Philosophy And Life Of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche Essay, Research Paper

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Nietzsche was born in Rocken (Saxony), Germany, on October 15, 1844. At age four, he lost his father, a Lutheran minister. Nietzsche spent his childhood in Naumburg surrounded by five females: a sister, mother, paternal grandmother, and two maiden aunts. After attending the prestigious boarding school at Pforta ,Nietzsche studied classical philology at Bonn and Liepzig. In May 1869, at the age of 24, the brilliant scholar was awarded his doctorate without thesis or examination so that he could accept a professorship at the University of Basel, Switzerland. This was in part due to a recommendation from Friedrich Ritschl, a professor at Liepzig.

“However many young talents I have seen develop under my eyes for thirty-nine years now, never yet have I known a young man, or tried to help one along in my fields as best I could, who is mature as early and as young as this Nietzsche. His museum articles he wrote in the second and third year of his triennium. He is the first from whom I have ever accepted any contribution at all the while he was still a student. If-God -Grant he lives long enough, I prophesy that he will one day stand in the front rank of German Philology. He is now twenty-four years old: strong, vigorous, healthy, courageous physically and morally, so constituted as to impress those of a similar nature. On top of that, he possesses the enviable gift of presenting ideas, talking freely, as calmly as he speaks skillfully and clearly. He is the idol and, without wishing it, the leader of the whole younger generation of philologists here in Liepzig who-and they are rather numerous-cannot wait to hear him lecture. You will say, I describe phenomenon. Well, that is just what he is-and at the same time pleasant and modest. Also a gifted musician, which is irrelevant here.”(The Portable Nietzsche,7)

As a student, Nietzsche had been especially influenced by Friedrich A. Lange’s The History of materialism and Arthur Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Representation and Richard Wagner’s music.Although Later Nietzsche came to reject pessimism, dualism, idealism, and materialism as well as racism, anarchism, spiritualism, and mysticism: moeover Nietzsche also came to reject the ideas, ideologies and beliefs of some of the most influential thinkers in the history of western thought: Plato, Aristotle, St. Paul, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibiniz, Kanlt, Hegel and even Marx, (A Critical Life, 14).

After ten years a t Basel, Nietzsche resigned from the university due to shattered health and then spent the following decade wandering alone through Italy and Switzerland. Despite his inadequate pension and chronic illness along with poor eyesight and chronic depression, the always suffering and utterly detached thinker was able to write ten ingenious books filled with new insights.

Essentially a loner , Nietzsche spent his mature years reflecting upon our species within a universe utterly indifferent to the origin, existence, and destiny of human kind. For him the cosmos have no divine purpose or goal.

Nietzsche’s intellectual development passed through three major stages: Original insights into Greek culture and a love for music ( operas of Richard Wagner) through a brutal criticism of western values (particularly democracy, socialism, communism, nationalism, utilitarianism, and Christianity) to the presentation of his distinctive philosophy of overcoming.

Nietzsche’s own counter-culture interpretation of classical Greek culture made a crucial distinction between the contrasting but mixed rational and irrational components involved in birth and death of ancient tragedy. In fact, Nietzsche saw Wagner’s early music as a revival of the old Greek tragedies, reenacted in modern music dramas.

Disenchanted by Wagner’s strict nationalism, stifling egoism and his religiously oppressive theatric Ring Des Nibulungen, Nietzsche turned away from the composer. Nietzsche ended their complex friendship in May of 1878. Freing the solitary Nietzsche to expand his creative theories.

Nietzsche rejected the theory of absolute truth and fixed values, preferring to look at the world within his own framework, which acknowledges that a multiplicity of perspectivism, suggesting that a multiplicity of ways of viewing reality are necessary. For example, Nietzsche saw the evolution of morality advancing from the premoral ape, through the moral human being with its mask of culture, to the ultra-moral overman yet to come.

Nietzsche held that Christianity is responsible for the entrenched bad conscience in the decadent European society and culture. Since our species is the only evaluating animal, Nietzsche called for a rigorous reevaluation of all values. He investigated fear, guilt, pity, friendship, resentment, suffering, and compassion. Nietzsche said that our species must grow by overcoming the struggles and sufferings within human exisitence. His own catigorial imperative beyond good and evil is a duty to eternal reoccurrence: So act that you will be able to act in just that manner an infinite number of times. In short his theory maintains that once is forever! One faces the supreme to make a decision for all eternity; a decision that has already been made an infinite number of times, but is still unknown to most of human kind.

Nietzsche is best remembered for his bold statement that “God is Dead!” He did not mean that, in terms of religious metaphysics, the personal God of the Judeo-Christian tradition had once existed but is know no longer an extant being. On the contrary, as the father of atheistic existentialism, Nietzsche maintained that this passed-on God had never existed, except maybe as merely an idea in the mind. And this idea of a personal God is no longer meaningful to human beings because they now are becoming aware of the fact that this belief is only the product of their own needs and desires. Therefore this self serving belief does not concern anything or anyone still existing in reality.

Nietzsche encouraged all experience, advocating total affirmation of life. To avoid nihilism, of which Nietzsche has been accused, Nietzsche developed his own conceptual framework of penetrating ideas and speculations: the master and slave moralities, The infamous will-to-power, the future overman as creative intellect beyond good and evil, and the awesome cosmic doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same events.

In modern civilization, Nietzsche distinguishes between the slave morality of the masses with their deecaying values and the master morality of those exceptional individuals of superior intellect who achieve self-overcoming and thereby create their own values “beyond Good and Evil” in society, that is not to say that they are beyond good and bad conduct. For Nietzsche, moral progress in humankind passes through three stages of development: from the lower man as a passive camel of burden, through the higher man as an active lion of wisdom, to the future overman as a reflective and receptive child of creativity in science, philosophy, and the arts. However, since Nietzsche did not show compassion for society or side with democracy, he was not a secular humanist. Nevertheless, his atheism did pave the way for the not sacred humanist movement.

For Nietzsche, everything is the manifestation of the will to power: reality is a creative becoming , and will is the essence of all things. In the struggle of life from worm through ape to human being, this cosmic order Nietzsche proposes will overcome all of its hindering obstacles. Surviving in order to develop greater independence for its own creativity.

The Nietzschian (for lack of a better word) world view asserts that all living creatures strive to enhance themselves through the will-to-power rather than merely merely continue to reproduce the slave and master moralities Nietzsche proposes that the human race in an effort to overcome its own hindering obstacles will develop overman, to preserve their kind in the struggle for existence. By stating this Nietzsche proposes that this overman will rise above the populace both mentally and physically, becoming noble beings, far greater than both man and ape. In short, the Darwinian struggle for power, especially since quantity has prove its self to be more powerful than quality.

If a cosmic observer stationed on the moon with a high-powered telescope could view the past organic history of our earth over the past few billion years, but watch it played out like a time-lapse film, then he would witness creative bursts of millions of life forms from simple plants and invertebrates to complex plants and vertebrates, to the recent appearance of our own creature. Nietzsche held that these surges and creative bursts in evolution are a direct result of an evolutionary will-to-power. Nietzsche proposes the will-to-power as a natural force driving life forward into ever-new emerging areas. Although human kind appears to be the latest result of this evolutionary will-to-power, but says Nietzsche human kind will be surpassed by the future overman as natures ultimate evolutionary goal.

Nietzsche’s projected book, that was extended to be titled, The Will To Power, was never finished before his mental breakdown . The only edition of The Will-To-Power that has been published is actually a compilation of Nietzsche’s extensive notes on the matter along with the authors fillers and opinions.

In fact it was the naturalist Charles Darwin who awoke Nietzsche from his dogmatic slumber. Nietzsche claimed that Darwinian evolution is “true but deadly,” especially in its far-reaching metaphysical implications(A Critical Life). Nietzsche held that sea animals had evolved into land animals and that apes had evolved into human beings. Speculating beyond Darwin Nietzsche saw the overman human gap as greater than that of the human ape gap or land sea animal gap. Like I mentioned before the German thinker thought that quality is usually endangered by quantity; moreover, excellent learning rate on various issues from moral corruption and catastrophe in the exceptional individuals rather than the slow learning by the populace or social unit, including both the slave and master moralities.

Nietzsche also wrote about the becoming of life as a part of the ongoing flux of reality. Nietzsche wrote further to explain that the strong individual or overman would conquer over the weak populace or the slave and master moralities. Nietzsche distinguished frequently between the one and the many, particularly in terms of survival and values. Nietzsche only celebrated the one as creative, courageous, and heroic overman: stating that the goal of our species cannot lie in the end of our species as a whole because we are not the highest evolution in the human cycle. Human kind is seen as being but an animal, a transition between t he past inferior ape to the future superior overman. Nietzsche proposed that what does not kill one only serves to make one stronger, thereby revolutionizing your own being.

Although Nietzsche consistently emphasized the conflict in life, he did not see selection working in favor of the species, eg, the last man on earth according to Nietzsche will be inferior to even modern man, just as the organized instincts of a herd are inferior to the exceptional talents of one individual. Sheer numbers and and mere survivals are intensely disliked in Nietzsche’s value of life on earth, since the highest specimens must struggle against the lower mass or in his model the overman will have to struggle against the populace. In this Nietzsche clearly takes on a form of Social Darwinism: nevertheless Nietzsche never advocating that the overman directly harm or enslave the underlings.

Yet, despite his not advocating harm to the underlings Nietzsche was nonetheless used as a justification for Adolf Hitler’s enslavement of millions of Jews during the holocaust. Where Adolf Hitler stated that the Aryan nation (people of direct German descent) where in fact the described overman and therefore had the evolutionary right to suppress what was evolutionary infererior.

Nietzsche did not maintain that the human race would improve through biological evolution but, rather he thought that human kind would evolve into a despicable race of last men. Of course there would be a sharp difference between the pathetic last men and the intellectual overman.

In early August of 1881, near Sils-Marai, while walking alone through he wooded Swiss Alps of Upper Engadine” 6000 feet beyond man and time” along the lake of Silvaplana, the restless Nietzsche claimed to have experienced a new vision far superior to that of all other thinkers. This remarkable event took place on a mountain pass when the solitary wanderer, deep in thought, came upon a powerful pyramidal rock not far form Surlei. An eternal recurrence of the same events as a joyful interpretation of ultimate reality. In fact, he was euphoric over this new paradigm.

( The Portable Nietzsche,234)

Nietzsche’s metaphysics as exemplified in his argument for the eternal recurrence is grounded in several basic and interconnected propositions.

1) That the total sum of energy is finite;

2) All energy is conserved: (neither created nor destroyed)

3) The number of energy states is finite

4) Space is finite, but time is infinite

5) All energy has infinite duration

6) Change is eternal: (There never has been or will be a state of maximum disorder, or equilibrium); and the principle of sufficient reason is invoked

(A Critical Life, 356)

In a cosmic cycle the number of states of energy is finite, and a sequence of all such states represents a limited series of events. That is, there is a limit to the number of possible states of the whole universe. If the number of distinct irreducible events is finite in an eternal universe, then a series of absolutely and completely identical to that which now exists must be reproduced at some future Time. Therefore, what is has also been before and will be again and again. The entire series is repeated over and over in this roulette game of existence and evolution. Each full turn of this roulette wheel is a circular movement of identical objects, events, and even relationships.

Nietzsche regarded his idea of this eternal return as the most scientific of hypothesis and, in fact tried through chemistry and mathematics to develop a formula that would firmly substantiate his theory. He even referred to the eternal recurrence as the mightiest of thoughts and the highest formula of the supreme Dionysian affirmation of life, that can possibly be reached. It justifies all human life (even Nietzsch’s tragic life) and in particular, gave philosophical support to his other two interdependent and relatively compatible ideas of the-will-power and the coming of the overman. Neither time now the world has had a beginning or an end, rather it has just continued to spin: backwards and forwards, change and reality are both eternal. Nietzsche also stated that time was an eternal knot, reality is an endless cycle, and the will-to-power is a creative force of energy without beginning or end. This eternal recurrence is how the cosmos work.

Nietzsche’s model somewhat resembles the movie 2001: a space odyssey which begins with the ape goes through the human and concludes upon the birth of the star child. Nietzsche states that the future overman is aware of this eternal recurrence with its inescapable reach and he accepts this unavoidable predicament. Doing so gladly the overman realizes that for him to exist again everything else must exist as it does know.

Nietzsche had planned to write a systematic and definitive volume to be entitled The Eternal Recurrence a book that Nietzsche had planned to devote solely to his theory of eternal recurrence.

Disaster finally struck Nietzsche in Turin on January 3, 1889. Sobbing he collapsed in the street of Piazza Carlo Alberta after having throwing himself in front of a horse that was being abused. Nietzsche had gone incurably mad. Although committed to the asylum in Jen, he was soon released under the protection of his mother who died seven years later. During the last eleven years of his life Nietzsche was both oblivious to his now thriving fame and deteriorating health. He would often stare into nothing, his wonderful mind lost to insanity.

Nietzsche died in Weimar on August 25,1900 and with pure appropriateness, was buried in the cemetery at Rocken in the Prussian province of Saxony, where Nietzsche was born Although Nietzsche was virtually unknown at the time of his death for both his genius and his wonderful books and theories , within a few years his fame spread around the world.