

The Evil Genius

An Examination of Friedrich Nietzsche's Rejection of Christ

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The Tangled Web

Any analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought faces certain difficulties.

Normally, one can subject a philosopher to rigorous examination and test the adequacy of his thought. But Nietzsche does not fit the mold of an ordinary philosopher. In fact, some have questioned if Nietzsche should even be considered a philosopher! Nietzsche's writings are never systematic. He valued creativity and aphoristic expression over logical argumentation. Inconsistencies, or at least loose ends, do not seem to have bothered him. In itself, this should not necessarily be seen as a weakness. But it does mean those who want to interact with Nietzsche in a systematic way need to be prepared to accommodate themselves to his wandering, unorganized style. This paper attempts to analyze Nietzsche's thought in relation to Jesus Christ (and Christianity).¹ I realize Nietzsche probably would not appreciate this kind of rigorous, systematic examination. But while great philosophers may be able to occasionally get away with being inconsistent and unsystematic, philosophy students cannot. Therefore, this evaluation of Nietzsche will press for consistency.

What are the basic contours of Nietzsche's thought? Lurking behind all Nietzsche says is the presupposition is that God is dead. Specifically, the Christian God is dead. Nietzsche does not mean by this that God's existence has been disproved. In fact,

¹ I realize Nietzsche drew a very sharp distinction between Christ and his subsequent followers (the church). At one point he goes so far as to say, "There was fundamentally only one Christian and he died on the cross. The 'gospel' died on the cross. The history of Christianity – after the death on the cross – is the history of a step-by-step and continually grosser misunderstanding of the *original* symbolism. The *church* is that very thing which Jesus preached against – and against which he taught his disciples to fight." (Cited in Van Riessen, *Nietzsche* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing Co., 1960), 46]. And yet Nietzsche seems to clearly reject both Christ and Christians on the same grounds. He does not distinguish between normative Christianity (as judged by the model of Christ and the Scriptures – what Christianity *should* be)

Nietzsche is not interested in the least in proof for or against God. He tells us he does not know atheism to be true as the result of argument² or an event; rather, atheism is known “from instinct.” God is ruled out of existence by philosophers because he is “at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think!”³ God is rejected not because the concept of deity is rationally incoherent in some way but because God would limit the autonomy of the philosopher’s mind. Elsewhere Nietzsche writes, “Our presuppositions: no God: no purpose: no finite force. Let us guard against the thinking out and prescribing the mode of thought necessary to lesser men!”⁴ God is a crutch to support “lesser men” – those too weak to rely on themselves.

For Nietzsche, the death of God was not something to celebrate. True, God no longer stood in the way of man’s freedom to develop.⁵ But, still, the idea of a world without God filled Nietzsche with fear. Walter Kaufmann explains:

Nietzsche prophetically envisions himself as a madman.
To have lost God means madness. When mankind
discovers it has lost God, universal madness will break out.
This apocalyptic sense of dreadful things to come hangs
over Nietzsche’s thinking like a thundercloud. We have
destroyed our own faith in God, there remains only the
void. We have fallen, our dignity is gone, our values are

and descriptive Christianity (what Christianity has *actually become* in history). Throughout my paper I will make this distinction. Thus not all that goes by name Christian is actually Christian.

² This is clear from Nietzsche’s genealogy of man’s belief in God. Nietzsche says, “In former times one sought to prove that there is no God – today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could arise and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous.” *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) Sec. 95

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 236-237

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967) sec 595

⁵ Frederick Coppleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 403-4. See also Nietzsche, Riessen, 37

lost. Who is to say what is up and what is down? It has become colder and night is closing in.⁶

Nietzsche understands clearly what the loss of God means, both for him personally and for civilization. He wants to face squarely the fact that man is alone in the universe – an irrational, purposeless universe. So what is man to do in face of these terrifying facts? Nietzsche believes only a few rare individuals can face the death of God. Those who do so have the task of creating values for themselves, rather than slavishly conforming to the values of the masses. The denial of God means man must affirm himself. This affirmation is what Nietzsche calls “will to power.”

For, Nietzsche, the will to power is not just a basic drive in man but a cosmological principle:

And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expand itself but only transforms itself; as a whole of unalterable size...enclosed by “nothingness” as by a boundary...not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but rather as a force throughout,...a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back,...with an ebb and a flow of its forms...as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this is my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,”...-- do you want a name for this world?...*This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!⁷

⁶ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche – Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974)

⁷ *Will to Power*, sec 1067

Will to power is the fundamental drive of all things as they seek to exert their power and dominate other things. Will to power is the raw energy of the world. The world is therefore in a state of constant flux and chaos. While will to power is Nietzsche's substitute for traditional mechanical, billiard-ball metaphysics, he works out the idea of will to power most extensively in human psychology. All of man's drives are variations of this one basic drive, the will to power.

Unpacking this psychological aspect of will to power leads us into Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, a naturalistic and philological account of the origins of morality. Will to power means there is only one ultimate good, power itself. But not all men possess this good of power (or exercise their will to power in an appropriately "natural" way).⁸ There are those with power, the masters, and those without power, the slaves. Those with power originate moral judgments by calling themselves "good" and those without power "bad."⁹ But the slaves resent the power of the masters and so they transvalue the values of the masters, turning their own powerlessness into a virtue. Thus, there are two kinds of morality, master morality and slave (or herd or priestly) morality.

These two categories of morality need to be examined in some detail. Note that master morality arises from an expression of will to power. The masters are good and noble precisely because they are powerful. Slaves are bad because they are powerless.

⁸ What Nietzsche calls "bad conscience" is bad because it suppresses will to power (or so it seems to me): "This *instinct for freedom* [i.e., man's natural drive of will to power] forcibly made latent – we have seen it already – this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings" (*Genealogy of Morals*, 87). It is proper to see a connection between bad conscience and the Christian version of slave morality.

⁹ In *Genealogy of Morals*, I:2, 10, Nietzsche says the "noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebian...every noble morality develops from a triumphant

However, Nietzsche does not call them evil. This is because they too can exercise will to power in the form of revenge and by seeking to become masters. But what if the slaves do not seek revenge overtly? What if they humbly accept their powerless status? What if they do not seek to become masters themselves? In this case they are suppressing their will to power. They are denying life, rather than affirming it. They are subverting the natural values of the world and are therefore out of harmony with the universe. Nietzsche describes the way slaves transvalue the values of the masters:

That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no grounds for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs were to say among themselves: “these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb – would he not be good?” there is no reason to find fault with the institution of an ideal except that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: “we don’t dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.”¹⁰

This is why Nietzsche finds slave morality so repulsive. Not only are slaves not acting in accord with will to power, but they are redefining the good to justify their powerlessness and setting that over and against what they now call evil, namely, having power.

The basic issue for Nietzsche is: What kind of morality will we choose for ourselves in a world without God? Will we be strong enough to be masters, creating our own values? Or will we be slaves, relying on an outside authority to impose morality on us? For masters, pride is the greatest virtue. The noble man is never insecure; he always triumphantly affirms himself. But the slaves stand master morality on its head. They

affirmation of itself.” See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966) Sec. 32

make humility the greatest virtue. The slaves secretly resent the power of the masters but instead of exercising will to power in overt acts of revenge,¹¹ they subvert the morality of the masters by the transvaluation of values.¹² How do the slaves do this? By actually enticing the powerful to accept the moral values of slaves, thereby quenching their will to power. The slaves “brainwash” the masters so they evaluate themselves from the perspective of slave morality. The result is a weak, decadent, mediocre culture that cannot produce great men.

The Gospel According to Nietzsche

For Nietzsche, the worst form of slave morality is found in Judaism and Christianity, but especially Christianity. Of Judaism, he writes:

The Jews, that priestly people, who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say an act of the *most spiritual revenge*. For this alone was appropriate to a priestly people, the people embodying the most deeply repressed priestly vengefulness. It was the Jews who, with awe-inspiring consistency dared to invert the aristocratic value-equation (good=noble=powerful=beautiful=happy=beloved of God) and to hang on to this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying “the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone – and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity; and you shall be in all eternity the

¹⁰ *Genealogy of Morals* 1:13

¹¹ It is virtuous for slaves to seek revenge in this way. But even if the slaves do pursue revenge, their morality is still inferior to that of the master. The master is so strong he doesn't have to retaliate against his enemies, unless he wants to.

¹² See especially *Genealogy of Morals* 1.10

unblessed, accursed, and damned!”...One knows *who* inherited this Jewish revaluation.¹³

Christianity, of course, inherited this form of slave morality from Judaism:¹⁴

In the sphere of moral values, one cannot find a greater contrast than between master morality and the morality of Christian value concepts: the latter developed on a soil that morbid through and through...master morality...is, conversely, the sign language of what has turned out well, of ascending life, of the will to power as the principle of life. Master morality affirms as instinctively as Christian morality negates (“God,” “beyond,” “self-denial,” all of them negations).¹⁵

One should not embellish or dress up Christianity: it has waged war to the death against the higher type of man, it has excommunicated all the fundamental instincts of this type...Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of opposition to the preservative instincts of strong life; it has depraved the reason even of the intellectually strongest natures by teaching men to feel the supreme values of intellectuality as sinful, as misleading, as temptations.¹⁶

According to Nietzsche, Christianity has become the new paradigm of slave morality and has used it to take masters on a guilt trip ever since. Nietzsche calls this guilt trip “bad conscience.”¹⁷ Christianity makes the master feel guilty before God by telling him his power, wealth, comfort, beauty, intelligence, etc. are marks of damnation. They are the virtues of earth, not heaven. Meanwhile, it comforts the slaves by telling them their

¹³ *Genealogy of Morals* 1:7. Nietzsche seems to distinguish sharply between Old Testament Judaism, which was closer to master morality, from post-70 A. D. Judaism, which has become slave morality.

¹⁴ Nietzsche seems to assume Christianity has more in common with post-70 A. D. Judaism than Old Testament Judaism. Normatively, this is certainly not the case. Historic Christian theology and ethics claims to be in basic continuity with the religion of the Old Testament.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Toronto: Random House, 1967), 190

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1979) sec 5

¹⁷ See W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy (Vol. 4): Kant and the Nineteenth Century*, (Ft. Worth: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1980) 245, 249. In *Genealogy of Morals* II, Nietzsche attributes bad conscience not so much to Christianity, but to the socialization process. Of course, in the history of Western civilization, Christianity has often been part of that socialization process.

poverty, lowliness, suffering, ugliness, weakness, etc. are marks of God's election.

Ironically, as Christianity has praised weakness, it has become strong. This is especially true of priests, who, while appearing to be slaves, are actually masters in disguise, lording it over the weak who flee to them for help:

But he [the priest] must also be strong, master of himself even more than of others, with his will to power in tact, so as to be their support, resistance, prop, compulsion, taskmaster, tyrant, and god. He has to defend his heard – against whom? Against the healthy, of course, and also against the envy of the healthy; he must be the natural opponent *and despiser* of all rude, stormy, unbridled, hard, violent, beast-of-prey health and might...He brings salves and balms with him,...but before he can act as a physician he first has to wound; when he then stills the pain of the wound *he at the same time infects*.¹⁸

Thus, Christianity appears hypocritical. It proclaims a morality of weakness and yet grabs a position of power and influence. It forbids acts of vengeance but then enacts the most dangerous form of revenge possible – spiritual revenge. In short, it professes one standard of morality, but actually lives out another.¹⁹ This is why Nietzsche sees Christianity as so dangerous. This is why it is “the *one* immortal blemish of mankind.”²⁰

It is not surprising then that Nietzsche would refer to Christ as the Great Seducer of the world. There is a great paradox here:

This Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this “Redeemer” who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, the sick, and the sinners – was he not this seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form, a seduction and bypath to precisely those *Jewish* values and new ideals? Did Israel not attain the ultimate goal of its sublime

¹⁸ *Genealogy of Morals* III.15. Perhaps Nietzsche sees the Apostle Paul as the ultimate example of this sort of priest. See Van Riessen 48f

¹⁹ See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche – Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* 133

²⁰ *Antichrist*, sec 62

vengefulness precisely through the bypath of the “Redeemer,” this ostensible opponent and disintegrator of Israel? Was it not part of the secret black art of truly *grand* politics of revenge, of a farseeing, subterranean, slowly advancing, and premeditated revenge, that Israel must itself deny the real instrument of its revenge before all the world as a mortal enemy and nail it to the cross, so that “all the world,” namely all the opponents of Israel, could unhesitatingly swallow just this bait? And could spiritual subtlety imagine any *more dangerous* bait than this? Anything to equal the enticing, intoxicating, overwhelming, and undermining power of that symbol of the “holy cross,” that ghastly paradox of a “God on a cross,” that mystery of an unimaginable ultimate cruelty and self-crucifixion of God *for the salvation of man*?²¹

In Nietzsche’s eyes, Christianity has won. Christians have succeeded in imposing their morality on the masters. “ ‘The masters’ have been disposed of; the morality of the common man has won. The ‘redemption’ of the human race (from ‘the masters,’ that is) is going forward; everything is visibly becoming Judaized, Christianized, mob-ized (what do the words matter!).” Because most men in every generation are weak, they cannot resist the temptation to slave morality. They fall for the lies of the Great Seducer.²²

Nietzsche Flexes His Muscles

²¹ GM 1.8. Nietzsche echoes this same thought in a quote in Riessen on 24: “[Behind all this] lies God, who likes dark, crooked, and wonderful ways, it is true, but who finally brings everything to a good end. It is ironic for those who thought that Christianity had been conquered by the natural sciences. For the Christian value-judgments were not at all conquered. ‘Christ on the cross’ is the loftiest symbol – still. Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnated gospel of love, is seduction in its most awful and irresistible form. Is there anything more seductive, more narcotic, more vicious, than the holy cross? And so clever a symbol. ‘God on the cross’ – don’t you understand the terrible implications of this symbol? Everything that suffers, everything that hangs on a cross is divine.” Again, from *Beyond Good and Evil*: “To turn upside down all valuations – *that* is what they had to do! To shatter the strong, to infect great hopes, to cast suspicion on the enjoyment of beauty, to break down everything autonomous, manly, victorious, dominating, all the instincts natural to the highest and best turned-out type of mankind, and bend it over into uncertainty, distress of conscience, and self-destruction – to reverse every bit of love for the earth and things earthly and control of the earth into hatred of things earthly and of the earth: this was the self-assumed task of the church” (70-71)

²² Jones sums up why Nietzsche finds this seduction so repulsive and dangerous: “Religion and transcendental ethics are instruments for preserving the unfit and for suborning the strong by duping them into the small virtues of small people” (251). But if the strong are so strong, how can they be duped?

We have seen Nietzsche's basic moral genealogy. We have seen how and why he condemns Christianity. But before analyzing his critique of Christianity, we must briefly consider Nietzsche's own moral schema. What does master morality really look like? While profiling Nietzsche's self-affirming, value-creating, "Overman" would be appropriate here, it will be enough to briefly summarize his doctrine of eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's idea that everything that has ever happened happens over and over an infinite number of times. In other words, each man's life will be lived over repeatedly without end. Why does Nietzsche subscribe to this seemingly depressing idea? Because he sees it as a test of his strength. To say everything recurs is to say there is no progress or meaning; it is to say we are locked in an endless cycle with no hope of escape. Can we face this truth? For Nietzsche, this is asking, "Can we say *yes* to life? Can we bear the thought that all of life's pain, suffering, humiliation, and agony, will be repeated endlessly? Can we face this prospect of a meaningless, eternal existence with joy?" If so, Nietzsche sees it as a sign of inner strength because it proves one has the desire for life and will continue to have it through all eternity. Eternal recurrence means man cannot long for an afterlife or a better world to come, but the great man (the Overman) can face the prospect of living his life over and over again without fear. Ultimately, eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's substitute for God and heaven.²³

Philosophizing With a Hammer: Striking Back at Nietzsche

The Christian reader of Nietzsche may be quick to become fed up with his blasphemous statements and turn away from him altogether. But this would be a great mistake. For all Nietzsche says about God, about Christ, and about Christianity really is

²³ See Riessen, *Nietzsche* 21

true, unless, of course, the man who hung on the cross really was the Son of God. If we want to know what a world without God looks like, we need look no further than Nietzsche's nihilism. Assessing Nietzsche's rejection of Christ and examining his nihilistic alternative is of great value to the Christian, as we shall see.

Before analyzing Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity, let us briefly summarize why he rejects this religion. There seem to be three main reasons:

[1] Christianity is slave morality. It denies man's exercise of will to power by transvaluing master morality. As a result, men are not truly men; they are weak and inauthentic.

[2] Christianity acts out the most dangerous form of revenge on the masters – spiritual revenge. While claiming to exalt humility and pity as virtues, and pride and power as vices, it really claims cultural influence and power for itself. Even though God is dead, Christianity continues to exert influence on Western culture because it is the only value system Western man knows. The result, once again, is a culture that has sunk into the mediocrity of egalitarian democracy.

[3] The origins of the idea of God and morality are strictly naturalistic. God's existence and Christian morality are not objective, but may be traced back to psychological factors and given a philological account. Thus, the claims of Christianity to be the one true religion (with its resulting uniformity) is a sham. There is no transcendental truth, no transcendental God, no transcendental morality.

Yet this rejection of Christianity is not the whole story for Nietzsche. While Nietzsche is obviously firm in his rejection of Christ and his followers, he also seems, paradoxically, to have a strange attraction to the character of Jesus. He was repulsed and

attracted to him at the same time. He found him hideous and captivating all at once.²⁴

This is not to say Nietzsche is a secret admirer of Christ or a closet Christian of some sort. But one thing is for sure: Nietzsche simply could not escape Jesus, no matter how hard he tried. Wherever his philosophy took him, it seems Jesus was always there to meet him, haunting him, pursuing him. In fact, it is virtually impossible to conceive of Nietzsche developing his philosophy apart from using Christ as a foil.

But is Nietzsche's rejection of Christ coherent? I think not, for a number of reasons. We might begin by turning Nietzsche's genealogical method against him. Surely there is much about Nietzsche's life that would allow us to construct a psychological explanation for his rejection of Christ.²⁵ Of course, Nietzsche knows this, and in anticipation of this objection he says,

Where my critics are concerned, I am often under the impression that they are scoundrels. Not *what* is said, but that *I say* it and what should have made me in particular arrive at it – only that seems to interest them... They judge me in order to ignore my work: they explain its genesis, and thereby consider it adequately *disposed of*.²⁶

But what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If Nietzsche can dismiss the origins of Christian belief in God and Christian morality by explaining their psychological genesis, there is no reason others can't return the favor. But rather than

²⁴ As proof, consider that Nietzsche described his Overman as a Caesar with the soul of Christ.

²⁵ Those familiar with the sad biography of Nietzsche will not doubt this. Another way to attack Nietzsche at this point would be to construct different, but equally plausible, genealogical stories to account for the origin of moral categories. However, a Christian critique of Nietzsche will not accept his naturalistic method and so will not want to play Nietzsche's game.

²⁶ Quoted in Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles Wallraff and Frederick Schmitz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965), 7

playing Nietzsche's own game,²⁷ and committing the genetic fallacy ourselves, let us turn to more substantial criticisms.

Why does it matter to Nietzsche that Christianity is slave morality? For Nietzsche the problem with slave morality is that it makes men weak and mediocre. Christianity prevents men from developing their potentialities or from exercising will to power to the fullest extent. But is this really so? Nietzsche's doctrine of will to power has some ambiguities, but it seems to include the notion that *everything* is will to power, that is, *chaos and flux*. But if will to power is chaos and flux, how can will to power be the basis for rejecting Christ? In fact, how can it be the basis for rejecting anything? If will to power is "a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back," it is hard to see how *anything* can contradict will to power or keep it from coming to expression. Will to power means there is no fixed standard by which anything can be evaluated. Will to power means a world without objective truth, a world in which "the falsity of a proposition should not be held against it." So even if Christianity is false, why should that matter?²⁸ It seems Christianity is just one of the many forms will

²⁷ There is another way to beat Nietzsche by turning his own guns against him. Just as he says all morality can be accounted for in terms of a genealogy, so he says all philosophy is just rationalization. Philosophers are not pursuing "objective" truth for objectivity is a myth. Philosophers are more like hired guns – lawyers arguing a case irrespective of its true merits. But if all philosophers are engaged in rationalizations which are nothing more than subjective interpretations, does this not apply to Nietzsche as well? Perhaps Nietzsche is rationalizing away Christianity because he does not want to face the truth about God and himself. Indeed, this is how the Apostle Paul explains the thinking of the unbelieving man: he is holding under the truth in unrighteousness because he is too weak to face up to the fact of his sin before God (Romans 1:18-32).

²⁸ When Nietzsche says that the falsity of a proposition does not matter, he seems to be espousing an instrumentalist or pragmatic view of truth. What matters is not whether a proposition matches objective reality, but whether it helps me further my will to power. But it is just at this point that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity seems to break down. Nietzsche would say that Christianity is false, but unlike other false propositions, according to him, Christianity suppresses rather than extends one's will to power. But how does he know this? After all, *if* Christianity is true, *if* there is a judgment day as described by Tertullian (*Genealogy of Morals* I:15), then Christianity does indeed further one's power. How can Nietzsche know which propositions will ultimately further our power without being omniscient? Will to power provides no

to power can take – albeit, a form Nietzsche does not like. But why should that matter? Surely Nietzsche is has no basis for imposing his anti-Christian values on us!

More importantly, it seems the gap between master and slave morality is a mere illusion. Masters are considered good by Nietzsche because they are strong enough to create values that serve them. In this case, making power a virtue works to their advantage. But are not the slaves doing the same thing? The slaves, in Nietzsche's genealogy, have created their own set of self-serving, self-justifying values. So what if these values are different than those chosen by the masters? And if this set of values has to deny power in order to get power (as is supposedly the case with Christianity) then isn't this just a supremely clever form of will to power? Haven't the slaves (Christians) simply outsmarted the masters? How can the weak Christians be blamed for dominating the supposedly much more powerful masters? Shouldn't Nietzsche praise those wily Christians, rather than condemning them, for conquering their masters? Nietzsche has simply failed to solve the greatest riddle of all, a riddle that is solved only by the aid of divine grace – the riddle of the cross. True strength is not being able to face the reality God is dead – rather, the truly strong man is the one who can face his sin and the holy God, for that is reality. It takes strength not to say "God is dead" but "God lives." Obviously Nietzsche was too weak for this.²⁹

certain basis for rejecting Christianity because it provides no certain basis for anything. (See Riessen, *Nietzsche*, 35, 38, 39)

²⁹ Nietzsche tells us in *Will to Power* (96) that "The Christian movement is a degeneracy movement composed of reject and refuse elements of every kind...It is therefore not only national, not racially conditioned; it appeals to the disinherited everywhere; it is founded on a rancor against everything well-constituted and dominant – It also stands in opposition to every spiritual movement, to all philosophy: it takes the side of idiots and utters a curse on the spirit. Rancor against the gifted, learned, spiritually independent: it detects in them the well-constituted, the masterful." In a sense, Nietzsche is right. Christianity is for men who, at least before God, are unworthy and fit only to be rejected. But where he

Finally there is the question as to whether or not Nietzsche has properly understood that which he rejects. Let us grant Nietzsche's two types of morality for a moment. Is Christianity truly slave morality? The cultural expression Christianity took in Nietzsche's day may have been pathetic, mediocre, egalitarian, and banal. But the cultural expression of Christianity Nietzsche saw is not necessarily true Christianity (any more than the Nazis' co-opting of Nietzsche's Overman truly expressed Nietzsche's thought!) Nietzsche failed to make clear distinctions here. The Bible tells us that at the creation man was given dominion over the earth – we might say man was made *master* over God's creation (Genesis 1:26-28). Nothing in later Scripture revokes this. Scripture is not embarrassed by wealth and power; indeed these are often seen to be signs of God's favor and blessing, while poverty is often seen to be a form of God's curse.³⁰ Christ himself, supposedly the arch enemy of master morality, is declared to be King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who possesses all power and authority (Revelation 19:16; Matthew 28:18). Christianity does not teach that suffering in and of itself is good or that it automatically qualifies one for heaven. Moreover, while Christianity does value

went wrong was in assuming that there existed a class of men who were exempt from this condition. To own up to the fact that one is a sinner before God is indeed difficult. To admit one is sick and in need of the Divine Physician is terrifying. And, of course, it could be seen as a sign of weakness, *unless it turns out to be true!* If it is true, the weak one is the one who refuses to face the seriousness of his condition and take the prescribed remedy. Nietzsche's position presupposes the falsity of Christianity and hopes to make men strong by forcing them to acknowledge that God is dead. But from a Christian perspective, Nietzsche is the weak one. Our only hope of recovering the strength we need to live lives of joy is found in God's grace. Besides this, Nietzsche does not see that suffering (i.e., being weak) can actually lead to strength in the long run. There are no short cuts to becoming a strong person; for the Christian, the path to strength is the way of the cross.

³⁰ Abraham and the great kings of Israel such as David and Solomon are examples of the goodness of God-given wealth and strength. The New Testament continues this theme (Mark 10:29-30; Philippians 4:13; 1 Timothy 6:17). While some later Christians (such as the monastic movement) found ascetic denial to be the heart of Christianity, it is hard to find this in the Scriptures themselves. Ascetic sounding statements need to be taken in the overall context of Scripture.

humility and other slave-type virtues in their proper place,³¹ clearly this is not the whole picture. What Christianity rejects is a sinful misuse and abuse of power, not power per se. Even a cursory reading of the Scriptures should have opened Nietzsche's eyes to this fact.

Christ and Anti-Christ: A Christian Appropriation of the Evil Genius

The impact of Nietzsche's thought on later philosophy, literary criticism, and psychology has been well documented. Most of his contributions have not come from attempts to use his thought systematically but by taking isolated insights and building upon them. There is no reason Christians cannot use Nietzsche in a similar way. Indeed, at many isolated points Nietzschean thought and Christian thought coincide.

First, consider Nietzsche's view of the antithesis. Nietzsche saw a clear line drawn between his own "Dionysian" position and the Christian position. He correctly saw that these were the only two really consistent alternatives.³² From a Christian point of view, this means Christian morality cannot be salvaged apart from Christian theology. Nietzsche saw right through those in his day who wanted to reject the "unscientific" elements of Christianity that could not be squared with their own humanistic

³¹ Christian humility is not what we moderns call poor self esteem. Rather it is based on a true assessment of yourself in relation to God and other men. In reality, Christian humility does not lead one to passive self-pity or self-degradation (though some holier-than-thou Christians may act this way) but to active service of others. Christ taught that the mark of greatness in his kingdom was having the strength to serve others (Luke 22:26-27).

³² In *Ecce Homo* he writes: "Have you understood me? Dionysius against the Crucified One..." In *The Will to Power*, he says, "Dionysius against the Crucified One: there you have the Antithesis." Van Riessen explains: "Nietzsche thus became steadily more conscious of the most radical antithesis: that between *Christ on the Cross* and his ideal of man, the *Dionysian nihilistic man of power*. He rejected every synthesis and every compromise. He realized that only the *Antichrist* could be put up in real opposition to Christ. And he wanted to create the Antichrist, he wanted to be the Antichrist. His great question, and he found no answer to it, was whether the Antichrist could obtain stature and permanence as the antipode of the Crucified One. He was so filled with this antithesis, and so much in a quandary over it, that during the

preconceptions, but still uphold a form of traditional moralism. For example, he says of G. Eliot and those like her,

They have got rid of the Christian God, and now feel obliged to cling all the more firmly to Christian morality... With us it is different. When one gives up Christian belief one thereby deprives oneself of the *right* to Christian morality. For the latter is absolutely *not* self-evident: one must make this point clear again and again, in spite of English shallowplates. Christianity is a system, a consistently thought out and *complete* view of things. If one breaks out of it a fundamental idea, the belief in God, one thereby breaks the whole thing to pieces: one has nothing of any consequence left in one's hands. Christianity presupposes that man does not know, *cannot* know what is good for him and what is evil: he believes in God who alone knows. Christian morality is a command: its origin is transcendental; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticize; it possesses truth only if God is truth – it stands or falls with the belief in God...³³

The Christian community should thank Nietzsche for putting matters so plainly.

Consistent Christians realize the Christian worldview (its morality included) is an all or nothing proposition. Western culture is only now beginning to learn a lesson Nietzsche taught very matter of factly over one hundred years ago: Christian morality is impossible apart from Christian belief. Traditional values only have rational grounding in the Christian “system.” Apart from this foundation, they cannot stand.

Nietzsche serves the Christian cause in another way as well. His epistemological self-consciousness is exemplary. This makes him perhaps the ultimate anti-Christian philosopher of all time. Other philosophers before him, of course, had rejected

period of his insanity he wrote two names over and over on scraps of paper – Dionysius and the Crucified.” (Nietzsche 46)

³³ *Twilight of the Idols* 69-70. See also Coppleston 405. Nietzsche shows us that the ultimate choice is not between Kant and Nietzsche but Calvin and Nietzsche.

Christianity as well, but never with the same ruthless consistency.³⁴ In fact Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity may be the only piece of his philosophy that is consistent!

Nietzsche can be appropriated by Christians as a good example of what philosophy looks like, truly purged of any lingering Christian influence. For example, take his lament, "I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar."³⁵ A Christian should say "Amen" to this, but then reverse it: The fact that we *do* still use grammar shows we *do* believe in God (however suppressed that belief may be – Romans 1:18-32). In fact, if our language is going to express anything about the world, if we are going to speak with one another at all, we must make certain presuppositions that are distinctively Christian-theistic. If the one who rejects Christianity is to do so consistently, he must remain silent. Otherwise, we may accuse him of "borrowing capital" from a worldview he claims to be rejecting altogether. Because Nietzsche, like the Christian, sees God as the necessary precondition of grammar (or language),³⁶ he has, in an odd sort of way, given the Christian a quite powerful apologetic tool.

³⁴ "If one considers the history of modern philosophy from Descartes, it is surely, for good or ill, the story of emancipation from religion. Or conversely: each philosopher goes just so far, and then bows to Christianity and accepts what becomes unacceptable to his successors. Descartes resolves to doubt everything, but soon offers proofs of God's existence that have long been shown to be fallacious. A similar pattern recurs in Hobbes and Spinoza, though they stray much farther from all orthodoxies, and, a little later, in Berkeley and Leibniz. Locke is an "empiricist" who cites Scripture to his purpose; Voltaire an anti-Christian who accepts the teleological argument for God's existence. Kant set out to smash not only the proofs of God but the very foundations of Christian metaphysics, then turns around and "postulates" God and the immortality of the soul, preparing the way for Fichte and idealism. Schopenhauer, finally, breaks with Christianity but accepts the metaphysics of the Upanishads from Hinduism. Nietzsche is one of the first thinkers with a comprehensive philosophy to complete the break with religion." Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) 17

³⁵ *Twilight of the Idols* 38

³⁶ It should be obvious what this does to Nietzsche's own writings. If what he is saying is true (if God is really dead and there is no basis for the objectivity of language) he couldn't communicate to us that this is the case. Nietzsche's texts would deconstruct themselves.

There are numerous other ways Christians can appropriate Nietzsche's thought. Christians should join in with Nietzsche in critiquing the decadence of modern Western culture (though Christians would propose a radically different solution). Christians do not believe that anyone is neutral; while not agreeing with Nietzsche's relativism, Christians can agree that "objectivity" is a myth. In short, there are many insights from Nietzsche that Christians can use to their own ends, to further the influence of their religion in the world.

Crossing the Sea of Nihilism, In Search of a Man-Made Island:

Parting Questions for Nietzsche

We have seen that Nietzsche's "arguments" against Christ and Christianity do not stand up to scrutiny. Nietzsche's world was different than ours – he was fighting against the decay of what he perceived to be a culture that had given in to the slave morality of Christianity. But roughly one hundred years later, our world is more Nietzschean than Christian. People who attack Christ as Nietzsche did no longer feel social stigma for doing so. People are no longer afraid of casting off "traditional" Christian values in favor of whatever values they prefer. To speak of "creating your own morality" does not sound strange to our twentieth century ears. Most are no longer terrified at the thought of God's death. But would Nietzsche be satisfied with today's world? Has the "Dionysian Revolution" succeeded? Have the Nietzschean Overmen of our day been strong enough to swim from the shore of Christianity, across the sea of nihilism, to the shore of man-made values? It seems that second shore has been rather elusive – in fact, it may be evident now that nihilism is an ocean *without* a shore. It seems that Nietzsche desperately wanted to escape the void of nihilism. Having rejected Christianity, he

wanted something positive to put in its place. But thus far, it seems post-Nietzschean man is still looking for a solid rock on which to grab hold and make a new beginning. While Nietzsche's thought is compelling at many points, in the end, he does not seem to have given us what it takes to cope with life in a Godless – or Christless – universe. From a Christian perspective, Nietzsche may have been a genius, but he was an evil one.