

COMMENTS ON NIETZSCHE: ON COMPASSION

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ABSTRACT

The reputation of Friedrich Nietzsche keeps growing in the post-modernist philosophy, post-structuralism and the social sciences, with dominant scholars like Camus and Sartre, Derrida and Deleuze, Heidegger and Foucault, Feyerabend, Rorty, etc. Yet, his idea of social justice is extremely elitist, and far away from the morality of liberal egalitarianism today that favours human compassion as expressed in the concepts of freedom and equality.

Keywords: Nietzsche' moral philosophy, post-modernism, compassion, liberal egalitarianism.

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche is now considered as one of the major post-modernist thinkers, philosopher and social analyst with emphasis upon morality and social psychology (Magnus and Higgins, 1996; Andersen, 2017). Gone are the accusations of being a forerunner to the German disaster in the 1930s. It is his individualism, existentialism and expressionism that have caught the attention of great post-modernists, like e.g. Heidegger, Foucault and Sartre as well as his voluntarism, paralleling Dane Kierkegaard. Nietzsche's individualism is an uproar against all forms of "herd instinct", or collectivism.

Compassion is now widely regarded as a moral virtue, based upon empathy with other people and sympathy for their fate. *The American people are compassionate*, declared Robert Kennedy often. With so many million poor, handicapped and homeless, compassion appears completely legitimate. There is a global conscience about the terrible fate of the new persons in slavery, the trafficking of children and the premature death from starvation of the children in some Muslim countries.

The idea of compassion is to be found in the new moral theory of liberal egalitarianism, which is represented by several of the leading moral philosophers, e.g. Rawls, Dworkin, Barry and Sen. Liberal egalitarianism entails two kinds of compassion;

- i) Compassion for individual choice, endorsing the liberty of the person;
- ii) Compassion for impartiality between individuals whatever group they belong to.

Globalisation fosters awareness of compassion. But Nietzsche, the great anticipator of post-modernism, is a spokesman for a merciless morality. How to explain this anomaly?

READING NIETZSCHE

The genius of Nietzsche resides to a large degree in his dexterity to write as well as to choose titles. He comes back to his themes very often, but in a new context. Often his style is paradoxical, but the messages can most often be distilled. Here, I will only focus upon his mercilessness, especially against the not so fortunate. Nietzsche propagates a certain set of tenets in almost all books and booklets, although the various versions of these tenets are

given different formulation, sometimes with a risk of being incoherent. He mixes these tenets in several ways, sometimes bringing them up abruptly.

One may approach these tenets in the following way, namely by isolating them and identify them in his rich publications, from 1872-1889, i.e. before his illness, whatever it was, struck him mad. This interpretative procedure may involve some injustice to each and every book or booklet, but it is conducive to clarity.

Here, I examine Nietzsche's analysis of the problem of *merci*. And I will show that his attitude is NOT post-modernist, even less so egalitarian. Let us go through some of his texts backwards starting with one from 1888.

It may be pointed out that Nietzsche's style evolved or changed over time, becoming more high strung and impatient. His self-biography Ecce Homo (1888) is so arrogant that one may raise the question of megalomania. Nietzsche wanted to kill morality – his *nihilism*. But did he not advocate a new or another different morality? How about mercilessness, i.e. the rejection of compassion?

NIETZSCHE'S STYLE OF WRITING

I will employ a special technique for rendering his thoughts justice, while permitting me to comment upon them. Thus, I make a quote from Nietzsche and then state my comment, as I proceed from the last books or booklets, backwards. Nietzsche published a few times second editions of his books, where he inserted materials from other earlier books or entirely new things.

Nietzsche changes his style when his illness sets in and forces him to give up his brilliant professorship at Basel UNI in 1879. In his Birth of Tragedy (1872) and Untimely Meditations (1876b), the style is analytically comprehensive, but he by and by shifts to the proverbial form with lots of aphorisms. He also published poetry, the value of which I cannot judge. He repeats his basic themes in all later books, sometimes in an incoherent manner. Nietzsche is the master philosopher of morality, examining all its aspects in and out, up and down. He also deals with great personalities over and over again, like the religious *virtuosi* (Max Weber's word) and dominant philosophers as well as prominent Germans.

One cannot treat each book or booklet as a finished whole, because he publishes all the time, with additions and slightly changed emphasis. Sometimes he is contradictory, e.g. rejecting Buddhism but also to honour it, engaging in anti-Semitism only to praise Jewish culture and philosophy, or bowing ahead of the Greeks just to put them down under the Romans. The right method of interpreting Nietzsche's writings is to focus upon his *themes* and follow them through.

THE TWILIGHT OF IDOLS (1888)

Some quotations run as follows:

(Q1) Let us consider the other method for "improving" mankind, the method of breeding a particular race or type of man. The most magnificent example of this is furnished by Indian morality, sanctioned as religion in the form of "the law of Manu." Here the objective is to breed no less than four races within the same society: one priestly, one warlike, one for trade and agriculture, and finally a race of servants, the Sudras. Obviously, we are no longer dealing with animal tamers: a man mining all its aspects that is a hundred times milder and

more reasonable is the only one who could even conceive such a plan of breeding. One breathes a sigh of relief at leaving the Christian atmosphere of disease and dungeons for this healthier, higher, and wider world. How wretched is the New Testament compared to Manu, how foul it smells! (Nietzsche, 2005: 184)

Comment 1: The Indian caste system is forbidden in the modern constitution of the county, when independent. Untouchables have been recruited for highest offices. The caste valuations may still plague India informally, but compassion has considerably reduced its relevance and acceptability.

(Q2) Yet this method also found it necessary to be terrible — not in the struggle against beasts, but against their equivalent — the ill-bred man, the mongrel man, the chandala. And again the breeder had no other means to fight against this large group of mongrel men than by making them sick and weak. Perhaps there is nothing that goes against our feelings more than these protective measures of Indian morality. The third edict, for example (Avadana-Sastra I), "on impure vegetables," ordains that the only nourishment permitted to the chandala shall be garlic and onions, seeing that the holy scripture prohibits giving them grain, fruit with grains, water or fire. The same edict orders that the water they drink may not be taken from rivers or wells, nor from ponds, but only from the approaches to swamps and from holes made by the footsteps of animals. They are also prohibited from washing their laundry and from washing themselves, since the water they are conceded as an act of grace may be used only to quench thirst. Finally, Sudra women are prohibited from assisting chandala women in childbirth, just as chandala women are prohibited from midwifing to each other. Nietzsche, 2005: 184-85)

Comment 2: Nietzsche's endorsement of social harassment of the untouchables – "chandala" in Sanskrit, is total. Few social systems are comparable to the India case system in terms of ugliness. One is reminded of American slavery, or the slavery in the Antiquity. Yet, Nietzsche raises no objection, although he is, as usual well-informed in old Indian culture and language.

(Q3) These regulations are instructive enough: we encounter Aryan humanity at its purest and most primordial; we learn that the concept of "pure blood" is very far from being a harmless concept. On the other hand, it becomes obvious in which people the chandala hatred against this Aryan "humaneness" has become a religion, eternalized itself, and become genius — primarily in the Gospels, even more so in the Book of Enoch. Christianity, sprung from Jewish roots and comprehensible only as a growth on this soil, represents the counter-movement to any morality of breeding, of race, privilege: it is the anti-Aryan religion par excellence. Christianity — the revaluation of all Aryan values, the victory of chandala values, the gospel preached to the poor and base, the general revolt of all the downtrodden, the wretched, the failures, the less favored, against "race": the undying chandala hatred is disguised as a religion of love. (Nietzsche, 2005:185)

Comment 3: Here, we come to the so-called "Aryan myth", which evidently Nietzsche believed in, although now discarded entirely; and he brings out his theory of Judaism and Christianity as the moral revolution against the strong and noble, i.e. no compassion with the "chandalas" and their suffering.

(Q4) The natural value of egoism. - Selfishness is worth only as much as the physiological value of the selfish person: it can be worth a lot or it can be worthless and despicable. Individuals can be seen as representing either the

ascending or the descending line of life. This gives you a canon for deciding the value of their selfishness. If they represent the ascending line then they have a really extraordinary value, - and since the whole of life advances through them, the effort put into their maintenance, into establishing their optimal conditions, might even be extreme. Of course, 'individuals', as peoples and philosophers have understood them so far, are a mistake: individuals are nothing in themselves, they are not atoms, they are not 'links in the chain', they are not just legacies of a bygone era, - each individual is the entire single line of humanity up through himself . . . If he represents descending development, decay, chronic degeneration, disease (- illnesses are fundamentally consequences of decay, not its causes), then he is of little value and in all fairness he should be taking away as little as possible from those who have turned out well. He is really just a parasite on them . . . (Nietzsche, 2005: 208)

Comment 4: No mercy, says Nietzsche. Egoism should play itself out, to the benefit of the lucky and to the harm of the unfortunate. Remember that Nietzsche's life was a losing struggle against an illness that finally drove him into madness, It has been suggested that it was syphilis, from a brothel in Italy, but new research suggest brain tumor. He was kept alive by the generosity of Basel UNI, paying him salary all the time. He did not sell many books during his active lifetime.

ON THE GENALOGY OF MORALS (1887)

Again, we begin by listening to Nietzsche:

(Q5) I dealt especially with the value of the 'unegoistic', the instincts of compassion, self-denial, self-sacrifice which Schopenhauer had for so long gilded, deified and transcendentalized until he was finally left with them as those 'values as such' on the basis of which he said 'no' to life and to himself as well. But against *these* very instincts I gave vent to an increasingly deep mistrust, a scepticism which dug deeper and deeper! Precisely here I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its most sublime temptation and seduction – temptation to what? to nothingness? – precisely here I saw the beginning of the end, standstill, mankind looking back wearily, turning its will *against* life, and the onset of the final sickness becoming gently, sadly manifest: (Nietzsche, 2006: 7)

Comment 5: Here we come to the crux of the matter analysed in this paper, the valuation of compassion itself. Starting from his deep insight into the teachings of Schopenhauer, his German colleague in philosophy of morality, Nietzsche finds that compassion must lead to negation of life itself.

(Q6) I understood the morality of compassion, casting around ever wider to catch even philosophers and make them ill, as the most uncanny symptom of our European culture which has itself become uncanny, as its detour to a new Buddhism? to a new Euro-Buddhism? to – *nihilism*? . . . This predilection for and overvaluation of compassion that modern philosophers show is, in fact, something

new: up till now, philosophers were agreed as to the *worthlessness* of compassion. I need only mention Plato, Spinoza, La Rochefoucauld and Kant, four minds as different from one another as it is possible to be, but united on one point: their low opinion of compassion. (Nietzsche, 2006: 6-7)

Comment 6: Compassion is at the basis of the modern theory of liberal egalitarianism, where equality among men and women has the same value as freedom. Equality is said to result from an impartial consideration of life opportunities for all people. Impartiality is justice, declares philosopher Brian Barry. And Dworkin talks about justice as an envy free society. But Nietzsche is partial in favour of those on the top.

(Q7) Exactly the opposite is true of the noble one who conceives of the basic idea 'good' by himself, in advance and spontaneously, and only then creates a notion of 'bad'! This 'bad' of noble origin and that 'evil' from the cauldron of unassuaged hatred – the first is an afterthought, an aside, a complementary colour, whilst the other is the original, the beginning, the actual *deed* in the conception of slave morality – how different are the two words 'bad' and 'evil', although both seem to be the opposite for the same concept, 'good'! But it is *not* the same concept 'good'; on the contrary, one should ask *who* is actually evil in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. The stern reply is: *precisely* the 'good' person of the other morality, the noble, powerful, dominating one, but re-touched, re-interpreted and reviewed through the poisonous eye of *ressentiment*. (Nietzsche, 2006: 11)

Comment 7: Nietzsche rejects any critique for moral partiality as the *resentment* of the bottom against the top. He even calls justice as impartiality a 'slave moral'.

(Q8) At the centre of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the beast of prey, the magnificent *blond beast* avidly prowling round for spoil and victory; this hidden centre needs release from time to time, the beast must out again, must return to the wild: – Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings – in this requirement they are all alike. It was the noble races which left the concept of 'barbarian' in their traces wherever they went; even their highest culture betrays the fact that they were conscious of this and indeed proud of it (for example, when Pericles, in that famous funeral oration, tells his Athenians: 'Our daring has forced a path to every land and sea, erecting timeless memorials to itself everywhere for good *and ill*').³¹ This 'daring' of the noble races, mad, absurd and sudden in the way it manifests itself, the unpredictability and even the improbability of their undertakings – Pericles singles out the *r9aqnmi/a* of the Athenians for praise – their unconcern and scorn for safety, body, life, comfort, their shocking cheerfulness and depth of delight in all destruction, in all the debauches of victory and cruelty – all this, for those who suffered under it, was summed up in the image of the 'barbarian', the 'evil enemy', perhaps the 'Goth' or the 'Vandal' (Nietzsche, 2006: 23)

Comment 8: Race theories were popular during Nietzsche's time. But he brings nothing original to these discarded hypotheses.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL (1886)**First a few quotations:**

(Q9) Religion, and the meaning religion gives to life, spreads sunshine over such eternally tormented people and makes them bearable even to themselves. It has the same effect that an Epicurean philosophy usually has on the suffering of higher ranks: it refreshes, refines, and *makes the most* of suffering, as it were. In the end it even sanctifies and justifies. Perhaps there is nothing more venerable about Christianity and Buddhism than their art of teaching even the lowliest to use piety in order to situate themselves in an illusory higher order of things, and in so doing stay satisfied with the actual order, in which their lives are hard enough (in which precisely this hardness is necessary!). (Nietzsche, 2000: 55)

Comment 9: Compassion is not entirely unknown to Nietzsche, as he here confirms that religion may be necessary for living with pain and sufferings. But it is all make belief.

(Q10) They try to preserve, to keep everything living that can be kept in any way alive. In fact, they take sides with the failure as a matter of principle, as religions *of the suffering*. They give rights to all those who suffer life like a disease, and they want to make every other Feeling for life seems wrong and become impossible. Whatever merit we Might find in this indulgent, preserving care, which was and is meant for The highest types of people (since these are the ones that, historically, have Almost always suffered the most), along with everyone else – nevertheless, In the final analysis, the religions that have existed so far (which have all Been *sovereign*) has played a principal role in keeping the type “man” on a lower level. They have preserved too much of *what should be destroyed*. (Nietzsche, 2000: 55-56)

Comment 10: Yet, Nietzsche quickly retreats from his compassion. He clearly identifies with the strong and noble against the unlucky and downtrodden.

(Q11) At the risk of annoying innocent ears I will propose this: egoism belongs to the essence of the noble soul. I mean that firm belief that other beings will, by nature, have to be subordinate to a being “like us” and will have to sacrifice themselves. The noble soul accepts this fact of its egoism without any question-mark, and also without feeling any harshness, compulsion, or caprice in it, but rather as something that may well be grounded in the primordial law of things. If the noble soul were to try to name this phenomenon, it would call it “justice itself.” It admits to itself, under certain circumstances (that at first give it pause), that there are others with rights equal to its own. As soon as it is clear about this question of rank, it will move among these equals and “equally righted” with an assured modesty and a gentle reverence equal to how it treats itself, in accordance with an inborn, celestial mechanics that all stars know so well. This is just *another* piece of its egoism, this finesse and self-limitation in dealing with equals – every star is an egoist of this sort. (Nietzsche, 2000:162)

Comment 11: In some theories of social justice, it is a necessary condition that justice implies the vision of an “impartial spectator” (Smith, 2010; Sen, 2009). But Nietzsche put egoism first, the enlightened selfishness of the noble.

(Q12) And the noble soul honors *itself* in them and in the rights that it gives them; it has no doubt that the exchange of rights and honors belongs to the natural state of things too, as the *essence* of all interaction. The noble soul gives as it takes, out of the passionate and sensitive instinct of retribution that is so fundamental to it. The concept of “mercy” is senseless and noisome *inter pares*; □ there might be a sublime way of letting gifts fall down on you from above, as it were, and lapping them up like raindrops; but the noble soul has no talent for this art and conduct. Its egoism gets in the way: it does not generally like looking “upwards,” – but rather *ahead*, horizontally and slowly, or downwards: – *it knows that it is high up*. (Nietzsche, 2000:162)

Comment 12: The concept of mercy is central in moral philosophy, just like pity. Thus, Johan Rawls (1971) formulates his famous second principle of justice in the following manner: to give the poor or unlucky his/her maxmin, which is actually the most sympathy one can get.

THE GAY SCIENCE (1982)

Is Nietzsche’s own morality really beyond the good and the bad? Could morals precepts override the good and the bad? Let us look at some of his favoured proverbs:

(Q13) *Against embarrassment*. - Whoever is always deeply occupied is beyond all embarrassment.

Imitators. - A: 'What? You want no imitators?' B: 'I don't want people to imitate me; I want everyone to set his own example, which is what *I* do.' A: 'So -?'

Skinnedness. - All people of depth find happiness in being for once like flying fish, playing on the outermost crests of waves; what they consider best in things is that they have a surface: their skinnedness - *sit venia verbo*.

From experience. - Some do not know how rich they are until they experience what kinds of rich people will steal from them.

Those who deny chance. - No victor believes in chance.

From paradise. - 'Good and evil are the prejudices of God' - said the snake.

One times one. - One is always wrong; but with two, truth begins. - One cannot prove his case, but two are already irrefutable, 'if you allow me to use this word'

Originality. - What is originality? To *see* something that still has no name; that still cannot be named even though it is lying right before everyone's eyes. The way people usually are, it takes a name to make something visible at all. - Those with originality have usually been the name-givers.

Sub specie aeterni: 'You are moving ever faster from the living: soon they will strike you out of their lists!' - B: 'That is the only way to participate in the privilege of the dead.' - A: 'What privilege?' - B: 'No longer to die.'

Without vanity. - When we are in love we want our defects to remain hidden - not from vanity but so the loved one won't suffer. Yes, the lover would like to be godlike - also not from vanity.

What we do. - What we do is never understood but always merely praised and reproached.

Ultimate doubt. - What, then, are man's truths ultimately? - They are the *irrefutable* errors of man.

Where cruelty is needed. - He who has greatness is cruel to his virtues and secondary considerations 'from the point of view of eternity'

With a great goal. - With a great goal one is superior even to justice, not only to one's deeds and judges.

What makes one heroic? - To approach at the same time one's highest suffering and one's highest hope.

What do you believe in? - In this: that the weight of all things must be determined a new.

What does your conscience say?- 'You should become who you are. '

Where lie your greatest dangers? - In compassion.

What do you love in others?- My hopes.

Whom do you call bad? - He who always wants to put people to shame.

What is most human to you?-To spare someone shame.

What is the seal of having become free? - No longer to be ashamed before oneself. (Nietzsche, 1997: 150-153).

Comment 13: Nietzsche here consistently rebuts compassion and its neighbouring concepts. He regards the ideal to be true of oneself to omit solidarity, which is hardly true. It seems that Nietzsche commits the error of linking the morals of sin, which he is totally against, with the morals of pity. People with moral integrity may of course feel pity with groups of persons in various difficulties.

HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN (1978)

This book is different from the books or booklets in the 1980s, because the style is less exalted, more objective and less emotional. Nietzsche deals with compassion when discussing socialism-liberalism and their moral foundations. This is one of his biggest books, examining a lot of aspects of morality. I will make two quotations:

(Q14) GENIUS AND THE IDEAL STATE IN CONFLICT.—The Socialists demand a comfortable life for the greatest possible number. If the lasting house of this life of comfort, the perfect State, had really been attained, then this life of comfort would have destroyed the ground out of which grow the great intellect and the mighty individual generally, I mean powerful energy. Were this State reached, mankind would have grown too weary to be still capable of producing genius. Must we not hence wish that life should retain its forcible character, and that wild forces and energies should continue to be called forth afresh? But warm and sympathetic hearts desire precisely the *removal* of that wild and forcible character, and the warmest hearts we can imagine desire it the most passionately of all, whilst all the time its passion derived its fire, its warmth, its very existence precisely from that wild and forcible character; the warmest heart, therefore, desires the removal of its own foundation, the destruction of itself,—that is, it desires something illogical, it is not intelligent. (Nietzsche, 1996:112)

Comment 14: Nietzsche succeeds in this passage to reject both classical liberalism (Bentham's formula "*Greatest happiness principle*") and socialism that focuses upon the state. Both these ideologies are self-destructive.

(Q15) The highest intelligence and the warmest heart cannot exist together in one person, and the wise man who passes judgment upon life looks beyond goodness and only regards it as something which is not without value in the general summing-up of life. The wise man must *oppose* those digressive wishes of unintelligent goodness, because he has an interest in the continuance of his type and in the eventual appearance of the highest intellect; at least, he will not advance the founding of the "perfect State," inasmuch as there is only room in it for wearied individuals. Christ, on the contrary, he whom we may consider to have had the warmest heart, advanced the process of making man stupid, placed himself on the side of the intellectually poor, and retarded the production of the greatest intellect, and this was consistent. His opposite, the man of perfect wisdom,—this may be safely prophesied—will just as necessarily hinder the production of a Christ. The State is a wise arrangement for the protection of one individual against another; if its ennobling is exaggerated the individual will at last be weakened by it, even effaced, —thus the original purpose of the State will be most completely frustrated. (Nietzsche, 1996: 235)

Comment 15: It is difficult to agree with this separation between intelligence and a warm heart. For Nietzsche, the state has other objectives than the overall welfare of its citizens. Perhaps "the greatest intellect" needs democratic control of the by the poor intellects?!

(Q16) CULTURE AND CASTE.—A higher culture can only originate where there are two distinct castes of society: that of the working class, and that of the leisured class who are capable of true leisure; or, more strongly expressed, the caste of compulsory labour and the caste of free labour. The point of view of the division of happiness is not essential when it is a question of the production of a higher culture; in any case, however, the leisured caste is more susceptible to suffering and suffer more, their pleasure in existence is less and their task is greater. Now supposing there should be quite an interchange between the two castes, so that on the one hand the duller and less intelligent families and individuals are lowered from the higher caste into the lower, and, on the other hand, the freer men of the lower caste obtain access to the higher, a condition of things would be attained beyond which one can only perceive the open sea of vague wishes. Thus speaks to us the vanishing voice of the olden time; but where are there still ears to hear it? (Nietzsche, 1996: 430)

Comment 16: Modern social structure has broken down each and every caste society, completely delegitimized by modernisation as well as post-modernisation. Democracy calls all to the election boxes, and the market economy rewards who ever display the necessary skills, at least in general. However, also the unfortunate have rights, i.e. they can legitimately claim support, assistance and sympathy or empathy.

CONCLUSION

With neo-liberalism discarded, as the affluence and wealth do not "trickle down" (M. Freedman's promise), and socialism is in lack of a credible economic system theory (see Venezuela), the morality of compassion takes center stage. The unlucky are so numerous in the globalization era: asylum seekers, refugees, Syria's and Yemen's children, undernourishment in Africa, the Rohingyas, the homeless in the rich world, the eco-refugees, etc. Compassion will not threaten the ruling classes or the capitalist system, but it offers a solid foundation for people assistance and personal help.

Compassion is strongly implied in liberal egalitarianism, as with its two forms of social justice = liberty and equality (Hinrose, 2014). But it also believes in the market economy as

the most effective allocation mechanism (Rawls, 1971). But Nietzsche did not see things this way. He explicitly rejects the morality of compassion with those left behind to such an extent that he also distances his own morality from pity. Yet, does not Nietzsche himself deserve pity due to all his suffering, wandering around, from Basel UNI to Engadin's Sila-Maria (Tanner, 2011; Young, 2010)?

Nietzsche rejected all forms of collectivism – religious or secular – as herd morality. Instead he endorsed individual freedom maximally, but at the same time regarded the idea of free will as nonsense like “*causa sui*”. Individualism does not entail no mercy, as even the billionaires display more and more of compassion.

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