

THE EXCEPTIONAL MAN AND NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche's concept of the superman, the man of the future appears far-fetched and utopian but not his distinction between the two types of men — the average and the exceptional.¹ This distinction together with the doctrine of eternal recurrence is proof of Nietzsche's sensitive and acute perception of human reality. Very often our shallow acceptance of democratic or socialistic slogans of equality is a thin disguise for our real conviction in the truth of Nietzsche's distinction. I am aware that we will be ready to concede this with some nervousness. The reasons for this are obvious. Nietzsche preferred the exception (say, Napoleon) to the rule (the Christian clergy² for example) which later became the cannon of a catastrophic political movement in Europe. His view of the higher man might have been used as a justification by some kinds of military dictatorships. But this should not lead us to approach his theory of the exceptional man with total intellectual distrust.

If we look at humanity we generally find the human herd (family alliances, communities, tribes, people, states and churches) the majority, always "a great number, who obey in proportion to the small number who command" (P. 488).³ Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that the need for obedience is a powerful need in most people. This need tries to satisfy itself, seizes, with (little selection, and accepts, whatever is shouted down into its ears) by all sorts of commanders—parents, teachers, laws, class prejudices, or public opinion.

If this instinct, however, increases to its greatest extent Nietzsche fears that there will come a time when the "commanders" and independent individuals are absent altogether or they will be suffering inwardly from bad conscience and will have to impose a deception upon themselves, in the first place, in order to be able to command. Here they will either, play the role of executors of older and higher orders or they might even justify themselves with maxims from the herd such as "servants of their people" and so on.

Nietzsche's views of the exceptional man, the philosopher, the ruler, the intellectual aristocrat, is contained in chapter II of *Beyond Good and Evil*. The following are some of the qualities of the exceptional man :

(i) He is first of all not dogmatic in his views. For it must be contrary to his pride and his taste that his truth should be the truth for everyone, which is the secret wish of every dogmatic effort. In his intercourse with the average man, it is natural for him to occasionally suffer from " disgust and distress. " Hence the exceptional man in every case 'strives' instinctively for a citadel where he feels free from the crowd, where he may forget the " men who are the rule. " But whoever of this class can remain independent (in spite of having to suffer from intercourse with the very average man) proves that he is " not only strong but daring beyond measure.

(ii) He will not cling to : (a) any person, even the dearest, (b) to a fatherland, even the most suffering and necessitous, (c) to a sympathy, even for a higher man, (d) to a science even if it tempts one with the most valuable discoveries (e) to his own liberation and (f) to his own virtues. In short he must know how to conserve himself — 'the best test of independence.'

(iii) He will wish the eternal return of things. Knowing that all events recur eternally, he will try to cultivate an affirmative attitude towards life. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche puts forward the ideal of the " most high spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have what was and is repeated into all eternity. "

There is really no contradiction in both maintaining the truth of the doctrine of eternal recurrence and desiring that people should have an attitude so positive that they can embrace life gladly. Nietzsche knew from personal weakness that the ideas of eternal recurrence could appear terrible indeed. This is why he regarded one's reaction to this idea as a decisive test of one's attitude to life. He himself, in moments of pessimism, found the idea unendurable while, in moments of exuberance, he embraced it enthusiastically. This suggested to him both that he himself, was still " human-all-too-human, " and what a better man than himself would in part be like.

(iv) The exceptional man will rid himself of all dogmatic faiths (like Christianity) and create his own values. According to Nietzsche there are two fundamentally different types of values or morality — “master morality” and “slave morality”¹ — the former needless to say, is the morality of the exceptional man.

“Master morality” arises out of a feeling for power and “slave morality” out of feeling of resentment. Nietzsche undoubtedly approved of master morality but only in the way Freud approved of sexuality, i. e., he does not see it as evil. But every morality is false in-as-much as it regards its own moral valuations as independently valid as “morality as such, while these valuations are valid only in so far as they are a means towards the preservation and enhancement of the type of man who holds them.” (Moral knowledge like all other kinds of knowledge is knowledge for use).

“Slave morality” is for those who are unable to endure an existence, unstructured by conventions and whose acts of assertion, therefore, cannot be creative. Their moral practices reflect the only type of contribution they are capable of making to the enhancement of the type which Nietzsche referred to as herd morality, which corresponds quite closely to the prevailing traditional conventional morality, and the desirability of which he suggests when he says: “A high culture can stand only upon a broad base, upon a strong and healthy consolidated morality” (*Will to Power*). On the other hand, for those who are strong enough to live a life of their own, and who have the capacity to be lively and creative, another type of morality is indicated. It is an individualistic self-assertive morality, which reflects the much greater and more direct contribution they are capable of making to the enhancement of their type. But neither type of morality is right or appropriate for all men, and neither is wrong or inappropriate for all. In short, “What is fair to one may not at all be fair to another—the requirement of one morality for all is really a detriment to higher men — there is a distinction of rank between man and man and consequently between morality and morality” (P. 534).

This, however, should not lead us to the conclusion that for Nietzsche there is not a single ultimate value by reference to which the value of everything else should be determined, namely the quantitative and qualitative enhancement of life culminating in the

idea of a "union of spiritual superiority with well-being and an excess of strength." (*Will to Power*).

Given this as the ultimate value, it follows that different lower order valuations of various particular things by different types of men are entirely in order. Hence, we have mainly two sorts or orders of values. One consists of values which are the creations of particular individuals or groups of men, whose physiological conditions and natural and social circumstances vary greatly and so consequently the valuations to which they give rise. The values so conceived prevail amongst great masses of men.

The other sort would be the values created by the higher men, answering to their own distinctive powers and abilities, thus enabling themselves to attain the highest possible degree of spiritual development. As gregarious utility is the only criterion of the herd, any instinct which carries the individual far above and beyond the average is branded and defamed by the herd.

Hence the lofty independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, "everything that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbour is henceforth called evil; the tolerant, unassuming self-adapting, self-equalising disposition—the mediocrity of desires, attains to moral distinction and honours." (P. 492).

What is perhaps of interest here to us is that Nietzsche accused the democratic form of political organisation for doing just this. He regarded such political organisation as the equivalent of a degenerating, a wanning type of man and as involving man's mediocrising and depreciation.

Nietzsche's idea of democracy was of course influenced by what the Greeks said about it, and also perhaps by the apparently decisive role played by concepts such as 'Consensus' and 'Common Good' in the actual practice of democracy. Note the following :

"And how could there be a common good : The expression contradicts itself; that which can be common is always of little value. In the end things must be as they are and have always been—the great things remain for the great, the abysses for the profound, the delicacies and thrills for the refined, and to sum up shortly, everything rare for the rare." (P. 428)

But although utilitarianism (greatest good of the greatest number) and the idea of majority rule have played important

roles in theorising about democracy, both these concepts involve philosophical difficulties such that in practice they very often have only a misleading application. The difficulties of utilitarianism are well-known. Even a simple seeming question such as "should we have more hospitals or more primary schools?" (given that such a choice has to be made) cannot be answered on purely utilitarian considerations. As to rule by the "people" or "majority" rule, we should reflect on the fact that the power to vote somebody into power is a different thing altogether from the power to rule. If by majority rule we mean rule by the majority of the people, the notion of rule here is applicable, if at all, only in an extraordinarily attenuated sense. The point that I wish to make is that because of over emphasis on notions such as "common good" and "majority rule," a "truly" democratic organisation may be confused with a populist organisation. But while populism is not incompatible with democracy, it is not necessarily connected with it either. I think Nietzsche's distrust of democracy is really a distrust of populism. A healthy democratic organisation can no more afford to ignore the distinction between the exceptional and the ordinary, the excellent and the average than it can the notion of leadership. Perhaps the test of a successful democracy is the degree to which the mechanisms within it can bear and overcome the tension created by the necessity to acknowledge this distinction and allow it to operate.

The idea, therefore, that a general acceptance of Nietzsche's theories would lead either to totalitarianism of one kind or another or to social chaos is quite ungrounded. Even in spite of his bitter attack on Christianity, as involving false consciousness of a particularly damaging kind—damaging that is to the spirit of man—he sees positive value in it. To ordinary men, religion can give "an invaluable contentedness with their lot and condition, peace of heart, ennoblement of obedience, additional social happiness and sympathy." These values, when they remain within the bounds of a living religion, make for social stability against the background of which alone the exceptional man can flourish. It may be said that for Nietzsche then, values emanating from religion have a merely exploitative function. This is in a way true, but if we remember, in this connexion, his doctrine that there are different kinds of morality suited to different kinds of human beings, much of the force in the objection is lost. One's morality must be based

on one's capacities—genuine capacities, not just imaginable or imaginary ones. A morality which makes impossible demands on one's capacities cannot, in principle, be practiced. Religious morality, therefore, is indispensable, whether we like it or not, just as the morality of the exceptional man is possible in so far as human beings of great spiritual strength and courage are possible.

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NOTES

1. The distinction introduced by Nietzsche between the average and the exceptional man should be taken as purely descriptive and not a normative one.
2. Nietzsche accused Christianity of shattering all instincts which are natural to the highest and most successful type of man, into uncertainty, distress of conscience and self-destruction. In short of inverting all love of the earthly into hatred of the earth and earthly things (Refer page, 40, *Twilight of the Idols* Penguin.)
3. All the references quoted hereafter are from *Beyond Good and Evil*, the Philosophy of Nietzsche, the Modern Library.
4. In all higher and mixed cultures attempts at mediation between the two are apparent and more frequently confusion and mutual misunderstanding, between them and sometimes their harsh juxtaposition — even within the same man, within one soul.