NIETZSCHE:
THE TRANSVALUATION OF ALL VALUES

A REMARKABLE INTENSITY of self-interest characterizes the modern era. Under its veneer of activity, our age is passionately turned inward and searches for a stabilizing principle that will give some ultimate meaning to life. This introspection is not the product of one man or even one generation. The distant roots were formed in the Renaissance when the supposed barriers of medieval thought were shattered and the eyes of theologian, philosopher and poet gradually drifted from the contemplation of a creation leading to Divinity. The new vision was of a material universe that should be dominated by a new god, Man.

This reversal of vision continued through succeeding centuries and was strengthened by restatement in the systems of various thinkers until the diminishing figure of God finally vanished. In this brief essay is outlined the efforts to erect a valid ethical system upon the ruins of divinely established absolute values by a nineteenth century champion of man's complete self-sufficiency.

Friedrich Neitzsche was born in 1844. He was a literary rather than an academic philosopher. He invented no new technical theories in ontology or epistemology; his importance is primarily in ethics.

The earliest formative influences on his thought were received from the teachings of Schopenhauer, from Wagner, and from his studies of classical antiquity. His first important work, *The Birth of Tragedy,* was an interpretation of history as a conflict between the principles of Dionysius and of Apollo. Dionysius represents the blind, but rich, mutable and inexhaustable forces of sensual life; Apollo, the balance, repose, permanence, and harmony of rational form. Although Nietzsche saw in history the inevitable and fertilizing conflict of these principles, it was the principle of Dionysius which he emphasized and which he found

embodied in the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the music of Wagner. While he admired the "will to live" of Schopenhauer and the *Siegfried* of Wagner, he revolted against the former's cult of *resignation* to life and the latter's Christianized *Parsifal.* At the same time that he diverged from these early masters, he came under the influence of naturalism both in its positive and negative aspects. In the positive aspect, he adopted the standpoint of explaining all of reality in the light of scientific biology; in the negative aspect, he denied the supernatural.

To this naturalistic stage of his development belong his works: *Human, All Too Human,* and his *Joyful Wisdom.* Finally, in his *Zarathustra* and in his later works, *Beyond Good and Evil, The Genealogy of Morals,* and *The Will to Power,* he found a unity of his own in the philosophy of the "will to power," which is both the Dionysian principle in culture and the vital principle in nature. Meanwhile his failing health aggravated his extreme sensitiveness and emotional instability. A stroke of paralysis in 1889 produced a state of complete mental collapse, which lasted until his death in 1900.[1]

Even though Nietzsche changes his standpoint during the different periods of his life, through all these changes there runs a crimson thread; he was essentially the preacher of a New Culture, a virile culture, in which virtue is to be understood in the Dionysian sense. According to Nietzsche, virtue consists in the acceptance that chance is the destiny which shapes our ends. The greatness of the Greeks was to be found in the fact that they were powerful enough to meet the universe head-on and the fate it had imposed on man, to recognize and contemplate without fear the dangers and horrors of the human situation, and to open their minds and hearts to existence as it is.[2] They were strong; they did not emasculate reality in order to deal with it. The will of the self, Nietzsche declares, is to "create beyond itself."[3] The Will to Creation, therefore, is virtue, and there is no other. A harmonious perfection of the whole man, the endeavor after an ideal, was the aim of Nietzsche.

To attain this end, he began as a revolutionary against the morality of his time. "I bade them upset their old academic chairs, laugh at their great moralists, their saints, their poets, and their saviours."[4] Nietzsche is thus a destructive genius of the first order: "God—God is dead."[5] Nietzsche asks:

> "A God stretched on a Cross, God personally immolating himself for the debt of man, God paying himself personally out of a pound of his own

> flesh, God as the one being who can deliver man from what man had become unable to deliver himself, the Creditor playing the scapegoat for his debtor, from love—CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?"[6]

God is the oldest lie. In declaring war on the moral standard of his time, Nietzsche believed that he had torn the gag from the lips of truth at last. Therefore, "nothing is true, everything is allowed."[7] This is freedom. Nietzsche had finally delivered man, the sovereign individual, from the morality of custom and had freed the universe of God, of even "the shadows of God." Now it is "Dionysius versus the Crucified."

Nietzsche has launched his polemic; now he constructs his own morality. Man is no longer a spectator in this universe but an actor. "Man himself becomes the determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: What is injurious to me is injurious in itself; he knows that it is only himself who confers honor on things; he is a *creator of values.*"[8] This autonomous "supermoral" individual, who has grown to freedom, i.e., to accept responsibility, this lord of the free will, is necessarily given the mastery over circumstances, over nature, over all creatures with weaker and shorter wills. "The 'free man,' the owner of a long unbreakable will, finds in this possession his *standard of values.*" Further analysis, he felt, shows that the will to live is an exhibition and utilization of power: to be strong, strong enough to exist, to survive, to assert, to affirm, to hold one's own and go one's way. The will to live is essentially a "Will to Power."[9] Nietzsche broke up the Will to Power into a multiplicity of "quantities of force" in a state of conflict with one another. The play of forces, of which the universe is composed, is not mechanical. Nothing is absolutely predetermined. Nor are the quantities of power everlasting. They rise out of nothing, they are constantly threatened by disintegration and annihilation, and they return to nothing when their course has been run. But while they exist, they are essentially efforts to resist annihilation, to defy their mortality, and to postpone the lapse into nothingness that perpetually threatens and eventually engulfs them. But new "quantities of power" are ceaselessly creating themselves ex nihilo to replace them. Each individual "self," like each individual object, is a complex of forces and tensions, of strivings to exist, interrelated with the all-embracing complex of "quantities of power" that constitutes the universe.

Man is, therefore, a being of no end, only a stage, an inter-

lude, a bridge, a great promise.[10] His whole modern life is power, the consciousness of power, the will to power. This power binds to create existence on a human plane. The sovereign man calls this responsibility of power his conscience.

Therefore, the sinfulness in man is not an actual fact, but merely the interpretation of a fact: a discomfort seen through a moral religious perspective, which is no longer binding for us. The Christian ethic, to justify its pusillanimous precepts and practices, invented the illusions of sin and hell, of future rewards and punishments. The "bad conscience" or an owing something to God is the instrument of the Christian God's torture.[11] Man has for too long regarded his natural proclivities with an "evil eye," so that eventually they have become affiliated to a bad conscience. Man "cannot shut his eyes to the prospect of the complete and eventual triumph of atheism, freeing mankind from all this feeling of obligation to their origin, their 'prima causa.' "[12] The good conscience is the triumphant affirmation of life, of self, and of freedom. The bad conscience is the negation of this instinct to freedom. It is this instinct of freedom forced back, trodden back, and imprisoned within itself. Thus the man who affirms, says yes to life, he is the good, the righteous. Then Nietzsche exclaims, "We alone," the righteous, "are the 'homines bonae voluntatis.' "[13] "And man must will—for man will wish nothingness rather than not wish at all."[14]

From his proposition of the existence of a "Will to Power," Nietzche derived his doctrine that there are two standards of morals: a master-morality and a slave-morality.[15]

The master-morality is simply the natural morality of man. Its motive force is the triumphant affirmation of life and self. The noble, the strong, the master constitute the master-morality and its standard demands man to be something—to be noble, grand and virile; to produce an aristocracy.

The slave-morality, the Christian ethic, on the other hand, is bound up with repression, being the product of what Nietzche distinguishes as the "reactive" feelings against the strong: hate, envy, mistrust, jealousy, suspicion, rancor, and revenge.[16] Its motive-force is a negation of life, of self, and of freedom. The slave population with such sentiments as these, Nietzche intimates, explains the values to which our modern morality bears witness. The Christian population has professed, and in the end has come to love just the opposite type of man to his strong, noble master, and the opposite human qualities. It is here that sym-

pathy, the kind and helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, humility, and friendliness attain to honor. For the Christian, these are the most useful qualities, and almost the only means of supporting the burden of existence.[17]

Nietzsche concluded that there must be a revision of our conception of what is good and evil, an alteration in our valuations. This transmutation of all values will involve the destruction of the timid Jewish-Christian morality which is the negation of the Will to Power and which for centuries has made man spiritually impotent and sterile. In this tremendous transvaluation, the Christian God will at last meet his doom. In creating Him to sanctify the negation of the Will to Power, man created a "God" who killed him. A new god, Dionysius, born of the Will to Power, fostered by its enormous forces, conflicts, and tensions, must be brought into being—a being who accepts all responsibility for all that is, and re-instates everything that the Jewish-Christian God denounced.[18]

A new nobility is needed; and what is noble? To be able to command. Nietzsche asks, but who can command—who is master by "nature"? Such things defy calculation; they come like fate, without cause, reason, notice, or excuse.[19] The answer came: the instinct of freedom, the "Will to Power," this force with all its construction and tyrannous nature is here—man himself. The noble man is essentially the incarnate "Will to Power." He is by no means a universal type, but a governing aristocrat. The noble man will be capable of cruelty, and, on occasion, of what is called crime. He recognizes duties only to equals. Therefore, the noble man, the perfect man, is master of both good and evil. The good is "everything that elevates the sense of power, the will to power, and power itself." Evil, or what is bad, is "everything that proceeds from weakness." Happiness is only that "feeling," that increases power after resistence is overcome. "Man does not aspire to happiness, only the Englishman does that."[20] All that is good or bad exists only in the superior few; what happens to the rest is of no account. To talk of intrinsic wrong and intrinsic right is absolutely nonsensical. True virtue is not for all, but should remain the characteristic of the aristocratic minority. It is not profitable or prudent;[21] it only isolates its possessor from other men; it is hostile to order, and does harm to inferiors. The master-morality, the aristocracy will rule and govern the slave-morality, the weak: this is only the natural order of things.

At this point, Nietzsche fused his idea of the Will to Power

with his doctrine of "Eternal Recurrence." "My doctrine is this: Live so that thou mayest desire to live again—that is the task—for in any case thou wilt live again!"[22] It is the "flux" of Heraclitus. The possible diversifications of the Will to Power, though finite in number, will return in the course of infinite "time," bringing with them the same world, and repeating its history. This is the Eternal Recurrence. The re-affirmation of the "Will to Power" must surpass all former affirmations of itself. It must be accompanied by a further evolution of the human race. Nietzsche through the fusion of these two doctrines created a new idea.

From man of the present must spring a being endowed with greater strength than humanity has yet possessed. A man must arise capable of humanizing and transvaluating inhumanity with a splendor yet unachieved. Man will and must beget the "Superman."[23] The Superman is this superior being who will surpass man as man surpassed the monkey.[24]

The "Superman" will be a more splendid instrument of the "Will to Power" and the temple of the risen Dionysius. He will rejoice in the possession and exhibition of strength in all forms, in the brute and terrible natural forces with which he must contend. He will despise any sort of weakness, physical, mental, or moral. The "Superman" will be magnanimous. His greatness will be his greatness of soul. His strength will be an inner strength of character—shrinking from nothing, undaunted by nothing that can befall him. This is Nietzsche's hero.

This god, the "Superman" will be beyond good and evil. "The superman is the meaning of the earth."[25] He will find nowhere in the whole universe or breadth of existence anything to fear, anything to hate, anything to pity, anything to forgive, anything to justify, or anything to reject. In identifying himself with the whole of existence as it is, in all its terrible and inhuman majesty, the "Superman" will be the expression and symbol of the new god: Dionysius reborn.

Nietzsche has reached his aim, his ideal, his "optimum." But the "optimum" is not a way to happiness, only a way to power. For the "Superman" only expresses "the fundamental feature of man's will: he needs a goal." "And man will sooner will nothingness than not will at all."[26]

Always in the past, Nietzsche insists, the aim of morality has been supremacy of the people. But even the growth of genius has been no more than a lucky chance. Though the "Greeks were

wonderful," their whole life being so organized as to favor the flowering of genius, even the Greeks hardly knew what they were about. And if they had known, they still would have been unable, with their rudimentary science, to plan the future more effectively than they did. Only now can the many moralities with their many restricted goals give way to one morality with one goal.[27] Only now is it possible deliberately to bring forth creatures which stand sublimely above the whole species of man, and to sacrifice "one's neighbor" and oneself to this end. The new Dionysius of the will and power to live will then be a profound oneness with the whole universe. A oneness which embraces and transcends human good and evil; the universal heritage of the new race.

This is Nietzsche's doctrine; a doctrine which failed to create and only destroyed. There is no God. There is no objective standard—no natural law. Man is supreme; he alone is the creator and determiner of all values.

The outstanding element which is lacking throughout Nietzsche's master-morality is its foundation in "right reason." His doctrine of blind will to power and force leads ultimately to tyranny and a complete disregard of any social responsibilities or obligations. The Will to Power running amok in a world of brute force is the most tragic phenomenon in history—tragic, because it culminated in the horrors of Nazism and Communism. It is a Will to Power devoid of the all-embracing Will to Love.

Nietzschean thought has been rightly recognized as an important forerunner of aetheistic Existentialism. The ground principle of Nietzschean and Existential philosophy is the death of God. Starting from this, both systems vainly attempt to erect individualistic ethical structures. Nietzsche, having rejected a divine goal as sufficient to bring order and meaning to life, was faced with a rootless existence. The dead God was replaced by the personal ego as the giver of significance, direction, vitality to the life of an abandoned mankind.

But even Nietzsche had his qualms. Was God dead? This recurring thought plagued him. From the beginning to the end of his works, he continually asks, will we ever be rid of the "shadows of God"? And one might answer—"No, not even in Hell."

—Dominic Clifford, O.P.

[1] Charles Andler, "Nietzsche," *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences,* Vol. XI.
[2] *Birth of Tragedy,* Chaps. 1, 17, 20, 25.
[3] *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Chaps. IV, XXVII.
[4] *Ibid.,* Chap. LVI, No. 2.
[5] *Joyful Wisdom,* Aphorism No. 108.
[6] *Genealogy of Morals,* II Essay, Chap. 21.
[7] *Ibid.,* III Essay, Chap. 24.
[8] *Beyond Good and Evil,* Chap. IX, No. 260.
[9] *Will to Power,* No. 1062; *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Chap. XXXIV.
[10] *Ibid.,* Prologue, No. 4.
[11] *Genealogy of Morals,* II Essay, No. 22.
[12] *Ibid.,* No. 20.
[13] *Ibid.,* III Essay, No. 14.
[14] *Ibid.,* No. 28.
[15] *Beyond Good and Evil,* Chap. IX, No. 260; *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* p. 410 (Anthony Ludovici, "Notes on Zarathustra").
[16] *Genealogy of Morals,* I Essay, No. 10.
[17] *Ibid.,* Nos. 13-16; *Beyond Good and Evil,* Chap. III, No. 46.
[18] *Ibid.,* Chap. VI, No. 211; Chap. VII, No. 230.
[19] *Genealogy of Morals,* II Essay, No. 17; *Beyond Good and Evil,* Chap. IX, No. 259.
[20] *Twilight of the Idols,* p. 2.
[21] *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Chap. XLIII; p. 422; p. 416 (Ludovici).
[22] *Ibid.,* p. 424 (Ludovici); *Joyful Wisdom,* No. 341; *Ecce Homo,* "Birth of Tragedy," No. 3.
[23] *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Prologue, No. 5.
[24] *Ibid.,* Chap. LVI, No. 4; Prologue, No. 3.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Genealogy of Morals,* III Essay, No. 1.
[27] *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Chap. XV; p. 414 (Ludovici).