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SOURCES OF NIETZSCHE'S "GOD IS DEAD!" AND ITS MEANING FOR HEIDEGGER

BY ERIC VON DER LUFT

Nietzsche is generally and rightly understood as primarily a philosopher of ethics and a critic of culture. Even kind observers see him as a gadfly bent on constantly annoying Western civilization, seeking to be the herald of a complete overturning (*Umkehrung*) of its values, especially its Christian values. He is hardly ever considered seriously as a metaphysician, and certainly never as a systematic metaphysician of the stature of Aristotle, Hegel, or even Schopenhauer. Indeed it is those doctrines of his which are most easily deemed "metaphysical," e.g., Eternal Recurrence, which are also most easily refuted. And yet, in spite of his questionable cosmological speculations, he has a metaphysics, a metaphysics which is not tangential to the main thrust of his ethics, a metaphysics which is pervasive, consistent, clear, and defensible. According to Heidegger, whenever a thinker makes a statement about what-there-is, he is doing metaphysics, and this metaphysics may be properly called by that thinker's name.¹ Of course, Nietzsche has very much to say about what-there-is and what-we-can-do-about-it.

Not only does Nietzsche have a metaphysics; he also has a theology, a complex theory of the nature of God to which justice cannot be done by a mere exposition of atheism. For instance, far from being only an anti-Christian slogan for Nietzsche, "God is dead!" involves an intricate and dynamic metaphor which has its roots deep in German religious thought. The phrase appears in Hegel at least three times, once in the early essay *Glauben und Wissen* (1802), and twice in that section of the *Phänomenologie* (1807) called "Die offenbare Religion."

Ever since J.B. Baillie, who published his translation of the *Phänomenologie* in 1910, told us that Hegel's use of "God is dead!" derives from one of Martin Luther's hymns, many fine scholars have been misled by this false association.² In fact, the hymn in question, "Ein trauriger

¹ Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsches Wort: 'Gott ist tot'," *Holzwege* (Frankfurt, 1950), 193-94. Hereafter cited in the text as NW. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York, 1977), 53-55. Hereafter cited in the text as QT.

² G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York, 1967 [London, 1910, 1931]), 753. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1977), 585. J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-examination* (New York, Oxford, 1976; London, 1958]), 138.

Grabgesang," was written by the Lutheran pastor Johann Rist (1607-1667). Nowhere in Luther's own published hymns do either of the phrases, *Gott ist tot*, or *Gott ist gestorben*, occur; although in his credal hymn, "Wir glauben All' an einen Gott," Christ is spoken of as *am Kreuz gestorben*. The idea of God's death is, however, not at all alien to Luther, and in one hymn, "Christ lag in Todesbanden," the sentiment is quite close to that of Rist and Hegel. A great battle is fought between Life and Death, in which Christ, in order to break forever Death's hold over mankind, allows Himself to become mortal, and so act as bait for Death to swallow. Christ's death, then, poisons Death, and causes Death to die. The imagery is of beasts of prey devouring one another:

Das Leben behielt den Sieg,
Es hat den Tod verschlungen.
Die Schrift hat verkündet das,
Wie ein Tod den andern frass,
Ein Spott aus dem Tod ist worden.^{2a}

It is but a short step from the Good Friday tradition, through Luther, to Rist:

O grosse Not!
Gott selbst liegt tot,
Am Kreuz ist er gestorben,
Hat dadurch das Himmelreich
Uns aus Lieb erworben.^{2b}

The idea, prominent in medieval mysticism, that God must die in the world, on the cross, so that He can be born, or reborn, in the human spirit, is taken over not only by Luther, Rist, and Hegel, but also by Kierkegaard, Tillich, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, indeed, by all who emphasize the *Angst* of mankind's worldly or existential situation.³ In a nutshell, the idea is that if someone feels alone, dejected, guilt-ridden, etc., then God has died, in effect, *for him*, i.e., he perceives no God. In this view, a person's life is seen as occurring entirely during that sad time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday; he is confused, depressed, disoriented, uncertain. Since reason, the *Logos*, Christ, is lost, one must rely instead on faith; once he again believes in salvation, then and only then will the Resurrection occur *for him*, then and only then will God no longer be dead.

The religion of reason is the religion of Neo-Platonism, i.e., with the primary emphasis on the absolute transcendence of the divine being. But one can go only so far happily with this type of religion before becoming

^{2a} Martin Luther, *Deutsche geistliche Leider—The Hymns of Martin Luther*, ed. by Leonard Woolsey Bacon (New York, 1883), 23.

^{2b} Johann Rist, *Dichtungen*, hrsg. von Karl Goedeke u. Edmund Goetze (Leipzig, 1885), 215.

³ Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis, 1966), xi.

dissatisfied, before becoming aware that his cosmological religion provides no answers for his everyday spiritual problems, before he realizes that living by metaphysics alone is like "travelling in Denmark with the help of a small map of Europe, on which Denmark shows no larger than a steel pen-point."⁴ At this stage the rational religion no longer makes any sense to him; he experiences doubt and despair (*Zweifel* and *Verzweiflung*).⁵ He knows now that for God to have any personal meaning at all for him, God must come into the world Himself and appear to him on a purely human level. The gulf between infinite immortality on the one hand and finite mortality on the other must be bridged by the infinite and immortal voluntarily lowering itself into the finite and mortal. This act is the birth of Jesus, the divine Incarnation. The death on the cross is the culmination, the inevitable outcome, of the Incarnation, not something distinctively different in kind from the Incarnation; it is no more than the simple fate of every mortal person. However, Christ must return from the realm of the finite and mortal to the realm of the infinite and immortal, else His life on earth would have been in vain. Hence the theological necessity of the whole transfigurative process, including the Resurrection and the *epistrophē*. In human terms, the life of Christ signifies that the universally transcendent has become particularly (i.e., *besonders* rather than *einzel*n, in the later Hegel's systematic usage) immanent; God at last has become relevant to the individual human being. But God has a divine purpose, not a human purpose; the immanent—and not only Christ, the hybrid transcendent/immanent being, but all immanent beings—must return into the transcendent. Therefore, one must have faith in the Resurrection of Christ, in order that, in an analogous way, one may also be resurrected. The penultimate death of God is necessary to this end.

Before the Nativity, the individual knew what it was to be conscious of God, and after the Nativity, what it was actually to know God; and now, after the death of God, what it is to live without God, having once known Him, to feel the loss of God from the world. After a personal Easter, one will again know God, forget one's alienation, renounce an "unhappy consciousness," become truly an individual, and a creature of God. This is exactly Hegel's position in the *Phänomenologie*,⁶ where the death of God is not seen as anything but an easily recognized part of the usual Christian cycle of redemption. The alienation, loss of self-certainty, loss of essential being, loss of substance, the tragic fate, the intolerable pain (*Schmerz*), are all typical of the Christian who lives his

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, 1968), 275.

⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg, 1952), 67. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 49.

⁶ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 523, 531, 544-46; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 454-55, 462, 475-76.

life, metaphorically, on Holy Saturday. This Christian finds that he has lost both his Neo-Platonic metaphysics of transcendence and his personal faith in divine immanence. He falls back into his godless world, perhaps materially prosperous, but tormented deep inside. His world has become absurd, meaningless, at once both comic in its appearance and tragic in its underlying realities.

In his earlier work, Hegel also refers to the great pain of realizing that God is dead:

The pure concept, however, or infinity, as the abyss of nothingness in which all being sinks, must characterize the infinite pain, which previously was only in culture historically and as the feeling on which rests modern religion, the feeling that God Himself is dead, (the feeling which was uttered by Pascal, though only empirically, in his saying: Nature is such that it marks everywhere, both in and outside of man, a lost God), purely as a phase, but also as no more than just a phase, of the highest idea.⁷

Clearly, Hegel wishes to see the Crucifixion not only as a historical event which has allegorical significance for the Christian, but also as a psychological event which has personal significance for the Christian. Hegel seems to think that the "Holy Saturday" mentality has generally typified Western European Christianity at least since the Renaissance, when the Roman Catholic Church was undercut from within, and when secular society began to flourish. For Hegel, the phrase "God is dead!" reflects not only that the transcendent elements have largely disappeared from religion, but also that the immanent elements of Christianity, i.e., the life and *kerygma* of Christ in the world, are no longer so easily seen. His use of Pascal supports his claim that Western secular society has lost sight of God both metaphysically and personally.

For Pascal, in the full context of the aphorism (*Pensées*, 441 Brunschvicg, 471 Lafuma), not only is God lost, but nature itself, as well as human nature, is corrupt. The inherent defects of human nature are responsible for the inability of a person to see God in his world. He cannot see the forest for the trees; he sees the phenomenal being in the world of sense awareness, but does not see the transcendent being which is supportive of this world. And, for Pascal, as a person loses the transcendent, so he also loses the personal aspect of God—this sentiment is echoed by Hegel but not by Kierkegaard. Even Nietzsche's position, though atheistic, is not too far from that of Pascal, as we shall see.

Heidegger notes the close agreement of Hegel, Pascal, and Nietzsche on the issue of the humanly caused loss of God in the world (NW, 197-98; *QT*, 58-59). Some scholars have argued that the death of Pan to

⁷ Hegel, *Philosophische Abhandlungen* (Berlin, 1845), 153; *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, 1977), 190. Although Cerf and Harris have admirably rendered *Glauben und Wissen* into English, I have here, for the sake of a phraseology which, I believe, better underscores those points intended for emphasis, substituted my own translation of this passage.

which Heidegger here refers, citing Pascal (*Pensées*, 695 Brunschvicg, 343 Lafuma), iconographically signifies the felt loss of transcendence, unity, and coherence. Notably, Edgar Wind, in *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1968), cites Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's analysis of Renaissance attitudes toward Neo-Platonic symbolism. For Pico, there is a juxtaposition of a monistic and a pluralistic principle, symbolized by a juxtaposition of the mythical figures of Pan and Proteus. One must seek Pan in Proteus (Wind, 191). While Proteus represents the variegation of earthly phenomena, immanent before our eyes, and is purely sensuous, Pan is construed by certain Renaissance humanists to represent the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Nicolas Cusanus, the mystical unity pervading earthly variegation, or the transcendent reality that one sees reflected in Plotinus' mirror. It seems extremely odd that these Renaissance men should have elected a satyr to serve this allegorical purpose, but if we take a clue from Plato's *Cratylus* (408b-408d), Pan does indeed suggest a *coincidentia oppositorum*.

The first to proclaim the death of Pan was Plutarch in *de Defectu Oraculorum*, 17, in which Thamous, an Egyptian pilot in the reign of Tiberius, is ordered by a mysterious voice to shout the news from his ship. From this tale medieval Christians built up a legend that Thamous obeyed his order at the very time of Christ's death on the cross, a possible hint at the loss of transcendence. Among those besides Pascal who have followed the literary theme of Pan's death is Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who, in her preface to "The Dead Pan" (1844), claims she was inspired by a poem of Friedrich Schiller, *Die Götter Griechenlands*, a lament for the demise of the classical pantheon in the post-Newtonian world. For Schiller, the world which is subject to the scientific method of understanding is a soulless world, in which *Keine Gottheit zeigt sich meinem Blick* (no Godhead comes into view) in which the scales balancing the one and the many are sadly tipped toward the many. For Pascal, too, the use of Plutarch's epitaph for Pan is meant to express the fulfillment of a prophecy, i.e., that the transcendent has been lost because the individual no longer gazes into Plotinus' mirror, where the One is reflected by the Many. Edgar Wind even goes so far as to suggest: "The doctrine that Pan is hidden in Proteus, that mutability is the secret gate through which the universal invades the particular, deserves credit for a peculiar philosophic achievement: it supplied a cogent mystical justification for an eminently sensible state of mind" (Wind, 218). The intimation, of course, is that the death of Pan, i.e., the loss of transcendence, is a violation of nature itself: "In the ever changing *balance des dieux* the gods reveal their Protean nature: but the very fact that each god contains his opposite in himself and can change into it when occasion demands makes him shadow forth the nature of Pan in whom all opposites are one" (Wind, 199). The superficial *Weltanschauung* in which only Protean features are seen is not faithful either to nature or to the human attempt

to live in harmonious union with nature: "For it is a general rule of Neoplatonic symbolism, because Pan is always inherent in Proteus, that any figure tends to engender others; they abhor isolation" (Wind, 209).

Throughout this intellectual lineage within the Platonic tradition, broadly conceived, from Plutarch to Pascal to Hegel, from Luther to Rist to Hegel, from Pico to Schiller to Elizabeth Browning, the death of either the Christian God or a pagan god has been used consistently to signify the singular human plight of finding oneself disoriented, purposeless, hopeless in that very world which ought to serve as one's own comfortable home. For all of these Platonically inclined thinkers, it is first the loss of faith in the reality of transcendent being which leads to the ultimate loss of one's spiritual security. As somewhat of an exception, Kierkegaard sees the origin of existential *Angst* not as the actual loss of the transcendent but as the realization that the transcendent is "wholly other," that it is too vast, too remote, to have any real significance for the suffering individual. This is a rather fine point, and not especially relevant to this paper, except to clarify the thought of the other thinkers. Suffice it to say that, for Kierkegaard, truth is the subjectivity of Christ on the cross, not the absolute power of the Father God.

I suggested earlier that "God is dead!" is not Nietzsche's basic statement of atheism. Rather, the primary expression of his atheism is in *Zarathustra*, II, §2, where he tells us that the whole idea of divinity is a mere supposition untrue to both the essential transitoriness of the world and the highest aspirations of the human spirit. God is a nauseating oppression from which only the direct action of the individual will can free us. Of course, the historical death of God proclaimed by the Madman in *La Gaya Scienza*, §125, is inextricably linked with the message of *Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche's use of "God is dead!" stands clearly within the context established by the Platonic tradition described above, even if it is not in final agreement with this tradition. When he says "God is dead!" he means no more than that "transcendence is lost"—and not only lost, but purposefully done away with. This is the main difference between Nietzsche's death of God and the Christian's; for the latter, the loss of transcendence is an accident, a regrettable accident, caused by our own spiritual blindness; whereas for the former, it is a deliberate and definitive act of throwing down that which is found to be no longer beneficial to human cultural progress. Hence Nietzsche's saying is not only that God is dead but also that we ourselves, individual human beings, by our assertion of will, our refusal to believe, are His assassins.

For Nietzsche, "God is dead!" serves a threefold purpose: 1) as a corollary to his atheism, 2) as a literary reference to the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition, and 3) as a literary reference to Heine, who, greatly admired by Nietzsche, at the end of the second book of *Zur Geschichte*

der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland, cited Kant's first *Kritik* as the sacrament brought to a dying God.⁸

Heine oversimplified the varieties of belief in God to pantheism and deism, whose paradigms are, for him, Spinoza and Lessing, respectively. Both of these types, however broadly conceived, rely upon some form of rational argument, whether inclusive or exclusive of faith, for their support. At the height of the Enlightenment controversy over whether God is in the world or out of it, whether He is material or ethereal, Kant suddenly announced that God is noumenal,⁹ that the three major speculative proofs of God's existence are useless,¹⁰ and that, for these reasons, we, for whom all knowledge arises from experience, can know nothing of God's existence or nature.¹¹ For Heine, as Kant swept God out of the epistemological realms of both sense awareness and pure thought, he thus relegated any possible consciousness of God's existence to the realm of faith, not the conditioned, clarified faith of Augustine or Aquinas but the absurd faith of Tertullian. For Kant, though, such faith would be sheer madness; religion must be kept within the strict bounds of 'practical reason' alone, and faith must be reduced to no more than a subservient confidence or stoic optimism. But who could believe in such a God as Kant described, so far beyond the everyday reaches of the world, representative of little else than a standard of absolute moral duty?¹² Certainly not Heine, nor Kierkegaard, nor Schleiermacher, nor Nietzsche. Therefore Heine eulogized Kant as "*dieser grosse Zerstörer im Reiche der Gedanken*"¹³ (this great destroyer in the realm of thought), and described his first *Kritik* as *das Schwert, womit der Deismus hingerichtet worden in Deutschland*¹⁴ (the sword with which deism was slain in Germany).

In Heine's analysis, which Nietzsche shares, Kant succeeded in defining a limit of theological speculation which rendered belief in a simultaneously personal and transcendent God nearly impossible. Granted, not everyone interprets Kant in this way; Hegel is a good counterexample to Heine. Despite Nietzsche's general distaste for Kant, through Heine

⁸ Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke* (Munich, 1972), III, 473-74. Incidentally, others, with more to fear from Kant than Heine had, agreed with Heine; Kant's first *Kritik* was placed in 1827 on the Roman Catholic *Index librorum prohibitorum*.

⁹ Heine, *Werke*, III, 483.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 484. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A (1781), 590-91, B (1787), 618-19.

¹¹ Heine, *Werke*, III, 483-88.

¹² Kant seems to change his position in the Prussian Academy edition (1792) of the second *Kritik*, 124, where he claims that God can and should be rationally postulated on the basis of the human will directed toward a possible *summum bonum*. The argument is Thomistic in the sense that it requires a first cause for producing the effect of good, i.e., the good will, in the world. In his later works, particularly *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (Part I, Berlin, 1792; completed in Königsberg, 1793), Kant continues this line of theology, searching for the Author of the Categorical Imperative.

¹³ Heine, *Werke*, III, 478.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 477.

he came to realize that Kant supported Nietzsche's atheistic philosophy by showing a vulnerable spot in the personal and theological implications of Christian Neo-Platonic metaphysics from Augustine through Anselm to Leibniz. It is not even too far-fetched to suppose that Nietzsche's Madman in *La Gaya Scienza*, §125, is a caricature of Heine's Kant.

Nietzsche's metaphysics, then, could be described as a this-worldly pluralism, opposed to the ultimately other-worldly monism of Neo-Platonic Christianity. It is a metaphysics of becoming, rather than of being, and thus is more akin to that of Heraclitus than to that of Plato. The ethical and psychological ramifications of his metaphysics are immediate: the loss of transcendence and of the monistic conception of other-worldly being signals the liberation of the human spirit toward creating something better out of itself. The denial of anything in any way transcendent is absolutely necessary for Nietzsche's idea of the unfolding and development of human potential. Only our murder of God allows us to love genuinely, for love is defined as the will of one to create that which is greater than he who created it (*Zarathustra*, I, §10; I, §20). Nietzschean love is never *Nächstenliebe*, the sterile love of the present condition, of what is common, nearby, immediately available, and immediately comforting; rather, it is always *Fernstenliebe*, the fertile love of the future, of what is extraordinary, noble, envisioned, out of reach, yet to be created by him who recognizes himself as its creator. Of course, in the traditional cosmology, which culminates in the other-worldly first cause, every effect must perforce be both ontologically and axiologically less than its cause. But Nietzsche, for whom the effect could well be greater than its cause, counsels us to be true to the earth (*Zarathustras Vorrede*, 3), to sacrifice ourselves to our love of our most distant creation (*Zarathustra*, II, §3), and he means this, not in a Darwinian or biologically evolutionary sense, but rather in an aesthetically and psychologically evolutionary sense, his goal firmly fixed in the world-historical future.

Ironically, Nietzsche's theology could be termed "apophatic." In proclaiming that God has died, indeed, has been killed, he seems to suggest that God was once alive. Now in the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, God is first given a name appropriate to His majestic nature, a name which is subsequently denied or substituted for its opposite. The cataphatic (name-giving) and apophatic (name-denying) phases of the whole speculative movement are then reconciled to show that, in fact, God is beyond any attempt to describe Him, and is utterly and completely transcendent, inclusive of all being. Thus, it is no contradiction for these mystical theologians to say that God is at once alive and dead. Nietzsche, however, having elsewhere denied that God was ever alive, must mean something quite different by his use of "God is dead!" Surely he realized that it would be a category mistake to speak of the death of something which never existed; thus, the distinction must be made between the death of God *in itself* and the death of God *for us*, or between God's own death and the death of our faith in God. Obviously, then, Nietzsche refers only

to the latter, since the former, given his atheistic stance, is pure nonsense to him. So, whereas the Neo-Platonic mystics use apophatic theology to show that God is everything, Nietzsche uses a sort of apophatic theology to show that God is *nothing*.

It cannot be overstressed that, in spite of his personal reaction to an overly pious Lutheranism, Nietzsche's main polemic is directed against Latin Christianity, primarily because it seeks to maintain the cultural *status quo* while promising the thus shackled individual eternal rest and comfort in the afterworld. Fackenheim suggests that the frustration which comes from our other-worldly aspirations demands that we turn back from the divine toward the human, even though our lordly sophistication forever prevents us from including "agnostic innocence" in the new humanism which we may fashion out of "the fragments of the disrupted modern world."¹⁵ For Nietzsche, the return to "agnostic innocence" is possible, indeed, necessary, if the individual is not to wallow in the "disrupted modern world." If he is to aim at any kind of deification, it must not be in the other world, the world of pure being, but rather in this world, the world of becoming (Cf. *Zarathustra* I, § 1). In the Roman Church, there is no deification which is not also blasphemy; but in the Greek Church, on the other hand, there is a lively tradition of deification, culminating in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century and John Scotus Erigena in the ninth. In the Greek world, deification has always meant achieving immortality, *athanasia*; we need only think of the myth of the final reward of Herakles for his services. The gods differ from men only in that they are *hoi athanatoi*, i.e., they have *ichor* where men have blood. The Greek Christians inherited and used this classical tradition, transforming it to suit their theological needs. However, such deification, i.e., the rendering of a living mortal into an immortal, had no cultural roots in Nietzsche's Nordic, Wagnerian world where there was no real idea of immortality, where gods, e.g., Balder, and heroes alike were all equally subject to death. Gods must die (NW, 197; *QT*, 58); hence, it is no departure at all from the Teutonic tradition for Nietzsche to assert that even the Christian God is doomed. In the Nordic view, the gods were not to be worshipped as eternal masters; they were to be honored as military heroes, accorded military funerals, and thereafter dutifully commemorated as fallen warriors. While in Greece deification meant the creation of a new master, a new object of worship, and was thus, in effect, a "deification-for-others;" for Nietzsche "deification" could only be "deification-for-oneself," i.e., for him what was called "deification" in the south must be no more than simply *amor fati*, remaining "true to the earth," *Fernstenliebe* for the creativity of the future *Übermensch*. It makes no difference to Nietzsche whether the Greek Christians call it "deification" or whether the Roman Christians call it "eternal rest and comfort"—it is all afterworldliness to him, and

¹⁵ Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Boston, 1970 [1967]), 13. Cf. 226.

thus all equally lies. In a world where there is no afterworld except this world itself in some new form—or in some new eternal succession of forms—there can be no rest, no comfort, eternal or otherwise. Nietzsche both recognizes and accepts, on behalf of the future *Übermensch*, this dreadful fact entailed by the loss of transcendence.

For Nietzsche, Christianity is a religion of death; the death of faith in its God is the death of death, a sort of resurrection, a beginning and a yea-saying to life—and not just any life, but the pain-ridden life of the artist, the heroic creator of new cultural values. The new god—or rather, the replacement for all gods—is the *Übermensch*, who will gain his victory in a way curiously analogous to Yahweh's victory over Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40): the old god is put to the test and discovered to be inadequate; a new champion is crowned. The testing of old gods is a human dimension: Christ did it on earth: he tested death itself, and won. He was then applauded as the ancient Greeks applauded the phoenix who arose from the ashes. People always seem to admire those of their own kind who are able to rise above themselves; they always seem to glorify those who exceed their expectations. Thus with Christ, thus with the *Übermensch*: what rises above humanity must rise out of humanity. Since the death of man carries in train the future resurrection of man as *Übermensch*, just as the death of Christ the man-God carries in train the Resurrection of Christ the God-man, it may be that *Götzendämmerung* and *Morgenröte* are, as titles, the most revealing of Nietzsche's fundamental ethical, theological, and metaphysical standpoints with regard to the Christian tradition. Anti-Christian though he is, Nietzsche somehow cannot seem to escape falling back on that standard Christian imagery.

* * *

The tradition described above, a tradition which Heidegger must have known, at least in its general outline, is the historical background of Heidegger's essay, "Nietzsches Wort: 'Gott ist tot'," exclusive of Heidegger's own thought about it. But what has Heidegger done to Nietzsche? Has he been fair to Nietzsche? Has he misunderstood or misused his predecessor? I believe that Heidegger is almost on the right track in his analysis of Nietzsche's "God is dead!" He has not misunderstood Nietzsche in the way that, for example, Whitehead in *Process and Reality* misunderstood Locke. Whether or not Heidegger has deliberately tried to set up Nietzsche as a straw man is another question. Heidegger makes no secret of his intent to infuse his interpretation of Nietzsche with the philosophy of *Sein und Zeit* (NW, 195-97; *QT*, 55-58); therefore, as might be expected, the essay tells us more about Heidegger than about Nietzsche.

One thing we can say is that Heidegger relies much too much on *Der Wille zur Macht*. Using this work, to the exclusion of those which Nietzsche himself published, certainly will not provide an inaccurate picture of Nietzsche but an incomplete, tainted one. Drawing conclusions about Nietzsche on the basis of these castaway notes is like drawing

conclusions about Hegel on the basis of the lectures posthumously published by his students; we see Nietzsche through the eyes of Peter Gast as we see Hegel through the eyes of his son Karl, *et al.*

We may also be suspicious of Heidegger because his and Nietzsche's approaches to philosophy are so different. The temptation looms large to oversimplify, to assert that Heidegger is metaphysical to the detriment of ethics while Nietzsche is ethical to the detriment of metaphysics. Heidegger's central concept is that of "Being" (*Sein*), and for him value, so fundamental for Nietzsche, is no more than an idiosyncratic way of regarding the hidden essentiality of Being (NW, 209-13; QT, 70-75). Nietzsche has very little to say about Being, and what he does say is disparaging. The opposition between value and Being, or, perhaps, between what-ought-to-be and what-really-is, is strikingly reflected by both thinkers; but in the last analysis Heidegger and Nietzsche prescribe directly antithetical remedies, the former claiming in an almost Taoist tone that Being must be let be, the latter preaching that the individual man must take what he finds and mold it to suit him. To use Heidegger's own language from *Gelassenheit*, he proposes passive "meditative thinking" (*besinnliches Denken*) where Nietzsche proposes active "calculative thinking" (*rechnendes Denken*).

In the section of *Götzendämmerung* concerning the role of reason (*Vernunft*) in philosophy, Nietzsche refers to the Being of Parmenides and the Eleatics as *eine leere Fiktion*; claims that the Platonic habit of considering that which changes, that which is in the realm of becoming, as appearance, while considering that which endures, that which is in the realm of Being, as reality, must be reversed; and decides that Being, far from the ultimate ground of reality, far from the first cause and principle (*aitia kai archē*), is no more than a construct of the ego, a construct which has proven as troublesome to its opponents, who were seduced into using the word in their discourse, as to its adherents. For Nietzsche, there are not two worlds, as there are for the Platonists: a real world of Being and an apparent world of becoming. There is only one world, the one we live in and know immediately as the actual world. The primary characteristic of our one world is mutability, not stability; the world will continue to change until it exhausts all possible configurations and is forced to repeat itself. Aphorism 581 of *Der Wille zur Macht* seems to be a preliminary study for this section of *Götzendämmerung*.

Since Nietzsche calls Being a growth out of the ego, some care must be taken to disassociate him from Fichte, whose philosophy, in which the absolutely real self floats on its own power through an ideal world consisting entirely of its perceived not-self, could be described as a far-fetched solipsism arising from misreadings of Descartes and Kant. Nietzsche is no solipsist. While we must grant that the individual living in his world is the most important philosophical concept for Nietzsche, at the same time we must be careful to understand what Nietzsche means

when he speaks of the “ego.” Certainly not to be identified with the individual person, the ego is rather that “inner” drive toward the highest self-interest of this individual. The ego can follow either of two basic paths, the deluded path toward self-realization where it posits itself as “soul,” posits its world as “appearance,” and posits its ideals as “Being,” or the true path toward self-realization where it “remains true to the earth,” accepts becoming as the way of the world, and accustoms itself to its fate, not as an atomic thing in an alien setting, but as the whole world itself (*Götzendämmerung*, “Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen,” 33). The world, the environment of the self, is neither epistemologically (as in Descartes) nor metaphysically (as in Fichte) derived from the self. A person *is* his world, and every part of his world is a part of him. He exists simultaneously at every instant of time and in every location in his world, much as every particle in Max Planck’s field theory pervades its system. The ego, therefore, is abstract; it is the individual considered *in vacuo*, as something set over against that which is outside its most immediate awareness (*Morgenröte*, §§ 115-116, 281, 285, 547, 549; *La Gaya Scienza*, § 162; *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §§ 16-17, 265; *Der Antichrist*, § 20; *Der Wille zur Macht*, § 149, 784-786).

Although the ego is, for Nietzsche, somewhat of a distortion of a person’s fundamental position in a living, dynamic, ever moving world; nevertheless egoism is no evil (*Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, I, §§ 101-04; *Der Wille zur Macht*, 362-73, 481-92, 682, 873). The individual must assert himself as an individual, as a fighting force. But, he must never lose his sense of the facticity of his situation; he must never see himself as anything which is somehow other than the world.

Quite naturally, the concept of an unmalleable “Being” is supremely hostile to Nietzsche’s way of integrating mankind and the world. Where Heidegger might say that reality is an ocean in which a person, as a thrown *Dasein*, must calmly swim, despite *Angst*, while contemplating the incredible co-extensive revealing and concealing of the ocean, all for the sake of the ocean; Nietzsche would say that reality is an ocean into which a person, as a “polluted stream” (*Zarathustras Vorrede*, § 3), empties himself with all the vigor he can muster, at once influencing and not influencing the future, at once changed and unchanged by the past, existing in the present, paradoxically, both necessarily and trivially, and all for his own sake, i.e., all for the sake of the high culture of the future *Übermensch*, the “meaning of the earth.” To act for the sake of any part of the cycle is to act for the sake of the whole cycle. As the stream (man) flows into the ocean (*Übermensch*), ocean water evaporates (man) and falls as rain (higher man), thus generating lightning (*Übermensch*) and replenishing the stream (man) (*Zarathustras Vorrede*, § 4). There is no such organic cycle in Heidegger; the ocean does not need the swimmer, and to assert that it does is to commit the Cartesian error of elevating the *subiectum* (NW, 220, 236, 241; *QT*, 82-83, 100, 107) to the point where it finally is forced to “drink the sea.” Reality is Parmenidean Being

for Heidegger, but Heraclitean becoming for Nietzsche (*Ecce Homo*, "Die Geburt der Tragödie," § 3). Heidegger, in Weber's terms an "inner-worldly mystic," is content to rest with the world as it presents, or "presences" (*anwesen*) itself, acting only to learn how to think of it properly; Nietzsche, an "inner-worldly ascetic," is content to accept fate, but for him fate involves action, not in the sense of doing (*praxis*) but in the sense of making (*poiësis*)—strong, willful, individual action—never rest, never "despicable ease." For Heidegger, Nietzsche is the "Enframer" *par excellence* (*QT*, 19-21).

The conclusion of Heidegger's essay is not that Nietzsche's metaphysics of will, value, and nihilism is misguided, but only that it is incomplete. Because all metaphysics, including nihilism as the devaluing of the highest values, is but an aspect of the history of Being itself, and because metaphysics conceals Being as it tries to reveal it, Heidegger believes that metaphysics always leaves Being in essence unthought; thus he joins Nietzsche in calling for a "completed nihilism" which, unlike "incomplete nihilism," does not replace old values with new ones, but replaces value altogether (NW, 208; *QT*, 69). But where Nietzsche means by "completed nihilism" the transvaluation (*Umwertung*), i.e., the elimination of all moral sanctions so that the *Übermensch* may live beyond good and evil, Heidegger means the realization that to value anything at all, even to value Being as Being, is to miss the whole point of the philosophical enterprise and to continue to conceal Being behind a metaphysics of Being (NW, 238-40; *QT*, 102-05). As Being is beyond value, so the individual, in order to appreciate or think properly of Being, must be beyond valuing. Nietzsche's nihilism is incomplete, Heidegger claims, because the "meaning of the earth" is never devalued, because the will never stops trying to rise higher, and because the truth of Being as simply what-there-is is never seen as a constant.

Heidegger agrees with Nietzsche that the suprasensory realm must be forever removed from our lives as well as from our metaphysics. He further agrees that the values which were hitherto products of belief in God must similarly be removed. He even agrees that the will to power is useful toward these purposes. Hence both can urge the slogan, "God is dead!" But where Nietzsche sees the will to power, at its best expression in the *Übermensch*, as the final agent of the devaluing of the highest values, Heidegger sees this will as trapped by itself as it turns back upon itself, positing itself as the highest value, though not a static value, but dynamic, as it strives for its eternal preservation and enhancement through a cyclical infinity of manifestations. Nietzsche cannot avoid value; even after the demise of all moral values, there is still a value left, the value of the devaluer. Because his fundamental principle is not Being, but the will to power—or Being as the will to power (NW, 230; *QT*, 94)—he is never able to approach Being as Being (NW, 239; *QT*, 104). Nietzsche's incompleteness is his failure to see the eternal motion of the will to power as occurring within the constancy of ever unfolding Being.

For most philosophers, Nietzsche included, metaphysics leads naturally into ethics; but for Heidegger, metaphysics leads into aesthetics, which enables us to characterize his thought as "amoral." Since Heidegger is primarily concerned, phenomenologically, with the continuing mystery of the 'destining' (*Geschick*) of Being, his willingness to do away with all value, even the value of Being itself, is understandable. Value is, after all, ultimately though not exclusively, an ethical concept. Being is neither enhanced nor degraded because we mortals happen to value, devalue, ignore, or remain ignorant of Being. And yet, we must not kill being as we have killed God, simply by not recognizing it; for if we do, we are, in Heidegger's view, committing some kind of sin. The god marked for death by Heidegger is just the god of value, for it is only by the death of this airy god that Being will ever be able to be simply let be. The truth, essence, and beauty of pure Being must be apprehended, insofar as we are able, in our meandering thought. However, what Heidegger fails to acknowledge is that this formula for the authentic existence of the individual cannot help but smuggle in value. Any prescription, any thought—indeed, any human activity—entails some value. We would have to exist as stones who never make a judgment if we were to purge all value. Heidegger may believe that he can do without ethical speculation in his mystical contemplation of Being, that he can do without value; but, if he believes that, then he has not properly understood ethics, or accurately defined its domain. To advocate letting Being be is to assert, implicitly, that Being is *worth* letting be.

Heidegger's emphasis on value as seeing or aim sometimes makes us wonder whether he is speaking of Nietzsche or of Dewey, and his identification of will as a metaphysical rather than an ethical concept is more Schopenhauerian than Nietzschean. He is prone to equivocate on the various forms of *Sein*, often using it systematically as a noun where Nietzsche uses it unsystematically as a participle or gerund (e.g., NW, 221; *QT*, 84). Nonetheless, his critique of Nietzsche is acute, and probably does more justice to Nietzsche than to Heidegger, though this was surely not intended. It is clear that he treated Nietzsche much better than Nietzsche would have treated him. Through allusions to the other essays in Lovitt's edition, and perhaps also through a subterranean use of Bergson's theory of duration, Nietzsche is established as a herald of that modern "technology" (*Technik*) which is no technology (Cf. *QT*, 4, 20), and of the attempt to exercise dominion over the earth, to manipulate the earth as an instrument (*QT*, 4-6), without taking into account the essential Being of the situation.

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