

Chapter Title: Nietzsche and the Old Testament

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Book Title: Studies in Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition

Book Editor(s): JAMES C. O'FLAHERTY, TIMOTHY F. SELLNER, ROBERT M. HELM

Published by: University of North Carolina Press. (1985)

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469656557_oflaherty.6

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III. Nietzsche and the Old Testament

Israel Eldad

(Translated by Yisrael Medad)

Dedicated to the memory
of Walter Kaufmann

A Value Judgment

The dedication of this article to Walter Kaufmann is more than an expression of my friendship and personal sorrow upon his death; certainly he would have dealt with the subject better than I. Actually, the dedication is part of the subject at hand, and I think it well to begin by relating something that I remember about him. During his stay in Jerusalem, a city he loved, I inquired of him in Kantian style while he was visiting with me (for I was then working on my Hebrew translation of Nietzsche): *Wie ist Dionysos in Jerusalem möglich?*—How can Dionysus be possible in Jerusalem? He seemed pleased by the question and his reply the next day was a poem whose theme was “And David was leaping and dancing before the Lord” (2 Sam. 6:14).

Here in one sweep we have three elements: Kaufmann’s poetic soul, which was full of enthusiasm for Nietzsche; the living Bible; and one of the keys to Nietzsche’s own love for the Old Testament. In fact, this key is provided by Nietzsche himself: “All honor to the Old Testament! I find in it great human beings, a heroic landscape, and something of the very rarest quality in the world, the incomparable naiveté of the *strong heart*; what is more, I find a people.”¹

This respect for the Old Testament is highlighted further when compared with Nietzsche’s negation of most of the personalities in the New Testament, for it is clear that personalities or situations of a Dionysian character are absent from the New Testament. Nietzsche, in truth, does not mention this biblical episode of David’s wild

1. GM, III, sec. 22; *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1966), p. 580.

dance before the Ark of the Lord. Incidentally, the language there is more explicit and stronger in that it stresses not the Ark but that he danced before the Lord himself, even though the subject there is the transporting of the Ark to Jerusalem. Yet the example chosen by Kaufmann to illustrate the possible connection between Dionysus and Jerusalem is concise in the extreme, as it usually is with expressionists. Ancient Greek culture had, as is known, a decisive effect on the thought of Nietzsche, which lends added significance to the clash with the culture of Israel, a clash quite surprising in its modernity.

The accepted historiography—and this too with a large measure of help from Jewish thinkers—always stressed the polarization between Judaism and Hellenism: on the one hand strict ethical monotheism, and on the other agnostic polytheism and creative philosophy. Nietzsche, however, as a philosopher of culture who opened gates to a new value scale, freed himself from such platitudes of thinking and unveiled new and surprising vistas.

It is obvious that Nietzsche possessed a profound knowledge of the New Testament and profited greatly from the deep Protestant tradition of his family. Yet there is no sharp division between the Old and New Testaments. The New is in no way an absolute negation of the Old, for already in the Old are to be found the roots of Christianity, for instance in the account of the separating of man from nature. Christianity, especially the Pauline version, inherited from Judaism the very concept of sin, the “revolt of the slaves,” and the priestly rule. All these, according to Nietzsche’s outlook, do not apply to the personality of Jesus himself. At times it seems that the idea of the Jews’ being “guilty” of Christianity is accepted by Nietzsche not in conjunction with the heroes of the Old Testament, but as a postbiblical link. It was the Exile that forced the Jews to develop an unnatural Judaism, the fruit of which is Christianity.

In this sense one can find the discerning distinction between the terms “Israel” and “the Jews” or “Judaism.” The first usually merits a positive response, whereas the latter is treated in a negative fashion. “Usually,” I note, for, from a historical-psychological standpoint and apart from a religious value system, Nietzsche is astonished at the will to survive and the strength of life of the Jews throughout their exilic history, and especially in their state of dispersion. It is as if this strength of will atones for their “sin” toward mankind’s history: “Jewish” morality.

And yet, it does not escape the eyes of a man of truth such as Nietzsche that the Old Testament already contains the possibilities

for the religious-moral development that he negates, just as he negates the morality that denies nature, even if it is clear to him that it was only Christianity that drew the final conclusions from these possibilities and brought them to a total denial of life, whereas Judaism—and this is its glory and the secret of its survival—did not follow this path to the end.

The history of Israel is invaluable as the typical history of all *denaturing* of natural values. I indicate five points. Originally, especially at the times of the kings, Israel also stood in the right, that is, the natural, relationship to all things. Its Yahweh was the expression of a consciousness of power, of joy in oneself, of hope for oneself: through him victory and welfare was expected; through him nature was trusted to give what the people needed—above all, rain. Yahweh is the god of Israel and therefore the god of justice: the logic of every people that is in power and has a good conscience. In the festival cult these two sides of the self-affirmation of a people find expression: they are grateful for the great destinies which raised them to the top; they are grateful in relation to the annual cycle of the seasons and to all good fortune in stock farming and agriculture. This state of affairs long remained the ideal, even after it had been done away with in melancholy fashion: anarchy within, the Assyrian without. The people, however, clung to the vision, as the highest desirability, of a king who is a good soldier and severe judge: above all, that typical prophet (that is, critic and satirist of the moment), Isaiah.²

An almost Dionysian description, at least in the later implication when Nietzsche's "wildness" was already restrained by the Apollonian element. The use in this instance of the name of the Divinity, Yahweh, rather than the plain "God," is an indication of Nietzsche's intention: this is His personal name, or in other words, the reality of Israel's god, His real sense. This is a living god of a people, an expression of its natural needs and of its soul. The morality of this god, too, is harnessed to Israel's life-needs as well as to its will to power, its need to know how to hate its enemies—who, of course, are Yahweh's enemies—and how to rejoice in its victories. All of Nietzsche's admiration for the Old Testament stems from the affirmation of life, the saying of "yes" to life, in which its religion is subordinated to this affirmation of life and its god is patterned on man and this life. The

2. A, sec. 25; *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 594.

strength of this life is so great in the Old Testament that Nietzsche is not above setting it as an example even for the Greeks who are without doubt in his opinion—even in the Apollonian view, without mentioning the hedonistic outlook—a sure example and symbol of the affirmation of life: “The Jews, being a people which, like the Greeks, and even to a greater degree than the Greeks, loved and still love life, had not cultivated that idea [‘life after death’] to any great extent.”³ Even the Greeks could learn from the heroism of the Patriarchs, says the admirer of Greece—that Greece which was itself an epitomization of heroic figures.

The resemblance between the later fate of Greek culture and that of Judaism, to Nietzsche’s mind, is self-evident, and even more so if Hellenization is seen to be an almost inexorable process. There is, therefore, a resemblance between the passage from youth to decadence in Hellas and that same passage in Judaism or, to be exact, in the Old Testament itself. Socrates and Plato are the watershed of Greek culture. All that preceded them was youthful, naive, strong, and healthy, even the thought of the earlier philosophers. From that time onwards—decadence. The watershed in the Old Testament is the struggle of the prophets against the kings: “The appearance of the Greek philosophers from Socrates onwards is a symptom of decadence. . . . Plato is just as ungrateful to Pericles, Homer, tragedy, rhetoric, as the prophets were to David and Saul.”⁴

As a classical philologist, Nietzsche naturally concerns himself with the particulars of the Greek stagnation, its “decadence,” to a greater degree than he does with the Old Testament, more so because in the former there is spread before him—and his critical soul—an aspect of Christianity that is the continuation and extreme extension of the decadence that began in Judaism. It was as if two streams of decadence met within Christianity: on the part of religion, the “gloomy religio-moral pathos,” and on the part of philosophy, the “Platonic slandering of the senses”; in either case, a negation of naturalism even unto the negation of life. The line of comparison is drawn out until it is established that “when Socrates and Plato took up the cause of virtue and justice, they were *Jews*.”⁵

Therefore, David dancing before God is perhaps indeed Dionysian, just as is his resemblance to Pericles—whom Plato attacks—

3. M, sec. 72; *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, 18 vols. (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1909–13), IX, 74.

4. WM, sec. 427 (my emphasis added); *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 231.

5. WM, sec. 429; *ibid.*, p. 234.

when David makes war and establishes a great kingdom. The presence of these figures in the Old Testament, full of life, full of vividness, and even imbued with a sense of humor, is what endeared the book to Nietzsche over the gloom of the New Testament that could not include a dancing David. Dance itself is even one of the signs of recognition of the true God: "a god prefers to stay beyond everything bourgeois and rational . . . between ourselves, also beyond good and evil. . . . Zarathustra goes so far as to confess: 'I would only believe in a God who could dance.'"⁶

The Old Testament David, of course, is not divine, just as Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* is not yet Dionysus to the extent that he would become in the last months of his creative work. What holds Nietzsche's attention is the similitude between the above expression of Nietzsche's and the dancing David, which lies beyond the bourgeois. Michal's despising of David's dancing expresses the situation well, and even though she is Saul's daughter, the stern moral spirit of Samuel is present and becomes even more evident in Nathan's indictment of David's involvement with Bathsheba—another event characterized as Dionysian (in the words "also beyond good and evil," as noted above). Incidentally, the Old Testament does not consider that it was his act with Bathsheba that was sinful, but rather his act directed toward Uriah.

What happened with the history of the Old Testament, which appears heroic to Nietzsche (and in the early parts of which Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, is heroic), is not simple and clear-cut, just as Nietzsche's views of Socrates and Plato are complex and contradictory. In the first instance, as pointed out above, he sees the prophets in much the same way as he does Socrates and Plato, branding them as destroyers of the naturalness of ancient Israel. On the other hand, Socrates merits high admiration, along with the prophets of Israel, if only for having struggled against the establishment in the form of the priesthood.

"These had a fine sense of smell who, in the past, were called prophets."⁷ There is no contradiction here. Rather, the similarity in Nietzsche's view of Socrates and the prophets stems from the same process of evaluation. Socrates is the fighter against accepted norms and goes forward, nobly and calmly, to his death as a result of his struggle. The essence of Socratism is the rule of moral values over all other values, and this is exactly what characterizes the prophets. The

6. WM, sec. 1038; *ibid.*, pp. 534–35.

7. "Die Unschuld des Werdens," sec. 1047; K, 83, 371.

heroic aspect in this is not damaged by the content of their struggle—neither in the case of Socrates nor in that of the prophets—which Nietzsche rejects as a contradiction of nature.

While it is Socrates, as befits a philosopher, who upholds *knowledge*, from which morals stem, the prophets of Israel rank God as primary, for it is He who commands morality (“God has been made a Jew”). In a deeper sense (as in *The Will to Power*), what benefits the herd is that which speaks through God’s will or the metaphysical imperative of knowledge. For our purposes, though, nothing more is needed than the empirical and conscious level: the prophecy in the Old Testament created a new world of values. The prophecy is, in a sense, a continuous correction of the establishment; that is its positive aspect, for it struggles and suffers (“the prophet is naturally alone”) and is heroic. Nietzsche, thereby, stands before three decisive factors—the Old Testament prophets, the pre-Pauline Jesus, and Socrates—in a dual relationship of admiration for their personalities but rejection of their theories, and especially of the conclusions drawn from them. These conclusions include, in Judaism, the assumption of the slaves’ morality as the fruit of the Exile; in Christianity, the Pauline church; and in Hellenism, the Platonic decadence in the world of simplistic “ideals” that affected Christianity as well.

This dual nature of Nietzsche’s relationship to Judaism and the Old Testament was expressed in his summing up of “What Europe owes the Jews!”:

Many things, good and bad, and above all one thing of the nature both of the best and the worst, the grand style in morality, the fearfulness and majesty of infinite demands, of infinite significations, the whole Romanticism and sublimity of moral questionableness—and consequently just the most attractive, ensnaring and exquisite element in those iridescences and allurements to life, in the aftersheen of which the sky of our European culture, its evening sky, now glows—perhaps glows out. For this, we artists among the spectators and philosophers are—grateful to the Jews.⁸

In spite of the fact that the subject at hand is the Jews and Nietzsche goes on to hint at their power to assume control of Europe if they so desire, even suggesting an admiration for their propensity—as a result of the loss of the Jewish instinct—to assimilate into European culture, it is clear that he is describing not the later Jewish characteristics but the intensity of life exhibited by them as an imprint from the Old Testament.

8. J, sec. 250; *Complete Works*, XII, 206–7.

In the Jewish "Old Testament," the book of divine justice, there are men, things, and sayings on such an immense scale, that Greek and Indian literature has nothing to compare with it. One stands with fear and reverence before those stupendous remains of what man was formerly, . . .—the taste for the Old Testament is a touchstone with respect to "great" and "small." . . . To have bound up this New Testament (a kind of *rococo* of taste in every respect) along with the Old Testament into one book, as the "Bible," as "The Book in Itself," is perhaps the greatest audacity and "sin against the Spirit" which literary Europe has upon its conscience.⁹

In other places Nietzsche terms the act of the joining together of the two portions of the Bible "an act of barbarity." As one who, like Schopenhauer, was a devotee of music, which he considered the highest expression of man's soul and the soul's contributions, he writes in *Nietzsche contra Wagner*: "It was only in Händel's music that the best in Luther and in those like him found its voice, the Judaeo-heroic trait which gave the Reformation a touch of greatness—the Old Testament, *not* the New, become music."¹⁰

Nietzsche makes a distinction between the Old Testament of the "older" parts and that of the "later" sections, a distinction that stems from his firm contrast between two philosophies: the one that says "yes" to life and the one that says "no."

What an affirmative Aryan religion, the product of the ruling class, looks like: the law-book of Manu. (The deification of the feeling of power in Brahma: interesting that it arose among the warrior caste and was only transferred to the priests.) What an affirmative Semitic religion, the product of a ruling class, looks like: the law-book of Mohammed, the older parts of the Old Testament. (Mohammedanism, as a religion for men, is deeply contemptuous of the sentimentality and mendaciousness of Christianity—which it feels to be a woman's religion.) What a negative Semitic religion, the product of an oppressed class, looks like: the New Testament (—in Indian-Aryan terms: a chandala religion). What a negative Aryan religion looks like, grown up among the ruling orders: Buddhism. It is quite in order that we possess no religion of oppressed Aryan races, for that is a contradiction: a master-race is either on top or it is destroyed.¹¹

9. *Ibid.*, sec. 52; *ibid.*, p. 71.

10. *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, "Eine Musik ohne Zukunft"; *Complete Works*, VIII, 63–64.

11. *WM*, sec. 145; *The Will to Power*, p. 93.

Here we have the distinction between Aryans and Semites and, it is unnecessary to add, without the two connotations that were attached to the terms as a result of National Socialism. The difference between the healthy and sick foundations (in order not to be misled by using the phrase "between good and evil") runs through the Aryans as it does through the Semites. The primary and decisive mode of measurement is the saying of "yes" or "no" to life. It is at this point that the Old Testament, but only in its older parts, finds its place among the "yes"-sayers.

In biblical scholarship, especially that of the Christian school combined with the popular evolutionism of the nineteenth century, there most certainly was a distinction between the older and later layers as seen from the idealistic-spiritual viewpoint. The assignment of value was in terms of a development from the primitive to the sublime, and thus monotheism reaches its climax in the days of the Second Temple. However, what is presumed by Christian Bible study to be progression is termed decadence by Nietzsche. The more the Old Testament and the God of Israel assume spiritualization and, more importantly, moralization (*Moralin* in his words), the more they lose their original power. "In itself, religion has nothing to do with morality: but both descendants of the Jewish religion are essentially moralistic."¹² Thus, the Old Testament in its essence and original form was not a moral code. What developed from it later, by virtue of the prophets and the weakness of the priests who turned morality into an instrument of state, was two daughter-religions whose essence derived from that which was either implicit in it or arbitrarily imputed to it—at the least, a deception almost from the start. I say "almost," for Nietzsche attempts to represent Jesus as standing above good and evil, above morality, a sacred anarchist. Paul is, as is known, the greatest deceiver, according to Nietzsche, but this deceit is only a continuation of that begun in the Old Testament. The same Israelite deity described above (see p. 49), God, is in almost Dionysian fashion a deception on the part of the priests. Isaiah, the "typical prophet," still considers as an outstanding king one who is a valiant soldier and bound to justice.

The concept of justice remains in its naturalness as a servant of the self-confidence of the people. But a tragedy occurred as a result of the Assyrian destruction or that of Babylon, which was the beginning of the Exile. The priests attempted to explain the tragedy with the help of a "sleight of exegesis" and rejected the natural causa-

12. *Ibid.*, sec. 146; *ibid.*

tion in favor of the discovery of a "nature-contradicting cause." In the stead of a helping god there appears a demanding god, and this is the source of the weakening of the necessary conditions. "Sin" is thus a central concept in the morality of Judaism and, in consequence, of Christianity. "The concept of God is falsified . . . the priest uses the name of God in vain."

In the hands of the Jewish priests the great age in the history of Israel became an age of decay; the Exile, the long misfortune, was transformed into an eternal punishment. . . . depending on their own requirements, they made either wretchedly meek or sleek prigs or "godless ones" out of the powerful, often very bold, figures in the history of Israel; they simplified the psychology of every great event by reducing it to the idiotic formula, "obedience or disobedience to God." . . . the priest lives on sins, it is essential that people "sin." Supreme principle: "God forgives those who repent"—in plain language: "those who submit to the priest."¹³

This is the effect, according to Nietzsche, that the Exile had on the Old Testament in its early form. Classical prophecy is not especially dealt with by Nietzsche and does not merit the same penetrating psychological analysis as does the priesthood. Incidentally, the priesthood, ruling in the court of sacred falsehood, is not the creation of Judaism or of the Old Testament in its later parts; that same law-book of Manu the Aryan which Nietzsche places alongside the life-assertive religions of the Aryan race itself is responsible for the sacred falsehood, for it is but an instrument of the will to priestly power. The law-book of Manu is based on the sacred falsehood: "we may therefore hold the best-endowed and most reflective species of man responsible for the most fundamental lie that has ever been told. . . . Aryan influence has corrupted all the world."¹⁴

In the Old Testament, the heroic prophets struggle with the falsification of life and, above all, against the corrupt priesthood. Hosea's lament that "the sin-offering of my people do they eat and for their iniquity each one's soul longs" (Hos. 4:8) reflects concisely the development that Nietzsche describes in his criticism of the priesthood (although he himself does not quote this stinging verse pointing to the vested interests of the priests and their own role in the sins of the people). Undoubtedly, it is not easy to distinguish between, on the one hand, the prophets—including that typical prophet Isaiah,

13. A, sec. 26; *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 596–98.

14. WM, sec. 145; *The Will to Power*, p. 92.

struggling on behalf of the God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts, and reproving the corruption—and, on the other, those who demand justice and morality in the purest sense, not necessarily as instruments of nature. Moreover, the distinction that Nietzsche does draw between the Old Testament in its early parts and its later form—as if it were a priestly forgery—cannot be established unless one wishes to slice through the entire Scriptures, to dissect them completely. For example, the sons of Eli represent the priestly corruption in that early portion. Samuel speaks out against this: “Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). But what will Nietzsche do when the same Samuel opposes the monarchy and Saul, or afterwards, for example in the case of Nathan versus David—is this to him like Plato railing against Pericles? And in a deeper sense still, even Moses, the first of the prophets and the lawgiver, formulates a value-system of obedience to God; it is unimportant whether this is the original Moses or the product of the later priests. Nietzsche does not engage in a scientific analysis of the sources. Moses, as he appears, takes the people out of Egypt while also constructing a constitution in fine detail that assures the rights, and sacrificial offerings, of the priests, the “holy parasites.”¹⁵ “God’s will,” as it were, was transferred to the priests via revelation—in order to permit the assumption of authority over the people—and is expressed in the “Holy Scriptures” that from now on are made into a “desecration of nature.”¹⁶

If, nevertheless, these “Holy Scriptures” never stopped being “the most powerful book”¹⁷ (and in another place, in a more mocking manner, “the greatest German book”), this is due to the heroic figures therein (the patriarchs and kings). But no less credit is due the prophets despite certain reservations of Nietzsche’s in connection with the prophetic morality. These prophets are prophets of wrath, and by their example the people of Israel fashion their God: “The Jews, again, took a different view of anger from that held by us, and sanctified it: hence they have placed the sombre majesty of the wrathful man at an elevation so high that a European cannot conceive it. They moulded their wrathful and holy Jehovah after the images of their wrathful and holy prophets. Compared with them, all the Europeans who have exhibited the greatest wrath are, so to speak, only second-hand creatures.”¹⁸ It is obvious that Nietzsche is

15. A, sec. 26; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 597.

16. *Ibid.*

17. MA, I, sec. 475; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 62.

18. M, sec. 38; *Complete Works*, IX, 44.

still relating in this instance to the early parts of the Old Testament that he admires, even though he is speaking of Jews and is not precise regarding the term "Israel." And "holy wrath" is in this case a term of praise and not of disapproval. This admiration for the prophets of Israel is expressed most astutely—as is usual for him—in a comparison with the Christian "inheritors" of that prophecy. He quotes from Luke 6:23, "For in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets," and bursts forth in the style that marks his later writings: "Impertinent rabble! They compare themselves with the prophets, no less."¹⁹

This dark and angry horizon of Israel's God is a dialectical necessity for the revelation of the religion of love and grace. This surely belongs to the internal contradictions within Nietzsche himself, whether he "explains" or is excited by the appearance of the "light" out of this deep biblical gloom:

A man such as Jesus was not possible except on the Jewish horizon—I mean a horizon over which continually hangs the dark and exalted storm cloud of a wrathful Yahweh . . . the sudden breaking-through, quite rare, of a single ray of light from out of the dark, perpetual night-day, only here could they feel it as a miraculous deed of "love," a ray of light of grace of which they were unworthy. Only here could Jesus have dreamt dreams of the rainbow and the heavenly ladder.²⁰

The emphasis here is, of course, on Jesus. Thus, the "single ray of light": for it was Christianity and its church, and especially Paul, that quickly ruined the purity of the love and grace. Further, not all the Jewish people felt the need for this ray of grace, since not all felt the distress in such an acute way.²¹ For this is the advantage of the Old Testament, in theory, over the New and the practice in the daily life of the people. In other words, the heavenly ladder of Jesus' dream is but the upper portion of Jacob's ladder when Jacob-Israel remained earthbound, if only in exile.

Nietzsche saw well the factor that differentiated the New from the Old Testament: the difference between "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (which did not overly impress him since, among other things, man can hate himself) and "love thine enemy." *Nature is driven out of morality* by this and it is a crime against life. The will to

19. A, sec. 45; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 624.

20. FW, sec. 137.

21. *Ibid.*, sec. 128.

life of the Jewish people seemingly prevented the execution of the final conclusions of the concept of sin that they created and nourished for the world. Like the chandala, Christianity spread itself among the nations and races and lost all trace and symbol of nationality. The Old Testament conceptualization of a jealous and vengeful God and of the commandment "thou shalt have no other gods before me" (other than the one who took them out of Egypt) preserved the survival of the Jewish nation, since "God himself was a Jew" and "a nation that yet believes in itself has its own God."²²

"What importance is there to a God that knows no revenge, jealousy, scorn, guile, and violence?" This jealousy, in addition to its being a national value for a people jealous of its own God, is also a general cultural asset that protects against the veneration of man. Nietzsche, who envisions a "superman," cannot bear this jealousy which truly evolves from the command "there shall be no other gods before me,"²³ and which in the end leads him—whether because of his experimental thought process in general or because of the differences of the periods—to see the prohibition of "thou shalt have no" as one of the most barbaric threats to the culture of man.

This contradiction in the different evaluations of the idea-content of the Old Testament finds its solution in the distinction between Nietzsche's descriptive analysis and his admiration for religion, morality, and human culture overall. Therefore, his criticism of the biblical law of morality as being a revolt of slaves, a revolt of the rabble element of society against the aristocracy—all aristocracy—and therefore antinature, does not contradict his positive approach to the revolt as revolt. The first tablets should have been shattered; the very act of the smashing of the old idols by the Old Testament was heroic. Moreover, on a deeper level—fundamentally, and not merely on the simple telling-of-the-story level—Yahweh, the Hebrew God of Hosts, grants land, a way of life, and nature to his people. And prior to the onset of the Exile, the Jewish religion never ceased being a religion of nature. All culture is the placing of the tablets and commands upon the collective public so as to harness and restrain its urges. Every Dionysus requires an Apollo. It is not enough for every prophet to rage against the establishment, for he himself must become a law-giver. A prophet is not a nihilist or anarchist, nor is he decadent. This is the difference between a healthy morality, which fixes "do" and "do not" commandments because the life-will guides it, and

22. A, sec. 16.

23. MA, II/I, sec. 186.

Christian morality, which in its entirety is antisocial, antinature, and turns God into an opponent of life.²⁴ The Old Testament established new values, but these values still served life. Nietzsche, as is known, did not champion a “return to nature” in the style of Rousseau,²⁵ but he did demand a return to the body, “up into the high, free, even terrible nature and naturalness.”²⁶

As a result of this, the Greeks are Nietzsche’s standard-bearers, not on the basis of two or three mentions of the “blond beast” taken out of context, but on the basis of restraint. “Before oneself too, one must not ‘let oneself go.’”²⁷ This is the essence of the sanctity of life according to the Old Testament, including that introduction to all moral commandments: “Holy shall you be for holy am I your God” (Lev. 19:3). Neither death nor any antinatural act is enjoined in those commandments, but actually self-restraint on behalf of a more beautiful life. Not in vain does Nietzsche repeatedly make this surprising linkage between Jews and Greeks, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, European civilization owes the Jews a debt for struggling on behalf of an occidentalization: “if Christianity has done everything to orientalize the Occident, Judaism has helped significantly to occidentalize it again and again: in a certain sense this means as much as making Europe’s task and history a continuation of the Greek.”²⁸

The words “again and again” imply a constancy of this people in keeping alive a spirituality without escaping into nothingness, escaping to the metaphysical from the physical. These words were preceded by others of appreciation for the Jewish people who gave the world the greatest book and life-directed laws (that is, the Old Testament), the most noble of men (Jesus, who, from various Nietzschean sources, is not a Christian in the Pauline sense, nor was he the sole and only Christian), and the purest scholar of all (Spinoza: “Deus sive Natura”—“God or Nature”—this is the opening of his *Law of Ethics*).

Nietzsche’s positive outlook on the Old Testament—as well as occasionally on the idea of the “Bible” encompassing both books, the Old and the New—is a result of three factors: first, his forefathers’ Protestantism; second, a literary sense that gained more satisfaction

24. G, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” sec. 5.

25. *Ibid.*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” sec. 48.

26. *Ibid.*; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 552.

27. *Ibid.*, sec. 47; *ibid.*, p. 551.

28. MA, I, sec. 475; *ibid.*, p. 63.

from the Old than the New, finding in it a work closer to the epic Greek spirit, with more positive figures; and third, his general inclination to prefer the "ancient" over the "modern," just as he preferred the "ancient philosophy" of Greece—the pre-Socratic—over the "new."

However, it cannot be denied that most of Nietzsche's appreciative remarks for the Old Testament, despite his critique of its idealistic-moral-religious content, flowed from the ever-growing outpouring of opposition, revealed and concealed, to Christianity in theory and in practice, except for the character of Jesus himself. It is to ridicule Christianity, in a certain sense, that he repeatedly raises the positive elements in the Old Testament. In like manner, he does not hesitate to accuse Christianity of acts of forgery committed against the Old Testament. It is here that he castigates the Protestants more sharply than he does the Catholics because of their greater use of, and reliance on, the Old Testament:

What are we to expect of the after-effects of a religion that enacted during the centuries of its foundation that unheard-of philological farce about the Old Testament? I refer to the attempt to pull away the Old Testament from under the feet of the Jews—with the claim that it contains nothing but Christian doctrines and *belongs* to the Christians as the *true* Israel, while the Jews had merely usurped it. And now the Christians yielded to a rage of interpretation and interpolation, which could not possibly have been accompanied by a good conscience. However much the Jewish scholars protested, everywhere in the Old Testament there were supposed to be references to Christ and only to Christ, and particularly his cross. Wherever any piece of wood, a switch, a ladder, a twig, a tree, a willow or a staff is mentioned, this was supposed to indicate a prophecy of the wood on the cross. . . . Has anybody who claimed this ever believed it?²⁹

Due to his intellectual integrity, Nietzsche did not permit himself to distinguish between biblical Judaism and Talmudic Judaism or, more explicitly, between the Judaism up to Jesus' time—whose goal was his coming—and the Judaism after Jesus, which was superfluous and stubborn. The concept of sin before God, which is the central iniquity of ancient priestly Judaism, is frequently to be found in the Old Testament, although without the extreme metaphysical conclusions that resulted in the New Testament with Paul in the fore-

29. M, sec. 84; *ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

front. Judaism still maintained as a religion a degree of naturalness for the benefit of the people. The obedience to divine command was a necessity for survival for Israel, and this remained unchanged even after Jewish societal fabric had been altered. "The Jews tried to prevail after they had lost two of their castes, that of the warrior and that of the peasant."³⁰

The healthy God, the God of the people, He is Yahweh whose name is special and unpronounceable and He is, understandably, a function of the health and naturalness of ancient Jewish society (and Nietzsche uses the term "Hebrews" in addition to "Israel"). The Exile, which did not automatically bring about assimilation and complete collapse—as it did in the case of other ethnic groups who left their lands and, with that, their gods and cultures—that Exile caused and brought about the critical spiritual turning point in Judaism, thus permitting the nation to continue to exist. Moreover, this nation created a historic precedent. This Judaism became possible, and perhaps had to be possible, due to the loss of political independence and, afterwards, the probable loss of a state-political ability that had become redundant.

This was also the case with the earliest Christian community . . . whose presupposition is the absolutely unpolitical Jewish society. Christianity could only grow in the soil of Judaism, i.e., amidst a people that had already renounced politics and lived a kind of parasitic existence within the Roman order of things. Christianity is a step further on: one is even more free to "emasculate" oneself—circumstances permit it.

One drives nature out of morality when one says "love your enemies": for then the natural "Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy" in the law (in instinct) has become meaningless.³¹

Nietzsche knows just how much this goes against the spirit of the Old Testament that establishes the attribution of character to God: "I will be an enemy to your enemies," God says, "and an adversary to your adversaries" (Exo. 23:22). This, of course, is conditional upon the upholding of the commandments of the Torah, but the religio-spiritual basis is still that of the God of peasants and warriors for that chapter and, in fact, deals with the conquest of the Land of Israel from the Canaanites and the smashing of their idols.

30. WM, sec. 184; *The Will to Power*, p. 111.

31. *Ibid.*, sec. 204; *ibid.*, p. 120.

Nietzsche explains how this people, close to the earth and almost Dionysian, changed into an exiled people, creating new moral values for the world and in the process destroying not only the Canaanite idols but also those of the naturalist world arbitrated by Christianity.

Despite the Jews' falling into sin or, in other words, despite most sections of the Old Testament, Nietzsche does not hold back his respect for them even in their exile. First of all because they did not submit completely to the consequences of their uprooting but preserved their national existence in the worst of conditions, and second, because they continued to contribute to mankind's culture even after the Old Testament basis had been completed: they participated—and continue to participate, as he emphasizes—in the composition of Europe even to the extent of assuming the leading role, due to the power of their *Geist*, their unique spiritual force.

Because the will to survival of Europeanism sought to prevent it, preferring instead the fusion of the races, Nietzsche does not yet contemplate the possible political renaissance of the Jewish people, its return to the status of a nation of warriors and peasants, to the surprise of the world. We may presume, though, both because of his sharp recoiling from the “new god”—the state—and because of his real interest in having the Jews become absorbed into Europe, that Nietzsche would not be counted among the supporters of the renewal of the Old Testament of the Jewish people again in its land, although, if he would be true to his character rather than to his philosophy, who knows, who knows . . . ?

A Literary Judgment

We would not be dealing fully with this topic of Nietzsche and the Old Testament if we did not speak of the strong impact, deep and lasting, that this “Book of Books,” as he refers to it, had on his entire work. Of course, while quite important for Nietzsche personally, it is outstanding in its influence on European culture beyond its religious aspects of monotheism, morality, and prophecy. One of the most important biographers of Nietzsche, Bernoulli, provides this fact with a literary-biographical expression in referring to Nietzsche's religiosity: “In the last year of his creativity (1888) . . . , religious signs became recognizable: an enthusiasm for ‘the future and hope,’ his Zarathustran consciousness bordering on messianism, his Yahwist jealousy against ‘foreign gods’ even to the point of a fanatical desire to destroy them altogether—these combined with the inner

joy of the visionary, the complete piety and prayerful devotion of a psalmist."³²

With regard to *Zarathustra* everything is quite clear and to the point. Despite the utilization of the figure of a Persian prophet, the founder of the Aryan religion, the volume is entirely "biblical," almost without any reflection of the original Zarathustra. Overbeck wrote to Rohde, who was not excited about the book's biblical style: "Beyond this I do not like the tone and I cannot find any good taste outside his primary homeland which is, of course, the Old Testament prophecy. This caused me added personal worry regarding Nietzsche."³³

The prophetic stance of a railer at the gates (as well as in the forest or on the hills) is conscious, directed, and even emphasized. Walter Kaufmann claims, if critically, that the main difference between the status of the prophets and that of Nietzsche is the latter's lack of humility: the prophets did not speak in the first person. But in this case Kaufmann should have remembered that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a copy not only of the Old Testament but of the New as well. In the New Testament the stress is on the "I say unto you," as opposed to the "thus says the Lord," "God does speak," and "thus speaks the Lord of Hosts" where the prophet is but a mouthpiece, a messenger to convey what has been told him. In this case, Nietzsche-Zarathustra is closer to the New Testament, with its personal pretentiousness of the single hero of the plot and his prophecy, than to the Old Testament with its many prophets, heroes, and saviors—but not one Messiah.

However, the main link between them is internal: the *will* of Nietzsche to appear as a prophet, as the giver of a new law. This is the root of the idealistic centrality of "On Old and New Tablets." Whereas in the law of Moses the second tablets are exact copies of the first, Nietzsche shatters the old, which symbolize a complete world of values borne by mankind for more than three thousand years, so as to write a completely new set—not in the script of God or from His mouth, but specifically and knowingly by man as creator and lawgiver.

Even though in the New Testament's Sermon on the Mount it is said plainly that the purpose is not to make new, and whereas most of Jesus' parables still remain within the bounds of Old Testament

32. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: Eine Freundschaft*, 2 vols. (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1908), II, 177.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

morality and are only slightly heightened and brought to an extreme, here, in this case, Nietzsche straightforwardly states that the intent is to bring down a temple so as to establish a new one, and to overturn all the old values. This is the basis for the command: "thou shall not pity thy neighbor." It is from here too that he derives the injunction: "surely thou shalt shatter the old tablets" because "there are gods but not one God."³⁴ This then is the way: contradicting the primary commandment of the Old Testament, even "surely you shall destroy the *righteous and upright* for me."³⁵

This conscious awareness—and it is unimportant if this is only pretension—of Nietzsche's, as if he were speaking from a new Mount Sinai or Tabor, is what gives the book its subjective strength. Nietzsche was convinced that this was the best, most important, and most decisive of his works, and not only of his alone. Thus, in this framework I will not draw any specific parallels, since the whole book, in content and style, is in fact a parallel version.³⁶

The biblical "philosophy" (if it is possible and permissible to refer to the "philosophy" of a Bible that is anti- or unphilosophical in the strict meaning of the term) extends from "In the beginning" as a central and determinable expression for the entire world of the Bible: there is a creator who directs, knows, wills, and fashions—a reason for everything, a beginning. Therefore there is purpose, at least until the "vanity of vanities" of Ecclesiastes (Kohleth), "the *wisest* of men" but not necessarily the most loyal (one thousand wives) nor he with the most faith ("who knows?"—surely a Socratic agnosticism—is the refrain of the book), which must be viewed as an expression of the paradoxical nihilism of the ultraoptimistic Bible.

Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, mocks the godly self-satisfaction of "and it was very good." Every nihilist certainly finds something on which to fasten in the book of Ecclesiastes. Many presume to find Greek sources for the book, even though it is clear today, after a comparative study of the various cultures before and after Greece, that every culture reaches, in the end, a stage of self-satiation, denial, and vanity such as this. The "eternal return" of Nietzsche is not bound up with this book and its recurring, seasonal theories because of differences in psychological points of departure: Ecclesiastes is a book of open pessimism and weakness even to the

34. Z, III, "On Old and New Tablets," secs. 10, 11.

35. *Ibid.*, sec. 27.

36. See Hans Vollmer, *Nietzsches Zarathustra und die Bibel* (Hamburg: Deutsches Bibelarchiv, 1936), where literally hundreds of verses are shown to have been drawn from the Bible.

point of cynicism, whereas the revelation of Nietzsche's "eternal return" is apparently optimistic, even joyful, and is expressed in an abundance of positive statements. The conclusion of Ecclesiastes—is also the product of an intervening editor: ". . . the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man"—is quite anti-Nietzschean. It is a wonder that Nietzsche did not pounce on this hypocritical Pharisaic Philistine, who assumed the guise of a rabbi or pope to cover his naked, laughing, yet unhappy bones, and contrast him with *Zarathustra*, proclaiming the joy of the sun, happy in its might without the laughter of man-beast-monkey ("man in God's image is a monkey," says Nietzsche, not that God is a monkey but rather man, who wishes to copy God). But the undercurrent of opposition I pointed out above, between "in the beginning" and "vanity of vanities," is to be found in Nietzsche in satirical form: "The history of the world is concentrated *in nuce*:—the most serious parody I have ever heard: In the beginning there was vanity of vanities, and vanity of vanities, by God, there was! And God was that vanity of vanities."³⁷

Paradoxical usages of biblical verses of this type are frequent and not necessarily a parody, as with the twisting about of the description of man's failure from Adam and Cain, on through to the generation of the flood, until God "grieved at his heart" and repented of his work. Nietzsche's conclusion is: "What? Is man merely a mistake of God's? Or God merely a mistake of man's?"³⁸ And in the same connection, regarding the creation of woman: "Man has created woman—out of what? Out of a rib of his god—his 'ideal.'"³⁹ Since we have seen previously how this idealistic act of man "succeeded," it is obvious to us what this rib is.

Nietzsche maintains a special affection for these Genesis tales of the Old Testament, for he views them as brilliant acts, the little containing much, and he also appreciates their sense of humor *vis-à-vis* the New Testament's lack of humor. And yet, man's fate over the centuries has been fixed in these texts of the Creation, the Fall, and the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The deep connection between knowledge and death has penetrated into man's consciousness ever since ancient times and in many cultures, as seen, for example, in the actions of Oedipus and of the Sphinx, and is reflected in modern times in the Spenglerian tension between *Dasein* and

37. MA, II/I, sec. 22.

38. G, "Maxims and Arrows," sec. 7; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 467.

39. *Ibid.*, sec. 13; *ibid.*, p. 468.

Wachsen. It is included in the folk-philosophical tale, humorous as it is, of the banishment from the garden of Eden; using as his basis the text there ("and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way to the tree of life" [Gen. 3:24]), Nietzsche formulates: "Paradise lies in the shadow of swords"—also a symbol and motto by which souls of noble and warlike origin betray themselves and divine each other."⁴⁰

Whether intentional or not, there is a contradictory parallel between two passages: one announces the victory of the one God and the other His death, with a satirical whiplash joining the two. The first is Elijah on Mount Carmel in the decisive Israelite struggle against the multiplicity of idols, against Ashtoreth and Baal, the gods of the Zidonites and Canaanites, the lords of nature—a struggle that was a victory for the one and only God of Israel. In this dramatic-satiric scene, Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal, as it is recorded: "and he said, cry aloud for he is a god, he is talking or pursuing or he is journeying, perhaps he sleeps and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27), so that he may conclude on a triumphant note announcing "the Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:39). The definite article is stressed to refer emphatically to the one and only God.

The second happening is at once tragic and satiric, brought about by one of the most famous and stinging of Nietzsche's creations, "the madman": he is a sort of antithesis of Elijah, announcing in the marketplace the death of the God whose victory Elijah announced on the mountaintop of Carmel. Marketplace versus mountain, death versus victory, Nietzsche versus Elijah: "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Why, did he get lost? . . . Did he lose his way like a child? . . . Or is he hiding? . . . Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated?"⁴¹

This is a satirical parallel and the fulfillment of tragedy. There and then on Mount Carmel Elijah slaughters the prophets of Baal as an idol-breaker does those who failed the test. Here and now, "the madman" shouts out: "Whither is God? . . . we have killed him—you and I."⁴² And from the announcement of God's death—and the pain of this "heretic" because of God's death needs no proof—Nietzsche

40. *Ibid.*

41. FW, sec. 125; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 95.

42. *Ibid.*

moves to the grief of the prophet on the threshold of his end. It is told regarding the death of Moses: "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the mountain of Nebo, to the very top . . . and the Lord showed him all the land" (Deut. 34:1). And in Nietzsche: "The place where I am today—on the height, where I will no longer speak with words but lightning bolts—ha, how far from this was I then! But *the land I did see* . . . this is the great tranquility of the promise, this the joyful promise even unto the distances of the future that will not remain as only a destiny!"⁴³ Certainly it cannot be assumed that in writing these words Nietzsche felt his own end—that is, the end of his conscious and willful life—approaching, felt himself on the edge of the breakdown that occurred in a matter of days thereafter. However, his identification at that time with the prophet, one legislating for mankind, was not inconsequential in dictating to him this style of Moses' dying days: "Ich sah das Land," "I saw the land" (the emphasis is Nietzsche's; what is the "land" doing here?)—and immediately afterwards "Verheißung," the "promise."

Surely one of the elements that attracted Nietzsche to the Old Testament—one that is missing from the New—is the contest between man the believer and his God. Nietzsche turns around the verse "he whom the Lord loveth He correcteth" (Prov. 3:12) and writes instead: "I love him who chastens his God because he loves his God."⁴⁴ (And in the same connection, in *The Dawn of Day*, sec. 15, Nietzsche attributes the verse in Proverbs to Christianity without mentioning the source.)

Most certainly it did not escape Nietzsche that God's correctors and chastisers were his biblical admirers, such as Abraham, Jeremiah, and Job. After all, it is because of this aspect that he calls them heroic. In one of his Dionysian dithyrambs, Nietzsche, the great and loving investigator of the Greek myths and thought, makes use of two biblical images (!) to describe his struggling, truth-seeking soul:

Oh Zarathustra
 Cruel Nimrod!
 Who, until recently, a hunter before God
 you were
 And now you yourself have become the game.

43. *Ecce Homo*, "The Untimely Ones," sec. 3.

44. Z, Prologue, sec. 4; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 128.

Why should you slip away
to the garden of Eden
of the ancient snake?

.
You are the man of knowledge
Zarathustra the wise.⁴⁵

This is a Nietzschean confluence: Nimrod and Zarathustra, Dionysus and Adam, who repeatedly returns—despite the expected punishment—to the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden.

In conclusion, there is an aphoristic expression that is the epitome of Nietzsche's conciseness on the one hand and the essence of the divine outlook of the Old Testament on the other. Preceding the final formulation were such phrases as *werde der du bist* (become what thou art) or *ich bin der ich sein muß* (I am what I must be), but in the motto of *Ecce Homo* we have: *wie man wird, was man ist*—how one becomes what one is. Is not this phrase, the essence of all the existentialist philosophy of which Nietzsche, together with Kierkegaard, is considered one of the founders, similar to the forced or willing fusion between what must be and the divine image of man that permits him—and obliges him—to choose his fate: the Nietzschean *amor fati*?

One last question arises for which there is no answer, for it pertains to a riddle for every Old Testament commentator that surely is not accidentally phrased. I am referring to God's answer to the query regarding His own very essence (this being the meaning of the biblical concept of "name"): "I am what I am" (Exod. 3:14). Is this not a basis for a divine existentialism? Did Nietzsche knowingly or unknowingly crown the *magnum opus* of his spiritual life in a truly moving similitude between the definition of the essence of the God of Israel, who reveals Himself to Moses out of a bush, and the definition of the essence of Dionysus-Nietzsche-Zarathustra, or man in God's image?

A question for prolonged, unceasing study.

45. WKG, VI, 390–91.