

Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil: A Morality of Immoralism

Abstract

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) presents a radical and enigmatic approach to existentialism by over emphasizing the attributes of subjectivity of the individual over the group, community and God, especially the Christian God. This essays takes a critical appraisal of the major presuppositions of Nietzsche, especially as contained in his work *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) which is a major amalgam of Nietzsche's works on existentialism.

The essay concludes that notwithstanding the empowerment Nietzsche's gives to man through the Will to power and the concept Superman, his perspective on the absolute freedom and supremacy of man over human institutions which serve regulatory functions are counter-functional to social order as they obscure our thorough sense of morality.

Key words:

Nietzsche, Good and Evil, Will to Power Nihilism, Morality

Nietzsche'nin İyinin ve Kötünün Ötesinde Kavrayışı: Ahlaksızlığın Ahlaki

Özet

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) sınıfın, toplumun, Tanrı'nın, özellikle de Hıristiyan tanrısının karşısında bireyin öznel niteliklerine vurgu yaparak varoluşçuluğun radikal ve gizemli bir türünü ortaya koymuştur. Bu çalışma, Nietzsche'nin özellikle varoluşçuluk üzerine olan çalışmalarının en büyük sentezi olan *İyinin ve Kötünün Ötesinde* adlı eserinde yer alan temel kabullerine eleştirel bir gözle yaklaşmaktadır.

Çalışma, Nietzsche'nin üst insan ve güç istenci kavramlarıyla insana yetki vermesine rağmen, mutlak özgürlük ve düzenleyici işleve sahip olan kurumlar karşısında insanın üstünlüğü düşüncesinin, ahlakın tam anlamını belirsizleştirdiği için sosyal düzene karşı işlevde bulunduğu sonucuna ulaşmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Nietzsche, İyi ve Kötü, Güç İstenci, Nihilizm, Ahlak.

* Olatunji A. Oyeshile is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan. He had served as Head of the Department between 2008 and 2010. He specialises in African Philosophy, Metaphysics and Existentialism. He has published in *Hekmat va Falsafeh (Wisdom and Philosophy)* (Iran), *International Journal of Applied Philosophy (USA)*, *Concordia: International Journal of Philosophy (Aachen, Germany)* and *Philosophy, Culture and Traditions (Canada)*.

Introduction

This essay is focused on the critical examination of Friedrich Nietzsche's moral Philosophy, especially as contained in his work, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886).

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), a German philosopher and poet is one of the most original and influential figures in modern philosophy. *Thus spake Zarathustra* (1883) contains the first comprehensive statements of Nietzsche's mature philosophy. He referred to it as the most profound book of world literature. *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), and *Towards a Genealogy of morals* (1887) are major commentaries on *Thus spake Zarathustra*. (Kaufmann, 1967: 504-509).

The book *Beyond Good and Evil*, can be seen as the amalgam of major thoughts of Nietzsche. In it we have the central ideas of his books, *The will to Power*, *Thus spake Zarathustra*, *Towards The Genealogy of morals* and so forth. All of Nietzsche's works were influenced by his practical life. Hence, it is germane to have a cursory look at his biography for a proper appreciation of his thoughts.

Nietzsche's life can be divided into three main periods viz: years of preparation, years of production and years of insanity. (Castell, 1976:235). Having been born into a puritanical family, his parents sent him to a denominational school to prepare him for a clergy job. However, in the university he revolted against his parents' wish to become a clergy man. He was greatly influenced by Erwin Rhode, a Greek historian, through whom he became acquainted with the problems and perspectives of cultural history of mankind.

It has been argued that Nietzsche's life revealed a kind of ruin. First his spiritual development could not reach fruition through his work. He had a problematic existence. His friendships led to the experience of loneliness that is without parallel and his sickness terminated his life in a ruinous way. As the sickness gradually developed, it became so much a part of him that one can scarcely imagine him as living and working without it. There were also signs of extra ordinary things found in him, these include his early call to a professorship and his difficulties with publishers compounded to the point of frustration. The negations were, in fact, too many for him. (Jaspers, 1965:27).

Some have even argued that Nietzsche became mad towards the end of his life. However, it should be noted that the ingenuity with which Nietzsche wrote did suggest that his madness is not madness in the ordinary sense in which we understand it. Nietzsche had a contempt for the Jews. In fact, Nietzsche's sister had married Bernhard Forster one of the leaders of the German anti-Semitic movement in 1885. Nietzsche was opposed to idealism and philosophers like G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell followed his footsteps by trying to emancipate philosophy from the influence of leading idealists like Hegel, Bradley and McTaggart.

Having revolted against the puritanical background he sought to embrace atheism and concludes that 'God is dead' and from this he strictures Christian morality or what he refers to as the herd morality. The influence of Erwin Rhode (the Greek historian) provided Nietzsche with the tool of engaging in archeological excavation of the European historical values in particular and that of the mankind as a whole which he saw as something which has been dominated by shift in standard from time to time.

Hence, he concludes that there was nothing immutable in moral values except its changing nature. Subsequently, he believes that the values of Europe in his days had outlived their usefulness because they do not promote the 'will to power' (his indictment of slave morality) in his distinction between slave morality and master morality. Therefore, he recommends *Nihilism* as the only way through which new values (especially the values that could promote the will to power can be attained). He holds that we must first destroy all existing values and create new ones which will ultimately result in the transvaluation of values.

From the above one can attempt to draw a sequence of Nietzsche's thought as contained in *Beyond Good and Evil* in the following ways: Nietzsche's upbringing and the effects of his life on his thought; his rejection of puritanical training that led him to postulate the death of God and his rejection of Christian morality; his views concerning the European civilization and cultural history of mankind; his distinction between master morality and slave morality; the will to power, the structure of woman emancipation, the role of philosophers and his postulation nihilism as the only avenue through which we can have our so called eternal values transvalued.

Nietzsche's work would be looked at from the above perspectives and it will end with a critical appraisal of his thought which has to do with the immoralism of his morality.

The Death of God and the Rejection of Christian Morality

Nietzsche used the presumption of the death of God to the effect that men must learn to re-examine their human situation since it is no longer tenable to believe in the existence of God. One of his concerns was how to live successfully as an atheist. Nietzsche, like many existentialist philosophers, concerns himself passionately with the human situation and he rejects as a delusion all abstract, objective, systematic philosophy. This is because he thinks that life is more than logic. (Passmore, 1957:470). The death of the Christian God leaves the European man without a universal goal. The aim is to stimulate the noble and free spirits to break the shackles of herd morality and determine their own values.

Nietzsche unleashes a great attack on Christianity. He reasons in the following way: From the start, the Christian faith is a sacrifice, a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self confidence of the spirit, at the same time an enslavement, self mockery and self-mutilation. Nietzsche believes that the day will come when the most solemn concepts which have caused the most frights and suffering, that is, the concepts of God and sin, will seem no more important to us than a child's toy. (Nietzsche, 1966:60-69).

Nietzsche opines that whoever unmasks Christian morality unmasks the worthlessness of values in which man believes. He sees in them only the most fatal kind of abortion, fatal because they fascinate. According to Nietzsche, the notion of God was invented as a counter notion to life. The notion of a beyond was invented to depreciate the only world that exists. The notion of immortal soul was invented to despise the body. The notion of sin was invented to mislead our instincts and finally the notion of a good man has come to mean everything that was weak, ill, misshapen, everything which

should be obliterated. This morality, he believes, thwarts the law of selection, all in the name of morality (Castell, 1976:250). Nietzsche means the law of natural selection which emphasizes the survival of the fittest.

Nietzsche equates the herd morality with priestly morality or morality of timidity. Morality in Europe, Nietzsche contends, is herd animal morality merely a one type of human morality beside which, before which and after which many other types, above all higher moralities, are or ought to be possible. But this morality resists such possibility, such an ought with all its power by claiming that 'I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality'. (Nietzsche, 1966: 115). And through the backing of religion, this morality manifests itself in social ad political spheres. Nietzsche rejects Christian religion because of its proclamation of man's equality before God as well as for the self-humiliation of man, killing in him the will to power. To Nietzsche, the equality of men blurs human capability which distinguishes one man from the other.

European Culture, Cultural History of Mankind and The Genealogy of Morals

Nietzsche can be described as a cultural historian. His investigations into mankind's cultural history, understanding by the term culture such things as art, religion, science, morality, government and so forth, impressed him with the enormous diversity that has obtained in these things at different times and places. He believes that cultural values are local and transitory affairs. This he shows through the notion of relativity of cultural values. Nietzsche believes that values are relative to time and place, relative to the needs peculiar to the people among whom they flourish. Put differently, there is nothing immutable about all values (Castell, 1976:236)

According to Nietzsche, the cultural history of mankind shows that Aristocratic qualities flourish in the early stages of culture and disappear gradually as that culture becomes old. In Homer's time, the Greeks were 'heroes', by the time of Pericles and the Spartan war, they had become mere sophists and philosophers and scientists. In early Roman history there were great kings who conquered the ancient world, but centuries later in the days of imperial decline, this nation of strong, silent men had become helpless victims of their own weakening civilization and the new races of barbarians as yet untouched by such things. These new comers swept Europe, and another passage in cultural history was begun, but with the same result. By the nineteenth century these Germanic peoples who had made over the civilization of ancient Rome had become democratic, even socialistic; they cultivated science, art, morality or (in some instances) decadent form of immorality, wealth, ease, the emancipation of women, optimism, pessimism, philosophy and so forth.(Castell, 1976:236).

In Nietzsche's opinion, to see through modern degeneration was the dawn of the day. To realize that virtues belong in context of fresh and vigorous young cultures was the first step in joyful wisdom.

Nietzsche repudiates the whole notion of trying to formulate any principle of morality in the sense that moralists have traditionally sought to do this. He insists that there is no such thing as morality having one fundamental principle running through it

and that, on the contrary, there have been and are many moralities, and any attempt to think philosophically about morality must begin by recognizing its diversity and the fact of its having had a history like any other phase of human culture. Nietzsche propounds then a tentative natural history or genealogy of morals. From this he undertakes to draw some far-reaching conclusions. This he called his immoralism, or transvaluation of values. (Castell, 1976:237-238).

Nietzsche believes that the European culture is moving for sometime now, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade, as toward a catastrophe. He opines that the European culture can no longer reflect. (Kaufmann, 1956:109-110). He believes that the state that is actually encountered in Europe today can be called moral hypocrisy of those commanding. He says that they know no other way to protect themselves against their bad conscience than to pose as the executors of more ancient of higher commands (of ancestors, the constitution, or right, the law, or even of God). They sometimes borrow herd maxims such as 'first servants of their people or instruments of common weal'. The high and independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, even a powerful reason are experienced as dangers, everything that elevates the individual above the herd and intimidates the neighbour is henceforth called evil. Only the conforming and submissive mentality is cherished. (Nietzsche, 1966:111-114).

Master Morality and Slave Morality

One fundamental distinction arising out of Nietzsche's account of the natural history of morals and forming the foundation of his immoralism, is that between master morality and slave morality. Nietzsche believes that it is the Aristocratic or ruling class that formulates the principle of morality at any given period in a society.

The master morality is especially foreign and irritating to present day taste. It is disliked and distrusted for the sternness of its principle that one has duties only to one's equals and that one may act toward persons of a lower rank, toward all that is foreign, just as one pleases and that its values are beyond good and evil (Castell, 1976:247).

Nietzsche argues that in all higher and more mixed cultures, there appear attempts at mediation between the master morality and slave morality. The moral discrimination of values has originated either among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight, or among the ruled, the slaves and dependents of every degree. Here is a place for the origin of that famous opposition of 'good and evil'. Into evil one's feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terrible, a certain terrible, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According to slave morality, those who are evil thus inspire fear, and according to master morality, it is precisely those who are good that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the bad are felt to be contemptible (Nietzsche, 1966:204-207).

The Will to Power

Nietzsche believes that philosophers have been previously concerned with the question of truth, an attempt which he depicts as futile. For Nietzsche, to recognize

untruth as a condition of life certainly means resisting accustomed value feelings in a dangerous way and a philosophy that risks this would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil. He stresses further that philosophy is a tyrannical drive and the most spiritual will to power. (Nietzsche, 1966:9-16).

To Nietzsche an unfree will amounts to a misuse of cause and effect. One should not wrongly reify cause and effect, as the natural scientists do. On the other hand, one should use cause and effect only as pure concepts, that is, as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation and communication, and not for explanation. In the "in itself", there is nothing of causal connections, of necessity, or of psychological non-freedom, there the effect does not follow the cause. Nietzsche says there is no rule of law. That cause, effect and so on are our own conjecture. The unfree will, he believes, is a mythology and that in real life it is only a matter of strong and weak wills. (Nietzsche, 1966:29).

Consequently, it is a moral prejudice to claim that truth is more than appearance and that the world properly defined according to its intelligible nature is nothing but the will to power. Power is seen by Nietzsche as the only criterion for evaluating the significance of any phenomena.

On Women Emancipation

Nietzsche criticizes women emancipation and sees it as a negation of their traditional roles. He believes through emancipation, women lose their modest. While she thus appropriates new rights, aspires to be master, and inscribes the progress of woman on her flags and banners, the very opposite realizes itself with terrible obviousness, the woman retrogrades. (Castell, 1976:248).

On The Role of Philosophers

Nietzsche says of the philosopher that he had wanted to supply a rational foundation for morality and he suffers from the illusion that he has done so. He advises philosophers to abandon this attempt because it is a misguided one since no rational foundation can be supplied for morality.

Nietzsche believes that the problem confronting mankind can be solved through the new philosophers, in the spirits strong and original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert eternal values. These men, to him, are men of the future. Their task would consist in teaching man the future of man as his will, as dependent on human will and to put an end to the nonsense called history (Nietzsche, 1966:117).

According to Nietzsche, it seems that the philosopher, being of necessity a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, has always found himself, and had to find himself, in contradiction to his today, for his enemy was ever the ideal of today. By applying the knife vivisectionally to the chest of the very virtues of their time, they are seen to have betrayed what was their own secret to know of a new greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement (Nietzsche, 1966:137).

To be noble, Nietzsche believes, one must transcend the herd morality in Europe of his time and embrace master fullness, higher responsibility, creative power, independence by wanting to be by one's self. To Nietzsche one cannot learn what a philosopher is because it cannot be taught, one can only know it from experience.

Nietzsche asserts towards the conclusion of *Beyond Good and Evil* that a philosopher is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes and dreams extra-ordinary things. He is always struck by his own thoughts as from outside, as from above and below, as by his type of experiences and lightning bolts. He depicts the philosopher as a fatal human being pregnant with storms of lightning, around whom there are constant rumblings and growlings, crevices and uncanny doings (Nietzsche, 1966:230).

Nietzsche as a Nihilist

Nihilism is the absolute denial of universal or eternal standard of values in human endeavours. Nietzsche advocates nihilism as a necessary step because the values of the Europe of his days are no longer tenable for they serve as obstacle to the free spirit. And since these values (of Europe) have outlived their usefulness, the logical conclusion is that everything is reduced to scratch or nothingness, from here one can start to rebuild new values.

Nietzsche believes that idealism is alien to him. For instance, where others see ideal things, Nietzsche sees human things. To Nietzsche, anybody who would be a creator must first be destroyer and break values into pieces. Nietzsche sees himself as the most terrible man that has ever existed, while at the same time the most beneficent. He says that he knows the joy of annihilation as the first immoralist and an essential destroyer. However, he believes that he is the voice of truth and his truth is terrible, for hitherto lies have been called truth. The transvaluation of all values is Nietzsche's formula for mankind's act of highest self recognition. (Castell, 1976:251-252).

One can summarise the central ideas of Nietzsche's book *Beyond Good and Evil* in the following ways: Nietzsche is of the view that morality is relative to time and culture and that we do not have immutable moral axioms. He believes that the herd morality or slave morality started with the Jew and was the baby of Christianity. Of all the moral or ethical theories, he gives passmark to utilitarianism. He agrees with the utilitarians that men will perform acts that bring more pleasure than pains to them.

He repudiates the emancipation of women in the sense that it makes them lose all that is womanly in them. He attacks Christian morality on the ground that it is one of the main drags on higher culture. The Christian preaches the existence of a beyond and sets a life over there over and against the life here. He believes that Christians morality serves as an obstacle in the way of creating free and noble spirits. It only embraces virtues which are useful to the hand such as kindness, love and so forth. The myth of the death of God, is therefore used by Nietzsche, to break the solidarity towards the Christian morality.

Nietzsche also makes a very important distinction between master morality and slave morality. The master morality is replete with such things as love of power, domination and so forth, while the slave morality is dominated by fear of the masters. The slaves repudiate the values of their rulers and masters.

In spite of the fact that Nietzsche says that the values of both master morality and slave morality are beyond good and evil, for what is good and evil are relative and depend on which side of the divide one is. He nevertheless subscribes to master morality. He believes that everyman should fulfill his will to power. In this regard he calls on the free spirits, the higher men, the noble men to emancipate themselves from the bondage which prevents them from their will to power. This they must do by abandoning and destroying the herd morality and creating their own values. Nietzsche can be seen to be advocating nihilism. Nietzsche believes that competition is an inherent part of human existence and as such the very essence of the will to power. To truly exercise the will to power, one must be ready to transvalue all existing values in the sense that is beyond good and evil.

Difficulties and Critique of Nietzsche's Thought

Karl Jasper, another existentialist, wrote on Nietzsche and he was able to point out certain difficulties in Nietzsche's work that may lead to a misunderstanding of his works. Jasper believes that all statements of Nietzsche seem to be annulled by other statements. Self-contradiction is the fundamental ingredient in Nietzsche's thought. This is because for nearly every single of Nietzsche's judgement, one can also find an opposite. He gives the impression of having two opinions about everything. Consequently, it is possible to quote Nietzsche in support of anything one happens to have in mind. Also there are endless repetitions in Nietzsche's works. Jaspers also believes that one can only have a complete view of Nietzsche's works by constant questioning which subsequently provides a whole of Nietzsche's thought. The whole is not concept, a world view or a system, it is rather the passion of the quest for being, together with its constant overcoming through relentless criticism as it rises to the level of genuine truth (Jaspers, 1965:10).

It is believed that one can benefit from Nietzsche's thought which has both its positive and negative aspects if one can respond in kind to his thoughts. But it will not serve any purpose to those who want to see Nietzsche's thought as something which ought to be valid for all times.

Nietzsche, in contrast into the greatest philosophers of the past, characteristically appears more truly himself in his negations than in his affirmations. The ultimate goal towards which the genuine, original driving force proceeds is not clear, though this will become clear to a serious reader. Nietzsche destroys confining horizons and offers unlimited space. He teaches us to raise critical questions, but his criticism unlike that of Kant, does not set bounds to our inquiry, he presents a plethora of possibilities and awakens the power that animate the innermost selves (Jaspers, 1965:123).

In order to philosophize with Nietzsche, one must constantly take up issue with him. In the fire of his thought, one's own existence can become purified to the point of

awareness of genuine self-being when tested by the boundless honesty and dangers of Nietzsche's critical questioning. Such self being can only be experienced as something that passes, not into existence, and not into objectivity and subjectivity of world-being, but rather into transcendence. (Jaspers, 1965:458).

An uncritical acceptance of Nietzsche's thought in *Beyond Good and Evil* is likely to lead to a lot of unsavory consequences. For instance, Nietzsche encourages a dogmatic lust for power and this means that any act that one perpetrates to get to power is justified, no matter at whose detriments the act is. It will be a philosophy of the 'end justifies the means' which is a dangerous position. Also, Nietzsche's rejection of the so-called slave morality or herd morality tends to deny that true love exists and that we cannot be of any good use to one another. This is not tenable. It is the case that in any human society, all men are not equal and therefore some need to be protected by the others.

In fact, if everybody embraces the doctrines of the will to power and the weaker ones are eliminated (which is not possible anyway) subsequently, the so called masters will start to prey on one another and it would continue in a infinite regress. Hence, in human society, the jungle justice of the survival of the fittest will operate. But from our experience of human development, human society cannot afford to retrograde to that level any longer. The defeat of Hitler by the allied forces during the second world war is a pointer to this fact.

Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity and Christian God has little or no contribution to his ethical theory. This is because Christian morality is exclusively applicable to those who embrace Christianity. And we live in such a world where people have their beliefs anchored on a lot of things. Besides, the concept of God seems to be a rallying point for the theists (believers in God) and this makes it possible for them to show unity of purpose in their actions such a kindness and love towards the needy.

The plausibility of Nietzsche's thought lies in the fact that morality as such is not a static phenomenon and that human society is always changing and progressing. Hence, there is need for us to revalue our values from time to time, which Nietzsche calls 'transvaluation of values'.

It should be noted that the difficulties and constraints which man encounters in society may make Nietzsche's autonomy of man a spurious issue. However, it has been argued that man is still autonomous inspite of all these constraints. Human beings, according to this view, may be said to be autonomous although not in the sense that they consciously work out their life aspirations which they pursue with a continuous flow of reflection. Most of our aspirations are strongly entrenched in society's established institutions and the need does not always arise for us as individuals to create new ones. Also the alternative means for achieving such goals are also embodied in our institutions. It seems therefore that both nature and culture have provided, although in raw form, what we as individual have to confront. All the same, man's autonomy lies in his freedom and ability to choose between available alternatives. To that extent, man is a rational being (Sogolo, 1987:50).

The importance of the line of argument on the autonomy of the individual is that the individual has freedom to choose from alternative courses of actions in society like Nietzsche preaches. However, it is not possible to have a radical departure from the norms of the society as Nietzsche wants us to do. In fact, we have internalized certain moral precepts unconsciously. Hence, the influence of society or nature on the individual is inescapable consequently, the kind of immoralism which Nietzsche wants us to embrace is impossible. Man can still pursue his goals and actions as he wants to his advantage and utility without a radical opposition to the norms of society. In fact, for man to survive in this thermonuclear age, there is need for transvaluation of values in line with Nietzsche's advice but this should be within the context of the society in which one lives.

Conclusion

One can see that Nietzsche's philosophy was highly influenced by the developments in his life and these have been responsible for his thorough-going, passion-soaked philosophy. However, the life we live in is such that reason and passion play complementary roles. Hence, it is difficult to subscribe to all of Nietzsche's thought in the present day world. On the other hand, Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, shows to us the independence of the individual spirit: the individual is exposed to new options, problems and relationships. It also affords one the opportunity of appreciating the dynamic nature of human cultural values.

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