

The Nietzschean Ideal

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A natural hierarchy exists at all levels of existence: within a species, within a race, within a nation, within a town, within a family and within an individual. These hierarchies stem from the inequality which is intrinsic to life itself: there are superior and inferior entities by the very virtue of natural selection, which is almost a tautology in its self-evidence. ‘Superior’ and ‘inferior’ here need not hold any connotations beyond their objective meaning: they may be seen simply as statements of fact. What sane man would place da Vinci on par with the average man? Likewise, who would look at a lion eating a gazelle and conclude that they were equal?

Nietzsche’s philosophy is rooted in this illiberal view of the world. He does not have contempt for those lower in the hierarchy, just as he doesn’t have contempt for animals, who sit lower still in the cosmic hierarchy. However, he warns against building a society around a structure which ignores natural hierarchy in favour of the lie of equality, which can only collapse the hierarchy down to the level of its lowest members, stifling those at the top who would otherwise drive us all forward.

Nietzsche divides the timeline of a society into three parts: the pre-moral, the moral and the extra-moral. A pre-moral culture is one in which the quality of a decision is measured by looking at its outcome. Such cultures have in many cases given way to moral ones, in which a decision is evaluated by comparing its intent against some universal principles. For Nietzsche, the moralist worldview in Europe is closely tied to Christianity, which he famously opposed. However, Nietzsche does not reject religion nor morality entirely. He sees religion as a combination of spirituality and dogmatism: that is, an immaterial aspect plus a structure for maintaining societal order.

However, a moral religion is undesirable. From such morality springs universalism, and then democracy and the concepts of the Enlightenment: egalitarianism, natural rights, etc., which further serve to flatten the hierarchy to a much lower level. This flattening doesn’t just hurt those in the higher ranks; everyone suffers because there is less upward pressure as a whole. Thus, a moral society and its political consequences is surely made of men on the decline, and must be growing weaker as a whole:

... the democratic movement is not merely a form assumed by political organisation in decay but also a form assumed by man in decay, that is to say in diminishment, in process of becoming mediocre and losing his value. . .

(203)

Against these ideas we turn to extra-morality, which Nietzsche posits as the superior worldview.

... the extra-moral: ... the decisive value of an action resides in precisely that which is *not intentional* in it, and that all that in it which is intentional, all of it that can be seen, known, ‘conscious’, still belongs to its surface and skin – which, like every skin, betrays something but *conceals* still more. . .

(32)

In an extra-moral society, a decision is evaluated based on the spirit of the person who enacted it. For Nietzsche, an extra-moral society is preferable to a purely moral one. Why? Because a moral society provides little room for the natural hierarchy to express itself fully: those in the higher levels are treated exactly the same as those in the lower ones, though they have drastically different spirits. An extra-moral society is one in which the character of each person is accounted for when evaluating events, giving much more room for great men to act according to their true nature.

What of the individual? Where is the aforementioned hierarchy within a single person? Man has many components, some higher and some lower. Broadly speaking, man is both creature and creator, with the creature representing the lowest instincts of man, anchoring us to the world of beasts, and the creator representing the highest instincts, setting us apart from them in a spectacular fashion.

In man *creature* and *creator* are united: in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator, and the seventh day – do you understand this antithesis? And that *your* pity is for the “creature in man”, for that which has to be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned, annealed, refined – to that which has to *suffer*, and *should* suffer?

(225)

The interplay between these different parts within a man is illustrative of his character, as we shall see when we examine Nietzsche’s ideal man, who, rather than insisting that we pander to the pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance of the creature in us, focuses on the creator.

So who is the Nietzschean Ideal? He is the the noble man, the great commanding man who is so rare amongst the masses. He is a man who does not shy from struggle; far from taking the path of least resistance, he will actively seek the opposite, burdening himself with responsibilities and taking great joy in doing so. He is a man of creation, creative in a much deeper sense of the word than the modern fad of adult colouring books and low-grade art school graduates. He achieves this by denying the creature any say in his life, giving the creator full rein, employing the creature as necessary to achieve the aims of his higher soul.

He creates his own values, something intrinsically extra-moral. He sees himself as a victorious man, viewing the world as a master of it, rather than as a slave to it. This is the mark of a noble man:

The noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values, he does not need to be approved of, he judges ‘what harms me is harmful in itself’, he knows himself to be that which in general first accords honour to things, he *creates values*.

(260)

He is a true free spirit, standing in stark contrast to those who too often claim the label for themselves but are nothing of the sort. These ‘free-thinkers’ are

... eloquent and tirelessly scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas'... (44)

and what is more,

What with all their might they would like to strive after is the universal green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, comfort and an easier life for all; their two most oft-recited doctrines and ditties are 'equality of rights' and 'sympathy for all that suffers' – and suffering itself they take for something that has to be abolished.

(44)

Nowadays we might well call them bugmen: men with strong morals of some form (dogmatic beliefs in universal truths), who seek comfort and equality for all. This is the exact antithesis of the genuinely free man, who takes suffering in his stride and who does not care one bit for the comforting lie of equality. The struggle which the bugmen go out of their way to avoid is actively sought out by the noble man, to test himself and to forge himself stronger: for the challenge of it. He understands his place and doesn't shirk his duties, knowing that they are for him and him only to complete, lest he degrade them and himself

It should be noted that struggle is valuable both in itself, for the noble man who lives by it, but also for the good of society as a whole. When considering where man has flourished most, it has been in harsh conditions:

... the perilousness of his situation had first to become tremendous, his powers of invention and dissimulation (his 'spirit' –) had, under protracted pressure and constraint, to evolve into subtlety and daring, his will to life had to be intensified into unconditional will to power...

(44)

This external pressure does not permit men to become complacent, even if their spirit might otherwise wish to, and so they are required to use the full capacity of their skill and willpower, driving their culture and civilisation forwards and upwards. However, some men have the spirit in them to do this even in the absence of external pressure:

Under conditions of peace the warlike man attacks himself. (76)

This is a great distinguishing feature: the ability to apply internal pressure even without any direct external need to do so. This is the triumph of the higher soul of man over the lower, the creator over the creature.

A culture looks up to instances of such great men from the past, for while they were individualistic in a way, they were also a part of their people's culture, and so their individuality was all in that context. As mentioned before, these men were not shackled by morality and its children; rather, they mastered themselves and mastered the world around them. They expanded and pushed that culture higher and further, like the great artistic geniuses of the past, or provided figures to admire and look up to for generations to come, like great military leaders. Nietzsche himself applauds the likes of Caesar and

Napoleon as such great men, and we still admire these men today, centuries or even millenia since they died. In this way, a culture is not broken apart by individualism, but is instead inspired and drawn together by the individualism of great men.

The Nietzschean Ideal is perhaps succinctly described as a man above time, in whom the creative force stirs ferociously, mastering and conquering and driving his culture along with him, whilst not being weighed down by them, nor the retarding concepts of morality. He sets his own values and derives meaning from life itself: he truly lives beyond good and evil.