

## An Appraisal of Friedrich Nietzsche's Atheism

Celestine Chibueze Uzundu

Veritas University, Abuja

### Abstract

Etymologically, the word a-theism means privation of God or gods. But the full import of this etymology did not emerge until the dawn of the modern age which inaugurated the transition from a religious to a secular age, from a supernatural to a natural orientation. This transition marks the birth moment of *the god-less man* of modernity and post-modernity. It is this *godlessness* that inspired the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. This essay is a critical engagement with Nietzsche's atheism and its implications. It highlights atheism as a postulate for his critique of religion and traditional metaphysics through his two main doctrines of the Will to Power and Eternal Recurrence to the proclamation of *the death of God* and the emergence of the Overman, and how these are all interconnected. The burden of this paper is to demonstrate that Nietzsche's atheism is not the conclusion of a philosophical argument, but a *postulate* that underlies his entire philosophy which is epitomized in his prophetic declaration of *the death of God* and *the advent of nihilism*.

**Keywords:** Atheism, Death of God, Godlessness, Eternal Recurrence, Nihilism, Overman

### Introduction

Unlike the other atheists before and after him, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is an atheist *sui generis*. He neither denies the existence of God nor simply disbelieves the existence of God nor just limits himself to a psychological statement about the rise of unbelief. He rather constates what no one has yet observed: *the death of God*. Nietzsche uses a madman as a character in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to proclaim *the death of God* to the public. Nietzsche prophesies that the dreadful news of *the death of God* and its consequences will take a few more centuries to be felt by the Europeans and the rest of the world. *The death of God* stands and falls with the advent of nihilism which characterizes *the god-less age*. More than a century after Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God and the advent of nihilism, the consequences of this historic proclamation are unimaginable as they

were and remain unforeseeable. Today, *godlessness* has become the criterion of thinking and living rather than exception to the rule. It underlies the anthropocentric, secularistic, hedonistic and thanatic culture of contemporary society. Not only the West, but the whole world has come under the radar of atheistic humanism which is spreading like wild fire. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that Nietzsche's atheism is not the conclusion of a philosophical argument, but a postulate that underlies his entire philosophy which is epitomized in his prophetic declaration of the *death of God* and *the advent of nihilism*.

### 1. The Concept of Atheism

Atheism derives from the Greek word *a-theos* which is a fusion of the Greek negating alpha ( $\alpha$ -) and the substantive *ho theos/to theion* (God/god).<sup>1</sup> Literally, it means without God/god. Originally, it

means atheist, godless or ungodly in the colloquial sense of being amoral or immoral.<sup>2</sup> Later on, the word *atheos* acquired the negative sense of *atheism* as a denial of the existence of God in contrast to theism which is the belief in God's existence. Therefore, atheism is defined in terms of that which it denies. It is the logical denial of theism.

The negating alpha (*alpha privativum*) denies or negates the substantive that follows it as illustrated by such Greek words like *a-nemia* (without blood, blood-less), *a-sthenia* (without power, power-less), *a-cephalos* (without head, head-less), *a-phasia* (without speech, speechless), *a-boulia* (without will-power), *a-patheia* (without passion, passion-less), *a-nomie* (without law, law-less), *a-kinesia* (without motion, motion-less), *a-byssos* (without bottom, bottom-less). The English equivalent of negating alpha is *no*, *not*, *without* or *-less*. Moreover, it is also used for differentiating or distinguishing between similar terms that are not exactly the same, and not just for outright denying, negating or rejecting. In this sense, Innocent Osuagwu argues that the alpha in *a-theos* not only functions as a privative but also as a differential particle. Hence, he talks about a *differential a-theism*, a category into which he classifies the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) as a *differential a-theist*.<sup>3</sup>

Another meaning of atheism is simply non-belief in the existence of God, rather than positive belief in the non-existence of God. These two different meanings are sometimes characterized as positive and negative atheism. *Positive atheism* is the belief in the non-existence of God, whereas *negative atheism* is the lack of belief in the existence of God.<sup>4</sup> Atheism is not only contrasted with *theism*, which, in its most general form, is the belief in the existence of God. It is also contrasted with *polytheism*, the belief in many gods; with *henotheism*,

the belief in a principal god among many gods; with *kathenotheism*<sup>5</sup>, the Vedic practice of rotating the position of the supreme god among the gods; with *deism*, the belief in God that is based not on revelation, but on evidence from nature; with *pantheism*, the belief that God is identical with Nature; and with *panentheism*, the belief that God is in all things. It is also least contrasted with *agnosticism*, the position of neither believing nor disbelieving that God exists.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the debate between theism and atheism, belief and unbelief is the linchpin of the history of Western thought.<sup>7</sup> But this essay focuses only on the atheism of the German philosopher and philologist Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), which is espoused in his two main doctrines of the *Will to Power* and *Eternal Recurrence*.

## 2. The Doctrine of the Will to Power

Historically, Nietzsche's doctrine of the *Will to Power* can be traced back to the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). After reading Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 1819 (*The World as Will and Representation*), Nietzsche was impressed by Schopenhauer's interpretation that Will is the prime principle and mover of the universe but he did not yet see it as the unifying force of all reality. It was only later that the idea of the *Will to Power* struck Nietzsche's mind like a flash of lightning and in a frenzied state of inspiration he wrote his famous work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) where he expounded the dithyrambs of the *Will to Power* and *Eternal Recurrence*. Thus Nietzsche found his *philosopher's stone* in the doctrine of the *Will to Power* and *Eternal Recurrence*. For Nietzsche, the *Will to Power* is the fundamental psychological force in human life. All other drives are merely manifestations of this one main obsession. The notion of the *Will to Power* has

frequently been misinterpreted to mean only physical or military power. However, whether they are strong or weak, all people manifest the *Will to Power*, although it may express itself in many hidden and subtle ways.

Nietzsche also took great delight in what he regarded as Schopenhauer's "unashamed atheism."<sup>8</sup> He saw Schopenhauer as the first avowed and trenchant atheist in the annals of German history. Like Schopenhauer, he wholeheartedly accepted the idea that atheism is a necessary postulate for the advancement of philosophical thinking. Just like Schopenhauer's *Will to Life*, Nietzsche's *Will to Power* is nothing but the *Will to Atheism* which is the mark of the spirit of modernity and post-modernity.

For Nietzsche, the rejection of God is a matter of instinct. In his first major work, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872 (*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*), he named and baptized his newly adopted deity:

Thus it happened that...my vital instinct turned against ethics and founded a radical counter-doctrine, slanted aesthetically, to oppose the Christian libel on life. But it still wanted a name. Being a philologist, that is to say a man of words, I christened it arbitrarily – for who can tell the real name of Antichrist? – with the name of a Greek god, Dionysos.<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche was enthralled with his new god. For him, the Greek god Dionysus - the counterpart of the Roman god Bacchus - is instinctive and undiluted life. According to Nietzsche, Christianity is nothing but a will to deny life. It is "a secret instinct of destruction, a principle of calumny, a reductive agent – the beginning of the end – and for that very reason, the supreme Danger."<sup>10</sup> In Nietzsche's estimation, Christianity from the very beginning was

preoccupied with self-loathing. It hates the real world, fears beauty and sensuality, and deflects its followers from life by directing their real, natural interests toward their neighbor and toward an afterlife.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche's hatred of Christianity proceeds mainly from his view of its supposed effect on man, whom it renders weak, submissive, resigned, humbled or tortured in conscience and unable to develop himself freely. It either prevents the growth of superior individuals or ruins them.

The Greek god Dionysus became Nietzsche's god and role model. In *Birth of Tragedy*, he tells of the two gods whom the Greeks had venerated in art. Dionysus is the first. He is the god of wine and revelry, of instincts, ecstasy and orgy. He is also the god of song and music, of dance and drama, and above all, of dauntless suffering. Then comes Apollo, the god of reason and logic, meditation and contemplation. Nietzsche ascribes a restless masculine power to Dionysus and a quiet feminine quality to Apollo.

Although Nietzsche contends that the noblest of Greek art is a union of these two ideals, it is only too clear from his writings that it is Dionysus who has thoroughly captured his soul. According to Nietzsche, the emergence of Socrates and Plato on the Greek philosophical scene signaled the cooling of the Dionysian spirit and the domination of Apollo. Thus reason replaces instinct, philosophy replaces poetry, science replaces art, and dialectic replaces the Olympic Games. Nietzsche excoriates Plato as a *pagan-Christian*, while condemning Socrates' counsel to "know thyself" as barbaric.<sup>12</sup>

Nietzsche's appraisal of Socrates would later turn to passionate venom. In his last work, *Der Wille zur Macht*, 1908 (*The Will to Power*), he states that Socrates represents a moment of the most profound perversity in the history of values. He

scathingly refers to him as a *moral-maniac*, a *buffon*, and a *tyrant*. He characterizes the Socratic method as "exaggeration, eccentricity, caricature, self-derision, dialectical dryness."<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche's Dionysian temper had little patience with the ratiocinative and investigative approach of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. He saw Philosophy not so much as a harmony of Dionysian and Apollonian attitudes, but exclusively in terms of the former. In *The Will to Power*, he states that "philosophy, as I have understood it and lived up to the present, is the voluntary quest of the repulsive and atrocious aspects of existence."<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the *will to Power* is for Nietzsche the *will to know* "...the hidden history of philosophers, the psychology of the great names..."<sup>15</sup> Hence the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur enlisted Nietzsche among the triumvirate of his famous expression "The Masters of Suspicion."<sup>16</sup>

### **3. Nietzsche's Conception of Religion**

Nietzsche conception of Religion is akin to that of the father of atheistic humanism Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804-1872). For Nietzsche, religion is a kind of psychological duplication. According to him, God is nothing more than the mirror of man, who, in certain intense, exceptional states, becomes aware of the power that is in him or of the love that exalts him. But, as these sensations take him more or less by surprise and he does not seem to be accountable for them, man, not daring to ascribe such power or love to himself, makes them the attributes of a superhuman being who is a stranger to him. He accordingly divides the two dimensions of his own nature between two spheres, the ordinary and weak dimension appertaining to the sphere he calls *man*, whereas the extraordinary and strong

dimension belongs to the sphere he calls *God*. Thus by his own action he defrauds himself of what is best in him. Like Feuerbach, Nietzsche construes religion as an *illusive human projection*. It is a process by which man is divested of his greatness and invested with wretchedness. Therefore, the whole essence of the human problem will consist in remounting that fatal slope so as "gradually to regain possession of those lofty and proud states of the soul of which man has wrongfully despoiled himself."<sup>17</sup>

This process of self-debasement in religion attains its climax in Christianity in which there is nothing good, great and true that is not solely bestowed by grace. Hence Nietzsche writes:

It is a deplorable story: man seeks a principle in the name of which he can despise man: he invents another world in order to be able to slander and besmirch this one; in actual fact he never grasps anything but nothingness and makes of that nothingness a 'God', a 'Truth', called upon to judge and condemn this present existence...<sup>18</sup>

Nietzsche takes it for granted that God cannot live anywhere but in the human mind. But He is an undesirable guest there because, according to Nietzsche, He is "a thought that bends everything that is straight."<sup>19</sup> The way to get rid of him is not so much to refute the proofs of his existence but to show how such an idea came to be formed and how it succeeded in establishing itself in the human mind and in gaining ground there. According to Nietzsche, this psychological refutation is the only one that will put an end to the oldest question of humanity. It will make any counter-proof unavailing, whereas without it a doubt will always persist; for in spite of themselves, men will always keep on wondering whether there is not perhaps some better proof than the one

that has just been refuted. Consequently, belief will not have been destroyed at the root, and it will not fail to put forth new shoots at the first opportunity. Hence Nietzsche concludes that God must die so that his new god, the *Overman*,<sup>20</sup> will take the place of God.

#### **4. On The Death of God**

Nietzsche's phrase *death of God* is probably one of the grossly misunderstood phrases in the history of Philosophy. Not only the man in the street, but also students and teachers of Philosophy misinterpret the true meaning of the expression. It has even inspired some Christian thinkers to talk of *The Death of God Theology*<sup>21</sup> leading to the paradox of *Christian atheism*.<sup>22</sup> But what does the *death of God* really mean? To know the true meaning of this controversial expression, it is pertinent to trace it back to its original context since there is no text without a context. Unlike the other atheists who tried to prove the non-existence of God, Nietzsche speaks about the *death of God* as a dramatic and historical event no one has yet noticed. He proclaims this dreadful news thus:

Have you not heard of the mad man who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried unceasingly: 'I am looking for God!' As many of those who were standing together there did not believe in God, he excited considerable laughter. Have you lost him then? Said one. Did he lose his way like a child? Said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on voyage? Or emigrated? – thus they shouted and laughed. The mad man sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances. 'Where has he gone? he cried. I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe

away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Wither is it moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually fallen? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of an empty space? Has it not become colder? Is more and more night not coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? – gods too decompose. *God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.*<sup>23</sup>

"God is dead"! What does it mean? Is it to be understood literally or metaphorically? How did we kill God? Above all, which God is Nietzsche referring to? First and foremost, we must avoid the trap of a literal interpretation of the words of the philologist Nietzsche, who writes in a style that is sketchy, irksome, and slippery. Typically, he expresses himself in aphorisms and metaphors meant to provoke, shock, and challenge his reader. According to Nietzsche, a good writer handles "his language like a flexible rapier, feeling from his arm down to his toes the dangerous delight of the quivering, over-sharp blade that desires to bite, hiss, cut."<sup>24</sup> Hence one is most likely to miss the gist if one searches for formal answers to questions or straightforward statements of Nietzsche's points.

What precisely then does Nietzsche intend by declaring that *God is dead*? Is the *death of God* myth or reality? The French theologian Henri De Lubach argues that whatever its antecedents may have been, the meaning Nietzsche attaches to the

phrase *death of God* is new. It is neither a mere statement of a fact nor a lament or a piece of sarcasm. Rather it is an act of the will.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the *death of God* is the consequence of man's wilful unbelief. It's the extinction of theistic belief in the heart of modern man. Similarly, American Theologian John Courtney Murray opines that: "The death of God is not a fact; it never happened. But men have projected the idea, as a fact, into history in an effort to account for an aspect of the human condition and for a direction of human striving in what has been called the 'age of the absence of God.'"<sup>26</sup>

Hence Nietzsche's phrase *death of God* does not mean that living God really died since by attribution He is, *inter alia*, immortal and everlasting or that the notion of God is no longer viable in the age of science and technology, but that the annihilation of belief in God is the necessary precondition for the emergence of the *godless man* of modernity and post-modernity.

According to Nietzsche, *the death of God* as a historical event leads to the advent of nihilism, which is the denial of all values. With *the death of God*, the earth has been separated from its sun and it is becoming gradually engulfed in darkness. Mankind is now drifting aimlessly without light and orientation. Without the orientation of religious belief, human life becomes absurd and meaningless. Thus Nietzsche anticipates *absurdity* as one of the main tenets of twentieth century Existentialism.

Bereft of God in whom it used to repose, to whom it used to appeal, humanity must henceforth go forward and upward. It is forced to create. Hence Nietzsche writes: "Since there ceased to be a God, loneliness has become intolerable; the man who overtops the rest must set to work."<sup>27</sup> He must produce out of himself something with which to transcend humanity; let him trample his own head

under foot and shoot forth beyond his shadow. The endurance test to which he has condemned himself will reveal to him his own divinity by bringing it into being. God is dead, long live the Overman, the Man-God of Nietzsche.

According to Nietzsche, remorse and despair will be overcome simultaneously, by the same effort:

How shall the murderers of all murderers console ourselves? That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bleed to death under our knives – who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us?<sup>28</sup>

At this prospect the free thinkers rejoice. Such a revelation is indeed *fröhliche Wissenschaft* (cheerful science). Before their delighted eyes, the horrible twilight gives place to dawn. The greatest danger that threatened them has been removed from their path. The corpse of God in decomposition is not, for them, a sign of death. Rather, it is a sign of great change. God will find himself again in man, beyond good and evil. Such is the power of a heroic decision. With God dead, the sublime adventure of humanity can begin:

Hearing that the old god is dead, we feel ourselves illumined as by a new dawn. Our hearts overflow with gratitude, surprise, foreknowledge and suspense... Now at last the horizon, even if it is not clear, is free once more; now at last our ships can weigh anchor and sail to meet any danger; now once more the pioneer of knowledge has license to attempt whatever he will: the whole expanse of the seas, our sea, is accessible to us once more. Never

before, perhaps, was there such an open sea.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, the demise of God and the emergence of the higher men inaugurates the era of unlimited possibilities for the greatness of man.

## 5. The Overman

Nietzsche summarizes his ideal of humanity with the German noun *der Uebermensch* which is better translated as the *Overman* instead of the *Superman*. The *Overman* does not refer to a particular individual but describes a type of person that will realize, for the first time, all the unfulfilled potentials within humanity. Hence Nietzsche writes: "The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope."<sup>30</sup> The higher types that have appeared thus far have come close to realizing the ideal, but even they are infected with the weight of their humanity: "Never yet has there been an overman. Naked I saw both the greatest and the smallest man: they are still all-too-similar to each other. Verily, even the greatest I found all-too-human."<sup>31</sup> The type of individual who fulfills the ideal of the *Overman* will save humanity from its own psychological destruction. While Nietzsche compares humanity to a polluted stream, he likens the *Overman* to a great sea that can absorb the minuscule pollution without being corrupted by it.<sup>32</sup>

Parodying the Medieval conception of man as *mid-way* between the animals and the angels, Nietzsche says that "man is a rope stretched between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss."<sup>33</sup> However, the biological process of evolution will not produce this new breed of humanity, because evolution is an unconscious process that only produces types of species and not the singularly unique sort of individual that Nietzsche envisions, who

will rise above the herd. The *Overman* emerges by a process of self-cultivation, which can only be accomplished by an act of the will. Human nature, as we know it, is constituted by our biological inheritance and our cultural conditioning. It constitutes what we are, but Nietzsche is speaking to those who are concerned with what they shall become. What is needed is to redefine what it means to be human, by overcoming the limitations of human nature. Hence Nietzsche writes: "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"<sup>34</sup> The overcoming of the limitations of man leads to emergence of the *Overman* who is the new god of the earth.

Although he speaks of the *Overman* as a powerful, commanding person, Nietzsche is not describing a tyrant. The *Overman* is not one who conquers others as much as he is one who overcomes himself by mastering the destructive drives in him. Thus, in spite of his antireligious bias, Nietzsche says "so far that the most powerful human beings have still bowed worshipfully before the saint as the riddle of self-conquest and deliberate final renunciation."<sup>35</sup> But the saint masters himself only by trying to stamp out the passions and ends by extinguishing any sense of his individual self. Instead, Nietzsche's ideal is a "union of spiritual superiority with well-being and an excess of strength".<sup>36</sup> The *Overman* combines "the Roman Caesar with the Christ's soul."<sup>37</sup> Although he admires the great conquerors in history, the kind of strength he admires in them is not their military power over others, but their psychological power and inner strength. For this reason, Nietzsche's ideal is more often found in the artist than in the military conqueror.

According to Nietzsche, the *Overman* is the meaning of the earth and, unless the elite of this world work hard for his

coming, man as a rope tied between beast and Overman, will certainly plunge into the abyss of animality. The elite must continually repeat the following Zarathustrian battle cry: "Let your will say: overman is to be the meaning of the earth."

## 6. The Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence

Nietzsche conceives his doctrine of *Eternal Recurrence* in opposition to the Christian conception of history which is teleological. The Christian conception of history is centered on the Mystery of Christ. Jesus Christ, the God-Man is the origin, the center, the end as well as the meaning of human history. For Christianity, the historical process is not a blind evolution of events but is oriented to the restoration of all things in Christ.

Nietzsche rejects this Christian conception as a falsification of history. Instead, he looks back to the Greek tragic era before Socrates as the pinnacle of man's glory in history. According to Nietzsche, history far from being a single course of decisive events under the guidance of divine and human intelligence, is in reality "fragmented into an experimental laboratory for coining men." History is "the great testing plant." In the words of Nietzsche: "Mankind does not advance; it does not even exist. The total aspect is that of a huge experimental station, where some tests succeed... and countless others fail." Thus Nietzsche reverses the idea of unity of history with his theory of *Eternal Recurrence*. Consequently, the emphasis in history now shifts from a unitary conception and goal of history to ways of trying to understand history and guide it toward a man-imposed ideal. This process is to be determined by the Will to Power of the higher men. The *Overman* will take the place and role of God as the Architect and Ruler of history. This conscious realization of cosmic power fills the higher men with

joy. But all joy wants eternity. And *Eternal Recurrence* is the only guarantee of eternal joy in the possession of power in time and history. Nietzsche conceived his doctrine of *Eternal Recurrence* in antithesis to any faith that looks to another world for eternal joy. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes:

...If ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, 'You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!' Then you wanted back all. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored – oh, then you loved the world... I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of other-worldly hopes.<sup>38</sup>

Nietzsche himself admits that the idea of the *Eternal Recurrence* is rather dismal, even oppressive. But just as the Christian faces death as the severest test of his ability to say yes to God so the higher men use the *Eternal Recurrence* as the supreme test of their willingness to say yes to the world and life as they are. In *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882 (*The Gay Science*), Nietzsche imagines a demon appearing to one of the loneliest of the higher types and putting the ultimate temptation, in the sense of a trial and test, before his soul. "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 no things new in it...all in the same succession and sequence."<sup>39</sup> Hence Nietzsche quizzes: "Will you curse and gnash your teeth at this dismal destiny, thereby becoming a nay-sayer to life? Or will you crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate, eternal confirmation and seal, thereby becoming a yea-sayer to the world of eternal Becoming?" The world-approving elite, in so far as they are actors in this life, want to act the play over and over again forever. In so far as they are spectators, their eternal cry is encore!

encore! They gladly follow their master Zarathustra whose destiny it is to be the teacher of *eternal recurrence*. Their highest courage and Will to Power is to accept gladly the eternal recurrence even of the smallest people who cause in the elite disgust with all existence. And Alas, nausea! nausea! nausea! Even so, despite this metaphysical sickness, the elite welcome the recurrence of every last details of this life. "Oh, how should I not lust after eternity and after the nuptial ring of rings – the ring of the recurrence."<sup>40</sup>

In a nutshell, Nietzsche's doctrine of the *Eternal Recurrence* supplants the Judaeo-Christian linear conception of history in which God is the Creator, the Ruler and the Telos of history.

## 6. Evaluation

The impact and influence of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy especially his atheism cannot be underestimated. He was prophetic in anticipating the century that lay ahead. The rise and onslaught of nihilism, secularism, hedonism, the crave for and abuse of power and the growing sense of alienation are just a few of the trends in the twentieth and twenty-first century and beyond that Nietzsche saw coming. But does the enormous influence alone of Nietzsche's philosophy justify his claims? Does the popularity of his ideas alone validate his conclusions? Certainly not!

At this point, it's expedient to appraise Nietzsche's philosophical method and presuppositions. Too often, Nietzsche dismisses traditional philosophical ideas with a wave of the hand by merely demonstrating that these ideas have a psychological origin and fulfill subjective needs within us. However, this is a typical example of the genetic fallacy. The genetic fallacy is a type of argument that attempts to prove that a belief is false on the basis of its origin. It would be just as fallacious to

explain away Nietzsche's philosophy by looking at the reasons why he had a psychological need for power and greatness. Even if many of our beliefs arise from deep-seated psychological needs, this does not imply that the conditions that would meet these needs do not exist. For instance, it is both true that we have built-in needs for nutrition, reproduction, communication etc. and that there are objective conditions in reality that fulfill these needs. Isn't it also possible that a belief in God or a belief in a rational world order both fulfill subjective needs and correspond to an objective reality that could meet these needs? This, of course, does not prove that there is God or a rational order. But it shows that the fact that an idea is psychologically satisfying does not in itself constitute grounds for its rejection. Unfortunately, this is Nietzsche's main criterion for the rejection of religious belief in God.

Furthermore, Nietzsche's project of the *death of God* and the advent of nihilism leads inevitably to the *death of man*. In view of this, Nietzsche is enlisted among the architects of the *culture of death* which is opposed to the *culture of life* inaugurated by Christ. Hence Donald De Marco rightly affirms that "By exalting the human will above all else and declaring the death of God, Nietzsche provides the Culture of Death with a passionate and enticing antiphilosophy to be used as its foundation."<sup>41</sup> The *culture of death* is characterized "by the eclipse of the sense of God and sense of man."<sup>42</sup> In fact, without the Creator, the creature is nothing. Hence the Second Vatican Council affirms that "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and

his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling."<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing, we can conclude without fear of exaggeration that Nietzsche's proclamation of the *death of God* is nothing else but a *psychological pronunciamento* of a man who hates the Christian God with passion. In fact Nietzsche's resentment against the Christian God is rooted in his visceral resentment against Christ and Christianity. His rejection of the Christian religion led him to the rejection of the Christian God. Hence Nietzsche is not only an atheist and antitheist, but also a miso-theist and an anti-christ.

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Thomas Mauthner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, <sup>2</sup> 2005), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Isidor F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> Innocent Osuagwu, *Differential A-theism: The Controversial Case of A Godly A-theist*, (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 1995), ch. 4. Cf. also Innocent Osuagwu, "Godly Atheism: Striking the Contrast between Atheism and A-theism" in *Live Witness Journal* (12<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2017), pp.48-55.

<sup>4</sup> William L. Rowe, "Atheism" in C. Edward, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.530-534.

<sup>5</sup> A term coined by the German-born British philologist, orientalist and indologist Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), which denotes one at a time-henotheism.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. James Thrower, *A Short History of Western Atheism* (London: Pemberton Books, 1971), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> James Collins, *The Existentialists: A Critical Study*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), p.21.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), p.11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp.10-11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. A.M. Ludovici, in: *Reality, Man and Existence: Essential Works of Existentialism*, ed. H.J. Blackham (New York: Bantam, 1965), pp.98-99.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.115.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), §3.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interpretations* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp.149-150.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 153-156.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Cf. also p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p.117.

<sup>20</sup> Vincent P. Miceli, *The Gods of Atheism*, (New York: Arlington House, 1971), p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Exponents of "the Death of God Theology" include William Hamilton, Thomas Altizer, Van Buren etc.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Altizer & William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966); Thomas Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp.14-15.

- 
- <sup>24</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §246.
- <sup>25</sup> Henri De Lubach, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* Part 1-3, trans. Edith M. Riley & Anne E. Nash, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), pp.49-50.
- <sup>26</sup> John C. Murray, *The Problem of God*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.3.
- <sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), § 800.
- <sup>28</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp.14-15.
- <sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 174.
- <sup>30</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue", §5.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., Part 2, "On Priests."
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., "Zarathustra's Prologue", §3.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., §4.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., §3.
- <sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §51.
- <sup>36</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §899.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., §983.
- <sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 435.
- <sup>39</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 101-102.
- <sup>40</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.340.
- <sup>41</sup> Donald De Marco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 53.
- <sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, Encyclical Letter on *The Gospel of Life* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), #21.
- <sup>43</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #22.
- **Celestine Chibueze Uzundu** is a Catholic priest and holds a Ph.D. He is of the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja and can be reached @: [uzonduc@veritas.edu.ng](mailto:uzonduc@veritas.edu.ng).