

Philosophy of Nietzsche

Aurora Philosophy Club. May, 2020

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I. N. Biography.

1844

October 15. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche is born as the first of three children to the pastor Karl Ludwig Nietzsche and his wife, Franziska, nee Oehler, in Rocken, a small village near Lutzen.

1849

July 30: Death of his father. Diagnosis: something of the brain.

“I consider it a great privilege to have had a father like this: it even seems to me that this explains any other privileges I might have – even apart from life, the great Yes to life”.

1850

January 9: Shortly before his second birthday, N.’s brother, Ludwig Josef, dies.

Early April: A new pastor comes to Rocken. The family – two unmarried aunts, his mother, and the two children, Friedrich and Elizabeth – relocated to Naumburg.

Attends the local boy’s school (until February 1851). His sister gave the following account of this period in his life: his fellow pupils called him “the little pastor” because he could recite “biblical verses and spiritual songs” with such feeling that “you almost had to cry”.

1856

N. writes his first philosophical essay, "On the Origin of Evil". He fills notebooks with poems.

1858

Summer: N. prepares for the Pforta school entrance examination, and begins to write his first autobiography. Over the next ten years, N. produced eight additional autobiographical essays.

1864

October: Begins studying theological and classical philology in Bonn.

1865

Leaves Bonn. "I fled from Bonn like a refugee". Switch to Leipzig, where his favorite teacher, Ritschl, had accepted a professorship.

1866

Lengthy hikes in the vicinity of Leipzig.

July: Admires Bismarck and declares his solidarity as an "engaged Prussian".

1867

Works on a study of Democritus.

October 31: His study on Diogenes Laertius is awarded a prize by Leipzig University.

October, 1867 – October, 1868. One-year military service in the Naumburg artillery.

1869

February 12: Although N. has not finished his dissertation or postgraduate thesis, he is appointed to the University of Basel at the urging of Ritschl.

1870

When the Franko-Prussian War begins (July 19) N. asks to be granted a leave of absence to participate in the war “as a soldier or medical orderly”. Gathers corpses and wounded soldiers on a battlefield. During a transport of the wounded, N. falls ill with dysentery and diphtheria.

1872

January: *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* is published. Wagner is enthusiastic.

1873

N. frequently ill. Works on first and second parts of “*Untimely Meditation*”. Eye disease.

1876

April: Precipitate and unsuccessful proposal of marriage with Mathilde Trampedach.

July 23: N. in Bayreuth for the first festival. Ill.

Disappointed with the audience and Wagner’s lack of attention to him. Makes his mind up to break with Wagner.

1878

Human, All Too Human was published in April. Wagner is horrified. Cosima Wagner: "I know that evil has triumphed in here".

1879

Submits a letter of resignation to the University of Basel. N.'s resignation is granted with annual pension of 3,000 Swiss francs. Begins his nomadic period. Physical breakdown. Continues working on *Wanderer and His Shadow*.

1882

Works on *The Gay Science*.

N. meets Russian woman Lou Salome in Rome.

N. proposes marriage to Salome twice, but she turns him down. Intense discussions with Salome.

N. feels desperate.

1883

N. writes part 1 of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as though in trance.

1885

N. completes part 4 of *Zarathustra*.

1886

N. writes *Beyond good and Evil*.

1887

N. writes *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

1888

N. works on *The Will to Power*.

Fantasies about grand political design.

Draft of letter to Kaiser Wilhelm II.

1889

Overbeck brings N. to Basel from Turin. N. is admitted to the clinic.

1900

N. dies on August 25, 1900.

II. Nietzsche's personality and his life condition.

- 1) N. is autistic men. This mean: lonely, self-reflective, "little pastor", having a narrow focus and megalomaniac (preoccupied with his own views and his own importance).
- 2) Lived without father from five years.
- 3) Since his student years was sick with Syphilis. This decease turned his life in a constant pain, mental breakdowns, lost of memory and created isolation from women. N. was never married.
- 4) Sickness makes N. to be a nomad. He constantly traveled in South Europe trying to stay in sunny and dry climate (mostly in Italy and France). N. never had his own home.
- 5) His mother and sister constantly were trying to control his life by providing the help and protection. N. tried to escape them.
- 6) N. was obsessed with idea that he was born to solve the crisis of the world.
- 7) With his friends he normally had some intellectual friendship which later resultant in break up. Only two friends stay with him until his last days: Peter Gust and Paul Ree.
- 8) In his view on the world N. had a progressing criticism which was grooving from a moderate criticism to almost a radical Nihilism and megalomania at the end of his life.
- 9) As Philologist N. created a unique literary style of writing whish is beautiful on one hand and hard readable on the other.
- 10) His creative age ended at the age of 44.
- 11) N. makes a very strange appearance to the people. A standard comment on his personality: "As though he were from a country in which no one else lives".

We need to understand that such special personality and such special conditions created a unique Philosopher not as anyone else. N. had a big influence on Philosophers of XX Century but was not a founder of any school. He predicted the tragedies of XX century: ideologies, revolutions, wars, masses and lost of vitality and Culture.

III. The main features of Nietzsche Philosophy.

- 1) N. is a post Romanticist.
- 2) N. tries to overcome the crisis of his time:
 - loss of old Faith – God is dead!
 - the need to create a new Faith or cultural perspective,
 - mass culture,
 - “soul in the cage”,
 - loss of vitality of life in contemporary men,
 - ideologies: Socialism, masses, Nationalism, Positivism.
- 3) The Will as the main underlying force of life. The Will is presented as Will to Life and the Will to Power.
- 4) Dionysian forces as the natural way how Life is expressing itself and affirms and exists. These are instinctual and impulsive forces often related to destruction and wars.
- 5) Eternal recurrence of Dionysian forces. (Later was developed by G. Spengler and N. Gumilev).
- 6) Culture as highest value of any society.
- 7) Division of all social and cultural phenomena in two categories: low and high. People are not equal. Dialectical division on High and Low – moral of Masters and moral of slaves.
- 8) Spiritual fight between Athens and Jerusalem. “Revolt of the slaves” – the spiritual concept created by defeated Jerusalem against Rome in the form of Christianity.
- 9) Strong connection to Ancient Greek culture: Plato, Thucydides. Plato was rather rejected by N. as a first step to Nihilism.
- 10) N. created Philosophy of the human condition, straggle, overcoming and escape. Superman as the limit of the self-evolution of the human spirit. N. as a strong representative of Continental school of Philosophy – Philosophy of Culture, of a soul and the Archetypes.
- 11) Zarathustra as the highest moral ideal presented by Nietzsche. Philosophy of unconscious and “person number two” (K.G. Jung).
- 12) Philosophy not of a general concept but rather the aphorism and a psychological observation.

13) As result of his style and absence of general concept it is often “you get from N. what you put in it”. His concepts look as relativistic and allows multiple interpretations. But they make the reader to think and to argue in response. “Plato is so close to me that I argue with him every day”, - N.

VI. On Genealogy of Morality. (partly based on Melvin Brugg, BBC podcast).

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The purpose of writing the book.

To define the value of moral and its origins.

N. want to revitalize the life and stress the importance of senses as the meaning of Life.

N. attacking the common morality in a polemic way to show the weakness of contemporary life and in attempt to overcome a crisis.

Essay I

As N. pointed out in Introduction, a polemical book addressed to his teacher Arthur Schopenhauer. Main subject – the reevaluation of the moral based on self-resignation and altruism.

Assay I is discussing the existence of two morals: a moral of Masters and a moral of slaves.

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Masters are instinctive and power individuals. Creating their own values based on their interests. Controlling their own way. Keep their world and have respect to their enemies (because the level of their enemies indicates their own status).

They are joyful, feel fulfillment of life and status.

The extreme form of Master moral is a Blond beast – joyful in life and murderous and destructive at the War – the pure instincts and expression of Will.

Noble are sufficiently strong, determined, and fearless to “engage in retaliation” when attacked. Those who can stand up for themselves and know how protect and average themselves are noble. The action of a noble person is good because the person is fundamentally good.

For N. moral good is derived from noble. He based his prove on the origins of the worlds ‘good’ and “bad” in variety of languages and relates them to words “noble” and “base” respectively.

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In contrary, **slave morality** is reactive to power, it is not independent. It is self-centered. Slaves think of themselves as “honest”, “poor” and of masters as “evil” and “bloody”. To be humble is a virtue. Morality of the slaves are morality of the soul in the cage.

The “base” individual is bad because his lack of self-regard prevents him from defending himself with whatever limited means he has at his disposal. Hence, “noble” and “base” are designations for differing measures of self-regard. From the perspective of a noble person, a bad person is an insignificant person from whom nothing needs to be feared, because he does not even have a regard for himself.

To survive against the master the slave must use psychological complexity. Their will grows inward, creating an inner world and at the same time is turning against themselves.

Slaves through the historical process which N. call the “revolt of slaves” redefine the nature of context in which they operate.

The date of “revolt of the slaves” is not defined by N. but he said this happens when pre-history becomes a History. French revolution was one of examples of “revolt of the slaves” and Napoleon was one of noble souls in the History (according to N.).

N. thinks slaves are interesting because(s) with the internal life and reflection which brings them more close to Art and Philosophy.

N. uses a French word “*ressentiment*” to express the revenge the slaves have against their masters. This is a special sort of revenge – a poisonous revenge - which is never fulfilled and creates a “spoiled blood”. Because neither Paradise nor Hell are reachable on the Earth the *ressentiment* turns against the slaves themselves.

Slave moral has a non-religious nature.

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Christianity created a framework for revolt of the slaves. Historically it happens because the noble class is divided on knighthood and priesthood. Priests pooled masses on their side and created a moral revolt where to be **humble** means to be **virtues**. Christianity was created by Jewish priests as a special type of revenge to the Roman conquerors. "God crucified on the cross" was easy to sell to the world (according to N.). And eventually Christianity destroyed the Roman spirit which initially was a spirit of masters.

Christianity brought a practice of confession, scruples self-examination. The radical extension of domain of guilt and punishment. Truthfulness about the personal life became a virtue.

"I am suffering because I am guilty". Christianity using guilt to make people better.

(Comment: But in reality punishment makes people more tough rather than reforms them).

Important: N. think of masters and slaves as **mentality** or **modes of life** rather than the **social classes**. Noble type is healthy, slaves are sick. Priests are sick and neurotic and need to use intellect to stand against the nights. Masters are life affirming, they have a great instincts of life. Slaves are life denying, has a lack of vitality.

Dialectic of pity

In *Human, All Too Human*, N. began to develop his critique of *ressentiment* in morality and to pick apart Schopenhauer's morality of pity by shifting the accent from the sensation of pity to the arousal of pity interpreting the use of pity as a weapon of the weak. The weak discover the vulnerable aspect of the strong, namely their ability to experience pity, and the weak exploit this vulnerability by arousing pity. In this way, sufferers have found means of "inflicting pain" on others.

In this view, the dialectics of pity impelled the battle between master and servant. When a person arouses pity, his "conceit rises up; he is still important enough to cause pain on the world".

Here I see a contradiction of N. methodology. On one hand he as Romantic is arguing for returning to pure instincts and feelings. (means, back from a trap of Civilization and too complex social reality). On other hand, he is analyzing (with a reason) a base emotions and in this way destroys their meaning and attempting removing them from the social reality. Means, something which should be simple and natural, turns in N. Philosophy into the opposite - too complex and dialectical. In N. we often can see conflicting ideals and methodologies.

N. method includes of getting an external context (plus one) and withing the most inner context to do the most detailed analysis. This usually creates a so complex schema where it is easy to hide a contradiction and produce any result. N. is tricking the reader, and this is the point where the dialog between author and reader starts. N. expects that reader can say No to him.

Essay II. Paragraph #12.

(Subjects: Epistemology. Creation of Social reality. Definition of the main force of History).

- 1) "The reason of origin of the thing and it's final use and inclusion in the system of goals – are so far as a heaven and a ground". [Epistemology]
- 2) "That something that exists, and come to being in some way, is constantly redefined by some overpassing force according to a new intensions, is submitted again, is rebuild again, for a new use". [Constant change, creation of social reality in layers].
- 3) "That everything which operates in organic world is an overcoming, a governing, and that all overcoming and governing presents a new interpretation in which the previous "meaning" and "goal" are immanently darkening or even fade away". [Driving force of history]

"Only that can be defined what does not have history".

"But all goals, all usefulness, are only indication of the fact that Wil to Power gets a control on something less powerful, and according to its will, puts a mark of its own goal".

"Form is flexible but the meaning even more... The real Progress always comes in the form of Will and on the way of higher power and always is done at the expenses of multiple smaller forces".

"About current moral and social tendencies in Europe: "But this have shadow the essence of life, its will to power, shadowed its advantage which has the offensive, destructive, redefining, setting the new goals and creating the forces under which the [social] "adjustment" is happening ".

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Question of Truth for N.

Truths are dangerous, deep, problematic and stinks.

N. unbind a Platonic triangle of Truth, Good and Beauty. Because Truths are usually ugly, and Beauty normally is not morally good. And what is morally good is bloody, instinctive and life enforcing.

N. is polemical but not dogmatic. His historical references normally are not well prepared. Philosophy is an aesthetic discipline (here N. belongs to Continental school).

Subjects to discuss:

- N. dialectics of pity. Has it a sense or not? Is everything touchable by Philosophy?
- Method of extending the context in N. works. Is it always productive?
- Relation of two books: "On Genealogy of Morality" and "The Revolt of the Masses" (1926) by Jose Ortega y Gasset.

More to read:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b087rt4z>

Rudiger Safranski "Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography". Granta Books. 2002.