

**REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF NIETZSCHE'S MORAL AND
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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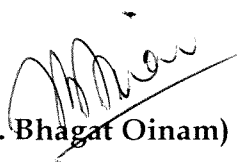


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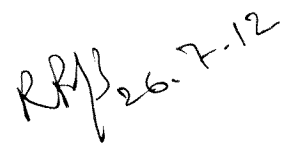
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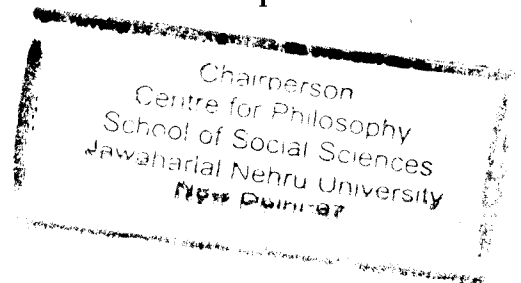

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DECLARATION

I, Varun Sharma, declare that the dissertation entitled Revaluation of All Values: A Critical Study of Nietzsche's Moral and Political Philosophy submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree in this or any other university.



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To my father, my mother and my sister.

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(Varun Sharma)

PREFACE

The title of my dissertation viz., Revaluation of All Values¹ (*Umwertung aller Werthe*) alludes to two things. Firstly it is an allusion to a major work Nietzsche had in mind towards the end of his sane life. It was to consist of four books and was to have the tentative title *The Will to Power. Attempt at a Revaluation of all Values*, as he tells us in the third essay of his *On the Genealogy of Morality*.² The project was abandoned by him for some time but was reconceived and re-titled as *Revaluation of All Values*³ before being shelved once again. (In the Preface to his *Twilight of the Idols*, he described his *Antichrist* as the “first book of the *Revaluation of All Values*”).⁴ Secondly the title alludes to the phrase “revaluation of all values” which Nietzsche uses at many places in his later writings to explain his philosophical project⁵ as well as that of others whom he despises.⁶ Since the objective of my thesis is to portray Nietzsche primarily as a “philosopher of values” – one who both demolishes and constructs values – the significance of the phrase cannot be overemphasized.

I have styled the chapters in my dissertation after the titles of Nietzsche’s books. The titles of my chapters are all modifications of the titles of Nietzsche’s books. In each chapter, I have taken up a particular theme in Nietzsche and tried to elaborate it by means of two or three sections. Thus the first chapter – wherein I show Nietzsche’s debts and denials of previous thinkers – is titled “Thus Spoke the Idols,” an amalgamation of the titles of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols*. The second chapter deals with the topic of morality, its origins and its shortcomings, and hence is titled “On the Axiology of Morality,” an allusion to the title of Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality*. The final chapter is to a large extent an analysis of Nietzsche’s random observations on politics, and hence is titled “Nietzsche contra Politics,” alluding to the title of *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, one of his last works, which, like my chapter, was an *assortment* of Nietzsche’s views on the composer Richard Wagner from his previous

¹ Some translations of Nietzsche use the term ‘transvaluation of values’; I have followed the majority.

² Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 118.

³ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, pp. 6, 81, 87.

⁴ As mentioned in Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 466. The italics are mine.

⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 30; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, pp. 61-2, 88

⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 17, 19; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 94.

books. In following the afore-mentioned schema, I have no purpose in mind other than paying homage to one of the greatest stylists philosophy has ever known.

Nietzsche's philosophy, especially the political tone of his writings, has been very controversial, to a large measure due to its attachment with Nazism in the period before the Second World War. Although this episode has been conclusively proved to be an abuse of Nietzsche's thought, yet it cannot be denied that there are strains in his philosophy that can lend themselves to a totalitarian interpretation. The anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian nature of his thought has been variously discussed and criticized, making him as notorious a thinker as he is famous. In this dissertation, I have not taken up the controversies that have attached themselves to Nietzsche for I wanted to study Nietzsche on my own terms without any presuppositions. I have therefore treated Nietzsche's thought more or less as a closed system and examined his arguments in contrast only to his other arguments.

In one respect the thesis may seem lacking, owing to a lack of citations from several of Nietzsche's early books. I confess that I have deliberately been selective in my choice of texts, but this selection has been influenced by many of the premier Nietzsche scholars who believe that it is Nietzsche's later works which contain the kernel of his thought.⁷ In preparation for this dissertation, I have read *in toto* Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and the semi-autobiographical *Ecce Homo*. I have read his *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Human All Too Human* only in parts. For the rest of his work, I have consulted the three "Nietzsche readers" published respectively by Viking Press, Penguin and Blackwell. My choice of texts has been chiefly guided by my primarily objective of understanding Nietzsche axiologically, and a larger study would have gone against both the stipulated time period as well as the scope of the dissertation.

⁷ "It is only occasionally in his earlier writings that he shows the kind of philosophical power, insight and sensitivity characteristic of so much of his later work; and it is indeed only occasionally that he even addresses himself to significant philosophical issues and tasks in them. Prior to *The Gay Science* he was only on the way to becoming the important philosopher he came to be". For details, see Schacht, *Nietzsche*. Preface, p. xiii.

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche is widely held to be one of the foremost philosophers of the nineteenth century as well as one of the most influential modern European thinkers, as one who provided critical insights into the problems that assail the modern times and more importantly, as one who claimed to have a way out of these problems. What separates him from his contemporary thinkers however is the timelessness of his thought, the fact that the maladies he was interested in persist to a great extent even in the present age and the remedies he suggested have a more sympathetic and ever-growing audience now than ever before. His work has influenced and continues to influence many philosophers, writers, artists, psychologists, sociologists, and revolutionaries. In this respect, he shares company with only one contemporary thinker, a fellow German, Karl Marx.

Nietzsche is different from his predecessors not only in what he says, but also how he chooses to say it. So how does Nietzsche write like? From his first published book *The Birth of Tragedy* to the five he finished in his last year of sanity, Nietzsche wrote several books. His books are not what the works of a philosopher generally look like. They are not argumentative; rather they are rhetorical and passionate. Many writers have noticed this lack of argumentation in Nietzsche. Richard Schacht, who is among the premier Nietzsche scholars, observes:

Where he can, he attempts to make a case for thinking of things as he proposes, and for ceasing to think of them in ways he suggests to be mistaken; but he does not consider it the better part of wisdom to withhold all such suggestions unless and until decisive reasons for doing so can be adduced. And whether for rhetorical purposes or simply because he is wont to do so, he frequently peppers his discussions with outbursts and tirades of a sort seldom encountered in philosophical literature sometimes offering nothing more in support of the positions he takes than the force they generate.¹

This does not, however, pose an insoluble problem for us, for it is an essential feature of Nietzsche's thought that it is deliberately anti-rational. There is no abstruse philosophical jargon in Nietzsche. He has little interest in abstraction and his thought

¹ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p. 2.

focuses more on the particularities in life. He does not believe in empty theorizing and his philosophy indeed presents a challenge to academic philosophers whom he calls 'philosophical laborers.'² Schacht argues:

As a final verdict concerning his philosophical efforts generally, however, its justice depends upon the legitimacy of regarding a particular sort of philosophical argumentation as constituting the only procedure appropriate to philosophical inquiry, and of taking Nietzsche's way of addressing issues to deviate too greatly from this paradigm to constitute a legitimate form of philosophical endeavor. And this is a matter requiring serious consideration; for the consensus of opinion concerning it may at least be contested.³

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. Towards the end of his career, he took up the essay again. As a writer, Nietzsche is funny at many places, infuriating at others, and in many instances, his way of expression seems closer to poetry than prose. 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.

Nietzsche is deliberately unsystematic: he shrinks from developing one system of philosophy that encompasses all his ideas. He is a different sort of philosopher also because most of his works do not restrict themselves to a single theme or idea; instead they are interrelated. Themes and ideas from one work are carried on and developed in other works. There is little attempt to present his thought in a coherent way, and yet when you view his *oeuvre* as a whole, it all fits together.

Nietzsche's philosophy, if we observe the titles of some of his works, is more of the nature of *meditations*, *thoughts*, a *prelude*, or a *polemic* rather than a systematic discourse.⁴ What is Nietzsche criticizing? In the Preface to his *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche tells us that his task as a thinker is to overthrow old ideals rather than establishing new ones. He identifies the malaise of modern age as the fact that humanity has chosen false ideals over true ones and this has led to a falsification of reality itself in that those values have

² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 105.

³ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p. 2.

⁴ 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*.

come to be cultivated and appreciated which do not in any way lead man to a prosperous future. As a corollary, the truly useful values have come to be neglected and looked down upon. This is what in Nietzsche's terms is called *decadence*.

Nietzsche sees his task as a thinker first and foremost to expose the hollowness of such ideals so that mankind finds it expedient to say goodbye to them. For instance, he seeks to trace the roots of moral values to the reasons and the times in which they came into being, and by showing that they have outlived their importance, calls for an undermining of the "old" morality and a "revaluing" of its traditional values. This anti-foundational attitude comes natural to Nietzsche for he believes that reality is a continual state of becoming, and is not a constant, immutable state of being. The existence is lacking in purpose; "purpose" itself is a human invention. Thus there is no "ideal man" or "ideal happiness" or "ideal morality" – it is absurd to wish man to be careering towards some sort of purpose.⁵

Thus it does not make sense to have a permanent table of values. Times change and our values grow old and useless with time. It is only our fear of something new and hence unknown that stops us from embracing a world where our old ideals do not work. Nietzsche wants his fellow humans to transcend this fear and throw themselves whole heartedly in the two-pronged task of rejecting the old and creating the new. This point is stressed in the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* where he is characterized as having two faces: "One face looks at our past and vivisects our common cultural heritage at its roots; the other seems to be turned towards the future, suggesting visions of possible new forms of Western life."⁶

In this dissertation, I have tried to address both these facets of Nietzsche's philosophy. But my major aim has been to attempt an appraisal of Nietzsche primarily as a thinker concerned with the value of ideals, or in other words, the value of values themselves. As he himself argues in the Preface to his *On the Genealogy of Morality*,

we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined* – and so we need to know about the conditions and circumstances under which the values grew up, developed and changed.⁷

⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 35-6.

⁶ Magnus and Higgins, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, p. 3.

⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 7.

This question of value is the linking thread between the three chapters in which I have divided my thesis. The first chapter, namely *Thus Spoke the Idols*, presents an overview of various philosophical and cultural influences on Nietzsche. Many of the values Nietzsche espoused were borrowed by him from his predecessors; although he could at the same time despise some other values in them quite virulently. Nietzsche's final value system, however, was a very original one, though shades of it have been found in thinkers and traditions he admired. Ancient Greece had the most lasting impact on his thought. Nietzsche was very much taken especially with the pre-Socratic Greeks for what he took to be their affirmative attitude towards life. They had achieved a fine balance between the rational and the instinctual aspects of life, exemplified by the perfection attained by Greek tragedy. Contrasted with these early Greeks are the later Athenians Socrates and Plato whom Nietzsche accuses of injecting Greek civilization with an overdose of rationality. It is in them that belief in "transcendent" ideals like absolute truth and a world "beyond" first originated. These values were then absorbed by Christianity, to which I turn in the second section.

Nietzsche's basic problem with Christianity is that since its inception, it has consistently propagated an ethic of life-denial. It has always looked upwards for guidance and this has made it oblivious and therefore indifferent to the life down here on earth. It has been an enemy of all progress and science since their advancement would mean its downfall. It has been anti-strength, anti-happiness and anti-truth. The fault for this lies to the greatest extent with the priestly class in Christianity who have for the preservation of their power distorted every truth that Jesus had preached. Here I point out a distance which Nietzsche keeps between Jesus and the later Christians. Although he accuses Jesus too for turning away from life into a realm of ideals, he has an attitude of reverence towards him. But he does not have the slightest patience with neither the Christians of yore who propagated lies like the "moral order of the universe," "personal immortality" etc., nor with the Europeans of today who in spite of being witnesses to the out datedness of Christian ideals insist on sticking to them.

Nietzsche discovered the shadow of these ideals in the works of several modern philosophers, of whom I have chosen two Germans, namely Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. Kant, by his declaration of the noumenal as unknowable, serves the cause of Christianity by first accepting there to be a transcendent realm and secondly shutting it off from all inquiry. Schopenhauer, through his pessimistic affirmation of the Christian

ideal of asceticism as the only means to deal with worldly suffering, furthers the cause of life-denial in his own way.

Thus my objective in the first chapter has been to situate Nietzsche inside as well as outside the long-established tradition of Western philosophy, presenting Nietzsche sometimes in agreement and sometimes in disagreement with these traditions and their flag-bearers.

In the second chapter, titled *On The Axiology of Morality*, I deal with Nietzsche's critique of values in general. Nietzsche rejects the objectivity and universality of our values and strives to show how these supposedly transcendent ideals in fact are products of particular stages of human history. This is discussed in the section titled *The Masters and the Slaves* where Nietzsche's famous distinction between "master morality" and "slave morality" is analyzed. It is here that one sees how values are determined by power relations, and are therefore liable to change with a change in power dynamics.

While the first section represents Nietzsche's understanding of the past, the second section of this chapter titled *The Nihilist and the Overman* presents his concerns with the present and the future of mankind. Nietzsche sees that mankind is facing an emptiness of values after its loss of faith in Christianity, and hence stage is set for a terrible form of pessimistic nihilism. While Nietzsche welcomes the abandonment of Christian ideals, he is not himself a nihilist. He does not want the modern man to become one either. Therefore he posits an alternate ideal of the *Overman*: a new and superior kind of being who will be a creator of values, and not a mere follower. Contemporary man is just a *bridge* to the *Overman*.⁸

The third and final chapter tries to make sense of Nietzsche as a political philosopher. In the wake of his confessed hostility to system-building, Nietzsche has been accused of charges as diverse as having no political philosophy to supporting a sinister politics. He has been notoriously misquoted and misapplied in this respect. But when we see his books, we find first that he does not have any concrete work on politics; all we get is a collection of aphorisms interspersed in his books where he expresses his views on state, democracy, equality etc. My aim in this section has been to look into the discussions on Nietzsche's political stance and to contrast that with the picture that comes to light from his writings. The first section of the chapter looks into those bits and

⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 7-8.

fragments of Nietzsche's political writing wherein he criticizes and rejects the modern ideals of equality and democracy, and finds fault with the institutions of liberalism and the modern state. The second section focuses on his more positive political thought wherein he seems to be advocating some particular form of political activity and governance. In short, the third chapter reflects on both Nietzsche's political views as well as the interpretations that one can draw from them in the light of his broader philosophical outlook.

To conclude, in this dissertation, I have tried to look at Nietzsche primarily as a philosopher of value, a thinker concerned with all ideals by which humans live and die. These ideals have to be minutely examined, for a depraved ideal will lead to a depraved society. Nietzsche inquires:

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?⁹

From this it naturally follows that if a system of ideals is found to be deficient, it ought to be replaced with a new one. Nietzsche's genius lies in presenting us with new standards to identify the ideals necessary for our age. He implores us to wake up and abandon our old values, for it is precisely our values that have proved to be our undoing.

⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 8.

CHAPTER ONE

THUS SPOKE THE IDOLS

In the Introduction to his *A Nietzsche Reader*, the premier Nietzsche translator R.J. Hollingdale calls Nietzsche a “problem philosopher” within the Western philosophical tradition. His insightful study of the traditional subjects of Western philosophy made him aware of their shortcomings and led him to question their validity. Nietzsche 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, religious, moral and rational truths which were formerly both backbone and substance of the Western tradition were in fact errors.¹⁰

Thus one of the ways in which we can interpret his philosophy is to see it as a response and a reaction to the preceding Western thinkers. Nietzsche was influenced by a host of other philosophers, including some of his immediate predecessors as well as some philosophers of antiquity. At times, he borrowed ideas from them, modifying and making them his own; at other times, he vehemently criticized aspects of their thought and formulated his own philosophy in contradistinction to them.

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, especially of the pre-Socratic period, 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

¹⁰ Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader*, p. 9.

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.

In addition to the Greeks and the Christians, Nietzsche has a lot to say about two fellow Germans, namely Arthur Schopenhauer and Immanuel Kant. While Schopenhauer was almost a contemporary of Nietzsche (he died when Nietzsche was sixteen), Kant died forty years before Nietzsche was born. Nietzsche has no words of kindness for Kant. For him, Kant was a handmaiden of theologians; he sees Kant as yet another Christian who is using philosophy to serve the ends of Christendom. With Schopenhauer, things are different. It was Schopenhauer whose work inspired Nietzsche into philosophy, and in his early writings, Nietzsche praises him as a great *educator*.¹¹ However he soon grew disillusioned with the latter's pessimistic outlook and strove to protect his own philosophy from that ailment. What is interesting in Nietzsche's treatment of these two thinkers is that while he acknowledges the importance of their contribution to Western culture, he also strives to show their implicit allegiance to the aforementioned twin sources of Western civilization in their own different ways.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to describe and analyze Nietzsche's debts to these philosophers. I shall also try and find out their points of divergence. And my final aim will be to ascertain in what respect and to what extent these thinkers are important if we have to understand the development of Nietzsche's thought as a whole. In each of the first two sections, however, I shall take a detour to emphasize in passing some important aspect of Nietzsche's thought. In my discussion of the Greek influence on Nietzsche, I shall talk about the famous Apollonian/Dionysian divide that Nietzsche first delineated in his *The Birth of Tragedy* and often made use of in later works. Similarly, while talking about the Judaeo-Christian tradition, I shall simultaneously seek to present an overview of Nietzsche's denunciation and attack on Christianity. I shall try to illuminate Nietzsche's point that outdated Christian ideals are masquerading in different disguises even in today's world, particularly in guise of moral values. The chapter will conclude with a general overview of the *rationale* behind Nietzsche's critique of all these "idols" save the Pre-Socratic Greeks.

¹¹ One of the four essays in Nietzsche's early work *Untimely Meditations* is titled "Schopenhauer as Educator."

A. The Greeks: The Pre-Socratics and Socrates

Nietzsche was by training a classical philologist and his area of interest was ancient Greek thought. His earliest published essays were on two sixth century BCE Greek poets, Theognis and Simonides, as well as on Aristotle.¹² Pre-Socratic Greece appears in his books as a sort of “Golden Age” against which all other historical ages, including his own could be measured. R.J. Hollingdale comments in an article:

Of even greater consequence than the influence he had on Greek studies, however, was the influence his Greek studies had on him. Their most general effect was to demonstrate to him that a high civilization - the highest, indeed, as he quickly came to think - could be raised on a moral foundation wholly at variance with the Christian; and that Christian morality was not the only one.¹³

Among the Greek philosophers, Nietzsche’s loyalty lay with the thinkers known as the Pre-Socratics and the Sophists, and not the later Athenian philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. (Among the Pre-Socratics too, he is most taken with Heraclitus, while being critical of Parmenides and his followers.) For Socrates, more often than not Nietzsche has nothing but contempt. Surprisingly, he is more sympathetic towards Plato. Bertrand Russell in his *The History of Western Philosophy* mentions this hierarchy Nietzsche makes in the case of Greeks:

“...in the main he regards the Greek philosophers from Socrates onwards as inferior to their predecessors. He cannot forgive Socrates for his humble origin... and accuses him of corrupting the noble Athenian youth with a democratic moral bias. Plato, especially, is condemned on account of his taste for edification. Nietzsche, however, obviously does not quite like condemning him, and suggests, to excuse him, that perhaps he was insincere, and only preached virtue as a means of keeping the lower classes in order.”¹⁴

Let us first try to understand why Nietzsche is attracted to the Pre-Socratics. Brian Leiter, in his book *Nietzsche on Morality*, points out four themes essential to the early Greek thought that drew Nietzsche to them. Firstly, in the Pre-Socratics, philosophy is not as divorced from natural sciences as it was to be later. The Pre-Socratics seek to give a general explanation of the natural world and its constituents, and almost all of them postulate a single entity, mostly an element, as *the primal origin and womb of all things*.

¹² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/>, accessed on May 28, 2012.

¹³ Hollingdale, “The Hero as Outsider,” p. 84.

¹⁴ Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, p. 761.

Leiter observes that in giving this sort of explanation, the Pre-Socratics come across as ‘natural scientists’ and as postulating a certain unity behind the apparently diverse nature of things. In this way, they anticipate Nietzsche in holding nature to be “continuous throughout, so that even the understanding of human beings must proceed apace with the understanding of the rest of nature.”¹⁵

Secondly, Nietzsche views the Pre-Socratics as “men of wisdom” rather than “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 of this truth. Nietzsche is thus influenced by the early Greeks in his lifelong opposition to the ideal of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake.” For him, 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 he criticizes Socrates and his rationalism. He accuses Socrates and his followers with their slogan of “knowledge is virtue” of making 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.”¹⁶

Thirdly, Nietzsche at many places in his books emphasizes that genuine knowledge comes from the senses, and he finds many Pre-Socratics reiterating his views. Leiter gives the example of the famous debate of antiquity between the heirs of Heraclitus and Parmenides. While the former accept senses as the real source of knowledge and as a consequence the world of constant flux that the senses present to us, the latter reject the senses in upholding an ideal world impervious to change. In his *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche praises Heraclitus: “But in declaring that Being was an empty illusion, Heraclitus will remain eternally right. The ‘apparent’ world is the only world: the ‘true world’ is no more than a false adjunct thereto.”¹⁷

Thus we can see the Heraclitan idea as the precursor of the Being/Becoming distinction that assumed a great significance in Nietzsche’s thought. He was forever a

¹⁵ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 41.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 73.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 18.

philosopher of the Becoming, and hence his philosophy rebelled against idealism of any kind, be it Platonic or Christian. He accuses idealists of claiming to rise above reality and suspecting it. By means of grand concepts like the Absolute, the Pure Spirit and the like, the idealist seeks to disparage the senses and what the senses inform about.

Last but not the least, Pre-Socratic philosophers appealed to Nietzsche because of their strong realist outlook. Leiter warns us against taking realism here in its contemporary sense of “a metaphysical doctrine about the mind-independence of the world”; instead he understands it to be “a certain hard-headed, unromantic, uncompromising attitude which manifests itself in a brutal honesty and candour in the assessment of human motives and the portrayal of human affairs.” In other words, what Nietzsche is appreciating is an honesty of approach towards the world which does not shrink from the horrible aspects of existence and savours them with the same relish as the pleasant ones.

He holds the ancient Greek historian Thucydides to be an epitome of this realist ideal for the latter affirms in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* that strength, power and selfishness, and *not* morality are the driving forces in human affairs. It is to be noticed that these are the instincts Nietzsche himself emphasizes in his own books. While praising Thucydides, Nietzsche holds Socratic rationalism as guilty of precisely this escape in the face of reality. He writes:

After all it is courage in the face of reality that distinguishes such natures as Thucydides from Plato: Plato is a coward in the face of reality – consequently he takes refuge in the ideal: Thucydides is a master of himself – consequently he is able to master life.¹⁸

We can find an example of this realist attitude in the Sophists Gorgias, Glaucon and Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Republic* who are honest in holding that “[s]elf-interest . . . is what every nature (*physis*) naturally pursues as good.”¹⁹

Throughout his own career, Nietzsche would uphold a realist attitude as one of the highest virtues a man could attain. In *Ecce Homo*, he stresses that Truth cannot be sought in the *beyond*. The idealists, out of their cowardice to face life and their instinct of self-preservation, stand in need of ideals – which are nothing but lies or flights from reality. The affirmation of reality is the mark of the strong.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹ As quoted in Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 51.

As can be observed from the above discussion, Nietzsche is a severe critic of Socrates. In order to properly bring out the reasons for his denouncement of Socrates, it is important to first turn to the Apollonian-Dionysian opposition which Nietzsche postulates in his *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Apollo was the sun god of ancient Greeks, and was linked to order and form, as the form-endowing force finding expression in temples and sculpture. The Apollonian principle was associated with the “principle of individuation;” in its formalistic aspect, it enabled the individual to separate himself from the rest of reality to an extent wherefrom he can regard the latter with some form of detachment or objectivity.

In contrast, Dionysus was the ancient Greek god of wine and festivals and was associated with sensual abandon, music and intoxication. The Dionysian principle represented the ecstasy one feels when one’s socially constructed sense of identity, one’s individuated self, is dissolved. Nietzsche observed that as an “individual,” a human being is cut off both from the natural world and also from experiencing a true sense of belonging within the community of fellow beings. In the Dionysian moment, this alienation is overcome and the social barriers separating person from person are negated. This was achieved in the Dionysian festivals by various means such as communal dances and orgies which gave a participant release from individual isolation. Through these festivals, “Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind.”²⁰

The role of chorus in these theatrical events was crucial because it enabled the isolated Apollonian individual to become part of a Dionysian community that celebrated life and accepted all its inconsistencies. This profound aesthetic experience provided by Greek tragedy allowed individual citizens to achieve a balance between both temperaments. Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Greek tragedy and Greek life could only be understood in terms of a combination of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. By producing this reconciliation, Greek tragedy made Greeks and their civilization unique.²¹ Only those who could sense the deepest, the most devastating effects of despair and inward suffering could succeed so admirably in covering up the horrors with beautiful and perennially brilliant aesthetic creations. From this, Nietzsche concludes

²⁰Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14-9.

that a life philosophy requires elements from both reason as well as the darker, more tragic aspects of life. He tends to measure the inadequate achievements of subsequent civilizations against this paradigm. Consequently his first target becomes Socrates.

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.²² 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.²³

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 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'."²⁴

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.²⁵

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

²² Ibid., p. 67.

²³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 7.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 62.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 72-3.

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.”

In his influential psychological study of Nietzsche, Professor Janko Lavrin 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.²⁶

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 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.²⁷

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.

²⁶ Lavrin, *Nietzsche An Approach*, pp. 101-7.

²⁷ Solomon, “Friedrich Nietzsche,” pp. 91-5.

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. Indeed, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche calls himself a “disciple of Dionysus.”²⁸

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*.²⁹

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 character which Nietzsche accuses Christianity of infecting with its various notions of good, bad and afterlife.

B. The Jews: Jesus and Paul

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

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 4.

²⁹ Pearson and Large, *The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 483.

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.

The title of this section alludes to 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).³⁰

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.”³¹

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 defended Europe against Asia.... If Christianity has done everything to orientalize the occident, Judaism has always played an essential part in occidentalizing it again.³²

³⁰ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 32-3.

³¹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 122.

³² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, pp. 174-5.

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 different mode 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.*”³³ 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.”³⁴

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

³³ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p.136

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

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!”³⁵

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!³⁶

Thus Nietzsche fights against the way in which Christianity has become an ideology set forth by institutions like churches, and how churches have failed to represent the life of Jesus. He criticizes the early Christians for turning Jesus into a martyr and Jesus' life into the story of the redemption of mankind in order to dominate the masses. He complains:

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...³⁷

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 pretensions and the self-deception to which they lead.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

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 lacked the courage to confess that it had done so. 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 everything remains as before....* every practice of every moment, every instinct, every valuation which 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!³⁸

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.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 138-9.

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.³⁹

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.*⁴⁰ 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: “Highest precept: “God forgives those who do penance” — in plain English: *those who subject themselves to the priest.*”⁴¹

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.*⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 153, 174.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 153-4.

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!*⁴³

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 anti 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 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.”⁴⁴

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”.’⁴⁵

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

⁴³ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 109.



destroyed’ translated into the imperative: ‘you *should* all be destroyed’— and *not only* into the imperative!’⁴⁶

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, *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*?”⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁸

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

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 157.

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.”

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.⁴⁹

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, as we shall see in the next section.

C. The Germans: Kant and Schopenhauer

Although Nietzsche studied and was influenced by a host of German thinkers, I have chosen only two from among them, namely Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. No study of Nietzsche can be afforded without having some insight into the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer with whose thought he was first inspired and later deviated from. It is Schopenhauer’s “Will” that echoes in Nietzsche’s concept of the “Will to Power.” It is against the pessimism of Schopenhauer that Nietzsche puts forward his various doctrines of Yea-saying, such as the doctrine of *amor fati*⁵⁰ and that of *eternal recurrence*.⁵¹ Hence it is imperative that a study of Nietzsche devote some space to his “educator.”

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 117.

⁵⁰ The literal meaning of *amor fati* is love of fate.

⁵¹ I discuss these two doctrines in detail in the second section of my second chapter.

The motive behind my selection of Kant as the other German thinker has been to present Kant and Nietzsche in contrast, for they represent two opposite strains of Western philosophy. Kant is a system builder *par excellence*; Nietzsche is vehemently anti-system. Kant is a philosopher of the brain; Nietzsche is a philosopher of the heart. Kantian thought is a continuation of Platonism and Christianity; Nietzsche's thought is a reaction against these very traditions. Although Nietzsche was virulently critical of Kant, there is much in his critique that has a broad philosophical significance. My objective would be to try and bring out the same. Since Kant was a predecessor as well as a major influence on Schopenhauer himself, I will start with Kant.

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 Kant regards as universally valid, and hence objective, are regarded by Nietzsche as having no absolute necessity or universal validity, but as products of human interests and purposes; 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 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*!⁵²

⁵²Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 13.

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.⁵³

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 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

⁵³Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 21.

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.”⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

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.

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.

Schopenhauer accepted Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal and incorporated it into his own philosophical system as the *will/representation* divide. To comprehend the world as representation is to encounter the world in terms of certain categories: the Kantian categories of space, time and causality, and Schopenhauer’s own category of the subject-object relation. Since the structure of the mind is oriented around these categories, all ordinary experience and knowing falls under them and is organized by them. Up to here Schopenhauer is a Kantian. However he soon

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 110.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

parts company with Kant in holding that the world beyond ordinary experience, to which these categories do not apply, is still somehow within the grasp of human knowledge.⁵⁶

In contrast to our external experience, our internal experience, that is, our experience of ourselves is not shaped by the categories. Our inner selves are not located in space and time, nor are we objects to ourselves as subjects. Thus we have, in fact, access to something beyond the categories – in effect, to something outside the phenomenal. What is the content of this inward knowledge? When we look inwards, for Schopenhauer, all we find is a *will* – the will to live, to preserve ourselves, to procure things for us, to multiply and so on. Since our selves are the only things-in-themselves to which we have access, Schopenhauer assumes that the world in itself is of the nature of a will, thus imparting every entity in the world, animate as well as inanimate, with an aspect of will. A commentator gives an example:

look at the suspension bridge, resisting, as we are wont to say, the buffets of the hurricane; it resists breaking apart; it holds together, struggling to maintain itself, attempting to preserve its integrity. In this regard, it manifests the will to self-preservation. For Schopenhauer..., this is not merely a metaphor. Thus, on the basis of such thinking, he concludes that everything in the world as representation – every individual thing – is a manifestation of will.⁵⁷

Once the nature of the world as will is uncovered, Schopenhauer raises the question “What is it to will?” To will is to desire. Thus the world is revealed to us as an object of desire, since we are concrete beings with appetites that demand satisfaction. However, it is the very nature of these cravings that they cannot be permanently satisfied; it is inbuilt in them that they are doomed to failure. To desire is moreover to be conscious of a lack and consciousness of a lack involves suffering. Thus we see a two-fold view of suffering: we suffer when we desire a thing and we suffer when after a temporary satisfaction, the desire returns. From this, Schopenhauer concludes that suffering is an innate condition of human existence. Through reflection on our inner nature, we can come to know that life itself is ultimately nothing else but suffering. Hence paradoxically though we all may be driven by the will to live, Schopenhauer’s solution to the ills of existence is to renounce the will to life. This is practically achieved in Schopenhauer temporarily by means of aesthetic contemplation and finally by means of ascetic denial,

⁵⁶ Gardiner, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” pp. 649-53.

⁵⁷ Carroll, “Arthur Schopenhauer,” p. 34.

whereby one overcomes the self and hence one's will to live. Indeed this outlook is epitomized by the doctrine that the best thing for any person would be to not exist at all, since reality is as appalling as it can possibly be. This more or less summarizes Schopenhauer's pessimism.⁵⁸

Nietzsche was mightily impressed by Schopenhauer's pessimism when he first came into contact with the latter's thought. Schopenhauer's pessimism plays an important role in Nietzsche's first book. The early Greeks are shown to have encountered this pessimism through their insights into the terrors of life; however they are able to deal with it through their achievement of balance between the forces of order and forces of frenzy. Initially Nietzsche viewed Schopenhauer's thought as an honest and serious attempt to pose the question of the meaning of individual existence. In his later years, however, Nietzsche found in Schopenhauer's pessimism and his remedy of self-abnegation a morbid life-denying tendency. He explains:

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 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.⁵⁹

Nietzsche agreed with Schopenhauer in accepting the existence of the blind "Will" behind the phenomenal world. He also accepted that this will could not be avoided, but instead of taking it pessimistically, Nietzsche modified it into his principle of "Will to Power," which emphasized that everything was in the state of continuous conflict, but the conflict in itself was creative and healthy. As regards the Schopenhauerian remedy of asceticism, Nietzsche saw it as the handiwork of the Christian theologians in order to propagate their life-denying philosophy. It is not surprising therefore that he understood Schopenhauer's pessimism as paying homage to these Christianity and gradually broke away from him. Jorg Salaquarda in his article in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* explains this point:

⁵⁸ Copleston, *A History of Western Philosophy Vol. VII*, pp. 272-6.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 7.

a religion symbolically attuned to Schopenhauerian principles would embrace a form of (iv) metaphysical pessimism. Since the striving of will essentially cannot be satisfied, there is no hope for a better life in this or in another world. This Schopenhauerian pessimism cannot be overcome by compassionate activities, but only by giving up all striving. This involves passing to a state of "holiness," which Schopenhauer described as quietist asceticism.⁶⁰

This is why in his later works Nietzsche differentiates between Schopenhauerian pessimism and what he calls *Dionysian* pessimism. 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 enormous and unbounded Yea- and Amen-saying'.... 'Into all abysses I carry my blessing Yea-saying'.... *But that is the concept of Dionysus once again.*⁶¹

Where the former sees life's suffering as offering no consolation and, because of this, drains it of all meaning, the latter 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. Thus a contrast is brought out by Nietzsche between Schopenhauer and the Greeks, as Richard Schacht points out:

it is important to appreciate the fact that Nietzsche's thinking on the matter of value initially had the fundamental character of a profound reaction against and response to Schopenhauer's pessimism and radical condemnation of life.... Thus in *The Birth of Tragedy* his basic concern was to try to understand how the Greeks could have found it possible to endure and indeed exuberantly embrace and affirm life, even though they shared Schopenhauer's recognition of the 'absurdity' and 'terror and horror of existence'.⁶²

It is in the background of Schopenhauer's pessimism that we should try to understand Nietzsche's doctrines of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence. While Schopenhauer laments the blind will that leads man with his never-fulfilled desires to a wretched and

⁶⁰ Salaquarda, "Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian tradition," p. 96.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 73.

⁶² Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p. 344.

repentant existence, Nietzsche tells us about his antidote to suffering: an attitude of optimism towards life, the firm belief that *what is necessary does me no harm*.⁶³ This is what is meant by *amor fati*.

A similar enthusiasm is to be found in Nietzsche's doctrine of *eternal recurrence* wherein contrary to Schopenhauer's renunciation of the will to live, he affirms life in all its tastes by agreeing wholeheartedly to the "unconditional and endlessly repeating circulation of all things."⁶⁴ We may say that a person affirms his life in Nietzsche's sense only insofar as he would gladly will the repetition of his entire life through eternity. Higher men are marked by a distinctive Dionysian attitude toward their life: they would gladly will the repetition of their life eternally.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that for Nietzsche, idealistic philosophy as expressed in Platonism, Christianity and Schopenhauer is life-denying – it is a vengeance on life itself. Nietzsche remarks: "Anyone who not only understands the word 'Dionysian' but understands *himself* in the word 'Dionysian' has no need for a refutation of Plato or Christianity or Schopenhauer—he can *smell the decay*."⁶⁵

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 that the 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 phoney 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

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 35.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

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.⁶⁶

Nietzsche thinks himself to be the first philosopher to inject the Dionysian strain into philosophic emotion and calls himself "the first *tragic philosopher*."⁶⁷ 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 false, life-denying and transcendent values propagated by both theology and philosophy.

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 47.

CHAPTER TWO

ON THE AXIOLOGY OF MORALS

One of Nietzsche's major works *On the Genealogy of Morality* starts with this observation about ourselves, that is to say, about mankind in general: "We remain strange to ourselves out of necessity, we do not understand ourselves, we *must* confusedly mistake who we are, the motto 'everyone is furthest from himself' applies to us for ever, – we are not 'knowers' when it comes to ourselves."⁶⁸

What Nietzsche means by this is that our lives are spent in complete ignorance of ourselves as "conscious individuals." We blindly follow the dictates of society, religion and the state, without ever calling into question their use, their justification, their origin and the like. We simply accept what we are told to be "good" as good, and "bad" as bad. Our life lacks, so to say, a critical faculty towards our convictions and ideals. Nietzsche therefore exhorts his readers to take up the challenge, as he guides them onwards by himself launching an examination into the origin of value.

In consonance with Nietzsche's project, I have tried to achieve two things in this chapter. The first is to emphasize Nietzsche's view that moral values are not a "given"; rather they are chosen. Values have their grounding in human circumstances and projects; they are not bestowed or commanded by any transcendent entity. Behind every system of values, there is a craving for power which manifests itself in the nature of the values adopted. Nietzsche criticizes the philosophers for propagating their own particular views in the name of objective *truth*. Armed with the tools of dry reason and impersonal dialectic, it is their subjective whims and fancies that they try to pass for universal values. Nietzsche remarks on this philosophical tendency: "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*."⁶⁹

This universality of values is denied by Nietzsche through his famous discussion about two systems of morality, namely that of the *masters* and that of the *slaves*. He talks

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 11.

about the distinction in the last section of his *Beyond Good and Evil*, and later elaborates on the theme in the first essay of his *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Using these texts, I have tried in the first section to understand Nietzsche's project of exposing the lie of the notion of objectivity of values. He does not believe that there is a universal set of values which is applicable to all. Instead different sets of values are chosen by different types of people as a function of their capabilities and propensities; In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche through his specific interpretation of history strives to prove that what we call morality today came into genesis at a particular historical juncture and was a product of human and not divine affairs. In his study of Nietzsche, Lee Spinks points out the importance of this endeavor:

if moral values may be seen to have a history it becomes possible to consider whose interests they serve and what vision of life they promote. Moreover, if morality is revealed to be a historical interpretation of life rather than a natural capacity for self-regulation shared by all men and women, we might be able to supplant the *moral* determination of values with another interpretation of our own: an interpretation that does not simply assume – as morality does – that there simply *are* values to be discovered.⁷⁰

This is precisely what I intend to point out in the second section. If the objectivity of values is denied, if the traditional sources of law, religion, state, society are all shown to have grounded their commandments in their own particular reasons, then a value chaos results. Nietzsche considers the thirst for meaning as “a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; it needs an aim –, and it prefers to will *nothingness* rather than *not* will.”⁷¹

A vacuum is generated which has to be either affirmed or transcended. If it is to be transcended, there has to be a new standard of values *chosen* of course in tandem with the most important needs and aspirations of the age. Nietzsche identifies the vacuum as *Nihilism* and gives us an alternative ethic of the *Übermensch*, or the Overman. Nihilism is, for Nietzsche, indelibly associated with the death of God, that is, with the loss of faith in the divine which results once the Christian worldview has ceased to have explanatory value due to the achievements of modern science.

The Overman is Nietzsche's replacement as the new source of values for the world. The second section of this chapter looks into the meaning of the meaninglessness

⁷⁰ Spinks, *Nietzsche*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 68.

that Nihilism signifies, and also tries to contrast the values embodied by the Overman with the values mankind has been accustomed to live with so far.

A. The Masters and the Slaves

In the Preface to his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche puts forward what he thinks are questions essential to any discussion of morality. He asks:

under what conditions did man invent the value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves have?* Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?⁷²

To this end he finds it necessary for modern Europeans to re-evaluate the origins of all their ethical beliefs. Human beings like to think of themselves as autonomous, ahistorical beings, but they are always the product of a complex social and political past. It is in order to reveal the true “genealogy” of moral values that Nietzsche carries out an aggressive investigation of the past. The concept of “genealogy” in Nietzsche implies a method for the analysis of different dominant modes of morality. He argues that the meaning attributed to moral terms like “good,” “evil” and “bad” is not to be interpreted in terms of “usefulness” or “altruism.” For him, ethical systems can best be understood by way of reference to the historical conditions under which they emerged and from which they developed.

Nietzsche views contemporary moral 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.⁷³

⁷² Ibid, p. 5.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 154-6.

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 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.⁷⁴

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 seigniorial 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

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 13.

‘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).⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶

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 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.⁷⁷

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

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁶ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 209.

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 154-6.

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 what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything.⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 111.

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 revolt lie 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 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 reevaluated 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.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 203.

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,” also known as *the* virtue; not-being-able-to-take-revenge is called not-wanting-to-take-revenge, it might even be forgiveness.⁸¹

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 set forth as holy and morally good within Christian morality are products of self-deception, since they were forged in the bad air of revenge, resentment, hatred, impotence, 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

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 28.

values, values that *devalue* the masters, that invert the masters' valuations: their valuations are, in effect, *projections* of these powerful reactive emotions.⁸²

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 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."⁸³

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.*⁸⁴

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."⁸⁵

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. And just as natural facts about the tree explain the fruit it

⁸² Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 203.

⁸³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

bears, so too type-facts about a person will explain his values and actions, and not the conscious mental states that precede the action. Nietzsche puts his point nicely across in the following extract:

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.’⁸⁶

As a corollary, Nietzsche denies that there is a universal morality applicable indiscriminately to all human beings, and instead designates a series of moralities in an order of rank that ascends from the plebeian to the noble: some moralities are more suitable for subordinate roles; some are more appropriate for dominating and leading social roles.⁸⁷ What counts as a preferable and legitimate action depends upon the kind of person one is. The deciding factor is whether one is weaker, sicker and on the decline, or whether one is healthier, more powerful and overflowing with life.

B. The Nihilist and the Overman

The word “Nihilism” comes from the Latin term *nihil* which means nothing. The dictionary meanings of nihilism range from an all-embracing belief in the pointlessness of life and the worthlessness of human values, to the general rejection of established social conventions and beliefs, especially of morality and religion. In his dissertation on Nietzsche, the famed Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis characterizes Nihilism as follows:

an unprecedented intellectual [or spiritual] anarchy has made an onslaught on History. Ideas from the past, as well as systems and laws and morals, are still alive, while the foundations, on which all the above are actually based, have been toppled and overturned by modern analysis and critique.... A human being now must need submit to laws, in which one can no longer have the slimmest faith; we are following rules for living, which were forged by notions already proven to be wrong— notions that have all but been overturned.... Thus, we find ourselves

⁸⁶Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 113.

⁸⁷ I have dealt with Nietzsche’s politics in detail in the third chapter.

in limbo, in a transitional state. Having destroyed the Temple in three days, Science is to this day unable to raise another one in its place.⁸⁸

Nietzsche was one of the very first thinkers to point out the inevitable movement of Western civilization towards nihilism. He diagnosed nihilism as a latent presence within the very foundations of European culture, and saw it as a necessary and approaching destiny. Nietzsche argued that Western culture must face and transcend a crisis in the wake of the irreparable dissolution of its traditional foundations, moored largely in Christianity. According to him, the causes of nihilism lay not in *social hardship* or *psychological degeneration* or *corruption*; they lay in the *Christian-moral interpretation of things*. The collapse of Christianity was what had spurred on Europe towards nihilism. And this collapse was a result of its morality which in its *will to truth* had finally turned against the falseness and lies propagated by the *Christian interpretation of world and history*. Nietzsche characterized this as “a backlash from ‘God is truth’ into the fanatical belief ‘Everything is false’.”⁸⁹

The Christian ideals lost their sanction the moment they fled into a *hereafter* instead of grounding themselves in the everyday world. And slowly and steadily, it became evident that the moral interpretation of the world to which so much energy had been dedicated was shallow; this led to the suspicion that all interpretations of the world may be similarly false: thus heralding the onset of nihilism. The situation was further aggravated by the number of challenges Christianity received from modern science's evolutionary and heliocentric theory. 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. Although he had nothing but disgust for it, he accepted the significance of Christianity in providing mankind a sense of meaning in the face of suffering and purposelessness that characterizes the universe. According to him, it was Christianity that

posited a *knowledge [Wissen]* of absolute values in man and thus gave him *adequate knowledge [Erkenntniss]* of precisely the most important thing it prevented man from despising himself as man, from taking against life, from despairing of knowing [*Erkennen*]: it was a *means of preservation*.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Kazantzakis. *Friedrich Nietzsche on the Philosophy of Right and the State*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Nietzsche. *Writings from Late Notebooks*, pp. 83-4.

⁹⁰ Pearson and Large, *The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 385.

Mankind, in order to justify its existence, has always required some belief in a higher purpose in life. People are never satisfied with the notion that there is no meaning in anything they do or accomplish. Without such a belief, life becomes impossible to bear, since it is as it is characterized by suffering. Nietzsche writes:

Man, the bravest animal and most prone to suffer, does *not* deny suffering as such: he *wills* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind.⁹¹

The idea of God and Christianity was one successful solution to this problem. It redefined the way in which man viewed the world. It shifted man's eyes on to the imagined glory of the skies away from the real misery of the earth. It postulated God as the transcendent source of absolute values about what is good and what is evil; these values were the same for all men who were supposed to be equal. Thus men were kept from the trouble of choosing values for themselves, and the fiction of equality helped them to survive in the face of extreme inequality.

One of the key points about Christianity that made it so successful was in the way that it addressed the question of suffering. Ever since there has been man there has been suffering in man, it abounds everywhere and is something which is impossible to ignore. Against suffering Christianity juxtaposed the ascetic ideal, that is to say, the claim that the more one suffers in this world, greater will be his rewards in the next. Thus rather than alleviate suffering, asceticism gave it a purpose; now man knew why he was suffering and this gave him both the courage in life and hope in afterlife. Within the Christian ideal of asceticism,

suffering was interpreted; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism. The interpretation – without a doubt brought new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life. . . . But in spite of all that – man was *saved*, he had a *meaning*, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of 'non-sense.'⁹²

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.

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 120.

⁹² *Ibid.*

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.”⁹³

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.”⁹⁴

Nietzsche considered it an added 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* any such 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

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 15.

⁹⁴ Pearson and Large, *The Nietzsche Reader*, p. 309.

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.⁹⁵

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 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 numb, soothe and pacify the conflict – regardless of the harms such a choice would entail over a course of time.⁹⁶

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 decline that 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.⁹⁷

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

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, p. 150.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.146-7.

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 104.

developed who are not, in Nietzsche's phrase, "human-all-too-human."⁹⁸ In the Preface to his book, Strong writes: "A critique of morality, or of 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."⁹⁹

This is the ideal of the *Übermensch*, translated variously as Overman (the term I shall be using except where used by others) or Superman. 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, *necessarily 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'.¹⁰⁰

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.¹⁰¹

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.

⁹⁸ Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, p. 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Preface, pp. x-xi.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, p. 177.

¹⁰¹ Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 115-6.

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 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.”¹⁰² 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.”¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴ 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!*¹⁰⁵

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.

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ *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?”¹⁰⁶

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!”¹⁰⁷

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!¹⁰⁸

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

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.57.

than lend it to lift the burden of some abstract idealization.¹⁰⁹ 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.¹¹⁰

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 *amor fati* 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 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!*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 154-55.

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 104

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 36.

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 *amor fati*: 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.¹¹²

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.¹¹³ 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 to existence – suffering from the nihilism brought on by the demise of 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

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 203.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 194-5.

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.¹¹⁴

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."¹¹⁵

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.¹¹⁶ With the help of intellect, the weak are ultimately able to trounce the strong. With every type of wound and loss, the lower, cruder soul is better off than the nobler soul. The dangers for the nobler soul must be greater; the likelihood that it will get into an accident and be destroyed is truly enormous, given the diversity of its conditions of life. Nietzsche remarks:

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 89-90.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 17.

When a lizard loses a finger, it grows back: not so with people.¹¹⁷

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 *crossing over* and a *going under*.¹¹⁸

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 Socrates, 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 however in the new age that they are *willed*, they are reared. The future is to be most consciously determined.¹¹⁹ 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!”¹²⁰

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, as the thought of existing at one point and ceasing to exist at another can be a frightening prospect. This is the gap which Christianity fills, it tells us that there will never be a point at which an individual ceases to exist, though he may change forms, he never dies. For some this is enough to justify the requirements which Christianity lays on them. In fact many thinkers have argued that in denying God and Christian values, Nietzsche

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 168.

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 104.

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 59.

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.¹²¹

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 unbelievable and need is being felt to give the vast number of nonbelievers another system in which they can believe. For such individuals Nietzsche's ideas are designed to make perfect sense. When one comes to terms with the fact that this life is all he has, he will love it and strive to extract all the enjoyment he can from it. This would serve to bring values back to earth from heaven, for we need human values and not godly ones.

¹²¹ Harper, *The Existential Experience*, pp. 75-6.

CHAPTER THREE

NIETZSCHE CONTRA POLITICS

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 chapter. In the first essay, Nietzsche sketches two moral systems reflecting structures of domination, those of the masters and the slaves. The masters asserted themselves in a non-reflective manner. They looked upon themselves as "good" and others that were unlike them (the slaves) as not good, that is, as "bad." The slaves suffered from their domination by the former. They attempted to alleviate it by introducing reflection into their world – and their masters' world as well. With this a new moral element was introduced into the world; the demand for reasons to legitimize one's actions. Thenceforth the masters had to "explain" their actions and were held responsible for them. Thus the very existence of moral categories ("good and bad" and "good and evil") was related to the desire to assert power over another group of people, exemplified by the slave morality.¹²² Nietzsche hence argues 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.¹²³

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, but

¹²² Strong, "Nietzsche's political misappropriation," p. 122.

¹²³ Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, p. 189.

“implications” and “consequences” are one thing, and having a political philosophy another. The canon of political philosophers is composed of thinkers (like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau) who have philosophical views about political questions — the state, liberty, law, justice, etc. — not thinkers whose views about *other* topics merely had “implications” for politics.¹²⁴

This makes the task of situating Nietzsche within the discipline of political philosophy a challenging as well as interesting enterprise. Although strains of thought that can be called “political” are there in Nietzsche from his very first book, there are some particular sections in some particular books, which contain his political philosophy, if he can be said to have one. What Richard Schacht says in general about Nietzsche’s philosophy is equally valid about his political writings:

He does not devote separate works to the systematic treatment of each of the matters he deals with, but rather touches upon them and returns to them on many different occasions, seldom if ever setting down anything that might be considered his definitive position concerning any of them; and so it is incumbent upon one would understand him to draw together the many strands of his dispersed and unsystematic reflections upon each of them, and to attempt to discern what they add up to.¹²⁵

I have proceeded in this regard by respectively picking out relevant political concepts and taking up Nietzsche’s criticism of them. In his article in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, Tracy B. Strong points out the logic behind such an approach:

Our (Western) political categories today derive their dimensions from the French Revolution (left-center-right) and these correspond loosely to different understandings of the mixture of state power and educated will required to effectuate a given policy. Different combinations have given rise to different “ism’s”: liberalism, republicanism, conservatism, libertarianism, anarchism, and so forth. By and large when we speak of a political position or identity, these are the categories that we use. The problem of the political (mis)appropriation of Nietzsche thus must proceed first in terms of these categories.¹²⁶

Among Nietzsche’s better-known political writings are the scattered aphorisms plus a full section titled “A Glance at the State” in his early work *Human, All Too*

¹²⁴ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/>, accessed on April 30, 2012.

¹²⁵ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, Preface, p. xiv.

¹²⁶ Strong, “Nietzsche’s political misappropriation,” p. 126.

Human; there are the consecutive sections titled “Skirmishes in a War with the Age” and “Things the Germans Lack;” and finally the controversial sections 56 and 57 of *The Antichrist* where Nietzsche compares the *Bible* with the *Laws of Manu*. He returns to political themes in his notebooks too. These pieces do not of course exhaust Nietzsche’s political writing but it is mainly in them that a coherent and developed political thought can be observed.

A. Nietzsche’s Critique of Modern Politics

In this section, I strive to outline the destructive element of Nietzsche’s political philosophy wherein he criticizes and condemns the political values and systems of his day.

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 avidly¹²⁷, 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

¹²⁷ Pearson. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, p. 25.

with these only in relation to a world which is again fairly independent of the welfare of a state, that of culture.¹²⁸

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.¹²⁹

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.¹³⁰

Nietzsche was also opposed to gaudy displays of nationalism which were fast becoming a staple in the event of the rising might of Germany. In the eighth section of *Beyond Good and Evil*, titled "Peoples and fatherlands," he criticized pan-Germanism and patriotism, and put forward a case for the unification of Europe.¹³¹ In *Ecce Homo* too, he attacked the conceptions of the German nation and Germans as a race, and condemned nationalism.¹³² 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

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, p. 148.

¹²⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/>, accessed on May 28, 2012.

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 43-4.

¹³¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 132-7, 148-9.

¹³² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 82, pp. 84-5.

through, stage would be set for people to proclaim themselves “good Europeans” and work for the unification of Europe. His ideal therefore was a good European rather than a good German.¹³³

In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche writes at length about the political scenario in his contemporary Europe. Europe has become a chessboard for various political factions and they use value-systems and their blind followers like pawns for their own gains. One such pawn is socialism. Nietzsche acknowledges the appeal that the socialist ideals have among the masses, but he himself has no sympathy for the same. His only interest in socialism as a political observer consists in viewing it as having a higher utility as a potential lever within the political arena. He says:

To men who with regard to every cause keep in view its higher utility, socialism...represents not a problem of justice (with its ludicrous, feeble question: ‘how far ought one to give in to its demands?’) but only a problem of power (‘how far can one exploit its demands?’)¹³⁴

Nietzsche drives his point home through an insight into the politics of Europe of his day. He believes that much of the fear that the “specter of socialism” has caused in Europe is a creation of the European governments themselves for their own interests. He observes that the socialists, by taking up cudgels against the democrats and other anti-dynasts, are in effect strengthening the hands of the dynastic governments of Europe, who feel threatened by the latter. Thus behind all their apparent public hatred of the socialists, these governments secretly have a welcoming attitude towards them.¹³⁵

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

¹³³ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, pp. 174-5.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

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.¹³⁶

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 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.¹³⁷

The socialists may decry the so-called unjust division of property, but the fact remains that both they and the bourgeoisie are inheritors of the same culture – a culture which has been constructed upon force and exploitation. The socialists are calling for the abolition of a mere part of this culture, a thing Nietzsche thinks cannot be done. He argues that the disposition to injustice lies in both the haves and the have-nots; there was a past when the latter were in the position of the former, and vice versa. Therefore, what is needed is not a redistribution of property, but a transformation of attitude on both sides.¹³⁸

He believes that the bourgeoisie and the socialists are not essentially different; possession of property is the only distinguishing factor. Their motives are the same. Behind the clamor of the socialists for attaining equality and the efforts of the bourgeoisie for maintaining inequality operates the same drive: the desire for the acquisition and preservation of property. In a turn of argument, Nietzsche blames the bourgeoisie themselves for the ascendancy of the socialist ideals in modern politics. He despises their pompousness as exhibited in their eagerness to flaunt their riches. Their pleasure over their wealth derives not so much from a sense of fulfillment as from a sense of

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 173-4.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 112-3.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 165-6.

comparative superiority over the masses. They parade their assets as showpieces in the face of the non-propertied classes. This creates jealousy in the latter, and in their craving for the same, they fall prey to the rhetoric of the socialists in ever larger numbers. Nietzsche therefore advocates the bourgeoisie to allow the taxation of their luxuries by the state and to limit their pompous displays of wealth; it is their superfluity that comes across as a challenge to the socialists.¹³⁹

Nietzsche questions the merits of the idea of redistribution of wealth. Nietzsche argues that mankind has not learned any lessons from the failure of such attempts in the past. For instance, “equal distribution of land” through its various divisions leads to animosity in the old landed class, to which is added the fact that the new owners are more often than not jealous of each other’s possessions, coloring the newly found equality with their envy and prejudice. The socialist alternative of abolition of property fares no better. If private holdings are abolished and the land is handed over to temporary tenants, this would necessarily entail its destruction. Here Nietzsche talks in terms similar to Marx’s concept of alienation. He believes that if man possesses something only temporarily, he does not take proper care of it, but is more interested in either squandering or exploiting it to the hilt. In holding private property lies man’s ego, which in Nietzsche’s view is the basis of his virtues.

The Nietzschean alternative therefore lies not in abolishing property, but in regulating and moderating it. Acquisition of wealth up to a moderate standard through work should be allowed and even encouraged, and unearned wealth should be taxed. All kinds of trades and transactions that lead to accumulation of immoderate wealth should be recovered from private business lords and companies. In Nietzsche’s view those who have too much are equally dangerous for the society as those who have nothing.¹⁴⁰

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

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 282-3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 381-2.

new middle class will have no need for socialism.¹⁴¹ 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 likewise the same old wheels. - Have things really got less perilous because the wellbeing of the nations now rides in this vehicle?¹⁴²

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.¹⁴³

In the same paragraph, he likens this democratization to the building of protective dams and walls. The democratic structure can serve both as a foundation and as a protection against the uncertainty of the future the way stone dams and walls protected Europe from attacking hordes and disease in the Middle Ages; the building of such a structure may appear dull, but it works. At another place, he says: “Democratic

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 383-4.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 384.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 376.

institutions are quarantine arrangements to combat that ancient pestilence, lust for tyranny: as such they are very useful and very boring.”¹⁴⁴

Thus Nietzsche does not favour democracy for its inherent merit; he rather views it as a useful catalyst in the political reactions. He, for example, praises democracy for its instrumental value in checking the tyranny of traditional political powers. Without employing any violent means, democracy effectively nullifies the powers of the monarchs through the continuous exertion of constitutional pressure, reducing them to nothing more than ceremonial heads. Moreover, the preservation of the office of the monarch saves the democrats from being blamed for the liquidation of ancient institutions. This is why the European monarchs are seen as ever pressing for wars, so as to allow the venting of the constitutional pressures upon them.¹⁴⁵

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.¹⁴⁶

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

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 383.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 379.

¹⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 80.

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.¹⁴⁷

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."¹⁴⁸ 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 was suspicious of the aspirations of the classical liberal project of achieving a harmonious community of equal individuals 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 conception of progress, which went against Nietzsche's claim that different human types require different values.¹⁴⁹

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

¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, pp. 319-20.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

¹⁴⁹ Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 10-11.

severity, to privation, and even to life itself. To be ready to sacrifice men for one's cause, one's self included.¹⁵⁰

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.¹⁵¹

For Nietzsche, the free man is a warrior. He feels the freest when the virile instincts which rejoice in war prevail over other instincts; he is not concerned with petty comforts and "happiness." The degree of freedom in an individual as well as a nation is to be measured by the degree of resistance that has to be overcome to seize and maintain that freedom.¹⁵²

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.¹⁵³

This has led some scholars to the conclusion that Nietzsche was not as opposed to liberalism as has been thought. Liberals must accept, minimally, the democratic idea that those in power should be willing to respond to the needs, and legitimate desires, of those over whom they rule. But, a liberal could reject populism, egalitarianism, and be skeptical of the merits of electoral politics without compromising his or her commitment to the rights of individuals to develop themselves, according to their needs, abilities, and

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 71.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

inclinations. 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.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, Nietzsche does not base his ethics on a notion of equal respect for all persons which is a key norm of liberalism.¹⁵⁵ 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*.¹⁵⁶

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 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.¹⁵⁷

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.

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 152.

¹⁵⁵ 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.

¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 72.

¹⁵⁷ Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 39-40.

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*.¹⁵⁸

For Nietzsche, in contrast, if we are trained always to think of happiness and comfort and safety and the needs of others, we shall cut ourselves off from the preconditions for creative excellence: suffering, hardship, danger, self-concern, and the rest. Instead, the aim of politics should be the production of higher men, the cultural elite who affirm everything that comes their way as part of character building.¹⁵⁹

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, 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.¹⁶⁰

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

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵⁹ Spinks, *Nietzsche*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 133-4.

itself in the mediocrising of man whereas the new tyrants would work towards promoting the ascension of man.¹⁶¹ According to Nietzsche, this was to be achieved by directing the political system towards the production of Overmen who 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.¹⁶² 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. Let us, therefore, move towards those writings of Nietzsche where he seems to affirm some form of socio-political organization as a prerequisite for the production of the Overman.

B. Towards an Alternative Politics?

Those who claim to find a political philosophy in Nietzsche typically rely on a handful of passages, most often, sections 56-57 of *The Antichrist*, as the slender evidence on the basis of which elaborate views about the ideal forms of social and political organization are attributed to Nietzsche. Nietzsche therein compares the *Bible* and the *Laws of Manu* as two law-books. He gives the outline of an aristocratic political system that is influenced by the social organization of the latter, which he finds superior to the Bible.

Nietzsche was of the opinion that the production of human greatness necessitates that society be established along the lines of a hierarchical social structure. As in case of the *Laws of Manu*, he seems to be in favour of a tripartite division of society: each of them with “its own hygiene, its own work domain, its own kind of mastery and feeling of perfection.”¹⁶³ Nature has itself observed this division by having created individuals with a high intellectual prowess, individuals with a superiority of muscular strength, and individuals who are distinguished in neither way – the mediocre. The first are always the smallest in number and the third always in a majority. The *elite*, as Nietzsche calls the former, are the superior caste, having all the privileges that come from such a rank. They are the most yea-saying of men; pessimism and indignation is not allowed to them. They

¹⁶¹ Spinks, *Nietzsche*, p. 112-3.

¹⁶² Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 104.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

look upon the world with all its evils as perfect; they “affirm” it as perfect. They are not extravagant with themselves; asceticism comes naturally to them out of their innate destiny for self-mastery and hardship. Their greatness does not rob them of their humor and grace; in fact they are the only ones who can laugh and bestow without malice. *They rule not because they will but because they ‘are’.*¹⁶⁴

The second class includes the guardians of the law, who bear the burden of order and security, the warriors with the king above them, *as the highest formula of the warrior, the judge and the keeper of law.* This class is constituted of the right hand men, the best disciples of the intellectuals. This class serves as the executive and relieves the highest class of all that is unrefined in the work of ruling.

The lowest classes, or the mediocre, have their own privileges. They do not have to concern themselves with the hardness and responsibility to which the highest class is subjected. Among the mediocre, Nietzsche lists all those having as their vocations “the whole range of professional and business callings.” The mediocre are characterized by the averageness of their ability and ambition; it is a natural instinct in them to specialize in a particular field. It is their *natural destiny* to be publically useful; it is the *only* kind of happiness that the majority of people are capable of. Offensive as these claims may seem to us, Nietzsche does not see any objection in mediocrity *per se*. In his opinion the mediocre are, in themselves, the essential condition under which exceptions can prosper; they are the prerequisites of a high culture. Therefore it is a duty on part of the exceptional to show tenderness to the mediocre.¹⁶⁵

Nietzsche defends his division of society as perfectly in sync with the laws of nature:

The order of castes, the *order of rank*, formulates only the highest law of life itself; the separation of the three types is necessary for the preservation of society, for making possible the higher and highest types — the *inequality* of rights is the first condition for the existence of any rights at all.¹⁶⁶

The above-mentioned socio-political organization reflects a particular feature of Nietzsche’s political thought that differentiates him from other philosophers. This is his justification and even celebration of suffering, of which “exploitation” is a political form.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 166-7.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.166.

It is one of the criteria in Nietzsche's measurement of a man's worth how much suffering he can endure. Now while against exploitation, socialists/anarchists would cry hoarse, supported by the democrats and somewhat grudgingly even by the liberals, Nietzsche condones it and even considers it a normalcy in political arena. This alone puts him in a different league altogether and compels us to listen to him attentively.

While the lower types deplore suffering, the higher types recognize its value and welcome it. This is because they know that man has grown strongest where

the danger of the human condition has first had to grow to terrible heights, its power to invent and dissimulate (its "spirit" →) has had to develop under prolonged pressure and compulsion into something refined and daring, its life-will has had to be intensified to an unconditional powerwill. We think that harshness, violence, slavery, danger in the streets and in the heart, concealment, Stoicism, the art of experiment, and devilry of every sort; that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical, predatory, and snakelike in humanity serves just as well as its opposite to enhance the species "humanity."¹⁶⁷

In the section titled "What is Noble?" in his *Beyond Good and Evil*, he discusses at length the functioning of a healthy political system, essentially aristocratic, with exploitation as an important means to ensure its smooth functioning. Mutually refraining from injury, violence, and exploitation make sense between individuals who belong to the same status socially and politically. But as soon as this principle is taken any further to apply it to society as a whole it immediately shows itself to be the principle of disintegration and decay. It proves to be a denial of life. This is because "life itself is *essentially* a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting."¹⁶⁸

Since life itself is characterized fundamentally by exploitation, the systems meant to order and regulate life cannot be devoid of it, and Nietzsche finds it desirable that there exist a distance between rulers and the ruled, the former commanding and the latter obeying. Without this "pathos of distance," the higher classes cannot feel themselves to be different from the rest and in the absence of this realization of distinction, they cannot engage in any creative activity. A higher responsibility is a privilege. In order to perform

¹⁶⁷Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 153.

great and dangerous tasks, such persons are required who have strength in them and who are their own masters. These tasks can only be performed by a few, and those few are always rare, and in order to sustain the latter, an order of rank in society is needed. This order can be sustained only through maintaining certain kinds of exploitative social structures and economic relationships. Within such structures, the lower ones in the society must think of themselves only as the substructure and framework for raising an exceptional type of being. It is in this task that they are to find the value and significance of their life, and for this they should happily bear every exploitation and sacrifice.¹⁶⁹ Nietzsche holds that

the essential feature of a good, healthy aristocracy is that...it accepts in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who have to be pushed down and shrunk into incomplete human beings, into slaves, into tools, all *for the sake of the aristocracy*.¹⁷⁰

Nietzsche is not saying that the strong purposely dominate and exploit the weak. He sometimes suggests that exerting dominance over others is an unconsciously happening process in the strong; they cannot be blamed for it.¹⁷¹ At other times, he argues that it is usually the weak people who strive to gain self-respect and a sense of power by exerting control over others and employment of force against them. Their actions are reactive, as pointed out in the second chapter. Contrarily, a strong nature relates to others out of an overflow of its abundance of power as an act of self-affirmation.

How is all this related to the development of the Overman? In what respect does such a political structure serve the ideal? Nietzsche did not believe in the concept of common good. He could see that the moral and political systems of his day were nothing more than accommodations for the weak, whose survival was dependent on equality in social and political sphere. The same systems were detrimental to the well-being of the strong. Just as the strong could not survive on the terms of the weak, the weak would also not survive on the terms of the strong.

This led Nietzsche to his idea of compartmental division of society into independent classes with distinct laws and goals. The lower classes in this machinery would be content to perform as cogs, justifying their existence through sustaining and

¹⁶⁹ Pearson. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 152.

¹⁷¹ See the discussion in the second chapter regarding Nietzsche's denial of the notion of human agency.

obeying the higher class. They would be happier and more secure than the latter, free as they would be of the responsibilities and danger faced by the higher classes. The higher classes, untroubled by the masses and their paralyzing belief-systems, will give birth from among themselves to the Overman. Thus the ultimate mission of the higher classes will be the development of the Overman. Nietzsche's political system would ensure in this way that those who are stronger will prevail and those who are decadent will no longer be allowed to hinder the progress of the strong and the superior.¹⁷²

Contrary to popular opinion, the Overman would not be a fascist ruler. He would be his only competition and his energies would be utilized in conquering and recreating himself. He would be tolerant and decent to the lower order, not out of pity but out of a natural feeling of superabundance of power. He would be beyond the realm of everyday politics, living a life of solitude and expressing himself artistically. Nietzsche's ideal in this respect is a man like Goethe.¹⁷³

In light of the above, it is not difficult to see why Nietzsche has been called an "aristocratic radical" – a sobriquet he seems to endorse. For him, political values are themselves somehow contingent on one's type, on one's position in a hierarchy that begins with the weak and world-weary and ends with the strong and life-affirming, the aristocrats being the latter. The higher types lead by example only; their political role can only be negative. Their task is to subvert outworn human values and propose new ones. By so doing, they also, indirectly, enhance the power of all individuals to overcome themselves. But it is to be remembered that what is being discussed here is not a *political* transformation, but an *individual* one. In this context, Tracy B. Strong writes:

Never has politics been so important; but never has it been so remote. For Nietzsche, in opposition to Marx, the solution to this dilemma must *first* be individual, and only then social. Societies no longer have their own revolutions out of their own logic; now history and the dialectic lead only downward.¹⁷⁴

An important question that arises here is whether Nietzsche holds the distinction between the three classes to be permanent; in other words, is there in Nietzsche a scope for an upward mobility? This is not very clear although at some places in his writing

¹⁷² Kazantzakis, *Friedrich Nietzsche on the Philosophy of Right and the State*, pp. 56-9.

¹⁷³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁴ Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, p. 217.

Nietzsche gives the impression that those with talent *can* proceed to the upper rungs of the ladder. He observes:

Differences in good fortune and happiness are not the essential element when it comes to the production of a higher culture.... If an exchange between these two castes should take place, moreover, so that more obtuse, less spiritual families and individuals are demoted from the higher to the lower caste and the more liberated in the latter obtain entry into the higher, then a state is attained beyond which there can be seen only the open sea of indeterminate desires.¹⁷⁵

Interestingly Nietzsche views religion as a major instrument in the task of bridging the gap between the high and the low. But not everyone belonging to the latter can achieve this. One must have adequate volitional power and must delight in self-control. This is how the priests in Nietzsche's genealogical account gained power. Thus Nietzsche holds that religion

tempts and urges them to take the path to higher spirituality and try out feelings of great self-overcoming, of silence, and of solitude. Asceticism and Puritanism are almost indispensable means of educating and ennobling a race that wants to gain control over its origins among the rabble, and work its way up to eventual rule.¹⁷⁶

A similar point of interest in Nietzsche's political writings is his deep analysis of the role of religion in maintaining and validating authority. Those who are strong and thus destined and trained to rule find in religion an additional help for overcoming resistance in the exercise of authority. Since the rulers and subjects are bound by the same religion, it betrays to the former first the conscience of the latter, and in following, their obedience too. Religion pacifies the heart of the individual in times of loss, deprivation, fear, that is to say, in which the government feels unable to do anything towards alleviating the psychological sufferings of the private person. In case of inevitable evils (famines, financial crises, wars), religion guarantees a calm, patient, trusting disposition among the masses. Whenever the shortcomings of the state government occupy the attention of the knowledgeable man and put him in a refractory mood, the ignorant masses are liable to see behind it the hand of God and patiently submit to instructions from above (in which

¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 162.

¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 55.

concept divine and human government are usually fused): thus internal civil peace and continuity of development is ensured. Hence it is evident that

As long as the state, or, more clearly, the government knows itself appointed as guardian for the benefit of the masses not yet of age, and on their behalf considers the question whether religion is to be preserved or abolished, it is very highly probable that it will always decide for the preservation of religion.¹⁷⁷

In order that the aforementioned uses of religion are properly achieved, Nietzsche charges philosophers with the responsibility of using religion as an educational and disciplinary medium. Otherwise religions can wreak havoc if they are allowed to rule voluntarily and paramount, not as a means, but as an end in themselves.

To conclude, Nietzsche is opposed to the usual political systems of the day with their paraphernalia consisting of State, elections, nationalism, democracy and the like due to three reasons. The first is that engagement in political activity is to him a great drain on the intellectual and spiritual resources of a people and is especially detrimental to the higher types. There is a great danger that the higher types might get seduced by this herd morality and lose the spark that makes them the hope of the future. Nietzsche therefore deplores the political situation of the day:

questions and cares of the public weal, renewed every day, devour a daily tribute from the capital in every citizen's head and heart: the sum total of all these sacrifices and costs in individual energy and work is so tremendous that the political emergence of a people almost necessarily draws after it a spiritual impoverishment and enfeeblement and a diminution of the capacity for undertakings demanding great concentration and application.¹⁷⁸

Secondly, the politics of those against the entrenched political system, i.e. of the socialists and the anarchists is diagnosed by Nietzsche as suffering from an ill-founded assumption about the way things work. In his view, in the dreams of the "revolution," there is still an echo of Rousseau's superstition, which believes in the inherent goodness of human nature and ascribes all the blame for its decay to the institutions of culture in the form of society, state and education, as if new modes of culture brought along by the Revolution would cure all this decay. A Nietzschean politics is not so much a critique of political events as it is a diagnosis of the forces and tendencies driving them. Nietzsche

¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, pp. 170-1.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

knows that those in power, whether they belong to any group, will express themselves in direct consonance to the “type” that group belongs to, irrespective of the ideals that group stands for.

Thirdly, modern politics lacks a conception of culture and, consequently lacks a proper conception of politics too. The modern state engages in a 'power-politics', and finds itself dominated by nationalist and militarist concerns and ambitions. It fails to see that politics is simply a means to an end, that of the production of true or great human beings and the perpetual self-overcoming of man.

Where does all this leave us with regard to Nietzsche’s position as a political philosopher? In what category must we put him?

Nietzsche believed that “The will to a system is a lack of integrity” and was consistent in never devising or advocating a specific system of governance. It comes therefore as no surprise that the extent to which Nietzsche can be called a political philosopher has been a matter of serious debate and disagreement. Some thinkers have suggested that Nietzsche’s aim was to by-pass the short time-span of modern politics, and its inherent lies and simplifications, for a greater historical time-span. Some argue that an aristocratic order is the political solution to Nietzsche’s despair over the leveling effects of democracy and his hope for higher men. Others claim that in spite of Nietzsche’s contempt for democracy, a progressive and democratic politics can be built upon his ideas. But the primary conflict is between thinkers who deny that Nietzsche has a political philosophy and those who view him as a political thinker of significance.

Among the former we find thinkers like Walter Kaufmann who read Nietzsche as an anti-political thinker. Kaufmann takes seriously Nietzsche’s claim in his semi-autobiographical *Ecce Homo* to be “the last antipolitical German.”¹⁷⁹ Kaufmann writes in the Epilogue to his *Nietzsche*:

Nietzsche is perhaps best known as the prophet of great wars and power politics and an opponent of political liberalism and democracy. That is the idol of the “tough Nietzscheans” and the whipping boy of many a critic. The “tender Nietzscheans,” on the other hand, insist – quite rightly – that Nietzsche scorned totalitarianism, denounced the State as “The New Idol”.... but some of them infer falsely that he must therefore have been a liberal and a democrat or a socialist.

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 100.

We have tried to show that Nietzsche opposed both the idolatry of the State and political liberalism because he was basically “antipolitical”.... and moreover loathed the very idea of belonging to any “party” whatever.¹⁸⁰

We have seen in the above study that Nietzsche does not seem to concern himself with mass movements or with the organization of groups and political parties either. He is rather being an advocate of individual struggle and self-realization. It is individual attitudes not political structures that seem to be Nietzsche’s primary object. Brian Leiter writes:

He is more accurately read, in the end, as a kind of *esoteric moralist*, i.e., someone who has views about human flourishing, views he wants to communicate at least to a select few. “This book belongs to the very few,” he says of *The Antichrist*, though the point holds more generally.... Nietzsche, the esoteric moralist, wants to reach only select individuals — those nascent higher human beings who are “predisposed and predestined” for his ideas — and alter their consciousness about morality. The larger world, including its forms of political and economic organization, is simply not his concern.¹⁸¹

One, however, has to be careful while subscribing to this reductionist view *in toto*. Nietzsche’s work may not propose or outline a “political project” in a concrete sense but a political tone can without doubt be discerned in Nietzsche's writings. Since Nietzsche concerned himself with the problems of the civilization and the necessity to give humanity a goal, this makes him, in a sense, a very political thinker. In his study on Nietzsche, Strong observes that the West has evolved in such a way that the structures that held Western life and society together have all but broken down: supported by a host of moral, epistemological and political straws, the Western civilization is deeply in need of a revaluation. It is in this sense that Nietzsche’s enterprise becomes politically relevant, for “through volition and demolition it seeks to replace one form of existence by another.”¹⁸²

Pearson makes a similar observation in the Introduction to his *Nietzsche as a Political Thinker*:

Nietzsche is a thinker preoccupied with the fate of politics in the modern world.

One has only to take a glance at his wide ranging concerns - from his early

¹⁸⁰ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 412.

¹⁸¹ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, pp. 296-7.

¹⁸² Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, pp. 186-7.

reflections on the Greek *agon* to his attempt to write a genealogy of morality and his diagnosis of nihilism to characterise the moral malaise and sickness of modern human beings - to realise that Nietzsche is a 'political' thinker first and foremost.¹⁸³

Pearson argues that Nietzsche's political thought is often dismissed and ignored because it fails to conform to liberal and democratic sentiments which have prevailed over the last two hundred years. It is not fair to Nietzsche to accept him as a political thinker only on some particular terms or else not at all. We may want to reject Nietzsche's political thinking, deeming its solution to the immense problems facing modern human beings to be inadequate, but that should not mean that we can find no instruction in his work.

¹⁸³ Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, p. 2.

CONCLUSION

The title of my dissertation is meant to express two claims. The first is that Nietzsche's moral and political philosophy is first and foremost a study of "values" of Western civilization: the values that were prevalent in its past, and the values that it presently embodied. Through a critical analysis of these values, he developed some specific standards which a value had to conform to in order to be "of value." His reflection on the contemporary values of Europe revealed most of them to be outdated, inefficient and harmful. As an antidote, Nietzsche prescribed a "revaluation of all values," which in effect meant an espousal of a certain set of values and a rejection of others. To this task, he devoted the essence of his philosophical endeavor. This is my second claim. In his dissertational work on Nietzsche, the famed Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis as if summarizes my project:

Every era, every civilization, has what Nietzsche calls 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.¹⁸⁴

Here I would like to summarize what I see as the essence of Nietzsche's attack on values. First and foremost, Nietzsche is a philosopher of Becoming like Heraclitus, Buddha and Hegel. His admiration for the Heraclitans has been pointed towards in the first chapter. He is therefore critical of any philosophy that attempts to crystallize the universe. This is why he is critical of the concept of value in itself, if value is to be

¹⁸⁴ Kazantzakis, *Friedrich Nietzsche on the Philosophy of Right and the State*, p. 15.

understood as something fixed or something unchanging. He gives the example of morality:

Philosophers have all demanded (with ridiculously stubborn seriousness) something much more exalted, ambitious, and solemn as soon as they took up morality as a science: they wanted morality to be *grounded*, – and every philosopher so far has thought that he has provided a ground for morality. Morality itself, however, was thought to be “given.”¹⁸⁵

In simple language, for Nietzsche, values have to change with time. This is one of the reasons he criticizes old value systems, be it the Greek or the Christian.

The second standard of the efficiency of a value for Nietzsche is its distance from reality. He has no respect for values that cause humans to neglect their earthly existence – the only one for Nietzsche – in favor or hope of an afterlife. Another aspect of this anti-idealism reflects itself in his anti-egalitarianism; nature itself portrays inequality, yet there is such a hue and cry for the ideal of equality. An idealistic attitude makes man blind and complacent to the happenings around him; it desensitizes him to the painful though simple reality around him and he begins to yearn for a pleasing future (in heaven, in revolution, etc.) which is nothing more a mirage. Nietzsche comments in one of his works:

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.¹⁸⁶

The third test of a value for Nietzsche is the extent to which it affirms or denies life. He establishes that the value of life cannot be estimated and any judgment concerning it only reveals the person's life-denying or life-affirming tendencies. All the ascetic ideals are condemned by Nietzsche because they are life-denying; they preach voluntary suffering in this life in exchange for comfort in the other. All kinds of natural instincts are crushed and bad-mouthed in the name of life-denying value systems of religion and morality. Instincts which are the essence of human living are looked down upon as if there were a separate life world where these instincts had no part to play.

¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 76.

¹⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 112.

Previously, men fought with their passions and tried to annihilate them, as exemplified in this injunction against sexuality in the New Testament: ‘if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out’. Nietzsche compares such men to those dentists who extract teeth simply in order that they may not ache again. The Church has always sought to root out passions, to root out sensuality, pride, lust of dominion, property and revenge. Such a war is waged only by one who is too weak of will to adopt the radical remedy, to renounce his inner Satan. To attack the passions at their roots means to attack life itself. Nietzsche is of the view that “A man is productive only in so far as he is rich in contrasted instincts; he can remain young only on condition that his soul does not begin to take things easy and yearn for peace.”¹⁸⁷

Therefore Nietzsche advises the “spiritualization of passions” by means of which the passions are beautified and made useful. In an Overman, sensuality for instance is spiritualized by transforming it into love. Hostility is spiritualized by the recognition of the fact that having enemies has its own value, and this leads to its moderation.¹⁸⁸

Another characteristic of value systems which Nietzsche criticizes is their claim to universality. This can be observed in the claim of various religions to be the only true one as well as in the claim of various philosophers to objectivity of their thought. As was seen in Nietzsche’s attack on Platonism and Kantianism, he does not believe in objective and universal values; only those values matter for him which are adopted in response to particular needs and desires. He criticizes the impulse inherent in philosophers to universalize their thoughts:

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.”¹⁸⁹

Nietzsche takes it to be a measure of health of a value system if it can withstand suffering and difficulty to a great extent. In the third chapter I pointed out Nietzsche’s

¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 26.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 8.

views on suffering as a necessary feature of life. As a corollary, Nietzsche does not value the ideals of comfort, for example, the luxury and happiness that is the mainstay of the masses. For example he critiques the conception of Goodness which is normally considered a virtue. For Nietzsche, the condition of the existence of the good is the refusal at any price to see the real nature of reality. They do not want to accept the fact that it is not in the nature of things to be always stimulating beneficent instincts. They consider distress of all kinds as an objection, and hence as something which must be done away with. Nietzsche calls this wish as disastrously mad, *almost as mad as the will to abolish bad weather, out of pity for the poor.*¹⁹⁰ The overall value of the so-called terrors of reality is much more than the petty form of happiness that 'goodness' is. Nietzsche even goes to the extent of lamenting the very allowance of the latter, on the grounds that it is based on the falsification of the instincts, it is in itself a falsehood. Observing that the optimist is as degenerate as the pessimist, Nietzsche warns against those who desire everybody to become "a good man" simply because existence is not so constituted as to secure to "the good" their paltry happiness. The so-called "the good" are therefore condemned by Nietzsche as the most detrimental kind of men for they secure their existence at the cost of Truth and at the cost of the Future.

A criticism of good is transformed in Nietzsche into a condemnation of the "common good." Nietzsche believes that some men are higher than the multitude not only because of their inherent virtue, but mainly because of their capacity of "yea-saying" to those aspects of life from which the multitude would shrink. Therefore the aspiration of the men to be treated equally is the claim of the undeserving to deserve. This claim is reflected in the modern liberal-democratic state with its egalitarian bias. But just like other objective values, equality has no feet to stand on.

And how could there ever be a "common good"! The term is self-contradictory: whatever can be common will never have much value. In the end, it has to be as it is and has always been: great things are left for the great, abysses for the profound, delicacy and trembling for the subtle, and, all in all, everything rare for those who are rare themselves.¹⁹¹

Thus in my dissertation, I have strived to show Nietzsche as an astute observer of human life. He sees all around him fake ideals masquerading in the garb of reality,

¹⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 91.

¹⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 43.

unhealthy instincts praised and extolled as beneficial, and hypocrites applauded and followed as men of integrity. Through his critical analyses, he exposes all hypocrisies and hidden motivations, revealing human beings and their values “as they are.” Behind the Socratic ideal of abstract rational contemplation, he finds an attitude of cowardice and escapism towards the realities of life. Behind the otherworldly concepts of Christianity, he sees weakness trying to take revenge on strength by postulating a system of reward and punishment opposite to the one found on earth. In the philosophy of Kant and Schopenhauer, he discovers both Socratic and Christian tendencies at work. In his contemporary political ideals of democracy, socialism and liberalism, he smells the resentment of the masses, the totalitarian impulse of the state and a materialist conception of progress. All in all, wherever he looks, he finds symptoms of corruption.

For Nietzsche, an individual or a species becomes corrupt when “when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* that which is detrimental to it.”¹⁹² It is in this way that all the ideals on which humankind has based its hopes and aspirations are corrupt – it is actually the forces of decline and of nihilism that are operating therein.

What is the remedy? Nietzsche suggests it is the revaluation of values. At one place in his *Twilight of the Idols*, he writes:

The most general principle lying at the root of every religion and morality, is this: ‘Do this and that and avoid this and that – and thou wilt be happy. Otherwise — .’ Every morality and every religion is this imperative – I call it the great original sin of reason – *immortal unreason*. In my mouth this principle is converted into its opposite – first example of my ‘transvaluation of all values’: a well-constituted man, a man who is one of ‘nature’s lucky strokes’, *must* perform certain actions and instinctively fear other actions; he introduces the element of order, of which he is the physiological manifestation, into his relations with men and things. In a formula: his virtue is the consequence of his good constitution.¹⁹³

This gives us an insight into Nietzsche’s project. Through a revaluation of values, he wants to take mankind to a realm beyond values. We have seen in the discussion on master-slave morality how Nietzsche denies the notion of human agency. As scholars have pointed out, Nietzsche believes that a person’s theoretical beliefs can be explained in terms of his moral beliefs and his moral beliefs can in turn be explained in terms of the

¹⁹² Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, p. 106.

¹⁹³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 29-30.

type of a person he is.¹⁹⁴ For example, the theoretical beliefs of a contemporary European (his values of pity, equality, and the like) are the outcome of his morality (which is a Christian morality), which in turn is the result of his nature (he is weak). Thus the way in which a person acts follows from his type. This is especially true of those who have traditionally given mankind its ideals: the philosophers. Nietzsche writes:

I have gradually come to realize what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir; in short, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown. Actually, to explain how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about, it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is *he* –) getting at?¹⁹⁵

Thus Nietzsche believes that the philosophical problems that have been there since antiquity are deeply related to the kind of human beings the philosophers and their followers were. It is the essential nature of humanity as we know it that is responsible for these problems. The faults inherent in being human affect everything we do: it is our nature as “humans” to move into nihilism. Therefore we cannot find an answer to these problems, unless we become a different “type” of beings.¹⁹⁶ It is in this sense that Nietzsche’s self-description as an “immoralist” is to be understood. When he critiques Western morality, or politics, he is not dismissing them as ‘lies’ and ‘illusions’; instead he finds them essential to the kind of beings we are. If we consider ‘God,’ or ‘heaven’ or ‘equality’ as real values, we are not being “childish,” we are behaving in a “human” way. Therefore a Nietzsche’s moral and political philosophy does not stop at the critique of institutions; it also critiques the beings who live their life according to them.¹⁹⁷

It is only in the development of beings which do not function anymore as normal men that the end of these problems lies.¹⁹⁸ In Wittgensteinian terms, these problems have to be dissolved rather than solved. They would not be addressed by political solutions. This is why Nietzsche has no faith and no optimism for any “Revolution.” He expresses his distrust in one of his works as follows:

¹⁹⁴ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/>, accessed on April 30, 2012.

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁶ Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Preface, pp. x-xi.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

There are political and social fantasists who with fiery eloquence invite a revolutionary overturning of all social orders in the belief that the proudest temple of fair humanity will then at once rise up as though of its own accord... The experiences of history have taught us, unfortunately, that every such revolution brings about the resurrection of the most savage energies in the shape of the long-buried dreadfulness and excesses of the most distant ages: that a revolution can thus be a source of energy in a mankind grown feeble but never a regulator, architect, artist, perfector of human nature.¹⁹⁹

As his antidote to these problems, Nietzsche proposes two complementary ways: the first is to effectuate a diagnosis of present conditions which will permit men to make a break with their past, the second is the cultivation of the “type” of Overman, someone who is “more than man.”

The first way essentially consists in exposing the lie of the objectivity and timelessness of values. In the same way as Nietzsche reveals the notions of “good,” “bad,” and “evil” to be historically-situated in his *Genealogy*, mankind has to be convinced that moral values like ‘pity’ and ‘altruism,’ and political values like ‘equality’ and ‘democracy’ have been human constructs to make life meaningful in general, and to lend legitimacy to particular socio-political systems.²⁰⁰ Nietzsche speaks through Zarathustra:

Indeed, humans gave themselves all of their good and evil. Indeed, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not fall to them as a voice from heaven.

Humans first placed values into things, in order to preserve themselves – they first created meaning for things, a human meaning!²⁰¹

Nietzsche’s second antidote to mankind’s problems, that is, the ideal of Overman as a value-creator must be looked at as Nietzsche’s attempt to develop a principle “interior” to life.²⁰² Contemporary man seeks to regulate and judge life through his values but this is done by raising the values “above” life itself. Life is essentially changing, but the values are hailed as inflexible and timeless. This results in the subordination of life to the very concepts that form the content of life. But life cannot have value if the world has no value, that is, if value is considered to be in heaven or afterlife. Therefore the Overman

¹⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 169.

²⁰⁰ Spinks, *Nietzsche*, pp. 123-4.

²⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 43.

²⁰² Spinks, *Nietzsche*, p. 5.

affirms the earthly life with all its related paraphernalia of violence, competition, sexuality, death and decay. It is in this wholehearted embracing of existence in its “good” as well as “evil” aspects that the Overman transcends fellow humans into a realm beyond values, i.e. beyond good and evil.

To conclude, when Nietzsche talks about his project of “revaluation of all values” and prescribes new values in place of the old, he intends them to function in a way not different from Wittgenstein’s ladder; their utility ends when mankind can see its way to a future that has no need of values. To paraphrase Zarathustra’s famous utterance, Nietzsche bids us lose our old existence and only by losing it, we can gain access to a new one.

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