

Nietzsche: A Confused Philosopher?

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Abstract

Nietzsche was one of the 18th century philosophers that cast his supreme presence on the world. His nihilism, existentialism, euphoria and eventual unstable nature has presented him as a confused philosopher. His attack on moral, religion, freedom, and his notion that God is dead make him an interesting character. This paper attempts and understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy based on his concept of superman, the doctrine of will to power and his concept of morality that transcends all moralities, and concludes that rather than being confused, that confusion is really an art of philosophizing.

Historical Background

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm (1844 – 1900) is the critic par-excellence. A philologist by training and academic profession. His philosophized enterprise grew out of his background as a philologist schooled in the study of classical languages and literature. His deep concern with issues relating to the quality of life in the culture and society of his time, his conviction that the interpretative and evaluative underpinning of western civilization is fundamentally flawed, propelled him to find solution to the profound crisis. He sought to help mankind with a new lease of life.

Nietzsche had no formal philosophical training, but he subsequently emerged as one of the most controversial, unconventional and important figures in the history of modern philosophy. His influence on the European philosophy in the twentieth century has been profound.

He was influenced by Schopenhauer, who's "the world as will and Representation" he read while studying philology at the university at Leipzig. This encounter how a profound influence on him. So did Wagner with whom he was enthralled. His attachment to Wagner subsequently gave way to dischantment and then criticism; just as he emancipated himself from Schopenhauer as well.

Nietzsche's brief career ended in 1879 owing to the drastic deterioration of his health. But his avowed position interpretations and reasoning had led to him being called a Villain. The Nietzsche said "God in dead, with the death of God, mankind is now free, for man has now been liberated from the slave morality". This singular view had resulted in Nietzsche being referred to as a confused philosophy. Is Nietzsche really confused? This we will determine after examining his philosophy.

Nietzsche's Philosophy

Nietzsche was openly and profoundly hostile to most forms of morality and religious thought. Having become persuaded of the fundamentally non-rational character of the world, life, history, Nietzsche tools the basic challenge of philosophy to be that of overcoming both these ways of thinking and the nihilism resulting from abandonment. This must have informed his attempt to reinterpret ourselves and the world along lines which would be more conducive to the flourishing and enhancement of life.

If he further rejected the God-hypotheses and any metaphysical postulation of a "true world of being". Nietzsche proposed that life and the world be interpreted in terms of his conception. "will to power" and he framed his "Dionysian value-standard" and the "revaluation of values" that he called for, in terms of his interpretation as well. The only positive and value-scheme possible, he maintained must be based upon a recognition and affirmation of the worlds fundamental character and so must posit as a general standard the attainment of a kind of life in which the assertive transformative will to power is present in its highest intensity and quality. This in turn led him to the "enhancement of life" and creativity to be the finding idea of his revaluation of values and development of naturalistic value-theory.

This way of thinking carried over into Nietzsche's thinking with respect to morality as well insisting that moralities as well as other traditional modes of valuation ought to be understood and assessed "in the perspective of life". He argued that most of them are contrary rather than conducive to the enhancement of life, reflecting the all-too – human needs and weakness and fears of less favored human groups and types. Nietzsche was highly critical of traditional and commonplace ways of thinking about truth and knowledge maintaining that as they are usually construed there is and can be nothing of the kind, that all thinking is "perspectual" and that "there are no facts, only interpretations". This has led some to believe that he rejected the idea of truth and knowledge, altogether and so was a radical epistemological nihilist. But he manifested a passionate commitment to "truthfulness and pursued philosophized tasks with a knowledge of understanding their aim. The preferred to offer suggestions, hazard guesses and propose hypothesis rather than attempt to construct rigorous lines of reasoning. In principle and practice, Nietzsche's thinking was avowedly interpretative, experimental and tentative, and made free use of language that is highly metaphorical and figurative.

Nietzsche's influence on the development of existentialism is decisive. Such influence came through his ethical relativism and his conception of "the will to power" Omoregbe (1993:200) maintains that his

"Ambitious programme was a radical revolution in ethics through what he called the 'transvaluation of values', that is, a complete transformation of traditional moral values."

Friedrick Nietzsche sees the traditional morality by Jesus Christ, Schopenhauer and Darwin as useless but harmful. He calls ethics “slave-morality” a morality that enslaves man, and destroys him by destroying his best instincts (John, 2005:164). The Christian religion is opposed to all that is successful, opposes strength, power and to intelligent development. For Nietzsche, Christianity feels resentment.

“Against those that are gifted, learned, intellectually independent... it aims at destroying the strong, at breaking their spirit... and it knows how to poison the noblest instincts” (Will 1926:252).

Nietzsche takes the case of Blaise Pascal as an example. He maintains that Pascal was a great scientist, a genius whose mathematical ingenuity was destroyed by Christianity. Pascal abandoned mathematics and became preoccupied with the “native a value of Christianity and this was his ruin” (Omeregbe, 1993:202).

In his reaction to religion in the 19th century, Nietzsche maintains that “God is dead and we (you and I) have killed him” with our reason and with our rationalistic philosophies, sciences and our pretensions to objective truth. Religion, therefore, is dead because God is dead “With the death of God mankind is now free, for man has now been liberated from the slave-morality” through which God was destroying man. That means God was an enemy of human progress. He never wanted man to develop. The news of God’s death is therefore, “good news to all lovers of freedom”. In *joyful wisdom*, Nietzsche declares:

“infect, we philosophers and free spirits feel ourselves irradiated as by a new dawn by the report that the old God is dead, our hearts overflow with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment and expectation. At last, the horizon seems open once more”

Nietzsche states that God hates life; that is why Christianity teaches life-denying ethics. The very concept of God was invented as the opposite of the concept of life. Having killed God, Nietzsche enquires “is not the greatness of this death too great for us? Must we ourselves not become Gods (supermen) simply to seem worthy of it?”. In other words, we must become gods to deserve the greatness of killing God.

Not only was God killed, Nietzsche, concludes that when God died all the alleged absolutes of morality died with him, leaving the individuals free. Nietzsche predicts that a new episode in history of man would begin with an era that will be nihilistic so far as the old conventional values are concerned. The “death of God” marks a beginning of a new historical period and emergence of a “new” man, the superman. The fundamental motive of all life, in Nietzsche’s view, is not to adjust supinely or passively to the pressures and necessities of the environment. Rather the motive of all life, is found in nature, it is the will to power. Value and power are identical, and the best and the only ethical principle for man is self-aggrandizement.

With the existence of the superman and the destruction of traditional morality and values man cannot be free. For nothing can be free in such dangerous superstition. The doctrine of superman underscores Nietzsche's attempt at man's freedom. "Power", we are told, "corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Since the superman remains always beyond good and evil, it follows that "good and evil" (morality) will not be available to direct him.

Again, Friedrich Nietzsche, having killed God presents us with a superman (another God), the superman, whose concept is identical with God will return humanity to that same old status quo. For as long as there is a superman, whatever choice a man makes in the presence of a superman is made around goal that he (the superman) has set. Nietzsche's philosophy becomes senseless except for chaos, strife and messy disorder. Bertrand Russell, (1945:765) criticizes Nietzsche when he argues that:

"With the philosophies in objecting to submission to the supposed will of God, but he would substitute for it the will of earthy 'artist tyrants'".

Truly, Nietzsche cannot kill God and present us with another God (the superman). Otherwise, what is the sense in his conception that "submission is right, except for these supermen, and never submission to the Christian God"? (Bertrand Russell, 1945:765).

Nietzsche's ideas of transvaluation of values, the concept of the order of rank and the myth of the superman cannot promote individual freedom. Copleston (1965:420) observes that:

It is arguable, however, that what is really significant in what many call the non-academic Nietzsche is not his proposed antidotes to nihilism but rather his insistence and thought considered precisely as a dramatic expression of a lived spiritual crisis from which there is no issue in terms of his own philosophy.

The road to Nietzsche's superman lies through blood. He advocates violence, wars and the destruction of Christianity. Nietzsche demonstrates overt hatred for democracy; a system that is capable of promoting enlightened or moderate individual freedom. He maintains that the triumph of Christ was the beginning of democracy. Nietzsche calls democracy "this mania for counting noses". His perception of Christianity portrays him as a cantankerous cynic. He removes "God above" in order to place man or the superman there. His philosophy would have had a focus if man's ability and dormant potentialities were only given adequate expression under God. Nietzsche can be described as the patron philosopher who unwittingly advocates for a complete destruction by his presentation of the superman.

Conclusion

Nietzsche's philosophy has espoused a subjective relativism. Nietzsche failed to recognize that brute force is not the necessary means to authority but quite the contrary. Violence is used as a last resort where legitimacy of power is lacking. Authority and violence are contraries, and even

though violence can lead to power, but it can also lead to destruction of authority. This is what Nietzsche should note in his desire for power or brute force.

Nietzsche has grossly minimized the spiritual instinct in supposing that people would agree to have a religion without God. Above all, Nietzsche has forgotten that in “killing” God and “replacing” Him with another God (the superman); he is actually destroying the great nurse of life and the chief source of freedom, which would have to be the psychological basis of society. But with unrivaled eloquence, Nietzsche unthinkable cuts off the branch on which humanity sits. This shows that, freedom plays a very important role in life: For it is in the demonstration of freedom that life’s most important experiences are weighed and verdict given. Nietzsche is biased in his philosophical perception. His thesis lacks sustained philosophical and logical merit. Durant (1926:305) describes him as gifted only in the art of imaginative intensity of blood, a man who could not match words with action. This is because Nietzsche never witnessed actual brutality in any battlefield, as a nurse, the sight of blood alone made him ill. In 1900 when Friedrich Nietzsche died one daily published that “Nietzsche is dead but God is alive” (Okon John, 2000:99). So if Nietzsche died and God is still alive (among His believers) where lies Nietzsche’s philosophy?

It is pertinent to propose that Nietzsche began the building of his intellectual personality to complete the circle of nineteenth – century European skepticism and pessimism. In particular he wished to destroy the nineteenth – century illusion that Christian faith can be quietly dropped like the belief in fairies and everything else remain as before.

It is important to note that rather than being confused, Nietzsche is a philosopher that took a different path to create a name for him. Scholars should assess him from that perspective as his views still hold sway up till today.

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