

NIETZSCHE

AT first sight Nietzsche is a perplexing figure. He was one of the acutest thinkers and most eloquent writers of the past century. A number of the most distinguished figures in contemporary literature—including men as sensitive and as humane as André Gide and Thomas Mann—have acknowledged their indebtedness to him. On the other hand he is remembered chiefly as the apostle of war and tyranny, as the enemy of all democracy and social reform and the advocate of what can only be described as Fascism. It would seem therefore that Nietzsche himself must have been an unusually complex and self-contradictory person, that he must have comprehended within himself hostile tendencies which he never synthesized into a unity. This happens to be true, but to disentangle the different threads, to show how far he was right and where he erred, is by no means an easy task. For the premises from which Nietzsche deduced his philosophy are those which dominate modern thinking; and if we wish to dispute Nietzsche's deductions we shall find ourselves criticizing not merely Nietzsche himself but the modern view of life. Nietzsche shows us what is logically involved in attitudes which are accepted as almost self-evident even by those who are most bitterly opposed to Nietzsche's own conclusions; he makes us aware of those basic contradictions which lie at the heart not merely of his own philosophy but of all contemporary culture.

Nietzsche's most valuable quality—the quality which makes him at his best so sane and exhilarating a moral teacher—was his craving for a classic harmony and balance. It was this craving which attracted him to the Greeks and to Goethe. The highest type of man, he declared, was the man who had organized his instinctive energies into a system and achieved a complete inner unity and self-mastery. Emotional order was the criterion by which men might be assessed. 'That your Self be in your action, as the mother is in the child: let that be *your* formula of virtue.' By contrast, most men exhibited different types of emotional disorder; they displayed that 'multiplicity and disintegration of the instincts, the want of system in their relationship,' which showed itself in 'vacillation and a lack of equilibrium.' 'Every mistake is in every sense the sequel to a degeneration of the instincts, the disintegration

of the will. This is almost the definition of evil.' Nietzsche's most penetrating criticisms were his analyses of such types. His general formula for decadence was the inability to resist a stimulus, the result of which was that men became 'obliged to fight the instincts,' and in consequence adopted a rigid moral code and an ascetic view of life. Life became 'clear, cold, cautious, conscious, without instincts, opposed to the instincts,' and this, however necessary as a remedy for a diseased condition, 'was in itself only a disease,' and led to religious pessimism. 'The darkening of the heavens over man has always increased in proportion to the growth of man's shame *before man*.' Romanticism in general was an indication of emotional disorder, and its outcome in religious pessimism was illustrated in the careers of the two men by whom Nietzsche, in his youth, had been most influenced—Wagner and Schopenhauer. Another form of decadence was that engendered among an oppressed class, which expressed itself in what Nietzsche called 'slave morality.' The stimulus which such a class was unable to control was resentment against strength and healthiness, and its result was that those qualities were denounced as evil and that all human values became perverted.

It was Nietzsche's classicist morality which made him call himself an 'immoralist.' In reality his 'immoralism' was not so alien to traditional, and even Christian, doctrines as appears on the surface or as Nietzsche himself imagined. His ideal was the man who had learnt how to be responsible to himself, the man who no longer required an external moral code because his morality had become an organic part of himself, so that he behaved well by instinct. To be '*beyond* good and evil' did not mean to ignore moral standards; it meant to have outgrown the need for them. The spirit, as he declared in *Zarathustra*, must aspire to be a child but it must begin by becoming a camel, a bearer of burdens. This condition of emotional integrity, which would characterize what Nietzsche called 'the superman,' would be achieved not when man renounced all laws but when he had become capable of giving laws to himself. Nietzsche's 'immoralism,' in fact, is analogous to the Aristotelian doctrine that the good man, the man in whom the form has become most perfectly actualized in matter, is the standard of good and evil, so that moral laws are merely descriptions of how the good man behaves. It resembles still more closely the Catholic doctrine that the sons of God are freed by grace from obedience to

the law; Catholicism taught that mankind might ultimately achieve union with God, but its primary aim, in this life, was to restore that natural perfection which men had lost through the sin of Adam, in order that they might do good freely and by instinct.

Historically, moral codes had become necessary because man lived in society, because he had become 'encaged' in the state. Morality, as Nietzsche declared, was 'the herd-instinct in the individual.' Without this necessary process of repression mankind would never have become civilized. By driving the instincts in upon themselves, it had made men more complex and increased their powers. It was 'on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human society, the sacerdotal, that man really becomes for the first time an *interesting animal*.' Thus Nietzsche accepted social imperatives, buttressed by theological and political doctrines, as a necessary stage in the evolution of the race, but he proposed that mankind should now outgrow the need for them. The individual should cease to accept moral codes, and the beliefs which had been invented in order to validate them, as absolute and objective truths; he should instead acquire an organic self-mastery which would enable him consciously, and by his own will, to adapt his desires to the needs of society and the restrictions imposed by nature. He should cultivate a healthy scepticism, a capacity to consider anything as possible. 'Belief is always most desired, most pressingly needed, when there is a lack of will.' 'Convictions are prisons . . . Freedom from every kind of conviction *belongs* to strength.'

This process of inner growth requires that one should have the courage to retire into emotional solitude. The majority of mankind believe in absolute moral laws, and as long as one thinks in such terms, one cannot achieve any true emotional integrity. 'Never yet did truth cling to the arms of an absolute one. On account of those abrupt ones, return into thy security; only in the market-place is one assailed by Yea? or Nay?' Inner growth involves a considerable degree of egoism, though, as Nietzsche realized when he was true to his own intuitions, egoism is only a means to an end; the individual who has achieved an inner and superabundant strength gives more than he receives; it is a sign of inferiority to wish to live 'gratuitously' The absolutism of popular thinking is particularly evident in politics; all political thinking, since it must appeal to the common denominator of the masses, is necessarily a vulgarization. 'The man who belongs to a party perforce becomes a liar.' 'That

which is great from the standpoint of culture was always unpolitical—even anti-political.’ For this reason the state, which enforces the political beliefs of majorities, is a ‘cold monster,’ which defiles everything which it touches. ‘There, where the state *ceaseth*,’ said Nietzsche, ‘pray look thither, my brethren. Do ye not see it, the rainbow and the bridges of the Superman.’

This is true, but it raises problems which Nietzsche was unable to ignore but which were insoluble within the individualistic terms to which he confined himself. Individualism is only half the truth; the individual also belongs to society, and it is impossible for him to isolate himself from it successfully. He cannot immunize himself from social diseases; if he wishes to live well he is inexorably compelled to attempt to cure society as well as himself. The growth of society and the growth of the individual must accompany each other, one is impossible without the other. Nietzsche refused to face this fact, and the consequences of his refusal are very evident in his later writings.

Nietzsche the philosopher tried to ignore the misery and the mediocrity which he saw around him; but Nietzsche the man was deeply affected by the kindred emotions of pity and disgust. This self-division gave to all his utterances on this subject a strange note of hysteria. Like an ascetic preacher of hellfire he castigated his own weaknesses. ‘A man loses power when he pities,’ he declared. ‘By means of pity the drain on our strength which suffering itself already introduces into the world is multiplied a thousand fold. Through pity, suffering itself becomes infectious; in certain circumstances it may lead to a total loss of life and energy.’ ‘They succeed,’ he complained, ‘in pushing their own misery, in fact, all misery, into the consciousness of the happy; so that the latter begin one day to be ashamed of their happiness, and perchance say to themselves when they meet, “It is a shame to be happy. There is too much misery.”’ . . . Away with this shameful soddenness of sentiment. Preventing the sick making the healthy sick—for that is what such soddenness comes to—this ought to be our supreme object in the world—but for this it is above all essential that the healthy should remain separated from the sick.’

As Nietzsche remarked, ‘a man . . . must almost have perished through it, in order to be unable to treat this matter lightly.’ His constant attempt to suppress one side of his personality was perhaps one cause of his final breakdown. A few days after he had

gone mad he was discovered tearfully embracing a horse which had been ill-treated by its driver.

The correct deduction to be drawn from this side of Nietzsche's teaching is that healthy individuals are possible only in a healthy society. Only in a society which has put an end to oppression, so that the few will no longer be attacked by pity or the many by resentment, will the individualism of Nietzsche become genuinely possible.

Why did Nietzsche refuse to adopt this conclusion? Why, on the contrary, since he could not ignore the political question, did he propose to regenerate society by the precisely opposite method? Everything that is enigmatic and reactionary in Nietzsche's teaching—all the advocacy of war and tyranny which seems so plainly pernicious and, coming from a person like Nietzsche, almost ridiculous—springs from the fact that he interpreted his classicist morality in terms of modern scientific materialism. But what is not sufficiently realized is the logical connection between that materialism and Nietzsche's deductions from it.

It is true that individuals have accepted the world of science as the only real world and at the same time have adopted ideals which ran counter to that world and led to its condemnation. Schopenhauer did so, and in our own day Bertrand Russell. But, as Nietzsche perceived, if one assumes that the material world is the only world, then it is impossible to form any judgment of value about it. 'The condemnation of life by a living creature' can only be 'a symptom of a definite kind of life.' 'In order even to approach the problem of the value of life, a man would need to be placed outside life.' 'But 'there is nothing that could judge, measure, compare and condemn our existence, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing and condemning the whole. *But there is nothing outside the whole.*' If the world, judged by human ideals, appears to be evil, it follows that human ideals must be changed. 'One must learn to compromise and arrange with that which was and is.' For Nietzsche, therefore, the highest virtue was to accept one's destiny, to rejoice in the world as it actually was without wishing it to be different, to be a 'yea-sayer.' And he found a kind of symbolical, almost mythical, expression for this attitude in his doctrine of eternal recurrence. He claimed that this doctrine was scientifically defensible, and indeed, if modern physics and biology are accepted, there is nothing intrinsically

improbable about it.¹ But the chief value of the doctrine was moral. To believe that men would be born again and repeat the same actions an infinite number of times would mean 'to stamp the impress of eternity upon our lives.' 'This life,' declared Nietzsche, 'is thy eternal life.' 'Live so that thou mayest desire to live again.' Ask of each deed: 'Is this such a deed as I am prepared to perform an incalculable number of times?' The highest type of man was 'the most world-approving, exuberant and vivacious man, who . . . wished to have it again as it was and is, for all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole piece and play.'

The essence of scientific materialism as it was interpreted by Nietzsche (he seems not so much to have adopted nineteenth-century physics as to have anticipated modern physics) was that substance was a meaningless conception; the universe consisted merely of different lines of energy, whose movements and relationships were the sole realities. 'There is no "being" behind doing, working, becoming,' he declared; "'the doer" is a mere appanage of the action. The action is everything . . . Our whole science is still . . . a dupe of the tricks of language, and has never succeeded in getting rid of that superstitious changeling "the subject" (the atom, to give another instance, is such a changeling, just as the Kantian "Thing-in-itself").' 'Everything,' he declared, 'is energy, and "all that teaching about the one, and the plenum, and the unmoved, and the sufficient, and the imperishable" had become nonsensical. Such a cosmology, accepted not merely as true in terms of its own postulates but also as the whole truth, implies that man is a kind of matter, that he consists of a bundle of certain kinds of energy, and that all his actions are predetermined. Moral and physical ideals therefore cease to have any objective meaning. The future is inevitable; whether what is inevitable is also desirable is a question which it is futile to ask and to which the answer will vary according to the particular point of view of the individual who asks it.

If man is a bundle of instincts and nothing more, then emotional order can consist only in the supremacy of one of those instincts over the others. And to Nietzsche, as he surveyed the course of man's evolution and his gradual conquest of nature, it

¹See J. B. S. Haldane, *The Inequality of Man*, pages 167-175.

seemed obvious that the most important of the instincts was the will to power. No other conclusion indeed was possible. This has always been a necessary deduction from mechanistic materialism, as far back as Hobbes. Nietzsche therefore attempted to interpret his classicist morality in terms of a universal will to power.

Emotional integrity, according to Nietzsche, did not mean a harmony of all the instincts; it meant the supremacy of the will to power over the other instincts. But if the other instincts were not to be co-ordinated but merely dominated, then there was no particular value in the extension of consciousness; it might, in fact, be positively harmful. Accordingly Nietzsche, who was one of the most completely conscious men who have ever lived, declared that 'we must, in sooth, seek *perfect life* there where it is least conscious.' 'Any degree of consciousness renders perfection impossible.' And if the will to power must be supreme, then the purpose of art and science must not be the extension of consciousness—with the former of human nature, with the latter of the external world—but the increase of power. Art should not be the result of 'objectivity, reflection, suspension of the will'; it should be a Dionysian outpouring, expressive of the exuberance of its creator. And what was the truth at which science aimed? Nietzsche himself, as he repeatedly declared, was governed by the desire to discover truth. 'Life as a means to knowledge—with this principle in one's heart one can not only be brave, but one can live joyfully and laugh joyfully.' And yet, when he came to consider truth in terms of the will to power, he was compelled to believe either that there was no such thing as objective truth or that, judged by its utility in increasing power, objective truth might be inferior to falsehood. In one mood he would define truth, pragmatically, as that which had proved useful in increasing human power; in another he would raise the question as to whether the truth might not be pernicious; in a third he would declare boldly that a man's power might be measured by the amount of truth which he could absorb without succumbing to pessimism. It would be useless to attempt to reconcile these statements.

These inconsistencies are obvious; but Nietzsche became involved in others even more fundamental. At times he assumed that the well-constituted man, the man who had achieved emotional integrity, was the man in whom the will to power was dominant; the evil man was the man who was weak, who had succumbed to

pity or resentment or to the desire for pleasure. Such a distinction, however, implies a moral evaluation, and once the universe has been reduced to a complex of mechanical forces, all of them operating on the same plane, moral evaluations become meaningless. At other times, therefore, Nietzsche assumed not that the will to power *ought* to be dominant but that it *was* dominant, universally. All human ideals and activities were manifestations of the will to power, and this was as true of 'slave morality' as it was of 'master morality.' The only distinction was that in some men the will to power was direct and explicit, in others it disguised itself as humanitarian sentiment. The real purpose of all humanitarianism was to enable the many to acquire power over the few.

Just as order within the individual meant, according to Nietzsche, the supremacy of the instinct for power; so order within society meant the supremacy of the powerful individual. And just as the evil individual was the individual in whom the other instincts did not obey the instinct for power, so the evil society was the society in which the powerful few were subordinated to the masses. All history was the history of a conflict for power between the many and the few, and all events and ideals were incidents in this conflict. Such a conception implies that civilization is valueless and indeed, since it may weaken the will to power, positively harmful. When Nietzsche came to consider the qualities which the strong individual should develop, he contradicted all that he had said about the value of the civilizing process; he spoke as though the superman was not to be *beyond* good and evil but behind them, not the fruit of an evolutionary process but a throwback to barbarism. And why, one asks, should he have considered one form of the will to power as better than the other? Why should the victory of the strong individual be preferred to the victory of the masses? In terms of a naturalistic metaphysic inevitability and objective desirability become identified. If strength is better than weakness, it must be because natural processes favour the strong. But this, we find to our astonishment, was not at all Nietzsche's conclusion. 'Selection' he declared, 'is never in favour of the exception and of the lucky cases; the strongest and happiest natures are weak when they are confronted with a majority ruled by organized gregarious instincts and the fear which possesses the weak . . . Strange as it may seem, the strong always have to be

upheld against the weak; and the well-constituted against the ill-constituted, the healthy against the sick and physiologically botched. If we drew our morals from reality, they would read thus: the mediocre are more valuable than the exceptional natures, and the decadent than the mediocre.' 'I protest against this formulating of reality into a moral.'

Thus Nietzsche, in spite of all his insistence that the world of nature was the only real world, and that to deny nature was a form of degeneration, was driven to admit that he did not draw his morals from reality. When then did he draw them? He had a prejudice in favour of the strong individual, and he insisted that this prejudice was objectively valid. But why a personal prejudice should have any such objective validity was something which he never explained.

Nietzsche's applications of this doctrine were equally extraordinary. Having identified the well-constituted individual with the powerful individual, he went on to argue that the powerful individual should make himself the master of society. He should be wholly egoistical, regarding the masses as worthy only to sacrifice themselves for his sake. Above all he should never give way to pity; to allow his will to power to be weakened by pity for the masses was the worst of crimes. Anything which diminished the power of the few was evil; anything which strengthened it was good, even though this strengthening might involve the capacity to inflict suffering, the love of war and violence for their own sake. 'The sight of suffering does one good, the infliction of suffering does more good,' he declared.

Nietzsche's self-identification with such 'tropic monsters' as Napoleon and Caesar Borgia would be absurd if it were not pathetic. In private life he was the most sympathetic of beings. It was himself, in a saner mood, who supplied the true refutation to his praise of cruelty. 'When we learn better to enjoy ourselves,' he said in *Zarathustra*, 'then do we unlearn best to give pain unto others.' It is important, however, to realize the cause of his error. When he declared that the individual must preserve his own emotional and intellectual integrity and must be protected from illegitimate social pressure, he was stating a truth of permanent importance. His error was that he thought in terms of power. He believed that one had to choose between the tyranny of the few

over the many and the tyranny of the many over the few. Such a dilemma, whichever way one prefers to decide it, is necessarily involved in a purely naturalistic view of life.

What is lacking in Nietzsche's philosophy—the missing cornerstone which would have enabled him to reconcile his classicist morality with a tenable political program—may be summarized in one word—the word 'development.' It was because Nietzsche denied the possibility of any true development that he identified order, both in the individual and in society, with the dominance of the will to power.

Development consists in the synthesizing into a higher unity of forces which have hitherto conflicted with each other. Such a higher unity cannot be wholly explained in terms of its component parts. Something new comes into existence; quantitative changes become qualitative, and when these changes occur, mechanical notions of cause and effect are no longer applicable.

Human nature is more than a bundle of instinctive energies; it is also a formative principle which combines those energies into a harmonious whole. This formative principle is active in the flux of change, but it is not itself merely a part of the flux; man may have developed out of matter, but he cannot be reduced to terms of matter. It would, in fact, be erroneous to describe this formative principle as a form of energy, to identify it with what is called 'the will,' for its functions are chiefly negative; it operates by checking and controlling the instincts, by bringing them into communication with each other and adapting them to the necessities imposed by man's environment, and it does so through the extension and intensification of consciousness. All growth within the individual means a growth in consciousness; individual freedom means conscious self-mastery. The difference between man's organic nature and the instinctive energies which it synthesizes is what gives meaning to moral ideals.

Similarly, within society, progress means the harmonizing of the energies of different individuals; and just as the true purpose of individual development is not to repress the instincts but enable each of them to find its proper satisfaction, so the true purpose of social development is not to enslave individuals but to enable each of them to fulfil themselves.

H. B. PARKES.

A CRITICAL THEORY OF JANE AUSTEN'S WRITINGS

IT is common to speak of Jane Austen's novels as a miracle; the accepted attitude to them is conveniently summarised by Professor Caroline Spurgeon in her address on Jane Austen to the British Academy:

'But Jane Austen is more than a classic; she is also one of the little company whose work is of the nature of a miracle . . . That is to say, there is nothing whatever in the surroundings of these particular writers [Keats, Chatterton, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë], their upbringing, opportunities or training, to account for the quality of their literary work.'

The business of literary criticism is surely not to say 'Inspiration' and fall down and worship, and in the case of Jane Austen it is certainly not entitled to take up such an unprofitable attitude. For in Jane Austen literary criticism has, I believe, a uniquely documented case of the origin and development of artistic expression, and an enquiry into the nature of her genius and the process by which it developed can go very far indeed on sure ground. Thanks to Dr. Chapman's labours we have for some time had at our disposal a properly edited text of nearly all her surviving writings, and scholarship, in his person chiefly, has brilliantly made out a number of interesting facts which have not yet however been translated into the language of literary criticism.

Correlated with Professor Spurgeon's attitude to the Austen novels is the classical account of their author as a certain kind of novelist, one who wrote her best at the age of twenty (Professor Oliver Elton), whose work 'shows no development' (Professor Garrod), whose novels 'make exceptionally peaceful reading' (A. C. Bradley); one scholar writes of her primness, another of her 'sunny temper,' with equal infelicity, and all apologize for her inability to dwell on guilt and misery, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. This account assumes among other things that the novels were written in 'two distinct groups, separated by a considerable interval of time . . . thus, to put it roughly, the