

**TRANSVALUATING CHRISTIANITY:
BRIEFLY LOOKING AT CERTAIN NIETZSCHIAN
PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND MORALITY**

Debmalya Biswas

Research Scholar

Centre for Linguistics

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi, India

Abstract

Subversion of institutionalized religious orders during the second half of the 19th century had stirred the fundamental understanding of virtues, morals and values. The unholy collusion of the State and the religious institutions had perpetuated prescriptive dogmas to shackle human potential, action, understanding and fate. Nietzsche's arrival marked a strong critical outcry that would resonate and shatter the fabricated veils obscuring reason and action. The 'herds' would thus be shaken from the unnatural stupor of religious and moral intoxication. The fear of divine consequence, that was being manipulated within the halls of scandal to further subjugate the oppressed, would be so hollow with Nietzsche's revolutionary observation of the "death" of the fabricated God. The closure against which human potential was being suffocated, had to be ruptured. The whole façade of herd obedience to propagate malicious lies and absolve all wrongs, would implode. With the overcoming of man, Nietzsche's Übermensch (the new human or the "Overman" or "Superman") would replace such vile, corrupt and puppeteer individuals.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Religion, Christian, God, Morality

**TRANSVALUATING CHRISTIANITY:
BRIEFLY LOOKING AT CERTAIN NIETZSCHIAN
PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND MORALITY**

- **Debmalya Biswas**

Various post-structuralist theories and approaches abound over how modernity and Enlightenment set up the modern contemporary cultural world. Walking along the Kantian line of thoughts, man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, absolved subjective understanding from the shackles of prescriptive institutional forces. But Kant also deliberated over reason being constituted in the human mind and therefore constrained by bodily existence. This was coupled with a critique of judgment, explicit rejection of religious practice and introspecting the human representational faculty on the basis of which humans can act. Man acquires autonomy vis-à-vis religion. Resigning immaturity is with respect to the dependence on others for knowledge.

Internal criticism of European culture started from the mid-50s. The end of the 2nd World War spelled doom for entire Europe with an incredible loss of lives and extensive socio-political ramifications. Writers were striving to escape the western influence. There were hordes of refugees migrating to Europe. New modes of thinking blossomed. The critique of Europe and Christianity featured prominently in the work of Nietzsche, an anguished critic of man and the German society along with being wrongly branded as the philosophical founder of Nazism.

Nietzsche critiqued three domains – that of religion, that of morality and that of knowledge. Nietzsche surfaced as a brutally honest Euro-critical-centric thinker who attempted a '...Transvaluation of All Values' through his masterpiece, "The Will to Power." A complete dissection of this epic work, as originally chalked out, goes as follows:

Vol. I. The Antichrist: an Attempt at a Criticism of Christianity.

Vol. II. The Free Spirit: a Criticism of Philosophy as a Nihilistic Movement.

Vol. III. The Immoralist: a Criticism of Morality, the Most Fatal Form of Ignorance.

Vol. IV. Dionysus: the Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence.

H. L. Mencken, translator of 'Der Antichrist', aptly remarks:

'The will to power was his answer to Christianity's affectation of humility and self-sacrifice; eternal recurrence was his mocking criticism of Christian optimism and millennialism; the superman was his candidate for the place of the Christian ideal of the

“good” man, prudently abased before the throne of God. The things he chiefly argued for were anti-Christian things—the abandonment of the purely moral view of life, the rehabilitation of instinct, the dethronement of weakness and timidity as ideals, the renunciation of the whole hocus-pocus of dogmatic religion, the extermination of false aristocracies (of the priest, of the politician, of the plutocrat) ...’

In his early life, Nietzsche became highly influenced by the views of Schopenhauer, who is widely considered to be the liberating factor from his Christian roots. Born into a family of Lutheran pastors, Nietzsche had an upbringing that would be in critical opposition to his robust, scathing works. However, a section of thinkers feel that it was his father’s early death, followed by growing up to fill his father’s shoes that had a distressfully confining effect. So, rejection of God’s existence, spurred by Schopenhauer’s ideas, came as a significant release. Schopenhauer’s comment on religion became the epigraph for Mencken’s study of Nietzsche:

‘I shall be told, I suppose, that my philosophy is comfortless — because I speak the truth; and people prefer to believe that everything the Lord made is good. If you are one such, go to the priests, and leave philosophers in peace!....There are two things which make it impossible to believe that this world is the successful work of an all-wise, all-good, and, at the same time, all-powerful Being; firstly, the misery which abounds in it everywhere; and secondly, the obvious imperfection of its highest product, man, who is a burlesque of what he should be. These things cannot be reconciled with any such belief.’ (Schopenhauer, A. “On the Sufferings of the World.” *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: Studies in Pessimism.*)

According to Nietzsche, though our existence is unique, the existential experience is transformed through language to something uniform without singularities. When individuals deal with that uniform language, the individualities are repressed. There is an urgent need to break out of this mould, to respond to one’s own sensations. Nietzsche critiqued the ideas of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The great Platonic idea of there being senses behind appearance is vaguely lofty since we deal with appearances in the physical world where senses are not visible. Nietzsche found science to be problematic as it repressed pleasure.

In “The Gay Science”, Nietzsche introduces some critical ideas like the “death of god”, “eternal recurrence” and “amor fati”, that have been further explicated in his subsequent works. Modern science has conjured monstrosities that have annihilated life in the most visceral and repugnant manner (Anthropocene). It hasn’t made us happy and therefore the need to be retrospective. Scientific ideas have a passive existence; on the basis of what can be acquired, there can be happiness later on. Modern educational systems put learners in a state of passivity, from where there is a chance of deriving happiness.

Since science is grounded in platonic and Socratic premises, it shuns playfulness and the element of pleasure is carefully eschewed. As per Platonic observations, pleasure disrupts the logical order. In the preface itself (Preface to Book V, *The Gay Science*), Nietzsche condemns philosophical and religious thinkers who deny or vitiate life alongside the pursuit of some transcendent "Apart, Beyond, Outside". This pursuit is intertwined with psychological demand, specifically alleviation of a certain kind of suffering, thereby nullifying the space between a philosopher's world of thoughts and his physical, repressed existence. 'I have asked myself whether, taking a large view, philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a misunderstanding of the body.'

He explains the 'gay'-ness of science:

"Gay Science: that signifies that saturnalia of a spirit who patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure - patiently, severely, coldly, without submitting, but also without hope - and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health, and the intoxication of convalescence...This whole book is nothing but a bit of merry-making after a long privation and powerlessness, the rejoicing of strength that is returning, of a reawakened faith in a tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, of a sudden sense and anticipation of a future, of impending adventures, of seas that are open again, of goals that are permitted again, believed again."

Nietzsche embarks on his chapter 'We Fearless Ones' by clarifying his observation of 'God is dead' as that 'the Christian God has become unbelievable'. Such a predicament sought to subvert the defining basis of the European world. It attacked European's 'ancient and profound trust', marring it with doubt. As human beings as ethical entities, Europeans are stuck in this facile, blunt dogma. Certain moral goals that religions ascribe, are not necessarily absolute. Debasement of static and redundant ideals that constitute the European morality, is not a maleficent effort sponsored for the sake of blaspheming nor an outcome of personal vindictiveness. Instead for philosophers and 'free spirits' like Nietzsche himself, such critical attempts of revaluation are causes of merriment, bewilderment and anticipation.

The concern over whether morality is beneficial for humans arises in accordance with the realization of the 'death of god'. Man is clearly a part of the physical, merciless and prejudiced world. He is in no way obliged to adhere to any divinely advocated morality as divinity itself is fallow. Speaking in the German context about the lack of happiness, Nietzsche believes that there is not enough personal engagement with the question while contemplating on accepted European-Christian moral foundations. There needs to be a revaluation or trans valuation of the basic value of morality itself. The 'will to truth' is churned from a moral responsibility to not deceive anyone. This encompasses the self, to

not even hoax oneself. Nietzsche goes on to argue that the 'will to truth' is embedded in the physical world disproving contemporary Christian religiosity. There is an interplay whereby the 'will to truth' demolishes its own premises by revealing the Christian God as a fabrication.

Moral conceptions continue to exist even when in the face of political and social changes sweeping through language. The nobles, aristocrats and priests create their own words and coin names for the world and themselves. Those who are in control, those manifesting power, consider themselves doing the right thing. In this regard, the continental superpowers think themselves to be the agents of all that is good and preservable. They project the groups against whom they exert military and strategic might as bad and in need of stabilization. There is substantial historicity involved in this context. Language is not transformed at the cultural level. It is the moral degradation that is perpetuated through language, that bothers Nietzsche. From the moral point of view, words that are used, are formed on the basis of sensations received from the external world. Good and evil are key moral terms. The actual meanings are considerably distanced from the sensational feeling. There is a continuity which requires a diachronic enquiry but the real existence remains repressed.

Nietzsche is viciously calumnious of religion and Christianity to be precise. He interpreted religion as a bulwark augmented by humans to seek refuge from fear and apprehension over impending death (mortality), miniscule existence (insignificance) and spiritual turmoil. Commenting on the origin of religions and of Christianity, Nietzsche delineates in *The Gay Science*:

'The metaphysical need is not the *origin* of religions, as Schopenhauer supposed, but merely a late offshoot. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has become accustomed to the notion of "another world (behind, below, above)"—and when religious ideas are destroyed one is troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation. From this feeling grows once again "another world," but now merely a metaphysical one that is no longer religious. But what first led to a positing of "another world" in primeval times was not some impulse or need but an *error* in the interpretation of certain natural events, a failure of the intellect.'(151)

Nietzsche denounces Christianity as antiquated and primitive:

"When we hear the ancient bells growling on a Sunday morning we ask ourselves: Is it really possible! This, for a Jew, crucified two thousand years ago, who said he was God's son? The proof of such a claim is lacking. Certainly, the Christian religion is an antiquity projected into our times from remote prehistory; and the fact that the claim is believed - whereas one is otherwise so strict in examining pretensions - is perhaps the most ancient

piece of this heritage. A god who begets children with a mortal woman; a sage who bids men work no more, have no more courts, but look for the signs of the impending end of the world; a justice that accepts the innocent as a vicarious sacrifice; someone who orders his disciples to drink his blood; prayers for miraculous interventions; sins perpetrated against a god, atoned for by a god; fear of a beyond to which death is the portal; the form of the cross as a symbol in a time that no longer knows the function and ignominy of the cross -- how ghoulishly all this touches us, as if from the tomb of a primeval past! Can one believe that such things are still believed?" (*Nietzsche: Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*, s.405).

Instead of following vacuous Christian ethics, Nietzsche suggested people to do whatever made them happy, satisfy their repressed desires whereby there is a rupture and dissolution of hypocrisy that cloaks the institutionalized religious orders. *The Antichrist* begins by decrying the contemporary institutionalized orders for the innocuousness of its ideals and virtues. The new man (the man to come) interpreted the good as that which fueled the sensation of power, the evil as feebleness and apathy, happiness as the consequence of an overcoming of resistance. Henceforth, Christianity with its compassion for the weak has to be overwhelmed.

On the nature of this man-to-come, Nietzsche devises a problem:

"The problem that I set here is not what shall replace mankind in the order of living creatures—man is an end—but what type of man must be *bred*, must be *willed*, as being the most valuable, the most worthy of life, the most secure guarantee of the future. This more valuable type has appeared often enough in the past: but always as a happy accident, as an exception, never as deliberately *willed*. Very often it has been precisely the most feared; hitherto it has been almost *the* terror of terrors—and out of that terror the contrary type has been willed, cultivated and *attained*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick brute-man—the Christian..."

So, the herd mentality overshadows singular lived experience and Christian moral paradigms generate scared, obedient groups of functionaries to bolster its fatuous propaganda. The deviants, those accidentally fortunate to escape the grasp of a uniform propaganda are viewed as threats and vilified. These deviants or the new kind of men will be evolutionarily superior to the contemporary lot.

In this context, arises the issue of overcoming of man and the subsequent

Übermensch (the new human or the "Overman" or "Superman"):

"All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What

is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the Overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment..." (Nietzsche, *Thus spake Zarathustra: a book for all and none*).

In course of evolution, the Übermensch would do what they want and the weaker lot would have to comply to it. This constituted the preliminary idea behind 'Master and Slave' philosophy.

Nietzsche also remarkably held that 'there was only one Christian and he died on the cross': The Christian as recognized today is a reflection, a deception behind which he permits masked instincts to act. Christianity developed from the love of the disciple, incapable of realizing why Jesus laid down his life. When this question surfaces, the Jews are maligned. Thereby a violent, invasive character was indoctrinated into Christianity that would overthrow the established religious order, whereas nothing in the spirit of Jesus signified such conflictual repercussion. Jesus was reduced to a sacrificial lantern, a lure for another realm, essentially a concocted dimension that Paul fashioned to quench his priestly instinct. The priestly instinct cowers in the face of science that can expose its divine engineering of the web of grace, sin and salvation:

'All the world still believes in the authorship of the "Holy Spirit" or is at least still affected by this belief: when one opens the Bible one does so for "edification."... That it also tells the story of one of the most ambitious and obtrusive of souls, of a head as superstitious as it was crafty, the story of the apostle Paul--who knows this, except a few scholars? Without this strange story, however, without the confusions and storms of such a head, such a soul, there would be no Christianity... That the ship of Christianity threw overboard a good deal of its Jewish ballast, that it went, and was able to go, among the pagans--that was due to this one man, a very tortured, very pitiful, very unpleasant man, unpleasant even to himself. He suffered from a fixed idea--or more precisely, from a fixed, ever-present, never-resting question: what about the Jewish law? and particularly the fulfillment of this law? In his youth he had himself wanted to satisfy it, with a ravenous hunger for this highest distinction which the Jews could conceive - this people who were propelled higher than any other people by the imagination of the ethically sublime, and who alone succeeded in creating a holy god together with the idea of sin as a transgression against this holiness. Paul became the fanatical defender of this god and his law and guardian of his honor; at the same time, in the struggle against the transgressors and doubters, lying in wait for them, he became increasingly harsh and evilly disposed towards them, and inclined towards the most extreme punishments. And now he found that--hot-headed, sensual, melancholy, malignant in his hatred as he was-- he was himself unable to fulfill the law; indeed, and this seemed strangest to him, his extravagant lust to domineer provoked him continually to transgress the law, and he had to yield to this thorn. Is it really

his "carnal nature" that makes him transgress again and again? And not rather, as he himself suspected later, behind it the law itself, which must constantly prove itself unfulfillable and which lures him to transgression with irresistible charm? But at that time he did not yet have this way out. He had much on his conscience - he hints at hostility, murder, magic, idolatry, lewdness, drunkenness, and pleasure in dissolute carousing - and... moments came when he said to himself: "It is all in vain; the torture of the unfulfilled law cannot be overcome."... The law was the cross to which he felt himself nailed: how he hated it! how he searched for some means to annihilate it--not to fulfill it any more himself! And finally the saving thought struck him,... "It is *unreasonable* to persecute this Jesus! Here after all is the way out; here is the perfect revenge; here and nowhere else I have and hold *the annihilator of the law!*"... Until then the ignominious death had seemed to him the chief argument against the Messianic claim of which the new doctrine spoke: but what if it were necessary to get rid of the law? The tremendous consequences of this idea, of this solution of the riddle, spin before his eyes; at one stroke he becomes the happiest man; the destiny of the Jews--no, of all men--seems to him to be tied to this idea, to this second of its sudden illumination; he has the thought of thoughts, the key of keys, the light of lights; it is around him that all history must revolve henceforth. For he is from now on the teacher of the *annihilation of the law*.... This is the first Christian, the inventor of Christianity. Until then there were only a few Jewish sectarians.' (Nietzsche, *Daybreak*)

Paul set up the whole façade, the persecutor of God:

"Paul thought up the idea and Calvin rethought it, that for innumerable people damnation has been decreed from eternity, and that this beautiful world plan was instituted to reveal the glory of God: heaven and hell and humanity are thus supposed to exist - to satisfy the vanity of God! What cruel and insatiable vanity must have flared in the soul of the man who thought this up first, or second. Paul has remained Saul after all - the persecutor of God." (Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and his Shadow*)

Works Cited:

Nietzsche, F.W. & Ludovici, A.M. *Thusspake Zarathustra: a book for all and none* (Vol. 11). Macmillan, 1911. Print.

Nietzsche, F.W. *The antichrist* (Vol. 3). AA Knopf, 1920.Print.

Nietzsche, F. W. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.Print.

Nietzsche, F. W. *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.Print.

Nietzsche, F. W. *Ecce Homo*, trans. RJ Hollingdale. New York and London: Penguin, 1979.Print.

Nietzsche, F. W. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Trans. R. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press, 1982.Print.

Nietzsche, F. W. *The wanderer and his shadow*. Trans. R. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press, 1986.Print.

Nietzsche, F. W. & Hollingdale, R. J. *Nietzsche: Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.Print.

Schopenhauer, A. *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: Studies in Pessimism*. Book Jungle, 2010.Print.

Higher Education &
Research Society