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978-0-521-81659-5 - Friedrich Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo,
Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings

Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman

Excerpt

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The Anti-Christ
A Curse on Christianity

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PREFACE

This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them are even alive yet. Maybe they are the ones who will understand my *Zarathustra*. There are ears to hear some people – but how could I ever think there were ears to hear me? – My day won't come until the day after tomorrow. Some people are born posthumously.

The conditions required to understand me, and which in turn *require* me to be understood, – I know them only too well. When it comes to spiritual matters, you need to be honest to the point of hardness just to be able to tolerate my seriousness, my passion. You need to be used to living on mountains – to seeing the miserable, ephemeral little gossip of politics and national self-interest *beneath* you. You need to have become indifferent, you need never to ask whether truth does any good, whether it will be our undoing . . . The sort of predilection strength has for questions that require more courage than anyone possesses today; a courage for the *forbidden*; a predestination for the labyrinth. An experience from out of seven solitudes. New ears for new music. New eyes for the most distant things. A new conscience for truths that have kept silent until now. *And* the will to the economy of the great style: holding together its strength, its *enthusiasm* . . . Respect for yourself; love for yourself; an unconditional freedom over yourself . . .

Well then! These are my only readers, my true readers, my predestined readers: and who cares about the *rest of them*? The rest are just humanity. You need to be far above humanity in strength, in *elevation* of soul, – in contempt . . .

Friedrich Nietzsche

I

– Let us look ourselves in the face. We are Hyperboreans,¹ – we are well aware how far off the beaten track we live. ‘Neither by land nor by sea will you find the way to the Hyperboreans’: Pindar had already known this about us. Beyond the North, beyond ice, beyond death – *our* lives, *our* happiness . . . We have discovered happiness, we know the way, we have

¹ Hyperborea is a land of plenty in Greek mythology.

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found the way out of the labyrinth of whole millennia. Who *else* has found this? – Maybe the modern man? ‘I don’t know where I am; I am everything that doesn’t know where it is’ – sighs the modern man . . . *This* modernity made us ill – this indolent peace, this cowardly compromise, the whole virtuous filth of the modern yes and no. This tolerance and *largeur* of the heart that ‘forgives’ everything because it ‘understands’ everything is *sirocco* for us. Better to live on the ice than among modern virtues and other south winds! . . . We were brave enough, we did not spare ourselves or other people: but for a long time we did not know *what to do* with our courage. We became miserable, people called us fatalists. *Our* fate – that *was* abundance, tension, a damming up of forces. We thirsted for lightning and action, we stayed as far away as possible from the happiness of weaklings, from ‘resignation’ . . . There was a storm in our air, the nature that we *are* grew dark – *because we had no path*. Formula for our happiness: a yes, a no, a straight line, a *goal* . . .

2

What is good? – Everything that enhances people’s feeling of power, will to power, power itself.

What is bad? – Everything stemming from weakness.

What is happiness? – The feeling that power is *growing*, that some resistance has been overcome.

Not contentedness, but more power; *not* peace, but war; *not* virtue, but prowess (virtue in the style of the Renaissance, *virtù*, moraline-free virtue).

The weak and the failures should perish: first principle of *our* love of humanity. And they should be helped to do this.

What is more harmful than any vice? – Active pity for all failures and weakness – Christianity . . .

3

The problem I am posing is not what should replace humanity in the order of being (– the human is an *endpoint* –): but instead what type of human should be *bred*, should be *milled* as having greater value, as being more deserving of life, as being more certain of a future.

This more valuable type has appeared often enough already: but only as a stroke of luck, as an exception, never as *willed*. In fact *he* was precisely

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what people feared most; so far, he has been practically the *paradigm* of the terrible; – and out of terror, the opposite type was willed, bred, *achieved*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick animal: man, – the Christian . . .

4

Humanity does *not* represent a development for the better, does not represent something stronger or higher the way people these days think it does. ‘Progress’ is just a modern idea, which is to say a false idea. Today’s European is still worth considerably less than the Renaissance European; development is *not* linked to elevation, increase, or strengthening in any necessary way.

In another sense, there is a continuous series of individual successes in the most varied places on earth and from the most varied cultures; here, a *higher type* does in fact present itself, a type of overman in relation to humanity in general. Successes like this, real strokes of luck, were always possible and perhaps will always be possible. And whole generations, families, or peoples can sometimes constitute this sort of bull’s eye, *right on the mark*.

5

You should not beautify Christianity or try to dress it up: it has waged a *war to the death* against this *higher* type of person, it has banned all the basic instincts of this type, it has distilled ‘evil’ and ‘the Evil One’ out of these instincts – the strong human being as reprehensible, as ‘depraved’. Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, failed, it has made an ideal out of whatever *contradicts* the preservation instincts of a strong life; it has corrupted the reason of even the most spiritual natures by teaching people to see the highest spiritual values as sinful, as deceptive, as *temptations*. The most pitiful example – the corruption of Pascal, who believed that his reason was corrupted by original sin when the only thing corrupting it was Christianity itself! –

6

A painful, terrible spectacle is playing itself out in front of me: I lifted the curtain to reveal the *corruption* of humanity. This word, coming from my

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mouth, is absolved of one suspicion at least: the suspicion that it implies some moral indictment of human beings. It is – I want to keep stressing this – *moraline-free*: and this to the extent that I see the most corruption precisely where people have made the most concerted effort to achieve ‘virtue’, to attain ‘godliness’. I understand corruption (as I am sure you have guessed by now) in the sense of decadence: my claim is that all the values in which humanity has collected its highest desiderata are *values of decadence*.

I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* things that will harm it. A history of the ‘higher feelings’, the ‘ideals of humanity’ – and I might have to tell this history – would amount to an explanation of *why* human beings are so corrupt.

I consider life itself to be an instinct for growth, for endurance, for the accumulation of force, for *power*: when there is no will to power, there is decline. My claim is that *none* of humanity’s highest values have had this will, – that *nihilistic* values, values of decline, have taken control under the aegis of the holiest names.

7

Christianity is called the religion of *pity*. – Pity is the opposite of the tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings: pity has a depressive effect. You lose strength when you pity. And pity further intensifies and multiplies the loss of strength which in itself brings suffering to life.² Pity makes suffering into something infectious; sometimes it can even cause a total loss of life and of vital energy wildly disproportionate to the magnitude of the cause (– the case of the death of the Nazarene). That is the first point to be made; but there is a more significant one. The mortal dangers of pity will be much more apparent if you measure pity according to the value of the reactions it tends to produce. By and large, pity runs counter to the law of development, which is the law of *selection*. Pity preserves things that are ripe for decline, it defends things that have been disowned and condemned by life, and it gives a depressive and questionable character to life itself by keeping alive an abundance of failures of every type. People have dared to call pity a virtue

² Nietzsche is playing with the similarities between the terms ‘pity’ (*Mitleid*) and ‘suffering’ (*Leiden*).

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(– in every *noble* morality it is considered a weakness –); people have gone even further, making it into *the* virtue, the foundation and source of all virtues, – but of course you always have to keep in mind that this was the perspective of a nihilistic philosophy that inscribed the *negation of life* on its shield. Schopenhauer was right here: pity negates life, it makes life *worthy of negation*, – pity is the *practice* of nihilism. Once more: this depressive and contagious instinct runs counter to the instincts that preserve and enhance the value of life: by *multiplying* misery just as much as by *conserving* everything miserable, pity is one of the main tools used to increase decadence – pity wins people over to *nothingness!* . . . You do not say ‘nothingness’: instead you say ‘the beyond’; or ‘God’; or ‘the *true* life’; or nirvana, salvation, blessedness . . . This innocent rhetoric from the realm of religious-moral idiosyncrasy suddenly appears *much less innocent* when you see precisely *which* tendencies are wrapped up inside these sublime words: tendencies *hostile to life*. Schopenhauer was hostile to life: which is *why* he considered pity a virtue . . . Aristotle famously saw pity as a dangerous pathology that should be purged from the system every once in a while: he thought of tragedy as a purgative. In fact, the instincts of life should lead people to try to find a remedy for the sort of pathological and dangerous accumulation of pity you see in the case of Schopenhauer (and, unfortunately, in the case of our whole literary and artistic decadence from St Petersburg to Paris, from Tolstoy to Wagner), to prick it and make it *burst* . . . In the middle of our unhealthy modernity, nothing is less healthy than Christian pity. To be the doctor *here*, to be merciless *here*, to guide the blade *here* – this is for *us* to do, this is *our* love for humanity, this is what makes *us* philosophers, we Hyperboreans! – – –

8

We need to say *whom* we feel opposed to – theologians and everything with theologian blood in its veins – the whole of our philosophy . . . You need to have seen this disaster from up close – even better, you need to have experienced it, you need almost to have been destroyed by it – to see that it is no joke (– the *real* joke, as far as I am concerned, is when our esteemed natural scientists and physiologists claim to be ‘free thinkers’, – they do not have any passion for these things, they do not *suffer* from them³ –).

³ Nietzsche is playing with the similarities between the terms ‘suffering’ (*Leiden*) and ‘passion’ (*Leidenschaft*).

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The contamination extends much further than people think: I find the theologian-instinct of arrogance cropping up wherever people consider themselves ‘idealists’, – wherever people think that their pedigree gives them the right to contemplate Reality and gaze out into the distance . . . The idealist, like the priest, holds all the great concepts in his hand (– and not just his hand); he plays them with a sort of good-natured disdain for ‘understanding’, the ‘senses’, ‘honour’, ‘the good life’, ‘science’; he thinks that these sorts of things are *beneath* him, like so many pernicious, seductive forces over which ‘spirit’ hovers in its pure ‘for-itself’-ness: – as if humility, chastity, poverty (in a word: *holiness*) have not done life unspeakably more harm than any vices or horrors ever have . . . Pure spirit is a pure lie . . . As long as the priest is considered a *higher* type of person – this *professional* negater, slanderer, poisoner of life – there will not be an answer to the question: What *is* truth? Truth has already been turned on its head when someone who consciously champions nothingness and negation passes for the representative of ‘truth’ . . .

9

I wage war on this theologian instinct: I have found traces of it everywhere. Anyone with theologian blood in his veins will approach things with a warped and deceitful attitude. This gives rise to a pathos that calls itself *faith*: turning a blind eye to yourself for once and for all, so you do not have to stomach the sight of incurable mendacity. This universally faulty optic is made into a morality, a virtue, a holiness, seeing-*wrong* is given a *good* conscience, – *other* types of optic are not allowed to have value any more now that this one has been sanctified with names like ‘God’, ‘redemption’, and ‘eternity’. I have unearthed the theologian instinct everywhere: it is the most widespread and genuinely *subterranean* form of deceit on earth. Anything a theologian thinks is true *must* be false: this is practically a criterion of truth. His most basic instinct of self-preservation does not allow any scrap of reality to be honoured or even expressed. Wherever the influence of theologians is felt, *value judgments* are turned on their heads and the concepts of ‘true’ and ‘false’ are necessarily inverted: whatever hurts life the most is called ‘true’, and whatever improves, increases, affirms, justifies life or makes it triumph is called ‘false’ . . . When theologians use the ‘conscience’ of princes (*or* peoples –) to reach out for *power*, let us be

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very clear about *what* is really taking place: the will to an end, the *nihilistic* will willing power . . .

IO

Germans understand me immediately when I say that philosophy has been corrupted by theologian blood. The Protestant minister is the grandfather of German philosophy, Protestantism itself is its *peccatum originale*.⁴ Definition of Protestantism: the partial paralysis of Christianity – and of reason . . . You only need to say ‘Tübingen seminary’⁵ to understand just *what* German philosophy really is – an underhanded theology . . . The Swabians are the best liars in Germany, they lie with perfect innocence . . . Why did the world of German scholars, three-quarters of whom are pastors’ and teachers’ sons, go into such fits of delight at the appearance of *Kant* –, why were Germans so convinced (you can still find echoes of this conviction) that Kant marked a change for the *better*? The theologian instinct of the German scholar had guessed just *what* was possible again . . . A hidden path to the old ideal lay open; the concept of a ‘*true world*’, the concept of morality as the *essence* of the world (– the two most vicious errors in existence!) were once again (thanks to an exceedingly canny scepticism), if not provable, then at least no longer *refutable* . . . Reason, the *right* of reason, does not extent that far . . . Reality was made into ‘mere appearance’; a complete lie called ‘the world of being’ was made into a reality . . . Kant’s success is just a theologian success: Kant, like Luther, like Leibniz, was one more drag on an already precarious German sense of integrity – –

II

One more word against Kant as a *moralist*. A virtue needs to be our *own* invention, our *own* most personal need and self-defence: in any other sense, a virtue is just dangerous. Whatever is not a condition for life *harms* it: a virtue that comes exclusively from a feeling of respect for the concept of ‘virtue’, as Kant would have it, is harmful. ‘Virtue’, ‘duty’, ‘goodness in itself’, goodness that has been stamped with the character

⁴ Original sin.

⁵ The seminary where both Hegel and Schelling received their secondary-school education.

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of the impersonal and universally valid – these are fantasies and manifestations of decline, of the final exhaustion of life, of the Königsberg⁶ Chinesianity. The most basic laws of preservation and growth require the opposite: that everyone should invent his *own* virtues, his *own* categorical imperatives. A people is destroyed when it confuses its *own* duty with the concept of duty in general. Nothing ruins us more profoundly or inwardly than ‘impersonal’ duty, or any sacrifice in front of the Moloch of abstraction. – To think that people did not sense the *mortal danger* posed by Kant’s categorical imperative! . . . The theologian instinct was the only thing that came to its defence! – When the instinct of life compels us to act, pleasure proves that the act is *right*: and this nihilist with the intestines of a Christian dogmatist saw pleasure as an *objection* . . . What could be more destructive than working, thinking, feeling, without any inner need, any deeply personal choice, any *pleasure?* as an automaton of ‘duty’? It is almost the *recipe* for decadence, even for idiocy . . . Kant became an idiot. – And this was a contemporary of *Goethe!* This disaster of a spider passed for the *German* philosopher, – and still does! . . . I am careful not to say what I think about the Germans . . . Wasn’t it Kant who saw the French Revolution as the transition from the inorganic to the *organic* form of the state? Didn’t he ask himself whether there was an event that could be explained *only* by a moral predisposition in humanity, thus *proving* once and for all the ‘human tendency to goodness’? Kant’s answer: ‘this is the Revolution’. The instinct that is wrong about everything, anti-nature as instinct, German decadence as philosophy – *this is Kant!* –

12

I will make an exception for a couple of the sceptics, the decent types in the history of philosophy; but the rest of them have no conception of the basic demands of intellectual integrity. They all act like little females, these admiring fans, these prodigies, – they think that ‘beautiful feelings’ constitute an argument, that a ‘heaving bosom’ is God’s bellows, that conviction is a *criterion* of truth. In the end, Kant even tried, with ‘German’ innocence, to take this form of corruption, this lack of intellectual conscience, and render it scientific under the concept of ‘practical reason’: he

⁶ Kant lived in Königsberg.

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