophy becomes autobiographical. It is characterized by self-referentiality not only in content, but in structure too.

In his *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche casts an accusatory look at the existing state of philosophy and its practitioners. He finds them obsessed with logic and reason, and detects in them the pretension of objectivity. He calls their bluff:

> They all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic… while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an "inspiration" or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact. They are all advocates who do not want to be seen as such; for the most part, in fact, they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as "truths."[47]

Nietzsche questions the time-honoured understanding of philosophy as a search for truth. He negates that philosophers are driven by a "drive to knowledge." Instead, "every drive craves mastery and *this* leads it to try philosophizing." Thus there is "absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals

[46] Furness, "Introduction," *Human, All Too Human,* p. xiv.

[47] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 8.

bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is* – which means, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand with respect to each other."[48]

Kierkegaard launches a somewhat similar attack on the dominant philosophy of his time – Hegelianism for its excessive abstractions. He charges the Hegelians with absorbing themselves in a "system" of pure thought and forgetting the importance of "the existing individual," raising him above temporal concerns into "pure being." He observes:

> Being a human being has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher mistakes himself for humankind, which makes him something infinitely great and also nothing at all.[49]

Actual human existence cannot afford a disinterested stance – humans are constantly confronted with the demands of choosing for themselves in divergent concrete situations, a sphere Kierkegaard terms "the ethical." Kierkegaard calls for a more subjective, closer-to-ground approach as a remedy.

> While, then, the Hegelian philosophy distractedly goes ahead and becomes a system for life, and what is more, is finished – without having an ethics (exactly where life belongs), a more simple-minded philosophy, propounded by someone existing for the existing, will especially bring the ethical to light.[50]

Thus philosophers do little more than rationalizing their prejudices; they merely furnish a rationale for what they happen to believe already. Their philosophy is autobiographical, even if accidentally: their dispassionate thought is actually unconscious confession. This justifies the more open approach of philosophers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who engage themselves much more with what they write, how they write and who they write for.

In continuance of the above, it would not be out of order to take a biographical peek into the lives of these two thinkers and inquire how the kernel of their thought came to be moulded by the circumstances of their life. In case of Kierkegaard, one

[48]Ibid., p.9.

[49]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p. 106.

[50]Ibid., p.103.

does well to begin with his father. The senior Kierkegaard was a more than dominant influence on young Søren's life. Kierkegaard does not mention his mother in his writings, but the shadow of his father looms large. His early education happened at home directly at the hands of his father whose stern discipline and austere Christian instruction often bordered on the excess. Despite being a devout Christian, his father was full of religious guilt, despair and melancholia, which was inherited by Kierkegaard to a considerable extent and left a lasting and unpleasant stamp on his life.[51]

The second event of importance in his life was a romantic one. He fell in love with Regine Olsen and became engaged to her. But before marriage could happen, his self-doubts, his depressive bouts and his vocation to become a serious writer led him to call off the engagement. To save her from public scandal, he pretended to act like a philandering bachelor, and they ultimately parted. Throughout his life he grappled with the ifs and buts of this "choice." He neither married nor loved another; he could never forget her, and left her everything in his will in the end.

It is not surprising therefore that the themes of "choice" and "sacrifice" serve as foundations to the seminal works of Kierkegaard. His retelling of the story of Abraham and Isaac in his *Fear and Trembling* employs these themes passionately, and commentators have pointed this out:

> In one respect, Kierkegaard was sacrificing Regine, who obviously wanted the marriage; in another he was sacrificing himself, since he obviously wanted Regine; and in yet another he perhaps felt that his whole life had been sacrificed through his father (Abraham?), at least ruined as far as being healthily adapted in mind as well as body to accepting the responsibilities and pleasures of family life and a solid job is concerned, and therefore a preparation for some higher mission…In his journals he wrote that if he had had faith – faith for this life – he

[51] An incident of note in his father's life was when as a young man, he was a poor young shepherd in a village, he had despaired of his hardships and had cursed God. Despite the fact that his status improved considerably in his later life, his obsession with his guilt and his apprehension of a divine revenge on him and his family pushed him into melancholia. Things were not helped by the constant deaths in the family, of his first wife, of his four children and then of his second wife, Kierkegaard's mother. Kierkegaard inherited the anxiety and remained convinced throughout the major part of his life that he would also die young. For details, see Watts, *Kierkegaard*, 13–30.

> would have stayed with Regine. But that too would have required sacrifice, at least of his career as a writer and all that his life had seemed to be a preparation for.... As an expert psychologist Kierkegaard was well able to sort out those possible constructions of his situations for himself, and to question the corresponding motives, as well as his own motives for adopting any of them.[52]

The last sentence in effect summarizes what he achieves in *Fear and Trembling,* through imagining different situations for Abraham and Isaac, and getting the readers to participate and see that there is no easy answer, just as there wasn't in his own case.

Autobiographical elements can be discerned even in his *Either/Or* where he introduces the two approaches to life, namely the aesthetic and the ethical, which different individuals are called upon to choose at various points in life. On this reading, the former represents the "Either," the life of sensual pleasures that Kierkegaard had lived in his youth and would have had to sacrifice in the event of his marriage."Or" symbolizes the ethical, building the case for marriage and the acceptance of social responsibilities that would follow in its wake. The work is thus seen as a literary representation of Kierkegaard's internal dilemma; its philosophical skin scarcely concealing the agony he had to face making the most important choice in his life.[53]

His other works such as *Repitition* and *Philosophical Crumbs* inquire whether it is possible to rescue meaning from great loss. The question whether we have the sufficient resources to dispel our despair on our own or not, again, has undeniable personal undertones which will not be lost on a serious reader of Kierkegaard.

When one moves to Nietzsche's life, the first interaction significant for understanding his persona is his friendship with the composer Richard Wagner, and their subsequent falling out. Nietzsche was influenced by the latter's music, and both shared an avid interest in the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Wagner fulfilled the role of a father figure in his life and Nietzsche held him in great awe, eulogizing him in *The Birth of Tragedy*. After some time though, Nietzsche was disenchanted with Wagner because of his anti-Semitism and an excess of Christian sentimentality in his new

[52]Hannay, "Introduction," *Fear and Trembling,* p. 35.

[53]Hannay, "Introduction*," Either/Or*, pp. 15–19.

works, and they had a painful breakup. Wagner was a psychological specimen par excellence – an artistic genius, a megalomaniac who lived out his fantasies to the full, a man seemingly "beyond good and evil." He was what Nietzsche was not, including a supremely gifted composer.[54] Nietzsche realized the danger Wagner was for his individuality and renounced him. Wagner's shadow, however, kept lurking in Nietzsche's works, and he wrote two critical works addressing their relationship in particular, and utilized the insights gained by him during his comradeship with Wagner, especially in his discussions of 'superior men.' He reminisces:

> I loved and admired Richard Wagner more than anyone else, and if he hadn't in the end had the bad taste - or the sad compulsion - to throw in his lot with a type of 'spirits' quite impossible for me, with his disciples the Wagnerians, then I would have had no reason to bid him farewell while he still lived: him, the deepest and most audacious, as well as the most misunderstood of all these hard-to-understand men of today, the encounter with whom has benefited my understanding more than any other encounter.[55]

Commentators are of the opinion that considering his lack of social experience and relationships, Nietzsche's profound psychological knowledge came primarily from two sources: his penetrating knowledge of himself (attested by none other than Freud), and his interactive study of Wagner.[56]It is most probably from Wagner and Goethe that he evolved his constantly-recurring trope of "free spirits," the "Overman" and the "new philosopher."

Sample this thinly veiled reference to Wagner in *The Gay Science*:

> ''Giving style" to one's character is exercised by those who see all the strengths and weaknesses of their own natures and then comprehend them in an artistic plan…Here the ugly which could not have been removed is hidden; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime…For one thing is needful: that a human being attain his satisfaction with himself.[57]

---

[54] Nietzsche was something of a frustrated musician and composer.

[55]Nietzsche*, Writings from the Late Notebooks,* p. 70.

[56]Ibid.,pp. 18–19.

[57] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* pp. 163–4.

This is not entirely different from his description of the true philosopher, whom he wants to

> …run through the range of human values and value feelings and *be able* to gaze with many eyes and consciences from the heights into every distance, from the depths up to every height, from the corner onto every expanse. But all these are only preconditions for his task: the task itself has another will, – it calls for him to *create values*.[58]

Another factor of great influence in Nietzsche's life was his constant ill-health and a deep loneliness. He was by most accounts a syphilitic, he suffered grave injuries during his required military service, he was a victim of near blindness and severe migraines his whole life which at times rendered him a cripple. He was forced to seek health in boarding houses across Switzerland to Italy, with little steadiness or leisure. In addition, he had few friends, no partners, little riches, and most tragically, few readers. All this took a toll on him and contributed to his eventual mental collapse. But before succumbing to the same, Nietzsche utilized his extraordinary talent and determination to turn the disadvantage on its head; rather than denying them, he embraced suffering and loneliness and made them dominant themes in his work. He offers penetrating insights on suffering, whether physiological or psychological, and even offers a justification for it:

> I have often asked myself whether I am not more heavily obligated to the hardest years of my life than to any others. As my inmost nature teaches me, whatever is necessary…is also the useful par excellence: one should not only bear it, one should love it. Amor fati: that is my inmost nature. And as for my long sickness, do I not owe it indescribably more than I owe to my health? I owe it a higher health, one which is made stronger by whatever does not kill it. I also owe my philosophy to it. Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit…Only great pain - pain which takes its time – only this forces us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths and to put away all trust, all good-naturedness, all that would veil all mildness, all that is medium - things in which formerly we may have

[58] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil,* p. 105.

found our humanity. I doubt that such a pain makes us "better," but I know that it makes us more profound.[59]

Leading by his own example, Nietzsche expounds in his various works how suffering can be turned into an advantage.[60] Ill health renders him an optimist because he cannot afford the pessimistic corollaries of destitution and discouragement. Sickness prevents him from making a mistake, leading him onwards in small, but sure steps; he has the luxury of leisure and patience because of it. One notices here how he turns a personal tragedy into something inspiring and profoundly meaningful at the same time. It is not a mere coincidence that it took such an invalid to come up with the idea of the "Overman."

Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche here come across as auto-therapists, they refuse to seek invulnerability. They accept the suffering, live with it**,** and embrace it even if it implies they have to pay dearly – to live a lonely life, to live for ideas. They transfigure the scrap metal into gold as it were, paying an exorbitant price in the process.

Before concluding, it would not be out of place to pay a visit to some stylistic elements in the writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche which have been pointed out as resulting directly or indirectly out of their life events. If one were to identify one thing that characterizes Kierkegaard's writings, it would have to be his use of pseudonyms for his more philosophical works. The use of the epithet "philosophical" here is meant to distinguish these works from his other writings, namely the twenty odd *Edifying Discourses*, which are religious in character and which were published in his own name. Otherwise the latter are full of philosophical insights and have finally begun to receive the attention due to them.[61] In these, Kierkegaard directly communicates with his readers and instructs them in the religious way of life as he sees it. The former, however, use "indirect communication," as he calls it, and an epitome of indirectness it is! Kierkegaard weaves a web of pseudonymous authorship here that sometimes

[59] Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche,* p. 680.

[60]Nieztsche, *Ecce Homo,* p. 13.

[61]Mcdonald, "Recent Developments in Scholarship on Key Existentialists," *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, pp. 282–7.

goes into layers. An example is the preface to his famous *Diary of a Seducer,* which is a part of his first major work *Either/Or* (itself presented as edited by one Victor Eremita, meaning "the victorious hermit"),[62] in which

> …'A' states that he is the editor of this diary, which he stole from a friend called Johannes. Victor Eremita, however, suggests that in fact, 'Johannes the Seducer' is probably just a name that 'A' has invented and that A's editorial claim is simply an 'old novelist's trick.' Then the whole issue of the manuscript's authorship is complicated further when, in the preface to the entire work, Victor Eremita suggests that his own editorial claims may also be a similar disguise.[63]

Why does Kierkegaard engage in this pseudonymous play? It is because for him, "indirect communication" is the only form of communication that can help another person in the realization of "subjective truth," direct communication being effective only in the communication of factual information. Kierkegaard observes that most people do not want to change, and hence choose to ignore direct exhortations, or even brand the direct critic as a threat to their selfhood. He observes, "…an illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect means can it be radically removed…That is, one must approach from behind the person who is under such an illusion."[64] He, therefore, imaginatively leads his readers into various points of view and offers them insights into their own reasons for settling down for particular ways of existence, in the process creating avenues to make possible their exit from such enclosures. The use of pseudonyms aids him greatly in this process, first preventing his work from being treated as another "system" coming from a recognized "authority," and secondly, distancing him from his works, allowing him more freedom in saying what he wants to. The indirect approach preserves the integrity and freedom of choice of the readers, because they have decided for themselves based on their own

[62]Similarly, *Repetition* is narrated by one ConstantinConstantinus (exemplifying repetition in his very name), *Fear and Trembling* is authored by one Johannes de Silentio or 'John the Silent' (emphasizing silence or indirect communiaction), *Philosophical Crumbs* by Johannes Climacus or 'John the Climber' (underlining a step-by-step approach to a higher plane from the lower), *The Concept of Anxiety* by VigiliusHaufniensis or 'Watchman of Copenhagen' (a funny name adapted as a contrast to the daunting theme of the book), and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* again by Johannes Climacus.

[63] Watts, *Kierkegaard,* p.66.

[64] Kierkegaard, *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, p.24.

understanding and not under any external pressure. This is somewhat similar to the Socratic process, which cannot be a mere coincidence, for Kierkegaard was greatly influenced by Socrates.

Beside this philosophical explanation, however, runs an undercurrent of biographical reasons. Kierkegaard's father was a strict disciplinarian and an austere man. He figured his son's remarkable intellect, and instructed him at home from quite a young age. A biographer tells us

> …rather than just taking him on ordinary walks through the streets of Copenhagen, Søren's father would guide him on numerous sightseeing trips, but without ever leaving the house, for these journeys took place only in the imagination, in the family home. Later, Søren would be asked to describe, with meticulous attention to detail, the surrounding panorama of his 'virtual reality' experiences.[65]

It is not difficult to link this manner of early instruction with its after-effects one sees in Kierkegaard's philosophical method, with the same resort to imagination and creativity. Add to this his father's instructions to try to come third in his class – not first or second – so as not to draw attention to himself, and one gets an insight into the later pseudonymous barricading between him and his audience. It is important to note here, however, that in using pseudonyms, it was not Kierkegaard's primary aim to conceal who he was, for his more learned readers would have known who the actual writer was. In one case, rather he wished his identity to be known despite the pseudonym.[66] The primary aim of his pseudonymous characters was to work not unlike the fictional people in a novel, with their own characteristics and viewpoints, and he expected his readers to find mirrored in them aspects of their own life, leading to inward reflection.

---

[65] Watts, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 16–17.

[66] Kierkegaard wrote *The Diary of the Seducer* as a veiled message to Regine Olsen – a girl he was going to marry but suddenly broke up with – expressing his thoughts and feelings about their relation. In spite of his assuming a pseudonymous identity, it seems obvious that he wanted her to know who it was written for, since it mirrors the contours of their relationship and tries somewhat to provide a rationale to the seducer's actions.

If pseudonymity and indirect communication are to be the symbolic keystones of Kierkegaardian authorship, in Nietzsche's case this honour has to be given to his employment of the "aphorism" as a means of philosophical communication. In the early years of his career, Nietzsche wrote mostly essays, but later he switched on to writing aphorisms – ranging from a minimum of two-three lines to a maximum of two-three pages.[67] Towards the end of his career, he took up the essay again. For most part Nietzsche writes simply yet profoundly – because much of his work is presented in aphoristic style, it is easy to assume that the idea is simple, yet it more than often turns out to be deep and complex. He appreciates the aphorism for its "eternity:"

> A good aphorism is too hard for the teeth of time and whole millennia cannot consume it, even though it serves to nourish every age: it is thus the great paradox of literature, the imperishable in the midst of change, the food that is always in season, like salt - though, unlike salt, it never loses its savour.[68]

In addition, each aphorism can be understood in itself, thus avoiding the pitfalls and the monotony of a long winded argument. He also values the aphoristic style because he wants to make his readers work, not unlike Kierkegaard. He makes it clear that mere reading cannot crack open the heart of an aphorism; it has to be understood. Therefore an aphorism is not for the rabble; it is for the sincere few who have it in them to work hard to comprehend, and therein lies its rationale. A different rationale emerges however when one takes into account the views of some commentators

> Nietzsche philosophized on the hoof in more ways than one. His best ideas came to him during long walks in the Swiss countryside. It has even been claimed that Nietzsche's aphoristic style resulted from his habit of jotting down his thoughts in a notebook while he was on the move.[69]

If this appears unbelievable, there are other examples of external factors influencing Nietzsche's writing. Assailed by perpetual ill-health, Nietzsche's texts abound in biological terms. He talks about the "health of a culture," "germs of

[67] He writes, "my ambition is to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book – what everyone else does *not* say in a book . . ." See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols,* p. 223.

[68] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* p. 250.

[69] Strathern, *Nietzsche,* p. 21.

decadence," "diseased religion," "breeding a new race," and so on. His frequent use of motifs like "heights," "depths," "abysses," "peaks" betrays his prolonged stay in the Swiss Alps. Because of his openness with his audience, these motifs do not remain opaque but become familiar metaphors.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are thus observed as leading a deliberate revolt against the previous philosophers in letter as well as spirit. They consciously seek to mock and overturn the dry and unimaginative preaching of traditional philosophizing, as is evident by the titles they give to their writings, which sometimes are a parody of the texts they are attacking, and sometimes dangerously hover above the boundary between philosophy and other disciplines. Nietzsche's philosophy, if we observe the titles of some of his works, is more of the nature of *meditations, thoughts,* a *prelude,* ora *polemic* rather than a systematic discourse.[70] Similarly,

> Kierkegaard presented himself not as a traditional philosopher or religious thinker, but as a kind of "poet" and as someone who was "in love" with his pen. This is not incompatible with offering sound philosophical, religious, or psychological insights, but it does mean that we will have to be prepared to read his works a little differently. Kierkegaard's own description of the genres of his works is a sign that this is the case. We find, for example, a "Dialectical Lyric," "A Venture in Experimenting Psychology," "A Fragment of Philosophy," "A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation, an Existential Contribution," as well as *Works of Love…"*[71]

Thus it has to be appreciated that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have left behind them an unusual philosophical as well as literary legacy. It differs from that of other great thinkers whose intellectual projects in the traditional forms of essays or treatises could be straightforwardly accessed for philosophical insights and arguments.

[70]I am here referring to his books *Untimely Meditations*, *Daybreak: Thoughts on Moral Prejudices*, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* and *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic.*

[71] Jamie Ferreira, M. *Kierkegaard,* p.1.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are not writing for everyone;[72] they want only those capable of risking themselves.

[72] Kierkegaard says, "It is thus left to the reader's discretion whether he should put it together all by himself; nothing is done for a reader's convenience. It is the latter, of course, that readers want. They want to read books in the royal manner, in the way that a king reads a petition, where a summary in the margin relieves him of the inconvenience of the longwindedness of the petitioner. Regarding the pseudonymous authors this must surely be a misunderstanding on the part of the reader, since, from the impression I have of them, I am not conscious of them seeking any kind of favours with the exalted majority-majesty of the reading public." See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p. 250.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GENESIS OF INDIVIDUALITY

Kierkegaard introduces into modern philosophy the idea that one has to become an individual; individuality is not something one is born with. Setting forth an opposition between individual and the general community – "the crowd" in his writings[73] – Kierkegaard necessitates an honest acknowledgement and consequent repudiation of the crowd as the starting point of the process of individuation. For Kierkegaard, the Hegelian exaltation of the universal, the total and the collective – characterized for example in his conception of the State – represents nothing but the ultimate submergence of the individual into the crowd. A similar conception in Nietzsche is witnessed in his discussion of the "herd."[74] The latter understands human beings essentially as herd creatures. The epitome of herd mentality for Nietzsche is European modernity ("a herd animal, something good-natured, sickly, and mediocre, today's European . . .)[75], which is nothing but the realization of Christian ideals in politics, ethics and economy. The main problematic of the dissertation results from this conceptual dualism.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche predate Heidegger in conceptualizing individual as one whose existence is an issue for him. This is reflected in their emphasis on the innermost feelings and desires of the individual as the dynamo of his conduct in contrast to the demands and requirements the external world puts on him. The socio-political institutions, the media, the Church – all these create obstacles in the way of self-realization of the individual. By providing ready-made answers, duplicated

[73] Hong and Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, pp. 53, 241, 258–9, 264, 315, 349, 419, 452–4, 471, 475, 477–8.

[74]Pearson and Large, *The Nietzsche Reader*,pp. 115, 125–6, 142, 207, 222–3, 262–7, 342–3, 368, 396, 479, 495.

[75]Ibid.,p. 335.

experiences and one-size-fits-all knowledge, these prevent the individual from creating a self-identity outside of the "crowd" or the "herd" or the "mass."

Kierkegaard stresses that the crowd is always impersonal, undefined, faceless and irresponsible. The majority is attracted to the crowd because such an existence is unaccountable; it is easy to pay lip-service to abstract concepts, but difficult to live them. Because the membership of the crowd involves no stake of any kind on the part of its members, there is for Kierkegaard little of use in it as regards the individual's endeavour to become who he or she is. The crowd for Kierkegaard is a leveling agent, appreciating all moral valuations and human differences based on the abstract standard of equality. By making easy and predictable choices on the behalf of its members, the crowd represents little more than a tyranny that does not let the individual function to the full of his or her ability and he or she is thereby absolved of all responsibility for making the choices for his or her life. For Kierkegaard, it is only God whose eyes can see each individual as distinct from the multitude. Therefore only in God can the individual find his own self-realization and thus his true individuality.[76]

Nietzsche in his concept of the herd talks about the general tendency of the multitude to agree on very many things – regardless of their truth or falsity – and to conform, coordinate and create a value system for all of them to then uphold. Unlike Kierkegaard, he includes even Christianity with God at its head to be such a value. Throughout his writings, Nietzsche stresses the individual striving to be something over and above the herd, the individual going beyond the herd to think for himself, and to create his own values. Nietzsche believes individual to be a rarity, and fears the extinction of the individuals at the hands of the herd.[77]

An authentic individual is the desirable form of human existence for Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Inauthenticity is not individuated; it is a feature of the faceless mass. And the mass is not passively inauthentic; it plays a positive role in blocking the road to authenticity for those who strive. Therefore, on the surface, the individual and the mass seem irreconcilable. My aim is to ascertain through close reading whether there is any scope in either Kierkegaard or Nietzsche for a middle ground or a synthesis in

[76] Hong and Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, pp. 453–54.

[77] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* p. 107.

this regard, and if not, to work out its implications for communal existence. What would be the status accorded to communal living and fellowship if one were to accept the pessimistic conclusion reached by these philosophers regarding the role of the mass? In this chapter, I will go deeper into the individual-mass debate by contrasting the two notions of "crowd" and "herd" and will attempt to bring out their significance in the larger discourse.

Nietzsche's Master-Slave Dichotomy

The "herd" is one of Nietzsche's favourite words for referring to many of the dominant trends in modernity. He believes that one of the essential ways in which human beings can be conceptualizedis understanding them as "herd creatures." To say it differently, their general characteristic is – as a result of their psychological makeup owing to their prehistoric origins – to their susceptibility to conformity. The community was the first to exist; the individual was not born with the community. The concrete preconditions for surviving were born out of the requirement for security which only the community could provide and hence community was always privileged with the utmost significance. The individual is a late and coincidental outcropping of normative structures (the web of habits, customs and traditions) that make up the human world. For this reason, he says in "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:" "The you is older than the I; the you has been pronounced holy, but not yet the I: so man crowds toward his neighbour."[78] In turn, things one might usually invest with a quantum of individuality are, for Nietzsche, just as prone to be devoid of it. Consciousness, for example, about which humanity feels so much pride and which is often taken to epitomise individuality, is for Nietzsche at least as amenable to being regarded as representing herd mentality in microcosm, for it is a feature that springs from our communal nature and the development of language. Our self-interpretative abilities, which come to constitute an essential aspect of the kind of animal we are, thus emerge from a realm of shared practices and traditions: what we tend to think of as being

[78] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* p. 111.

"individual" about ourselves is not quite as individual as we might like to think. The unique nature of the individual is, in turn, something that is fashioned rather than given. Indeed, for Nietzsche this is something that springs from the unconscious, embodied self not the consciousness of the "I." Whereas the "I" is still overwhelmingly communal the self is a complex channelling and refraction of the hierarchical forces that are at work in all social orders no less than individuals.

For Nietzsche, the history of humankind begins with a brute animality that is by turns shaped by primitive communality (the morality of custom) and the emergence of shared identities and the ability to make promises, which give rise to the development of self-interpretative abilities. Only then comes the sovereign individual, whose transcendence of normative compulsion and constraint pays testimony to the forming of an individuality out of what was once common and shared. The herd is, it follows, the precondition of the individual, which is an accidental but ultimately inestimably valuable consequence of communal existence. For Nietzsche, what is appalling about modern life, replete as it is with talk of equal rights, democracy, and the emergence of the nation state, is that it is representation of a regressive ethos; it is as if a primitive normative structure is beckoning us into backwardness. Modernity is, at its worst, Christianity writ large: the diminution of individuality in favour of a revitalised collectivism. Nietzsche cannot comprehend how such a collectivism might not ultimately pose a threat to the individual but actually serve to cultivate it. Hence, his dismissal of the "herd" mentality is often accompanied by anti-socialist sentiment:

> Socialism is the fanciful younger brother of the almost expired despotism whose heir it wants to be; its endeavours are thus in the profoundest sense reactionary. For it desires an abundance of state power such as only despotism has ever had; indeed it outbids all the despotisms of the past inasmuch as it expressly aspires to the annihilation of the individual.[79]

That said, Nietzsche is no liberal, either. For he sees in market capitalism and liberalism an evil that is no lesser in terms of its tendency to conformism and the

[79]Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human, p.345.*

eradication of the individual: "Liberalism: in plain words, reduction to the herd animal."[80]

Nietzsche views herd values as resulting from socio-historical conflicts of power between two modes of evaluation, which he calls the "master morality" and the "slave morality."

> There is a *master morality* and a *slave morality*….Moral value distinctions have arisen within either a dominating type that, with a feeling of well-being, was conscious of the difference between itself and those who were dominated – or alternatively, these distinctions arose among the dominated people themselves, the slaves and dependants of every rank.[81]

Nietzsche understands the masters as the dominant class in ancient social groupings. The slaves are those who are ruled over by the masters. The master morality is a moral system of "good and bad" and the slave morality of "good and evil." In his *Nietzsche on Morality,* Brian Leiter differentiates between these two systems in three ways. Firstly, they are genetically different, which means that "they differ with respect to aspects of their origin," the aspects being"chronological" and "motivational." The chronological aspect deals with the temporal order in which the elements of the respective moralities arose. For the masters, the term "good" (*gut* in German) is invented first as a judgement of themselves and their actions in contrast to everything lowly and common. The term "bad" (*schlecht* in German) develops only as a later corollary to denote all those who are not "good."

Nietzsche makes full use of his skill as philologist to prove this point, as demonstrated in this passage:

> I was given a pointer in the *right* direction by the question as to what the terms for 'good', as used in different languages, mean from the etymological point of view: then I found that …everywhere, 'noble', 'aristocratic' in social terms is the basic concept from which, necessarily, 'good' in the sense of 'spiritually noble', 'aristocratic', of 'spiritually highminded', 'spiritually privileged' developed: a development that always runs parallel with that other one which ultimately

[80] Nietzsche, *Twilight Of The Idols,* p.38.

[81] Nietzsche*, Beyond Good and Evil,* pp. 154–6.

> transfers 'common', 'plebeian', 'low' into the concept 'bad'. The best example for the latter is the German word '*schlecht*' (bad) itself: which is identical with '*schlicht*' (plain, simple) – compare '*schlechtweg*' (plainly), '*schlechterdings*' (simply) – and originally referred to the simple, the common man with no derogatory implication, but simply in contrast to the nobility.[82]

For the slaves, by contrast, the term "evil" (*bose*in German) comes first as a characterization of the "good" of the master morality, while the term "good" comes second and denotes all those who are not "evil" in this sense.

In giving the masters first credit for the first baptism of moral terms, Nietzsche wants to emphasize that it is power which is possibly the "origin of language itself."

> The seigneurial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers: they say 'this *is* so and so', they set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it, as it were.[83]

There is a genetic difference of motivations too. The masters have an internal criterion due to which they feel themselves superior; Nietzsche identifies it to be the possession of *exalted, proud states of the soul*. In contrast, the values of the slaves are seen as arising as a response to something "external": in this case, the "good" man of master morality. The values of the latter are thus reactive, while those of the former are self-affirming.According to Leiter,

> it is the *motivational* difference that explains the *chronological* difference: values that are reactive necessarily invent their positive terms *after* their negative ones because valuation is driven by a desire to negate something external; the opposite holds true for valuation motivated by self-affirmation.[84]

The second dimension of difference is the evaluative, divided by Leiter again in two parts. The first part takes into consideration the subject matter of evaluative judgments. For the masters, the subject matter is the person; for the slaves it is the

[82] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 13.

[83]Ibid., p. 12.

[84]Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 209.

actions of the person, for which he is held responsible. The second part concerns itself with what is held by these two moralities to be valuable. For the masters, it is their intrinsic "exaltedness"; the slaves in their fear and hatred of everything that is noble, value those qualities which *serve to alleviate the existence of sufferers.* Nietzsche laments the fact that such qualities as

> pity, the obliging, helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness receive full honors here –, since these are the most useful qualities and practically the only way of holding up under the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.[85]

Last but not the least, the two moralities differ metaphysically. They differ in their metaphysics regarding the notion of agency. As mentioned before, the subject matter of master morality is the person rather than his actions. The actions are held to be expressions of the kind of person one is, thus denying the notion of free agency. The slaves, on the other hand, have a fervent belief in free agency; they hold that agents choose freely to do what they do and this makes them morally responsible for their actions.

Nietzsche here sides with the masters. In denying the notion of a free agent, he is challenging the traditional Western conception of an "inner subject" to which actions and their responsibility can be traced. He gives the example of lightning to illustrate his point. The lightning and its flash are not two things; but people consider the first to be a cause and the second an effect, as if there is an agent "lightning" that is *responsible* for the action of "flashing." Similarly deluded is the attempt of slave morality to hold the masters responsible for their actions. The actions of the masters stem from their inherent strength, and not from any malicious intent. Birds of prey cannot be held responsible for being *the way they are*. To hold otherwise is to believe *that the birds of prey are free to be lambs*. Strength cannot be separated from

> the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not. But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind the deed, its effect and

[85] Nietzsche*, Beyond Good and Evil,* pp. 154–6.

> what becomes of it; 'the doer' is invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything.[86]

The slaves support free agency only because it gives them a pretext to hide their weaknesses under the claim that they, as free agents, are deliberately choosing not to emulate the nobles in their "evil" values. The truth however is that they are good to do nothing for which they are *not strong enough*. Nietzsche despises the fact that this attitude of weakness has been made into a virtue, under the name of asceticism, whereby the weak satisfy their will to power by falsely interpreting their weakness as their superiority to the masters. He writes in this context:

> Moral judgment and condemnation is the favorite revenge of the spiritually limited on those who are less so, as well as a type of compensation for having been slighted by nature, and an opportunity to finally acquire spirit and *become* refined: – malice spiritualizes. It warms the bottom of their hearts for there to be a standard that makes them the equal of even people who are teeming with all the qualities and privileges of spirit.[87]

For Nietzsche, the history of morality is characterized by an ensuing struggle between master and slave moralities. He sees the historical manifestation of the struggle as the contest between the Roman Empire and the Jewish people which finally resulted in Europe in the victory of Christian morality, which Nietzsche considers the supreme manifestation of Jewish ideals. How did this happen when the masters were the more powerful? In Nietzsche's genealogical account, the masters were described as consisting of the two classes of warriors and priests. Over time, the priests could not compete with their counterparts due to their lack of physical power. Hence they sought the support of the slaves who were already alienated from their masters. Thus began what Nietzsche calls the *slaves' revolt in morality*.

The roots of the revoltlie in the slaves' attitude of *ressentiment* towards their masters. The anger and hatred of the slaves for the master class had no outlet due to their physical and political powerlessness. Nietzsche calls this the anger of *ressentiment*. To compensate for this deficiency, what the slaves did was to devise

[86] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 26.

[87] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 111.

an *imaginary revenge* against their masters. As mentioned before, the masters had developed their identity by first asserting their own power and then marking their degrees of difference from the world around them. The slaves, instead of an attitude of self-affirmation, adopted an ethic of negation: they denied the outside world that was hostile and superior to them, and instead created their own moral system and vision of the world. This world was revaluated according to the image of the master as "evil" in contrast to whom the slaves viewed themselves as "good."

> It was the Jews who, rejecting the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed) ventured, with awe-inspiring consistency, to bring about a reversal and held it in the teeth of the most unfathomable hatred (the hatred of the powerless), saying: 'Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!'…. We know *who* became heir to this Jewish revaluation.[88]

As is evident from the above quotation, Nietzsche believed Christianity to be the consequence of the victory of slave morality over the master morality. If one looked at the history of the Jews, one would find in them the roots of *ressentiment*towards their Roman oppressors; it is in this *ressentiment*that the seed of Christian morality lie. All the weaknesses that the Christian "slaves" suffered from were hallowed by the "priests" by making them into virtues. Nietzsche gives some examples:

> …impotence which doesn't retaliate is being turned into "goodness"; timid baseness is being turned into "humility"; submission to people one hates is being turned into "obedience" (actually towards someone who, they say, orders this submission – they call him God). The inoffensiveness of the weakling, the very cowardice with which he is richly endowed, his standing-by-the-door, his inevitable position of having to wait, are all given good names such as "patience,"

[88]Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality,* p. 203.

> also known as *the* virtue; not-being-able-to-take-revenge is called not-wanting-to-take-revenge, it might even be forgiveness.[89]

The epitome of the slavish revaluation of values was their creation of a transcendent world comprising of God and a "moral order," where only the meek and the lowly shall be admitted. The so-called "heaven" had no place for those who espoused the values of the masters; it was exclusively for the slaves. But there was no sign of this heaven in this life; hence an otherworldly existence, and that too, an eternal one was fabricated, so that the seemingly eternal suffering they had undergone in this world could be somehow justified. The masters were consigned to the tortures of hell, in describing whose horrors the so-called "apostles of love and piety" left nothing to imagination.

Thus the traditional ideals that are identified within Christian morality as having holiness and moral goodness result from deluding the self, since they originated in the wretched surroundings of revenge, hatred, weakness and cowardice. In effect, the master class, over the last two thousand years, has been "poisoned" and shamed by these ideals into accepting the inversion of their own noble values, and thus the morality of the slave class is the one which prevails today.

> This, then, is the slave revolt in morals: slaves, unable to take physical action against the sources of their misery (their masters, their oppressors), are driven by their stewing hatred of their masters to do the only thing they can do, create new values, values that *devalue* the masters, that invert the masters' valuations: their valuations are, in effect, *projections* of these powerful reactive emotions.[90]

While reading Nietzsche's account of master and slave morality, it seems evident that Nietzsche is supporting the ethics of the former. However, commentators have warned against this reading of Nietzsche. In consonance with his overall philosophical outlook, he may affirm that the master morality is "healthier," that is, the masters are well-constituted, life-affirming and passionate, but he is nowhere explicit in saying that they are superior. The class of masters comprises generally of men of

[89] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 28.

[90] Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 203.

action rather than contemplation; a single-minded pursuance of instincts to the detriment of reason has rendered their development lopsided.

In contrast, the slaves have intellect – their circumstances have made them clever. Their weakness has given in them the intellect for which the strong, due to their strength, have no need. It is they who have introduced intellect into human civilization, and not the master brutes. As Nietzsche points out, "The history of mankind would be far too stupid a thing if it had not had the intellect [*Geist*] of the powerless injected into it."[91]

Nietzsche in fact leaves the question open to future philosophers. His note at the end of the First Essay states:

> *All* sciences must, from now on, prepare the way for the future work of the philosopher: this work being understood to mean that the philosopher has to solve the *problem of values* and that he has to decide on the *rank order of values*.[92]

We may conclude with a quotation from the Preface of the *Genealogy* wherein Nietzsche argues that "our thoughts, values, every 'yes', 'no', 'if ' and 'but' grow from us with the same inevitability as fruits borne on the tree – all related and referring to one another and a testimonial to one will, one health, one earth, one sun."[93]

From the above, we can understand that for Nietzsche, the value of an ideal depends on the *type* of person in whom it is instantiated. A particular type of person will necessarily bear a particular set of values, in the same way as a particular type of will of necessity bear a particular fruit. The fruit born by the tree is made sense of by the natural facts pertaining to the tree; in a similar way, it is the type-facts pertaining to a person that put his morals and acts into perspective. It is not helpful to look at the mental states the person consciously had before performing the action for a context. Nietzsche puts his point nicely across in the following extract:

---

[91] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 17.

[92] Ibid., p. 34.

[93] Ibid., p. 3.

> Enough, it is always a question of who *he* is and who that *other* is. For instance, in a person who was made and determined for command, self-denial and modest retreat would not be a virtue but the waste of a virtue: that is how it seems to me…. Morals must be compelled from the very start to bow before *rank order*, their presumptuousness must be forced onto their conscience, – until they are finally in agreement with each other that it is *immoral* to say: 'What's right for the one is fair for the other.' [94]

As a corollary, Nietzsche does not believe in a universal morality that holds true without discrimination for all human beings. In its place, he conceptualizes a series of moralities ranked in ascending order from the plebeian to the noble: some of these are more suited for subordination; some take better to social roles of dominance and leadership. The kind of individual one is ultimately decides whether an action performed by one counts as a preferable and legitimate action. The deciding factor is whether one is weaker, sicker and on the decline, or whether one is healthier, more powerful and overflowing with life.

Crowd vs Individual – A Kierkegaardian Binary

The title of this section alludes to one of Soren Kierkegaard's posthumously published works, namely *"The Single Individual:" Two "Notes" Concerning My Work As An Author*, wherein is found the most succinct treatment of the concept of "the crowd" in his oeuvre. Another of Kierkegaard's works, namely *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, opens with a dedication to "that single individual," who Kierkegaard believes worthy of being called "his reader."[95] In these titles, it is not difficult to discern the author's preference for "the individual" as opposed to "the crowd." Indeed he even goes to great lengths to qualify the former with the epithet "single." This should leave no doubt in the mind of the reader as regards the importance for Kierkegaard of the distinction between the two concepts in general and the concept of

[94]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 113.

[95] Hong and Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, p. 269.

"the individual" in particular. This section aims to expound on the distinction, clarify the two conceptions in *"The Single Individual"* and relate the issue at hand to some other aspects of Kierkegaard's thought.

> There is a view of life which holds that where the crowd is, the truth is also, that it is a need in truth itself, that it must have the crowd on its side. There is another view of life; which holds that wherever the crowd is, there is untruth, so that, for a moment to carry the matter out to its farthest conclusion, even if every individual possessed the truth in private, yet if they came together into a crowd (so that "the crowd" received any *decisive*, voting, noisy, audible importance), untruth would at once be let in.[96]

The second view given in the paragraph sets the tone for the rest of the essay, and in a way, summarizes what Kierkegaard has to say about "the crowd." Understood in a formal and conceptual way, "the crowd"[97] for Kierkegaard is essentially a numerical entity – a set of more than one. He does not mean by it merely "the mob," or "the ignorant masses." The crowd results when people numerically assert themselves to decide on the value of something - a truth, and as a corollary to perform an action. Kierkegaard makes it clear that he is not challenging the jurisdiction of the numerical over worldly, temporal matters – in a footnote, he shows his readiness to accept the crowd as even the decisive factor in these matters. However the crowd loses its decisive power in the "ethical-religious" sphere, the sphere of "truth:" in this sphere, the very presence of the crowd on a side proclaims its falsity – here the "crowd is untruth."

Kierkegaard here can be seen as rebelling against the Hegelian notion of the objective or the universal. Hegel presents an understanding of reality via construction of concepts and concepts are general, thereby imparting to reality/truth itself a general or "public" character. Kierkegaard uses the concept "the crowd" to denote this generality and situates himself on the side of the non-conceptual or the particular, the existence which is left when all conceptual description of a being is exhausted, i.e. its individuality.

---

[96] http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kierkegaard/untruth/files/untruth.html, retrieved on 08/02/2015.

[97] Hereafter I would be using the phrases "the crowd" and "the individual" sans the quotation marks. This should not be taken to imply any change in their meaning.

It is to be clarified here what Kierkegaard means when he uses the term "truth." Here I find it essential to take a detour into the history of Western philosophy to illustrate my point. The philosophical climate preceding Kierkegaard was dominated by epistemological concerns. The rationalist-empiricist debate had culminated in Kant who had provided a holistic picture of what could be known by thought and what could not be. Hegel, Kierkegaard's immediate predecessor, had formulated a grand philosophical system, summarizing reality as an evolutionary march of the Absolute to know itself via reason. The aim of philosophy was viewed largely to procure dispassionate, universal and objective "truths." Kierkegaard's genius lay in diagnosing the impersonality of such philosophical concerns and their great distance from the concrete world in which humans lived - in a way, from life itself. He identifies the real in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

> That essential knowing essentially relates to existence does not, however, signify that abstract identity mentioned above, between thought and being; nor, objectively, does it mean that the knowledge corresponds to something that is there as its object. It means that the knowledge relates to the knower, who is essentially someone existing, and that for this reason all essential knowledge essentially relates to existence and to existing. Therefore only ethical and ethico-religious knowing is essential knowing.[98]

The way in which Kierkegaard sought to bring philosophy back to concrete human concerns was to make a distinction between objective truth and subjective truth. Objective truth has been the ultimate search of philosophers, who have tried to approach it via reason, logic and empirical methods, whereas subjective truth because it is passionate and personal has been neglected. Kierkegaard wonders whether objective truths of philosophy or even science had real value in the life of an ordinary human being. If he/she does not know how to live, of what good is the philosophical or scientific knowledge of such a person? Kierkegaard further stresses that objective truth can be understood directly by everyone and endlessly and unconsciously repeated; this makes it functional largely in the domain of the crowd. In its place, Kierkegaard introduces his notion of "truth as subjectivity." Subjective truth is understood as a conscious appropriation on part of the individual in consonance with

[98]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p.166.

his fundamental needs and desires. While objective truth stresses on the "what" of life, subjective truth centres on the "how." Existence is always in flux and hence cannot be determined; life with all its paradoxes and contradictions is not subordinate to reason, hence passion, or the attitude with which one approaches an issue, constitutes the truth. Kierkegaard illustrates his point in relation to one's relationship with God:

> When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true… Let us take knowledge of God as an example. Objectively, reflection is on it being the true God, subjectively on the individual relating to something in such a way that his relation is truly a God-relationship. On which side now is truth to be found?[99]

Thus the truths important to humans cannot but be subjective, for they imply making choices and acting on them. They are a function of one's efforts to deal with one's fears, dispositions, desires etc., and could not be achieved by a calm, dispassionate search. Thus the truly important truths by their very nature forbid armchair or speculative philosophy and demand responsibility. For Kierkegaard, such subjective truths fall in the domain of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. Therefore he criticizes contemporary philosophy as pointing the way towards empty objectivity and instead posits Christianity as teaching the way to become a "subject in truth." But a disciple of such a teaching cannot afford to be passive. Although "Christianity proposes to endow the individual with an eternal happiness… and assumes that there inheres in the subjectivity of the individual…the possibility for its acceptance," yet "…it does not assume that the subjectivity is immediately ready for such acceptance or even that it has, without further ado, a real

[99]Ibid., pp. 167–8.

conception of the significance of such a good."[100] One, in other words, has to actively "become a Christian," and this makes Christianity an essentially individual affair, a point through which we return to the text we started with.

In the *"Single Individual,"* Kierkegaard dissects the dictum of St. Paul in *Corinthians* wherein he says, "…only one receives the prize." Obviously referring to the prize of divine grace, Kierkegaard understands this "only one" as the reference to the individual. He interprets Paul's statement to mean that only as an individual can one receive the prize, and not as the member of a crowd. It does not mean that there is s single person in the world that can gain the prize, but that one has to become a "single person" to gain the prize. "Everyone ought to become" that single person; it is within the capability of each of us, but again not as a member of the crowd, but in our own capacity.

In worldly affairs, those concerning objective truths in other words, social cohesion and cooperation, and not individual effort in itself, is seen to increase the chances of success. But this does not work in a relationship with God. God is the only being capable of seeing the multitude individually; He knows each individual in and out. He judges and saves only individuals, not the mass. Individual toil, faith in the face of the absurd and full responsibility for these choices is what counts in the eyes of God. But these are the very things the crowd abhors. It takes away the element of responsibility from the actions of its members or reduces it to a mere fraction. Kierkegaard holds the crowd to be more cowardly than any of its members; its cowardice as a whole is the sum of the cowardice of those who joined it, afraid of their individuality. That the crowd has courage therefore is an untruth.

> Take the highest, think of Christ—and the whole human race, all human beings, which were ever born and ever will be born; the situation is the single individual, as an individual, in solitary surroundings alone with him; as a single individual he walks up to him and spits on him: the human being has never been born and never will be, who would have the courage or the impudence for it; this is the

[100]Ibid., p. 108.

> truth. But since they remain in a crowd, they have the courage for it—what frightening untruth.[101]

Kierkegaard argues that the modern Press servesas the handmaiden as well asthe propagandist of the crowd. The chief advantage the Press has in this regard is the anonymity with which it operates. There is no individual responsibility, and any anonymous person can propagate to millions of readers (and listeners and viewers in present times) what one would not have the courage to individually say and take responsibility for. In a strange turn of events, the power has passed from the nameless mob of the ancient times to the nameless author. The people in modern age have as a grave misfortune the luxury of receiving views without any effort to be worthy of them; there is no abstinence, no self-control, no integrity. In such an atmosphere, the truths of the individual quickly become the untruths of the crowd. It is another way of saying that for the modern man devoid of seriousness and self-concern, untruth has become the easier path to take, and the most innocent way of doing this is to identify oneself with a crowd.

It is something of a surprise that the crowd is composed of individuals and yet is an antithesis of the very conception of "the single individual." However Kierkegaard sees hope even in this scenario; for every individual comprising the crowd – being an individual after all – has the potential to realize his individuality, "unless he prevents himself by becoming many."[102] Towards the end, there is given an example in support of the thesis that truth rests with the single individual. Kierkegaard mentions the Biblical injunction of "Love thy neighbour," and argues that it is the absolute and true expression of human equality. Nowhere does the Bible ask one to "Love the crowd," as it is only through the individuality of the neighbour – a subjective relation – that true equality can be established.

Thus we may say that the crowd is unable to express the truth and any idea which has the vehicle of the crowd for its propagation – be it an idea holding true in the case of the individual – automatically becomes false. Even in scientific matters, a thing does not become true just because many hold it to be true. Thus Kierkegaard

[101] http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kierkegaard/untruth/files/untruth.html, retrieved on 08/02/2015.

[102] Ibid.

would summarize that "…ethically and ethically religiously, the crowd is untruth, the untruth of wishing to work by means of the crowd, the numerical, of wishing to make numerical the criterion which decides what truth is."[103]

To conclude, being an individual is a prize in itself; it is what came to be known in existential thought as "being authentic." For Kierkegaard, its value is the uppermost because it has value in the eyes of God. It is how God sees one, as an individual. Failing to become an individual is a tragedy for one is then lost in the crowd and becomes an abstraction, losing oneself in the process. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard says that speculative philosophers confuse themselves with humanity as a whole, and thereby become infinitely great. But this greatness is in another sense to be nothing at all, for the only reality to which an existing individual can have a true relation is his own reality, the fact of his existence, that which remains when all conceptual coverings are exhausted.[104] The relation of the individual to other, less significant realities, those belonging to what Kierkegaard calls the "worldly" realm, is something I take up in the next section.

The Solitary Individual and Political Community

Could there be a sense in which Kierkegaard's activism on behalf of religious individuality, so far from inspiring a disdain for community, may rather prompt us to refresh or even reinvent an idea of what community should mean? In connection with Kierkegaard the idea might seem surprising to some. However, an affirmative answer would not force us to skate over Kierkegaard's antipathy towards that "crowd" whose supposed cowardice and sluggishness so many other thinkers (like Nietzsche) have deplored. Surely what Kierkegaard most vehemently decries is that subjectivity should *start* by attaching itself to a public "they," and only think afterwards. Surely the eventuality he most stridently warns against is that a person's subjectivity should actually be throttled by an amassed hodgepodge of received formulae and ready-made

[103] Ibid.

[104] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* pp. 106, 262.

conclusions passing as observation or as analysis. Of course the avoidance of this sorry state of affairs can prove to be easier said than done, and not only for contingent historical reasons.

Now it may also be the case that Kierkegaard is unenthusiastic about *any* worldly alliance, and he may as a consequence be thought of as an extremist of sorts. But we are at liberty to suppose that if community is something we value (even if it is hard to establish precisely how it was valued by Kierkegaard), we may very well need a thoroughgoing account of individuality like Kierkegaard's, and we may need to second his endorsement of subjectivity and inwardness precisely in order to ensure that what we create is truly deserves to be called a community. The concept of community depends upon that of individuality or, rather, upon that of numerous individualities (as opposed to what Kierkegaard most deplored: an individuality composed of a number). And sure enough, we have evidence in support of this from Kierkegaard:

> Not until the single individual has established an ethical stance despite the whole world, not until then can there be any question of genuinely uniting; otherwise it gets to be a union of people who separately are weak, a union as unbeautiful and depraved as a child-marriage.[105]

Indeed, if community did not depend upon individuality, it would cancel itself out as a meaningful concept and simply amount to a placeholder for what was really just a bigger individuality, and not just in the Hegelian sense, as outlined, say, in *Philosophy of Right*, but rather in what Kierkegaard would think of as the Hegelian sense, which is a little bit different (in that it is a less accommodating, more "levelling" and in fact less dialectical conception of "bigger individuality" than what a sympathetic reader of Hegel would grant him). Perhaps this is why, in *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard was careful not to mount tirades against *community*, saving them instead for the concept of "the public." One could even gloss portions of Kierkegaard's invective against "the public" as amounting to a complaint that "the public" precisely does not signify "community." Indeed, one of the very attributes Kierkegaard is at pains to ascribe to "the public" – while bemoaning, of course the fact

[105] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages,* p. 108.

that it can be so ascribed – is, sure enough, *individuality*. The public acts like an individual. *This*, most assuredly, is not Kierkegaard's individual, his famous "single individual"– far from it. The treatment by Kierkegaard of "the public" in *The PresentAge*, as if "the public" referred to a single great animal of some kind is more than an entertaining rhetorical strategy. Kierkegaard really is arguing that the public's *individuality*, instantly arising and instantly disappearing as required, is just what is most grievous and most lamentable. The public's individuality is monstrous not least because it is unaccountable. So when we hear it said that Kierkegaard spoke out for individuality we will concur, but it would be as well to observe that he did not wish to represent the cause of any or every "individuality."

It is not entirely wrong to say that Kierkegaard hated the public. It is true as long as one understands that "the public"– is what he hated and not, say: "members of the public," unless of course the expression "members of the public" were being used to designate the extent to which people are not belonging to themselves. To be sure, there are faint echoes, even in the non-pseudonymous works, of the Romantic depiction of the exceptional and extraordinary man, the lofty and unusual man (and, alas, it is indeed invariably a *man*), conceptions which often enough were elaborated at the expense of another conception – of supposedly ordinary people, but in the non-pseudonymous Kierkegaard there is never really the conscious celebration of arrogance and haughtiness that we might associate with Nietzsche. This is not to say that Kierkegaard was never arrogant or haughty nor even that arrogance and haughtiness could never play a part in the life of a Kierkegaardian "single individual;" Kierkegaard would presumably prefer such haughtiness to a cowering before the wisdom of "the public" which – for all it is a cowering – manages also to be *pompous*. What could be worse than to come away from a dialogue, as Kierkegaard says, feeling that one has just been conversing with an anonymity (since one's interlocutor has spoken only the latest usages and not with an earnest or anxious voice, but only with the gossipy voice of "the public")?[106]

Better, perhaps, for as many people as possible to be haughty, even if haughtiness may not seem very Christian, than to make any additions to all that hollowness. Yet in principle and in essence, Kierkegaard, who wanted to be a

[106] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages,* p. 103.

Christian, was not out to elevate any individual to the detriment of the rest nor to recommend haughtiness; he was committed to elevating the possibility of elevation for each and every individual. Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus, for example, says simply that "the single individual" is something "which everyone can and should be."[107]

The question here arises as to whether Kierkegaard in his diatribe against the crowd could be accused of promoting a new kind of aristocracy, a kind of charge we tend to associate more with Nietzsche. Nietzsche is often accused of upholding a vision of an esoteric group of Overmen, as will be studied to greater length in the following pages. However when we read Kierkegaard deeply, we do not find much ground in this charge:

> The reader will consider that here *the mass* is not…*a common herd.* God in heaven, what if the religious way should fall into such an inhuman division of mankind! No, the mass is s number, the numerical. A number of the nobility, the millionaires, the highest dignitaries, etc., can through the use of the numerical quite as readily become the mass.[108]

We see in the world that men have different talents. And we also see various forces perpetuating these and other inequalities to their own benefit. To Kierkegaard, there is only way of resolving these inequalities and that is in the relation which we share with God. God as an eternal loving father has equal care and love for every individual to ever exist. Only in the Christian sense of us all being the progeny of the same Being are we equal. Kierkegaard has no patience for the political revolutions and revolts of his day that hold religion to be futile in bringing about any kind of equality. He says:

> Only that which is religious can with the assistance of eternity press the equality of men through to its ultimate conclusions: the reverent, genuine, unworldly, true, the only possible equality between men. And therefore that which is religious, may it be said to its glorification, is also the true humanity.[109]

---

[107] Kierkegaard, *Practice In Christianity,* p. 223.

[108] Kierkegaard,*Collected Works, Vol. XIII,* p. 593.

[109] Ibid., p. 590.

Kierkegaard tries to bring out this theme through an analysis of the things that separate a genius from an Apostle. The genius has natural talents that have the effect of distinguishing him from his fellow human beings. The apostle, as many of them were, could be a layman; he could have a single talent, multiple ones, or no talents at all, yet he is uplifted by the grace of sacrificing and subsuming all he has at the feet of God. The genius may have brilliance of elocution , but it is the apostle whose speech is backed by authority. What the genius does is not possible for everyone to do. The way of the apostle however beckons to all individuals, to the genius too, if he can rise above his self-sufficiency. Kierkegaard in his humility thought of himself as no more than a mere genius. Only God could judge whether he deserved to be listed with the apostles, since it was only in the eyes of God that all men irrespective of their natural gifts were deemed equal.

Thus it is in this relation with God that the roots of equality lie for Kierkegaard. Secular movements or political rebellions operate in the realm of the impersonal crowd, and hence fail sooner or later to bring about equality, because only the individual can bring about real change, and being in a crowd kills one's individuality, as Kierkegaard warns:

> It is the 'mass' not this one or that one…that is now living, now dead, not a group of menials or of aristocrats, of rich or of poor, but the mass understood in a purely conceptual sense…which is false. For as a man is in a crowd, he is released from repentance and responsibility or at least is weakened in responsibility for himself as an individual.[110]

It is as individuals and individuals only that we can formulate a relationship with others in the community through the Christian concept of neighbour-love. Kierkegaard points out that the Bible says nothing about loving the impersonal man-in-the-crowd, it only talks of loving one's neighbour as one would love oneself:

> As Christianity's glad proclamation is contained in the doctrine about man's kinship with God, so its task is man's likeness to God. But God is love; therefore

[110]Ibid., pp. 593–594.

> we can resemble God only in loving, just as, according to the apostle's words, we can only "be God's co-workers—in love."[111]

Human beings gain individuality only via their separation from the mass and it is only with such an individual that a communal relationship can be commenced. It is in doing this that one accepts and realizes that all men are equal – as individuals in divine eyes: "That one shall honour each individual man, without exception, each man: that is truth and is reverence and is neighbour-love."[112]

Kierkegaard may not have found it easy to commit the power of his thinking to the study of what community in this world ought to mean. Even admirers of both Kierkegaard and the ideal of community have conceded as much. He feared that as soon as you have numbers acting in concert, there is a likelihood that responsibility will be diffused. His *Practice in Christianity* for example, contains many a stern reminder that when individuals are grouped, a dodging or passing-on of accountability (accountability, perhaps, for the injuries sustained by those outside the group) can become normal. This bleak view of community is now contrasted with that of Nietzsche.

The primary question that arises in Nietzsche's case, as it does in Kierkegaard's too, is to what extent can he be called a political philosopher? Does he have important things to say about the community, considering communal existence in Western history has majorly been constituted in the backdrop of herd values? It has been pointed out by scholars that many of Nietzsche's views on morality point towards a distinctive political framework. An example frequently drawn upon is that of the first essay of the *Genealogy*, discussed in the previous section. In the first essay, Nietzsche sketches two moral systems reflecting structures of domination, those of the masters and the slaves. We see Nietzsche arguing that moral systems are based on and derive from power relations, from politics. This has been taken by scholars to imply that for Nietzsche, moral systems and politics are codetermined and that all morality is fundamentally a form of politics.[113]

---

[111]Kierkegaard,*Works of Love,* p. 127.

[112]Ibid., p.597.

[113]Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, p. 189.

Such derivations, however, do not suffice to call Nietzsche a "political philosopher." Indeed, if one undertakes a general study of Nietzsche's works, one would find that he has not written any concrete text on the subject of politics. Of course, one finds a great number of aphorisms dealing with political concepts such as "state," "liberalism," "socialism," "equality," "democracy" and the like scattered across his books, but to ascribe to him a systematic political theory on this evidence has been viewed by various Nietzsche scholars as challenging. The strong individualistic and anti-egalitarian outlook that one comes across in his writing without a doubt lends itself to political implications, that is all.

A political philosophy can be said to arise from two sources following Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian divide; it can either be the result of rational endeavour to chalk out a system for the ordering and governance of the society as well as the distribution of power, or it can be emotionally founded on the love and concern for one's nation, what we call patriotism, or in political terms, nationalism. If we try to understand Nietzsche's thought in relation to the latter, we find him in opposition and reaction to the whole nationalist/patriotic sentiment embodied in the institution of the State.

Although the early Nietzsche was sympathetic to Bismarck and followed the "nation-state" political debates avidly[114], he soon grew hostile to the idea of the state as a remedy for the ills of men. Even in his early *Untimely Meditations*, this hostility is already evident. Nietzsche comments therein that

> the state is the highest goal of mankind and that a man has no higher duty than to serve the state: in which doctrine I recognize a relapse not into paganism but into stupidity. It may be that a man who sees his highest duty in serving the state really knows no higher duties; but there are men and duties existing beyond this—and one of the duties that seems, at least to me, to be higher than serving the state demands that one destroys stupidity in every form, and therefore in this form too. That is why I am concerned here with a species of man whose teleology extends somewhat beyond the welfare of a state, with philosophers, and with

[114] Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, p. 25.

> these only in relation to a world which is again fairly independent of the welfare of a state, that of culture.[115]

Incidentally Nietzsche remained for the most of his life a stateless person himself. He had given up his German citizenship to acquire a Swiss one, but he did not pursue it.From 1880 until his collapse in January 1889, Nietzsche was a rolling stone, circling almost annually between his mother's house in Naumburg and various French, Swiss, German and Italian cities.[116]

Nietzsche considers the realm of State to be different from the realm of Culture; he goes to the extent of calling them antagonists. Culture and state are both expressions of an expenditure of the resources of strength, of reason, of will, and these resources are limited, which means that the expenditure can be carried out only in either direction, never in both. Thus he observes that

> All great periods of culture have been periods of political decline; that which is great from the standpoint of culture was always unpolitical – even anti-political…. At the very moment when Germany arose as a great power in the world of politics, France won new importance as a force in the world of culture.[117]

In *Ecce Homo* too, he attacked the conceptions of the German nation and Germans as a race, and condemned nationalism.[118]Nietzsche could see that impersonal forces such as "trade and industry, the post and the book-trade, the possession in common of all higher culture, rapid changing of home and scene, the nomadic life now lived by all who do not own land" were of necessity creating conditions for the steady weakening and eventual abolition of the European nations. Believing this to be an anathema for princely dynasties and business classes, Nietzsche accused them of secretly fanning nationalistic fires to slow down and eventually halt the process. He believed therefore that once their designs have been seen through, stage would be set for people to proclaim themselves "good Europeans" and work for the unification of Europe:

---

[115] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* p. 148.

[116]http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/, accessed on May 28, 2015.

[117] Nietzsche*, Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 43–4.

[118] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 82, pp. 84–5.

> We "good Europeans," we also have hours when we allow ourselves a warm-hearted patriotism, a plunge and relapse into old loves and narrow views--I have just given an example of it-- hours of national excitement, of patriotic anguish, and all other sorts of old-fashioned floods of sentiment…. Indeed, I could think of sluggish, hesitating races, which even in our rapidly moving Europe, would require half a century ere they could surmount such atavistic attacks of patriotism and soil-attachment, and return once more to reason, that is to say, to "good Europeanism."[119]

His ideal therefore was a good European rather than a good German. This and other similar quotes are there aplenty which serve to rescue Nietzsche from the charge of being the National Socialist philosopher he was made into through the efforts of his sister Elizabeth and other over-zealous Nazis who deliberately misrepresented and misinterpreted his ideas to give him that image.

In his insightful analysis of socialism, Nietzsche points out that it in many ways resembles the authoritarian political systems it aims to replace. The socialists desire a maximization of the power of the state at a scale that leaves the despots far behind. In its demand for the absolute subjugation of individual interests to those of the community, socialism betrays an authoritarian streak of the extent never seen before. The socialists, however, are stuck in a paradox. Owing to their professed ideal of the "abolition of the state," they cannot lay a claim to the sort of religious devotion people have had since ancient times towards the ideal of state. Therefore they resort to two alternatives: creating fear in the minds of the masses through acts of extreme terrorism, and ideologically poisoning them with false values like "equality," "justice" and "rights." The latter values through their inherent nature agree with the conscience of the ignorant masses and they become pawns in the hands of socialist politics.[120]

Another problem that Nietzsche has with the socialists consists in their vilification of suffering and their resultant ideal of a comfortable life for all. Nietzsche, on the contrary, views suffering as the prerequisite for the development of the individual. Life, as it is characterized by exploitative forces and violence, is akin to a

[119]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 245.

[120]Ibid., pp. 173–4.

fire essential for the purification of valuable metals. Nietzsche accepts that a sympathetic and warm-hearted person would press for the abolition of such a state, but at the same time he points out that such an attitude would be unintelligent, inimical as it is to the ideal of continuance of human species towards perfection. The abolition of suffering would eventually lead to a state with weak citizens. The state was invented to protect human beings against one another; violence is in its very genesis. Its perfection on the path away from violence and savagery, on the socialist lines, would weaken and eventually dissolve its members, thus achieving a negation of the very purpose it was meant to serve.[121]

Nietzsche believes that since the desire for property is a basic human drive, socialism with its ideal of abolition of private property is ultimately unsuited to people. Since all political parties strive to strengthen their base by promising and bestowing all kinds of exemptions and freedoms to the masses, which will ultimately make the masses all powerful and pave the way for democracy. As soon as the masses get the power into their hands through the instrument of representative democracy, they will start taxing the bourgeoisie progressively, leading to the emergence of a new middle class at its cost. This new middle class will have no need for socialism.[122] Such an ideal democracy would have to deny voting rights to the very rich as well as the very poor. This conception of democracy in Nietzsche is characterized by the maximum possible independence in the realm of "opinion, mode of life and employment." His democracy would also have to work for the liquidation of political parties, as he considers them as anathema to the above-mentioned ideal. Such a conception is obviously different from the definition of democracy as we know it, but Nietzsche does not consider our democracy an ideal one. He remarks:

> I am speaking of democracy as of something yet to come. That which now calls itself democracy differs from older forms of government solely in that it drives with new horses: the streets are still the same old streets, and the wheels are

[121]Ibid., pp. 112–3.

[122]Ibid., pp. 383–4.

> likewise the same old wheels. - Have things really got less perilous because the wellbeing of the nations now rides in this vehicle?[123]

However Nietzsche was an astute observer of his times and he could see the growing acceptance and influence of democratic thought in Europe, so democracy was for him a *fait accompli.* We can find several passages in his works which show his grudging acceptance of the democratization of Europe. Consider this passage, for example:

> The democratization of Europe is irresistible: for whoever tries to halt it has to employ in that endeavour precisely the means which the democratic idea first placed in everyone's hands and makes these means themselves more wieldy and effective: and those who oppose democracy most on principle (I mean the spirits of revolution) appear to exist merely to impel the various parties ever faster forwards along the democratic path through the fear they inspire.[124]

One important aspect that can be gleaned from Nietzsche's political thought as it is presented above is his anti-egalitarianism. He does not hide it; in fact he makes it a point to make his contempt for equality explicit in his discussions on society, morality and politics. It is out of this anti-egalitarianism that Nietzsche's contempt for democracy as the propagator and perpetuator of equality arises. He traces the germs of the modern ideal of equality in the Christian notion of "equality of all souls before God." As was seen in the second chapter, this was nothing more than a falsehood devised by the weak men as a pretext to vent their resentment against the strong. Egalitarianism was later paraded as one of the "truths" by the French Revolution. Nietzsche thus trivializes the modern egalitarian ideal by making its appeal contingent upon the fact of its association with this historical event:

> The fact that so much horror and blood are associated with this doctrine of equality has lent this 'modern idea' *par excellence* such a halo of fire and glory, that the Revolution as a drama has misled even the most noble minds.[125]

---

[123]Ibid., p. 384.

[124]Ibid., p. 376.

[125] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 80.

Equality, with its aim of making everybody uniform, finds its expression in the theory of "equal rights." Nietzsche questions the very validity of this ideal. In a discussion on the origin of rights, Nietzsche traces the concept of a "right" to the tradition of making agreements. There was a time when men were mutually content with the agreements they had made, so much so that they became careless enough to neglect their renewal, and over time this neglect gave rise to a belief in the immutability of rights. This was obviously to the benefit of the weak and they continue to appeal to that single act of agreement as eternal.[126]

Equality has thus been made a prerequisite of justice and yet nothing can be as far from justice. Unequals cannot be made equal. It is not fair to equate the strong with the weak. The demand for equality is the expression of a declining culture. At one place Nietzsche writes: "A few hours' mountain climbing make of a rogue and a saint two fairly equal creatures. Tiredness is the shortest path to equality."[127]All strong ages recognize the chasm between man and man, class and class. In the modern times, the anarchists and the socialists have taken up the egalitarian flag, and in their hands, it is nothing more than the principle of decay of the whole social order.

While Nietzsche was critical of the socialist/anarchist school of thought, he was no supporter of the liberal one either. He had a sceptical stance towards the classical liberal aspiration which aimed at realizing a community of equal individuals living in harmony with each other united by a common acceptance of universal moral laws. Keith Ansell Pearson in his study of Nietzsche's politics gives three reasons for Nietzsche's antagonism to contemporary liberalism. The first was that by aligning themselves with nationalistic sentiments, European liberal states had become infertile as far as the rearing of creative spirits was concerned; the second was that European liberalism in its essence had an economic character, that of *laissez faire* capitalism, which worked to the detriment of a strong communal ethical life because of the domination of polity by a money economy. This also restricted the realization of a true individuality; the third reason was that liberalism had an abstract and crystallized

[126] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* pp. 319–20.

[127]Ibid.,p. 373.

conception of progress, which went against Nietzsche's claim that different human types require different values.[128]

Liberalism is essentially based upon the principle of maximization of freedom. Nietzsche has his own understanding of what "freedom" is. He explains:

> Freedom is the will to be responsible for ourselves. It is to preserve the distance that separates us from other men. To grow more indifferent to hardship, to severity, to privation, and even to life itself. To be ready to sacrifice men for one's cause, one's self included.[129]

This is in contrast to what Nietzsche thinks is the modern understanding of freedom, as consisting in living for the present, living without any sense of responsibility. For Nietzsche, this notion of freedom which characterizes modernity is misleading, for while modern individuals are no longer bound by hierarchical social ties or religious bonds, they have to assume a new responsibility to create themselves and their own laws.[130]

A noteworthy point relevant to Nietzsche's treatment of liberalism is that while he did not support the liberal political system as a whole, he was nevertheless an enthusiastic supporter of the struggle for liberty. He observed that liberal institutions are built upon the slogan of freedom and till the time they are not soundly established, they promote the cause very well. Their establishment however sounds the death knell for freedom. He laments that

> liberal institutions straightaway cease from being liberal the moment they are soundly established: once this is attained no more grievous and more thorough enemies of freedom exist than liberal institutions!.... The same institutions, so long as they are fought for, produce quite other results; then they indeed promote the cause of freedom quite powerfully.[131]

---

[128] Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 10–11.

[129] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 71.

[130] Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 10–11.

[131] Ibid.

This has led some scholars to the conclusion that Nietzsche was not as opposed to liberalism as has been thought. We call those liberals, who are in at least a minimal agreement with the democratic notion that the rulers must be responsive to the wants and legitimate aspirations of those they are ruling over. But this does not mean all liberals must be populists and egalitarians, and must not have doubts regarding the advantages of electoral politics. They could have these doubts and still not jeopardize their commitment to the individual's legitimate rights for his development according to what he deems fit, in tune with his abilities, and aspirations. But, as Pearson points out, there are certain irreconcilable differences. Firstly Nietzsche is an anti-humanist. He has little value for the sacrosanctity of human life or the inviolability of individual rights. His politics permits the sacrifice of the masses if it ensures the well-being of the higher men.[132] Secondly, Nietzsche does not base his ethics on a notion of equal respect for all persons which is a key norm of liberalism.[133] Pearson concludes therefore that Nietzsche's individualism is an aristocratic one, rather than a liberal one. As he remarks in *Twilight of the Idols*:

> For institutions to be possible there must exist a sort of will, instinct, imperative, which cannot be otherwise than antiliberal to the point of wickedness: the will to tradition, to authority, to responsibility for centuries to come, to *solidarity* in long family lines forwards and backwards *in infinitum.*[134]

To conclude, an analysis of the above leaves one with the feeling that Nietzsche has nothing more than a perfunctory endorsement of existing liberal-democratic institutions and their values. In his heart of hearts, he considers them unsatisfactory and unsuitable for the goals he has in mind. Pearson summarizes Nietzsche's views on liberalism and socialism:

Nietzsche objects to both socialism and liberalism on the grounds that, despite the differences between them, they are no more than attempts at an economic management of society in which culture is devalued and a utilitarian logic governs. Liberalism has no notion of an order of

[132] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 152.

[133] This point is reiterated by Lee Spinks in his *Nietzsche* wherein he argues that Nietzsche deplored the idea of a common good for all, and that he saw in this idea a conspiracy against the higher men to drag them down. For details, see Spinks, *Nietzsche*, p. 112–3.

[134] Nietzsche*, Twilight of the Idols*, p. 72.

rank, and rests on an abstract individualism which gives rise to a timid conformity in society, while socialism subordinates the goal of culture to that of social justice and gives rise to a society dominated by bureaucracy.[135]

From the above discussion, it is evident that whatever alternative Nietzsche has in mind for a politics, if he has any, cannot be based on an egalitarian structure. A liberal democracy is also not suited for Nietzsche's project nor is a socialist regime. Lee Spinks is of the view that Nietzsche's denial of these systems is basically a denial of the assumption that politics can be based on a moral context, whether it is the Judaeo-Christian tradition or the egalitarianism of socialism and modern liberal democracy. Nietzsche wants to question this optimism – the belief that a more moral society would produce more opportunity for more people to do creative work. Nietzsche criticizes the socialists and the democrats for holding the view

> that*all* human misery and wrongdoing is caused by traditional social structures: which lands truth happily on its head! What they want to strive for with all their might is the universal, green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, contentment, and an easier life for all. Their two most well-sung songs and doctrines are called: "equal rights" and "sympathy for all that suffers" – and they view suffering itself as something that needs to be *abolished.*[136]

Nietzsche analyses the modern notions of progress, civilization, and democratization as gradually leading to the emergence of such an elite, a "supra-national"and nomadic species of man who is characterized by his capacity for maximum adaptation. He warns that in going about furthering their chief aim, that is the "leveling and mediocrising of man,"these processes will quite unintentionally create conditions for the rise of "exceptional men of the most dangerous and attractive qualities."How will this happen? Firstly, increasing democratization will tend to the production of a multitude of weak-willed, average workmen with particular proficiencies, a bit akin to the old class of slaves, who will necessarily require masters. It is among such people that the exceptional individuals will be reared, this time in an unprejudiced manner. Secondly, the adaptive capacity of the "new human" will lead him with increased frequency to newer and ever diverse environments and milieu,

[135] Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 39–40.

[136]Ibid., p. 41.

leading to optimal development of his persona. Exposed to an immense variety of experiences, these humans would essentially be stronger and richer than they have ever been before.[137]

Spinks points out that the end result of this process would be the replacement of an inferior form of tyranny with a superior one; the old tyranny of democracy manifested itself in the mediocrity of humanity whereas the new tyrants would work towards promoting the ascension of man.[138]According to Nietzsche, this was to be achieved by directing the political system towards the production of Overmenwho would not be affected by the shallow egoism and materialism characterizing modern societies. They would need no external source of values to live their life; their values would naturally flow from their superabundance of power. Such natures have not been absent in human history, but hitherto they have been accidents or exceptions. Our politics should be so structured as to allow for the conscious and "willed" development of these new kinds of beings.[139]Because certain socio-political conditions have to be first created so that such men can flourish, or even exist, the whole project unavoidably assumes a political character.

[137] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 133–4.

[138] Spinks, *Nietzsche*, p. 112–3.

[139] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 104.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AXIOLOGY OF TRUTH

In their crusade against the systemic subordination of the individual, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche challenge as a prerequisite the very notion of an objective truth and propound in its place their own understanding of the conception of "truth." They restrict the meaningfulness as well as significance of the term only to those beliefs or attitudes in which the individual has or can have a stake, thus creating a dichotomy between "truth," and "my truth." Mathematical and scientific truths, by this criterion, are the preserve of the crowd, having little relation to the particular and the personal in the individual. Kierkegaard posits a subjective notion of truth wherein truth and untruth respectively refer to the sincerity or insincerity with which one lives one's life rather than being the property of assertions. The highest truth is one that is sincerely held in the face of objective uncertainty of the highest degree, and Kierkegaard holds absolute faith in the Christian God to be an epitome of such truth. Nietzsche, in contrast, favors a pragmatic and a perspectival theory of truth. All truths for him are "useful fictions" which have been invented to ease human existence in the world by imposing names and concepts on the constant flux of phenomena. Untruths, or "errors" for him are simply those fictions which have over time proved less useful to human beings; the rest have been embedded and internalized as truths. The true and false of logic, the heaven and hell of religion, and the right and wrong of morality – all can be understood and explained this way not as facts but as perspectives. It is this dissociation of truth from fact and its association with attitude or interpretation that makes it possible for individuals to reject as mere tradition the dogma of the crowd and cultivate such truths as would assist them in the process of individuation. The significance of this anti-foundational move and its consequences for philosophy in general will be a primary subject of analysis in my dissertation. I will also attempt to

situate within this issueNietzsche's attack on the positivistic notion of science[140] in particular and his critique of values in general.

One can accept Kierkegaard's point that the attitude with which one handles a truth goes a long way in determining the value of that truth for oneself. One can also appreciate Nietzsche when he exposes established truths as essentially being useful illusions. The question nevertheless remains whether subjectivity is indeed a correct criterion for ascertaining the value of a truth, especially in a larger backdrop. While the importance of the attitude with which one embraces a belief cannot be overemphasized, it seems counterintuitive to discard objectivity while dealing with ethical and socio-political issues. If individuals are to abide by subjective truths which are not subject to rational or moral validation, how are we to fix responsibility for an act? If the attitude while performing an action is to become the pivotal factor of adjudication rather than the content of the act, how are we to determine which mode of behavior to appreciate or condemn? A similar problem results from Nietzsche's perspectival theory of truth. Again, while these non-objective theories of truth might come handy in furthering individual self-becoming, it is to be asked whether they have any larger social role to play. It is also to be inquired whether such measuring rods lead to relativism or not.

A Critique of the Objectivist Model

Objective truth since the time of Plato focuses at specific conditions and prerequisites – used for asserting true or false propositions – to comprehend existence. The most prevalent theory of truth, i.e. the "correspondence theory" necessitates that statements are proven true only if they are factually aligned with the referred-to object or

[140] Pioneered by Auguste Comte, positivistic philosophy conceived itself as propagating a worldview conditioned by modern science. It therefore viewed the description and explanation of empirical facts as the prime philosophical enterprise. It held that the progress of mankind went hand-in-hand with scientific progress and that religion and metaphysics were pre-scientific forms of thought that had little relevance in this age of science. The positivists were quite influential in Nietzsche's time.

situation. Under objective truth, truth and untruth do not occur in degrees; a proposition is either true or not. The rules and conditions employed to assess the truth become both the boundary as well as the habitat of truth as it were.

To do justice to the objective-subjective debate, as far as truth is concerned, one inevitably has to go back to the Renaissance and its after-movements, which is where this bifurcation has its roots. The Renaissance led to the development and growth of two divergent attitudes towards human existence in Western thought. The Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment were at the vanguard of one, and at the other polar opposite was the Romantic resistance to the overriding rational element that characterized the Enlightenment, and an espousal of the more emotional aspects of human experience; this had its roots in the Renaissance as well as the classical heritage from Greece and Rome. The modern sensibility was an uneasy mixture of both of these, and they went on to influence philosophers and thinkers in their own ways. And it is only by studying the value systems of both these strands that we can gain a better insight into their genesis and development:

> Every era, every civilization, has… its "table of values." In other words, [every civilization] accepts a hierarchical ranking of values; it faults and condemns certain ideas, it elevates and imposes on others. Accordingly, the table of values of the contemporary era inscribes truth as preferable to falsehood, morality above immorality, kindhearted compassion and benevolence above cruelty and maliciousness. This arrangement [and ranking] of values constitutes the very foundation of State and Society; it regulates the action of citizens, rewards and punishments, individual and civil rights, and responsibilities—in brief, it defines and posits the rules that everyone should follow in his inner and external life if he is to live up to the dictates of Right and Morality. Therefore, its corresponding table of values is the foundation of every era and every civilization. It follows that we need to seek the cause of every general [valuation of] health or illness in the corresponding table of values.[141]

While pointing out the distinctions and divergences in the two afore-mentioned approaches, one must not lose sight of the fact that the Enlightenment shared a lot with its Romantic counterpart. They were both "humanist" in the sense of their high

[141] Kazantzakis, *Friedrich Nietzsche on the Philosophy of Right and the State*, p. 15.

estimation of human capabilities and their agreement on the importance of man's place in the universe. It was this world that was viewed by them as the stage for the enactment of human emotions and fulfilment of human endeavour, not some higher or transcendental world. Human consciousness and its hidden framework interested both these temperaments. Both drew insights and inspirations from classical culture, and admired its values. In a way, both rebelled against the tyranny of tradition, emphasised on new explorations and held individual human genius in the highest esteem. And yet they had very significant differences.

Thinkers of the Enlightenment proposed a critical self-questioning, bringing forth into the modern Western tradition an "age of criticism." As expressed in Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment," they called for a rational critique of religious and metaphysical meta-narratives which persisted only because of the influence of external authority, and not because of intrinsic rational merit. Their project was to release man from this tutelage, and the key to freedom was rationality. It was our reason that characterized our human-ness, and we could use our intellect to obtain infallible knowledge, a universal morality and a progressive politics, provided correct philosophical and scientific procedures were applied. Thus the emphasis was on the uniqueness and superiority of man in terms of the unmatched rational capabilities of his intellect, and his consequent ability to understand and put into use the laws of nature. For the scientific mind, observation and experimentation was what nature was for; it had to be theoretically explained and technologically exploited. In this manner of sober analysis was nature's mystery sought to be demystified. The "truth" which was being pursued by the Enlightenment thinkers had to be testable and pragmatically effective. This informed their treatment of the concept of mind wherein they led an empirical and epistemological inquiry into the latter, focussing on sensory perceptions, cognitive faculties and the behavioural mechanism. Putting aside the darker features of the human psyche, science went about its way rather optimistically, centralizing the rational aspects of it. This crystallized into a staunch belief in a concrete and univocal reality which was objective in nature – mechanistic, material and impersonal in essence – and uniquely valid. However, it often led the philosophers into hubris:

> It always creates the world in its own image, it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the "creation of the world," to the *causa prima*.[142]

The Romantics viewed the world not in the scientific image of an atomistic machine; rather they understood it as an organic phenomenon. They were more concerned with the dynamic unpredictability and drama that human life offered than the static abstractions of science. Man was to be valued for his imagination, his emotions, his creative powers and his capability for self-expression and self-creation. Nature was viewed as inherently and essentially spiritual, as a source of mystery rather than an object of explanation. Nature and human self were to be united in order for existence to reveal its true spiritual essence. With such a non-material conception of existence, the Romantic conception of truth could not but be one with an inward focus – something sublime and transfiguring.

The Romantic conception of truth was not bounded by the limitations of the scientific worldview. Its origin was the complexity that a human self was imbued with, and it was powered by the intensity of self-awareness which had arisen as a product of the times. Emotive and imaginative faculties – not rational and perceptual ones – assumed significance. This brought into light the hitherto hidden areas of the human psyche which tempered the conception of truth with the vices and the inner contradictions that make up a human self, along with its virtues and its innate equilibrium. This called for a new kind of truth because human beings were not dealing with a monolithic reality – as science would like them to believe – there was in fact an unfettered multiplicity of entities that imposed themselves on a human's subjective awareness, all of them unique in their own way, in content as well as experience. As one commentator remarks:

> Western man was facing a radical change in his relationship with 'truth': a change that would come about when he recognized that the metaphysical, religious, moral and rational truths which were formerly both backbone and substance of the Western tradition were in fact errors.[143]

---

[142] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 11.

[143] Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 9.

The univocal objectivity of the empirical ideal of truth was thus superseded by multiple divergences of the Romantic one. Existence was fundamentally multivalent, entities being complexes of many-sided meanings, some of which could be opposites. Sense and reason alone were too weak to comprehend and appreciate it; they had to be supplemented by imagination and feeling. Truth – in order to be a truth in which one had a more than superficial stake – had thus to contend with inner conflicts and tensions – of love and desire, fear and angst, faith and doubt, for example – and explore the mysteries of memories and dreams, moods and motives; only such an ordeal would make the truth "personal" and therefore worthy of concern.

There are significant reasons for the Romantics and their successors like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard to launch an offensive against objectivity in truth. Objective truth gives us only theoretical information about the world. This creates a supposed dichotomy between a "subject" – who is the isolated knower and detached observer of events – and an independently existing sphere of "known" objects, thus creating an unbridgeable duality. What concerns the objective thinker is to deal with the contents of the mind only in relation to what is external to the mind. Another significant characteristic of the objectivist model is that it is based – in its appraisal of living things – entirely on objectively available data: in case of human beings, for example, on their color, race, sex, weight, habits, history, and their similarities and dissimilarities in similar respects to others. However, the "existing" human being and her primordial essence is completely ignored in the process. The objective view sees her only as an idea, divorced of any concrete existence. The actual person disappears, and only an abstract idea of the person remains. This is the seminal characteristic of the objectivist model: it is representational. In this way can be discerned a drawback of this model, that its "truths" approximate concrete existence in a mere conceptual way and thus falls short of capturing existence itself, as is evident from the severely limited sense of existence the term "existence" itself conveys. The philosophers with their slogan of "knowledge is virtue," attempt to make knowledge into an end-in-itself, a sort of "panacea" which could cure everything. Nietzsche criticizes this view as "a profound *delusion*…namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the

thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting* it."[144]

Another drawback of the objective approach towards understanding reality is that rational certainty towards anything is unachievable, since we have as the sources of our knowledge either information derived from history or the data conveyed by our senses. Existence, however, is constantly subject to change and therefore both historical information and sense data are affected by the laws of change; even knowledge acquired through personal experience is not impervious to it. Hence certainty towards the truth of any objective knowledge is not possible, since we can never be certain that the information stands true "at this moment."

Here I would like to introduce Nietzsche's critique of Socrates as the representation of a backlash against the objectivist worldview. It is not an accident that when this break between the two worldviews was happening, the ancient Greek culture had come to assume great importance. The increase in disillusionment with the goals and values of modernity prompted many to look back to by gone eras, ancient Greece being the most notable among these. It was felt my many poets, artists and philosophers that the Greeks possessed a set of values, a spirituality and an affirmation of life that seemed to be desperately lacking amongst industrialized, scientific, modern man. And one of the most applauded figures therein was that of Socrates. However, Nietzsche would rather have us believe that Socrates was the archetype of the modern, alienating values. Here it needs to be clarified that when Nietzsche talks of the philosophy of Socrates he is not usually making any distinction with that of thye philosophy of Plato. It is the objectivist aspects of the philosophy of Socrates and Plato that Nietzsche finds himself particularly in disagreement with.

Firstly the Platonic view that there is such a thing as objective truth. This was Plato's response to the Sophists' relativism: that the morals and beliefs are a product of a particular time and place and therefore there is no such thing as right and wrong. Secondly, Plato argued that the world we live in is essentially an illusion, a poor image of a better, perfect world. The role of the philosopher, therefore, was to seek out this better world rather than be preoccupied with everyday existence. Thirdly, Plato

[144] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* p. 73.

believed that the true world can be accessed through the power of reason. Mankind has both instinct and the capacity to reason, but frequently prefers to follow instinct and ignore reason like other animals do. Plato argues that by exercising the intellect mankind can know what truth is. Finally Nietzsche lays the blame of over two thousand years of this type of philosophy at the foot of Socrates. In particular the whole philosophical concern with metaphysics, the speculation on what exists beyond the physical world Nietzsche considered to be an error and a distraction from what really mattered.

Nietzsche views Socrates as representative of the desire to "explain," to engage in argument and counter-argument, rather than accept that ultimately there are no fixed explanations for existence. Nietzsche is here not being again reason and science; he would be the first to praise its achievements and the role it played in the enhancement of life. What he is condemning is the regard for reason as the provider of answers and over-reliance on it to deliver mankind from ignorance.

Socrates appears in Greece at a time in a social world which is in decline so far as the dominant customs that constitute it are decaying. Socrates responds to this problem by turning to reason and dialectic. Nietzsche calls this the response of a *decadent:* Socrates is in effect turning away from the active circumstances of existence to the passive world of contemplative reflection. Moreover, the Socratic response chiefly consists in rebelling against the ancient Greek instincts with the weapons of reason and dialectic. Nietzsche argues that Socrates is mistaken in believing that drives and instincts are not essential to a philosophic life. He points out that since thought itself is based on unconscious and instinctive activities, philosophy cannot be said to be free of them. Instead

> most of a philosopher's conscious thought is secretly directed and forced into determinate channels by the instincts. Even behind all logic and its autocratic posturings stand valuations or, stated more clearly, physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life.[145]

Socrates brings with himself the rationalist demand that the world must conform to the prescriptions of logical discourse. The balance of the Greek tragedy is lost by

[145]Nietzsche*, Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 7.

the demands placed upon it by logical thought, resulting in a kind of "*aesthetic Socratism*, whose supreme law runs roughly like this: "In order to be beautiful, everything must be reasonable – a sentence formed in parallel to Socrates' dictum that 'Only he who knows is virtuous'."[146]

Socrates represents the logical or the *theoretical man*, as Nietzsche terms him. Such a man is the epitome of an individuated nature and hence must break with the Dionysian principle and consequently with the Apollonian as well, since the two operate in tandem. In such a man, therefore, the hard-achieved balance of the Greeks is no longer there.

The twin tendencies inherent in Socratic thought that have been delineated above – the evocation of a conceptual objective ideal as an escape from real particulars, and the upholding of reason to the detriment of instincts – were identified by Nietzsche to have carried on far beyond Socrates' time into the philosophy, the religion and ultimately into the culture of modern times. The former could be observed developing chronologically first into the doctrine of Platonism which holds there to be a fundamental difference between the experiential realm of the senses and the realm of intellect or spirit. Reality, Plato argues, is restricted to the latter. Christian metaphysics which comes much later borrows this idea and further modifies it with its concepts of "Kingdom of Heaven" and "a moral order of the universe."

Christianity's appeals to a search for eternal, transcendent truths had given birth to science which was now examining and repudiating the metaphysics of Christianity itself. This was resulting in a naïve reverence for science as a secular substitute of Christianity. For Nietzsche, we should not have high hopes from science either. He views it as merely another human method of investigating natural phenomena, which was limited in its application, and was incapable of creating a coherent set of values. He observes: "Now it is beginning to dawn on maybe five or six brains that physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to ourselves! if I may say so) and *not* an explanation of the world."[147]

[146] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* p. 62.

[147] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 15.

For Nietzsche, there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it. Any investigation into science as a historical, cultural and social phenomenon soon shows that scientific truths are contingent human constructs. They are often thought to be absolute only because we use persuasive terms like "law" for them. Now if science is also found incapable of providing a framework of values, this would lead to deep feelings of disillusionment, scepticism and pessimism. For Nietzsche, it has resulted in a collapse of meaning, relevance, and purpose.

> Man's aversion to existence has not become any greater than in previous times, it is simply that we moderns have come to doubt that there is any meaning in suffering and in existence itself. One extreme position is now succeeded by another equally extreme position, one that construes everything as if it were in vain. It is this "in vain" which constitutes the character of "present-day nihilism."[148]

In his influential psychological study of Nietzsche,JankoLavrin argues that the split between Reason and Instinct prevalent among the cultured Europeans of Nietzsche's time was held by Nietzsche to be an expression of the latter tendency i.e. an overemphasis on the rational. This separation between the two seemed to already have reached a stage where the so-called intellectual man was thriving at the expense of his vital instincts. In order to arrive at some sort of adjustment, Nietzsche looked for a solution among the ancient Greeks and he thought he had found a clue to it in the Dionysian element of collective revel and intoxication. This was exemplified in Nietzsche's thought by an explicit stress on the instinctive Dionysian element as against the abstract "Socratic" tendency in modern man.[149]

Nietzsche turned to the ancient Greeks precisely because in them the strong instincts prevailed over the abstract theories of life such as were current in the post-Socratic Greece, for instance. As mentioned before, the ancient Greeks faced an abyss of pessimism and potential denial of life, but they had averted both by their aesthetic transvaluation of the world. Nietzsche viewed the strongly instinctual and wild Dionysian element within the pre-Socratic Greek culture as an essentially creative and

[148]Pearson and Large,*The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 309.

[149]Lavrin, *Nietzsche An Approach*, pp. 101–7.

healthy force. Surveying the history of Western culture since the time of the Greeks, Nietzsche observed that this Dionysian, creative energy had been submerged and weakened as it was overpowered by the Apollonian forces of logical order and formal conceptualization. He therefore concluded that European culture since the time of Socrates has remained one-sidedly Apollonian, stiff and relatively unhealthy.[150]

In his later philosophy, therefore, there is no longer an attempt to keep the balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian drives; Dionysus is allowed to absorb Apollo. In this new form, Dionysus becomes a symbol for the affirmation of life in face of the hardest circumstances, while Apollo comes to stand for the flight from life into a realm of ideals that is therefore one of illusions. To be a Dionysian now is to affirm life; it is to overcome the inherent suffering of existence, not by negating pain but by transfiguring it through the celebration of all the potential possibilities of our animal nature, a concept which later transforms into that of the Overman.

Thus we see that Nietzsche aspired to a totality: he fought against the separation of reason, sensuality, freedom and will; he disciplined himself to a whole. It is this *Dionysian* attitude that is one of his lasting contributions to modern thought. He describes it thus:

> a*liberated* spirit stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, with *faith* in the fact that only what is individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole – *he no longer* denies.... But such a faith is the highest of all possible faiths; I have baptized it with the name of *Dionysus.*[151]

In the concept of Dionysus, we can see the supreme expression of the optimistic spirit in man. A person, for Nietzsche, has a Dionysian attitude toward life insofar as he affirms his life unconditionally; in particular, insofar as he affirms it including the hardships it has involved. The Dionysian man does not shrink from anything; he takes pleasure and pain equally in his stride. He does not view life as a duality and therefore refrains from taking a viewpoint that is not immanent in life itself. It is this positive

[150] Solomon, "*Friedrich Nietzsche*,"pp. 91–5.

[151]Pearson and Large,*The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 483.

character which Nietzsche accuses Christianity of infecting with its various notions of good, bad and afterlife. For both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, the really valuable truths are simple and closer to heart; since they do not belong to the public, they do not need to be loud:

> In the end one might reasonably ask whether it was not actually an *aesthetic* taste which kept mankind in blindness for so long: they desired from truth a *picturesque* effect, they desired in the same way from knowledge that it have a strong effect upon the senses. Our *modesty* offended their taste for the longest time.[152]

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche prefer "men of wisdom" over "men of knowledge." What separates the two is that while the former are interested in knowledge as a means to some end, the latter view it as an end in itself. The early Greeks knew too well about the "irrationality and suffering of human existence" and so they wanted to put limits on knowledge so that life can be lived even in the face ofthis truth. Like them, our two thinkers believe that knowledge should serve the ends of some particular value rather than the so-called absolute value of "truth." And this is one of the reasons why they criticize overemphasis on objectivity and rationalism.

Kierkegaard's Notion of Subjective Truth

Kierkegaard in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* takes up cudgels against the demand for objectivity in truth. He argues that what constitutes the essence of our lives is beyond the pale of objective truth. The questions of personal truth cannot be dealt with objectively because such an approach cancels out significantly the "subject" whose truth it is and for whom the truth has consequences. The truths that are essential to us – Kierkegaard places them in the ethical/religious realm – are embedded in our existence as concrete individuals. Objectivity deals with the measurable, a characteristic not applicable to actual human existence and values. Objectivity applies in the case of the tangible which my existence, not being a thing external to me, is not.

[152] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 112.

None other than me can tap into it and claim to know it, thus falling short of the demand for universality - a key constituent of objectivity. Hence in case of the existing individual, the objective criterion of truth fails. Kierkegaard argues that all "essential knowing pertains to existence, or only the knowing whose relation to existence is essential is essential knowing…all essential knowing is therefore essentially related to existence and to existing. Therefore, only ethical and ethical-religious knowing is essential knowing. But all ethical and all ethical-religious knowing is essentially a relating to the existing of the knower."[153]

Objective truth has its own areas of application; it is instrumental in the disciplines of history, science, mathematics, for example – Kierkegaard does not deny its relevance. He rather appreciates its role in facilitating general activities of daily survival, such as avoidance of injury owing to knowledge of physical phenomena. However its primary limitation is what Kierkegaard calls its "existential indifference" – it says nothing about in what relation to the innermost core of his being a person is. Moral or spiritual insights cannot be captured by it. It is therefore futile of philosophers to attempt or claim to know life by accumulating objective facts about existence. The "truths" they postulate have little bearing on how one actually "experiences" reality. Human experience is never disinterested; it can therefore never yield to a detached mode of thought. Their truths are complete and immutable, while human existence, which these truths claim to represent, is not a finished item that can be so easily categorized. Human existence is a perennial mode of occurring, like a growing plant. If it is uprooted from its immediate context and analysed, the results will not be true of individual as he exists.

The type of truth Kierkegaard posits against objective truth he calls "subjective truth." At times he also refers to it as "inwardness."[154] It does not mean that something becomes true if a subject believes it to be. Far from it, when the subject, while in the process of existing - which being continuous is also the process of becoming – explores and discovers one's own selfhood by directly immersing oneself in the innermost experiences of his being, this experiential involvement gives to him the

[153]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p. 166.

[154]'subjectivity, inwardness, is truth … the inwardness of the existing person is the truth.' See*Ibid.,*p.171.

keys to his actual existence, and this constitutes the highest truth available to him – subjective truth. There are matters in which the objective approach appears entirely futile, and we have to look for alternatives, as Kierkegaard notices:

> When subjectivity is truth, subjectivity's definition must include an expression for an opposition to objectivity, a reminder of the fork in the road, and this expression must also convey the tension of inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: the objective uncertainty, held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth available for an existing person. There where the way swings off (and where that is cannot be discovered objectively but only subjectively), at that place objective knowledge is annulled. Objectively speaking he has only uncertainty, but precisely there the infinite passion of inwardness is intensified, and truth is precisely the adventure to choose objective uncertainty with the passion of inwardness.[155]

It does not say much "factually" about us, but is the only passage to our "way of being." We have values that determine the choices and the decisions made by us and it is within this context that our life unfolds. It is not possible to have an objective vision of it because being protagonists, we cannot observe the nature of our existence from an outside vantage point. For Kierkegaard only God can cast an objective eye upon an individual's existence. If humans strive to achieve this, all they facilitate is a vulgar conceptualization of individual experience. Kierkegaard warns: "The subjective thinker is continually in the process of becoming. The objective thinker has already arrived."[156]

An important thing to note here is that by inwardness, Kierkegaard is by no means referring to the introspection or detached reflection that we do emotionally and mentally, for this would be reducing it to the activity of contemplation. He rather refers to actively involving oneself in one's innermost moral and spiritual commitments. One may argue that objectivity has a role to play here because we seem to have "objectively" true moral and spiritual truths, like moral laws and doctrines of religion. Kierkegaard does not deny this. Yet he points out that these truths are of no use and we do not really know them until we inwardly appropriate them through

[155]Ibid., p. 203.

[156]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.73.

experiencing them subjectively. We understand only when we experience, and not when we intellectually know. A person can have objectively true moral beliefs and still live falsely. Examples of this kind of hypocrisy can be seen everywhere around us. Examples contrary to this, though rarer, are not extinct. Someone may have pagan beliefs, but for Kierkegaard, she may come to display what he thinks is the essence of "Christian goodness." It is more about one's attitude towards the object, and less about the object itself:

> When truth is asked about objectively, reflection is directed objectively at truth as an object to which the knower relates. Reflection is not on the relation but on it being the truth, the true that he is relating to. If only this, to which he relates, is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. If the truth is asked about subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively on the individual's relation; if only the how of this relation is in truth, then the individual is in truth, even if he related in this way to untruth… Let us take knowledge of God as an example. Objectively, reflection is on it being the true God, subjectively on the individual relating to something in such a way that his relation is truly a God-relationship. On which side now is truth to be found?[157]

One can potentially be in a true relation with reality only via a subjective understanding. Our morals and values in an important sense constitute our individual identity. Even when we think we are acting dispassionately, on the 'facts' of a situation so to say, we somehow respond to these facts in the light of our values and morals. If someone holds that causing others' injury is wrong, it will inevitably reflect in his behaviour. Once your beliefs undergo change, you cannot be impervious to change yourself. In a sense therefore we are our values, and our individual identity is a manifestation of the values we hold. And we cannot judge our values by any objectivist criteria. The is-ought gap ensures that something such as "stealing is wrong" does not lend itself to an objective examination, since there is no way of proving or verifying it. This is why for Kierkegaard, subjectively experiencing moral truth opens up an "objective uncertainty."

Kierkegaard's point of departure is the concrete individual that is situated in the world that is otherwise all open to explanation. It is thus a relation of contradiction

[157] Ibid, pp. 167–8.

which the individual has with this explained world because the arbitrary happening of his existence – that one is one and nobody else, and that one "is" rather than not – is both unpredictable by reason nor can it be simplified into something analysable. Yet this existence that one lives from moment to moment, and that seems beyond comprehension is the only thing that gives one certitude; it is the only thing I really can be said to possess evidence of. To fully understand and engage with it, man has no other option but to become subjective. When one adopts a subjective attitude, one starts existing consciously and is aware of the contrast between the paradox that life is and the comparative lull objectivity leads him into. The most significant questions of life, whether those concerning the soul, the world, the God or the man himself can be approached via objective truth, but their comprehension become available to us only when we engage with them subjectively. This is why Kierkegaard holds Socrates in high esteem because his queries concerning existence reaffirm its paradoxical nature:

> Was he therefore a doubter? By no means. The Socratic ignorance…was an expression for the principle that the eternal truth is related to an existing individual, and this truth must therefore be a paradox for him as long as he exists.[158]

Following Socrates, Kierkegaard's aim is to move away from the sort of philosophy that attempts to accumulate a set of facts about the world. Instead, he would prefer to go back to the Socratic question of how to live one's life. This obviously means to realize oneself through self-commitment to the choices one makes as a free subjective individual, since the crowd is untruth and one cannot attain authentic truth if one does not look for it through passionate inwardness. It needs to be pointed out here that this passionate inwardness and this focus on the inner sphere leads one out of philosophy into life itself. Its only relation with philosophy is the sense that the philosopher is offering philosophical reasons for his turning against philosophy. Kierkegaard wants to move directly to action, and this calls for a suspicion in him regarding the workability of a purely contemplative cognition. This is why we see him moving towards a more psychological approach in describing internal activity. Thus the essence of Kierkegaard's view on truth is that truth is not a set of propositions to be learned, but a process of choices to be made, which is never

[158]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p. 344.

completed. "Truth in subjectivity" can never be a finished product; it is always in progress, and therefore cannot be formalized or explained away by philosophy. Faith, which is the epitome of this subjectivity, is absurd to its very core, and if it is attempted to justify faith through the agency of any objective media like reason or science, the project would crumble. Faith cannot be compatible with any objectivity even in principle. The individual has to approach it via a conscious decision to engage with its paradoxical nature.

There have been a number of thinkers preceding Kierkegaard who have advised against the attempts whereby a cognitive justification is sought for religious beliefs, most important of them Kant, who does not appreciate the various proofs preceding philosophers had been offering in support of God's existence. To talk of founding religious beliefs on theoretical turf was a project doomed from the start for him, as it is for Kierkegaard. But this does not mean that no positive account of religion can be given, and Kant tried to perform this task. However the way Kierkegaard handles the problem distinguishes him from other philosophers. Rather than trying to give objective explanations for faith, and playing down the rational difficulties a religion like Christianity offered, he straightforwardly announced himself as a Christian thinker, and emphasised the aforementioned problems instead of sweeping them under the rug. Philosophers prior to him had been putting their minds together to try and make Christianity compatible with rational inquiry, but Kierkegaard denied that such an inquiry was even possible or desirable; he pointed out that a true Christian walked not towards objectivity, but in the opposite direction. Only by engaging with it "subjectively" could this religion be followed and inculcated by the individual. Following Christianity was essentially resolving to dedicate oneself inwardly and sincerely than to speculate disinterestedly or to rationalize in a vacuum. Kierkegaard had nothing but loathing for the latter type of Christians, as a commentator points out:

> Bourgeois religiosity, he declares, is a religion of the lips and not the heart. 'The bourgeois' love of God commences when the vegetative life is in full swing, when the hands are comfortably folded over the stomach, when the head is reclining on a soft, easy chair, and when a drowsy glance is raised toward the ceiling, toward higher things.[159]

[159]Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith,* p. 17.

By painting Christianity with a subjective hue, Kierkegaard was not trivializing it or reintroducing it in an easier format. Nothing could be farther from the truth than this. His point was only that the truly important things in life, faith in this case, are not the domain of objective or universal truths, which are the domain of the public, making them accessible to all. Faith, for example, demanded sacrifice and utmost inner hardship on part of an individual. Religious beliefs, for Kierkegaard, were distinguished by two stages of their development. Any religious belief worth having had to brave the "objective uncertainty" that characterized statements pointing towards the divine, the uncertainty a corollary of the lack of rational justification for the statements in question. Thus having faith was something like staying true to a belief for which there was no objective guarantee, which could be a matter of personal crisis to the follower. That is why Kierkegaard calls the religious sphere

> the sphere of fulfilment, but, please note, not a fulfilment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack of gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on seventy thousand fathoms of water, and yet be joyful.[160]

However we are here still talking about something for which there is just an objective uncertainty; Kierkegaard's second stage tests us even more. He presents the concept of "incarnation" in Christianity as something that has an intrinsically contrary relationship with reason. It is a kind of illegible paradox which demands of the follower a sacrifice of his thinking faculties so to say. There is no objective escape route of skirting around this issue for the true Christian. Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals and Papers* about the special nature of this Christian doctrine:

> Christianity is not content to be an evolution inside the total determination of human nature, such a proposition is too little to offer to God…The incarnation would in such a case have direct analogies in the incarnations of paganism, while the difference is: incarnation as a human invention and incarnation as stemming from God.[161]

[160]Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way,* p. 476.

[161]Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript,* p. 241.

Historical research, Biblical exegesis and their results hold no importance or relevance here, for it is a matter that has much more on stake. The concept of incarnation states that God which is eternal, infinite and divine entered the realm of temporality, finitude and mortality. The very conception goes against logic as it brings together contradictions in an unprecedented manner. Kierkegaard asks his readers to appreciate and not despair of the paradox:

> But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow. But the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding to will the collision, although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.[162]

Another outcome of the paradox is its undermining of the correspondence theory on which most accounts of objective truth are based. Kierkegaard argued that the testimony of Christ's contemporaries and the Apostles was in no way superior in legitimizing the event of the Incarnation than the later generations whose knowledge about it was based on nothing more than this testimony. This was because to truly understand or "accept" the Incarnation, a voluntary leap of faith from the domain of reason into the domain of the absurd was needed for both the parties, irrespective of the fact how closer or further in time one was from Christ. Thus the situation for the man of faith is from the point of objectivity a horror, and yet Kierkegaard calls the man of faith as displaying "the highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity." An interesting point here is that unlike in case of objective truth, to proceed subjectively could require divine help, which is why the distinction between reason and faith is more than just a quantitative distinction. This is why in stressing that "subjectivity is truth," Kierkegaard is not talking so much about the content of this truth, as the manner in which the truth has been arrived at, and its relation with the concerned person. This could lead to the implication, as it has, that for Kierkegaard, if one has the right intensity of belief in something, it sufficed to prove that the thing in question was real. However, what we must not lose sight of is the fact that with

[162]Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments,* p. 37.

Kierkegaard, the focus was always more phenomenological or existential than epistemological. He held Christianity as something belonging to a higher realm; it had nothing to do with the passive rituals, the uninvolved worship, and the metaphysical justifications that were being carried out in its name. A commentator notes,

> The paradox must be the historical event that is discontinuous with human experience and expectations. The surprising thing is that Christians have been bothered by the fact that Christianity contradicts immanent speculation and have even tried to alter their faith to make it more palatable – this is the heart of Climacus' polemic against modernism and liberalism in theology.[163]

Christianity primarily meant for him committing oneself wholeheartedly and sincerely to the necessarily non-rational demands it made on one, the greatest of which entailed being called upon to understand the birth, life and death of its founder. This is where his approach differed from that of Hegel who offered an ultimate conceptual synthesis of reality, through the reconciliation of all contradictions and negations in the Absolute Spirit. For Kierkegaard, such reconciliation can be grasped only by faith, in an attitude of supreme subjectivity. As regards the reason, he had to offer nothing but absurdity. The union of God and man for him is not an eternal, objective truth of reason, but actual in the historic incarnation of Christ, and the true Christian believes it in spite of the scandal it offers to reason.

Nietzsche's Doctrine of Perspectivism

In Nietzsche's case, one has to take at face value his statement that he is onto something different from his predecessors in philosophy. He was among the first Western thinkers to realize that

> Western man was facing a radical change in his relationship with 'truth': a change that would come about when he recognized that the metaphysical,

[163]Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript,* p. 249.

> religious, moral and rational truths which were formerly both backbone and substance of the Western tradition were in fact errors.[164]

While he can be seen as offering novel solutions to the usual problems of philosophy, he aims to rather inquire into the basic concepts in which philosophy has traditionally been couched. In traditional philosophy, we find the attempts to present universally and objectively true answers to philosophical questions – the presupposition being that such universal and objective truths are possible. Nietzsche contests against this being the case. The cornerstone of his philosophy is his crusade against absolutism of all kinds. He perceives it as dogmatic to ask for universally binding solutions to problems of philosophy, and maintains that the thinkers' search for eternal objective truths "out there" is a wild goose chase.

Nietzsche's philosophy, in a desire to give it some kind of label, has sometimes been described as *nihilism.* Coming from the Latin *nihil,* meaning "nothing," the term suggests negativity and emptiness, a rejection of all values and a belief in nothing. This is an incomplete characterization of his thought. We can categorize two types of nihilism; neither of which Nietzsche falls into but was nonetheless influenced by, namely, Oriental nihilism, and European nihilism. Nietzsche gained an insight into Oriental nihilism via the writings of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was heavily influenced by what he understood of Buddhist teachings and when he talks of extinguishing the self and that the world we live in has no ultimate reality, it is this form of nihilism that he is considering. Oriental nihilism preaches that because the world we live in is not real, our attachment to it is an illusion. Life is without sense or point, merely an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Therefore to find salvation we must escape from this world and extinguish the concept of the self with all its desires. In his initial career, Nietzsche was greatly taken in by Schopenhauer's pessimism, but he soon outgrew it:

> I dealt especially with the value of the 'unegoistic', the instincts of compassion, self-denial, self-sacrifice which Schopenhauer had for so long gilded, deified and transcendentalized until he was finally left with them as those 'values as such' on

[164]Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 9.

> the basis of which he *said 'no'* to life and to himself as well.... Precisely here I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its most sublime temptation and seduction – temptation to what? to nothingness? – precisely here I saw the beginning of the end, standstill, mankind looking back wearily, turning its will *against* life.[165]

Then there was the kind of nihilism that existed in the later decades of nineteenth century Europe under the influence of writers such as Turgenev. These nihilists consisted mostly of the younger generation who were rejecting the beliefs and values of the older generation. Going against the old ideas of religion, tradition and culture, these nihilists claimed to believe in "nothing."Characterizing them as "passive nihilists," Nietzsche did not find in them any hope for the future. They represented an ethos wherein faith in values has been lost but the desire for the absolutes that characterized such faith remains in place. The overall synthesis of values and goals dissolves which leads to an immanent conflict within various individual ideals. In confusion, the age turns to any moral, political or religious system that can benumb, soothe and pacify the conflict – regardless of the harms such a choice would entail over a course of time.[166]The nihilists also replaced traditional beliefs with a belief in science. Instead of seeking salvation in the next life, the nihilists looked to a better understanding of this world as the future hope.

In both Oriental and European nihilism, there still existed a belief in salvation, and in some form of order or values. Nietzsche however went further than this. He proclaimed that all belief systems, whether science, religion, art or morality, were fictions. They were merely instances of the will to power. This world was the only world even if valueless. The recognition of these facts should not lead to pessimism. Rather we should say a Dionysian "yes" to life. Nietzsche here describes the Dionysian idea:

> one who has the harshest, most terrible insight into reality, who has thought the 'most abyssal thought', nevertheless finds in it no objection to existence, or even to the eternal recurrence of existence—but rather yet another reason *to be himself* the eternal 'yes' to all things, 'the

[165]Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 7.

[166]Ibid., pp.146–7.

enormous and unbounded Yea- and Amen-saying'.... 'Into all abysses I carry my blessing Yea-saying'.... *But that is the concept of Dionysusonce again*.[167]

Where Schopenhauer sees life's suffering as offering no consolation and, because of this, drains it of all meaning, Dionysus overcomes it in an act of affirmation that celebrates the horrors of existence; thus offering the opportunity for fashioning a creative and hence fulfilling life in the face of meaninglessness.

To say the world is 'valueless' is not to say that it has little worth. Rather, it does not make sense to say that one thing has more 'value' than another, because there is no such thing as an absolute scale of values. This was a rejection of the beliefs of so many philosophies and religions that there is an objective world. These systems and their metaphysical propositions often endorse a correspondence theory of truth. This theory holds that when we use terms like 'God,' or 'good' or 'bad' or 'justice' we are making reference to an actual 'God,' an actual 'justice' and so on; that is, these terms correspond to a reality. For Nietzsche, there is no reality for these terms to correspond to.

In Nietzsche's view, all views and theories are but convenient illusions essential for carrying on with our lives. This is especially applicable to what he thinks is our commonly held assumptions about the world: that we inhabit a world of independent entities of various types, that these interact with each other causally, and a relatively crystallized self is witness to it. He looks at this worldview as a convenient fiction, but one which is absolutely imperative for our survival as a species. All theories regarding the world are at best what they are: theories. Through them, we attempt to put our experience under an organized schema, which in turn helps us to exert control and order over our surroundings. But this obviously does not translate into a universal validity for the schema. It is a "fabricated world" at best no matter how often or since how long it has been referred to as the "real world."

All our truths and our knowledge claims must be identified in their essence as interpretations, no matter what field of human activity they belong to. Add to this the limitation that we cannot have a finished version of anything – our knowledge is essentially limited. Our metaphysics, our theories of knowledge, and our moral

[167] Nietzsche*, Ecce Homo,* p. 73.

worldviews – all fall short of being definitive. It is in fact liberating to accept the untenability of recognizing any worldview as the final and objectively valid one, and to recognize that all we can claim to have are distinctive worldviews. Nietzsche actively denies that final solutions in philosophy are ever within our reach. Therefore he does not mince words in attacking the pretence of philosophers in their claiming for themselves an objective, impartial and disinterested concern for truth. In his view, such a concern is always conditioned by the particular values they hold, their personal prejudices, and their general outlook towards existence. He chides them:

> They all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic…while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an "inspiration" or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact. They are all advocates who do not want to be seen as such; for the most part, in fact, they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as "truths."[168]

What kind of a person a philosopher is goes a long way in determining what kind of philosopher that person is. He attacks the metaphysicians especially for their haughtiness in positing a superior "real world" against the "apparent one," and argues that reality cannot be described by any of these so called disinterested objectivities – all of them are inherently interpretations and do not exhaust reality. An objective worldview is no view at all – a true philosopher does not regard it even as unattainable; he simply dismisses it as an ideal.

The common-sense view of the world, as was stated before, is to a great extent preferable to the varied theories of the metaphysicians, since it has pragmatically proved useful to us in the well-being of our species. It is a measure of its adaptability and strength that it has outlasted other views. Other views did not help in ensuring human survival and either disappeared with their pioneers or were phased out gradually as errors or illusions. This clearly shows that it is not in logical sharpness or objective necessity that the strength of a theory lies but by its contribution in actively facilitating particular values and interests. We have to simplify our understanding of

[168] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 8.

the world and make do with coarse comprehensions regarding reality because it is the only way we can ensure our survival in an endlessly varied and changing environment; hence our belief in various independent entities, causal relations, self and even science. Our "truths" and systems of knowledge rather paradoxically become our masters instead of the other way round and lay down the boundaries of our existence and understanding; we forget that we invented them just to aid our survival. Once we forget this hierarchy, our relation with our own instruments stands reversed.

Every view campaigns for values and interests of its own in different ways. This in itself is not problematic. What is problematic is the dogmatic attitude inherent in the philosophers who believe they are not subject to perspectival interests and limitations and can present a detached, objective worldview of "things as they are." Their theories are, however, not much different from the common-sense view because the former also originate out of specific interests; they betray both a way of life as well as an attitude towards life. If one accepts these theories, one cannot do so without accepting the founts of their origin as well. A value-free view of reality, for Nietzsche, is just impossible, and moreover a demand for the same reeks of latent dogmatism. He says in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> most of a philosopher's conscious thought is secretly directed and forced into determinate channels by the instincts. Even behind all logic and its autocratic posturings stand valuations or, stated more clearly, physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life.[169]

Nietzsche again holds that philosophers cannot claim for their theories superiority over common sense even in the sense of a better correspondence to reality "as it is" – for him all theories fail on that standard. He upholds the common sense view only up to that point in the past where it benefitted life and human survival; it could never claim to give an accurate picture of reality for him. And he attacks it also on the same grounds: that now it has ceased to be life-affirming and proves inimical for what constitutes our strengths. This is what he wants his readers to applaud and affirm his own thoughts for – because the latter point towards a way of life that is better suited for mankind's further development. An important thing to note here is

[169]Ibid.,p. 7.

that Nietzsche realizes the important role values play in ensuring the safety and survival of our species, and therefore he agrees that his demand for the refutation of the common sense or herd values opens us up to the probability of our taking up even more hostile or harmful views. He therefore offers his own philosophy as a refuge, though being a Heraclitan,[170] he offers it only as Wittgenstein would offer one a ladder. What we see Nietzsche doing here is attacking the idea and importance of a universally agreed upon theory of truth. For him, truth is most fundamentally constituted by specific values that ensure our survival – that is why the common sense was taken to be the truth for so long, and Nietzsche appreciates that – and therefore it is bound o change from time to time.

Nietzsche's doctrine can be construed as an attack on the correspondence theory of truth and an advocacy of a pragmatic one in its stead, but that would be a poor reading of him. He is against the conception of a theory of truth because a theory calls for an acceptance of "truth" as a necessary and generally agreed upon condition, while even an error or illusion can serve the ends of human survival better than a truth sometimes. As he says,

> People have taken the *value* of these 'values' as given, as factual, as beyond all questioning; up till now, nobody has had the remotest doubt or hesitation in placing higher value on 'the good man' than on 'the evil', higher value in the sense of advancement, benefit and prosperity for man in general (and this includes man's future). What if the opposite were true?[171]

Nietzsche is sometimes accused of having a correspondence theory of his own, the reasoning being that in holding all other views guilty of not corresponding to reality, he allows that there must be a perfect standpoint whose correspondence to reality is accurate. However all he is saying is we must replace the theory that truth correspond to some objective reality out there with one that has an alternate criterion

[170] Heraclitus saw the natural world as an environment of perpetual struggle and strife. "All is flux," he supposed; everything is changing all the time. As Heraclitus is often reported to have said, "Upon those who step into the same river, different waters flow." The tension and conflict which govern everything in our experience are moderated only by the operation of a universal principle of proportionality in all things. See http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/2b.htm

[171] Nietzsche*, On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 8.

of catering to certain values that promote life; in other words, he calls for an acceptance and appreciation of the interests that go into proposing a view, rather than a celebration of supposed detachment and disinterest that does not exist in actuality. It is impossible to wash our hands of the interests which lead us to promulgate "truths," and which play an important role in establishing what is "true" by us.

When we look at Nietzsche's own worldview, we have to take him at his word that he is not putting forward a detached and objective view; otherwise his own view falls prey to his own criticism. He views the world as devoid of any inherent order – it is perennially in flux. The world is run by a "will-to-power" wherein its different constituents exert themselves to prevail over other constituents.[172] Their continuous and never-ceasing activity is their essence and consists primarily of attempting to overcome and incorporate the rest. Each of these is the sum of its effects. Humans are nothing more than complex aggregates of these power-entities. All manifestations of exerting control, organizing and imposing order come under the will-to-power, and knowledge is no different. And we constitute knowledge through formulating concepts and categories which make this world liveable and manageable; our "truths" – being in their essence concepts only – are therefore expressions of will-to-power themselves. In a fascinating paragraph in his eponymous work, which is worth quoting *in toto*, Nietzsche gives us some insights:

> And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend

[172] Considering the importance of the concept of Will-to-Power in Nietzsche's philosophy – he also considers it a central idea – it is lamentable that it is never very clear what he means by it. Is it a power in the sense of being an energy? If yes, of what kind? Should it be seen as a biological fact? Or is it a psychological phenomena? To say the worst, Nietzsche makes himself susceptible to the charge of positing one of those metaphysical entities he criticises in others in order to make a case for a particular table of values? The main reason for this difficulty is that Nietzsche is never particularly explicit in his account of the doctrine, and most material related to it came top fore after Nietzsche's death. In his unpublished notes, Nietzsche seems to present will to power as a metaphysical explanation for the nature of everything. This interpretation however goes against Nietzsche's views against all kinds of metaphysical doctrines. The theory remains open to all kinds of interpretations.

> itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by "nothingness" as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be "empty" here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms striving toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my "beyond good and evil," without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself—do you want a name for this world? A solution for all of its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides![173]

The "will to power" of Nietzsche can be interpreted in two ways. One is the traditional –the objective – view that looks at it as an explanation for all of life's manifestations. It is a neutral force that governs the world. It betrays a Pre-Socratic influence on Nietzsche as it implies a search for some underlying principle, a "theory of everything." The Pre-Socratics were distinguished by their belief that there is an underlying principle that governed the universe, a first principle that was the origin of all things. Thales thought it was water, Heraclitus fire, and so on. Can Nietzsche's doctrine also be interpreted this way? Is the underlying principle of the universe nothing but a multiplicity of drives seeking power over one another? But then Nietzsche stands accused of creating the world in the image of his own philosophy, as

[173]Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks,* p. 39.

he lampoons other philosophers for. This brings us to the second interpretation, the subjective one, which results from this passage in *Beyond Good and Evil:*

> somebody might come along, who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same "Nature," and with regard to the same phenomena, just the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of the claims of power--an interpreter who should so place the unexceptionalness and unconditionalness of all "Will to Power" before your eyes, that almost every word, and the word "tyranny" itself, would eventually seem unsuitable…Granted that this also is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better.[174]

Here Nietzsche seems to suggest that will to power is in the end just an interpretation and is therefore no truer than other interpretations. The question remains as to why is it then important, if it is just a subjective view. Nietzsche answers that it cannot be otherwise, not only for his view, but for any view. The knowledge that one cannot demonstrate objective truths, that one cannot step outside one's own perspective, is not a reason to remain silent or to adopt a nihilistic stance. He writes about the will to power not because it exists, but because he values it. Rather than seeing the will to power as some underlying world explanation, it is seen first and foremost as the power over one's self. In Nietzsche's Zarathustra, we have a character in the process of creating a new kind of world with new values. When faced with a world that no longer had meaning or credibility in his eyes, he creates a world that is meaningful to him. The issue of whether it is true or not is irrelevant; at best it highlights the whole problem of trying to look at the world in terms of polar opposites. Nietzsche often saw creative artists, painters and composers as his higher beings and so the importance for him of creating a world for oneself cannot be overemphasised. While we can live with a world that lacks meaning, Nietzsche questions whether such a life is worth living. Mere self-preservation is futile for him, unless it is also accompanied by self-enhancement. Thus "will to power" is our saying "yes" to life and go on the offensive against mediocrity and what Nietzsche calls decadent values. His Zarathustra says: "This new tablet, my brothers, I place above you: *become*

[174]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* p. *22.*

hard!"[175] What is truth therefore is whatever overcomes the world, whatever view of the world prevails. Truth is a mental construct; it is what is psychologically bearable.

Why this is not like other views is because other views assume that there is some objective fixed reality out there, and they claim to correspond to it. Nietzsche denies that there is an objective structure, that there is something for truths to stand true of. He therefore does not believe in "truths," just in different views which derive from particular interests and campaign for specific ways of life. He does not claim universal validity from these; his requirement is just that they be credible from particular points of view. In rebutting existing values and "truths," Nietzsche's ultimate aim is to transubstantiate the table of values in order to facilitate the genesis of a new worldview which would in turn facilitate a race of "higher beings:"

> To show that an ever more economical use of men and mankind, a 'machinery' of interests and actions ever more firmly intertwined, *necessariIy implies a counter-movement*. I call this *the secretion of a luxurious surplus from mankind*, which is to bring to light a *stronger* species, a higher type, the conditions of whose genesis and survival are different from those of the average man. As is well known, my concept, my *metaphor* for this type is the word 'superman'.[176]

He wants human beings to appreciate and desire this higher plane of existence for themselves and it is with this prejudice or interest that he presents his own worldview including his own notion of truth. At the same time, however, we must note that this higher existence is antithetical to earlier similar conceptions of religion which downplay earthly existence and posit a superior and better "higher realm" in its place. Nietzsche instead firmly believes that our worldviews cannot and should not be divorced from the world itself. He sees such an attitude as degenerate: "To divide the world into a 'true' and an 'apparent' world, whether after the manner of Christianity or of Kant (after all a Christian in disguise) is only a sign of décadence – a symptom of *degenerating* life…."[177]

---

[175]Ibid., p. 172.

[176] Nietzsche*, Writings from the Late Notebooks,* p. 177.

[177] Nietzsche*, Twilight of the Idols*, p. 21.

The world itself is a composite of our interpretations, and there is no outside position we can take in order to take a God's eye view of the world. The notion of "the world" holds nothing but interpretations of various kinds, and would be rendered empty were these to be taken away. Nietzsche fervently holds that "one is in the whole – there is nothing that could judge, measure, compare and condemn our existence, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing and condemning the whole. *But there is nothing outside the whole!"*[178]

Thus there is no view that is not an interpretation; even the denial that there is actually such a view is itself an interpretation. In fact when we rid ourselves of the tyranny of "truths," we rid ourselves of the real/apparent distinction with respect to the world, because once the world is shown to be a primarily interpretative entity, there can be no hard "reality" to it, and reality and appearance being mutually dependent concepts, there is no "apparent" world too. We come back from the heavens to our Earth, as it were.

Another important point Nietzsche raises is that all our views of the world are deeply embedded in our linguistic structure.Indeed, he sees language, as we use it, also as an expression of power, as he says in the *Genealogy:*

> The seigneurial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers: they say 'this *is* so and so', they set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it, as it were. [179]

We inculcate linguistically the composite notion of "subject-predicate" and then proceed to look for a similar structure in metaphysics. The linguistic subject leads to the metaphysical "self" and the predicate to the "things." Then we proceed to involve "causality" and in the process bestow "agency" onto the subject. Our tendency for metaphysical speculation is thus rooted in our linguistic framework. It is also evident in the case that Nietzsche's pronouncements where his downplaying of various "views" about the world as "interpretations" still leaves a linguistic vacuum for a reader to see him as building the case for a "real" world which would admit of

[178]Ibid., p. 36.

[179]Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals,* p.12.

something better than interpretations. It is no surprise that in a Wittgensteinian manner, Nietzsche also calls for a critical and self-conscious use of language.[180] In a similar manner, our tendency for seeing any theories as true is rooted in our inheritance of comprehending reality as something external, objective and transcendent. Once we stop pursuing the illusion of fixed, eternal and dispassionate truths, we are rendered free to use our faculties in giving ourselves novel perspectives which are moulded to best further our requirements and interests in life. They may not seem as comforting and awe-inspiring as the earlier views and values, but they certainly would, in all their humility, be more life-affirming:

> In the end one might reasonably ask whether it was not actually an *aesthetic* taste which kept mankind in blindness for so long: they desired from truth a *picturesque* effect, they desired in the same way from knowledge that it have a strong effect upon the senses. Our *modesty* offended their taste for the longest time.[181]

Whether Nietzsche's perspectivism invites the charges of relativism or not is contestable, but it certainly does not mean that all views are equally good or bad. It is specific standpoints which decide which views will do well, and not all views fare equally well on all standpoints. In case of particular persons, for example, just any set of values or truths will not do, their choice of values will rather be dependent on their station in life and on their attitude towards existence. If relativism is taken to mean that the world cannot be said to have only one character and therefore there can be no ground for choosing between different views of it, perspectivism would part ways with it in holding that there is no character the world possesses independent of interpretations. It would also not demand universality for these interpretations and this is the axiological aspect of Nietzsche's crusade. Postulating a homogenous version of truth and values has been, in his view, a devious and consciously intended strategy to frustrate creativity and novelty in ideas since times immemorial. It has been one of the most visible manifestations of the will-to-power.

---

[180] "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language." See Wittgenstein,*Philosophical Investigations,* p.47.

[181] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 112.

One may yet ask whether – everything being a manifestation of the will-to-power in one way or the other – Nietzsche's perspectivism in itself is not a decoy to facilitate new types of domination. Nietzsche seems to answer this in a two-fold way. For those "higher spirits" who embrace his invitation to break the shackles of "truth" and "value," everything takes on a new meaning and they are free to not only interpret but also change the world with ever new perspectives. In this endeavour, they may come across "lower beings" or the members of "the herd" who would need to be subordinated, since they lack the creativity or the power of the will to create values for themselves. Nietzsche does not rule out this power hierarchy – indeed, he expects and favors it – but his writings seem to make the case for a creative or artistic dominance, not a military or political one, as was once thought.

Moreover the "higher spirits" would be denied the haughtiness and destructive over-confidence which comes with the idea of possessing the final/real "truth" and which becomes the driving force for domination and exploitation of others in the name of religion, politics or even knowledge. They would instead follow the hard path with no support of universal and objective beliefs, living constantly the life of an explorer of the unknown, braving all the uncertainties and difficulties unimaginable to the "lower beings," yet it is this renunciation that would evolve them from ordinary mortals into "Overmen."[182]

In the absence of God as well as His heaven, the Overman is left with only himself and the earth. Nietzsche, therefore, exhorts his readers to invest all they have in this earthly life. In Zarathustra's impassioned words:

> Remain faithful to the earth, my brothers, with the power of your virtue! Let your bestowing love and your knowledge serve the meaning of the earth! Thus I beg and beseech you.

[182] "Over" words, some of them coinages, are common in this work, and Übermensch has to be understood in its context. Mensch means human being as opposed to animal, and what is called for is not a super-brute but a human being who has created for himself that unique position in the cosmos which the Bible considered his divine birthright. The meaning of life is thus found on earth, in this life, not as the inevitable outcome of evolution, which might well give us the "last man" instead, but in the few human beings who raise themselves above the all-too-human mass." See Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 115–6.

> Do not let it fly away from earthly things and beat against eternal walls with its wings! Oh, there has always been so much virtue that flew away! Like me, guide the virtue that has flown away back to the earth – yes, back to the body and life: so that it may give the earth its meaning, a human meaning![183]

It is through the creation of this "human meaning," that man for the first time becomes himself a creator. Nietzsche is not saying that the earlier values were created by an external source, although this is what mankind has been led to believe. What Nietzsche wants to emphasize is that now man would use his power of creation for himself rather than lend it to lift the burden of some abstract idealization.[184] As we saw in Nietzsche's criticism of Kant, he values only those ideals that are meaningful and valid subjectively. Rejecting the idea of a God who gives us values changeless and transcendent of the everyday world, his Overman creates values which are firmly rooted in the everyday changing world. He is a self-contained moral authority. His conceptions of good and evil are self-created, depending on what contributes to his success or failure. Good is therefore something which helps actualize his potential and whatever contributes to putting obstacles in the way of the former is evil.

Through his conceptualization of the Overman, Nietzsche is seen as creating a new ideal consistent with his doctrine of perspectivism. This ideal is presented as an alternative to Platonic truth, in that the distinction between real and apparent world is transcended through it, and only our earthly experiences are the laboratory to experience and test its truth. By proposing the Overman, Nietzsche is in a way dismissing the notion of the thing-in-itself, and it is the thing-in-itself that has been the basis for the two world theory. To separate our experiences as the illusory world and whatever may be the cause of those experiences as the real world was exposed by him as an untenable distinction; they are both experiences. The Overman affirms this and his world is composed purely of the experiences he has had. He abolishes the real world by denying the distinction between the real world and the apparent world.

[183]Ibid., p.57.

[184]Ibid., pp. 154–55.

CHAPTER FOUR

AUTHENTICITY AS SELF-BECOMING

Authenticity is a term best understood via the original/copy, real/imaginary dichotomies and isgenerally used with regards to works of art, documents and historical excavations and finds, and to distinguishthe genuine ones from potential copies and forgeries. Philosophically, the concept is applied to human life and human selves, and becomes much more convoluted than its daily use suggests.[185]

Within the purview of existential thought, authenticity refers to a sort of honesty, truthfulness with one's own self in the sense of a character or a persona, and involves not bowing down to external pressures, whether they be in the form of external truths, external mores or the mass surrounding oneself. It is only a person conscious of herself, having inured herself to the twin influences – crowd as well as objective, universal and absolute truth – who can aspire to truly come to terms with the demands her individuality and subjectivity make on her – that she "become what she is," or lead an authentic life, in other words.

The term "authenticity" was popularized through Martin Heidegger's liberal use of the term in his *Being and Time.* Heidegger's term "*eigentlich*" signifies descriptively on the one hand what is formally unique and peculiar to each individual human being. It also has an evaluative meaning whereby "authentic" refers to a desirable and a choice worthy way of life. As a rough approximation, one may say that authenticity consists in somehow being true and honestto oneself, which is to say, being inwardly sincere. In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre refers to human existence as "being which is what it is not and which is not what it is."[186] In a similar way, he holds that we cognize authenticity when "we flee it," thus implying that it is present when it is absent, that authenticity is to be reached through inauthenticity and through

[185]https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/authentic, retrieved on 19/07/16.

[186]Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* p.58.

experience of different cases of 'bad faith.' It is not a coincidence that more examples of the latter than the former are to be found in Sartre's works.

Although Kierkegaard makes no systematic use of (the Danish equivalent of) the term "authenticity," we can nonetheless identify in his major works a number of interconnected themes that, taken together, constitute an account of authentic selfhood. Similarly,Nietzsche did not use the term "authenticity" explicitly, but it is possible to locate its origin in his recurrent distinctions between *Wahrheit*(truth) and *Wahrhaftigkeit* (truthfulness).This notion of *Wahrhaftigkeit*is virtually a synonym of the Heideggerian term *eigentlich*.[187]

Authenticity for the existentialists is a new norm for comprehending the ssence of being human, and it differs significantly both from the value of truth that one associates with scientific worldview as well as from the moral concepts like good, just etc. Authenticity makes sense only to a conception of self which transcends the Cartesian self; it is a kind of engaged-with-the-world self, a self that is embodied. The contrast is brought out by existentialist writers through a comparison between what they call an authentic lifestyle on the one hand, and the life of the anonymous public on the other.

Here it is noteworthy that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not in fact exemplify an authentic life historically. While Kierkegaard turns to Semitic mythology, Nietzsche has to make do with the fictional figure of Zarathustra. Here is how Kierkegaard describes the authentic person, or the "man of faith," as he calls him – through his analysis of the Biblical figure of Abraham:

> I have not found any reliable example of the knight of faith…. Here he is…. I clasp my hands and say half aloud, 'Good Lord, is this the man? He lives as carefree as a ne'er-dowell, and yet…he does not do the least thing except by virtue of the absurd…. what a tremendous paradox faith is, a paradox which is capable of transforming a murder into a holy act well-pleasing to God, a paradox which gives Isaac back to Abraham, which no thought can master, because faith begins precisely there where thinking leaves off…. The ethical expression for what Abraham did is, that he would murder Isaac; the religious expression is, that

[187]Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity,* p. 46.

> he would sacrifice Isaac…. This contradiction consists the dread which can well make a man sleepless, and yet Abraham is not what he is without this dread.[188]

The authentic hero, as we see above, aspires to go beyond his social and moral dilemmas and achieve a truthful mode of existence. He tires of the passivity of his life, even though none but he himself is the centrepiece of his story; he desires rather to write the story himself too, and pledges constant engagement with and unwavering loyalty to that story. This is evidently at work in Nietzsche's characterization of the Zoroastrian philosopher in his "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*" too:

> When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not tire of it. But at last a change came over his heart, and one morning he rose with the dawn, stepped before the sun, and spoke to it thus:
>
> 'You great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?…I must descend to the depths, as you do in the evening'…
>
> Like the sun, Zarathustra too wants to go under; now he sits and waits, surrounded by broken old tablets and new tablets half covered with writing. Behold, here is a new tablet…. Man is something that must be overcome…. God died: now we want the overman to live.[189]

The authentic person however is not a "hero" in the traditional sense, because a hero never strays too far from the customs and mores of his ilk, and others' admiration of him stems from his exploits within the framework of the ethos of his age. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's authentic persons, however, are feted primarily for going beyond this ethos and carving out a deeply personal and subjective niche which they use for self-expression as individuals. They are not and cannot be everybody's heroes. Thus we find relatively little space in their writings for a description of a concrete historical personality who instantiates authenticity. There seems to be a sort of unwritten agreement that to describe authenticity positively amounts to negating it.

---

[188] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* pp. 49, 50–1

[189] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* pp. 3, 231–232.

For these two philosophers, it is in quite critical situations that the authentic persona is best forged. Such a situation could be what we now call an "existential crisis," triggered both by external or internal events. But social and historical upheavals such as the decline of Enlightenment rationality, loss of Christian belief in God, etc. could also precipitate a relook into the questions of identity, self and meaning for many people. In this chapter, an in-depth analysis of the concept of authenticity, and a threadbare discussion of its chief constituents, as envisioned by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, is to be undertaken.

Kierkegaard's *Knight of Faith*

The project of authenticity is nothing but the project of carving out a self. Everyone seems to have a self, but what it really means to be a self is not so easy to comprehend. Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death* starts with a definition of the self: "A human being is a Spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself."[190] We see Kierkegaard defining the self in terms of the spiritual content in man and the realization of that. The spirit in man is the further enunciated by way of the meaning of being a self. Now what is the self?

As is evident from the last sentence of the above quote, Kierkegaard understands self to be a relation. This at once denies the substantiality of self, and overwrites the self as has been understood by previous philosophers. The self is something other than an empirical or transcendental subject, and cannot be seen as a crystallization that stays the same behind the changes we observe in it. This does not mean however that there is nothing in the self, that it is an empty concept. Kierkegaard holds the opposite view in fact, that the self is the most real, and because it has to become something, it is the most responsible too.

Now as Kierkegaard mentions, the self is a relation not with any other thing, but with itself. This means that the self is not passive, in the sense that it inertly receives

[190]Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death,* p. 146.

thoughts and experiences. Other relations are objective relations, because they relate one thing with another, and therefore little difference they make to the things which they are relations between. This is why the self is so important; it is not an objective, passive relation, and it is not a relation between two different things. It relates itself to itself. This is the more important of the two relations human beings are a part of: the existential relation of themselves to themselves, and the ontological relation of themselves to whatever is there other than themselves. This makes it imperative for an authentic human being to go for those potentialities of being which lead to his innermost ways of being himself. Every human being is unique, and has his own nature, and the objective of life is to realize that, and this is to be done by choosing those potentialities that lead to self to become what it is.

From the very beginning of Kierkegaard's career, one sees in him a quest for truth – in the sense of creating or choosing a pattern of life for himself which he could be true to, and vice versa. He writes in his journal – an entry made when he was only twenty-two – that "the thing is to find a truth which is true *for* me, to find the idea for which I can live and die."[191] As discussed in the third chapter, we know that he does not imply a theoretical speculation or rational explication here by truth. To live authentically for him does not have as much relation to a particular concrete content, than it has with a particular way of life, a sort of existential vocation. In the first chapter, it was established that Kierkegaard was a pioneer in modern philosophy to insist that philosophical activity must follow the personal life of the thinker. He wanted

> to lead a complete human life and not merely one of understanding, so that I should not…base the development of my thought upon…something that is called objective…but upon something which grows together with the deepest roots of my life.[192]

For Kierkegaard, a starting point in the search for authenticity is the confusion regarding one's own identity. Unless the question as to where one should anchor one's self-identity raises its head, little progress can be made. Human beings frequently go

[191]Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard,* p. 15.

[192]Ibid., p. 17.

through conflicts between various patterns of life and suffer the dilemmas of choosing from among them – something which has long-lasting and sometimes permanent ramifications for their lives. If one is aware, one can discern in this process a disintegration of one's self-identity through frequent and debilitating self-questioning and self-analysis. Only those who have gone through this can appreciate the value of a serious quest for a genuine self. In Kierkegaard himself, though we see the dominance of a religious self-identity, he was not religious at all times, and experienced different modes of life at different times. But it was only after going through these meanderings that he worked out a personal resolution – a going back to original, authentic faith, in his case obviously, the Christian faith. It is the Christian faith to which he exhorts his audience to embrace, and become what he calls "knights of faith," undergoing a life-changing metamorphosis in the process.

What or who is the "knight of faith?" For Kierkegaard, when one becomes subjectively oriented, one faces objective incertitude. By turning to Christianity, one experiences the problem of commitment. When one chooses to believe in the Christian doctrine, one's choice matters as it shapes one's life and there is no going back from the consequences that follow. Furthermore one does not know beforehand the specific consequences one's choice is going to lead one into and one chooses from behind a *veil of ignorance*, to borrow the Rawlsian phrase. So one cannot go all out, and one cannot go half heartedly either, and this gives rise to despair. Faith is the only answer here, for the working out of one's endeavour requires one to take chances with factors one has no control over. As Kierkegaard says, "faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty."[193] A knight of faith is a person who embraces this paradox and climbs out of the well of despair by using the ladder of faith. He does not succumb to a wish of total control over affairs, but neither does he fall prey to despair; he believes and expresses faith in God. The one who does not choose the latter "will be forever running errands in life, never enter the eternal; for at the very moment he is almost there he will suddenly discover that he has forgotten something and so must go back."[194]

[193]Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* p. 182.

[194]Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* p. 72.

To cultivate faith in oneself, one must first have meaning in one's life. Many people believe that life is subject to blind forces of chance to the point of being fatalistic, and hence they think they are absolved of any accountability or responsibility in the matter. This prompts them to let go of their seeking of an authentic existence. In Kierkegaard's own life, we see the reverse, as there is a sort of existential dialectic there, and he bequeaths it to us for our guidance and use. One may also discern it in his use of the pseudonyms, which are nothing but representations of various "stages in life's way," as he calls them. It seems that he is all of them and yet none of them; he is not Abraham who has genuine religious faith, and nor is he totally claiming to be an aesthetic or an ethical individual. There is a distance between him and his pseudonymous authors. The only writings which are in his own name are the "religious discourses" and therein he reveals his authentic existence as a devout Christian. In expressing himself religiously, Kierkegaard denies identification with the aesthetic and the moral – he sheds them as inauthentic modes of existence in his case. His self-identity is finally revealed as a religious writer, as he mentions in his journal:

> I have looked in vain for an anchorage in the boundless sea of pleasure and in the depth of understanding…. But the pleasure did not outlast the moment of understanding and left no profound mark upon me. It seems as though I had not drunk from the cup of wisdom, but had fallen into it. What did I find? Not my Self, which was what I was looking for…. And so the first thing to be decided, was the seeking and finding of the Kingdom of Heaven…. Although I am still far from having reached so complete an understanding of myself, I have, with profound respect for its significance, tried to preserve my individuality—worshipped the unknown God.[195]

However, Kierkegaard had to face great anxiety before he received his calling, and that indeed is the way things are for everyone else too. In existential literature, this anxiety goes by other names such as "anguish" and "despair." Kierkegaard in his *Sickness unto Death* undertakes a thorough analysis of despair:

> Despair…is a malady affecting all the dimensions of the self. It is a failure to will to be the self one truly is—in other words, a deficient selfrelation—which involves also an imbalance among the components of the self as synthesis and a

[195]Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard,* pp. 17–19.

> deficient God-relation. The health of the self—which he eventually identifies as faith—is an affirmation by the self of itself (that is, a positive self-relation), in which the components of the self as synthesis are in right relation, and the self is properly related to its divine foundation. It is a state in which "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it."[196]

But is this despair necessary? Kierkegaard thinks it is necessary, and more importantly, that it is desirable. He says that it "is not depressing, but instead is elevating, inasmuch as it views every human being under the destiny of the highest claim upon him, to be spirit."[197] Despair, anguish, anxiety, all appear to us as pathological names, but there is a very important difference between these existential states and normal pathological and psychological conditions, and that is the nature of their removal. Unlike the latter, which require an external or an internal agent or remedy to counter their effects, despair can be eradicated only via a deeper despair. The panacea for despair does not lie even within the self, leave alone another human being, but only in God.

> In spite of this, it is only despair that points towards the redemption. One is doomed if one does not face despair; one is finished if one succumbs to it. The leap of faith towards God is the only way out, and it is revealed to the individual at the moment of deepest despair. Hence despair is potentially dangerous for if it does not lead him to faith but away from faith, then he is lost; otherwise it will eradicate precisely what it brings forth itself.[198]

Despair is different from fear in having no particular object for itself. Being a Christian thinker, Kierkegaard cannot however ignore the relation of despair to the concept of original sin. However in his *The Concept of Anxiety,* he tries to protect human freedom from this deterministic concept by arguing that human beings, like their ancestor Adam, choose sin not because they are sinful because of the Fall from heaven, but because they are innocent.[199] Adam, in disobeying God, knew that he had

[196]Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness Unto Death, pp. 5–6.*

[197]Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard,* p. 356.

[198]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* pp. 155–59.

[199]Ibid.,pp. 21–22.

the freedom to do so, and it was this that fomented despair in him. Even after acquainting ourselves with Adam's story over and over, and drawing lessons from it, human despair does not cease because there is always the recognition of the possibility that one could rather do one way than another. And despair rears its head in any alternative one looks at. In *Either/Or,* Kierkegaard humorously lays down the pitfalls and the futility of choosing alternatives:

> Marry, you'll regret it; don't marry, you'll regret that too; marry or don't marry, you'll regret it either way; whether you marry or you don't marry, either way, you'll regret it. Laugh at the world's follies, you'll regret it; weep over them, you'll regret that too; laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you'll regret it either way; whether you laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, either way, you'll regret it. Believe a girl, you'll regret it; don't believe her, you'll regret that too; believe a girl or don't believe her, you'll regret it either way; whether you believe a girl or don't believe her, either way, you'll regret it. Hang yourself, you'll regret it; don't hang yourself, you'll regret that too; hang yourself or don't hang yourself, you'll regret it either way; whether you hang yourself or you don't hang yourself, either way, you'll regret it. This, gentlemen, is the essence of all life's wisdom.[200]

Kierkegaard holds despair to be unavoidable. This is not merely because of the relational nature of man as stated earlier, but more importantly due to the fact that he himself is not the maker of this relation. It is a higher authority viz. God that has constituted man as this relation. Of course, this makes more sense in Kierkegaard's own theistic milieu, wherein it is God that is the creator of each soul. God has constituted each soul as a relation to itself, but that is nota sufficient condition for despair. The sufficient condition is the freedom that has been given to each soul to go its own way. This is what leads to despair. Kierkegaard says: "If a human self had established itself, then there could be only one form: not to will to be oneself, to will to do away with oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself."[201] Hence there is but one way for the self to free itself of despair, and that is when it surrenders before God and submerges itself in the power that constituted it.

[200]Kierkegaard, *Either/Or,* p. 33.

[201] Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death,* p. 52.

This brings into play the concept of choice. In the modern times especially, choice is a complex philosophical issue. We have so many influences working on us that we never know whether what we are thinking are our own thoughts, There are just too many voices, too many influences, and as a corollary, too many options. And we cannot say that every alternative is equally valid, because if that were the case, no alternative would really matter. It would hardly matter what our decision is. For Kierkegaard, the only way to escape the dilemma is to boldly make a choice, examine it thoroughly, and stick to it through thick and thin. That would make it not just any choice, but *your* choice.

In his own life, Kierkegaard chose a leap of faith from the world of rationality into the irrational world that being a genuine Christian entailed for him.[202] However in his works, he does not preach a similar solution for everyone; he wants his readers to have a stake in their choice, and a passionate stake at that. In his writings, he offers the readers a three-rung ladder to authenticity. The three rungs, or three modes of existence, as they are more commonly called, are namely the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. Although Kierkegaard's passion for Christianity leaves but one authentic alternative for him out of the three, readers may find that each of the stages could be lived authentically as well as inauthentically, depending upon the level of passion and commitment the person living out the respective stage has.

In the aesthetic stage, a man concentrates on pleasure as an end in itself. The value of anything and everything is directly proportional to the amount of pleasure it is capable of producing. It must be noted here that although Kierkegaard presents the aesthetic does not denigrate all pleasure. Pleasure could be found not just in sensory delights, but in music and philosophy as well. The bane of this stage is boredom. It forces individuals to fill their days with activity in their efforts to make life seem meaningful and important. Ultimately the aesthete is bored and the moment of

[202] Sometimes it is difficult to conceptualize the Kierkegaardian concept of 'leap of faith' as a 'choice' in the true sense of the term, since the former is mostly understood as an irrational endeavor undertaken in the deepest of despair, and hence cannot be called as truly 'willed.' However, for Kierkegaard, this problem does not arise as it is only because one can will the leap that it has value. In other words, the fact that you had the option of avoiding the leap, and you did not, is what makes it meaningful. In myopinion, choice is generally viewed as necessarily rational, and this creates the problem, and this is what Kierkegaard would deny.

decision arrives, since he comes to know that he cannot find further fulfilment this way. He either stays rooted in the aesthetic stage – now characterized by boredom – or transcend it into the ethical stage. It is not a rational but a passionate decision, and the individual has to choose it for himself not because of, but despite external pressures. In the ethical stage, the spontaneity of the aesthete is replaced by deliberation and speculation. There are moral and social duties which take precedence over one's desires. Kierkegaard offers marriage as an example of such duties.[203] By moving into marriage, the ethicist seeks to commit for future rather than merely satisfy present urges and move on. Self-reflection takes over self-satisfaction. However, soon there arises in man the need to associate himself with "something more profound."[204] He tires of his finite, limited existence and wishes to partake of the immortality and the infinity a relation with God offers him. Another either/or faces him, and he could then proceed to the religious stage, but again through an irrational path – the leap of faith. Each person has to choose for himself one of the three stages, but Kierkegaard himself prioritizes the third stage over all others. This is evident in his summary of the three spheres of existence in *Stages on Life's Way*:

> There are three existence spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious…The ethical sphere is only a transition sphere, and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The esthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfilment, but, please note, not a fulfilment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack of gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful.[205]

Kierkegaard has taken pains to conceptualize the three stages as largely incompatible with each other. Each one of them comes with its own set of directions and norms. The transition from one stage to another is facilitated not through an intellectual process but through a leap that cannot be accounted for by reason. Here

[203]Kierkegaard, *Either/Or,* p. 8.

[204]Ibid.,p. 449.

[205]Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way,* p. 476.

one must notice the distinction between Kierkegaard's dialectic and that of Hegel. While human beings are merely "cogs in the machine" in the latter's framework with no choice at all, Kierkegaard prizes choice, and since genuine choice requires freedom, his dialectic emphasizes that man's destiny be in his own hands. Let us revisit what he says in *Sickness unto Death:*

> Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self…. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity…. A man who has no will at all is no self. [206]

How can we balance the twin concepts of freedom and necessity in our lives, since they seem to be contradictory to each other? There are surely spheres of our existence we have little say on. Our physical bodies, the accident of our birth, the basic outlines of our temperaments and attitudes etc., are all beyond our control. Another example could be the way we have lived so far – the past, with all my actions and mistakes that cannot be undone now. But there are at the same time, potentialities and possibilities for transformation in the future, and the chances of our becoming different individuals than we are right now. We cannot deny the possibility of such things. Kierkegaard, it has to be noted, does not take much issue with the ontology of free will. He is more interested in our internal existence, and our ability to choose for ourselves. He does not engage much with the question of determinism, and in effect, performs an *epoche*as regards the external world.

When we look at Kierkegaard's stages, we may classify or even prioritize them on the basis of the strength of the passion at play. Due to the extremity as well as the effervescence of passion in the aesthetic stage, there is not much authenticity to be had. The ethical subject engages in too much rational speculation and self-reflection for there to be the requisite amount of genuine passion so necessary for an authentic existence. It is primarily with the third stage that man finally enters into a relationship that is not finite and therefore there is no limit or boundary as regards the extent of passionate subjectivity of the individual in that stage. It is no coincidence that in his

[206]Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death,* p. 146.

own life too, Kierkegaard himself found the authenticity of existence only in the religious sphere:

> A self directly before Christ is a self intensified by the inordinate concession from God, intensified by the inordinate accent that falls upon it because God allowed himself to be born, become man, suffer, and die also for the sake of this self…the greater the conception of God, the more self; so…the greater conception of Christ the more self. Qualitatively a self is what its criterion is. That Christ is the criterion is the expression, attested by God, for the staggering reality that a self has, for only in Christ is it true that God is man's goal and criterion.[207]

Kierkegaard's stages can be summarized as a hierarchy of an ever-increasing intensification of consciousness: a) the first stage showcases a self which is seldom conscious of itself, to the extent that it is not at all aware of being in despair, b) in the second stage, the self becomes consciousness of its being in despair and desires to immerse itself into society to get rid of despair, and c) wherein the self becomes itself and embraces the highest intensity of despair which forces it to make the leap of faith. Thus with every addition in consciousness follows an increase in the will, which due to the paradoxical nature of despair moves the self away from its goal, unless the self renounces its will in the will of God.

A final glance needs to be cast on Kierkegaard's solitary example of the "knight of faith," the Biblical figure of Abraham, who is the epitome of the transition from the ethical sphere to the religious, and whose name is imperatively invoked in any discussion of the concept of "leap of faith." A very significant point Kierkegaard makes is regarding the lack of certitude that even an authentic hero like Abraham faces. This is because certainty and intelligibility themselves are functions of rational and reflective discourse which a man of faith automatically denies to himself. Abraham "keeps silent…he cannot speak."[208] He cannot talk to his son or anyone else because the exclusive nature of his relation with the divine is not available to anyone else and hence incomprehensible to others. He cannot offer a proof of his authenticity, and sometimes not even to himself. He is thus tested by God and an extraordinary faith is demanded of him. He suffers constantly from the uncertainty that it is not God but

[207]Ibid., pp. 113–4.

[208]Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* p. 122.

some other force – it could be an external power, like Satan, or even an internal delusion – that demands the ghastly sacrifice. Yet, in the face of this absolute uncertainty, he stays determined to sacrifice Isaac, and this is what makes his actions authentic:

> The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he was willing to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac; but in this contradiction lies in the very anguish that can indeed make one sleepless; and yet without the anguish Abraham is not the one he is.[209]

In other stages, it is the objective that takes precedence over the subjective. The rational categories operate in the other stages; faith starts where reason ends. No rational, reflective considerations bind Abraham; he embraces the absurd, and that too with utmost passion. As Kierkegaard notices:

> The paradox of faith has lost the intermediary, that is, the universal. On the one side, it has the expression for the highest egotism (to do the terrible act, do it for one's own sake), on the other side, the expression for the most absolute devotion, to do it for God's sake.[210]

Unlike the previous two stages, here the individual is not relating to anything ephemeral, limited, mortal or finite, hence the rules relating to such relationships stop operating. The knight of faith realizes that the aesthetic and the ethical spheres ultimately cannot but lead into despair, and the road to authenticity passes through the valley of faith, and more importantly, one cannot both cross this valley and keep our reason intact. Authenticity thus understood may require us sacrificing our much valued capabilities of reason and reflection, but for Kierkegaard, that would be but a small sacrifice on the divine altar. It is a small price to pay for owing yourself truly, for only in the eyes of God are you an individual in the genuine sense of the term. Your individuality derives its meaning primarily out of your relation with the divine, and this relation cannot be a transaction of a rational kind. This is because certainty and intelligibility themselves are functions of rational and reflective discourse which a man of faith automatically denies to himself.

---

[209]Ibid., p.96.

[210]Ibid., p. 71.

Nietzsche's *Overman*

Nietzsche is a prominent philosopher of authenticity in his own right. He resists all efforts to trace down human existence to abstractions or generalities; he maintains that an individual's life cannot be made meaningful by giving it a historical significance or by subsuming it to some category. Nietzsche's whole oeuvre can essentially be interpreted as a search for an authentic manner of life. Very early in his philosophical career, in his *Untimely Meditations,* Nietzsche is seen using the term "authentic human being" in terms of explaining the difference between the "common human" who is too busy with his animal existence and the higher beings who live a hero's life and stamp history with a seal of their most authentic existence, as an author, an artist or a creator of new values.[211] He abhors the mechanical existence and the resultant uniformity promoted and desired by contemporary culture, and bemoans the present age for prioritizing common labourers over mature and well-grounded personalities, just for the reason that the latter cannot be easily put to work to serve the interests of the age.[212] Nietzsche uncovers the basic norm of authentic existence which is to alert the individual to resist anything and everything that bars its freedom: fear, sloth, mass opinions, tradition, etc. The crowd gives each individual "work" and "education" which render him nothing more than a drugged money making machine and take him away from the important task of self-realization. Stress is laid on sociability for precisely this purpose and solitude is looked down upon.

In his middle works, like *The Gay Science* and *Daybreak*, he continues with his task of laying down an authentic mode of existence. He says in *The Gay Science, "*Let us therefore limit ourselves to the purifications of our opinions and valuations and to the *creation of our own new tables of what is good.*"[213] He differentiates between the intellectual and the moral conscience in terms of the duties assigned to them; the former has to propel the individual beyond the latter, the latter being the domain of ordinariness, and the former of uniqueness and singularity. In *Daybreak,* Nietzsche

[211]Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditation II,* p. 98.

[212]Ibid., p.7.

[213]Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* p.335.

maintains that throughout their history, individuals have mostly lived in conformity as members of a herd and have sacrificed their right and duty to be recognized as individuals to gain the safety of the generalities such as "human beings" and "society." The driving force behind this levelling down is the idea that one must deny oneself to fit within the whole, and this cannot be done unless the "individual" is forgotten. Nietzsche warns, "your true being does not lie deeply hidden within you, but rather immeasurably high above you, or at least above what you commonly take to be your ego."[214] Man follows not his own ego but a sort of collective ego composed of the views of society in general: "one person always in the head of another and then again this head in other heads: a curious world of phantasms that nonetheless knows how to don such a sensible appearance."[215] The powers that be promote the culture of industriousness precisely for this reason: to keep individuals in check and curtail the cultivation of reason and the consequent urge for independence. The imagination and speculation which could be utilized for incubating the individual within us all is sacrificed in the name of constant work and achievement. To counter this, Nietzsche encourages us all to self-cultivate ourselves, and make of ourselves "a lovely, peaceful, self-enclosed garden…with high walls to protect against the dangers and dust of the roadway, but with a hospitable gate as well."[216] There is no doubt a danger associated with becoming such free thinking individuals and society and power has not taken kindly to these specimens in the past, but Nietzsche hopes that in the coming age, such inventive and fruitful natures will not be punished but celebrated. They will not be like the old moral preceptors who sought to ignore the differences between individuals and dressed them all in the same garb; they will understand that individual happiness results not because of external prescriptions, but in spite of them.

Let us now examine the Nietzschean version of the "knight of faith," by which is implied Nietzsche's conception of an authentic persona. As was mentioned before, Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, did not provide us with a historical example, and rather focussed on critiquing the values of contemporary society. But it is through these critiques of inauthentic modes of living that we are able to put together what his

[214]Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* III.p. 1.

[215]Nietzsche, *Daybreak,* p.105.

[216]Ibid., p.174.

conception of an authentic hero must be like. This is the idea of the Ubermensch, or the Overman, as it is generally translated.

Nietzsche's concern is that the way in which the modern man thinks, feels and acts is still rooted deeply in Christian-Platonic philosophy. Through claims to transcendence, the Christian-Platonic tradition renders the value of this world derivative, as finding the source of its value in a superior transcendent world – heaven, God, the forms, the ideal communist utopia. We can see even in science thatthe tradition propagates a desire and a longing for an absolute, fixed, universal, consistent and incorrigible truth. The impossibility of achieving a universal, objective, single truth for all humankind ultimately wears us out and leads us to reject truth and value of *any* kind – even of a more human, provisional and partial kind. In short, Christian-Platonic culture leads us to self-hating, life-thwarting, world-consuming nihilism.

In contrast to the so-called modern man stand the pre-Socratic Greeks who had no faith in phony transcendent values. Instead they faced up to and coped with the brutal realities of human existence extremely well. So the modern man should be able to learn from their example. He must accept that he is part of a material world, regardless of what else might exist. As part of this world, man must live as if there is nothing else beyond life. As Nietzsche puts it,

> To divide the world into a 'true' and an 'apparent' world, whether after the manner of Christianity or of Kant (after all a Christian in disguise) is only a sign of décadence – a symptom of *degenerating* life…. The tragic artist is no pessimist – he says *Yea*to everything questionable and terrible, he is Dionysian.[217]

Nietzsche thinks of himself as the first philosopher to inject the Dionysian strain into philosophic emotion and calls himself "the first *tragic philosopher*."[218] His Dionysian philosophy involves optimism of the highest degree. It comprises of a positive attitude even towards the impermanence and annihilation of things, a celebration of Becoming to the extent of a radical rejection of the very concept of Being. It is in such an attitude that Nietzsche sees the deliverance of mankind from the

[217] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 21.

[218] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 47.

false, life-denying and transcendent values propagated by both theology and philosophy.

For Nietzsche, there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it. Any investigation into science as a historical, cultural and social phenomenon soon shows that scientific truths are contingent human constructs. They are often thought to be absolute only because we use persuasive terms like "law" for them. Now if science is also found incapable of providing a framework of values, this would lead to deep feelings of disillusionment, skepticism and pessimism. For Nietzsche, it has resulted in a collapse of meaning, relevance, and purpose.

> Man's aversion to existence has not become any greater than in previous times, it is simply that we moderns have come to doubt that there is any meaning in suffering and in existence itself. One extreme position is now succeeded by another equally extreme position, one that construes everything as if it were in vain. It is this "in vain" which constitutes the character of "present-day nihilism."[219]

Nietzsche considered it a misfortune that the modern world was characterized by a lack of the *higher species*. Nietzsche gives an example of Napoleon as such an ideal figure, as *the one whose inexhaustible fruitfulness and power sustains belief in humanity.* Such figures fill their age with a new hope, armed with which it can take on a crisis bravely. But even if there *were* anysuch figures, the increasing *vulgarization* of European civilization was bound to discourage their life-giving propensities. Nietzsche gives an insight into the nature of this vulgarization:

> the lower species, 'herd,' 'mass,' 'society,' forgets how to be modest, and puffs up its needs into cosmic and metaphysical values. Through this the whole of existence is vulgarised: for to the degree that the mass rules, it tyrannises the exceptions, who thus lose their belief in themselves and become nihilists.[220]

In his later writings, Nietzsche distinguishes between two types of nihilism: the active and the passive. Active nihilism is a sign of *the increased power of the spirit.* Embracing this form of nihilism signifies that an individual is finding the values of his

[219]Pearson and Large,*The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 309.

[220] Nietzsche*, Writings from the Late Notebooks,* p. 150.

age as outdated and insufficient. It implies that he thinks himself averse to submitting to the authority of the values of his age and consequently the resistance in him is gathering momentum for the destruction of old values. This is contrasted with a passive and weary nihilism wherein faith in values has been lost but the desire for the absolutes that characterized such faith remains in place. The overall synthesis of values and goals dissolves which leads to an immanent conflict within various individual ideals. In confusion, the age turns to any moral, political or religious system that can benumb, soothe and pacify the conflict – regardless of the harms such a choice would entail over a course of time.[221]

Nietzsche himself seems to be an "active nihilist," if it be deemed necessary to choose one of the two nihilisms. He believes that all the ideals on which humankind has based its hopes and aspirations are corrupt – it is actually the forces of declinethat are operating therein. He argues that

> Mankind does *not* represent a development towards a better, stronger or higher type, in the sense in which this is supposed to occur today. 'Progress' is merely a modern idea – that is to say, a false idea. The modern European is still far below the European of the Renaissance in value. The process of evolution does not by any means imply elevation, enhancement and increasing strength.[222]

Nietzsche desires a different kind of evolution. In his book on Nietzsche, Tracy B. Strong discusses Nietzsche's project at large. He argues that for Nietzsche, it is the present humanity, that is, humans as they are now, that is responsible for the problems of the Western civilization. It is in the very nature of these humans to fall into nihilism. What Strong is arguing is that in criticizing moral or political values, Nietzsche is not reducing them to illusions. Rather he sees them as values essential to the particular type of humans we have come to be. This implies that for Nietzsche, new ways of dealing with these problems would not do; rather a different breed of humans would have to be developed who are not, in Nietzsche's phrase, "human-all-too-human."[223] In the Preface to his book, Strong writes: "A critique of morality, or of

[221]Ibid., pp.146–7.

[222] Nietzsche*, The Antichrist,* p. 104.

[223] Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, p. 13.

politics, or of religion, cannot stop with the institution or practice; for Nietzsche, it must continue on to the beings of whose life it is a necessary part."[224]

Nietzsche explains in one of his writings:

> To show that an ever more economical use of men and mankind, a 'machinery' of interests and actions ever more firmly intertwined, *necessariIy implies a counter-movement*. I call this *the secretion of a luxurious surplus from mankind*, which is to bring to light a *stronger* species, a higher type, the conditions of whose genesis and survival are different from those of the average man. As is well known, my concept, my *metaphor* for this type is the word 'superman'.[225]

Walter Kaufmann in his "Editor's Note" to the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* gives an insight into the meaning of Overman as a translation of *Übermensch*:

> "Over" words, some of them coinages, are common in this work, and Übermensch has to be understood in its context. Mensch means human being as opposed to animal, and what is called for is not a super-brute but a human being who has created for himself that unique position in the cosmos which the Bible considered his divine birthright. The meaning of life is thus found on earth, in this life, not as the inevitable outcome of evolution, which might well give us the "last man" instead, but in the few human beings who raise themselves above the all-too-human mass.[226]

This, precisely, is the essence of the concept of Overman. The meaning of life is not to be found in another life or afterlife, but right here in this life in this world, and it is entirely up to man to give his life a meaning. No external value sources can assist him in this matter. In giving meaning to his life, he "wills" his own existence and himself becomes the source and origin of his values.

An understanding of what Nietzsche means by "last man" may be helpful in grasping the notion of the Overman. Contemporary man, according to Nietzsche, is

---

[224]Ibid., Preface, pp. x–xi.

[225] Nietzsche*, Writings from the Late Notebooks,* p. 177.

[226] Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 115–6.

concerned mainly with comforts. He exemplifies the tendencies of modern mass culture manifested in his desire to ease all existential suffering. He wants things to be easy for him, and does not want to inquire into the essence of his values. If the present humans soon do not show "contempt" for this state they are in, they would inevitably go down the path leading to the last man. Nietzsche's vision of the last man is a satire as well as a warning to his fellow human beings. The last man has only one value: the prospect of comfortable living. He hates effort, detests pain and revels in shallow entertainment and self-indulgence. He does not want the trouble of "choosing" for himself; in his age, "Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the insane asylum."[227] He is the epitome of the nihilist idea of "in vain" discussed earlier. Like the slaves of Nietzsche's genealogical account, the last men have renamed their negatives to masquerade them as positives. They call their eagerness for petty happiness their "resignation," their "mediocrity" as their "moderation," and their tendency to avoid harm by pleasing everyone, i.e. their "cowardice," as their "virtue."[228]The excessive self-obsession of the last men may ensure the longevity of their race, but theirs would be an existence as insignificant as that of the flea-beetle.[229]It is an irony in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that when people are presented with the conception of the "last man" as a warning, they welcome and desire it most enthusiastically. Through this irony, Nietzsche acknowledges that as things stand today, most people may ultimately prefer this mode of existence because of its "softness." He, however, has a different ideal to preach: "This new tablet, my brothers, I place above you: *become hard*!" [230]

This is the ideal of the Overman. The Overman is a metaphor for the greatest human potential. He exemplifies the self-created autonomy and uniqueness of the sovereign individual in a modernity characterized by the impersonal forces of mass production and consumption. Through the idea of the Overman in Nietzsche's works attempts to engage both in the nihilistic task of challenging the ingrained values of society as well as in the anti-nihilistic project of creating new values.

[227] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 9–10.

[228]Ibid., p. 135.

[229]Ibid., p. 10.

[230]Ibid., p. 172.

The Overman is a reply first and foremost to those Christian ideals that sing paeans of a transcendent world. He believes the conception of afterlife to be the handiwork of those who despise earthly existence and condemn the bodily instincts as sinful. To Nietzsche, on the contrary, the body symbolizes the "meaning of the earth." By listening to the body, by recognizing the significance of its demands, one gets closer to earth. Those who vilify bodily passions lack intelligence. Nietzsche cautions them: "There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows then to what end your body requires precisely your best wisdom?"[231]

One of the chief building blocks of the Christian doctrine has been its emphasis on the punishment, suffering and the promise of the future reward of eternal life. Nietzsche questions the integrity of those who follow Christianity for no other reason than to escape the former and gain the latter. The Overman steers clear of all such deceptions; he knows that there is no paymaster who can punish or reward. He mocks those who still believe in the existence of God: "It has been over for the old gods for a long time now – and truly, they had a good cheerful gods' end!"[232]

In the absence of God as well as His heaven, the Overman is left with only himself and the earth. Nietzsche, therefore, exhorts his readers to invest all they have in this earthly life. In Zarathustra's impassioned words:

> Remain faithful to the earth, my brothers, with the power of your virtue! Let your bestowing love and your knowledge serve the meaning of the earth! Thus I beg and beseech you.
>
> Do not let it fly away from earthly things and beat against eternal walls with its wings! Oh, there has always been so much virtue that flew away! Like me, guide the virtue that has flown away back to the earth – yes, back to the body and life: so that it may give the earth its meaning, a human meaning![233]

It is through the creation of this "human meaning," that man for the first time becomes himself a creator. Nietzsche is not saying that the earlier values were created

[231]Ibid., p. 23.

[232]Ibid., p. 146.

[233]Ibid., p.57.

by an external source, although this is what mankind has been led to believe. What Nietzsche wants to emphasize is that now man would use his power of creation for himself rather than lend it to lift the burden of some abstract idealization.[234] As we saw in Nietzsche's criticism of Kant, he values only those ideals that are meaningful and valid subjectively. Rejecting the idea of a God who gives us values changeless and transcendent of the everyday world, his Overman creates values which are firmly rooted in the everyday changing world. He is a self-contained moral authority. He creates his own good and evil, based on that which helps him to succeed or fail. In this way good is something which helps him to realize his potential and evil is whatever hampers or stands in the way of this effort. Nietzsche explains:

> What is good?—Everything that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad?—Everything that stems from weakness. What is happiness?—The feeling that power is *increasing*—that a resistance is overcome.[235]

Here a question arises as to what is the Overman's attitude towards the fact of worldly suffering. Christianity was able to justify it through the negation of the earth and the affirmation of heaven. But the Overman has already rejected God, and with him the conceptions of "eternal life," "moral order," "divine justice." He cannot appeal to them anymore. For Nietzsche, this does not pose a problem, for his Overman is distinguished from the present humanity primarily by his attitude to the darker aspects of life. He is the opposite of the old value system: he *affirms* the suffering of the world as joyfully as he affirms its pleasures. This affirmation is brought to life by Nietzsche through his twin doctrines of *amorfati* and eternal recurrence.

*Amor fati*characterizes the Overman's desire to always be a "Yes-sayer" to existence. Life brings in its each moment a potential for joy as well as suffering; love of fate is the love of this plurality of life. Fate means the necessity of things; hence there is no place for criticism or complaint. In fact, moral valuation to the tune of appreciation or condemnation of life is just not possible. The value of life cannot be

[234]Ibid., pp. 154–55.

[235] Nietzsche*, The Antichrist,* 104

grasped because for that one would have to be placed outside life. Nietzsche fervently holds that

> one is in the whole – there is nothing that could judge, measure, compare and condemn our existence, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing and condemning the whole. *But there is nothing outside the whole!*[236]

Moreover to make such a valuation, one ought to know life as well as one, as many, as all in fact, who have lived it. This discredits the philosophers who are concerned with problems in the value of life. They are not equipped or authorized to do so because they are a contending party. Since their very life is the very object of dispute, this bars humans from putting an estimate on the value of life. The only viable attitude remains affirmation of this fatalism, but it is important that this affirmation be willed. As Nietzsche says:

> My formula for human greatness is *amorfati*: not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just enduring what is necessary, still less concealing it—all idealism is hypocrisy in the face of what is necessary—but *loving* it.[237]

The affirmation of existence –as it is – is a key constituent of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence. He introduces the doctrine in *The Gay Science* as a question to the reader regarding his attitude towards the idea that his life will be repeated exactly as it has occurred in even the smallest of details. One could either curse at the thought of this idea or respond to the prospect with joy and affirmation. This thought would subject one's attitude towards life to the most decisive of judgments because saying "Yes" to all that has happened to occur over and over again would be the highest degree of affirmation one could give to existence.[238] The embracing of eternal recurrence is the joyful affirmation of meaningfulness in a fleeting world of becoming devoid of ultimate sense – thus an antidote to nihilism. Thus eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's response to the challenge of providing a life-saving meaning toexistence – suffering from the nihilism brought on by the demise of

[236] Nietzsche*, Twilight of the Idols*, p. 36.

[237] Nietzsche*, Ecce Homo*, p. 203.

[238] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 194–5.

God – without returning to a faith in the transcendent as preached by Christianity.Nietzsche thinks that the doctrine of eternal recurrence would be resented only by those individuals who have not turned well in life and who do not find any consolation in existence. The Overman would gladly affirm it as a condition of his existence.

Nietzsche's Overman is not a fixed concept, crystallized with a set of his own values for eternity. True to his philosophy of Becoming, Nietzsche presents the Overman as a process. Having an insight into the impermanence of things, the Overman continuously redefines and reconstructs himself so as to keep pace with the changing world, becoming stronger in the process. He does not hanker after happiness, rest and peace because he knows that mankind does not advance towards a fixed goal; everything is in a flux. The Overman therefore is the ideal of someone who has mastered the practice of overcoming himself.[239]

Such is the nature of the Overman as imagined and yearned for by Nietzsche. The Overman would both outwardly and inwardly engage in the task of destruction of old values. He will renounce religion, state and morality as they exist today. Despite this renunciation and destruction, he shall be cheerful, for he would be walking without crutches. He will embody what Nietzsche calls the Dionysian attitude towards life, accepting life in its entirety along with all of its ups and downs.

It may seem that the idea of the Overman betrays a Darwinian influence on Nietzsche. If, as Darwin had shown, man could descend from the ape, then why should he not be followed by a still higher species in the same manner as the ape was followed by man? The conclusion was logical. In fact Nietzsche uses the example of the ape in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to distinguish between man and Overman. He comments: "What is the ape to a human? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And that is precisely what the human shall be to the overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment."[240]

[239] Nietzsche*, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 89–90.

[240]Ibid.*,* p. 6.

However Nietzsche denies this influence and calls those who draw this conclusion *learned cattle.* For Nietzsche, the general condition of life is the struggle for power and not the Darwinian "struggle for existence." Even if the latter occurs, its result is not, as Darwin suggests, the survival of the fittest, but rather the reverse. It is to the disadvantage of the strong and the privileged. The weak prevail over the strong, due to two reasons. First, the weak are in a majority. Second and more important is the fact that their weakness gives in them the rise to instincts of caution, craft, disguise, self-control etc. (the compound of which to Nietzsche is "intellect") for which the strong, due to their strength, have no need.[241] With the help of intellect, the weak are ultimately able to trounce the strong. The cruder, simpler souls are able to withstand all kinds of injuries and losses. The nobler soul is more likely to suffer from danger; its conditions of existence are so multifarious that it is far more prone to involve itself into some accident and consequent annihilation. Nietzsche remarks: "When a lizard loses a finger, it grows back: not so with people."[242]

Thus Nietzsche holds the Overman as an ideal achievable only in the future. He argues that in an age of decadence, the very means chosen to oppose it are liable to be themselves degenerate. They will only *modify* its means of manifesting itself; they cannot abolish it. This is why Christianity as a movement for the upliftment of man failed. Thus the man of today cannot be an Overman; he can only serve as a link to the Overman:

> Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss…What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossingover* and a *going under*.[243]

Although Nietzsche denies that any Overmen have yet arisen, he mentions several individuals who could serve as models. Among these models he lists men such as Jesus, Wagner, Goethe, and Napoleon. Thus there have existed men of *higher* nature in every age, but hitherto they have been "happy accidents." It is imperative

[241] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 17.

[242] Nietzsche*, Beyond Good and Evil,* p. 168.

[243] Nietzsche*, Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* p. 7.

however in the new age that they are *willed,* they are reared. The future is to be most consciously determined.[244]Here is an extract from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* to this effect:

> And that is the great noon, where human beings stand at the midpoint of their course between animal and overman and celebrate their way to evening as their highest hope: for it is the way to a new morning… '*Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live*.' – Let this be our last will at the great noon![245]

One of the consequences of willing this "last will" is to open ourselves to the disturbing belief that after death there is nothing more. Although it may be seen as a cheerful invitation to accomplish as much as we can while we live, this cheerfulness soon fades away. The idea of non-existence makes many uneasy, people do not like to entertain the idea that their existence at any moment could be a contingent matter; it scares the wits out of them. Christianity's success owes to the fact of negating this vacuum; one is informed that the individual continues in one form or another, and that death is not the final end. For the multitude, fulfilling the demands being a Christian makes of them is but a small transaction in return for living forever. In fact many thinkers have argued that in denying God and Christian values, Nietzsche

> opens up a psychological void for civilized men and women, accustomed to the consolation of what they thought were experiences of transcendence. For that matter, Nietzsche's rhetoric makes one wonder whether he fully understood, in his pride at being a pioneer, how desperately mankind had felt the need of something transcendent to cancel out the pain of individuation.[246]

Against this criticism, we may argue that since there is no empirical evidence for Christian God, the Christian concepts and values being based on it are automatically falsified; the afterlife could be nothing more than a tempting lure for those afraid of death. As far the Overman is concerned, since there is no God and no afterlife for him, to look forward to anything other than this life would be unthinkable. In the modern world, the ideals of Christianity or religion in general, are becoming more and more

[244] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 104.

[245] Nietzsche*, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 59.

[246] Harper, *The Existential Experience,* pp. 75–6.

difficult to believe in. A growing requirement is being experienced to give the multitudes of those who do not believe in it another system to put their faith in. Nietzsche would be most properly comprehended by such adventurers of spirit. It is the realization and the acceptance that one only has this life to live that will propel man into caring for it, loving his existence and enjoy it to its fullest. This would serve to bring values back to earth from heaven, for we need human values and not godly ones.

The Nature of the Authentic Self

As discussed in the above sections, the question of authenticity essentially boils down to the query as to how one is to lead a fulfilling life. However, the question also impinges on the nature of the self that is asking the question. Is it a constant self or not? What notion of self is operating in the writings of our two philosophers? Are they on the same page or do they have differences among themselves?

It can be argued that in order to give a continuity and unity to our lives, there is needed some fundamental belief that maintains a constant self committed in its pursuit. Kierkegaard is of the opinion that in the absence of such a self, despair is inevitable. Nietzsche on the other hand denies the very notion of the self as a free agent. He believes that the desire for continuity betrays weakness, and one must not let oneself be crystallized in the pursuit of a single value or belief. Here Nietzsche is challenging the traditional Western conception of an "inner subject" to which actions and their responsibility can be traced. He gives the example of lightning to illustrate his point. The lightning and its flash are not two things; but people consider the first to be a cause and the second an effect, as if there is an agent "lightning" that is *responsible* for the action of "flashing." Strength cannot be separated from

> the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not. But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind the deed, its effect and

> what becomes of it; 'the doer' is invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything.[247]

Free agency is supported only by lower natures because it gives them a pretext to hide their weaknesses under the claim that they, as free agents, are deliberately choosing not to emulate the higher natures in their "evil" values. The truth however is that they are good to do nothing for which they are *not strong enough*.

In spite of their differences on the question, the two thinkers come to agreement on more points than one. Both of them understand the value of disciplining oneself in pursuit of great goals. Both are confirmed in their high opinion of risk as the harbinger of great gains. Both detest certainty as belonging to the plebeian natures and hold uncertainty in high regard. And both are of the opinion that self-restraint bestows an individual with the necessary poise required for existential crises. They both demand from the concrete individual an asking of the question as to how he or she shall live, and both are in agreement as to there being different answers to the question on part of different individuals. However, in my opinion, the existence of a continuing self is theoretically of much more assistance in the project of authenticity rather than the absence of it. That is to say, in this regard, Kierkegaard to me seems to have better and more reasonable things to say.

Kierkegaard holds it a mark of utmost strength for an individual to "concentrate the whole of his life's content and the meaning of reality in a single wish."[248] Thus it is up only to the strongest individuals to make a commitment without conditions. Such a commitment imparts identity to the self, and propels it towards an end that is fulfilling for it. Such a commitment does not care after the results of the enterprise. It lasts an entire life, no matter whether the object of the pursuit is realized or not. An example of such a commitment could be the commitment given to someone you love. Whether the person leaves you or dies, the love does not decrease one bit. It is such a consuming single minded commitment that the person in question "is not afraid to let his love

[247] Nietzsche*, On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 26.

[248]Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* p. 72.

steal upon his most secret, most hidden thoughts, to let it twine in countless coils around every ligament of his consciousness."[249]

In Kierkegaard's opinion, going back on a commitment is like letting go of one's identity. A commitment without conditions is possible only for higher natures; the risk involved in it keeps lower beings at bay. One needs to centralize one's entire existence on to one thing to make such a commitment. Holding on to a self that is lesser than a continually committed self is to stand bereft of an identity and let go of an important part of one's humanity. Those who do so necessarily invite despair, and cannot have a fulfilling existence.

As far as the necessity of a strong will is concerned, Nietzsche is on the same page with Kierkegaard. He affirms the role of a strong will in producing the best results for one's life as an individual. However his notion of strength is not the same as Kierkegaard; in other words, the will needs to be strong, but its relation to its object need not be constant. He interprets the demand for steadiness as a mark of weakness. In *The Gay Science,* he says,"The demand that one wants by all means that something should be firm…is still the demand for support, a prop, in short an instinct of weakness."[250] In his philosophy, those who have strength are wary of anything and everything that might be employed in service of stability. Beliefs, desires, commitments– nothing can bind them. "I love brief habits," he says.[251] Commitments other than those that are permanent he welcomes. He enjoys them while they last, and simply moves on the next commitment, when their time is over. The commitments and habits that last too long are to be shunned. He does not believe that lack of a self that is continually committed could lead to anxiety. In fact, the strong derive their greatest happiness from the very fact of their being free of any permanent commitments, for they are always experiencing growth and transformation and even if they wanted a constant self, it would not keep up with them.[252]

[249]Ibid., 71.

[250]Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 347.

[251]Ibid., p. 295.

[252]Ibid., p. 343.

For Kierkegaard, the "brief habits" streak of Nietzsche's strong natures is reminiscent of the aesthetic stage of existence which before anything is characterized by immediacy and fear of boredom. It is an existence where not much reflection takes place; it is only the immediate desires that are important. Nietzsche's "brief habits" smell of the same immediacy as in his case too, a habit is followed only up to a certain duration until there comes another one, presumably better, to replace it. Kierkegaard regards it the mark of a strong nature to keep up with a commitment even if it stops yielding satisfaction or becomes difficult to entertain, that is, when it becomes risky to follow it after a while. But can Nietzsche, with his philosophy of "yay-saying,"be charged with escaping risk? Consider this statement of his: "the secret of harvesting from existence the greatest fulfilment and the greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously!" There is thus no doubt that for him, the capacity to take risks reflect how strong one is and also how joyful, but he believes that strength and joy result only if risks arise from the ventures one consciously engages with and not from commitments one has no business to permanently latch on to.

Another positive thing Nietzsche takes from commitments is their ability to impart life lessons to us. Every habit carries within itself the potential to teach us things like discipline, self-reliance etc. However after having had our lessons, we must be able to rid ourselves of the habit without any regrets and not cultivate any reliance on it. The strong are capable of cultivating even a religious attitude for the discipline and education it provides, but the weak abuse it to craft morals that are harmful to the former's interests.[253] Discipline follows from what is there in the commitment to offer, and not what the duration of the commitment is.

Nietzsche thinks that striving for faith betrays the aspiration to stand stable and secure. However this attitude is what Kierkegaard would associate with the naïve churchgoing Christian public, and not with the authentic man of faith. For Kierkegaard, faith properly understood did not press for certitude.[254] Abraham's faith propelled him into doing a host of unusual actions, and he never had the assurance or certainty of doing the right thing. The committed person stays true to her commitment

[253]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* pp.3, 252.

[254]Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* p. 99.

no matter what; faith is certainly not there to act as his life-support system. Hence contrary to what Nietzsche thinks, Kierkegaard is on the same page with him in this regard.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree that a life finds fulfilment not because of something outside the individual. Rather the conditions for the fulfilment must be taken up and developed actively by the individual himself. As Nietzsche remarks, "It will be the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own."[255] Despite this and the other agreements, it remains to deice whether Nietzsche's manner of "brief habits" or Kierkegaard's way of "unconditional commitment" goes a longer way in constructing an authentic persona. As far as the incentives to self-growth – risk, discipline, and the like – are concerned, they are available with either option. But if we glance at our contemporary worldview, Kierkegaard's path seems to be more well-rounded and relevant. We live in an increasingly individual-centric and market-oriented age, with the television, radio and print commercials constantly egging us on to try on newer and newer fads. Something better than the previous thing or better than the rest is always on offer, from materials to daily use to whole lifestyles. We hanker after gratification and prefer it when it is instantly delivered to us, and we do not mind moving from one yearning to another for this. Our commitments last much shorter than even the "brief habits" of Nietzsche, and even he believed that a habit needs time to mature. We, on the other hand, are much goaded by boredom and distracted by discomfort to have a long enough commitment that would merit the name "habit." Hence our emphasis must be first on cultivating the ability to keep commitments and make them last, as Kierkegaard would have us do. Then we can talk of outgrowing them *a la* Nietzsche.

[255]Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* p. 290.

CONCLUSION

If there is anything that a study of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche vis-à-vis each other reveals, it is an identity-in-difference relation. The two philosophers are like each other in so many contexts. They are both very committed writers, have highly significant things to say about human existence, and are deeply interested in the psychological realm of faith and morality. Both write for the modern man who lives a repetitive and meaningless life, burdened by his disinterestedness towards things and his over-reflective attitude. And both recommend as remedy a life of feeling and commitment. Yet, like reflections in the mirror, they are different though they look the same.

It is not difficult to realize that the chief bone of contention between them is the belief in God, the starting point of religion. However theirs is not a simple disagreement between a believer and an atheist. Kierkegaard is not one of those common theists one sees around oneself. He is deadly opposedto ritual and pomp in religion, and does not have much use for asceticism and evangelism either. For nearly all his life, he had a relation of constant antagonism with the contemporary Danish church, all these being facts that bring him closer to Nietzsche and not otherwise. Nor can Nietzsche be called a run-of-the-mill atheist. Atheists of his age, unlike him, had unwavering faith in progress and were fully wedded to the other Enlightenment ideals too. They considered man as the most superior of beings, whereas for Nietzsche man was an abomination compared to the Overman. Religion for him has to be repudiated not due to rationalistic reasons, but something more subjective, and hence more important. Their attitudes towards it might differ, but both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree that religion is the chief source of meaning in people's lives, and pulling religion out of their lives would entail a reformulation of life as they know it.

Regarding morality too, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche differ in interesting ways. For Nietzsche, morality and human existence in many ways do not sit comfortably with each other. Kierkegaard also in his espousal of the religious stage, divorces the

ethical life from the life of faith. Yet it is not the case that they have no place at all for ethics in their respective views; it is just that the ethics suited for their ultimate ideals of existence are not the one we conventionally follow; they are qualitatively rather than quantitatively different. The ethics they talk about is deeply personal, and they do not think what is good for society has much to do with the conventional ethics.[256]

This "similar-yet-different" conundrum is encountered at various places when we focus on the three topics dealt with in this dissertation, viz. individual, truth and authenticity. I will here present first a short summary of their views on these, and then try to facilitate a conversation between them so that the contours of the debate stick out and are observable.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche take as their rallying point the emphasis Western philosophy has always laid on the rational nature of existence. There are examples of introducing non-rational and even irrational elements into philosophy such as Plato's spirited soul and appetitive soul, and Descartes' evil demon, respectively. But eventually these have always had a secondary status to the rational. The triumph of rationality in modern times is seen in the writings of the German philosophers Kant and Hegel who posit impersonal ideals such as duty, Absolute, universality et cetera over and above the existing individual. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rebel against these immediate predecessors in particular, and the whole Western philosophical tradition in general, and their point of reference is the category of the individual, which they contrast with the category of "herd" or "crowd."

There are certain similarities in their respective conceptualizations of the existing individual. Their individuals detest the vulgar comforts of anonymity, ease and readymade truths that associating with a crowd or a herd bestows on its members. Those who equate their existence with that of the mass resign themselves to conventionality and ordinariness. It is this dislike of the mass that prompts Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to engage in an indirect rather than direct communication with their readers, so as to make what they say the preserve of only a few committed

[256]Ethics here takes on the broader meaning of 'way of life' rather than a 'set of moral rules.' The latter concept is also present in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche respectively in their discussion of 'the ethical stage' and 'morality,' but both these philosophers exclude it from the set of prerequisites they deem necessary for an authentic life.

men of passion, rather than the multitude. Hence we see both of them employing a wide variety of literary devices, genres, pseudonyms etc. to restrict communication to genuine individuals.

It is occasion now to look at some of their main points of disagreement as regards the individual. Nietzsche, as we have seen, talks of two kinds of morality, and as a corollary, two classes of people: the masters and the slaves. The former has the features of nobility and creativity; the latter the characteristics of weakness and ordinariness, as a result of which, it finds satisfaction in its identity as the member of a herd. For Nietzsche, a person is either this or that. This creates problems as to where in these two mutually exclusive classes must we place the Kierkegaardian individual. Kierkegaard's individual does not have the sense of superiority Nietzsche's noble souls possess, but he shares the latter's disgust for the objective and the universal. Not everyone can realize himself as a noble soul, since some people are necessarily superior, and others inferior by the same token; but everyone has a potential to realize himself as an individual. Here we see Nietzsche's aristocratism in tussle with Kierkegaard's optimism about human potential. This shows it to be a weakness of Nietzsche's philosophy that it is largely black and white, and has no place for a third sort of person who is neither master nor slave, which is what Kierkegaard's individual seems to be.

There is another criticism in store for Kierkegaard from Nietzsche's side and that is regarding Kierkegaard's passionate espousal of the Christian faith as a major constituent of the very individuality of his individual. For Nietzsche, the Christian religion is but a system devised by the weak in order to gain power over the strong by means of the postulation of an alternative reality – the world beyond. Kierkegaard's individual therefore stands guilty of surrendering man's dignity and freedom into the hands of an objective ideal, and as a corollary, of preaching ideals he himself goes against. However, if we delve deeper into Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, we will find that he is more against organized religion than a religious person *per se*. And here we see Kierkegaard keeping company with him through his own denouncements of Christendom and his lifelong commitment to a more subjective self-relation. Kierkegaard's God is not someone surrendering to whom brings ease, pleasure and comfort; instead He is a paradox with which Kierkegaard and every genuine Christian

struggles and suffers in the process. Kierkegaard specifically warns in his writings that true religiousness is not the preserve of crowd, or Church, or any other group that seeks to establish its validity by virtue of numerical strength; true religiousness calls for a deep subjective engagement in isolation from others. Hence a probable Nietzschean response to Kierkegaard's individual could be to include him in his category of noble souls or higher natures, but to stop short of conceptualizing him as an Overman, largely because of his belief and commitment towards a transcendent ideal.

Let us now come to truth. As discussed earlier, objective truths arethe verifiable and universal bits of knowledge thatwe arrive at when we use our powers of reasoning dispassionately. The search for objectivity has been a central concern of philosophy as it has been traditionally viewed and practiced in the West. For our two philosophers, however, such truths by their very nature are useless when it comes to value, meaning or telos, for these exist in a realm that is by its very essence subjective. Value or meaning is subjectively related to each individual, and examining it in an objective background does not do justice to it. Kierkegaard situates it first in the deepest possible inwardness, and then in a paradoxical move, links that ultimate subjectivity to the ultimate objectivity that is God. For him, the coming down of Jesus is also a paradox of the same kind – a connection between eternity and temporality, and the objective and the subjective. Faith is the resolution of this paradox.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, dispenses with all kinds of absolutes. He focuses outwards rather than inwards, and grounds meaning and value in this world, that is, earthly existence with its commanding principle of will to power. All kinds of imposed truths that pointed to another, and more importantly, better realms of existence were to be discarded as decadent. If that signified embracing the world in its darker hues, so be it. Suffering and joy, ugliness and beauty, death and life – being constituents of earthly life – were equally sacred and were to be together said "yes" to, without discrimination. Then, at a more advanced stage, *truth* itself was brought under question, and its contribution to human existence questioned. Truths were nothing more than metaphors, and signified perspectives rather than essences. They were conceptualized and employed at various times in history to subjugate and exert power over others, Christianity being one of such truth systems. All truths for him are "useful

fictions" which have been invented to ease human existence in the world by imposing names and concepts on the constant flux of phenomena. Untruths, or "errors" for him are simply those fictions which have over time proved less useful to human beings; the rest have been embedded and internalized as truths. In the absence of both faith and truth, Nietzsche called for existence itself to be made the standard for values. Existence no doubt was fragile and value-less, but this was to be revelled in for its infinite possibilities and the promise of freedom it held in its bosom, rather than escaped. The Nietzschean doctrines of eternal recurrence and *amorfati*are but expressionsof the same attitude, that of not judging this world in terms of other-worldly concepts, but to live it out and create meaning for oneself through that living itself.

Here one has to empathize with Nietzsche as the Kierkegaardian attitude towards truth makes more sense to a believer, and that too a Christian believer. For others, his leap of faith is hard to comprehend. Nietzsche on the other hand gives us an antidote to melancholy and depression by asking of us the most optimistic and positive attitude possible in the very face of existential horror. His critique of truth itself – rather than the types of truth – shows a deeper level of thought than Kierkegaard as far as the outward aspects of human existence are concerned.

Here it would not be out of place to talk of a common misunderstandingregarding Kierkegaard and Nietzsche which is that they are anti-rational. In other words, reason has no role at all, or if it has, then a negative one, in their scheme of things. This does not hold up to scrutiny, as they both appreciate and value the rational approach in the realm of sciences, and for argumentative purposes in philosophy too. In their work too, they make use of arguments to refute what they see as bad reasoning. Kierkegaard especially is quite systematic in his reasoning, even though he was a fierce critic of systems in general, and the Hegelian system in particular. In fact, his account of the three stages may seem quite dialectical to an outsider. However, since the stages are not logically connected, and do not necessarily follow one after another, he cannot be labelled a systematic thinker on that account. And he always maintained that it is in the very nature of a system that it will neglect the individuals who it is supposed to cater to.

Nietzsche was dismissive of the rational approach in philosophy because for him, reason did not and could not help the philosopher in his mission, which was not to explain the world via systems and theories, but to concern himself with the problem of values. The former task came under the jurisdiction of science, while philosophy primarily had instrumental value and was to be used chiefly as a tool to weed out false values. While Kierkegaard believed that systems led people to believe in false truths, Nietzsche held that systems were by their nature incapable of bringing out any truths. If any, the system led to subjective truths, which was Nietzsche's way of saying that the system said something about the people who built it or believed in it rather than about its intended subject matter. But since no system was ever built with the intention of getting subjective truths, all systems were in a sense failures.

Last but not the least, there is the ideal of authentic existence, for whose sake the crowd as well as its objective, universal truths are renounced. As discussed earlier, for Kierkegaard, authentic existence is experienced only in and via the religious sphere, and the ideal of authenticity is the Christian knight of faith. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the ideal cannot be found among contemporary men or in the past; instead we have to hope and wish for the emergence of the Overman, the name for Nietzsche's authentic ideal. In a way, one can see that for both the philosophers, the average human being has an incomplete existence, and he has to be superseded – by the Overman as per Nietzsche, and by oneself as per Kierkegaard, respectively.

An interesting parallel is here drawn between Nietzsche's Overman and Kierkegaard's aesthete, the main reason being that Nietzsche's examples of noble souls or higher natures are mostly artists, sculptors, composers etc., and the primary way for an Overman to operate is create new values or express himself in novel ways, for which art is a great outlet. The second similarity is the Overman's impatience with long-time commitments and the aesthete's constant fear of boredom.

Might Nietzsche also have seen Kierkegaard as too severely denying the aesthetic? It is arguable that there was a profound difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on the aesthetic, understanding the aesthetic as that orientation of life that emphasizes the immediate and the manipulation of the immediate. For Nietzsche, Kierkegaard may have wrongly renounced – or reduced – the aesthetic, first in favour of the ethical, as in *Either/Or,* and then in favour of the religious, as in *Fear*

andTrembling. This disagreement signals what is finally one of the deepest divisions between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the division over the role of individual will.

Kierkegaard would most probably identify the Overman as a confused aesthete. Nietzsche's view of the knight of faith would fare no better. He would think of the latter as someone in service of a lie, or someone who follows life-denying values. But both would agree that there is no royal road to authenticity, and that it is always the individual who makes the choice for himself and bears the responsibility thereof rather than some external authority.

By way of conclusion, what also needs to be pointed out or rather called out is the severe individualism inherent in the writings of these two philosophers. The project of "becoming what one is" is very restricted, and some would question its validity in today's interconnected globalized world. Indeed there would be others, who Nietzsche addresses as the "Last Men," who would shrink from the task of self-creation into easier and more pleasing pursuits. Nietzsche thinks it is fine, as value creation is the preserve of the strongest individuals who can look beyond personal interests. Only some are shepherds, others feel more comfortable as members of the herd. Kierkegaard would second such a view for his knight of faith is also an exception among men. From this, we ought to deduce that neither the idea of the Overman nor of the knight of faith were meant to be universalizable for the whole society. As we said earlier in this work, the crowd never experiences authenticity; individuals do. Hence interpreting these authentic ideals as universalizable and objective and applicable to all is to doinjustice to the genius of these two philosophers. The point is not whether one is to become a Kierkegaardian or a Nietzscheanor not. In many respects, the ideals these thinkers upheld could be too extreme for normal human beings to follow. The point is to ponder over the great questions they have raised about existence and its meaning, and appreciate the passion with which they chose to resolve those questions for themselves – irrespective of what they chose. One may not understand their thought in totality, but if one is prompted after reading them to ask questions for and about oneself, one is on the path to "becoming what one is."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Books

- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript.* Translated and Edited by Alastair Hannay. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- _____. *Either/Or, Part I and II*. Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- _____. *Fear and Trembling* in *Fear and Trembling and The Book on Adler*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. London: Everyman's Library, 1994.
- _____.*Journals of Kierkegaard.* Translated by Alexander Dru. Harper Torchbooks, 1959.
- _____.*Practice in Christianity.* Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- _____. *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by David Swenson and Howard V. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- _____.*Stages on Life's Way.* Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- _____. *The Concept of Dread*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- _____.*The Point of View of My Work as an Author.*Torchbooks, 1978.
- _____. *The Sickness unto Death*.Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- _____. *Two Ages*.Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

- _____. *Works of Love.* Translated and Edited by David Swenson and Lilian M. Swenson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- _____. *Ecce Homo*.Translated by Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- _____. *Human, All Too Human*: *A Book for Free Spirits*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- _____. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- _____. *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. Translated by JosefineNauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- _____. *The Antichrist* in *Ecce Homo and The Antichrist.* Translated by Thomas Wayne. New York: Algora Publishing, 2004.
- _____. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- _____. *Twilight of the Idols* in *Twilight of the Idols with The Antichrist and Ecce Homo*. Translated by Antony M. Ludovici. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2007.
- _____. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Edited by Rudiger Bittner. Translated by Kate Sturge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Secondary Sources

Books

- Ansell-Pearson, Keith. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Barrett, William. *Irrational Man.* New York: Doubleday Books, 1962.

- Blackham, H.J. *Six Existentialist Thinkers.* London: Routledge, 2002.
- Conant, James F. *Three Philosophers: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and James.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Daigle, Christine, ed. *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics*.London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.
- Durkheim, Émile.*On Morality and Society: Selected Writings*. Chicago: Universityof Chicago Press, 1973.
- Evans, C. Stephen. *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self.* Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006.
- _____.*Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript.* Humanity Books, 1999.
- Ferguson, Harvie. *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity.* London: Routledge, 2005.
- Ferreira, Jamie M. *Kierkegaard*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *The Science of Knowledge.* Nabu Press, 2010.
- Garelick, Herbert M. *Kierkegaard's Anti-Christianity.* Hague: MartinusNijhoff, 1965.
- Gill, Jerry H. *Essays on Kierkegaard*. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1969.
- Golomb, Jacob. *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Hannay, Alastair. *Kierkegaard and Philosophy.* London: Routledge, 2003.
- Harper, Ralph. *The Existential Experience.* The John Hopkins University Press, 1972.
- Hegel, G.W.F.*Elements of the Philosophy of Right.*Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H.B. Nisbet.Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- _____.*The Science of Logic.* Translated by George di Giovanni. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Hollingdale, R.J., ed. and trans. *A Nietzsche Reader.* London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Hong, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, eds. *The Essential Kierkegaard*.Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

- Hunt, Lester H. *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue.* London: Routledge, 2005.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Reason and Existenz.* Noonday Press, 1967.
- Johnson, Howard A. and NielsThulstrup. *A Kierkegaard Critique.* Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals.* Edited by Thomas E. Hill, Jr., and Arnulf Zweig. Translated by Arnulf Zweig. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- _____. *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- _____, ed. and trans. *The Portable Nietzsche.* London: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Kazantzakis, Nikos. *Friedrich Nietzsche on the Philosophy of Right and the State.* State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Lampert, Lawrence. *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil.* London/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Lavrin, Janko. *Nietzsche: An Approach.* Routledge, 2010.
- Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche on Morality.* London: Routledge, 2005.
- Magnus, Bernd and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Marino, Gordon D. *Kierkegaard in the Present Age.* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001.
- May, Simon. *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on 'Morality.'* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Ortega Y Gassett, José. *The Revolt of the Masses.*Edited by Kenneth Moore. Translated by Anthony Kerrigan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
- Pattison, George. *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

- Pearson, Keith A., ed. *A Companion to Nietzsche*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006.
- _____. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- _____. and Duncan Large, ed. *The Nietzsche Reader.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.
- Perkins, Robert L., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness Unto Death.* Mercer University Press, 2001.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness; An Essay onPhenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.
- _____. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Vol. 1, *Theory of Practical Ensembles*. London: Verso, 2004.
- _____. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Vol. 2, *The Intelligibility of History*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Schacht, Richard, ed. *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Schiller, F.C.S. *Must Philosophers Disagree?: And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. Macmillan: 1934.
- Siemens, Herman W. and VastiRoodt, eds. *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*.Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008.
- Shaw, Tamsin. *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Spinks, Lee. *Friedrich Nietzsche.* Routledge, 2003.
- Strong, Tracy B. *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
- Watts, Michael. *Kierkegaard.* Oneworld, 2003.
- Weston, Michael. *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy.* London: Routledge, 2003.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Articles

- Beabout, Gregory R. and Brad Frazier. “A Challenge to the "Solitary Self" Interpretation of Kierkegaard.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Volume 17, 2000: 75-98.
- Fremstedal, Roe. “Kierkegaard's double movement of faith and Kant's moral faith.” *Religious Studies*, Vol. 48, 2012: 199-220.
- Glenn, Paul F. “Nietzsche's Napoleon: The Higher Man as Political Actor.” *The Review of Politics* Vol. 63, No. 1, 2001: 129-158.
- Guess, Raymond. “Nietzsche and Morality.” *European Journal of Philosophy,* 5:1 ISSN 0966-8373, 1997: 1-20.
- Kaiser, Otto. “Democracy and Aristocracy in Nietzsche’s Late Writings.” *The European Heritage in Economics and the Social Sciences*, Volume 3, 2006: 229-253.
- Klemke, E.D. “Kierkegaard, Logicality and the Christian Faith.” *Studies in the Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 1976: 15-26.
- Mcdonald, William “Recent Developments in Scholarship on Key Existentialists,” *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism,* Bloomsbury Academic, 2011:282-7.
- Levine, Michael P. “Kierkegaard: What does the subjective individual risk?” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* Volume 13, 1982: 13-22.
- Philips, D.Z. “Subjectivity and religious truth in Kierkegaard.” *Sophia*, Volume 7, 1968: 3-13.
- Plekon, Michael. “Beyond existentialist caricatures: New views of Kierkegaard.” *Human Studies*, Volume 4: 87-95.
- Siemens, H.W. “Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy (1870—1886).” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies,* No. 38, 2009: 20-37.
- Solomon, Robert C. “Friedrich Nietzsche.” The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003: 90-111.
- Strong, Tracy B. “Nietzsche’s Political misappropriation.” *The*Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 119-150.

- Thompson, Curtis L. “The end of religion in Hegel and Kierkegaard.” *Sophia*, Volume 33: 10-20.

Websites

- www.dartmouth.edu/~fnchron/
- www.sorenkierkegaard.org
- www.ccel.org/ccel/kierkegaard/untruth/files/untruth.html
- www.philosophypages.com/hy/2b.htm
- http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/