

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

NIETZSCHE AND HIS DOCTRINE.*

BY PRESIDENT E. Y. MULLINS, D.D., LL.D.,

LOUISVILLE, KY.

The present European war has been the occasion for much renewed comment upon the teachings of F. Nietzsche, a leader of German thought of a peculiarly modern type. It has been frequently stated that Nietzsche's teaching created the ideals of modern military Germany. It is always difficult to trace a great group of influences and ideals back to their original sources. Many causes combine to produce great effects in human society. Men are usually exponents of existing as well as creators of new tendencies even in cases where they powerfully impress their age. It was so in the case of Nietzsche, as will appear in what follows. It is proposed here simply to give in outline an exposition of his leading ideas. The reader who is unfamiliar with those ideas is warned beforehand that they are so radically in conflict with the ideals of Christianity that he will find difficulty at certain points in grasping them. This is not to say that there is any intellectual difficulty involved, but only that the reader may find himself slow to comprehend the audacity of a thinker who seeks to set aside all the distinctive Christian ideas.

German commentators on his writings debate the question whether or not Nietzsche is to be called a philosopher. We need not consider the question. Unlike most philosophers he writes with passion, and in a highly pic-

*The books consulted in the preparation of this article are, in addition to the numerous works of Nietzsche himself the following: Richard Oehler; "F. Nietzsche und die Vorsokratiker"; W. Gieseler, "Das Mitleid in der neueren Ethik"; Walther Hanff, "Die Ueberwindung des Schopenhauerischen Pessimismus durch Friedrich Nietzsche"; E. Witte, "Das Problem des Tragischen bei Nietzsche"; H. Vaihinger, "Nietzsche als Philosoph"; A. Riehl, "F. Nietzsche der Künstler und der Denker."

turesque and striking style. He thinks in images and figures rather than in abstractions. There is a general world-view underlying his doctrine, but his chief interest is not the discovery of ultimate truth so much as to reform society. He is thus a combination of artist, reformer and philosopher.

Who were Nietzsche's predecessors, or intellectual ancestors? Some say the Greek Sophists and Cynics. Others say Rousseau, with his doctrine of the return to nature. Still others say the leaders of the Renaissance with their doctrine of individualism. Two modern writers, beyond all question, exerted a powerful influence upon his development. These were Schopenhaur with his doctrine of the will, and Darwin with his doctrine of the struggle for life.

There are three well-defined periods in the development of Nietzsche's thought. First, the artistic period which was influenced by Schopenhaur's metaphysics of the will and his pessimism. According to Nietzsche, art is the means for man's escape from the pain of desire, from the tragedy of life. Art and tragedy are one. Nietzsche thus became a pronounced admirer of Wagner and his music. But he broke with Wagner after a while, because, as he alleged, in his *Parsifal* Wagner bows before the altar and becomes subservient to the church.

The next period is the scientific. Nietzsche becomes a positivist. The true ideal of life is the study of external nature. He falls in love with Darwin and his theory. Schopenhaur is neglected now. The doctrine of the struggle for life fascinates him. Under its influence he ceases to be a pessimist and becomes an optimist.

In the third period he combines the teachings of Schopenhaur and Darwin. The will no longer represents a blind, helpless, and vain struggle against pain and misery, but is conquering and mighty. Now the doctrine of "the will to power" (*der Wille zur Macht*) is developed. This "will to power" takes the place of Schopenhaur's

“will to live” (der Wille zum Leben) and is held to be the fundamental instinct and impulse of all being and the source of all development. In his brochure on Nietzsche, entitled “Nietzsche as Philosopher,” Professor Baihinger says that the kernel of Nietzsche’s teaching is “Schopenhaur’s doctrine of the will positively applied under the influence of Darwin’s teaching of the battle for existence” (p. 57, Nietzsche als Philosoph). Nietzsche indeed repudiated both Schopenhaur and Darwin, and as Professor Baihinger says, thus repudiated the “navel string” which attached him to his predecessors. Nevertheless the connection is clear to students of his writings.

It is now time to indicate more in detail the teachings of Nietzsche. The negative elements are manifold, and strike at the roots of many of the traditional views. These we must notice before emphasizing his characteristic doctrine of the overman.

First, Nietzsche is antipessimistic. Nature wills conflict. Without conflict there is no progress. Without pain there is no conflict. (Ohne Kampf kein Fortschritt, ohne Schmerz kein Kampf.) Formerly a theodicy was necessary, a justification of God. Now a cosmodycy, a physiodicy, a biodicy are necessary, a justification of the cosmos, of nature, of life. Like Goethe, Nietzsche said to be a man is to be a fighter. German artists like Böcklin, whose works anyone may see in the Berlin galleries, and who are fond of painting Centaurs and Tritons, are followers of Nietzsche. They delight in figures that represent power and conquest. Thus his antipessimistic attitude finds expression in his influence over German art.

Secondly, Nietzsche is anti-religious and anti-Christian. Thus his optimism is rooted in materialism, not in a spiritual and religious view of the universe. He holds that the Christian conception of sin is the arch-destroyer of the joy and freshness of life. Priests reverse the chief values of life. Cowardice, inactivity, bloodlessness, docility, submission, humility, they call virtues. They

put these blasé virtues in the place of abounding life. They are really not virtues at all. The priests abuse the body and put it upon a diet of bloodless shadows. Nietzsche rejects the doctrine of love root and branch. Sympathy is weakness. Nature knows nothing of it. Man violates nature in advocating and practicing it. Vitality, power, ambition, conquest, these are the saving qualities. Society makes progress only as these are the standards and rules of conduct.

Third, Nietzsche is anti-democratic. This follows from what has been said. The strong survive, the weak perish. So it is ordained by nature. Nietzsche cares little for the masses. The title of one of his writings and one of his battle-cries is "Viel-zu-Vielen" (Much too Many). He is thus strongly aristocratic in his ideals. He favored the ideals of the French aristocracy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the aristocratic side of his teachings Nietzsche has many followers.

In the fourth place and as a logical outcome of the preceding views Nietzsche is strongly anti-socialistic. He is an individualist of the most pronounced type. Hence he is in direct conflict with the social democratic movement of modern Germany. The socialistic program is: The individual must be subordinated to the mass. Nietzsche's program is: The mass must serve the individual. Nietzsche has many admirers on this point. Many modern Germans criticize their fellow countrymen for lack of individuality. They think this teaching of Nietzsche is a wholesome corrective.

In the fifth place Nietzsche is anti-feministic. Nature did not intend that woman should rule. She is the weaker and is meant to serve. "Thou goest to women? Do not forget to take along a whip" (du gehst zu Frauen? Vergiss die Peitsche nicht). The destiny of the man is to say: "I will; the destiny of the woman is to say: he wills." Nietzsche objected to the woman-emancipation movement, but not on the usual ground

that woman is inferior in intellect. With him it was a question of will. Woman is inferior to man in will power. Intellect is secondary. It is not our leading faculty. Here Nietzsche follows Schopenhaur with his doctrine of the will.

This leads to the sixth point, viz., Nietzsche is anti-intellectualistic. With Schopenhaur the intellect occupied a secondary place. But he found its use in the pursuit of science a means of escape from the misery of will and desire. Nietzsche asserts on the contrary that intellect is the "little reason" and will the "great reason" of man. The wisdom of nature speaks in the will. The rise of the intellect to the first place is the decline of the race. The Greeks and Socrates marked the predominance of the intellect over the will and the decadence of humanity. It is ever thus. The reason merely cannot determine the course of events. Nature and the true ideal come to expression best of all in the predominance of will.

We are not surprised, in the light of the foregoing, to find finally that Nietzsche is strongly anti-moral. Schopenhaur deduced sympathy and morality from his will doctrine. The struggle of the will centres led to recognition of the identity of being of all men. The result was sympathy and mutual helpfulness. Nietzsche was of an opposite way of thinking. The strong must rise. The weak must fall. "Death to the weak," says Nietzsche. This is the law of nature. You violate and outrage the law of nature if in sympathy you help the weak to his feet. All philanthropy is in the teeth of nature's law. "Become hard," is one of Nietzsche's favorite sayings.

Another road led him to an anti-moral conclusion, i. e., history. All progress has been through the great conquerors. Men like Alexander the Great often achieve their ends by ways and means considered immoral. But these men stand beyond the childish conception of good and evil. Nietzsche has a book entitled "*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*" (Beyond Good and Evil). This is the

true destiny of man. He is to progress beyond the foolish distinction of good and bad, the essence of all morality. The lordly men who have disregarded moral standards and conquered their way to power have always been called "bad" by those who were made uncomfortable by their success. But this does not change the law of nature. Might is the one and only law of right, because it is the supreme law of nature. With Nietzsche there are two moralities: 1. The morality of the masters; and 2. The morality of the slaves. Slave morality fosters, encourages, and praises mildness, gentleness, sympathy. The morality of the masters stands for the opposites of these. The passive virtues taught by Christianity are injurious to the race. They have kept back human progress and will continue to hold it back until they are abolished as ideals of human conduct. Lordly men override the weak and should override them with as good conscience as a bird of prey seizes and tears the tender lamb.

The reader is perhaps aghast at this system of teachings already. But it remains to set forth briefly the positive side of it. This is found chiefly in Nietzsche's doctrine of "The Overman" (*Ueberschensch*). The doctrine is easily deduced from the preceding. Nietzsche speaks of the historic Overman of the past and of the Overman of the future. Alexander the Great, Cæsar Augustus, Charles the Great, Cæsar Borgia, Napoleon—these are among the historic overmen. The ideal Overman of the future is yet to rise. He is to set up a new nobility. In his book entitled "Zoroaster" (*Zarathustra*) Nietzsche sets forth this ideal. The Romans are the only race who approximated this ideal in the past. The ideal Overman of the future rejoices in conflict. He is a man of war. Struggle and victory are his delight. He is glad, joyous and free. Especially is he free from all religious scruples and trammels, from all subservience to slave morality. His law is his own will. There will come a new social order in which the Overman will rule.

Nietzsche does not give details of this new Utopia. It would require an imagination beyond his, even, to picture a state of society in which his conception is thoroughly applied.

There is little teaching in Nietzsche as to the future life. A doctrine of transmigration and future struggle through endless cycles seems to underlie his general view.

What shall we say of Nietzsche's teachings? There are many modern people who profess to see in them wholesome elements. They think his emphasis on individualism is good, and that his revolt against traditional ideals as to the passive virtues is valuable. So also as to other phases of his thought. But I fail to see the value of his teaching. In so far as there are elements of value they may be found in a far better context elsewhere. His ideals are the ideals of the jungle. His morality is beast morality. His philosophy is materialistic evolutionism carried out to its logical issue. Not only does it destroy morality; it destroys society. The conception of a "social order" is absurd as the logical outcome of his thinking. He tacitly assumes the constructive power of ideals and standards which he combats, in order to retain any semblance of the idea of civilization. It is a system not only anti-moral but anti-human. He dehumanizes men and asserts that the nearer we approximate the tiger the nearer we will come to the end for which we were made. His appeal is to the natural man on the lower plane of his nature. The spiritual universe has no meaning for Nietzsche.

He is the logical outcome of naturalism in one of its extreme modern forms. Modern scientific unbelief must go the way of Nietzsche or in the end go the way of Christ. Nietzsche and Christ are at opposite poles.

We may specify a little more in detail a few of the fatal objections to Nietzsche's theory. One we have already named. It is unhuman. No possible mode of

reasoning can reduce human nature to the elements involved in the mere "will to power." Altruism in some of its forms is an element even in the nature of beasts. Professor Drummond has shown this clearly. When we reach the human level this element becomes more and more pronounced. In the lengthened period of human infancy and dependence, and in the development of the human mother, nature speaks in clear tones a word which subverts the doctrine of Nietzsche.

Hence it is clear that Nietzsche holds a perverted naturalism. Apart from Christianity and revelation he cannot make out a case for the abolition of morality. The very structure of human society is held together by the elements which Nietzsche condemns. All true progress is based upon the gradual rise of the moral ideal. To set up another conception of progress is to attempt a task for which the human imagination is inadequate. A social order in which the Nietzsche cult has been crystallized into definite and fixed forms involves so violent an effort of the mind to conceive it and so complete a reversal of all known values that it is to normal men absurd.

Nietzsche's view is thoroughly unhistorical. The morality of the jungle has never worked practically. The code of Hammurabi, the legislation of Lycurgus and of Moses are all witnesses to the necessity for an ideal totally at variance with that of Nietzsche. It is true that the military ideal of national life ruled until Christ came; but it is also true that the age in which the Gospel arose was an age of despair. The ancient order of things was on the verge of collapse. The moral ideal had not been thoroughly applied. Christ gave it a new sanction and armed it for a new conquest. That conquest is far from complete to-day. But it is a conquering force in the thinking of men. It will win in proportion as the redeeming Gospel triumphs. Men must be radically regenerated. The world must have a regenerating power thoroughly applied if it is to abandon war and the gospel

of hate. Christian morality without the Christian redemptive forces will not succeed. But the world has already seen enough to learn that the moral ideal of Christianity may be successfully combined with the Christian redemptive power.

The cult of Nietzsche is one of the many forms of modern revolt. Everything traditional and established is the object of condemnation and attack for a large number of radical thinkers. But their attitude is the result of passion, not of reason.

They do not understand nature, nor man, nor history, nor the Christian religion. The attitude of revolt, while useful sometimes, is deadly in its effects when blind and pitiless. All the high things and the deep things of human life are arrayed against Nietzsche. The Nietzsche cult is a passing phase of modern thought. It is bearing and will continue to yield bitter fruit. But it will pass away as a will-o'-the-wisp across the swamps and shadows of current naturalistic philosophy.

There is little need of showing the logical connection between Nietzsche's views and modern social organization and life. What has been written above makes that connection clear. He is on the side of war in all its forms: war in the literal sense in which men destroy their fellowmen with sword and cannon; war in the commercial sense where competition becomes absolutely selfish, where no quarter is asked or given; war between the classes resulting in the rise of the few against the many; war indeed in every sense except war against selfishness and sin and against the reign of godless power. It is the gospel of might tricked out in a garb of brilliant rhetoric and biting epigram, grounded in an alleged scientific theory of the universe, presented in the outlines of a general philosophic worldview, and springing from the impulses (we cannot in the best sense call them ideals) which have their home in the haunts of the leopard and the tiger.