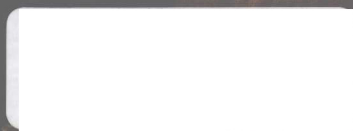


Friedrich Nietzsche
The Gay Science



Essential Classics of Liberal Studies



全国百佳出版社
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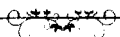
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I



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INTRODUCTION I



Nietzsche: The Darkness of Life

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900) is a writer who is often discounted by professional philosophers because he is too literary, and who is passed over by professors of literature because he is too much of an abstract thinker. Nietzsche's work, in other words, defies the usual academic division of labor. Yet, Nietzsche has played a significant role in Western thought. He was one of the most profound forerunners of such movements as Psychoanalysis and Existentialism, and he was a most radical critic of Western philosophy and culture. His observations and ideas inspired scores of twentieth century intellectuals—including those who misconstrued his work as a proto-fascist doctrine and justification for Nazi politics.

Nietzsche explicitly refused to develop a philosophical system, suggesting that individual, independent analyses, expressed in short, well-written aphorisms, are more honest and insightful than lengthy scholarly treatises which tend to bend everything to fit a comprehensive and unifying theory. Thus, his writings may at times appear to be self-contradictory. The way to read Nietzsche is not to figure out how the many things he wrote can be fitted into one abstract formula, a procedure that may be more appropriate for such philosophers as Plato or Kant, but to consider every one of his pieces as a thought experiment that fails or succeeds on its own.

The Victorian complacency and sense of propriety of Nietzsche's cultural environment made any success during his

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INTRODUCTION I



relatively short lifetime impossible. Nietzsche even had to pay for the publication of some of his books. He did not become famous until the reigning pretenses of European culture were headed for their massive breakdown at the time of World War I. And not until the mechanized brutality of the "Great War" had shattered the vain self-image that Europeans had had of themselves as stalwarts of advanced civilization did readers begin to gauge the seriousness of Nietzsche's critical analysis of the Western mind.

Nietzsche was born in Prussian Germany into the family of a Lutheran pastor. His father died when he was very young, and he was brought up in a household of exceedingly conventional and pious women. Because of his precocious facility with edifying speech he was nick-named "the little pastor." As an adolescent he attended Pforta, one of Germany's elite prep schools, where he received a solid classical education. His subsequent university training was in classical languages and ancient culture, and he became professor of Greek language at the exceptionally young age of twenty-four. For about ten years he taught Greek at the University of Basel in Switzerland, during which time he developed a profound admiration for and friendship with the composer Richard Wagner (a friendship which in later years turned into passionate enmity).

Around 1879 Nietzsche became chronically ill, and he retired from teaching on a moderate pension. During the following ten years he wrote in rapid succession all the books which were to make him posthumously famous—*Human, All Too Human*; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; *The Gay Science*; *The Case of Wagner*; *Beyond Good and Evil*; *The Antichrist*; *Twilight of the Idols* and more. During most of this time he was physically in miserable condition. He had no permanent residence, preferring to take up temporary lodgings in various places in the Swiss Alps or on the Mediterranean coast. He grew increasingly critical and contemptuous of Germany at time when Germany tried

to rival such world powers as England and France by way of aggressive military and industrial expansion.

Because of his near-blindness his doctors advised him to abstain from reading, but he kept reading and writing at a furious pace as best as he could. He fought his insomnia with opiates and Veronal, drugs that upset his delicate stomach. He frequently suffered from migraine headaches that prompted him to experiment with further drugs. He endured, partly by choice, a loneliness that included both social isolation and a general misunderstanding of his philosophical ideas even among friends. At the beginning of 1889 he suffered a major collapse that resulted in permanent insanity—possibly the consequence of untreated syphilis. His sister, as his guardian during the last years of his life, and as his self-appointed literary executor, seems to have destroyed and falsified part of Nietzsche's unpublished writings, thereby furthering the dubious interpretation of her brother's work that made the philosopher look like a forerunner of the Nazis.

A useful way to begin a description of Nietzsche's thought is to ask how he defined the self. It was the predominant view in Western philosophy that human beings have a twofold nature—a nature composed of a mind and a body—and that there is a constant struggle between these two components, a struggle that ideally results in the dominance of the mind over the body. It is this dualistic view of human nature which Nietzsche combats throughout his philosophy; he calls this dualism "childish." The mature view, according to him, consists in recognizing that mind and body are one, and that what is called the mind or the soul is nothing but one aspect of the basically physical nature of human beings. The mind, according to Nietzsche, is one of the many organs that the body uses to survive, and which is thus under the over-all control of the physical organism as a whole. In the chapter called "On the



Despisers of the Body" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes:

"Body am I, and soul"—thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children?

But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body. The body is a great reason, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd.

An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call "spirit"—a little instrument and toy of your great reason....

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.

There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows why your body needs precisely your best wisdom?

The body, in other words, is not the external tool of an inner sovereign mental ego, but an organism within which the ego, or mind, plays a subordinate role. To think that the mind is, or even can be, in control of the body is one of the most preposterous illusions that Western civilization has produced, according to Nietzsche, and one of the most damaging as well. It is one of the crucial assumptions which would have to be overcome in a future and more healthy civilization.

By saying that the true self is the body, Nietzsche does, of course, not deny that people have feelings, inner experiences, and ideas, or that they can be very intelligent or thoughtful. He also does not deny that people can overcome such things as physical cowardice, laziness, or fatigue by an exertion of their wills, or that they can achieve impressive feats even if their physical condition happens to be a handicap more than a help. Such self-mastery is, indeed, one of the most fruitful manifestations of what Nietzsche elsewhere calls "the will to power." But what superficially looks like a mind operating



on its own, or like a victory of the mind over the body, is ultimately nothing but a demonstration of the power of the body as a whole—the temporary strength of one part of the organism over another part. (The body is, after all, a complex, multi-faceted organism, “a herd and a herder, a war and a peace.”) For if one asks for the ultimate source of such things as will power, determination, or whatever else goes into the bringing about of extraordinary achievements, one will have to explore those aspects of a person that are sometimes called the unconscious—aspects that are intricately connected with the physiological and neurological functions of the organism. Will power, keen intelligence, or any other mental phenomenon is not the emanation of some non-physical entity “inside” the body, but the self-expressions of a dynamic and multifaceted physical being.

Nietzsche had been brought up within a Christian tradition according to which the body was something base, filthy, or evil, and in many theological analyses the very center of depravity and sin. Throughout his adult years Nietzsche was in revolt against this tradition, and the reconstitution of the body as something wonderful and as a source of great achievements can be described as one of the main aims of Nietzsche’s entire philosophy. For this reason Nietzsche embraced much of the scientific materialism which developed in the course of the 19th century. During the previous two centuries scientific progress had primarily been made in the area of physics, the science of inanimate bodies. The 19th century, by contrast, was the period of rapid advances in chemistry and biology. Darwin’s publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) was only one of the significant scientific developments that took place during Nietzsche’s life time, although it turned out to be a particularly spectacular and controversial one.

Among the reading public philosophical materialism became something like a popular movement which at times found





expressions that were rather pithy and polemical. Ludwig Büchner, for example, submitted that the brain produces thoughts in the way kidneys produce urine, and he coined the famous ditty "Man is what he eats" ("Der Mensch ist was er isst"). Nietzsche's materialism was generally more sophisticated than that, and he was also rather critical of Darwin. His thinking, however, fit into and was part of a broad trend that characterized much of 19th century culture.

The discovery (or re-discovery) of the body that took place during the 19th century scandalized many conservatives, and it offended the moral sensibilities of what then was still the cultural mainstream. In 1857, for example, two of the most important literary works of that century were published in Paris: Charles Baudelaire's collection of poems called *The Flowers of Evil*, and Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*. Both books were immediately banned by the French courts because of their alleged "indecentcy," and outside France most publishers would not even think about publishing such material. Baudelaire's poems were considered offensive because they too frequently dwelled on the pleasures of the flesh, and Flaubert outraged his critics by describing in some detail the pleasant feelings of a woman's orgasm. Much of the official public was simply not ready to openly acknowledge the reality and importance of the physical aspects of human existence; the definition of the human self as mind or spirit still prevented people from acknowledging such things as the pervasive power of sexuality or the determining force of physical conditions in human history. Yet, for a significant minority the discovery of the richness of the physical universe, and of the human body in particular, was both revelation and liberation. Walt Whitman's "I sing the Body Electric" (published by himself in 1855 in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*) testifies to this new enthusiasm about the physical nature of human beings. Like Nietzsche,

Whitman postulates the basic identity of body and soul:

I sing the body electric;

*The armies of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discurrup them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.*

*Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal
themselves?*

*And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the
dead?*

And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?

And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?

To conceive of the body, and not the rational mind, as the true self is part of a change in perspective that has far reaching implications. One implication for Nietzsche was a deep appreciation of the many non-rational faculties that emanate from or are connected with the drives and passions of the body, and the darker and more unconscious regions of the soul. In his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche developed a theory of art which highlights the importance of visionary dreams and inspiring intoxication, while debunking the role of reason and rational calculation in the creative process. (A summary of Nietzsche's theory of art, including his discussion of Apollinian dream visions and Dionysian intoxication, will follow below in the essay on "Barton Fink.") In his later works Nietzsche continues to emphasize the power and fruitfulness of all the faculties that are connected with the physical and non-rational nature of human beings, and he continues to critique the philosophical self-conceptions that are based on the idea of a disembodied mind.

By insisting that the mental or spiritual can ultimately not be separated from physical matter, Nietzsche rejected the metaphysical thinking that had dominated most of traditional philosophy until then. The best known division of





reality into a physical and a non-physical realm is, of course, Plato's separation of the imperfect and changing world of the senses from the timeless and perfect world of ideas. With this separation Plato provided the basic model of a twofold reality which subsequently spawned several variations of it in the course of Western thought. The most popular of these variations is the metaphysical transcendentalism of Christian theology (which Nietzsche dubbed "Platonism for the people") with its sharp division of reality into the temporal world here and now and an eternal hereafter. Still later variations of the same basic model were the philosophical systems of Descartes, Kant, and other Idealist thinkers. What most of these dualistic conceptions of reality have in common is the additional notion that the physical world is inherently inferior to the spiritual world, and that for this reason enlightened individuals will not attach their allegiance to this less valuable part of reality, to the deficient and corrupting world of the body and the senses. Ever since Socrates and Plato, according to Nietzsche, the West has been on the road of degeneracy as a result of this misguided devaluation of matter and its corresponding over-valuation of a seemingly supernatural spirit or mind. For Nietzsche this wrongheaded valuation of things amounts to nothing less than a wholesale betrayal of the earth—with all the consequences that such a betrayal of the natural cosmos implies.

One reason why people devalue the physical world, according to Nietzsche, is their fear of life—of life's innumerable uncertainties, sufferings, and its inescapable finality. It is because of this deep-seated fear that people seek refuge in an ideal and imaginary world where they seem to find everlasting peace and relief from all the ailments that besiege them on earth. People do this either naively, by imagining "another world" in which people somehow continue to exist in the way they do in this world, only more perfectly, or they do it in more

sophisticated ways, the ways philosophers like Plato or other teachers of a spiritual life recommend. But in whatever way people try to escape the imperfections of the physical world, their retreat is always a manifestation of weakness, an inability to face reality in the way strong individuals would. Strong persons would not only take suffering and other adversities in stride, they would in a sense even welcome them as inevitable aspects of the very nature of life.

As there is no life without death, there is also no experience of health without sickness, no enjoyment of wealth without poverty, and no appreciation of happiness without a real knowledge of pain. “Live dangerously” is one of Nietzsche’s well known pieces of advice. It is his reminder that the most exuberant and ecstatic experiences of life do not grow out of a well protected existence where risks and extremes are anxiously kept at bay, but out of a courageous exposure to the forces and conditions of life that activates the best of a person’s powers. A good horseback rider will not beat a spirited horse into submission to have an easy ride, but rather learn how to handle a difficult mount. Similarly, a strong and healthy person will not shun the dark and often dangerous sides of the world by retreating to some metaphysical realm of comfortable peace, but rather embrace life in its totality, its hardships and terrors as well as its splendors and joys.

It is in this connection that one has to read Nietzsche’s notorious reflections on “master” and “slave” moralities in *Beyond Good and Evil*. As a species, according to Nietzsche, human beings will naturally tend to cultivate either of two moralities. “Master moralities” are developed and embraced by naturally strong and self-confident people—people who like to “live dangerously.” They value most highly such things as strength, intelligence, courage, strife, and the pleasure of having people and things at their command. Pride for such people is no





sin. They despise traits like meekness, timidity, simple-mindedness, and fear. In their eyes humble people are “bad.”

“Slave moralities” are developed by just such humble people. They tend to develop among downtrodden cultures. “Slave moralities” value virtues like sympathy, charity, kindness, humility, patience, self-effacement, and pity. The worst features in their estimate are aggressiveness and being dangerous to others. People who embody such aggressiveness are shunned and denounced by the meek not just as “bad,” but as “evil.”

Nietzsche’s prime example for a “master morality” is the ethos of Pre-Socratic Greece—embodied in the attitudes and deeds of those tribal heroes that Homer described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Nietzsche’s prime example for a “slave morality” are the ethical teachings of Christianity. Although Nietzsche claims that, in analyzing these two kinds of morality, he does nothing more than describe impartially certain psychological and anthropological facts, it is clear that he considers only variations of the “master morality” as suitable designs for a future with any hope. Only individuals who feel at ease among strong and daring people would be ready to face the darkness and dangers of the world with confidence and an enterprising spirit. Only they could live without comforting metaphysical myths and imaginary hopes. They would intensively live their lives here and now, cheerfully or otherwise, and be content with being gone once their chosen tasks are accomplished. Talk of some non-physical “life eternal” they would leave to the fearful and weak.

Although Nietzsche thought of all metaphysical systems as so many forms of illusion, he was not blind to the great importance that these systems have had for the shaping of humanity. In a sense he saw them as *necessary* illusions, illusions that indirectly taught people self-discipline and propelled them forward to heroic undertakings and significant accomplishments.

Nietzsche was keenly aware of how much depended on the beliefs and attitudes that Christianity had imposed on people in the course of many centuries, and in his own way he took the modern decline of Christianity as a cultural organizing force much more seriously than most ordinary Christians.

Nietzsche discusses the cultural significance of Christian metaphysics (and by implication of other religious systems) in connection with his often quoted and rarely understood remark "God is dead." By coining this phrase Nietzsche did, of course, not make any statement about the existence or non-existence of God. What he offered, rather, is an observation concerning the idea of the deity, and the idea's crucial role as a foundation of culture. In a nutshell Nietzsche's reasoning was this: In a universe conceived in strictly scientific terms God has no intelligible place anymore, no meaningful role in the explanation of the workings of the world. In a culture that depends as much on sober scientific research and thinking as ours, the traditional talk about God has become vacuous and pointless.

Ancient Greeks thought of the awesome power of thunderstorms in terms of Zeus and his greatly feared thunderbolts. People familiar with the theory and manifestations of electricity, by contrast, will have no other than a poetic use of the Olympian god and his bolts; as an explanation of natural phenomena Zeus has been rendered irrelevant by the discoveries of physics. And that, in the context of modern technological civilization, has happened to all deities in all traditional cultures. People who think in scientific terms do not refer to divine powers when exploring or discussing earthquakes, volcanoes, droughts, or the atomic bomb. Some scientists may continue to talk about God, but there is no real opportunity anymore to demonstrate any provable effects of a divine existence or power. Where people used to assume heaven, they now measure intergalactic space; where once

II



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they experienced the wrath of God, they now pinpoint viruses that spread in populations without immunity. Mention of God in laboratory reports or professional conferences would dumbfound the scientific community.

The very concept of God becomes problematic when people are used to the discipline of logic, and when the furnishing of evidence in support of important contentions has become standard practice in everyday life. What kind of being could God possibly be? How could one recognize God if one encountered him (or her) or heard "his" voice? Can we trust at all our hopelessly anthropomorphic ideas of God? And how exactly would an unobservable God be different from a God that does not exist? Is there anything left of faith except old word shells and hazy desires?

Because of such questions and uncertainties, God has become less and less of a palpable factor in modern life; the scientific-technological world has grown used to functioning without theological basis. Today science alone provides the functional standards of what is true and what works. Whenever there is a conflict between science and religious doctrine, science will not accommodate religion anymore, but religion will adjust itself to scientific conclusions. It is the prevalence of this secular cultural situation that prompted Nietzsche to propose that "God is dead."

Nietzsche did not present this famous statement as his own, but rather as that of a "madman" whom he describes in a sort of parable in Section 125 of *The Gay Science*. This madman, talking to an unsympathetic crowd in the market place, raises some noteworthy questions concerning God's demise:

"Whither is God," he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away

the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while?... God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives.... Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?

The madman in Nietzsche's story is not mad because he talks nonsense, for his speech is coherent and insightful. The speaker only appears crazy because he is excited about something the crowd has not yet become aware of—because he is too far ahead of his time. The fact that “God is dead” in itself is no news to the crowd; many of them have been faithless for some time. What is news to them is that it is they who have *killed* God, that it was their own doing (by developing a modern civilization of scientific thought and sophisticated technology) that has led to the demise of the Supreme Being in their world. And what the crowd also fails to realize is the enormity of the consequences that are bound to follow from their deed. For so far most people have continued living as if nothing had happened, as if the world in which God's authority had once been supreme were still intact. But that well-ordered and comfortable world, as the madman insists, does not exist anymore. Unnoticed by the crowd, the world as a whole has become a dark, cold, and frighteningly disorienting place.

Mention of the “wiping away of the horizo” is a reminder that the comfortable *narrowness* of traditional views of the world has irremediably vanished: everything has opened up

