

Influence of Norse Mythical Archetype in Frederich Nietzsche Thought: Predestination and Totalitarianism

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Abstract. The Second World War symbolizes how a radical evil can be embodied in human minds. After holocaust many scholars tried to bond Frederic Nietzsche as the precursor of National Socialism. Quite aside from such a fallacy, the present article not only intends to recover the thought of this outstanding philosopher but also trace on the roots of ancient Norse mythology in the inception of existentialism and capitalism. Echoing the contribution of a previous article written originally by Martin Jenkins, we put our efforts in explaining the liaison between mythical archetype and the world of ideas.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Norse Mythology, Second War, national socialism, genocide.

INTRODUCTION

After reading the interesting work of Martin Jenkins relating to the will-to-power in Frederich Nietzsche recently published at the electronic journal *Philosophy Pathways* edited by British philosopher Geoffrey Klempner, we felt his endeavors might be continued in examining the liaison between politics and the doctrine of authoritarianism. As the previous argument given, there was a point that has not been explained in the traditional examination of Frederich Nietzsche, not only associated to the influence of German mythical archetype in his thought but also in whole existentialism. For that reason, the present review is aimed at discussing critically to what an extent classical mythology can influence in the inception of XIX century philosophy and fulfilling a gap that characterized the aprioristic obsession of Nietzsche in emphasizing on the Death of God; of course if God has died it implies that anytime He had somehow existed. This unresolved and troublesome concern will be philosophically tackled off in the following lines.

UNDER THE LENS OF NIETZSCHE

Logically, an absence can be complementary understood with a presence and vice-versa but Nietzsche, beyond such an aphorism, has not given further argument about the existence of God. Under such a context, Jenkins says

the will to power is a notorious term. It conjures up images of Leni Riefenstahl's film documentary *Triumph of the will*; of the infatigable will-power of a tyrant. Associated with other terms used by Nietzsche such as blond beast, superman, the herd, and the death of god, it is no surprise that the name of Nietzsche has been associated with Fascist and Nazi doctrine and practice. At a lesser level, he is generally associated with anti-democratic authoritarianism; with what one of his earliest admirers termed Aristocratic Radicalism. The defense of Nietzsche against Fascist misappropriation has been accomplished elsewhere. My intentions here are to challenge the reading of Aristocratic radicalism, to demonstrate that there are alternative readings and, to demonstrate that will to power furnishes plurality and post-modern Anarchism (Jenkins, 2009, p. 1).

The main thesis of our author is that will-to-power does not converge in 'Aristocrat radicalism' but encourages a proactive anarchy, which allows a reconfiguration of values and identities. Basically, Christian tradition based on the morality of slavery has been presented as a vehicle towards the equality and monopoly of truth. In the line of his bibliography but first of all in the *Origin of Tragedy*, Nietzsche found that modern tragedy is no other thing than a result of Apollonian and Dionysian forces encounter that characterized the Ancient Greek World. In brief and in contradiction with Socrates, tragedy was considered as an art capable to make sensible the acceptance of terror whenever we feel the reality around us. As a result of this, human beings construct their beliefs related in accordance to the necessity of transcendence and love of fate; it is often assumed as the prerequisite for idols and idolatry. That way, good and evil are aprioristic conceptualizations based on an authoritarian logic imposed and perpetuated by Christianity. Taking his cue from Roman classical philosophers as Lucretius, Nietzsche argued that it is almost impossible to prevent the advent of pathos in the social World. Apollonian logic

represented in the wish of power, happiness and wisdom is inextricably submitted to the Dionysian domain. Metaphorically speaking, our author emphasize on the apollonian spirit is present in the principle of individualism as a mechanism capable to keep the law and order in a world that valorizes issues relating to security, rules, property and authority.

Following this, his book entitled *The Origin of Tragedy* looks to be no other thing than the encounter between the cruelty of natural World and a human bubble fabricated by the rationality. Of course, no need to say that one of criticism of Nietzsche is directed towards Kantian ethic. After a short but deep appraisal of Greek classical myths such as Oedipus, or Prometheus, Nietzsche refers to Socratic contributions as a form of tergiversation of reality and rejection of Dionysian logic. To put this in brutally, Nietzsche is convinced whereas first type refers to 'logos, rationality and all what can be planned or ordered in the life', Apollonian ones symbolizes the 'pathos', which does not stem from the word 'path' as Freudian psychoanalysis followers misunderstood, as the transcendence of material life over civilization. That way, 'Pathos' represents everything that is chaotic, awful, gruesome and wild under the human scrutiny. For Nietzsche as the myth of Penteo showed, it is fruitless to slow down the advance of Pathos over logos. Once again, the chaos will impose always to our imperious need of logic.

In addition, once and once again throughout *The Genealogy of Moral*, Nietzsche devoted considerable attention on how religious sentiments and loyalty are manipulated by an elite moved with the end of presenting their own values as absolutes realities for the rest of humanity. An historical examination allows philosophers unveiling inside the temporal character around moral creation. The *Genealogy* as a book became in a more lucid criticism and claim against the hegemony and imperialism of Europe (of course, this was what a century later anthropologist baptized as ethnocentrism). Quite aside from moral as a revealed truth, Nietzsche demonstrated to what extent good and evil are no other things than terms assigned by the rejection of everything that is important in the nature such as: a body, desire and instinct. This depiction has been historically camouflaged resting in a paradox that concerned human beings - no matter than the time and culture - 'there is nothing more wrong and unmoral than the moral in such'. As a whole, the force of human instincts is repressed by an ideal construction aimed at creating subordination, obedience, humiliation and submission; this is the reason why our author considers the moral as ruin of our modern civilization (Nietzsche, 2007). In other

terms, Nietzsche's thought established a precedent for potential critics against the influence of political power in ethic issues as well as omnipotence of God and presence of Evil.

THE RESURGENCE OF EVIL

To be honest, one of more interesting and insight books that we had never read before by respecting to the social implications of mythical conflagration between good and evil is 'The Abuse of evil', a project authored initially by Richard Bernstein who – in accordance to Nietzsche – intends to unravel the mystery of suffering contrasting the omnipotence of God with the inception of evil. The question as to whether evil can born from a God who unconditionally loves his sons remains unresolved for an uttermost part of theologians and philosophers. Ones might think in evil as the negation of good, others see it as the fact that proves the inexistence of God – or at least the pre-requisite for what his omnipotence should be placed under debate. Taking as an example an interesting previous work of A. Arendt respecting to the figure of holocaust symbolized in Auschwitz, Berstein argues that evil can be defined as any intention of trivializing the essence and transcendence of human beings. Of course, this happens whether spontaneity and unpreparness are destroyed in the name of logic (totalitarianism). Under totalitarian regimes, extermination of corporate body is accompanied with destruction of individuality and spontaneity transforming the human personality in a simple issue (Bernstein, 2006, pp. 14-20).

The trial against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem not only reminds us that ordinary people with banal interests can often commit appalling crimes, but also it shows that responsibility and premeditation are dissociated conceptualizations. By keeping with the liaison between religion with moral issues, Bernstein addresses how some corporate groups manipulate the roots of religion and politics looking for their own benefits. Although every religion traditionally created what we can consider the concepts of evil and good, beliefs are gradually shifted according to the needs and contexts of each society. Totalitarianism surfaces at the time a minority tries to impose a set of inflexible ideological prejudices as 'moral absolutes' over the rest of humanity. The goal of philosophy should be the criticism of particular point of views focusing on pragmatism. With this background in mind, Bernstein examines the inception of Pragmatism in Dewey, James, Pierce and Holmes as a result of Civil War that whipped

United States during 1861/1865. For these well-known scholars, metaphysics beliefs should not be divorced from social practices. For better or worse, in moments of uncertainty, anxiety and fear, people need imperiously of moral absolutes (Bernstein, 2006, pp. 48-52). Undoubtedly, as a critical instrument, philosophy plays a pivotal role in the resistance of totalitarian doctrines. However, what is the influence of Norse mythology in nihilism of F. Nietzsche?

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

In perspective to this discourse, will-to-power is deemed as a necessary instrument for superman to achieve the emancipation. Morality, Nation, God and Transcendence work as forms of false consciousness that restrains human basic needs. Fear combined to mercy drives to an 'aristocracy' wherein privileged elite monopolizes the use of force determining where lies the line between evil and good. Whatever the case may be, underpinned on the proposition that Nietzsche's development is embedded in ancient German Mythology, the present exploratory commentary piece will emphasize on conceptualization as Macht (translated to English as power), extermination and morality (Gerlomini, 2007).

During I A.C century, Roman Empire came across with a bunch of strangers who were called under the term of 'Germans'. An important number of them did not know the writing in which case they were baptized as 'Savages'. Of course, rationality and civilization dominated the life of Romans who focused on the control of disorder by means of reason. Control, development and administration in ancient Mediterranean times look to be the cradle of causality in our modern thought (Solá, 2004; Robert, 1992; Tacitus, 2007). Following this explanation, we can explain to readers that German was a term used originally by Caius Julius Caesar who grouped dissimilar folks under the same denomination, even if, etimologically, there is no consensus about the origin of this word. Academically, three streams dispute today the hegemony of what this mean. For one of them, 'German' comes from two terms: 'Heer (war) and Mann (man)' in which case it refers in English to 'Warrior'. Second one points out that German stems from 'Cor-manus' which in Latin signifies 'all who speak with the heart on hands'; the third wave insists in a Celtic term known as 'Carmanos' which means 'people who shout', most likely a characteristic based on what Celts viewed just upon free-men

predisposed to enter in battle. From our point of view, the underlying problem here is that Germans encompassed indistinctively more than 40 different folks ranging from Saxons, Frisians, Burgundians, Gothics and Ubians to Franks whose customs and traditions notably contrasted. Of course, certain resemblance in the way how they conceive the principle of power remains. In spite of Roman efforts in trivializing 'these uncivilized tribes', their mythology composes of an unabated net of complex beliefs that sometimes plausible for confusion and misunderstanding.

For one hand, unlike Christianity and Judaism, Norse mythology highlights death as one of possible consequences even for Gods; immortality is a concept that should be put under debate in this kind of cosmologies. Main Gods such as Wodan, Thor, Locki and Freyja can fall in the Rognarok – a scenario wherein Vanes and Asses will fight in the end of times – and can be revenged by their sons. The fact is that *revenge* plays a pivotal role in the configuration of their cult since it obliges warriors to exterminate all enemies once defeated; this belief accompanied with the reincarnation of Fylgias constitutes a powerful element that consider enemies as dangerous entities even dead. In deep contrasting to Romans who considered in right of changing and transforming the environment and slavery, ancient Germans were scary of natural forces, predestination and weather (Meunier, 2006; Wilkinson, 2007; Gerlomini, 2007). As the previous argument given, forces of nature operate over the wish of human beings and nothing here in this world can alter what is designed by gods. For instance, enemies after each battle were exterminated by means of ritual of decapitation. Ancient Germans believed in death as a prophylactic mechanism to prevent the passage of enemies from dead to the live. Precisely, figures of filgia embody the possibility a spirit takes a physical existence. Quite aside from this, the fact is that Roman's eyes saw these type customs as a signal of inhumanity and barbarism.

As it has been explained, there is a bridge between the Nietzsche to Aristotelian construal of citizenship but such difference can be explained by mythological structures involved either folks. On the Mediterranean World subordination was related to the power of stronger for co-existence wherein slavery takes place as a palpable reality; this liaison was not rigid and unalterable. In its own time span, a slave would have chances to access at roman citizenship. In opposition to this, in Norse world slavery has been replaced by a complex but flexible system of tribal alliances. Unlike Romans who assimilated to all those who are not roman but in a subordinated status, otherness for German was stiff and impossible to be

broken. In consequence, Non-Germans were excluded from the civil life of tribe. The matrix of otherness of Romans and Germans gave as a result a divergence in the ways philosophy has been adopted in Germany and England in comparison with France, Spain or Italy. This corresponds to the social background wherein F. Nietzsche is dialoguing with Greek philosophy and of course his most observable hate against the legacy of Socrates. For example, in XVI century whereas Spain colonized part of America in the name of the King and religion (as Roman archetype many centuries back), England valorized other criterion as the work and betterness of soil in accordance with their Anglo-Saxon ancestor's traditions (Pagden, 1997; Korstanje, 2007). This demonstrates how ancient mythical elements can somehow survive in the threshold of time coming across of kingdoms and Nation-States until today.

In sharp contrast to Socratic thought, for Nietzsche subordination should be considered as a vehicle toward physical and symbolic extermination; for that reason, man is an intermediate bridge between superman who stands out of morality and animals. Culprit as a way of sublimation had been a concept unknown for ancient Germans. This is the principle Nietzsche is retrieving at the time he says, Superman is not aware of God, Nation, or morality. Jenkins appears to be not wrong when he writes

further, active forces will revalue the reactive structures to instantiate new values in their very activity. This is to deconstruct the existing condition of truth, of value and reconfigure them. This is similar to the practice of critical Ontology found in the writing of Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. This practice can be termed post modern Anarchism as it deconstructs and reconstructs the determination of value, of structures on all levels (Jenkins, 2009).

For instance, Nietzschean as well as Weberian thesis of predestination that characterized the advent of modern capitalism is enrooted in the ancient Norse belief that death is pre-determined whenever the person is unborn. Another fundamental issue is raised of this discussion: inferiority of humankind along with divine forces and predestination. Before than every fight, Walkirians knew exactly the destiny of involved combatants, such a predestined future was unbreakable by the intervention of humans. This represents a previous tension, as Nietzsche

insisted, between 'pathos (the presence of chaos) and logos (the personalization of order)'. This is the reason as to why our German philosopher radically criticizes the roots of classical Greek tradition of thought even epicureism. Indeed, for Greeks the live should be let at random and nobody can know exactly the date and terms of their own death. At time of collapsing the Roman Empire, this substantial topic opens the door for the adoption of christianism as a religion based on piety, fraternization, culprit and forgiveness. The agreement between injurers and victims is solidified by the existence of culprit which generates solidarity enough to re-create future reparation. No matter what I do for being forgiven, the doctrine of predestination prevents from the possibility of redress. As a whole, even if niezschean philosophy would not have been stood at a distance of influences of Norse mythology, it is unfortunate that this issue had not been in depth developed by philosophers of history in past. On the successive centuries after the collapse of Roman Empire and once Christianized, Germans absorbed the turn of mind of Mediterranean world and abandoned their beliefs and lore. Anyway, at the bottom of their culture, mythical archetype elements still remain.

FILGIUR KULTUR

For readers who wishing to understand further regarding this last issue, it is important to explain that Germans believed that in human soul coexisted two forces, one of them was the classical notion of spirit but the second corresponds to the 'fylgia' (Filgur), which permitted a physical embodiment even if in absence. For that reason, warriors who surrendered were immediately assassinated following carefully certain specific rituals. A prophylactic measure to prevent the enemy returns to life looking for revenge was the decapitation. Many centuries later, this has been the main concern in the tragic extermination that National-Socialism in Second War drove towards assassination of more than 10.000 millions of people included civilians. This Regime monopolized the right of exterminating their enemies without a fairer trial. Once finished this tragedy, Jerusalem and Nuremberg witnessed as almost of Nazis showed a lack of remorse for the committed crimes. Many years back, Nietzsche assured in a conference 'Germany only brings chaos and destruction where goes'.

Albeit, the presence of enemies was unbearable for ancient Germans, this condition does not expiate the responsibilities of involved

criminals but explains the contextual factors which determined the holocaust. Unlike other scholars as Carl Schmitt or Martin Heidegger, the diverse efforts in linking Nietzsche to National-Socialism are illogic because the fact is that Nietzsche had never manifested any anti-Semitic expression nor had not been part of this infamous regime. Concerns like this moves Jenkins to affirm that Nietzsche is not 'the philosopher of totalitarianism' as an uttermost wave of post-modernist scholars had argued. Once again, as his ancient ancestors, Nietzsche is convinced that civilization in combination with religion indoctrination is the ruin of humanity. In this case, anarchism that referenced Jenkins is not other thing that application to power-will for liberation (Gerlomini, 2007).

Furthermore, power in combination with other values such as work and freedom, have been a conceptualization linked to all societies beyond the time and culture, however in Norse mythology these ideas had an original emphasis. As it had been examined by Pagden (1997) and Korstanje (2007) in other researches, 'Power (macht)' and proud were fundamental factors for the acceptance of warriors in Valhalla (the representation of heaven in Norse mythology). For that, it is not surprising extermination fields exhibited a sign as 'Arbeit (macht) Freiheit' where 'arbeit means work and freiheit freedom'. Of course, it is a clear fallacy as Jenkins said arguing that F. Nietzsche contributed to the conformation of Nationalsocialism in Germany. Both, rather, are a side of the same coin. In turn, National-socialism has been born as a response (the worse possible) to modernity and the inexistence of God.

CONCLUSION

Under such a context, our thesis is that Frederich Nietzsche as well as existentialism pertains to a broader structure based on ancient mythological elements, as a kind of social imaginary which contains accumulated beliefs, depictions and customs of Norse spirit. We have so far here to explain as clear as possible as to how modern idea of God's death as well as will-to-power is anthropologically shaped by a previous ancient mythical archetype founded thousand of years back. As a whole, these findings reinforce and complement this interesting afore-mentioned argument of Martin Jenkins in relation to the power-will in F. Nietzsche. Whether we begin from the premise than Nazi holocaust only can be accomplished in Germany thanks to preexistent cultural and residual values regarding extermination and fear of otherness, we must acknowledge that a

genius of the caliber of F. Nietzsche only can be born on the cradle of Norse Mythology as well.

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