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"WHY DO YOU SUBMIT TO REGULATIONS?" Insights from Nietzsche for Being an Authentic Christian

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Abstract

Although Friedrich Nietzsche is known for his critical stance on Christianity, his philosophy can offer valuable insights for examining Christian life. Building on Merold Westphal's assertion that Nietzsche's philosophy might contribute to Christian theology, this paper demonstrates that Nietzsche's ideas can aid Christians in pursuing authenticity by encouraging them to question established traditions. This paper explores Nietzsche's critique of morality and Christianity, his concept of authenticity, and provides a theological analysis of Nietzsche's thought.

Keywords: Nietzsche, morality, authenticity, Christianity, self-creation

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"MENGAPA KAMU MENAKLUKKAN DIRIMU PADA BERBAGAI PERATURAN?" Gagasan-gagasan dari Nietzsche untuk Menjadi Seorang Kristen yang Autentik

Abstrak

Meskipun Friedrich Nietzsche dikenal dengan sikap kritis terhadap kekristenan, filsafatnya dapat memberikan wawasan berharga untuk menelaah kehidupan Kristen. Berangkat dari klaim Merold Westphal bahwa filsafat Nietzsche dapat berkontribusi pada teologi Kristen, makalah ini menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Nietzsche dapat membantu orang Kristen dalam mengejar keautentikan dengan mendorong mereka untuk mempertanyakan tradisi yang sudah mapan. Makalah ini mengeksplorasi kritik Nietzsche terhadap moralitas dan kekristenan, konsep keautentikan yang dimilikinya, serta memberikan analisis teologis atas pemikiran Nietzsche.

Kata-kata Kunci: Nietzsche, moralitas, otentisitas, kekristenan, penciptaan diri

Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a prominent philosophical critic of Christianity, expressing his condemnation of it in his writings.[1] In addition to declaring that "God is dead,"[2] Nietzsche asserted that Christianity is both unnatural and detrimental, finding that it contradicts the core essence of life.[3] In this way, Nietzsche called Christianity the "religion of pity."[4] Given Nietzsche's views on Christianity, it may seem surprising for Christians to find insights for living their Christian life in Nietzsche's philosophy.

A number Christian scholars have nevertheless incorporated Nietzsche's ideas into their work, whether critically or appreciatively.[5] For instance, John Charles Evans identifies

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H.L. Mencken (Noontide Press, 1980), §62.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1974), 3:125.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §7.

[4] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §7.

[5] The following are some studies of Nietzsche that related to Christianity: John Charles Evans, "Nietzsche on Christ vs. Christianity," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 78, no. 3/4 (1995): 571–88; Merold Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," *Modern Theology* 13, no. 2 (1997): 213–26; Jan Rehmann, "Nietzsche, Paul, and the Subversion of Empire," *Union Seminary*

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distinctions between Nietzsche's views of Christianity and of Jesus Christ,[6] noting Nietzsche saw Jesus as failing to transcend himself.[7] Peter Frick anthropologically compares Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *mündiger Mensch*,[8] finding both affirm life—Nietzsche atheistically, Bonhoeffer theistically.[9] Mathew Rose refutes Nietzsche's critique of Augustine's ethics, disputing that Augustine devalues human life by placing its meaning beyond human nature.[10] Aryeh Botwinick interprets Nietzsche's declaration of God's death as aligning with negative theology.[11] Merold Westphal contends that Nietzsche holds a quasi-scriptural and quasi-traditional role for theologians.[12]

For Westphal, Nietzsche performs a kind of prophetic critique similar to Old Testament prophets and Jesus.[13] Westphal claims that, in this way, Nietzsche can be a theological resource, albeit differently from scripture and Christian tradition.[14] He recommends Nietzsche's perspectivism and Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics of suspicion as safeguards.[15] If Westphal is right, Christian theology stands to gain from engaging with Nietzsche's philosophy.

A key theme in Nietzsche's philosophy is his notion of *authenticity*, though he never used the term explicitly.[16] Yet Jacob

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Quarterly Review 59, no. 3–4 (2005): 147–61; Peter Frick, "Nietzsche's Übermensch and Bonhoeffer's Mündiger Mensch: Are They of Any Use for a Contemporary Christian Anthropology?" *Sino-Christian Studies* 7 (2009): 9–42; Matthew Rose, "Nietzsche on Augustine on Happiness," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 30, no. 2 (2017): 170–78; Aryeh Botwinick, "Theological and Political Postscript to Presentations at the Haifa Conference: The Faith of Skepticism and the Skepticism of Faith in St. Augustine, Avicenna, Judah Halevi, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jacques Derrida," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 57, no. 1 (2022): 148–57; Patrick Jolley, "Friedrich Nietzsche Contra C.S. Lewis: A Nietzschean Critique of Christianity and Retributive Punishment," *Review and Expositor* 119, no. 3–4 (2022): 315–28; Mat Messerschmidt, "Nietzsche's Confrontation with Christianity via the Body and History," *The Journal of Religion* 103, no. 2 (2023): 187–208.

[6] Evans, "Nietzsche on Christ vs. Christianity," 572.

[7] Evans, "Nietzsche on Christ vs. Christianity," 587.

[8] Frick, "Nietzsche's Übermensch," 11.

[9] Frick, "Nietzsche's Übermensch," 37.

[10] Rose, "Nietzsche on Augustine on Happiness," 176–78.

[11] Botwinick, "Theological and Political Postscript," 156.

[12] Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," 216.

[13] Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," 216.

[14] Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," 216.

[15] Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," 221–25.

[16] The following are some studies about Nietzsche's account of authenticity: Jacob Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," *Philosophy Today* (Fall 1990): 243–58; Marc Lucht, "Nietzsche and Tolstoy on Authentic Christianity," in *Godly Heretics: Essay on Alternative Christianity in Literature and Popular Culture*, ed. Marc DiPaolo (McFarland & Co., 2013), 62–78; Keith Ansell-Pearson, "'We Are Experiments' Nietzsche on Morality and Authenticity," in *Nietzsche and the*

Golomb demonstrates how this concept runs throughout Nietzsche's work and "might assist us in overcoming cultural repression and to entice us into uncovering and reactivating our own creative power."[17] Thus, Nietzsche's perspective on authenticity still has modern relevance.

This article explores how Nietzschean concepts can help Christians live authentically before God—*Coram Deo*—despite the "death" of God.[18] The essay prosecutes the thesis that Nietzsche's ideas are useful for informing authentic Christian living. To these ends, the essay examines Nietzsche's critique of morality and Christianity, his notion of authenticity, and considers theological reflections that draw on Nietzschean thought as a source of theological insight.

Nietzsche's Critique of Morality and Christianity[19]

In *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche examines the roots of morality.[20] By means of skepticism, he questions the origin of "good" and "evil."[21] He critiques moral values by challenging their worth.[22] Through suspicion as method, Nietzsche provocatively suggests that morality may hinder humanity's full potential.[23] Nietzsche's concerns stem from his belief that morality could be turning humanity away from life itself.[24]

While other philosophers and moralists attempted to ground morality in transcendent reality, Nietzsche opposed such attempts.[25] According to R. Lanier Anderson, Nietzsche's contemporaries sought morality's foundations outside Christianity

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Becoming of Life, ed. Vanessa Lemm (Fordham University Press, 2015), 280–302; Christine Daigle, "The Nietzschean Virtue of Authenticity: 'Wie Man Wird, Was Man Ist.,'" *Journal of Value Inquiry* (2015): 405–16; Paul Franco, "Becoming Who You Are: Nietzsche on Self-Creation" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 49, no. 1 (2018): 52–77.

[17] Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 243.

[18] Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 243.

[19] In this section, I will mainly focus on *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *Beyond Good and Evil* as my primary sources for Nietzsche's critique of morality. I will also use some parts of *The Antichrist* as a source for his critique of Christianity.

[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Pre:5.

[21] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pre:3.

[22] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pre:6.

[23] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pre:6.

[24] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pre:5.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5:186.

while still drawing from its influence.[26] In contrast, Nietzsche viewed moralistic claims like the Kantian *categorical imperative* as self-serving.[27] He suspected that moralists exalt themselves by norming the conduct of those expected to follow their code.[28] Drawing Nietzsche's ire, according to Anderson, are "traditional European moral commitments, together with their foundation of Christianity."[29] The declaration that "God is dead" asserts that everything built upon Christian faith—including (Western[30]) morality—must also fall. In other words, Nietzsche contended that once belief in Christianity collapses, so too should the morality based on it.

Nietzsche asserts that even the concept of *goodness* must not be evaluated merely by the experience of its recipient, which amounts to external praise.[31] Instead, he contends that what is "good" concerning morality must be intrinsic.[32] This forms the foundation of Nietzsche's initial distinction between *good* and *bad*. He posits that the original understanding of "good" is rooted in nobility and aristocracy, whereas "bad" is defined as their opposites.[33] This framework, which Nietzsche refers to as "master morality," is characterized by chivalric and aristocratic values.[34]

Within this first paradigm, the dominant, noble class derives a sense of well-being and heightened awareness of their distinction from the subordinate classes—namely, the slaves.[35] A group of masters, as such, determines the definition of "good."[36] According to *moral mastery*, "good" and "bad" are distinguished

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[26] R. Lanier Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/nietzsche/.

[27] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:187. It seems that Nietzsche was criticizing Immanuel Kant in this regard.

[28] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:187.

[29] Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche."

[30] "Much less may one suppose that many people know as yet what this event [the death of God] really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality," in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:343.

[31] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:2.

[32] "It [goodness] has been 'the good' themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who say and judged themselves and their actions as good, I mean first-rate, in contrast to everything lowly, low-minded, common and plebian," in Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:2.

[33] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:2.

[34] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260. See also Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.

[35] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.

[36] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.

based on what is considered *noble* versus *despicable*. The noble individual autonomously establishes values according to personal benefit.[37] This form of morality inherently involves glorification of self. Conversely, individuals deemed "despicable" are described as cowardly, anxious, and narrow-minded, ergo lacking trustworthiness, while "nobles" are associated with truthfulness. Thus, the noble represents "good," and the despicable slave is perceived as "bad."[38] Nietzsche concludes, after examining the origins of morality, that such moral judgments are a natural development within humanity.[39]

The second, complementary paradigm Nietzsche described is a "slave morality" or ethics of the oppressed, defined by negative judgments of their masters.[40] The powerless resent and envy those in control, leading to a moral system based on their own suffering and lack of freedom.[41] Nietzsche termed it the morality of *ressentiment*, rooted in hatred and envy toward the powerful "masters."

Here we see that, for Nietzsche, the enslaved desire the power of their masters and are by definition powerless, unable to attain what they want.[42] By rejecting the aristocratic values of the so-called masters, the oppressed feel justified to call them "evil."[43] According to the "slave morality" paradigm, the traits valued by masters are seen as dangerous and immoral to slaves.[44] Their inability to resist such valued traits is then considered morally good.[45] Nietzsche refers to this as the "cunning of powerlessness,"[46] suggesting that forgiveness is just the inability to exact revenge as slaves consider their own condition as morally good.[47] Regarding such a notion of "good," Nietzsche wrote:

> Only those who suffer are good [within slave morality—namely], only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them

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[37] This, even as "he [sic—the nobleman] creates values," observes Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.

[38] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:11.

[39] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:5.

[40] Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche."

[41] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7. Such a resulting value system stems from being "violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, exhausted, and unsure of themselves," in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.

[42] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:15.

[43] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.

[44] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.

[45] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §29.

[46] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:13.

[47] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:14.

> alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned![48]

Here, the primary moral contrast becomes *good* versus *evil*, not good versus bad, with "master" virtues redefined as evil.

Nietzsche argues that within the slave morality paradigm, values are considered important if they help alleviate suffering, thereby making moral utility central.[49] In other words, slaves assign value to qualities that they prefer to be recognized for, such as "pity, the obliging, helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness."[50] Nietzsche contends this *moral slavery* is neither natural nor rational and relies on coercion, which he believes has long suppressed human spirit and freedom, ultimately limiting human potential.[51] Such a paradigm of coercion becomes the prevalent form of morality following what Nietzsche describes as "the slaves' revolt in morality,"[52] explaining that

> The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying "yes" to itself, slave morality says "no" on principle to everything that is "outside," "other," "non-self": and this "no" is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance—this essential orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself—is a feature of *ressentiment*: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is basically a reaction.[53]

In other words, this slave revolt leads to a dominant morality marked by "herd instinct," which as a kind of ideal or fixed idea Nietzsche views as unnatural and irrational.[54]

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[48] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.
[49] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.
[50] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:260.
[51] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:188.
[52] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.
[53] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:10.
[54] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:5. "Every morality, as opposed to *laisser-aller* [letting go], is a piece of tyranny against both 'nature' and 'reason,'" in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:188.

Within his account of the "slaves' revolt in morality," Nietzsche further examines the function of religion, expressing a critical perspective on its influence. Prior to this moral shift towards the powerless in Nietzsche's account, there were also clerics who as members of the aristocracy practiced a unique, priestly system of valuation that differed from the chivalric-aristocratic approach.[55] Their valuations focused on distinctions such as purity and impurity, which Nietzsche characterizes as less healthy.[56] He notes that these priestly aristocrats lacked power and therefore expressed opposition toward the values held by the chivalric aristocrats. Nietzsche refers to priests as historically significant critics of dominant value systems, attributing both strong opposition and notable intelligence to them.[57] Focusing on the Jewish priesthood, Nietzsche then argues that they rejected aristocratic values, thereby initiating a reversal of morals.[58] He claims that the interventions of these Jews, whom he describes as "born for slavery," marked the start of the slaves' revolt in morality.[59] Nietzsche claims, "The slaves' revolt in morality begins with the Jews."[60]

Nietzsche argues that Christianity inherited the Jews' revaluation of values, promoting priestly ideals that reject worldly things as sinful In regard to Christianity, Nietzsche states that Christianity is heir to the Jews' revaluation.[61] Christians, with their priestly values, reject everything in the world and call it unholy, worldly, and sinful.[62] Nietzsche claims Christianity opposed the "master" paradigm and sided with the masses, accelerating the slave revolt in morality.[63] Nietzsche contends that the Christian church corrupted values, turning truth into lies and integrity into baseness, and took the part of the lowly, the common, the herd.[64]

Next, Nietzsche explores "bad conscience" as the product of slave morality[65]—a sense of guilt and indebtedness arising from

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[55] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:6.

[56] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:6.

[57] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.

[58] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.

[59] "Their [the Jews'] prophets have smelted 'rich,' 'godless,' 'evil,' 'violent,' and 'sensual' into one coined the word 'world' as term of abuse for the first time," in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5:195.

[60] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7.

[61] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:7. See Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §27.

[62] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §27.

[63] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §5. See also Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:8.

[64] "The Christian church has left nothing untouched by its depravity; it has turned every value into worthless, every truth into a lie, and every integrity into baseness of soul," in Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §62.

[65] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:4.

the process of implanting memories of suffering and punishment throughout human history, which then becomes lodged as a fixed idea.[66] He sees it as an illness imposed by society, simultaneously restricting individuals and shaping populations unnaturally into a fixed form, presenting as a sickness defined as being sick of humanity itself.[67] While the so-called masters lack bad conscience, its growth is tied to their existence.[68] Furthermore, *bad conscience* is linked to *ressentiment*[69]—thereby forming the basis of slave morality .[70] Nietzsche traces other moral concepts like *justice* and *punishment*, likening them to creditor-debtor relationships within society and arguing that morality is nihilistic at its core: in essence and origin, morality is nothing at all.[71]

Nietzsche therefore criticizes religion for fostering a sense of debt to God.[72] As an instrument of torture, this leads to moral *guilt* as a fixed idea.[73] Nietzsche insisted that society must abandon religion to escape this indebtedness,[74] as concepts like "guilt," "duty," and "religion" are linked.[75] If regarding God as "creditor" no longer, morality itself disappears.[76] In *The Antichrist* (1895), Nietzsche argues that Christianity prioritizes faith over truth, emphasizing the belief in sinfulness rather than its reality. In terms of salvation from sins, it matters not that people are truly sinful when the important thing is that people *faithfully believe* that they are sinful.[77] In other words, Nietzsche claims Christian concepts like *guilt* and *salvation* are imaginary constructs used as tools of control, with priests wielding dogmatic power. Christian doctrines become "instruments of torture" and "systems of cruelty" where a priest becomes—and remains—a master.[78] Consequently, morality is framed unassailably by "the will of God which, once and for all time, determines what man [sic] ought to do and what he [sic] ought not to do."[79]

In yet another salvo to religion, Nietzsche perceives in the religious endorsement of asceticism the very tool used by priests to

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[66] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:3.
[67] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:16.
[68] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:17.
[69] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:11.
[70] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:18.
[71] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:8.
[72] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:19.
[73] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:22.
[74] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:20.
[75] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:20.
[76] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:21.
[77] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §23. The condition of sin, he states earlier, is "purely imaginary," in *The Antichrist*, §15.
[78] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §38.
[79] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §26.

gain power; as they aspire towards mastery, *ascetic ideals* present as "their best instrument of power."[80] Ascetic ideals center *transcendence* as the essence of life itself, as Bernard Reginster later notes,[81] dismissing natural human needs and producing virtues of monastic traits like poverty, humility, and chastity.[82] For ascetics and priests, the subjugation of life is all-consuming, thereby relegating what is worldly as dross to be abandoned.[83] In short, the *ascetic ideal* as a manifestation of *bad conscience* is essentially nothing. [84] For Nietzsche, the "ascetic" life is self-contradictory and ultimately opposed to life itself.[85]

In summary, Nietzsche argues that the morality rooted in Christianity is unnatural and illogical, and in tracing its origins he concludes that morality lacks substance. Nietzsche regards Christianity as enabling a "slave revolt," imposing the norms of such an irrational morality and leading the "herd" to reject life in the end.[86]

Nietzsche's Post-Theistic Notion of Authenticity

Given both the Nietzschean proclamation of God's death and critique of religiously derived morality as ultimately nil,[87] one must ask: what kind of life does Nietzsche advocate? What type of person does Nietzsche envision to overcome such nihilism and live *authentically* without external moral standards?[88]

Nietzsche regards morality and its *bad conscience* as a sickness, yet one that carries hope, akin to pregnancy, potentially gestating and birthing something new.[89] Following the collapse of religion and morality, he envisions individuals liberated from external, fixed ideas.[90] With the fall of these systems, Nietzsche argues that humanity should return to what is "healthy" and "natural" by going in the "reverse direction."[91] Upon

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[80] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3:1.

[81] Bernard Reginster, *The Will to Nothingness: An Essay on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 155–56.

[82] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3:8.

[83] Cf. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3:11.

[84] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3:5. *Ascetic ideals* represent an intensification of the self-punishment that a *bad conscience* develops, according to Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche."

[85] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3:11, 13.

[86] Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §20. "Under Christianity, neither morality nor religion has any point of contact with actuality. It is purely imaginary," according to Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §15.

[87] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:343.

[88] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:24.

[89] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:19.

[90] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:24.

[91] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 2:20.

deconstructing morality by its origins, Golomb later notes that Nietzsche's ultimate aim is to foster "a creative and authentic life in a world without dogmatic beliefs."[92]

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche insists, "We, however, want to become those we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves law, who create themselves."[93] Following the death of God and collapse of morality, Nietzsche urges people to be their true, unique selves[94]—free and happier human beings whose faith is belief in themselves[95] and who embrace their own strengths and weaknesses.[96] In a beautiful passage, Nietzsche states,

> I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati* [trans. love of one's fate]: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.[97]

The way in which human beings affirm themselves, in essence, demonstrates whether one loves their fate and says "yes" to life as it is.[98]

It seems clear that for Nietzsche morality and religion suppress human desires and hinder humanity.[99] He thus urges humanity to embrace life as it is, to pursue as the first point of *authenticity* an *amor fati* that affirms life regardless of how "good" or "bad" it is perceived to be. For Nietzsche, authenticity means accepting life's realities without complaint or accusation, affirming both oneself and existence by saying "Yes" to fate, "Yes" to self, and "to see as beautiful what is necessary in things."[100] As Golomb

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[92] Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 247.

[93] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:335.

[94] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:283.

[95] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:284.

[96] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:290.

[97] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:276. "*Amor fati*" also appears in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*. He says, "My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just enduring what is necessary, still less concealing it—all idealism is hypocrisy in the face of what is necessary—but *loving* it..." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford University Press, 2007), II:10.

[98] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, II:10

[99] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pre:6.

[100] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:276.

observes, only those who fully accept life in all its difficulties are truly alive, truly *authentic*.[101]

Further operationalizing the unequivocal affirmation of life, Nietzsche's idea of "eternal recurrence" prompts us to imagine reliving our lives, with every event repeating endlessly.[102] He questions how one would respond if faced with the prospect of a demon who comes one day to pronounce fate as thus:

> This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small and great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust![103]

What is our response to that demon? Do we embrace life as it is, knowing it will recur in exactly the same way? What is our attitude toward this life, and do we want it "once more and innumerable times more?"[104] As Anderson later notes, this serves as "a practical *thought experiment* designed to test whether one's life has been good."[105] Connecting this to the concept of *amor fati*, Nietzsche claims that those who wholeheartedly accept *eternal recurrence* are genuine affirmers of life[106]—the *Yes-sayer* whom Nietzsche later elevates as a "higher human being"[107] and is elsewhere dubbed as superhuman (*Übermensch*)[108]—able to affirm life completely, in its totality and entirety.

Yet mere self-affirmation is insufficient following the Nietzschean *death of God*. According to Golomb, "one has to adopt for oneself the God-like role of being the originator of truth and

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[101] "A man [sic] is true in the sense of life only if he [sic] accepts it in all its harshness and complete immanence," in Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 243.

[102] See: Paul S. Loeb, "Eternal Recurrence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford University Press, 2013), 645–71.

[103] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:341.

[104] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:341.

[105] Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche."

[106] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:276.

[107] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:301,

[108] See: Randall Havas, "The Overman," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford University Press, 2013), 461–84.

of one's own self."[109] Thus individuals must take responsibility for creating truth and values, devoid of the universal, as Nietzsche saw nature itself as value-neutral.[110] Despite the Nietzschean desire to retrieve what is "healthy" and "natural," people must embrace self-creation as *authenticity*.[111] As Golomb notes, becoming oneself means actively shaping one's identity, not simply following a purportedly innate nature.[112] What matters is self-affirmation ("to see as beautiful what is necessary in things") *and* self-creation ("[to] make things beautiful").[113]

In terms of creating ourselves, Nietzsche likens the effort to artistry, urging us to approach our lives as poets or artists do their work, namely, by striving to make our life "beautiful, attractive, and desirable."[114] He believes everything in our lives should contribute to this artistic project—be it desire, will, strength, weakness—until life, as a whole, becomes something beautiful.[115] To achieve such self-creation, praxis and work are needed.[116] Later, Nietzsche states,

> To that end, we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world: we must become physicists in order to be able to be *creators* in this sense—while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on ignorance of physics or were constructed so as to *contradict* it. And even more so that which compels us to turn to physics—our honesty.[117]

What Nietzsche means by "physics" in this quotation, Paul Franco notes, is a working "knowledge of the complex mechanics of the self."[118] Ergo the Nietzschean conviction that one must gain this knowledge to achieve a higher state of being."[119]

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[109] Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 243.

[110] "Nature is always value-less," in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:301.

[111] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:301.

[112] Paraphrasing Nietzsche: "To become 'what we are' is not to live according to our innate nature but to create our selves freely," in Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 244.

[113] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:276. For Nietzsche, *authenticity* involves not only accepting necessity but also the act of transforming—a process of constructing meaning, as explained in Anderson, "Friedrich Nietzsche."

[114] He also declares, "We want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest most everyday matters," in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:299.

[115] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:290.

[116] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:290.

[117] Italics original, appearing in the section titled, "Long Live Physics!," in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:335.

[118] Paul Franco, "Becoming Who You Are," 66.

[119] "The self we become is ultimately made, not found," in Franco, "Becoming Who You Are," 69.

From the foregoing it is evident that self-knowledge is essential to self-creation for Nietzsche, who argued that people often lack self-understanding and thus undermine genuine, self-defined morality as *authenticity*.[120] With self-awareness, individuals recognize the uniqueness of their actions and reject any stipulated universal morality.[121] By understanding ourselves, we shape our being: "What does your conscience say? You shall become the person you are."[122]

In summary, Nietzsche's call for us *to become who we are* means fully affirming our lives—*amor fati*—and actively creating the Self in the process.[123] In this we find the relation between being and becoming, as *authenticity* for Nietzsche required ongoing effort for the human/superhuman artistry that is both self-affirmation and self-creation.

Theological Reflection

Nietzsche unflinchingly interrogated Christianity's teachings like forgiveness, humility, and generosity, suggesting that the religion's consequent moral systems encourage human oppression, divert adherents away from life, and offer by means of its dogmatics an unrealistic response to human suffering. Yet is it the case that Christianity leads its followers to turn away from life? Do church doctrines deal unrealistically with human suffering and offer rationalistic escapism?

Evident as it may be that certain aspects of Nietzschean philosophy stand in conflict with orthodox Christianity—rooted as it is by belief in a living God[124]—Nietzsche's critiques nonetheless merit careful consideration. Reflecting theologically on Nietzsche, three key insights can guide authentic Christian living. *First*, Christians must avoid uncritical conformity in following the status quo or succumbing to the herd-mentality that religiosity can foster. *Second*, Christians must value and engage with worldly life, recognizing it as God's creation (Jn 3:16) and not simply focusing eschatologically on the hopes of afterlife. *Third*, rather than uncritically adopting inherited doctrines or traditions—an issue

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[120] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Pre:1.

[121] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:335. According to Golomb, self-knowledge is needed "to distinguish what we can change in ourselves and in the external circumstances that have so far shaped us," in Golomb, "Nietzsche on Authenticity," 244.

[122] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 3:270.

[123] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:335.

[124] Editor's note—biblical references abound: Deut 5:26, Josh 3:10, 1 Sam 17:26, 1 Sam 17:36, Ps 42:2, Isa 37:4, Jer 10:10, Matt 22:31–32, Mark 12:26–27, Luke 20:37–38, Acts 14:15, 2 Cor 3:3, 1 Tim 4:10, Heb 3:12, Heb 9:14, Heb 10:31, and Rev 7:2.

Nietzsche frequently criticized[125]—Christian faith must be "authentic" by virtue of being self-created.

One may very well grant the claim that Christianity promotes a *slave morality* in the Nietzschean sense—at least in part. Given the religion's emphasis on humility and service, in fact, Christians are called to be humble and serve others, submitting themselves as servants/slaves to one another (Eph 5:21). Illuminating is the following insight of Magisterial Reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546):

> A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. These two theses seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully. Both are Paul's own statements, who says in 1 Cor. 9, "For though I am free from all men [sic], I have made myself a slave to all," and in Rom. 13, "Owe no one anything, except to love on another." Love, by its very nature, is ready to serve and be subject to him [sic] who is loved. So Christ, although he was Lord of all, was "born of a woman, born under the law [Gal 4:4]," and therefore was at the same time a free man and a servant, "in the form of God" and "of a servant [Phil 2:6-7]."[126]

For Luther, a Christian is both independent and obligated to all. Interpreted through Nietzsche, true and perfect freedom—that is, "mastery"—both requires and makes possible *authentic* "servanthood" (1 Cor 9:19). Thus, Christian virtue arises as a voluntary expression of true human freedom. Luther's reference above to "Christ" points to the conviction that Jesus the Messiah is the ultimate exemplar of and for humanity. Importantly, in becoming human, Jesus did not lose his divinity (Phil 2:6-7).[127]

Viewing the paradox through the lens of the Nietzschean *slave-master* dichotomy, being a "slave" represents the voluntary choice by the Christian who becomes a "master" and remains fully free—mirroring Jesus' example in the (magisterial) Lutheran sense.

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[125] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 4:335.

[126] Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty* (Fortress Press, 2003), Kindle Edition.

[127] The Cappadocian Father, St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390), expresses this point by means of a theological aphorism: "He [Christ] remained what He was [namely: divine]; what He was not, He assumed [the humanity]," in St. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29 On the Son," in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Lionel Wickham (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), §19.

Conversely, Christians who become enslaved to moral systems without first experiencing true freedom in self-creation risk becoming the very "herd" that Nietzsche critiques. His challenge, in reality, ought to encourage Christians to ask whether they really, truly express their freedom in submitting themselves—or whether they have simply submitted *inauthentically*, that is, outside of exercising their true freedom.

When *authentically* examined, Christian virtues should not be viewed as signs of weakness that evince "the cunning of powerlessness," as Nietzsche had claimed.[128] Drawing on Luther, we may contend that Christian virtues like forgiveness—another target of Nietzsche's critique[129]—actually stem from a position of strength. In an asset-based interpretive framework, authentic human freedom found in relationship with God is distinct from mere inability to retaliate or uncritical compliance with tradition or law. *Authentic* Christian ethics, as Westphal asserts, must avoid presenting the lack of power as moral virtue, echoing Nietzsche's view that true goodness reflects strength (asset) rather than impotence (deficit).[130]

Such a critical perspective on Christian ethics can also be applied to virtues like humility, which should not signal low self-esteem; likewise, meekness ought not indicate weakness, just as hope does not stem from helplessness. Nietzschean critiques are valid whenever purported Christian virtues arise from the valorization of powerlessness. This analytic insight empowers faithful Christians to examine whether their lived practices reflect weakness or the dynamic influence of the Holy Spirit—and if the former, then sustained are Nietzsche's objections toward forms of Christianity that weaken and oppress humanity.

Toward the beginning of this essay, the Nietzschean assist for the modern theologian was summarized by Westphal as offering a *quasi-traditional* ferment—like the pneumatologically inflected account immediately above—as well as eliciting *quasi-scriptural* implications. Westphal even suggests that Christian Holy Writ may just be the most anti-religious of historical sacred texts.[131] For example, consider the following examination attributed to the Apostle Paul:

> If with Christ you died to the elemental principles of the world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?

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[128] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:13.

[129] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1:13, 14.

[130] Merold Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (Fordham University Press, 1998), 251. A page earlier (250), he writes, "True goodness, Nietzsche believes, expresses power not impotence."

[131] Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 265.

> Why do you submit to regulations, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. (Col 2:20–22)[132]

The Colossians, scolded for adhering to "human religions," are challenged to reconsider what (figuratively) dying with Christ and professing to being liberated means if they still unreflectively submit to such human ordinances (see Col 2:16–23).[133] From a Nietzschean perspective, this implies that even freed Christians tend to follow human-made religious rules and moral systems out of a desire for the certitude of fixed ideas, favoring uncritical conformity over true freedom in faith. Overcoming this herd-like tendency is essential to *authentic* Christianity.

Instead of focusing on human regulations, Nietzsche's critiques may offer grist for the mill of developing personal spirituality. To Christians in the Corinth of antiquity, the Apostle Paul stresses that every Christian should be mindful of how they build upon Jesus Christ as a foundation (1 Cor 3:11-12). This suggests that the figure of Christ be interpreted, not as a fixed foundation defined by organized religion or established dogmas, but as representing a living knowledge and dynamic relationship that differs from one individual to another. In this view, the Christian's experiences and connection with Jesus Christ would likely vary and evolve over time.

In the Hebrew Bible, *Qohelet* (trans. teacher) asserts that there is a time for everything, and the human person has no control over their life (Eccl 3:1–8).[134] *Qohelet* teaches that, although humans lack control over life and cannot comprehend the divine economy (Eccl 3:9–10),[135] they ought to find joy and meaning in life's simple pleasures—eating, drinking, labor—as gifts from the God who offers scant consolation for humanity's many limitations:

> I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. (Eccl 3:12–13)

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[132] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[133] Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Word Books, 1982), 149.

[134] See Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, vol. 23A, Word Biblical Commentary (Word Books, 1992), 39.

[135] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 39.

The life-sustaining acts of *eating and drinking* appear to function as endorsements of a good, pleasurable life.[136] Even as otherworldly things like eternity remain mysteries for humanity (Eccl 3:11), *Qohelet* urges pupils of the Teacher not to put aside worldly joys or focus solely on future hope; instead, they are called to affirm and enjoy life as a divine gift—approaching something even Nietzsche might support, albeit without religious trappings. Christians must learn to affirm the value of their life, whether favorable or otherwise.

In the final analysis, Christians can certainly stand to benefit from Nietzschean negations of cherished doctrines by treating his provocations as prophetic critiques of misleading Christian practices. Nietzsche criticizes Christian practices that weaken humanity, relegating them to mediocre living.[137] Yet reading Nietzsche charitably, even apophatically as this essay has attempted to do, effectively diverts his compelling objections toward inauthentic Christianity instead. By engaging with Nietzsche's concerns thoughtfully, Christians can avoid falling into the conditions he criticizes. In striving for *authenticity*—by embracing life and freely living out their faith in Christlike virtue—Christians can experience the Nietzschean virtue of self-creation as loving one's fate (*amor fati*) in the presence of God*, coram Deo* (trans. before the face of God).

Conclusion

Pursuant to the *God's death*, Nietzsche went to great lengths to demonstrate how traditional (Western) codes of morality inevitably collapse without the presence of a living God. Nietzsche criticizes Christianity for being unrealistic about the human condition, accusing it of being inescapably life-denying. He urged humanity to work towards true *authenticity* through affirming life in its entirety and towards the self-creation of determining new truths and values.

A notable upshot of Nietzsche's philosophy is the reframing of *authentic* Christian virtues as those practices that comprise consciousness-raising, voluntary choices by the true Christian exhibiting Christlikeness in mutual submission—with these acts being a consequence of the gospel, rather than what Nietzsche perceived as the inevitable result of frail human religiosity. By taking the critiques of Nietzsche as prophetic provocations, Christianity in its divine-human *authenticity* must

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[136] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 26.

[137] Westphal says that Nietzsche reveals how bad Christianity can be for its victims; see Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*, 230.

categorically reject the herd-mentality and life-denial that Nietzsche so vehemently opposed.

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