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Nietzsche, Christianity and Cultural Authority  
In the United States, 1890-1969

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Doctor of Philosophy

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In the United States, 1890-1969

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Patrick L. Connelly  
M.A., Emory University, 2004

Advisor: Patrick N. Allitt, Ph.D.

An abstract of  
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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2011

## Abstract

### Nietzsche, Christianity and Cultural Authority In the United States, 1890-1969 By Patrick L. Connelly

This dissertation examines the reception of Friedrich Nietzsche in the United States between 1890 and 1969 with a particular focus on the intersection between his critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority. My study suggests that this intersection proved important in understanding Nietzsche's rise in stature in American intellectual and cultural life despite apparent obstacles. I explore these dynamics by providing a panoramic overview of Nietzsche's American reception before highlighting three key flashpoints where Nietzsche's ideas were engaged in intellectual and cultural venues in which Protestant cultural authority was being contested.

I consider three important strands of interpretation in the early reception period: professional philosophers, cultural critics and social/political activists outside the halls of academia, and Protestant ministers, theologians and intellectuals. Academic journal articles, monographs, book reviews, collected papers and university publications are consulted to determine how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity resonated in the changing world of professional philosophy. I analyze the books, journalistic efforts, cultural criticism, and political and social writings of independent intellectuals to assess their beliefs regarding Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and how it may be utilized in their efforts. I also examine the writings, speeches and sermons of Protestant intellectuals who were responding to Nietzsche amidst an array of challenges to their cultural authority. Nietzsche's thought was assessed, resisted and enthused over by all of these groups who were increasingly aware of the ongoing seismic shifts of cultural authority.

The dissertation concludes with an epilogue that explores how the three strands of interpretation explored in the subsequent three chapters, which focused on the first three decades of the twentieth century, persisted into the 1960s. I argue that earlier dynamics of engagement laid the groundwork for Nietzsche to be accepted as a serious philosopher in subsequent decades when Protestant cultural authority was greatly diminished. This dissertation seeks to contribute to intellectual, cultural and religious history by highlighting the dynamics between ideas and social structures in the history of Nietzsche interpretation and by exploring more in depth the notion of cultural authority.

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Betsey was my advisor up until her untimely death in 2007. I have thought about her often as I've brought this project closer to completion. She was a tremendous

advocate for all of her students and always showed concern for their lives as well as their work. I have fond memories of many engaging lunchtime and dinner conversations—another expression of generosity toward her students. I am grateful that she helped convince me to come to Emory and for the enthusiasm she demonstrated for this project. She continues to be missed.

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION: NIETZSCHE AND PROTESTANT CULTURAL AUTHORITY IN AMERICA</b> .....	<b>1</b>
NIETZSCHE AND PROTESTANT CULTURAL AUTHORITY IN THE UNITED STATES:	
THEORETICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	5
‘THE MOST DISASTROUS LIE OF SEDUCTION’: NIETZSCHE’S LIFE, WORKS AND CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY .....	14
NIETZSCHE’S FINAL DAYS AND GROWING REPUTATION .....	46
<b>CHAPTER ONE: A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NIETZSCHE’S RECEPTION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1969</b> .....	<b>49</b>
‘NIETZSCHE IS IN THE AIR’: NIETZSCHE IN AMERICA PRIOR TO THE GREAT WAR, 1890-1914.....	52
NIETZSCHE AND THE GREAT WAR: CULPABILITY, CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILIZATION, 1914-1918 .....	61
NIETZSCHE IN THE INTERWAR AMERICAN POPULAR IMAGINATION, 1918-1939 .....	65
NIETZSCHE, NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND CIVILIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1939-1956.....	73
NIETZSCHE’S POSTWAR ASCENT: KAUFMANN, EXISTENTIALISM AND RELIGION, 1950-1959.....	87
NIETZSCHE, CULTURE AND COUNTERCULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1956-1969 .....	96
POSTSCRIPT.....	112
<b>CHAPTER TWO: NIETZSCHE, ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY AND PROTESTANT CULTURAL AUTHORITY IN THE AGE OF PROFESSIONALIZATION AND SPECIALIZATION, 1895-1925</b> .....	<b>113</b>
NIETZSCHE IN THE AGE OF PROFESSIONALIZATION AND SPECIALIZATION .....	115
NIETZSCHE, CHRISTIANITY AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF HARVARD PHILOSOPHY .....	123
NIETZSCHE, ‘OLD AND DEAR BELIEFS’ AND PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY AT CORNELL .....	135
‘A TRAVESTY UPON PHILOSOPHY’: NIETZSCHE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.....	144
NIETZSCHE AND THE ‘SHACKLES OF REIGNING DOGMATISM’ AT CHICAGO.....	151
NIETZSCHE, LOVEJOY AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AT JOHNS HOPKINS .....	156

NIETZSCHE, CHRISTIANITY AND AUTHORITY IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS AND MONOGRAPHS.....	161
CONCLUSION: NIETZSCHE AND THE SECULAR REVOLUTION IN PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY .....	174
<b>CHAPTER THREE: NIETZSCHE, INDEPENDENT INTELLECTUALS AND PROTESTANT CULTURAL AUTHORITY, 1901-1929 .....</b>	<b>177</b>
NIETZSCHE AND THE INDIVIDUALISTS: THE <i>SMART SET</i> CIRCLE .....	185
NIETZSCHE AND CULTURAL RENEWAL: THE ‘YOUNG AMERICANS’ .....	197
NIETZSCHE, CHRISTIANITY AND RADICAL POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900-1917 .....	209
POSTSCRIPT: NIETZSCHE AND THE CRITICS AFTER THE WAR, 1918-1929 .....	233
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: CULTURAL AUTHORITY IN CRISIS: THE PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO NIETZSCHE, 1900-1933 .....</b>	<b>244</b>
‘THE PROCLAMATION OF A NEW GOSPEL’: NIETZSCHE AND THE PREWAR THREAT TO PROTESTANT CULTURAL AUTHORITY, 1900-1914.....	251
NIETZSCHE, THE SOCIAL GOSPEL AND THE CRISIS OF CULTURE, 1901-1917.....	256
‘NIETZSCHE’S SERVICE TO CHRISTIANITY’: CONSTRUCTIVE PROTESTANT ENGAGEMENTS WITH NIETZSCHE, 1900-1918 .....	264
NIETZSCHE, AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918.....	274
NIETZSCHE AND THE POSTWAR PROSPECTS OF PROTESTANTISM, 1919-1925 .....	282
CLIMBING THE ‘BLOODY LADDER’: FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THE DARWIN-NIETZSCHE NEXUS, 1918-1925 .....	290
EPILOGUE: NIETZSCHE, FUNDAMENTALISM AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION .....	301
<b>EPILOGUE: NIETZSCHE, CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY IN THE UNITED STATES TO 1969 .....</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>323</b>

## INTRODUCTION: Nietzsche and Protestant Cultural Authority in America

I know my fate. One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful—of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience, of a decision evoked *against* everything that until then had been believed in, demanded, sanctified. I am not a man, I am dynamite.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (1888)<sup>1</sup>

A subtle, slow, secular revolution in the mental and moral realm is what he has in mind—a matter, as he says, of two thousand years, and only now out of sight and consciousness, because it has triumphantly accomplished itself.

—William Mackintire Salter, *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study* (1917)<sup>2</sup>

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) emerged from the nineteenth century as one of the most influential and intriguing figures of European intellectual life. Nietzsche's elegant prose and captivating, if controversial, ideas struck a nerve with audiences across Europe and the United States. He became for many American observers an indispensable figure of the zeitgeist, though not all agreed on whether that was a positive or negative development. Nietzsche's enduring appeal in the United States is all the more remarkable when considering the historical factors conspiring against it. Nietzsche, after all, was a German philologist who rejected the university model that had originated in his homeland and that had subsequently been exported to the United States. His strident hostility to Christianity was an affront to the predominant religious belief, in its various expressions, of American society. Nietzsche expressed little sympathy for cherished American social and political ideals, believing that democracy bred mediocrity and that hierarchy was natural. He was often held responsible for inspiring German militarism in World War I and National Socialist ideology in World War II. The final decade of Nietzsche's life was

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1908; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1992), 96 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>2</sup> William Mackintire Salter, *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), 260.

characterized by a descent into insanity. These obstacles would seem to relegate Nietzsche to the periphery of American intellectual and cultural life. Instead, he achieved a level of professional and popular acceptance that led University of Chicago political philosopher Allan Bloom to go so far as declaring in 1987 that Nietzsche had “conquered America.”<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation examines an important component of Nietzsche’s American ascent, namely the intersection between his critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority in the United States from 1890 to 1969. The symbiosis between Nietzsche’s indictment of Christianity and the waning influence of Protestant Christianity in culture-shaping institutions was pivotal to American assessments and appropriations of Nietzsche. It played an important role in the gradual recognition of Nietzsche as a serious and formidable philosopher. I will explore these dynamics in my dissertation by providing a chronological overview of the American response to Nietzsche before highlighting three key flashpoints where Nietzsche’s ideas were engaged in intellectual and cultural venues in which Protestant cultural authority was being contested.

Chapter One surveys the ebbs and flows of Nietzsche’s reception from the earliest English translations of the 1890s to the theological incorporation of Nietzsche in the late

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<sup>3</sup> Allan Bloom, “How Nietzsche Conquered America,” *Wilson Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 80-93. Bloom elaborated on his argument in his surprising bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom explored what he called Nietzsche’s “conversion to the Left,” whereby American leftist intellectuals appropriated Nietzsche for their own ideological purposes. Bloom suggested that college professors initiated the “popularization of German philosophy” before passing it on from the academy to the marketplace. Students imbibed this teaching and applied its moral and cultural application to their lifestyles. The result was a banal egoism and American-style nihilism. See idem, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 147, 225. For a more recent suggestion of Nietzsche’s nihilistic influence on popular culture, see Thomas Hibbs, *Shows About Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture from The Exorcist to Seinfeld* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999).

1960s. I discuss how Nietzsche elicited responses from an astonishingly wide range of interpreters from the realms of professional philosophy, cultural criticism, social and political activism, religion and popular culture. I discuss key moments of response to Nietzsche including the debates surrounding his culpability for both world wars, the rehabilitation efforts that were spearheaded by influential scholars such as Walter Kaufmann, and Nietzsche's integration into the much publicized "Death of God" theology of the 1960s. This chapter demonstrates how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity resonated forcefully through different eras and events of that reception. This general survey sets up the following three chapters (Chapters Two-Four), which take a zoom lens to particular aspects of Nietzsche interpretation to show how the changing fortunes of Protestant cultural authority accentuated Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in the United States.

Chapter Two examines the professional philosophical response to Nietzsche from 1895 to 1925, an era in which the modern American university was undergoing a significant transformation due to professionalization, specialization and the growing marginalization of the Protestant establishment. I look at academic journal articles, book reviews, monographs and the relevant department records, curricula and faculty writings of five prominent universities to determine how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was received in a setting at the forefront of the shift in cultural authority. I will argue that while both creating and limiting opportunities for Nietzsche scholarship in the short term, the groundwork was laid for a new hearing for Nietzsche in the decades to follow.

Chapter Three analyzes the efforts of independent intellectuals positioned outside the modern university who enthusiastically appropriated the writings of Nietzsche in their

cultural criticism, social thought, and political activism from 1900 to 1929. These self-styled moderns—whether fierce individualists like H.L. Mencken, cultural critics eager to produce a new American culture free from the shackles of tradition, or activists looking for new foundations of American social order and politics—became participants in the quest to hasten Protestant cultural authority's decline. Nietzsche was for many of these independent intellectuals not merely symbolic of that decline but a valuable resource to help facilitate it.

Chapter Four considers the response of Protestant clergy, theologians and intellectuals to Nietzschean assaults on Protestant cultural authority before, during, and after World War I from 1900 to 1925. Liberal and conservative Protestants expressed concern at the threat Nietzsche's ideas represented to Christianity's cultural authority and presumed status as the foundation for western civilization. They also assessed Nietzsche through the lens of their own specific concerns, whether it was liberal Social Gospel advocates worrying about his threat to the social ethic of Christianity, fundamentalists concerned about his link to Darwin, or liberal and conservative Protestants who worried that the war was really symptomatic of a broader crisis of civilization in which Christianity found its position precarious.

Finally, I will conclude this dissertation with an epilogue reflecting upon how these three strands of reception persisted into the 1960s. I will argue that earlier dynamics of engagement laid the groundwork for Nietzsche to be accepted as a serious philosopher in subsequent decades when Protestant cultural authority was greatly diminished. Prior to moving on to these chapters, however, this introduction will offer important theoretical and historiographical considerations for the topic and provide a needed overview of

Nietzsche's life, works and thought so that one can better understand how American readers applied his ideas.

### **Nietzsche and Protestant Cultural Authority in the United States: Theoretical and Historiographical Considerations**

The process of understanding Nietzsche's surprising allure involves not only appreciating the dynamism of his ideas or the stylistic quality of his writings. It requires more than looking at the impact of individual interpreters and translators, such as the enormously influential Walter Kaufmann.<sup>4</sup> It also entails understanding the wider context into which his writings were appropriated in multiple ways and with various goals.

Numerous factors merit consideration when seeking to understand that context: professionalization and specialization in the emerging modern universities, the institutional structure and ideological nature of American cultural criticism, two world wars and their resulting social and intellectual dislocations, the arrival of emigrant scholars who reintroduced Nietzsche to American audiences, new intellectual currents such as existentialism, and the ongoing debates about the nature and value of religion, democracy, progress and tradition in the United States. Nietzsche's ideas were appraised in the corridors of academic philosophy, the multifarious world of independent intellectuals, the sermons, lectures and writings of ministers and theologians, and in the

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Kaufmann emigrated from Germany in 1939, received his doctorate from Harvard, and taught at Princeton. He translated many of Nietzsche's works into English, challenged uncharitable interpretations of Nietzsche, vigorously defended Nietzsche from the taint of Nazism, and argued that Nietzsche was a serious philosopher who belonged in the long, grand tradition of the West. Many of his arguments culminated in his seminal work, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950). For more on Kaufmann's role in transforming Nietzsche into a serious philosopher for an American audience, see Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, "'Dionysian Enlightenment': Walter Kaufmann's Nietzsche in Historical Perspective," *Modern Intellectual History* 3, no. 2 (August 2006): 239-269; and Ivan Soll, "Walter Kaufmann and the Advocacy of German Thought in America," *Paedagogica Historica* 33 (1997): 117-133.

realm of popular culture.<sup>5</sup> My dissertation examines all of these factors by contextualizing them in the framework of the correspondence between Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority. Some observers believed that that this decline was epitomized and facilitated by Nietzsche's ideas.

It therefore becomes important to clarify the meaning of Protestant cultural authority and to appreciate its historical expression in the United States in order to perceive the threat represented by Nietzsche's critique of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Academics, cultural critics, social activists, theologians and clergy frequently engaged his thought with the intent of assessing, marginalizing or defending traditional Protestant Christianity's hold on American institutions, culture and moral assumptions. The effort to curb Protestant Christianity's influence and to empower new ideas, institutions and individuals to positions of cultural authority was nothing short of a "secular revolution."<sup>7</sup> Secular elites transformed culture-shaping institutions such as the university and strove to marginalize religious authority from the "structures of cultural power."<sup>8</sup> They were countered by Protestant clergy, theologians and intellectuals who embarked on "the quest

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<sup>5</sup> "Independent intellectuals" is a term that I am drawing from Steven Biel. They were usually distinct from academia, sought their own venues to establish "critical independence" and "public influence," and pursued "self-conscious generalism" as opposed to specialization. See Biel, *Independent Intellectuals in the United States, 1910-1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 5, 2. These intellectuals formed small communities and networks, usually around their own journals. They participated in political, cultural, social, and religious criticism. Their reaction to Nietzsche was largely positive, as they sought to incorporate him into their respective critiques of American society.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Glenn Alan Lucke for his historiographical overview of the sociological literature on culture. See Lucke, "Thriving on the Margins: Why Evangelicals are Not Winning the Culture War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Christian Smith, "Introduction," in *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*, ed. Christian Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-96.

<sup>8</sup> James Davison Hunter and James E. Hawdon, "Religious Elites in Advanced Capitalism: The Dialectic of Power and Marginality," in *World Order and Religion*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1991), 40.

for cultural authority” due to the realization that they could no longer “rely upon deep and truly vast reserves of inherited authority” from the 1830s onward.<sup>9</sup>

The assertion that Protestant Christianity exercised tremendous cultural authority is not to suggest that all Americans were practicing Protestants, even if a significant percentage were despite the growing pluralism of the American religious landscape. Protestant cultural authority refers more specifically to a “matrix” of influential denominations whose formal institutions and personal networks exercised authority and resisted challengers in American culture, society and politics.<sup>10</sup> It consisted of engrained assumptions about the existence and nature of God, human personhood, the structures of familial and communal life, the nature and nuances of public and private morality, and the roots of American political, economic, cultural and legal ideals. The Protestant establishment combined “Scottish Common Sense Realist epistemology,” a “Baconian philosophy of science” and a confidence in biblical authority in an effort to vindicate the veracity of Christianity and understand the world as “a single, unified whole.”<sup>11</sup> Schools

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<sup>9</sup> William R. Hutchison, “Preface: From Protestant to Pluralist America,” in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, ed. William Hutchison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xii-xiii.

<sup>10</sup> See Hutchison, “Protestantism as Establishment,” in *Between the Times*, 3-18. Hutchison identifies the denominations most commonly associated with the “Protestant establishment” as Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, the white divisions of the Baptists and Methodists, the Disciples of Christ, and the United Lutherans. He notes that this was not a monolith, as each denomination had its own divisions and diversity.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *The Secular Revolution*, 25. Scottish Common Sense philosophy emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from thinkers such as Thomas Reid (1710-1796). George Marsden notes that it facilitated an assumed alliance between “science, common sense, morality and true religion” that was shared by different religious and philosophical groups in the United States after the American Revolution. Marsden continues: “Reid, in answering David Hume’s skepticism, emphasized that there were a host of other foundational beliefs, such as one’s personal identity, the existence of other minds, consistency of nature, verifiable empirical data, and beliefs based on reliable testimony, as well as necessary truths of mathematics and logic, that all normal people...could not help believing. A firm science of human behavior could be founded on such unquestionable principles and eventually, through careful inductive reasoning, all philosophical disputes should simply be settled.” Marsden adds that evangelical faith in empirical science “put traditional Protestantism in a most vulnerable position” once the European scientific consensus moved away from traditional Christian assumptions. See Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 91, 93.

transmitted “Protestant beliefs and morals,” colleges were in the hands of Protestant clergy, and American political culture and laws revealed a deep Protestant Christian imprint. Republicanism, democratic egalitarianism, reform movements, voluntary societies, popular journalism, and even free market capitalism were informed by Protestant ideas and practices. Cultural arbiters included many Protestant theologians, ministers and laypersons.<sup>12</sup> Earlier manifestations of Protestant cultural authority affirmed the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, though this position became contested in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Protestant establishment became associated more commonly with theological liberalism. Liberal Protestants accepted to varying degrees the inroads made by biblical higher criticism and Darwinism while also acceding to theological adjustments made to accommodate the realities of modernity.<sup>13</sup> Growing theological and denominational divisions, however, did not change the fact that during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, American culture was defined by “the powerful institutions and ideals of a Protestant-Republican habitus” that informed the country’s “character ideal, moral sensibilities, and civic ethos.”<sup>14</sup> This understanding of

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, *The Secular Revolution*, 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> Hutchison’s standard work on theological liberalism, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*, found three meanings of modernism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism: “first and most visibly, it meant the conscious, intended adaptation of religious ideas to modern culture. The popular or journalistic definition tended to stop there, or to move directly from there to a functional explanation of modernism as the direct opposite and negation of biblical literalism. But for Protestant theologians, preachers, and teachers who either championed or opposed the idea of cultural adaptation, two further and deeper notions were important. One was the idea that God is immanent in human cultural development and revealed through it. The other was a belief that human society is moving toward realization (even though it may never attain the reality) of the Kingdom of God.” See Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 2.

<sup>14</sup> James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age Without Good and Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 222-223. Hunter’s use of the term “habitus” derives from the writings of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. David Swartz noted that Bourdieu’s understanding of culture was informed by an emphasis on power, which meant that “beliefs, traditions, values and languages” not only served as “grounds for human communication and interaction” but also as a “source of domination.” See Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1. Bourdieu defined a “habitus” as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions” that operates at a subconscious cultural level and in effect became “history turned into nature.” See Bourdieu, *The Logic of*

Protestantism's pervasive cultural presence and power in the United States is vital to understanding the landscape of Nietzsche's American reception and to appreciating the challenge he presented to such an ethos.

This evocation of Protestant cultural authority raises the issue of how to understand the nature of the authority being exercised during the time of Nietzsche's introduction to American audiences. Sociologists Paul DiMaggio and Bethany Bryson, for example, explicitly define cultural authority as "the legitimate rights of specialized elites to evaluate objects, ideas, or actions in specific spheres of collective responsibility."<sup>15</sup> Historians also have assessed cultural authority in similar terms when discussing the development of cultural criticism, the emergence of mass culture, the highbrow-lowbrow debates and "the emergence of cultural hierarchy" in the United States.<sup>16</sup> The focus on elites when assessing cultural authority also corresponds with recent efforts to define secularization not as some natural, inevitable demise of religious practice due to modernization, industrialization, bureaucratization or urbanization but as the active efforts of elites to quicken "the declining scope of religious authority."<sup>17</sup>

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*Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53. Hunter clarified Bourdieu's rather opaque definition by describing a habitus as "the taken-for-granted assumptions that prevail in a particular society or civilization that make our experience of the world seem commonsensical." See Hunter, *The Death of Character*, 222.

<sup>15</sup> Paul DiMaggio and Bethany Bryson, "Public Attitudes toward Cultural Authority and Cultural Diversity in Higher Education and the Arts," in *The Arts of Democracy: Art, Public Culture, and the State*, ed. Casey Nelson Blake (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 248. A familiar starting point in sociological circles is Max Weber's tripartite understanding of authority—legal, traditional and charismatic—that connects authority with the notion of legitimacy. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 215-216.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999); John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Lawrence C. Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (March 1994): 750.

Secularization in this sense represents “the successful outcome of an intentional political struggle by secularizing activists to overthrow a religious establishment’s control over socially legitimate knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and recognition of its declining cultural authority in the West provided ammunition for American activists in academia, cultural criticism and journalism who sought an alternative to or redefinition of Protestant dominance of American society, culture and politics.

The connection between Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority is also illuminated by an understanding of culture as “a normative order by which we comprehend ourselves, others, and the larger world and through which we order our experience.”<sup>19</sup> Culture becomes a reservoir of meaning and value while authority conveys “the probability that particular definitions of reality and judgments of meaning and value will prevail as valid and true.” Cultural authority thus resides not only in ruling elites but in scientific, sacred or even grammatical texts and the ideas they embody. It exists in institutions such as the church, which makes “authoritative judgments about the nature of the world.” It inhabits the increasingly specialized “professional communities” that exercise dominion over their respective fields of knowledge. Cultural authority isn’t necessarily imposed but rather can serve as an instrument of persuasion or an “antecedent to action.”<sup>20</sup> This interpretation of cultural authority—related to meaning and value, persuasive in nature, and evident in ideas, texts, institutions and professions—corresponds to the influence Protestant Christianity

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, *The Secular Revolution*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 200.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 13-14. Starr also makes an interesting connection between the rise of professions and the decline of Protestant cultural authority: “At a time when traditional certitudes were breaking down, professional authority offered a means of sorting out different conceptions of human needs and the nature and meaning of events.” *Ibid.*, 19.

maintained prior to rigorous challenges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It also makes sense of why Nietzsche's critique of Christianity represented such a threat to the individuals, institutions and ideas exercising that authority. Nietzsche not only critiqued the claims and doctrines of Christianity, he displayed an acute awareness of its lingering and pervasive cultural authority. The process of rooting out its persistent influence, Nietzsche understood, would be long and arduous.

The concentration on Nietzsche's reception in an American Protestant context is one of many fruitful avenues of inquiry that are available in regard to Nietzsche's reception in the United States. Indeed, several efforts by scholars to address the topic reflect different methods and deserve special mention.<sup>21</sup> Melvin Drimmer and Hays

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<sup>21</sup> Dissertations include LeRoy C. Kauffmann, "The Influence of Friedrich Nietzsche on American Literature," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1963); Melvin Drimmer, "Nietzsche in American Thought, 1895-1925," (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1965); James Peter Cadello, "Nietzsche in America: The Spectrum of Perspectives, 1895-1925," Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1990); Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, "Neither Rock nor Refuge: American Encounters with Nietzsche and the Search for Foundations," (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2003). Kauffmann focused on Nietzsche's interaction with the naturalism of several American literary critics and writers. Drimmer examined a wide range of independent and academic intellectuals, cultural critics, and literary figures that interacted with Nietzsche's thought from 1895-1925. He concluded with the "twilight of an idol"—the post-World War I demise in Nietzsche's popularity. Cadello focused solely on four American expositors and their works during the years 1895-1925. Ratner-Rosenhagen expressed interest in addressing neglected "concerns of historians," including "how Nietzsche's thought influenced broader themes and debates in twentieth-century American political, religious, or cultural life." See Ratner-Rosenhagen, 5. Her dissertation covers the early period through the 1920's. Articles include Ludwig Marcuse, "Nietzsche in America," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 50 (1951): 330-339; Bryan Strong, "Images of Nietzsche in America, 1900-1970," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1971): 575-594; Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche Today: A View from America," *International Studies in Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (1983): 95-103; Wilfried van der Will, "Nietzsche in America: Fashion and Fascination," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 1015-1023; Daniel Conway, "Nietzsche in America or: Anything That Does Not Kill Us Makes Us Stronger," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 9/10 (Spring/Autumn 1995): 1-6; Ratner-Rosenhagen, "Conventional Iconoclasm: The Cultural Work of the Nietzsche Image in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 3 (December 2006): 728-754. Marcuse augmented generalizations about Nietzsche's "alien and sinister" reputation in the United States with a few comments on the response of Josiah Royce and H.L. Mencken. He also noted Nietzsche's negative associations with Germany in both world wars. Strong examined monographs from 1900 to 1970 and concluded that Nietzsche had been transformed from a "prophet of barbarism" to a "philosopher of existentialism." Magnus discussed the current state (in 1983) of Nietzsche scholarship in American professional philosophical circles and suggested that there were different readings—Continental European, analytical, and reconstructionist—of Nietzsche contesting with or talking past one another. Wilfried van der Will surveyed several decades of Nietzsche monographs and suggested that Nietzsche's ideas were being fashioned for an American context—through emphasizing either his liberalism, philosophical seriousness, or his perspectivism—and therefore diluted. Conway offered a humorous and brief look at the American

Steilberg take an “encyclopedic” approach by exhaustively detailing how Nietzsche influenced specific American intellectuals until 1925 and 1950, respectively.<sup>22</sup> *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, a collection of essays edited by Manfred Pütz, explores not only Nietzsche’s direct influence on various American writers, critics and philosophers but also any indirect affinities, even in cases where no explicit connection existed.<sup>23</sup>

Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen offers a more robust, historical analysis of Nietzsche’s American career. Her dissertation focuses on interpreters of “Nietzsche’s challenge to universal foundations” as well as “the relationship between the impact of his ideas and the symbolic meaning of his image” during the early reception period.<sup>24</sup>

Ratner-Rosenhagen expanded the scope of her project in a subsequent article, which explores the “the cultural work of the Nietzsche image” in the United States throughout the twentieth century. This approach involves not a traditional “history of thought,” but rather, as suggested by historian Daniel T. Rodgers and cited approvingly by Ratner-Rosenhagen, of “histories of men and women thinking: making, consuming, and

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misreadings and popular osmosis of Nietzsche’s ideas. Ratner-Rosenhagen explores the “cultural work” of both the ideas and image Nietzsche, focusing less on evaluating whether interpreters successfully reflected authorial intent and more on the meaning readers created via textual and biographical interaction with Nietzsche.

<sup>22</sup> Ratner-Rosenhagen also notes the “encyclopedic detail” of these volumes while contrasting them with her approach: “I aim instead to provide a synthetic treatment of interpretations relating to Nietzsche’s challenge to universal foundations and to examine the relationship between the impact of his ideas and the symbolic meaning of his image.” See Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Neither Rock nor Refuge,” 5n. Likewise, my dissertation steers away from a comprehensive, “encyclopedic” approach. My focus is on how one major component central to Nietzsche’s thought—his critique of Christianity—was received in a context crucial to understanding his American reception—the decline of Protestant cultural authority in the United States.

<sup>23</sup> Manfred Pütz, ed., *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995). Other books include Hays Alan Steilberg, *Die amerikanische Nietzsche-Rezeption von 1896 bis 1950* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); and Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche’s impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972). Pütz’s volume examines the textual interaction and influence between Nietzsche and American writers and thinkers. Steilberg’s survey divides Nietzsche’s reception into three parts: monographs, essayists, and literature. Bridgwater’s volume primarily explores English writers but contains a chapter on Nietzsche’s influence on American writers.

<sup>24</sup> Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Neither Rock nor Refuge,” 5n.

remaking ideas and language, arguing and conversing, filling the air with ideational stuff.”<sup>25</sup> Ratner-Rosenhagen, while noting the impact of social history, cultural studies and literary theory, observes that historians now acknowledge “that texts contain multitudes” and not essential meaning. It is readers who create meaning “as they interact with texts” and therefore assume for themselves “a form of authorship.”<sup>26</sup>

Reception studies certainly benefit from the profitable examination of how readers apply texts in conjunction with their respective historical and social contexts, personalities, beliefs, and interests. Indeed, my project also will pay close attention to how Nietzsche’s ideas were received, appropriated and even reinvented in a distinctly American context. I will investigate how Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity was treated by American interpreters in light of Protestant cultural authority’s decline and will argue that this decline was a salient feature of understanding his paradoxical popularity. But a key component of evaluating the cultural exchange between Nietzsche and his American readers will be an assessment of his ideas on their own terms. Though the effort to understand authorial intent, the meaning of ideas, and the milieu that they shape and reflect is akin to seeing through a glass darkly, it remains a necessary endeavor. The risks of totalizing or oversimplifying are outweighed by the possibility of being unable to render even partial judgments about the cultural exchange. It becomes difficult, for example, to understand how one could completely destabilize Nietzsche’s texts and yet criticize National Socialism for misappropriating his thought.

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<sup>25</sup> See Daniel T. Rodgers, “Thinking in Verbs,” *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 21-22. Rodgers is quoted in Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Conventional Iconoclasm,” 732.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 733.

## **‘The Most Disastrous Lie of Seduction’: Nietzsche’s Life, Works and Critique of Christianity**

Understanding how Nietzsche’s assessment of Christianity was evaluated and appropriated in the United States requires familiarity with his life, career and ideas. The caveat to this assertion is the acknowledgement that Nietzsche’s collective writings appear impervious to systematic categorization and inspire a multiplicity of interpretations and uses. His body of work proves notoriously difficult to summarize and perhaps any attempt to do so would go against his intentions: “I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.”<sup>27</sup> Qualifications aside, a general—if partial—appreciation of his life and thought is fundamental to evaluating the uses to which his supporters and opponents put his ideas.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844 in the small Prussian village of Röcken. The son and grandson of Lutheran pastors, Nietzsche experienced tragedy at the young age of four when his father unexpectedly died in 1849. His family then moved to Naumburg, where he grew up before leaving for the esteemed Pforta boarding school in 1858. Nietzsche had remained pious into his early teens, but a shift in perspective became evident during his years at Pforta.<sup>28</sup> Its rigorous curriculum included historical criticism of ancient Greek, Roman and biblical texts, which meant that

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1888; London: Penguin Books, 1968), 35 (page citation is to *Twilight of Idols*).

<sup>28</sup> Biographer R.J. Hollingdale notes that Nietzsche wrote a childhood autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben*, that contains intense expressions of Nietzsche’s faith. He quotes the following example written when Nietzsche was not quite 14: “I have already experienced so much—joy and sorrow, cheerful things and sad things—but in everything God has safely led me as a father leads his weak little child...I have firmly resolved within me to dedicate myself forever to His service. May the dear Lord give me strength and power to carry out my intention and protect me on my life’s way. Like a child I trust in His grace: He will preserve us all, that no misfortune may befall us. But His holy will be done! All He gives I will joyfully accept: happiness and unhappiness, poverty and wealth, and boldly look even death in the face, which shall one day unite us all in eternal joy and bliss. Yes, dear Lord, let Thy face shine upon us forever! Amen!” See Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.

Nietzsche was no longer reading the Bible under the assumption of its veracity.

Nietzsche, already a prolific writer as a teenager, began to express doubts not only about the historicity of Scripture but about traditional theological notions of God, providence, justice and evil.<sup>29</sup>

His break from Christianity appeared decisive in an essay written during Easter vacation in 1862, at the age of 17, titled “Faith and History.” Nietzsche called for “a free and impartial” reassessment of “Christian doctrines and church-history” that would be removed from “the yoke of custom and prejudice” or the pre-determination of childhood. Nietzsche expressed skepticism about rationales for Christian belief, affirmed “history and natural science” as the only “secure foundation” for his speculations, and hinted that while it was “easy” to pull down traditional beliefs, “rebuilding” something new in its place was demanding. Destroying “the authority of two millennia and the security of the most perceptive men of all time” was not a task to enter into lightly. Nietzsche, even at the age of 17, recognized that “such an attempt is not the work of a few weeks, but of a lifetime.”<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche may or may not have realized it at the time, but his life and works would come to be consumed with the philosophical project of critiquing Christianity, explaining the wide-ranging ramifications of rejecting it, and articulating an alternative vision of life.

Nietzsche’s Pforta education not only planted the seeds for that philosophical project, it also prepared him for further study and professional advancement in the field of classical philology. Nietzsche began his studies in 1864 at the University of Bonn,

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<sup>29</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 34. Safranski also noted that Nietzsche “penned no fewer than nine autobiographical sketches” between the years 1858-1868. *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, “Fate and History: Thoughts (1862),” in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 12, 13.

where he came under the tutelage of highly regarded philologist Friedrich Ritschl (1806-1876). His stay at Bonn was brief, as Ritschl left for the University of Leipzig and was followed there by Nietzsche in 1865. Ritschl proved to be a vital person in Nietzsche's life through his strong encouragement of Nietzsche's scholarly activities and unique ability in the field of philology. Nietzsche, prepared by a lifetime of incessant writing and by the study of Greek and Latin at Pforta and under the guidance of Ritschl at Leipzig, was transformed into a professional classical philologist.<sup>31</sup> Ritschl also recommended Nietzsche for the vacant philology chair at the University of Basel, a position that he was offered in 1869 when he was only 24.

Nietzsche's career path and intellectual interests were not limited solely to the world of classical philology. Other influences emerged during his time at Leipzig. A secondhand bookstore purchase of *The World as Will and Representation* by German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a transformative experience for Nietzsche.<sup>32</sup> Biographer Rüdiger Safranski suggested that Schopenhauer taught Nietzsche "that the world construed by reason, historical meaning, and morality is not the actual world."<sup>33</sup> Schopenhauer argued that the real world was shaped not by reason or revelation, but by the will. Schopenhauer's emphasis on the primacy of the will influenced Nietzsche, despite the latter's different rendering of the will in terms of

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<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche's essay on the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Greek poet Theognis convinced Ritschl of his star quality and was published in 1867. His subsequent piece on 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD historian of Greek philosophy, Diogenes Laertius, won Leipzig's philological essay prize and was published in four parts during 1868-9. See Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 34-35.

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche wrote, "I am one of those readers of Schopenhauer who when they have read one page of him know for certain they will go on to read all the pages and will pay heed to every word he ever said." See "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1874; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 133.

<sup>33</sup> Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 45.

power.<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche's early celebration of Schopenhauer was surpassed by his exuberance over the music of Richard Wagner (1813-1883).<sup>35</sup> Wagner's force of personality, Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann observes, persuaded Nietzsche of the possibility of "greatness and genuine creation" while his musical direction encouraged Nietzsche's scholarly focus on Greek tragedy.<sup>36</sup>

Nietzsche's debt to Schopenhauer and Wagner came at a time when he was beginning his professional career at the University of Basel, where he taught from 1869-1879.<sup>37</sup> Chronic health problems and dissatisfaction with professional academia short-circuited his career as an institutional scholar but accelerated his assumption of a Schopenhaueresque posture as an independent thinker. His first major publication, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), surprised and disappointed many

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<sup>34</sup> Schopenhauer also presented Nietzsche with an example of how to write and be a scholar outside a professional context. Schopenhauer rejected professional philosophy "on the ground that independence of means is a precondition of independence of thought." See Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81. Nietzsche wrote that he profited "from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example" and viewed Schopenhauer's impatience "with the scholarly caste" as a model worthy of emulation. See Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," 136-137.

<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche knew of Wagner prior to their initial meeting in Leipzig and was familiar with operas such as the mythology-rich *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle and *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner became both a long-term influence and foil for Nietzsche, whose turbulent relationship with Wagner was evidenced in the changing tone in his writings from *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872) to *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1888).

<sup>36</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Lionel Gossman persuasively argues that the setting of Basel may help us understand the development of Nietzsche's ideas, as well as those of other prominent scholars: "For a good part of the nineteenth century, the 'anachronistic' city-republic of Basel was a place where those whose ideas were 'unzeitgemäss'—untimely or unseasonable—could feel, to some degree, at home and could even count on a measure of official approval and support. In particular, it became a sanctuary for intellectual practices that ran counter to the reigning orthodoxies of German scholarship: for Johann Jacob Bachofen's antiphilology and Franz Overbeck's antitheology, for Jacob Burckhardt's cultural history and Friedrich Nietzsche's unorthodox philosophy. In Basel, Backofen, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Overbeck found the peace and security they needed to develop or pursue unseasonable thoughts. Though they came from different backgrounds and were by no means uniform in their style of thinking or of writing, they shared in some respects a common outlook. Their work, taken *en bloc*, constitutes a formidable critique not only of *Wissenschaft* as it was understood in the late nineteenth century, especially in German, but of the optimistic, self-confident modernism of their time." See Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8.

expectant colleagues who anticipated the highly regarded young scholar demonstrating his philological acumen.<sup>38</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* posited that the origins of Greek tragedy were found in the “wedding of two principles” associated with the gods Apollo and Dionysius. The “Apollonian principle” was “the principle of order, static beauty, and clear boundaries.” The “Dionysian principle” was “the principle of frenzy, excess, and the collapse of boundaries.”<sup>39</sup> Greek drama gave evidence of “the strife of these two hostile principles,” Nietzsche argued, and the ramifications of this contest carried through to contemporary cultural concerns.<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, after a discussion of the demise of Greek tragedy, focused particular attention on Socrates and his contemporary relevance. Socrates was “the prototype of the theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of a panacea, while understanding error as the evil *par excellence*.” Socrates’ shadow lingered over the West and was evident in its celebration of knowledge and science. Nietzsche argued that “science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck.” Nietzsche prescribed art as the remedy for this Socratic-induced disaster. Art, Nietzsche affirmed in a preface to

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<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche’s early Basel lectures were geared toward pre-Platonic philosophy but his association with Wagner moved him more in the direction of Greek drama, which was the subject of his first book. Nietzsche later wrote, in an “Attempt at a Self Criticism,” that he found *The Birth of Tragedy* to be “an impossible book: I find it to be badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image-confused, sentimental” but also a work that “had a knack for seeking out fellow-rhapsodizers and for luring them on to new secret paths and dancing places.” Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Or: Hellenism and Pessimism in Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library Edition, 2000), 19.

<sup>39</sup> Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, “Nietzsche’s Works and Their Themes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche offered positive assessments of Greek tragedians Sophocles and Aeschylus for the manner in which they navigated the Apollonian-Dionysian divide. But he was very critical of Euripides, who has separated the “original and all powerful-Dionysian element from tragedy” and reconstructed it “purely on the basis of an un-Dionysian art, morality and world-view” characterized by conventionality and mediocrity. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 81.

Richard Wagner, “represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life” and Greek tragedy, he declared later in the text, should result in “the metaphysical comfort...that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable.”<sup>41</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* did not extensively critique or address Christianity, but it did contain themes that would inform his later philosophy. These ideas included the importance of art, the irrational nature of human beings, the limits of science and reason, and the significance of power.

Nietzsche followed *The Birth of Tragedy* with a series of shorter works, written in 1873-1876, categorized as the *Untimely Meditations*. These meditations, R.J. Hollingdale aptly stated, “contain Nietzsche’s thoughts on the nature of culture in the post-Darwinian world in general and in the *Reich* in particular.”<sup>42</sup> His first meditation, “David Strauss, the Confessor and Writer,” dealt with German theologian and biblical scholar David Strauss (1808-1874), who was known for his rejection of orthodox Christianity and pioneering work in New Testament criticism. His *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) was a groundbreaking work in biblical higher criticism that offered a mythological interpretation of the miracles and supernatural occurrences in the New Testament gospel accounts. Nietzsche wrote about Strauss at a time when another of his books, *The Old Faith and the New* (1872) had become a bestselling work in Germany. *The Old Faith and*

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<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 97, 31-32, 59. Nietzsche closed *The Birth of Tragedy* with a paean to Wagner, who was seen as bringing back the better qualities of Greek drama to modern Germany, though Nietzsche later repudiated his pro-Wagnerian sentiments. See *Ibid.*, 99-144.

<sup>42</sup> Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 98. It should be noted that Nietzsche’s first meditation was not only an attack on the style and content of David Strauss’s writings but a broader attack on German “cultivated philistines” in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. Daniel Breazeale argues that the intended target was “the smug and false complacency of the ‘cultivated’ German bourgeoisie in the aftermath of Prussia’s victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent establishment of the second German *Reich*.” See Breazeale, “Introduction,” in *Untimely Meditations*, xiii. The meditation also was motivated by Wagner’s personal feud with Strauss. See Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 168-171.

*the New* contained evidence of Strauss' rejection of Christian orthodoxy as well as his optimistic affirmation of modern science, reason, technological advancements and German political order. Nietzsche acknowledged the "admirable frankness" of Strauss' rejection of Christianity but also accused Strauss of failing to come to grips with the implications that "a genuine Darwinian ethic" would have for many of his stated assumptions about human nature, morality and culture.<sup>43</sup> This charge echoed Nietzsche's later more fully-orbed critique of those who rejected Christianity while either living off of its cultural capital or failing to come to grips with the ramifications of that rejection.

The remaining meditations dealt with the topics of historical education in Germany and on the two major intellectual influences in his life, Schopenhauer and Wagner. Nietzsche's second meditation, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), asserted that "we want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life," the implication of which was that while history did have some value, it also could be debilitating. Nietzsche, while noting that "forgetting is essential to action of any kind," nevertheless found three types of history to possess moderate usefulness: monumental, antiquarian and critical. Monumental history focuses on examples of individual greatness; antiquarian history preserves and celebrates the cultural heritage from which

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<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss the Confessor and Writer" in *Untimely Meditations*, 29-30. Nietzsche's elaboration of the point bears repeating: "He [Strauss] announces with admirable frankness that he is no longer a Christian, but he does not wish to disturb anyone's peace of mind; it seems to him contradictory to found an association in order to overthrow an association—which is in fact not so very contradictory. With a certain rude contentment he covers himself in the hairy cloak of our ape-genealogists and praises Darwin as one of the greatest benefactors of mankind—but it confuses us to see that his ethics are constructed entirely independently of the question: 'What is our conception of the world?' Here was an opportunity to exhibit native courage: for here he ought to have turned his back on his 'we' and boldly derived a moral code for life out of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and the privileges of the strong—though such a code would, to be sure, have to originate in an intrepid mind such as that of Hobbes, and in a grand love of truth quite different from that which exploded only in angry outbursts against priests, miracles, and the 'world-historical humbug' of the resurrection. For with a genuine Darwinian ethic, seriously and consistently carried through, he would have had against him the philistine whom with such outbursts he attracts to his side." Ibid.

one emerged; critical history brings that same cultural heritage “before the tribunal” and offers critique, judgment and condemnation.<sup>44</sup> Otherwise, Nietzsche called for a transcending of history and turned to the ancient Greeks for his example: “But there we also discover the reality of an essentially unhistorical culture and one which is nonetheless, or rather on that account, an inexpressibly richer and more vital culture.”<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche argued that historical education was not producing “the free cultivated man” but rather the “cultural philistine, the precocious and up-to-the minute babbler about state, church, and art” who is trained in the stultifying professions.<sup>46</sup>

Nietzsche’s remaining two *Untimely Meditations* continued his critique of contemporary culture while also dealing with two major influences in his life: Schopenhauer and Wagner.<sup>47</sup> “Schopenhauer as Educator” (1874) was Nietzsche’s tribute to a philosopher whose own sense of individuality provided a model for others. Nietzsche’s third meditation strove “to defend a novel conception of genuine selfhood as a never-to-be-completed process of self-development and self-overcoming,” not through detailed engagement with Schopenhauer’s ideas, but with his example of living.<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche wrote that Schopenhauer’s example included the willingness to take “*upon*

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<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, 50, 62, 67-77.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Nietzsche argued that the ancient Greeks were especially instructive to modern Germany: “Even if we Germans were in fact nothing but successors—we could not be anything greater or prouder than successors if we had appropriated such a culture and were the heirs and successors of that.” Instead, Nietzsche saw Germany as remaining under the sway of Hegelian notions such as history as a “world-process” of which Germany represented the culmination. “I believe,” Nietzsche suggested, “there has been no dangerous vacillation or crisis of German culture this century that has not been rendered more dangerous by the enormous and still continuing influence of this philosophy, the Hegelian.” *Ibid.*, 103-4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche later wrote that the essays on Schopenhauer and Wagner were about him: “Now, when I look back from a distance at the circumstances of which these essays are a witness, I would not wish to deny that fundamentally they speak only of me. The essay ‘Wagner in Bayreuth’ is a vision of my future; on the other hand, in ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ it is my innermost history, my *evolution* that is inscribed. Above all, my *solemn vow!*” See Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 57.

<sup>48</sup> Breazeale, “Introduction,” *Untimely Meditations*, xix.

*himself the suffering involved in being truthful,”* an idea that frequently emerges in Nietzsche’s later writings regarding Christianity, which he felt many were rejecting without fully appreciating the consequences and scope of that rejection.<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche’s final meditation, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth” (1876) was written at a time when Nietzsche was filled with increasing ambivalence toward Wagner.<sup>50</sup> While dealing with the specific festival that would feature Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* play cycle, the work also offered an intriguing psychological profile of Wagner that also served as a precursor to Nietzsche’s later thoughts on the will to power:

When the *ruling idea* of his life—the idea that an incomparable amount of influence, the greatest influence of all the arts, could be exercised through the theatre—seizes hold on him, it threw his being into the most violent ferment. It did not produce an immediate clear decision as to his future actions and objective; this idea appeared at first almost as a temptation, as an expression of his obscure personal will, which longed insatiably for *power and fame*. Influence, incomparable influence—how? over whom?—that was from now on the question and quest that ceaselessly occupied his head and heart.<sup>51</sup>

Nietzsche’s next published work, *Human, All Too Human, a Book for Free Spirits* (1878), was written near the end of his Basel tenure amidst growing health concerns and extended absences from his regular teaching duties. *Human, All Too Human* represented a significant shift in both style and content. Nietzsche’s longer essay format of previous writings was supplanted by a series of aphorisms that became characteristic of later

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<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” 152.

<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche frequently visited Richard and Cosima Wagner from the late 1860s through the mid-1870s and held high hopes for Wagner’s rejuvenation of German culture. He originally hoped that Wagner’s efforts, particularly through the Bayreuth festival would succeed in “returning art to its origins in Greek antiquity and in “becoming a sacral event in society” through the communal experience of art. He gradually soured on Wagner due to a belief that his aesthetic vision was compromised fatally by his arrogance, vanity, and cultural nationalism. See Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 99.

<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, “Wagner in Bayreuth” in *Untimely Meditations*, 227. Hollingdale observes about this passage and the work in general that it reflects Nietzsche’s growing recognition of the importance of power. Wagner’s “desire for power” resulted in his becoming “a genius of the theatre, not stopping until he had created an entire little world in which his word was law.” Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 106.

works.<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche scholar Richard Schacht notes the sense of crisis that permeated the work, not only Nietzsche's growing health problems and fractured relationship with Wagner but, on a broader scale, the crisis of civilization itself. Nietzsche's "deepening appreciation of the profound and extensive consequences of the collapse of traditional ways of thinking" as well as "his growing recognition" of the inadequacy of the Enlightenment and Romanticism "to fill the void" were on display.<sup>53</sup> *Human, All Too Human* included forays into philosophy, religion, science, literature, politics, social thought and cultural criticism that make it a difficult work to summarize. Nietzsche drew from many subjects and perspectives in order to critique traditional beliefs and modes of thought, as well as their tremendous impact on culture. Nietzsche celebrated this flight from tradition but nevertheless found contemporary alternatives inadequate. The book's multiplicity of topical studies and aphoristic insights explored the possibility of cultivating "a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age would have been expected of him."<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche's prescription of "liberation" still

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<sup>52</sup> Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins offer a useful elaboration on the stylistic shift of *Human, All Too Human*: "While his previous works had typically been in the forms of essays or similarly structured longer works, *Human, All Too Human* is the first of Nietzsche's 'aphoristic' works. That is, it is written as an assembly of short discussions (sometimes literally aphorisms) which are strung together like beads, often without obvious connections between adjacent fragments. This appearance is often deceptive, however. Nietzsche orders his fragments to achieve a given effect, suggesting but not dogmatically asserting comparisons and contrasts, while challenging his readers to draw their own conclusions." See Magnus and Higgins, "Nietzsche's Works and Their Themes," 32-33.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Schacht, "Introduction," in Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1878; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) vii.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 108. Schacht offers a succinct summary of the perspectivism inherent in the work and how it establishes important patterns for understanding later writings: "But if we are to make something worthwhile of ourselves, we have to take a good hard look at ourselves. And this, for Nietzsche, means many things. It means looking at ourselves in the light of everything we can learn about the world and ourselves from the natural sciences—most emphatically including evolutionary biology, physiology and even medical science. It also means looking at ourselves in the light of everything we can learn about human life from history, from the social sciences, from the study of arts, religions, languages, literatures, mores and other features of various cultures. It further means attending closely to human conduct on different levels of human interaction, to the relation between what people say and seem to think

necessitated a diagnosis of the sickness, a task for which he employed many examples and explanatory devices.<sup>55</sup> For example, he frequently offered psychological or naturalistic explanations for beliefs and morality previously thought of as rooted in transcendent sources, with Christianity serving as an obvious target. Nietzsche wrote that “every religion was born out of fear and need” and dedicated numerous passages that sought to explain Christian doctrines, practices and morality in terms of the “false psychology” that he believed was operative in Christianity.<sup>56</sup>

*Human, All Too Human* came to symbolize a dramatic shift in direction for Nietzsche, both professionally and personally. He was moving from the philological impetus of *The Birth of Tragedy* toward more philosophical reflections, albeit of an interdisciplinary nature. He was also adopting the posture of an independent—and at times isolated—scholar as opposed to a professor at a recognized institution.<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche never married, and the constellation of his friendships was changing due to his falling out with Wagner and growing tension with longtime friend, former classmate and fellow

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about themselves and what they do, in their reactions in different sorts of situations, and to everything else about them that affords clues to what makes them tick. All of this, and more, is what Nietzsche is up to in *Human, All Too Human*. He is at once developing and employing the various perspectival techniques that seem to him to be relevant to the understanding of what we have come to be and what we have it in us to become.” Ibid., xv-xvi.

<sup>55</sup> Liberation for Nietzsche was something that required a great deal of effort. For example, he wrote: “One, certainly very high level of culture has been attained when a man emerges from superstitious and religious concepts and fears and no longer believes in angels, for example, or in original sin, and has ceased to speak of the salvation of souls: if he is at this level of liberation he now has, with the greatest exertion of mind, to overcome metaphysics.” Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 62, 73. Multiple examples of this approach were evident in the third chapter, “The Religious Life.” Nietzsche discussed the “origin of the religious cult,” notions of sacrifice and redemption, the practical benefits of being religious, and notions of guilt and sin. See Ibid, 60-79.

<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche wrote his sister about his increasing solitude: “Where are those old friends with whom in years gone by I felt so closely united? Now it seems as if we belonged to different worlds, and no longer spoke the same language! Like a stranger and an outcast, I move among them—not one of their words or looks reaches me any longer. I am dumb—for no one understands my speech—ah, but they never did understand me.... Was I made for solitude or for a life in which there was no one to whom I could speak?” See “Nietzsche to His Sister. Sils-Maria, July 8, 1886,” in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921), 181-182.

philologist Erwin Rohde (1845-1898), who disapproved of Nietzsche's new direction.<sup>58</sup>

Nietzsche's health problems led to his 1879 resignation from the University of Basel, which granted him a pension that contributed to his ability to travel and write in the years to come.<sup>59</sup> The years 1879-1889 for Nietzsche were characterized by not only increasing solitude but constant travels, as Nietzsche never permanently settled down and moved across Switzerland, France and Italy prior to his 1889 collapse. This decade also produced a bevy of new works, beginning with some additions to *Human, All Too Human* in 1880 followed by *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* in 1881. "In this book," Nietzsche wrote in the preface, "you will discover a 'subterranean man' at work, one who tunnels and mines and undermines."<sup>60</sup>

Nietzsche indeed understood his project as digging deeply to uproot the tentacles of Christian morality and to point out—through an extensive series of aphorisms in *Daybreak*—the manifestations of the sickness that plagued civilization. Nietzsche linked the origins of Christianity to dubious New Testament texts that didn't meet his philological expectations and reserved particular spite for the Apostle Paul, "the inventor

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<sup>58</sup> Key friendships in addition to Rohde included the psychologist Paul Rée (1849-1901), who encouraged Nietzsche to incorporate the insights of psychology into his thought but fell out with Nietzsche over their mutual romantic attraction to the same woman, Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861-1937); the composer Peter Gast (1854-1918) who helped Nietzsche with amanuensis, often nursed him to back to health, and worked in the Nietzsche-Archiv in Weimar; Basel colleague Franz Overbeck (1837-1905), the radical Protestant theologian who brought Nietzsche back from Turin after his 1889 collapse. For more on Nietzsche's relationships with Rée and Salomé, see Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 339-356. For more on Gast' role in Nietzsche's life, see Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 93-94. For Nietzsche's friendship with Overbeck, see Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 163-166, 472-473.

<sup>59</sup> Lionel Gossman notes: "Though it was not rich, the University of Basel granted its now seriously ailing young professor an annual pension of three thousand francs, and that, together with some other sources of private income, was enough to support him for the rest of his life." See Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 415.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1881; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

of Christianness!”<sup>61</sup> Psychological explanations were offered to explain the origins and development of Christian morality, whose deep entrenchment in European civilization was made possible through the development of powerful customs and habits.<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche also brought Europe’s Christian history full circle with a deeply ironic aphorism titled ‘*In hoc signo vinces.*’ The phrase was a reference to the conversion of Constantine, who claimed to have seen a sign of the cross in the sky and to have received a message of “By this sign you will conquer.” The implications of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity were immense for Europe, but Nietzsche now sought to invoke the story for altogether different purposes. He declared that in modern Europe there were “perhaps ten to twenty million people who no longer ‘believe in God’—is it too much to ask that they should *give a sign* to one another?” The resulting awareness would mean that they “constitute a *power*” in Europe that could accelerate a post-Christian era.<sup>63</sup>

The post-Christian era was further accentuated by Nietzsche in his next work, *The Gay Science* (1882). The title reflected Nietzsche’s optimism both about his personal future and the future of post-Christian European civilization. *The Gay Science*, whose fame primarily derived from its memorable introduction of the “death of God” concept, was described by its author as “nothing but a bit of merry-making” after overcoming illness and weakness and regaining strength. It was an affirmation “of a reawakened faith in a tomorrow and the day after tomorrow” and “of seas that are open again, of goals that

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 42. See also 49-50 for his reflections on philology’s impact on the authority of the Bible.

<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche believed that in order to reverse the effects of Christianity on civilization, one must understand how deeply rooted it was in the customs and habits of civilization. He wrote—in a passage that could be taken as a metaphor for both the individual and for civilization as a whole—that “the chronic sickness of the soul” arose “very rarely from one single gross offence” but rather from “countless little unheeded instances of neglect.” Curing the soul, therefore, required one to make “changes to the very pettiest of his habits.” Ibid., 193.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

are permitted again, believed again.”<sup>64</sup> This was the scene painted by Nietzsche of what Hollingdale terms “the disappearance of the metaphysical world.”<sup>65</sup> The “death of God” was Nietzsche’s description for the civilization-wide loss of faith and the accompanying loss of Christianity’s cultural authority in modern Europe. He stressed “how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined” but also celebrated the fact that “the horizon appears free to us again,” an observation that explains the optimism behind the terror and sense of awe that Nietzsche believed the news of God’s death evoked.

Nietzsche heralded “the ability to contradict” and feel hostility toward “what is accustomed, traditional, and hallowed”—a disposition that constituted “what is really great, new, and amazing in our culture” and represented an important step in the liberation of the spirit.<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche did caution, however, against potential replacements to satisfy “the need to believe,” even science itself.<sup>67</sup> The need for faith was connected to the lack of will: “the less one knows how to command, the more urgently one covets someone who commands, who commands severely—a god, prince, class, physician, father confessor, dogma, or party conscience.” Nietzsche countered with the idea that one could embrace the “pleasure and power of self-determination” which he categorized as

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<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science; With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1882; New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 32.

<sup>65</sup> Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 138.

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 279, 280, 239.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 287, 288. Nietzsche commented: “Metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is that impetuous demand for certainty that discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form. Elsewhere he speculated that there was a connection between religious and scientific sensibilities: “Do you really believe that the sciences would ever have originated and grown if the way had not been prepared by magicians, alchemists, astrologers, and witches whose promises and pretensions first had to create a thirst, a hunger, a taste for *hidden* and *forbidden* powers?” *Ibid.*, 240. “Materialistic natural scientists,” Nietzsche worried, divested “existence of its *rich ambiguity*.” *Ibid.*, 335.

the “*freedom of the will*” that was characterized as being able to “take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty.”<sup>68</sup>

*The Gay Science* hinted at philosophical doctrines that were developed more fully in Nietzsche’s next work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which was published in parts in 1883, 1884 and 1892. It was in this work that three major Nietzschean ideas—the Übermensch (frequently translated as the ‘superman,’ or ‘overman’), the will to power and eternal recurrence—were fleshed out in a fictional narrative. The plot predominantly consisted of a series of speeches, dreams and songs by the prophet Zarathustra, with occasional assistance from his accompanying eagle and snake. Zarathustra emerged from ten years of solitude in a mountain cave to travel and instruct crowds of people about his post-God vision of life. The work blended religious and philosophical musings with social and political critique, with Nietzsche’s anti-democratic tendencies particularly on display.<sup>69</sup> These tendencies were part of a larger task, however, which was to explain the post-metaphysical or post-theological purpose for life, absent a transcendent source, through ideas such as the superman, the will to power and eternal recurrence.<sup>70</sup> Several scholars have noted that Nietzsche employed these ideas as naturalistic substitutes for traditional religious beliefs in God, grace, and eternity.<sup>71</sup> That interpretation is reinforced by

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 289, 290.

<sup>69</sup> Zarathustra stated, for example, “I do not wish to be mixed up and confused with these preachers of equality. For to *me* justice speaks thus: ‘Men are not equal.’ Nor shall they become equal! What would my love of the overman be if I spoke otherwise?” See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1883, 1884, 1892; New York: Modern Library Edition, 1995), 101.

<sup>70</sup> Social and political ideologies that promoted equality contradicted the quasi-religious vision offered by Nietzsche: “You that are lonely today, you that are withdrawing, you shall one day be the people: out of you, who have chosen yourselves, there shall grow a chosen people—and out of them, the overman. Verily, the earth shall yet become a site of recovery. And even now a new fragrance surrounds it, bringing salvation—and a new hope.” Ibid., 77.

<sup>71</sup> Hollingdale, for example, writes that Nietzsche “whether he intended it or not, offered naturalistic substitutes for God, divine grace and eternal life: instead of God, the superman; instead of divine grace, the will to power, and instead of eternal life—the eternal recurrence.” See Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 164. Stanley Rosen described Nietzsche’s pagan understanding of salvation as

Nietzsche's use of biblical images and language that confirmed the religious overtones of the work, albeit recontextualized for decidedly anti-Christian purposes.<sup>72</sup> “*Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live,*” Zarathustra preached in an acknowledgement that the overman was intended to fill the divine vacuum. The overman was “the meaning of the earth,” an individual whose superiority was evinced by his ability to transform natural impulses and instincts into a state of self-mastery. This process did not entail submitting to traditional laws, customs or beliefs but rather becoming “judge and avenger of one's own law.”<sup>73</sup>

The overman facilitated self-mastery through the will to power, “the unexhausted procreative will of life.”<sup>74</sup> The will to power had become for Nietzsche not only “a psychological formula for self-transcendence and self-enhancement”—although *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* used the term in that capacity—but “as a universal key to interpret all life processes” that are driven by power.<sup>75</sup> Nietzsche saw the exercise of the will to power in the “ongoing process of “begetting and becoming,” which explains Zarathustra's comment that the will was his “liberator and joy-bringer.”<sup>76</sup>

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follows: “Nietzsche's doctrine of salvation, despite its explicit appeal to the Christian doctrine of transformation, or to the notion of the overcoming of nature by the supernatural, is pagan rather than Christian. The ascent to the superman is not an ascent to the supernatural, and not an overcoming of, but a return to, nature.” See Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>72</sup> Young notes that “*Zarathustra* is, in a word, intended to be the central, sacred text of the new religion that is to replace the now-‘dead’ Christianity.” See Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 366.

<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 79, 13, 63.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>75</sup> Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 282. “Only in *Zarathustra* is the will to power proclaimed as the basic force underlying *all* human activities,” observed Kaufmann. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 193.

<sup>76</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 87.

The overman and will to power were linked to eternal recurrence, the third major concept in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche first introduced the idea of eternal recurrence in *The Gay Science*:

*The greatest weight.*—What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘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 nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, a speck of dust!’<sup>78</sup>

The idea of life events repeating themselves through the infinity of time had the practical effect of provoking self-reflection about the life one lived. One commentator called it “the doctrine that an ideal of human well-being is being able to say a joyful ‘Yes’ to *everything* that has happened and thus will its eternal return.”<sup>79</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* noted that the prophet returns “eternally to this same, selfsame life” to teach the doctrine of “the eternal recurrence of all things” and “to proclaim the overman again to men.”<sup>80</sup>

The solitary nature of Zarathustra in some way reflected the growing solitude of Nietzsche himself. Nietzsche had fallen out with friends, experienced spectacular failure in his last major attempt at a romantic relationship, and was facing his sister Elizabeth’s marriage to noted anti-Semite Bernhard Förster (1843-1889). Nietzsche’s relation to Elizabeth proved vital to his posthumous legacy. She became his caretaker late in life and his controversial image-maker after his death, all while overseeing Nietzsche’s

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<sup>77</sup> Paul S. Loeb argues that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* doesn’t merely seek to explain the doctrine of eternal recurrence but instead embodies it in the narrative structure. It is a “performative” text that was “meant to dramatize what Nietzsche thinks is the deeper reality of eternal repetition.” See Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>78</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 273.

<sup>79</sup> Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 18. Hollingdale notes that the knowledge “that events must recur an infinite number of times” would be crushing “unless he can attain to a supreme moment of existence for the sake of which he would be content to relive his whole life.” Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 167.

<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 221.

burgeoning reputation. Her controversial racial and political views, culminating with lending her brother's legacy to Hitler and National Socialism in the early 1930s, were never far removed from how Nietzsche was perceived. Ironically, Nietzsche was a strong opponent of anti-Semitism and deplored his sister's marriage to Förster. The anti-Semitic activism of Förster led him to leave Germany for the purpose of starting an Aryan colony in Paraguay called Nueva Germania, a disastrous effort that ended with Förster committing suicide.<sup>81</sup> Nietzsche's later years prior to his breakdown were not only consumed with dealing with family issues. He also continued to move and travel frequently while dealing with chronic, debilitating health problems. Severe headaches, digestive disorders, nausea, vision problems, and depression were among the recurring struggles Nietzsche experienced.

Nietzsche managed to continue writing and in 1886 published *Beyond Good and Evil*, a work he later described as “a critique of modernity” that had philosophy, science, the arts, politics, and morality in its sights.<sup>82</sup> These realms all contained false assumptions about truth, values and morality that led to “the *total degeneration of humanity*.”

Philosophers represented both the nature of the problem and the possible solution.

Nietzsche indicted philosophers for making “a huge, virtuous racket” when it came to acting “as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions” through

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<sup>81</sup> Young makes the following observation about Nietzsche's contrast with his brother-in-law: “One can see from Nietzsche's cosmopolitanism—closely connected, of course, to his anti-anti-Semitism, since ‘rootless cosmopolitanism’ was, well into the twentieth century, a familiar anti-Semitic slur—the precise character of his loathing of his brother-in-law. It was not Förster's colonialism he objected to: on the contrary, Nietzsche was all for Europe colonising the entire world. What he objected to was the nationalistic and racist character of Förster's colonialism. What Nietzsche wanted was *European* not *German* colonialism, a *Nueva Europa* rather than a *Nueva Germania*. And what he wanted was colonisation by, not the decadent European culture of the present age, but by a *revived and unified* European culture—which is why he told Förster that, rather than going to Paraguay, he should found an alternative high school, education being always, for Nietzsche, together with art and religion, the key to the revival of a culture.” Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 404. For more on Nietzsche's “anti-anti-Semitism,” see *Ibid.*, 358-359.

<sup>82</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 82.

objective means. The reality, Nietzsche countered, was that philosophers took “a conjecture, a whim, an ‘inspiration’” or more frequently “some fervent wish” and then “defend it with rationalizations after the fact.”<sup>83</sup> Nietzsche called for philosophers of the future who would take up tasks such as uncovering “the natural history of morals,” which would establish how morality was not given, constant or transcendent but rather created, unstable and explained by natural, physiological or psychological factors.<sup>84</sup> The philosopher was “to be a critic and a skeptic and a dogmatist and historian and, moreover, a poet and collector and traveler and guesser of riddles and moralist and seer and ‘free spirit and practically everything’” when it came to the task of understanding and analyzing values. But the philosopher also was called “to *create values*,” which Nietzsche linked to exercising one’s will to power.<sup>85</sup>

*Beyond Good and Evil* was followed by *A Genealogy of Morality* (1887), which told the story of “the deformation of the human animal in the hands of civilization and Christian moralization.”<sup>86</sup> Nietzsche enhanced the historical and psychological explanation of the origins of Christian morality that he had begun to explore in *Beyond Good and Evil* with concepts such as master and slave morality. Nietzsche surmised that the origins of morality could be traced to the “the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions good” as opposed to “everything lowly, low-minded, common and plebian.” Christianity’s origins could be traced to “the slaves’ revolt in morality,” which was fueled by what Nietzsche termed

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<sup>83</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (1886; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 92, 8.

<sup>84</sup> See Part 5, “On the natural history of morals,” *Ibid.*, 75-92.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>86</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson, “Introduction: On Nietzsche’s Critique of Morality,” in Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (1887; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xiii.

“*ressentiment*”: a resentment fueled by dissatisfaction that leads to a reaction. This *ressentiment* led the slaves to construct notions of evil that they attributed to the masters.<sup>87</sup> Historically, Nietzsche found the struggle between master and slave morality to be symbolized by Rome and Judea—out of which Christianity emerged—and argued that “without a doubt Rome has been defeated.” The slave morality of Christianity, Nietzsche argued, prevailed and placed a divine sanction on notions such as responsibility, guilt, duty, justice, punishment and debt that were better explained naturalistically. The result was the creation of a “bad conscience” which Nietzsche viewed as “a serious illness” brought on through the acceptance of the psychologically damaging Christian morality.<sup>88</sup> Nietzsche ultimately argued that the naturalistic process of self-overcoming applied to Christianity as well, which is why he believed that “Christianity *as a dogma* was destroyed by its own morality” and that a similar process was now occurring with its morality: “Without a doubt, from now on, morality will be *destroyed* by the will to truth’s becoming-conscious-of-itself: that great drama in a hundred acts reserved for Europe in the next two centuries, the most terrible, most questionable drama but perhaps also the one most rich in hope....”<sup>89</sup>

*The Genealogy of Morality* was followed by a time of growing concerns about Nietzsche’s own physical and mental state, which was characterized by an increasing

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<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 11, 20. Nietzsche disparagingly observed that slave commentary on evil basically amounted to the following: “‘We weak people are just weak; it is good to do nothing *for which we are not strong enough.*’” Ibid., 27.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 33, 56. See Nietzsche’s ‘Second Essay’ for his explanation of the development of a ‘bad conscience.’ Ibid., 35-67. See his ‘Third Essay’ for the psychological damage incurred by Christian “asceticism” Ibid., 68-120.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 119.

sense of euphoria, megalomania, and signs of possible insanity.<sup>90</sup> The year that followed, 1888, ironically became the most prolific period of Nietzsche's writing career with five short works published.<sup>91</sup> These writings have come under scrutiny due to Nietzsche's decisive descent into insanity shortly thereafter in 1889, but two of them represented the zenith of Nietzsche's long-escalating attack on Christian morality, doctrines, institutions and cultural legacy: *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* and *The Anti-Christ*.

*Twilight of the Idols* declared its goal from the beginning: "A revaluation of all values" that amounted to "a grand declaration of war" against the "eternal idols" that were still greatly believed.<sup>92</sup> The book contained the usual wide range of targets, from Socrates (who made "a tyrant of reason") to rationalistic modern philosophy to contemporary Germany. Nietzsche continued his argument against Christian morality and

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<sup>90</sup> See Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 193-199, and Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 311-316, for discussions of Nietzsche's letters and actions that raised these concerns.

<sup>91</sup> These writings included *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem* (1888), which continued Nietzsche's preoccupation with the late icon who he viewed as indicative of modern Europe's cultural decadence: "But confronted with the labyrinth of the modern soul, where could he find a guide more initiated, a more eloquent prophet of the soul, than Wagner?" See Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 612. It should be noted that Nietzsche's final published work prior to his insanity was *Nietzsche contra Wagner: Documents of a Psychologist* (1888), which served as an anthology of previously published passages regarding Wagner. Nietzsche also produced an autobiographical account, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* that was written in 1888 but was published posthumously in 1908. *Ecce Homo* offered reflections on his life and works and raised questions about his mental state given chapter titles such as "Why I Am So Wise," "Why I Am So Clever," "Why I Write Such Good Books," and "Why I Am a Destiny." Magnus and Higgins argue that the chapter titles are intentionally humorous and a reversal of "Socrates' pose of modesty when he insisted he was wise because he knew he was not wise." See Magnus and Higgins, 57. It is also worth noting that there was another project Nietzsche discussed called *The Will to Power* and later *The Revaluation of All Values*. He never published it according to his original outline but he did claim that *The Anti-Christ* was the work he wanted to come out of the project. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and Peter Gast later published the notes from that period as *The Will to Power* and it has been widely read and deemed significant despite Nietzsche himself deciding not to publish what could amount to preliminary, experimental or discarded material. See Hollingdale's discussion of this issue in *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 217-227.

<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 31, 32 (page citations are to *Twilight of the Idols*).

celebrated certain aspects of ancient Rome and Greece, particularly Dionysius with whom he linked his own thoughts about eternal recurrence and “the will to life.”<sup>93</sup>

*The Anti-Christ* offered Nietzsche’s most blunt and provocative assault on Christianity, one that certainly shaped the reception of his ideas in the decades to come. Nietzsche’s meditations on Christianity grew more expansive as his writing career advanced, culminating in near complete absorption—if not obsession—with the topic in *The Anti-Christ*. Contextualizing the work within that broader framework serves to illuminate not only the critique itself but to grasp better the tone and content of Nietzsche’s American reception, given that his views on Christianity were such a lightning rod for controversy. Nietzsche’s heightened sense of ferocity and opposition to Christianity in his later writings revealed how much he perceived it to be such a vital element of his philosophical task. He asserted that “what defines me, what sets me apart from all the rest of mankind, is that I have *unmasked* Christian morality.”<sup>94</sup> He left little doubt about his conviction that the beliefs and consequences of Christianity were pernicious, if insidiously alluring. Christianity was “the most disastrous lie of seduction there has ever been...there must be war against it.”<sup>95</sup>

The war Nietzsche waged against Christianity was fought on many topical fronts. An exhaustive framework with which to embed his comments is impossible due to the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 43, 120.

<sup>94</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 101. Nietzsche’s belief in the magnitude of the task—and the magnitude of the one who carries it out—was expressed several paragraphs later: “The unmasking of Christian morality is an event without equal, a real catastrophe. He who exposes it is a force majeure, a destiny—he breaks the history of mankind into two parts. One lives before him, one lives after him...” Ibid., 103.

<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge (1885-1888; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 205. The insidious allure of Christianity was a theme to which Nietzsche returned to frequently in his writings. For example: “And could anyone, on the other hand, using all the ingenuity of his intellect, think up a more *dangerous* bait? Something to equal the enticing, intoxicating, numbing, corrupting power of that symbol of the ‘holy cross’, to equal that horrible paradox of a ‘God on the cross’, to equal that mystery of an unthinkable final act of extreme cruelty and self-crucifixion of God for the *salvation of mankind*?” See idem, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 18.

aphoristic, observational, and developing nature of his writing, but five broad, reoccurring and interconnected themes of his critique may be highlighted. First, Nietzsche focused upon the demise of Christianity and the “death of God” in the West, which persuasively could be cast in the language of declining cultural authority. Second, Nietzsche focused on Christian morality as being anti-nature. Third, Nietzsche revealed a psychological critique of Christianity in regard to its origin, appeal and insidious effects on the individual and on civilization. Fourth, Nietzsche unveiled a historical critique of Christianity’s genealogy and poisonous role in human history. Finally, Nietzsche engaged in a critique of Christianity’s origins, founders and scriptures as one whose education included both exposure to German higher criticism and philological training.

#### *The Death of God and Christianity’s Cultural Authority*

Nietzsche’s focus on the death of God and Christianity’s cultural decline increased in intensity as his works progressed. It was already present in the early middle period of his writings, which contained the observation that people had “grown weary and exhausted by” the symbols of religion.<sup>96</sup> Nietzsche suggested in *Human, All Too Human* that his age was “an interim state,” in which “the old ways of thinking” coexisted with new ideas.<sup>97</sup> He complained in *Daybreak* that his century continued to cling to “the

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<sup>96</sup> Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford University Press, 1995), 310. Nietzsche’s works could be broken down chronologically in several ways, but I am following the framework applied by Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large. This would put works such as *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872) and *Unfashionable Observations* (1873-4) in the early period; *Human, All Too Human* (1878), *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudice of Morality*, *The Gay Science*, books I-IV (1882) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5) would be located in the middle period; *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), *The Case of Wagner* (1888), *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), *The Anti-Christ* (1888), and *Ecce Homo* (1888) therefore would constitute the late period. See Pearson and Large, eds., *The Nietzsche Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>97</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 117.

old habits of Christian security, Christian enjoyment, recreation, evaluation” despite moving toward a rejection of the faith.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, it was imperative to acknowledge and facilitate the passing of the old—a task that would involve sketching out the death of God and its enormous ramifications.

Nietzsche most forcefully articulated his conception of the death of God in later middle period works such as *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. “God is dead;” he wrote in the former work, “but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.” This quote revealed Nietzsche’s repeated assertion that Christianity’s cultural roots run deep and require a more drastic deracination than mere disavowal of beliefs. A famous passage from *The Gay Science* couched the death of God in terms of a story about a madman coming to tell the people in a marketplace that God is dead and that “*We have killed him—you and I.*” The madman explained the present and future consequences “of the divine decomposition” only to realize that, “I have come too early.” The story illustrated Nietzsche’s belief that Christianity was clearly on the path to irrelevance due to the death of God, which he depicted in the following terms: “the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable.” Its foundations challenged, its beliefs jettisoned, and its remaining churches lingering as “tombs and sepulchers of God,” Christianity nevertheless possessed a cultural legacy that would require an uprooting that would go on well beyond Nietzsche’s own life span.<sup>99</sup>

Uprooting Christianity’s cultural legacy—and authority—was understood by Nietzsche to be a time-consuming but liberating opportunity. The death of God was an

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<sup>98</sup> Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 167, 181, 279, 282.

event that provoked a response of “gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation.” *The Gay Science* evoked “a new dawn” and a “horizon” that appeared “free to us again,” with boundless opportunity for “the lover of knowledge.”<sup>100</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* elaborated on specific opportunities presented by the death of God, such as the rise of a superior caste: “You higher men, this god was your greatest danger. It is only since he lies in his tomb that you have been resurrected. Only now the great noon comes; only now the higher man becomes—lord.”<sup>101</sup> Nietzsche held Christianity responsible for encouraging equality and the dissolution of hierarchy, which is why he remained an ardent opponent of democracy and socialism. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* called for a “new nobility” to counter the “rabble” and “mob” who suggest that “before God we are all equal.”<sup>102</sup>

The connection made between the death of God and social and political ideologies demonstrated Nietzsche’s belief that Christianity contained a deeply entrenched authority that poisonously permeated the foundations of civilization. The “unstoppable *democratic* movement of Europe,” which he noted was associated with the idea of “progress,” had Christianity as “its preparation and moral augury.”<sup>103</sup> Nietzsche frequently chided contemporaries for underestimating Christianity’s foundational role in public and private morality as well as in social, political, cultural, religious and even scientific ideologies. He also stressed, in a telling tangent during a reflection on England and George Eliot, that the consequences of rejecting belief in God were undervalued:

Christianity is a system, a consistently thought out and *complete* view of things. If one breaks out of it a fundamental idea, the belief in God, one thereby breaks the whole thing to pieces: One has nothing of any consequence left in one’s hands. Christianity presupposes that man does not know,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>101</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 286.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 203, 286.

<sup>103</sup> Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 68.

*cannot* know what is good for him and what evil: he believes in God, who alone knows. Christian morality is a command: its origin is transcendental; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticize; it possesses truth only if God is truth—it stands or falls with the belief in God.<sup>104</sup>

The shattering of this system, with all its cultural baggage and moral assertions, would have radical consequences. Nietzsche argued that even while living during a transition period in which civilization appeared directionless and unfettered, the notion of living off of the cultural credit of Christianity—with its notions of good and evil, its articulations of the human person, its assertions of value and purpose—must be cast aside.<sup>105</sup>

### *Christianity as ‘Anti-Nature’*

Recognition of the death of God carried with it for Nietzsche an opportunity to assess Christianity’s distortions of nature. A second major and interrelated critique of Christianity was that its morality was “*anti-nature*.” Christianity resisted and suppressed the natural instincts, social hierarchy, and individual development of human beings, thereby leading to a “declining, debilitated, weary, condemned” quality of life.<sup>106</sup>

Christian morality as exhibited in the Sermon on the Mount became an example of the religion’s disastrous moral program, which “combats the passions” and promotes an excision comparable to castration. Christian theologians were guilty of defying nature by infecting “the innocence of becoming” with notions of punishment, guilt and moral order.<sup>107</sup> One of Nietzsche’s chief concerns was preserving the opportunity of a higher type of human being to emerge and fulfill “the fundamental instincts of this type.”

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<sup>104</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 80-81 (page citation is to *Twilight of the Idols*).

<sup>105</sup> See Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 229-230 for an extended list of examples of how the cultural credit of Christianity continued to be borrowed by civilization. The list included items such as the immortal soul and “eternal value of the ‘person,’” applications of morality that include the stigma of sinful behaviors and a system of punishments and rewards, the hope of a beyond or “final triumph” even in immanent forms such as political and social ideologies, and the intrusions of the church in affairs of state, social institutions, and the individual.

<sup>106</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 55 (page citation is to *Twilight of the Idols*).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 52, 64 (page citations are to *Twilight of the Idols*).

Instead, Christianity distorted nature by taking “the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted” and by opposing “the preservative instincts of strong life.”<sup>108</sup>

Nietzsche illustrated this process in great detail in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, where he explored the origins of debt and guilt in Christianity. He viewed these concepts as artificial perversions of nature and the misdirection of legitimate animal instincts. The inheritance of “millennia of conscience-vivisection and animal-torture,” Nietzsche argued, had warped the modern world. Nietzsche spoke of mankind as possessing “real and irredeemable animal instincts” to which “God” was created to provide “the ultimate antithesis.” This led to understandings of guilt, debt, good, God, the devil and the punishments of the afterlife that Nietzsche equated to “the most terrible sickness ever to rage in man.”<sup>109</sup> Nietzsche remained morbidly fascinated with how he believed Christianity constructed an elaborate system of beliefs and practices that ran contrary to nature and our animal instincts. He also suggested that the psychological consequences, for both individuals and civilizations, were profound.

#### *The Psychological Ramifications of Christianity*

Nietzsche’s allegation that Christian morality ran contrary to nature corresponded with his critique of the negative psychological impact that Christianity had on individuals and civilizations. The desire to embrace Christianity and experience redemption was, for Nietzsche, the result of a “false psychology” that involved an “aberration of reason and imagination.” Nietzsche believed that once this was explained, “one ceases to be a Christian.” He understood his role as vital in exposing the psychological damage of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 129 (page citation is to *The Anti-Christ*).

<sup>109</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 66, 63, 64.

Christianity. This religion “crushed and shattered man completely” through its teaching of human sinfulness, leading to a “pathological excess of feeling.”<sup>110</sup> Nietzsche deplored the way Christianity had transformed “the passions” into something “evil and malicious.” Eros and Aphrodite, for example, were transmogrified into “diabolical kobolds and phantoms” of sexuality that tormented conscience-stricken believers.<sup>111</sup>

Nietzsche’s psychological explanation for why people were drawn to religion began with a recognition that one’s actions stood “low in the customary order of rank of actions” and an awareness of the superiority of others. One’s sense of “insufficiency” led to the search for “a physician” who could heal the wounds of psychic inadequacy.<sup>112</sup> This sense of falling short involved not just comparison with superior individuals but with a divine being who in turn could offer to heal the wounds of that inadequacy in the language of sin and redemption. Nietzsche insisted that this false construction be recognized and that the consequences of this recognition be applied:

The Christian who compares his nature with that of God is like Don Quixote who under-estimated his own courage because his head was filled with the miraculous deeds of the heroes of chivalric romances: the standard of comparison applied in both cases belongs in the domain of fable. But if the idea of God falls away, so does the feeling of ‘sin’ as a transgression against divine precepts, as a blemish on a creature consecrated to God.<sup>113</sup>

The resulting awareness would transform not only individuals but entire civilizations that had been tarnished by centuries of Christianity. Nietzsche argued that Christianity triggered “the *deterioration of the European race*” through preserving “much of *what should be destroyed*.” Nietzsche condemned European religious authorities, whose focus

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<sup>110</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 73, 66. See Ibid., 70-73 for Nietzsche’s psychological explanations for the “Christian need for redemption.”

<sup>111</sup> Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 45. Nietzsche went on to suggest that the psychological damage of Christianity extended to the experience of death: “Let us never forget that it was Christianity which made of the *death-bed* a bed of torture, and that with the scenes that have since then been enacted upon it, with the terrifying tones which here seemed to be realised for the first time, the senses and the blood of countless witnesses have been poisoned for the rest of their life and for that of their posterity!” Ibid., 47.

<sup>112</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 70, 71.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 72.

on the suffering, oppressed and despairing also led to strength being disdained, beauty questioned, and subverting “the highest and best-turned-out type of ‘human.’ “Doesn’t it seem,’ Nietzsche railed, “as if, for eighteen centuries, Europe was dominated by the single will to turn humanity into a *sublime abortion?*” Christianity was embraced by those who did not achieve the highest levels of existence and who could not accept the “chasms in rank between different people.” The result was a sick European civilization full of herd animals who were clamoring for “‘equality before God’” on the road to mediocrity.<sup>114</sup>

#### *Christianity’s Origins, Founders and Scripture*

Nietzsche believed that Europe’s descent to mediocrity was spurred by the continent’s embrace of the authority of the Bible, which was encouraged and imposed by ecclesiastical authorities. The “millennia” of a church-imposed “tyranny of authority” allowed the Bible to obtain a degree of “profundity and ultimate meaning” in the eyes of Europeans.<sup>115</sup> Nietzsche’s aphorisms repeatedly attempted to undermine that authority through deconstructions of the Bible, the person of Jesus, and instrumental figures such as the Apostle Paul. He ridiculed the common assumption that the “Bible” was “a single book” and then proceeded to attack its parts. The Old Testament was at least preferable to the New Testament, according to Nietzsche, because it contained “great men, heroic landscape and...the incomparable naivety of the *strong heart.*” The New Testament, by contrast, was full of “petty sectarian groupings,” “rococo of the soul,” “the air of the conventicler,” and the “bucolic sugariness” of a people who audaciously and irreverently

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<sup>114</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 56, 57.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

assumed close relationship to God.<sup>116</sup> The New Testament was characterized by “the proper, tender, musty stench of true believers and small souls.”<sup>117</sup> Nietzsche also was rankled by what he termed the “unheard-of-philological farce” of presuming that the Old Testament really “contained nothing but Christian teaching” and was the property not of the Jews but of the Christians.<sup>118</sup>

Nietzsche reserved loathing for those whose contributions to the New Testament proved so influential. He depicted the Apostle Paul as a “most ambitious and importunate” soul with “a mind as superstitious as it was cunning.” Paul’s writings and the Christian ideas they promoted would have long ago relinquished power if they were not read as “revelations of the ‘Holy Spirit’” but instead were engaged by “a free and honest exercise of one’s own spirit” apart from “personal needs.” Nietzsche’s psychological analysis extended to Paul, whom he found to be obsessed with fulfillment of the moral law and who was driven by an “extravagant lust for power.”<sup>119</sup>

While Paul was blamed for systematizing and institutionalizing the toxic teachings of Christianity, it was Jesus himself who became the focal point of Nietzsche’s critique. Nietzsche provocatively suggested in his late work *The Anti-Christ* that there has actually only been one Christian in history, “and he died on the Cross.” This assertion was based on Nietzsche’s rejection of the idea that assent to certain beliefs warranted the title “Christian.” He believed that only “Christian *practice*, a life such as he who died on the Cross *lived*, is Christian.”<sup>120</sup> Nietzsche remained morbidly fascinated with the person and appeal of Jesus. His psychological critique of Jesus included the notion that Jesus

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<sup>116</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 107.

<sup>117</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 48.

<sup>118</sup> Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 49.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 40.

<sup>120</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 163 (page citation is to *The Anti-Christ*).

was “a poor man who was unsatisfied and insatiable in love” and therefore “had to invent hell” for those who refused to love him.<sup>121</sup> Nietzsche referred to Jesus as a “free spirit” who disregarded “what is fixed,” such as “nature, time, space, history” and instead cultivated an internal spiritual world that merely used the “real” world for its metaphors and signs. Nietzsche rejected the redemptive importance of Jesus’ death, though he did offer mild praise for Jesus by suggesting that he demonstrated “how one ought to live.”<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, however, Nietzsche’s *Anti-Christ* blamed “the enraged reverence” of the disciples of Jesus for inflating his claims and significance to the point where history itself was stained by the excesses and falsehoods of Christianity.<sup>123</sup>

#### *Christianity’s Historical Legacy*

Nietzsche’s belief in Christianity’s waning cultural authority, anti-nature impulses, psychological perniciousness and dubious origins all reinforced his conviction that Christianity had played a destructive role in human history. Nietzsche scoured the historical record, from ancient to modern, for examples of Christianity’s negative impact. He lamented Christianity’s detrimental effect on the ancient world, where it subdued beliefs and values of the Roman Empire as well as ruining the legacy of paganism. “Christianity,” Nietzsche charged in *The Anti-Christ*, “was the vampire of the *Imperium Romanum*—the tremendous deed of the Romans in clearing the ground for a great culture which could take its time was undone overnight by Christianity.” It “absorbed the doctrines and rites of every *subterranean* cult of the *Imperium Romanum*” and brought its

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<sup>121</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 166.

<sup>122</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 158, 159 (page citation is to *The Anti-Christ*).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

toxic moralization to what antiquity previously considered “natural drives.”<sup>124</sup> The Greeks gods, “these reflections of noble and proud men in whom the *animal* in man felt most deified,” were much preferred by Nietzsche to the God of Christianity.<sup>125</sup> The latter prevailed with help from Greek philosophy, as Nietzsche blamed Plato for being “an antecedent Christian” whose idealism caused “the nobler natures of antiquity to misunderstand themselves and to step on to the *bridge* which led to the ‘Cross.’”<sup>126</sup> Even ancient Germany, with its “heroic, childish and animal soul” was tarnished by the introduction of Christianity.<sup>127</sup> *The Anti-Christ* submitted that both “the harvest of the culture of the ancient world” and later “the harvest of the culture of *Islam*” were “robbed” by Christianity. Nietzsche suggested, in fact, that the Crusaders would have been better advised to not fight but bow down “in the dust” before the superior culture they encountered—a culture to which even 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe looked “impoverished” by comparison.<sup>128</sup>

Major figures in church history also were not spared Nietzsche’s sharp criticism, whether ancient or modern. Augustine and the Church Fathers were berated for their suppression of natural instincts, leading Nietzsche to the conclusion that, “between ourselves, they are not even men.”<sup>129</sup> The Reformation, Nietzsche asserted, ironically came at a time when “Christian civilization” in Germany “was ready to burst into

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 192, 161; Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 145.

<sup>125</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, 64. Nietzsche added that the invention of gods did not always have to bring negative effects: “These Greeks, for most of the time, used their gods expressly to keep ‘bad conscience’ at bay so that they could carry on enjoying their freedom of soul: therefore, the opposite of the way Christendom made use of its God. They went *very far* in this, these marvelous, lion-hearted children; and no less an authority than the Homeric Zeus gives them to understand that they are making it too easy for themselves.” Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>126</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 117 (page citation is to *Twilight of the Idols*).

<sup>127</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 269.

<sup>128</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 195, 196 (page citations are to *The Anti-Christ*).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 195.

hundreds of blossoms” but instead it “brought the storm that put an end to everything.” Germans, as the Reformation demonstrated, were the “most efficient destroyers” of Christianity historically. Martin Luther was depicted by Nietzsche as a “calamitously myopic, superficial, and incautious” man who unwittingly began a work of destruction, surrendering “the holy books to everybody—until they finally got in the hands of the philologists, who are the destroyers of every faith that rests on books.” Luther, in addition to building the road to biblical skepticism, greatly weakened the authority of the church by casting doubt on “the inspiration of church councils.” The Reformers, while unintentionally sowing the seeds for Christianity’s implosion, were still blamed by Nietzsche for unleashing a “*plebeianism of the spirit*” that remained to his day.<sup>130</sup>

### **Nietzsche’s Final Days and Growing Reputation**

The 1888 publication of *The Anti-Christ* represented the culmination of Nietzsche’s multifaceted critique of Christianity. He believed that Christianity sowed the seeds of its own destruction, which in itself illustrated how nature was in a constant state of becoming. Nietzsche himself was in a state of becoming, as long-term mental and physical difficulties finally resulted in a collapse into a state of debilitating insanity from which he never recovered. The immediate trigger was allegedly the sight of a carriage driver whipping a horse on January 3, 1889 during his stay in Turin, Italy. The causes of Nietzsche’s long-term health struggles and descent into insanity have been widely discussed. Causes mentioned have included that his ideas literally drove him to the point of despair and madness, though the scholarly consensus over several decades has been that Nietzsche’s long-term, devolving condition was due to an earlier contraction of

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<sup>130</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 194, 310, 311, 312.

syphilis. Julian Young's recent biography casts doubt on that traditional interpretation and considers other possibilities including various medical conditions such as a brain tumor, a psychiatric condition of "manic depression with late-developing psychotic features, or the potential "continuity between his philosophy and his madness."<sup>131</sup>

The cause of Nietzsche's tragic descent into insanity may never be determined with absolute certainty, but it did play a vital role in shaping his subsequent reception. Nietzsche ironically experienced his first significant spike in popularity after being mentally unable to comprehend it. Nietzsche, after his departure from Turin and short stays in clinics in Basel, Switzerland and Jena, Germany, remained under the care of his mother until her death in 1897. He then was cared for by his sister Elisabeth, who already had taken control of his writings and established a Nietzsche-Archiv, originally in Naumburg before being moved to Weimar. She then moved Nietzsche to the Archiv where he was rarely but occasionally seen by visitors. Förster-Nietzsche capitalized on the growing interest in Nietzsche throughout Europe and encouraged a Nietzsche publishing boon. Rüdiger Safranski speculated that Nietzsche's "grand finale of insanity" may have added to his growing appeal by lending his writings "an eerie ring of truth" in the mind of readers who believed that "he had penetrated so deeply into the secret of existence that he lost his mind in the process."<sup>132</sup> Nietzsche died in 1900, unaware of the growing international acclaim that greeted his works. English translations were already

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<sup>131</sup> See Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 559-561 for a fuller discussion of the debate. Walter Kaufmann, who played such an instrumental role in rehabilitating Nietzsche's reputation in the United States, deemed the contraction of syphilis as the most likely cause of Nietzsche's chronic health problems and insanity. But he nevertheless acknowledged that "the certainty that can be achieved today by various tests can never be matched by posthumous conjectures on an atypical disease. See Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 70.

<sup>132</sup> Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 317.

beginning to make their way to the United States, beginning the story of his gradual rise in stature in American intellectual and cultural life.

**CHAPTER ONE:  
A Chronological Survey of Nietzsche's Reception in the United States, 1890-1969**

"If I were to preach any doctrine to the world it would be love of change, or at least lack of fear from it. From the Bible I would quote: 'The older order changeth, giving place to the new,' and from Nietzsche: 'Learn to revalue your values.'"

—Theodore Dreiser (1920)<sup>1</sup>

"Nietzsche wrote that 'America has no future.' Certain it is that the forces of frustration, monotony, and conformism which he opposed are here strong and systematically cultivated. But Nietzsche himself had high praise for Emerson, and Whitman and Melville are testimony that the search for exuberant integral men and women, compounded out of the partial ideals of the past and cohered in chaos, has here deep roots and strong defenders. In the coming struggle to direct the resources of contemporary technology toward the freeing of levels and kinds of personality not previously possible, Nietzsche may yet play in America a significant role. In a society more diversified and less absolutistic than Nietzsche conceived, even more comprehensive persons than he imagined may be possible, and Nietzschean man, in the best sense and as one person among others, may find his most congenial habitat."

—Charles Morris (1945)<sup>2</sup>

"Nietzsche's thought and vision are increasingly relevant. His analyses of human weakness and his vision of the possibilities of human power, his awareness of the dissolution of traditional values of Christendom, his sense of urgency of a reevaluation of traditional values, the almost apocalyptic anticipation of wars to come, make his writings singularly topical."

—James Gutmann (1968)<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation argues that a central factor in understanding Nietzsche's reception in the United States is the intersection between Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority. This vital aspect of Nietzsche's thought attracted and repelled commentators from many different segments of American intellectual and cultural life. Professional philosophers, cultural critics, social activists, journalists, novelists, ministers, theologians, and filmmakers were among those who sought to accelerate, slow, or explain the decline of Protestant cultural authority through engagement with Nietzsche's thought. Understanding this important aspect of the American response to Nietzsche requires an awareness of the specific flashpoints in which the intersection of his critique of Christianity and the decline of

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Hey Rub-A-Dub-Dub: A Book of the Mystery and Wonder and Terror of Life* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Morris, "Nietzsche—An Evaluation," *Journal of History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 292-293.

<sup>3</sup> James Gutmann, "The Relevance of Nietzsche," *Nation* 206, no. 15 (April 8, 1968): 482.

Protestant cultural authority proved insightful. Appreciating the importance of that interpretive dynamic also requires familiarity with its placement within the broad outline of Nietzsche's reception in the United States. This chapter offers a chronological survey of how Nietzsche was engaged, assessed and appropriated in the United States from the 1890s to the 1960s. It provides a panoramic view of Nietzsche's gradual ascent in American intellectual and cultural life and highlights the broad appeal of his ideas. Commentators came to Nietzsche's ideas with varying degrees of sympathy but a shared belief that his thought was of great consequence for American society and western civilization. The panoramic overview in this chapter precedes the zoom lens approach of the following three chapters, in which key strands of engagement with Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in the early reception period are explored.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter begins with a discussion of the "Nietzsche vogue" before World War I. It explores the impact of English translations that steadily made their way to American shores and the way Nietzsche was introduced through the writing of other authors. Professional philosophy in an age of transformation provided an early venue for engagement, but independent intellectuals promoted Nietzsche most vigorously during the prewar period. The chapter then examines the impact of the Great War on Nietzsche reception, as concerns about German militarism and the growing sense of a civilization in crisis shaped the way Nietzsche was perceived. The next section explores the interwar period, in which a decrease in scholarly activity on Nietzsche was matched with ongoing

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter Two examines the professional philosophical response to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity at a time when Protestant cultural authority was being increasingly marginalized in the modern American university. Chapter Three explores how cultural critics and social activists outside the university appropriated Nietzsche to their various agendas that usually involved the acceleration of Protestant cultural authority's decline. Chapter Four investigates how Protestant ministers, theologians and intellectuals responded to Nietzsche in the context of his threat to Protestant cultural authority. All three strands occur in the earlier period of his reception but lay the groundwork for subsequent engagement. These components will be mentioned in this chapter but obviously will merit extensive analysis in the following chapters.

interest outside the academy as expressed in popular books, newspapers, popular culture, and the sensationalized Leopold-Loeb and Scopes trials. Nietzsche became an iconic figure in the cultural and religious battles of the period as well as a measure of a civilization's health.

The emergence of National Socialism in Germany represented the next stage of Nietzsche reception in the United States. This development was not only because of the popular association of Nietzsche with the Nazis but also due to the arrival of emigrant scholars intent on defending Nietzsche or bringing balance to the debate. One of those scholars, Walter Kaufmann, shaped the postwar reception with a series of translations and an influential monograph that forcefully challenged links to National Socialism and presented Nietzsche as a serious philosopher. Kaufmann and other writers also linked Nietzsche to existentialism, which became an important postwar framework through which Nietzsche was given a new hearing. Finally, this chapter examines Nietzsche's cultural impact in the 1950s and 1960s. Cultural criticism linked Nietzsche with other major figures such as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud while professional philosophers like Arthur Danto treated Nietzsche's ideas as a system of thought worthy of consideration apart from his life circumstances and historical context. Nietzsche struck a chord in the turbulence of the 1960s with his critiques of power, tradition, and concern for individuality in the age of mass society, culture and politics. The appropriation of Nietzsche in the 1960s represented the culmination of his surprising ascent in American intellectual and cultural life, but the groundwork had been laid for decades. No small factor in the changing fortunes of Nietzsche in the United States was how his rise

corresponded to the changing fortunes of Protestant cultural authority, a circumstance that allowed for reassessments and new opportunities for influence.

### **‘Nietzsche is in the Air’: Nietzsche in America prior to the Great War, 1890-1914**

Nietzsche’s personal lost decade and ironic celebrity in the 1890s coincided with the first sustained attention his works received not only in Europe but in the United States.<sup>5</sup> No American monographs on Nietzsche were produced until 1901. Most Americans prior to that date were introduced to his ideas in a rather indiscriminate fashion through newspapers and journal articles, which picked up on certain ideas, books, or presumed associations with other thinkers but rarely offered a comprehensive treatment of his thought and works. One particularly notorious but influential introduction to Nietzsche came in the form of the 1895 book *Degeneration* by Hungarian-born and French-based doctor and writer Max Nordau (1849-1923). Nordau’s bestselling work, popular in the United States, claimed that Nietzsche and other examples of fin-de-siècle art, literature and thought were the product of actual physiological degeneracy. Nordau repeatedly made reference to the “crazy shower of whirling words” and “demented raving” of Nietzsche. He characterized certain passages as “obviously insane assertions or expressions” or “a collection of crazy and inflated phrases” that compromised any serious assessment of his thought.<sup>6</sup> Nordau excessively and

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<sup>5</sup> The earliest known reference to Nietzsche in an American periodical was in an 1875 critical notice in the *North American Review* on the original German language version of *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie* (*On the Uses and Disadvantages of History* the second volume of *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (*Untimely Meditations*). The reviewer noted that Nietzsche not only addressed “the unwise study of history” but denounced “a great deal of the shallowness of modern culture.” The critic added: “Nietzsche writes well, and, except for occasional, almost incoherent bursts of denunciation, his book is very readable.” Despite those outbursts, the reviewer concluded, Nietzsche’s meditation “deserves reading and consideration.” See “Art. VI.—Critical Notices,” *North American Review* 131 (July 1875): 190, 191, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 7th ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 419, 432.

erroneously seized upon Nietzsche's madness as the all-consuming characteristic of his life, ideas and writings in a book that gave many American readers their first impression of the German philosopher. Alexander Tille (1866-1912), a German-born scholar and Social Darwinist who lectured at Glasgow University in Scotland, and Thomas Common (1850-1919), an independent Scottish scholar and fellow Social Darwinist, attempted the first English language series of Nietzsche's complete works.<sup>7</sup> Several of Nietzsche's later works, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Genealogy of Morals* and the works of 1888 such as the incendiary *The Anti-Christ* were published between 1896 and 1899, first by London publisher Henry & Company prior to its bankruptcy and then by the Macmillan Company in New York.<sup>8</sup> This uneven introduction to Nietzsche's thought led to a wide range of impressions, applications and misinterpretations of his thought.<sup>9</sup> It was perhaps indicative of this interpretive climate that *The New York Times* obituary of Nietzsche heralded him as "the apostle of extreme modern rationalism and one of the

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the Social Darwinist leanings of Tille and Common and how they attempted to connect Darwin to the moral and ethical teachings of Nietzsche, see Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 66-68.

<sup>8</sup> The first piece on Nietzsche published in the *New York Times* was a dismissive 1896 review of the first English translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The reviewer saw poetic justice in having "the lamented and lamentable" Nietzsche's works published out of chronological sequence: "Logical sequence would be entirely out of place in an edition of this inspired German lunatic, who threw logic to the winds in all his writings." See "Another Book by Nietzsche," *New York Times*, 23 August 1896, 23.

A review of *The Case of Wagner* offered criticism of Tille's preface and of the translation itself: "Mr. Tille's preface labors to graft Nietzsche's views on the Darwinian conception of the fit (as if Darwin would have ignored à la Nietzsche the moral, intellectual, and social qualities in the make-up of fitness!)... There is no index, and for the translation not much can be said; it generally fails to reach a fluent and idiomatic English rendering, it not infrequently becomes unintelligible, and sometimes blunders." See "A Philosophic Mr. Hyde," *Nation* 62 (June 11, 1896): 460.

<sup>9</sup> Hays Steilberg notes the ramifications of this publishing history: "What all this adds up to is that American (as well as English) readers immediately encountered Nietzsche at the pinnacle of his thought, with its startling intellectual experimentation and radical style, for which they were prepared mainly through second-hand (and, in part, second-rate) expositions." See Steilberg, "First Steps in the New World," in *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, ed. Manfred Pütz (Columbia SC: Camden House, 1996), 24.

founders of the socialistic school,” despite Nietzsche’s strong opposition to both rationalism and socialism.<sup>10</sup>

The gradual publication of English translations of Nietzsche’s works did occasion journalistic introductions of his thought to American audiences, however. Charles Ransom Miller (1849-1922), editor-in-chief of *The New York Times*, offered extensive reflections when reviewing an edition of Nietzsche’s works in 1903. Miller cast Nietzsche as “an inspiration and stimulant of unequalled potency” who provided an opportunity “to re-examine our modern beliefs” and their foundations. Miller carefully and charitably explored Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and its negative implications for civilization and democracy. Miller’s focus on the social import of Nietzsche’s ideas led him to acquit Nietzsche of “the charge of furious blasphemy” on the grounds that his philosophy should be considered “as a social system, not as a theology.” Miller’s relatively sympathetic assessment was tempered by his belief that Nietzsche may only have a “few hundred” serious readers in the United States, given that “thousands of Americans” remained under the conviction “that it is their duty to abhor him utterly as an atheist and dreadful pessimist.”<sup>11</sup>

Some professional philosophers were beginning to take notice, however, and it

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<sup>10</sup> “Prof. Nietzsche Dead. He Was One of the Most Prominent of Modern German Philosophers.” *New York Times*, 26 August 1900, 7. Other obituaries took note of the centrality of religion to Nietzsche’s thought. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that his writings expounded “a revolutionary philosophy, denouncing all religion and treating moral laws as a remnant of Christian superstition.” See “Death of a Noted Philosopher,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 August 1900, 9. A *Washington Post* obituary depicted Nietzsche as believing that “organized government and organized religion” were “the two great enemies of man.” It also, however, described Nietzsche as “deeply religious” before quoting a lengthy passage from *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche famously proclaims the death of God in Europe. See “Solves Last Problem. Passing of Nietzsche, German Sage and Thinker. Ideas on the Conduct of Life. A Supreme Pessimist, Abhorring Humanity in Its Present Condition, He Taught the Value of Solitude and Discussed the Futility of Life—Scientific Atheism His Creed—Opposed to Organized Government and Organized Religion,” *Washington Post*, 7 October 1900, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Charles R. Miller, “Friedrich Nietzsche. His Philosophy of Social Life, of Morals, and of Human Progress Toward a Higher Ideal State.” *New York Times*, 7 March 1903, BR1-BR2.

was from their ranks that the first American monograph on Nietzsche was produced in 1901 by Wells College philosophy professor and Cornell University graduate Grace Neal Dolson (1874-1961).<sup>12</sup> *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, which was based upon Dolson's recently completed doctoral dissertation, represented the earliest American effort to systematically and comprehensively understand and his thought and works.<sup>13</sup> Scholarly journals provided avenues of Nietzsche scholarship through articles and book reviews, which demonstrated that Nietzsche was being treated seriously and with an eye toward the social, political, and religious implications of his thought.<sup>14</sup> However, with the possible exception of Harvard University's Josiah Royce (1855-1916), major figures in American philosophy did not pay significant attention to Nietzsche prior to World War I. Philosophy department curriculums occasionally included Nietzsche, but more often than not it was as the subject of a rare elective, a course in modern thought, or as a minor figure in the history of German philosophy. Nietzsche did have his defenders, however, whether among foreign exchange professors, younger scholars seeking to establish themselves, and scholars on the periphery of professional philosophy. The changes in the academy also laid the groundwork for the gradual transformation of Nietzsche into a

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<sup>12</sup> See Grace Neal Dolson, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901). Charles M. Bakewell, who taught at Bryn Mawr, the University of California, and Yale University, was the first American to write a full-length article on Nietzsche in a professional philosophical journal in 1899. See Bakewell, "The Teachings of Friedrich Nietzsche," *International Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 3 (April 1899): 314, 315, 330, 331.

<sup>13</sup> See the following chapter of this dissertation for further discussion Dolson's engagement of Nietzsche's thought.

<sup>14</sup> Examples include A.K. Rogers, "Nietzsche and Democracy," *Philosophical Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1912): 32-50; William Mackintire Salter, "Nietzsche's Moral Aim," *International Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 2 (January 1915): 226-251; and Salter, "Nietzsche's Superman," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 12, no. 16 (August 5, 1915): 421-438. Charles Gray Shaw of New York University considered Nietzsche in relation to Ralph Waldo Emerson. He found little reason to "dote on Nietzsche" when Americans had "Emerson the Nihilist" to absorb. Shaw's genealogy cast Emerson's *Essays* as "the beginning of downright egoism" that later would be encapsulated by the philosophy of Nietzsche. Emerson foreshadowed "Nietzsche's hardness, his coldness, his acidiferous ethics" and shared his critique of Christianity's detrimental effects on the individual. Charles Gray Shaw, "Emerson the Nihilist," *International Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 1 (October 1914): 68, 77-78.

serious philosopher whose critique of Christianity demanded attention. It was from the ranks of cultural critics, journalists, social and political activists and those involved in the arts and literature, however, that Nietzsche's pre-war popularity would be spurred.

H.L. Mencken (1880-1956), the iconoclastic, prolific and caustically witty Baltimore journalist and cultural critic, published the first book on Nietzsche to receive popular attention in the United States. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (1908) was a deeply sympathetic and irreverent treatment of Nietzsche with an eye toward his contemporary relevance. Mencken celebrated Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, which he used to confirm his own convictions of the untenable nature of religious belief in the modern world and his perception of a long historical war between science and religion. Mencken also appropriated Nietzsche to reflect on American society, politics and religion. Mencken, who espoused a vigorous individualism and loathed what he deemed mediocrity-inducing mass culture and ideologies of social equality, found a sympathetic ally in Nietzsche.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, more of Nietzsche's works were being translated into English and were being read, discussed and written about by journalists, cultural critics, political and social activists, novelists, playwrights, theologians and clergymen in the prewar period. The Macmillan Company in 1907 published *Beyond Good and Evil*, which was translated by Nietzsche friend and writer Helen Zimmern (1846-1934). Oscar Levy (1867-1946), a Jewish doctor of German descent who lived in Britain and became a Nietzsche enthusiast after being introduced to his works by a patient, oversaw the first English language

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<sup>15</sup> Mencken was joined in his enthusiasm of Nietzsche by a group of fellow cultural critics, journalists, and friends who also wrote on Nietzsche, whether in *The Smart Set* journal co-edited by Mencken or in other books and articles. This group included James Gibbons Huneker (1860-1921), Willard Huntington Wright (1888-1939), and Benjamin De Casseres (1873-1945).

complete works edition produced between 1909 and 1913.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Jacobs (1854-1916), an Australian-born Jewish scholar and professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York who also served as editor of *The American Hebrew*, wrote an extensive review of Levy's edition for *The New York Times*. Jacobs proclaimed that "Nietzsche is in the air" and merited serious attention. Jacobs noted Nietzsche's "fiercest onslaughts against Christianity" and acknowledged Nietzsche's megalomania, but he appreciated the counterintuitive perspective Nietzsche offered to modern Americans. Nietzsche offered "a set of ideals so opposed and subversive of the American ones."<sup>17</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* reviewer also highlighted the subversive nature of Nietzsche's "ruthless clearing away of accepted values" and credited *The Anti-Christ* with offering "the most astonishing and effective criticism" yet encountered by Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

The "ruthless clearing away of accepted values" inherent in Nietzsche's thought held great appeal for many cultural critics and social activists. Randolph Bourne (1886-1918) and fellow 'Young America' cultural critics explored Nietzsche's usefulness for the creation of a new American culture free from the legacy of Puritanism. The anarchist

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<sup>16</sup> See *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. The First Complete and Authorized English Translation*, 18 volumes, ed. Oscar Levy (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1909-1913).

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Jacobs, "Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. A Critical Consideration of the German Philosopher, if Philosopher He Can be Called, Based Upon the New English Translations of His Works—Many Recent Nietzsche Volumes," *New York Times*, 7 May 1910, BR8-BR9. Jacobs reiterated his belief in Nietzsche's appeal in a book review five years later: "The very one-sided character of Nietzsche's thought makes it more valuable for American thinkers, since it is just that one side which Americans have hitherto carefully avoided considering. The democracy of America is so ingrained that the aristocracy advocated by Nietzsche seems alien to the very fundamentals of American life. Yet, from another point of view, the highly trained, efficient, aristocrat of the Polish German thinker is just what the American democracy is aiming at and its sloppy sentimentalism can best be stiffened and made more manly by contact with the eccentric yet penetrating thought of the great solitary thinker who thought himself into madness by brooding over the fundamental problems of modern life." See idem, "Nietzsche's Life and Work. Current Views of the Man Whose Iconoclastic Philosophy Is Popularly Regarded as One of the Causes of the European War." *New York Times*, 4 April 1915, BR121.

<sup>18</sup> "Reviews of the Week. Nietzsche: First Paper." *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1912, III21; Reviews of the Week. Nietzsche: Second Paper." *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1912, BR1. The unnamed reviewer very likely was Willard Huntington Wright, who wrote book reviews for the *Times* before moving on to other venues for cultural criticism and later writing mystery novels under the pseudonym S.S. Van Dine.

Emma Goldman (1869-1940) identified with Nietzsche's critique of Christianity due to her belief in its responsibility for many social ills and her rejection of its social morality. Socialists such as William English Walling (1877-1936) embraced the difficult task of enlisting Nietzsche's help in undermining the foundations of a civilization that presented obstacles to a socialist vision of society, despite Nietzsche's well-known support for social hierarchy and antipathy for socialism. Liberal Protestants wrestled with the implications of Nietzsche for a faith already under the duress of modern challenges and a cultural authority perceived to be in decline. A 1910 article in *Current Literature* took notice of the increasing attention given to Nietzsche in the United States. Making special mention of the influence of Mencken and the translation of his works into English in addition to other engagements with his thought, the article raised the specter of a potential "Nietzsche vogue" in America. "The slow but persistent growth of Nietzsche's fame," it observed, "is one of the intellectual romances of our time."<sup>19</sup>

American writers, even among those who shared divergent political ideals from Nietzsche, reflected this intrigue. Jack London (1876-1916) balanced appreciation for

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<sup>19</sup> "Will Nietzsche Come into Vogue in America?" *Current Literature* 49, no. 1 (July 1910): 65. Not all American intellectuals were captured by the Nietzsche romance, however, including those who would seem to be logical choices to engage Nietzsche's thought. Henry Adams (1838-1918)—patrician historian, novelist and editor—only mentions Nietzsche once in *The Education of Henry Adams*, a work that soberly contemplated cultural authority's changing of the guard amidst the transformations wrought by modernity. This negligence may seem surprising given Adams' extensive knowledge and experience of German higher education and philosophy due to studying civil law in Berlin and Dresden following his Harvard graduation. Both men jettisoned their family religious traditions and Adams shared with Nietzsche a suspicion of Enlightenment progress, skepticism over man's ability to control nature, and a belief that many truth claims masked the will to power. See John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 88-89. But the single reference to Nietzsche in *The Education of Henry Adams* does illuminate the place in the Western intellectual tradition that Adams saw for Nietzsche. Adams painted a picture of Europe as engrossed in the forces of change, helplessly billowing in the waves of nature's anarchy and history's dynamism without any clear sense of authority or divine imperative. He believed that the "contortions" of the continent were best understood through the writings of Voltaire, Montaigne, Pascal, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Europe was awakening to the passing of old certitudes, a belief in reality's multiplicity instead of unity, and the recognition that nature was controlling man rather than the reverse. See Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Cambridge: Riverside Press for the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1918), 484-485.

Nietzsche with criticism informed by his Socialist sympathies in novels such as *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) and *Martin Eden* (1909).<sup>20</sup> London later claimed that he intended both novels to be attacks on “Nietzsche and his super-man idea.”<sup>21</sup> *Martin Eden*, for example, embedded its critique of Nietzschean individualism in the title character himself, an aspiring writer who espoused Nietzsche’s ideas and lambasted socialism only to meet a tragic end.<sup>22</sup> Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) was introduced to Nietzsche by H.L. Mencken and utilized his ideas in novels such as *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914).<sup>23</sup> These novels traced the rise and the professional and personal exploits of Frank

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<sup>20</sup> London also contained a footnote in his 1907 novel *The Iron-Heel*, in which he wrote the following: “Friedrich Nietzsche, the mad philosopher of the nineteenth century of the Christian Era, who caught wild glimpses of truth, but who, before he was done, reasoned himself around the great circle of human thought and off into madness.” See London, *Novels and Social Writings*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Library of America, 1982), 326.

<sup>21</sup> London argued in a 1915 letter that his novels dealing with Nietzsche were misunderstood: “I have again and again written books that failed to get across. Long years ago, at the very beginning of my writing career, I attacked Nietzsche and his super-man idea. This was in *The Sea Wolf*. Lots of people read *The Sea Wolf*, no one discovered that it was an attack upon the super-man philosophy. Later on, not mentioning my shorter efforts, I wrote another novel that was an attack upon the super-man idea, namely my *Martin Eden*. Nobody discovered that this was such an attack.” See Jack London, *No Mentor But Myself: Jack London on Writing and Writers*, 2d ed., ed. Dale L. Walker and Jeanne Campbell Reesman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 159. For a detailed treatment of London’s blending of Nietzschean sympathies and radical politics, see “Jack London and the Cult of the Revolutionary Superman,” Chapter XI in Melvin Drimmer, “Nietzsche in American Thought 1895-1925 (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1965), 353-412.

<sup>22</sup> The title character, Martin Eden, defends Nietzsche: “‘Nietzsche was right. I won’t take the time to tell you who Nietzsche was, but he was right. The world belongs to the strong—to the strong who are noble as well and who do not wallow in the swine-trough of trade and exchange. The world belongs to the true noblemen, to the great blond beasts, to the noncompromisers, to the ‘yes-sayers.’ And they will eat you up, you socialists who are afraid of socialism and who think yourselves individualists. Your slave-morality of the meek and lowly will never save you.—Oh, it’s all Greek, I know, and I won’t bother you any more with it. But remember one thing. There aren’t half a dozen individualists in Oakland, but Martin Eden is one of them.’” London, *Novels and Social Writings*, 848-849.

Eden’s commitment later showed signs of crumbling when his abstract ideals were confronted with the human face of his sister: “As he watched her go, the Nietzschean edifice seemed to shake and totter. The slave-class in the abstract was all very well, but it was not wholly satisfactory when it was brought home to his own family. And yet, if there was ever a slave trampled by the strong, that slave was his sister Gertrude. He grinned savagely at the paradox. A fine Nietzsche-man he was, to allow his intellectual concepts to be shaken by the first sentiment or emotion that strayed along—ay, to be shaken by the slave-morality itself, for that was what his pity for his sister really was.” *Ibid.*, 864.

<sup>23</sup> Dreiser biographer Richard Lingeman noted that Dreiser was not as enthusiastic about Nietzsche as was Mencken: “On Mencken’s subsequent visits to New York City he and Dreiser argued boisterously about literature, science, God, religion, and myriad other topics. Dreiser did not share Mencken’s near worship of Nietzsche, calling the German philosopher ‘Schopenhauer confused and warmed over.’ Mencken inscribed

Cowperwood, a plutocratic industrialist who became the embodiment of the Nietzschean will-to-power and rejection of conventional morality.<sup>24</sup> Playwright Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) proclaimed Nietzsche his literary idol and especially cited the influence *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* had on him as a young man and aspiring writer.<sup>25</sup> Nietzschean themes infuse numerous O'Neill plays, from his early writings to his post-World War II efforts.<sup>26</sup> But it was Nietzsche's concept of the death of God, along with its attendant consequences in modern society, which held particular appeal for O'Neill both personally and professionally.<sup>27</sup>

Not all who wrote about Nietzsche in the prewar period were pleased with his widespread appeal. Classicist and critic Paul Elmer More (1864-1937), who lectured at Princeton University, edited *The Nation*, and spent the latter part of his career as a Christian apologist, lamented Nietzsche's popularity in his short work *Nietzsche* (1912). More noted the flood of Nietzsche books and articles that unfortunately were "composed

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his third book, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, to his friend, 'In memory of furious disputations on sorcery & the art of letters.'" See Richard Lingeman, *Theodore Dreiser: An American Journey* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 245.

<sup>24</sup> For further analysis of Nietzschean themes in Dreiser's novels, see Joseph C. Schöpp, "Cowperwood's Will to Power: Dreiser's *Trilogy of Desire* in Light of Nietzsche" in Pütz, ed., *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, 139-154.

<sup>25</sup> O'Neill was asked who his "literary idol" was in a 1928 *New York Sun* interview. His response: "The answer to that is one word—Nietzsche." Reprinted in Eugene O'Neill, *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Mark W. Estrin (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 81. For more on the impact of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on O'Neill, see Louis Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Playwright* (New York: Paragon House, 1968), 122-124. Critic and biographer Travis Bogard argues that *The Birth of Tragedy* also was influential on O'Neill and cites the example of his play *Desire Under the Elms* in particular. See Bogard, *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 216-218.

<sup>26</sup> Gerhard Hoffmann provides a useful survey of the wide-ranging application of Nietzschean themes in "Eugene O'Neill: America's Nietzschean Playwright," in Pütz, ed., *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, 197-223.

<sup>27</sup> One critic surmised that it was the death of God as depicted in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that resonated with O'Neill: "What he understood in the half-mad rhapsodies of Zarathustra was an almost Biblical statement of this: the agonies of being a human being in the modern world, with God gone, society in cataclysmic turmoil, male and female in a murderously ambiguous relationship, and the individual trapped in circumstance and absurd in essence." See John Henry Raleigh, "Eugene O'Neill," *The English Journal* 56, no. 3 (March 1967): 369. O'Neill made this connection explicitly in his 1956 play *Long Day's Journey into Night* by having character Edmund Tyrone say the following: "Then Nietzsche must be right. *He quotes from Thus Spake Zarathustra*. 'God is dead: of His pity for man hath God died.'" See Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (Yale University Press, 2002), 70.

by professed and uncritical admirers.” More attributed his popularity to Nietzsche’s writing style, which he described as “just the sort of spasmodic commonplace that enraptures the half-cultured and flatters them with thinking they have discovered a profound philosophical basis for their untutored emotions.”<sup>28</sup> Paul Carus (1852-1919) was an independent philosopher and religious ecumenicist who edited *The Monist* journal and who expressed worry about Nietzsche’s influence. Carus wrote *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism* (1914) out of concern for the social consequences of Nietzsche’s thought. Carus feared that Nietzsche’s assault on tradition and authority would have disastrous results, including the inability to ground the self as needed for responsible individualism. Nietzsche was guilty of “looking with disdain upon the heap of ruins in which his revolutionary thoughts would leave the world.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Nietzsche and the Great War: Culpability, Christianity and Civilization, 1914-1918**

Carus’ book was published the same year the Great War broke out in Europe, an event that certainly triggered increased interest in Nietzsche during the years 1914-1918.<sup>30</sup> Newspapers and popular magazines charged that Nietzsche was culpable for German militarism and the undermining of civilization itself.<sup>31</sup> The American Legion

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Elmer More, *Nietzsche* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 3-4, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Carus, *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1914), 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> The *New York Times* reported that the war triggered renewed literary interest among Americans and presented comments from a librarian who observed readers demonstrating “a pronounced curiosity in the works of German philosophers, and especially Nietzsche, whose doctrines were so generally accepted as the basis of Germany’s political philosophy.” The librarian noticed that as the war went on, interest dropped in Nietzsche and other German thinkers either “because they gorged themselves” on their writing or because they “could not sympathize” with their teachings. See “War is Making Readers Literary,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1917, 65.

<sup>31</sup> For example, see “The Case Against Germany,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 June 1917, D4; “Peace as a Means to New Wars,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9 January 1918, 1; George W. Crile, “German Philosophy Reverts to Brute Force; Logical to a Certain Point, Its Fatal Flaw is Rejection of Community Progress Which Constitutes Civilization,” *New York Times*, 25 November 1917, SM3. Debates spilled over to letters to the

published source books for the Great War in which an essay on Nietzsche was included in the section detailing causes of the war.<sup>32</sup> Wartime sermons and religious writings frequently linked Nietzsche with German militarism. A.C. Dixon (1854-1925), the fundamentalist pastor and evangelist who co-edited *The Fundamentals*, shortly after the war offered what had become a consensus opinion among conservative Protestants during the war: “Under the spell of Nietzsche’s ‘superman’ there came into the brain of the Kaiser the vision of a supernation, a national brute, devil and philosopher, with the scientific right to destroy all weaker nations and erect his throne upon their ruins.”<sup>33</sup> Catholic writer Joseph Jacobi traced the genealogy of civilization’s contemporary crisis back to the Protestant Reformation, which created a vacuum of authority, a “laxity in morals and religion,” and the “spirit of liberalism and freethinking” that cultivated modern “erratic thinkers” like Nietzsche.<sup>34</sup>

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editor as well. For example, after Oscar Levy had a piece published in the *New York Times* lamenting the American middle class, predicting the end of democracy and celebrating Nietzsche, reader J.S. Eichelberger responded with a letter that put the conflict between “Americanism and Prussianism” in terms of Lincoln vs. Nietzsche. See “Lincoln or Nietzsche?” *New York Times*, 6 February 1917, 7.

<sup>32</sup> See William Baird Elkin, “The Worship of the Superman as Taught by Nietzsche,” in *Source Records of the Great War, Volume I How the Great War Arose*, edited by Charles F. Horne and Walter F. Austin (American Legion: National Alumni, 1923), 21-43. Elkin, a philosophy professor at the University of Indiana, argued that Nietzsche was devastatingly influential in Germany but also dismissed Nietzsche’s ideas on the grounds that many of his speculations fell outside his area of specialization: “Nietzsche was a specialist. He may have been a great scholar in philology,--though even in this field his unfortunate prejudices sometimes lured him aside from the straight and narrow path of scientific procedure. But he wrote on anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, philosophy, ethics, and religion, subjects about which he knew comparatively little. Hence his religious and philosophical opinions are largely of the nature of personal guesses, not logical or valid conclusions.” *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> A.C. Dixon, “The Bible at the Center of the Modern University,” *Baptist Fundamentals; Being Addresses Delivered at the Pre-Convention Conference at Buffalo June 21 and 22, 1920* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1920), 134.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph B. Jacobi, “The Nietzschean Idea and the Christian Ideal—Superman and Saint,” *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 41 (July 1916): 463. The tragedy of Nietzsche, Jacobi added, was that he was not Catholic: “What Nietzsche lacked at a critical moment was the authority of Catholic teaching, which would not have made him a slave to a system, but a freeman such as Paul of Tarsus speaks of. The real bondsmen are and ever will be the heralds of revolt.” *Ibid.*, 489. Jacobi went on to lament Nietzsche’s Protestant background and failure to appreciate the Catholic intellectual tradition, since “to him, Aristotle as Christianized by Aquinas was a close book.” *Ibid.* Nietzsche offered for Jacobi an object lesson to those searching for truth and the proper source of authority: “They must know that God has set His seal upon revealed truth as taught by the infallibility of its guiding and invisible head, the Vicar of Christ upon earth

Mencken, by contrast, heaped scorn on what he viewed as “a lot of startling gabble” that blamed Nietzsche for the war. Nietzsche, he mused, was “hailed as the patron and apologist of all crimes of violence and chicanery” by a group of critics who couldn’t even spell his name right.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, a damaging association between Nietzsche and German war efforts remained strong both during and after World War I, especially given Nietzsche’s hostility toward Christianity and loathing of democracy. This impression was aided by the ongoing efforts of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche to reshape her brother’s legacy and to lend his posthumous support to German militarism and nationalism. Her biographer Carol Diethe notes that Förster-Nietzsche wrote an article for a Berlin newspaper in 1914 that portrayed her Friedrich Nietzsche as one who “would have welcomed this war and defended the Fatherland.” Förster-Nietzsche “dragged Nietzsche’s name into war propaganda at every opportunity” and promoted his poisonous association with German militarism and nationalism. The result was “incalculable” injury to his image in Europe—and America as well.<sup>36</sup>

Nietzsche was not without his American defenders during the war. Max Eastman (1883-1969), the socialist writer and activist who sympathized with the Bolshevik Revolution before becoming an ardent anti-communist later in life, thought it “foolish” to blame the war on “a relatively unknown German thinker who happened to live in the generation before it.” Eastman took comfort in the fact that “the popular attention”

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and custodian of the treasure house of truth, the Catholic Church itself.” *Ibid.*, 490. For further elaboration on Jacobi’s theological and ecclesiastical objections to Nietzsche, see Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Neither Rock nor Refuge,” 92-94.

<sup>35</sup> Mencken, “The Bugaboo of the Sunday Schools,” *Smart Set* 45, no. 3 (March 1915): 290. Mencken added: “And his critics and expositors, as if to prove their easy familiarity with him, spell his name variously Nietshe, Neitzsky, Nittszke, Neitzschi, Nietschke, Neatsche, Nietzschei, Nitzzsche, Nzeitsche, Neitzschi, Nietzskie and Nistskie.” *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Carol Diethe, *Nietzsche’s Sister and the Will to Power: A Biography of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 137-138, 140.

Nietzsche was receiving meant people would hear him saying “some things that everybody ought to hear.”<sup>37</sup> Cultural critic Randolph Bourne was a sympathetic reader of Nietzsche who was strongly opposed to the war and used Nietzschean categories to excoriate the likes of John Dewey for supporting it.<sup>38</sup> Princeton University philosophy professor Philip H. Fogel, in a 1915 *Sewanee Review* piece titled “Nietzsche and the Present War,” expressed skepticism that Nietzsche could be held culpable for bringing about the war. Fogel questioned how the “will for power” could be linked to the mass ideology when in Nietzsche’s hands it was an individualist doctrine. Fogel ultimately attributed Germany’s situation to “historical, political and economic rather than philosophical influences” and concluded that Nietzsche was not necessary “to explain Germany’s present attitude.”<sup>39</sup> George Burman Foster (1858-1919), the liberal Protestant who taught at the University of Chicago also defended Nietzsche. Foster, who wrote about Nietzsche in popular, academic and radical outlets, pointed to Nietzsche’s criticism of Germany during his lifetime and suggested that his ideas of a dominant people did not have national connotations but was in support of a more “cosmopolitan culture.”<sup>40</sup>

Nietzsche’s most robust defender during the wartime debates was William Mackintire Salter (1853-1931), an independent scholar who had a brief stint as a Unitarian minister before becoming involved in labor politics, starting an Ethical Society chapter in Chicago, and lecturing in American universities. Salter wrote numerous

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<sup>37</sup> Eastman, *Understanding Germany; The Only Way to End War and Other Essays* (New York: Michael Kennerly, 1916), 61.

<sup>38</sup> Randolph Bourne, “Twilight of the Idols,” *Seven Arts* 2, no. 6 (October 1917): 688-702.

<sup>39</sup> Fogel, “Nietzsche and the Present War,” *Sewanee Review* 23, no. 4 (October 1915): 455, 456, 457. *Sewanee* professor Thomas P. Bailey took his defense of Nietzsche further. “We see him always worse than he is,” Bailey argued. Nietzsche was to be commended for abstaining from the “lying diplomacy and treacherous hypocrisy” shown by actors on the world stage. Bailey provocatively concluded that “if Nietzsche is a poison, he is also a medicine and a tonic” for America. See Bailey, “Nietzsche as a Tonic in War Time,” *Sewanee Review* 26, no. 3 (July 1918): 374.

<sup>40</sup> Foster, “Nietzsche and the Great War,” *Sewanee Review* 28, no. 2 (April 1920): 149.

articles on Nietzsche in scholarly journals and produced a comprehensive and highly regarded monograph with *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study* (1917). Salter spent a great deal of his scholarly efforts exploring the ethical, moral and religious implications of Nietzsche's thought and correcting what he believed were distortions of it—even by sympathetic critics such as Mencken. Salter certainly was aware of how daunting was the task of Nietzsche's rehabilitation: "Is not his an evil name in the mouths of most men now? I hear little but dispraise of him, or at best condescension and pity towards him, in America."<sup>41</sup> Salter repudiated the idea that Nietzsche was responsible for the Great War, which Salter interpreted as "a gigantic struggle of conflicting national interests," and cast Nietzsche's thought as the antithesis of German nationalism.<sup>42</sup> Salter argued that while Nietzsche allowed for a war of ideas, there was no basis for seeing that as a foundation for the German call to arms.<sup>43</sup>

### **Nietzsche in the Interwar American Popular Imagination, 1918-1939**

Nietzsche's reputation nevertheless sustained damage, despite the efforts of Salter and an array of sympathetic critics, due the wartime association with Germany. The next scholarly monograph on Nietzsche written by an American was not produced until 1941, with the exception of the posthumous publication of George Burman Foster's *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1931). The cultural critic Van Wyck Brooks (1886-1963), who had been part of the "Young America" critical movement along with Randolph Bourne, noted the literary impact of the war in his 1932 work *Sketches in Criticism*. Nietzsche was listed as

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<sup>41</sup> Salter, "Nietzsche's Superman," 434.

<sup>42</sup> Salter, "Nietzsche and the War," *International Journal of Ethics* 27, no. 3 (April 1917): 359.

<sup>43</sup> Salter wrote, "He praised war, but not a war like this, without an idea or a principle behind it—save, indeed, as it might prove a training-ground for men who would fight to great uses in the future." *Ibid.*, 375.

part of an elite group of European thinkers who “had invaded our literature” and infused it with terms such as “the will to power” that signaled a belief “in human evolution.”

Brooks sensed that the great thinkers and writers of the nineteenth century now were giving way to a more reactionary, stale period and “that the World War really marked the end of a literary epoch.”<sup>44</sup>

Nietzsche did not disappear, however, from public consciousness during the interwar period. Artists, cultural critics and popularizers still engaged his thought with attentiveness to Christianity’s precarious position in the modern world. The internationally acclaimed dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), for example, took a philosophical approach to her craft due to her avid reading of Nietzsche, who in her estimation “created the dancing philosopher.”<sup>45</sup> Duncan cultivated a distinctly modern “vision of dance” that drew from Nietzsche in the hopes “of generating and realizing an alternative morality to the one offered by Christian sources.”<sup>46</sup> Journalist and theater critic Joseph Wood Krutch (1893-1970) was less enthusiastic about Nietzsche’s prescriptions but was still aware of his timeliness in *The Modern Temper* (1929).

Krutch’s book was a haunting meditation on the inadequacies of science and technology

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<sup>44</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, *Sketches in Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1932), 51.

<sup>45</sup> Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, 2d ed., ed. Sheldon Cheney (1928; New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1977), 48.

<sup>46</sup> Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Nietzsche’s Dancers: Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and the Revaluation of Christian Values* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 109. LaMothe’s work provides a detailed description of how Nietzsche’s writings influenced both Duncan and the dancer and choreographer Martha Graham (1894-1991), who “learned from Duncan’s experience about how dance can and should participate in the revaluation of Christian values Nietzsche describes.” *Ibid.*, 15. See also Ratner-Rosenhagen’s discussion on how Nietzsche provided both “artistic guidance” and spiritual salvation” for Duncan in “Neither Rock nor Refuge,” 154-155. That discussion comes in the chapter of her dissertation dedicated to “the Nietzschean religion” of a wide array of “artist rebels.” Among those highlighted are several individuals who do not feature in my dissertation but whose importance to Nietzsche’s American reception are demonstrated by Ratner-Rosenhagen: Duncan, playwright Susan Glaspell, poet, playwright and novelist George Cram Cook (husband of Glaspell), novelist and literary critic Floyd Dell, novelist Upton Sinclair, and British poet John Cowper Powys (who spent many years living in the United States). See *Ibid.*, 123-179.

to address the loss of transcendence and meaning in the modern world. Though Krutch disagreed with Nietzsche, he still exhibited a Nietzschean vision of a world both “haunted by ghosts from a dead world and not yet at home in its own.”<sup>47</sup>

Nietzsche also reached wider audiences through works of Will Durant (1885-1981), whose writings on the history of philosophy first reached readers through his participation in the *Little Blue Books* series. These five-cent booklets were published by the socialist activist Emanuel Haldeman-Julius (1889-1951), who opened up a printing plant in Girard, Kansas for the purpose of producing a “democracy of literature” and challenging traditional mores on subjects such as sex, religion, social issues and “freethought.” Haldeman-Julius recruited writers like Durant to introduce readers to Nietzsche, whom he felt was “the most popular of all the philosophers the world has yet produced.” The result was a spectacular success as Haldeman-Julius claimed to print over a hundred million Little Blue Books for mass consumption.<sup>48</sup> Durant’s contributions were later accumulated and published in the bestselling single volume work *The Story of Philosophy* (1926).<sup>49</sup> Durant’s chapter on Nietzsche provided an overview of his life and works that mixed appreciation with criticism. Durant cast Nietzsche as a man of his times who whether conscious of it or not “was the child of Darwin and the brother of

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper: A Study and a Confession* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 26. Krutch offered mild praise in an earlier *Nation* review essay: “Nietzscheism offers at least an ideal of the glorified man which is more attractive than the humanitarian ideal of well-fed mediocrity. It reestablishes the idea of excellence as a goal, and if it is cruel, cruelty is no more than a scientific age has been led to expect. See idem, “Antichrist and the Five Apostles,” *Nation* 113 (December 21, 1921): 734.

<sup>48</sup> Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, *The First Hundred Million* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1928): 2, 176.

<sup>49</sup> Joan Shelley Rubin observes that Durant’s book appears “less the outgrowth of a well-defined philosophical orientation than a pastiche of Durant’s prejudices, interests, and readily assembled lecture notes.” See Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 239.

Bismarck.”<sup>50</sup> Durant praised the stylistic and substantive appeal of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the “stimulating exaggeration” contained in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. But he argued that the arch-individualist Nietzsche failed to appreciate “the value of social instincts” and the contribution that Christianity made by moderating “the natural barbarity of man.” Durant concluded that Nietzsche still remained “a milestone in modern thought” who offered “a wholesome critical review of institutions and opinions that for centuries had been taken for granted.”<sup>51</sup>

While Nietzsche received positive treatment from the likes of Durant, popular culture in several instances reflected the level of toxicity associated with Nietzsche. The Superman comics were created by Cleveland, Ohio natives Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in the 1930s, though it remains tantalizingly unclear what if any inspiration was provided by Nietzsche’s familiar concept. What is clear is that the character was sanitized of any potentially Nietzschean notions of malevolent power as had existed in early drawings and that later Superman found himself fighting the Nazis.<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche also came up in a film censorship case in 1933. The New York state film board objected to how the philosophy of Nietzsche was evident in the film *Baby Face*. It was a “fallen woman film” in which

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<sup>50</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 2d ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933), 301. Durant elaborated on Nietzsche’s relation to Bismarck and Darwin: “The growing military and industrial vigor of this new Germany needed a voice; the arbitrament of war needed a philosophy to justify it. Christianity would not justify it, but Darwinism could. Given a little audacity and the thing could be done. Nietzsche had the audacity, and became the voice.” *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 331, 332, 333.

<sup>52</sup> See Les Daniels, *Superman: The Complete History; The Life and Times of the Man of Steel* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 17-18. Daniels elaborates on the elusive origins of Superman as follows: “With so many different versions bearing only the slightest similarity to one another, it’s significant that Siegel and Shuster stuck with the name Superman, but they never explained what its attraction for them was. The term, originally *Übermensch*, had been coined in 1883 by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche to suggest an individual whose creativity transcended ordinary human limitations (it was misappropriated by the Nazi party, which took power in Germany in 1933). Most likely Siegel picked up the term from other science fiction writers who had casually employed it before him, but the determination of this young Jewish-American to find a personality that matched the word was finally so successful that his concept is remembered today by hundreds of millions who may barely know who Nietzsche is.” *Ibid.*, 18.

Nietzsche's name was mentioned in the context of a woman using her sexuality to exploit others and advance up the company ladder. The notion of Nietzschean power in conjunction with female sexuality was unacceptable to censors who prevailed that the script be rewritten.<sup>53</sup>

Nietzsche also entered popular consciousness through a series of sensational journalistic accounts of despondent individuals self-destructing after reading Nietzsche, whose works usually were open at the scene of the crime. The *New York Times* reported in 1924 on an actress who poisoned herself after failing to get a part in a play. It breathlessly recorded her reference to Nietzsche in the suicide note: "After reading Nietzsche's book I agree with his idea of the superfluity of life and so I am going to practice what he preaches. Good-bye and forgive me."<sup>54</sup> The double suicide of international silent film star Max Linder (1883-1925) and his wife was also the subject of great media attention. It was noted that "a well worn and copiously marked volume" of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was found in his trunk.<sup>55</sup> But it was not simply the famous that were so nefariously influenced by Nietzsche. The *Boston Globe* told the story of a college graduate who majored in philosophy, proclaimed himself a disciple of Nietzsche, but despaired and killed himself after failing to find a job other than at a restaurant.<sup>56</sup> The *Washington Post* reported on a night club hostess and mother of a four year-old son in

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<sup>53</sup> See Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 74-77. Jacobs quoted the original dialogue—cut from the film—in which a cobbler tells the female character Lilly the following: "A woman—young, beautiful—like you—can get anything she wants in the world! Because you have a power over men! But you must use men—not let them use you! You must be a master, not a slave!...Nietzsche says, 'All life, no matter how we idealize it, is nothing more or less than exploitation!' That's what I'm telling you! Exploit yourself!...Use men to get the things you want!" Ibid., 76.

<sup>54</sup> "Actress in Despair Poisons Herself," *New York Times*, 9 February 1924, 3.

<sup>55</sup> "Had Love, Health, Fame, Wealth—and Wanted Death," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1925, F10. The article also noted that in his pocket was "a copy of paragraphs from Nietzsche's essay on 'Voluntary Death.'"

<sup>56</sup> "Nietzsche Disciple Admits He Failed," *Boston Daily Globe*, 19 November 1926, 8.

New York who unsuccessfully attempted suicide. It reported that police found “an opened copy of Nietzsche’s ‘Beyond Good and Evil’ in the room.”<sup>57</sup> These and other accounts affirmed the image of Nietzsche’s own instability and the connection between his ideas and the despair or drastic actions to which they could lead.<sup>58</sup>

Nietzsche’s thought was also be associated with terrible crimes, as demonstrated by the 1924 Leopold-Loeb trial.<sup>59</sup> Nathan Leopold (1904-1971) and Richard Loeb (1905-1936) were well-educated Chicago youths from wealthy families who committed the brutal, long-planned murder of fourteen year-old acquaintance Bobby Franks in 1924. The high profile case was a media sensation not only due to the nature of the crime but to the allegation that the two were inspired to kill by Nietzsche’s philosophy, especially the idea of the Superman. Famed defense attorney Clarence Darrow (1857-1938) entered a guilty plea for the young defendants, but his closing argument called for a life sentence rather than capital punishment. He laid partial responsibility at the feet of Nietzsche, whose Superman idea had “permeated every college and university in the civilized world,” even if many readers knew not to apply them in the manner of Leopold and Loeb. Darrow asserted that Leopold was “obsessed with these doctrines,” and that “boys are

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<sup>57</sup> “Club Hostess Tries to Commit Suicide,” *Washington Post*, 20 May 1929, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Other examples include “Father Finds Son’s Suicide. Young Man Spends Night Reading Nietzsche, Then Turns on Gas,” *New York Times*, 2 July 1925, 6; “Nietzsche Student Ends Life He Believed to Be Futile,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 December 1924, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche did not have to be read by the criminal to be brought into the case. The *Atlanta Constitution* reported on the crime of Frank McDowell, who confessed to killing his parents in Florida and his sisters in DeKalb County, Georgia. Lawyer and “character analyst” Arthur Codington examined the case for the paper and made the following observation: “The case of young Frank McDowell in certain mental indications and in his reported references to the ‘anti-Christ’ and the sin against the ‘Holy Ghost,’ is somewhat parallel to that of Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, who died insane. The brain of McDowell reached out to become a ‘superman,’ with ideas or delusions of grandeur; then turned back to strange forms of religion. So also did the brain of Nietzsche waver in conflict between a pitying Christ and a monstrous, unfeeling ‘superman’ who should slay the helpless and put under foot all the humanities which lay between him and his Godless pinnacle. This parallel is based of course on the assumption that the Decatur youth is not feigning insanity, a question which with the data at hand cannot be absolutely determined.” See “McDowell Like Nietzsche,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 February 1924, 5.

largely what their ideas make them.” Darrow thus presented Leopold and Loeb as incapable of handling the explosive ideas of Nietzsche.<sup>60</sup> The following year saw William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) use Darrow’s words against him in the public discourse leading up to the Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee. Bryan was the three-time Democratic Party candidate for President, former Secretary of State, populist and religious activist who served as a counsel for the prosecution. Bryan cited Darrow’s Leopold-Loeb defense that the young men were psychologically damaged by their reading of Nietzsche as proof that evolution must not be taught in schools. Bryan suggested that Nietzsche’s religious and social views were the “logical conclusion” of carrying out Darwin’s theories.<sup>61</sup>

Waldo Frank (1889-1967), the Jewish American writer whose wide-ranging interests included fiction, cultural criticism and Latin American social history, referenced Nietzsche in his assessment of events in Dayton TN. He described the Scopes Trial as a stage for a broader cultural conflict that characterized postwar America: “Main Street against the Nietzscheans of Mencken.”<sup>62</sup> Frank’s observation corresponded with how the

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Hal Higdon, *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1975), 209-210, 218, 238-239. Paula Fass writes of the dynamics of the case and the popular changes in perception over the years. She also argues for the importance of modern psychology in the case, which transformed the two young men from Nietzschean supermen to abnormal youths. Nevertheless, Darrow’s closing argument did lay some blame, at least implicitly, at the feet of Nietzsche while acknowledging that not all who read Nietzsche were prone to such behavior. See Fass, “Making and Remaking an Event: The Leopold and Loeb Case in American Culture,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 3 (December 1993): 919-951.

<sup>61</sup> See Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 40, 100, 198. Bryan planned a closing statement at the Scopes Trial, but both sides agreed to dispense with closing statements. Bryan died shortly after the trial and his speech was printed throughout American newspapers. Bryan offers a detailed explanation of his link between teaching Nietzsche and Darwin and quotes Darrow’s Leopold-Loeb trial speech at length to prove his point. See “Bryan’s Last Appeal: Uphold the Bible and Protect Children of America; Evolution is Merely a Guess; Holds No Hope Address to Jury Made Public. Incomplete Source,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 July 1925, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Waldo Frank, *Memoirs of Waldo Frank*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 144.

trial represented a struggle for cultural authority and shed light on the ongoing battles within American Protestantism. This conflict produced a series of writings and sermons in which Nietzsche was used both as a weapon and a barometer for clashes over Darwinism, higher criticism and assessments of the state of American Christianity. The growing institutional and theological divides between liberal and fundamentalist Protestants produced a discourse in which Nietzsche made numerous appearances as either symbolic and instructive of the modern challenges to faith (for liberals) or as symptomatic of the disease modernity represented to faith (for fundamentalists).<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche was referenced by American Protestants—and Catholics—in the 1920s and the 1930s as pastors and theologians evaluated Nietzsche's ramifications for contemporary religious belief and practice.<sup>64</sup>

The 1930s were a relatively dry period in the American reception of Nietzsche. A Modern Library edition of several Nietzsche works was published in 1937 with an introduction by Nietzsche enthusiast Willard Huntington Wright—the journalist and one-

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<sup>63</sup> For a fuller discussion of these reception dynamics, see Chapter Four of this dissertation. Harry Emerson Fosdick is an example of a liberal Protestant minister using Nietzsche as a symbol for the modern challenges to faith and cultural authority. In 1934, Fosdick described the plight of young people who left the “love-ethic” reinforced by their homes, churches and schools for the “power ethic” of “the world at large.” Fosdick called for the preservation of the love-ethic in institutions such as the home but warned that Nietzsche “with his ethic of power” reigned supreme in the world.” See Fosdick, *The Secret of Victorious Living* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934), 76.

<sup>64</sup> For example, popular Catholic author, broadcaster and priest James M. Gillis (1876-1957) offered a harsh assessment of Nietzsche and his liberal Protestant enablers in a 1924 *Catholic World* article later published in *False Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925). Those “curiously sympathetic” writers who sought to make Nietzsche more agreeable to the Christian faith, Gillis argued, downplayed Nietzsche’s “reiterated blasphemies against Christ and the Gospel.” Nietzsche was very aware and intentional in portraying himself as “the antithesis of Christ.” Christian observers who attempted to make Nietzsche more amenable to the faith were in Gillis’ estimation to be commended for their “charity” but not for their “judgment.” Gillis also credited Nietzsche with at least not being a “mealy-mouthed hypocrite” and for being consistent in his disdain for Christianity: “He could not abide the cowardice of those who gave up belief in Christ but had not the courage to reject the moral system of Christ.” The divorce of Christian ethics from Christian doctrine was unacceptable to Gillis. See James M. Gillis, “Friedrich Nietzsche,” *Catholic World* 119 (May 1924): 226-234. For further discussion on how Gillis directed his critique at liberal Protestantism and argued that Catholicism was better equipped for modernity, see Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Neither Rock nor Refuge,” 95-97.

time editor of *The Smart Set* who by that point was better known for his detective novels written under the pseudonym S.S. Van Dine.<sup>65</sup> Academic journals contained the occasional article on Nietzsche, but not a single monograph was published besides the aforementioned posthumous publication of George Burman Foster's *Nietzsche* in 1931.<sup>66</sup> Foster's book was derived from a series of lectures that reflected a topical approach with chapters on Nietzsche's views on feminism, the state, militarism, democracy, science, art, and several chapters on his implications for religion.<sup>67</sup> Foster acknowledged points of disagreement with Nietzsche, but he also expressed a profound appreciation for his thought and demonstrated a desire to appropriate Nietzsche's insights in his quest to modernize traditional Christian doctrine. Besides the long-delayed publication of Foster's work, however, there were important events afoot in the late 1930s that would have an immense influence on Nietzsche's American reception.

### **Nietzsche, National Socialism and Civilization in the United States, 1939-1956**

The rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930s had a paradoxical effect on Nietzsche reception. Damagingly, Nietzsche was connected with a German regime with which the United States would once again find itself at war. This association was only reinforced by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's support of Hitler and the National Socialists as well as her willingness to lend her brother's reputation to the cause. Hitler was said to be drawn to Nietzsche's concept of the will-to-power and made multiple visits to the Nietzsche-

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<sup>65</sup> *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1937). This edition contained previously published translations of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by Thomas Common, *Beyond Good and Evil* by Helen Zimmern, *The Genealogy of Morals* by Horace B. Samuel, and *Ecce Homo* and *The Birth of Tragedy* by Clifton P. Fadiman.

<sup>66</sup> The few academic journal articles in the 1930s that focused on Nietzsche included Yale University's Heinz Blum, "Nietzsche's Religious Development as a Student at the University of Bonn," *PMLA* 52, no. 3 (September 1937): 880-891.

<sup>67</sup> George Burman Foster, *Nietzsche*, ed. Curtis W. Reese (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), ix.

Archiv in 1934, when he was photographed memorably staring at a bust of Nietzsche. He assisted Elisabeth financially and attended her elaborate funeral that was overseen by the National Socialists in 1935.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, numerous German scholars such as Karl Löwith (1897-1973), Paul Tillich (1886-1965), and Walter Kaufmann (1921-1980) fled Europe and came to the United States, where they would help lay the groundwork for a different reception for Nietzsche.

More common during the war was an anti-Nazi interpretation of Nietzsche's link with National Socialism. William Montgomery McGovern (1897-1964), noted anthropologist, explorer and Northwestern University political science professor, placed Nietzsche in a "Fascist-Nazi" lineage that went back to the Reformation and up to Hitler. McGovern noted that his thoroughgoing individualism did not lend itself easily to mass political ideology. But Nietzsche's "reverence for struggle, for conflict, for war" corresponded with his "violent denunciation of democracy and his defense of aristocracy" in a way that made his thought malleable for statist politics.<sup>69</sup> Catholic philosopher and poet Mary Whitcomb Hess (1893-1987) also traced the roots of Nazism back to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation but more forcefully asserted Nietzsche's responsibility. Nietzsche was "the god of the Nazi cult." The downward spiral of Luther's nation culminated in the "complete religious anarchism" that produced Nietzsche, Hess argued, and resulted in "the blind, brutal military philosophy" of the

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<sup>68</sup> For more on the relationship between Hitler, the Nazis, Elisabeth, and the Nietzsche-Archiv, see Diethel, *Nietzsche's Sister and the Will to Power*, 149-159. Diethel notes that "Nietzsche scholars are still at work stripping away the myths with which Elisabeth encased her brother." *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>69</sup> William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (Cambridge MA: The Riverside Press, 1941), 412. McGovern added, "It is not without significance that Mussolini admits the strong influence which Nietzsche's writings exerted in the formation of his own political opinions." *Ibid.*, 415.

Third Reich.<sup>70</sup> Liberal Protestant stalwart Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) declared in a 1943 sermon that while newspapers focused on “the clash of armies,” just as important was “the clash of philosophies” on display in the world. Fosdick argued that Nietzsche’s gospel of “might makes right” correctly recognized Christianity, with “its ideal care for the weak,” as its mortal enemy. Fosdick warned that “Nietzscheanism has become incarnate” and challenged parishioners at New York’s Riverside Church to “represent” the faith they profess: “But if we ever believed even a little in Christ’s way of thought and life, every personality sacred, and so all of us members alike of one human family, we had better believe in it now.”<sup>71</sup>

The war also inspired reflections by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), a theologian and Union Theological Seminary (NY) professor whose engagement in the public sphere represented one of the last successful examples of Protestant cultural authority in action. Niebuhr commented on Nietzsche in his seminal two-volume work *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941, 1943).<sup>72</sup> Niebuhr’s first volume discussed classical, modern and Christian notions of man and explored the “tension” within Christianity “between man as sinner and man as image of God.”<sup>73</sup> Niebuhr’s second volume, once the nature of man

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<sup>70</sup> M. Whitcomb Hess, “The Nazi Cult of Nietzsche,” *Catholic World* 156 (January 1943): 434, 436, 437.

<sup>71</sup> “Fosdick Stresses the Way of Christ,” *The New York Times*, 12 July 1943, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Niebuhr based his work on the 1939 Gifford Lectures that he gave in Edinburgh, Scotland under the dark clouds of war in Europe. Niebuhr emphasized “Western civilization’s inadequate understanding of the evil threatening it.” See Ronald H. Stone, *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 134.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 202. This view of humanity informed Niebuhr’s “Christian realism,” which argued that an authentic Christian viewpoint could uphold both the dignity of humankind while acknowledging the complexities of sin and evil which hamper society and hinder human efforts to improve it. See Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-3. This led Niebuhr to challenge the ethos of progress in American thought: “In America, our contemporary culture is still enmeshed in the illusions and sentimentalities of the Age of Reason.” See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1932), xxv.

was established, explored the outworking of human destiny throughout history.<sup>74</sup>

Niebuhr's sober theological assessment in wartime included commentary on Nietzsche, whose view of man Niebuhr contrasted with Christianity's dual emphasis on dignity and sin. Niebuhr believed that Nietzsche's brand of individualism amounted to a "romantic protest" against Enlightenment rationalism. But he concluded it was "nihilistic" because it privileged vitality and instincts at the expense of "all possible forms and disciplines."<sup>75</sup> Niebuhr contrasted the Christian and Nietzschean view of the individual by observing that Nietzsche's celebration of "egotism and the will-to-power" was considered "the quintessence of sin" by historical Christianity. Niebuhr argued that without the Christian dual emphasis on man's dignity and sinfulness, "the individual is either nothing or becomes everything." "Nietzschean romanticism" left the individual with "no law but his own will-to-power" and with "no God but his own limited ambitions."<sup>76</sup> The contemporary political consequences of this view of man troubled Niebuhr, but he also noted the irony of how Nietzschean individualism was applied to mass politics. Despite its aggressive assertion of autonomy "against every type of universality," Nietzschean

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<sup>74</sup> Niebuhr observed that "man's ability to transcend the flux of nature gives him the capacity to make history. See *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation; II. Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1943), 1.

<sup>75</sup> Niebuhr elaborated as follows: "The final form of this protest is achieved in the thought of Nietzsche, who asserts the 'wisdom of the body,' the will-to-power (the vitality of what he assumes to be a physical impulse), against the discipline of reason. In Nietzsche, the romantic protest achieves nihilistic proportions because he regards vitality as self-justifying and sets robust expression of instincts against all possible forms and disciplines. Originally, he was primarily concerned with the protagonism of the 'Dionysian' urge against the rational disciplines of a 'Socratic' culture. His protests were subsequently directed more and more against Christian discipline, which he probably understood primarily as Schopenhauer interpreted it, and against every type of form and discipline. No complete moral nihilism is of course possible. Some recognition of the principle of form and order is inevitable even in the most consistent vitalism. In Nietzsche, this is done in minimal terms by his insistence that the will-to-power of his superman will create aristocratic societies of higher worth than the rationalized societies in which the morality of 'herd animals' has gained ascendancy. See Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man; I. Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 34.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 25, 92.

individualism ended up being “subtly compounded with nationalistic furies” by the very “inferior classes” against whom Nietzsche railed.<sup>77</sup>

Wartime reflections on Nietzsche also brought an end to the long drought of American monographs on Nietzsche in 1941 with the publication of Harvard historian Crane Brinton’s *Nietzsche* and Duke philosophy professor George Morgan’s *What Nietzsche Means*. The two monographs offered a striking contrast in tone and organization, a point not missed by contemporary reviewers.<sup>78</sup> Brinton’s scathing work did not offer a systematic exposition of Nietzsche’s thought and made clear that it was not coming from a “professional philosopher” but from an intellectual historian.<sup>79</sup> He thus considered Nietzsche’s ideas in the context of a biographical profile and synthesized Nietzsche’s thought with chapter titles such as “What Nietzsche Hated” and “What Nietzsche Wanted.” Brinton accused Nietzsche of “anti-intellectualism,” noted his particular appeal to “fresh generations of adolescents” and maintained that all of his “more general and abstract hatreds were focused in his hatred for what he called

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 88. Niebuhr offered an elaboration of this point: “There is a peculiar irony in the fact that his doctrine, which was meant as an exposure of the vindictive transvaluation of values engaged in by the inferior classes, should have itself become a vehicle of the pitiful resentments of the lower middle classes of Europe in their fury against more powerful aristocratic and proletarian classes.” Ibid. Niebuhr linked Nietzsche to fascism but tended to group him with other thinkers: “The fateful consequences in contemporary political life of Hobbes’s cynicism and Nietzsche’s nihilism are everywhere apparent.” Ibid., 25. He also credited Nietzschean romanticism and Hegelian idealism with providing a “strange unity” expressed in “modern nationalistic hysterias.” Ibid., 83.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas L. Cook reviewed both books for the *American Historical Review* and made the following observation: “That two books on the same thinker, and a thinker who has not in general been the subject of many works in English, should be published within a year by a great university press is in itself arresting. What is far more striking, however, is that these two works, even granted the difference in their purpose and scope, should be so divergent, not only in their judgments and evaluations but even in their exposition of what their subject actually wrote, that it is well-nigh impossible to believe that they are in truth concerned with the same thinker.” See Thomas Cook, review of *What Nietzsche Means* by George Allen Morgan Jr, and *Nietzsche* by Crane Brinton, *American Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (April 1942): 601.

<sup>79</sup> Crane Brinton, *Nietzsche* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), ix. Some of the ideas of the book, especially the chapter on Nietzsche and the Nazis, were explored in an earlier article. See idem, “The National Socialists’ Use of Nietzsche,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 2 (April 1940): 131-150.

Christianity.”<sup>80</sup> Despite scholarly consensus that Nietzsche was not an anti-Semite, Brinton argued that *The Anti-Christ* gave evidence that “Nietzsche can write as crudely as any Nazi Jew-baiter.” Brinton accused Nietzsche of having views on women that sounded “very like a Nazi.” Brinton downplayed Nietzsche’s criticisms of Germany and suggested that while Nietzsche sought a philosophy to go “beyond himself,” his ideas never went “beyond an Italian socialist hack” or “an Austrian corporal.” Brinton’s reference to Mussolini and Hitler were in a line with a work intent on burnishing the connection between Nietzsche and contemporary fascism, especially National Socialism. Brinton categorized Nietzsche as one of the “Early Fathers” of the Nazi faith and concluded that there were consequences for all: “The unrelieved tension, the feverish aspiration, the driving madness, the great noise Nietzsche made for himself, the Nazi elite is making for an uncomfortably large part of the world.”<sup>81</sup>

In striking contrast, George Morgan’s *What Nietzsche Means* (1941) was the product of an author’s deep respect and personal appreciation for Nietzsche’s ideas, which he characterized as “an oasis of life in the desert of the post-war period.”<sup>82</sup> Morgan’s gratitude led him to write a book that treated Nietzsche as a systematic, serious thinker. Morgan (1905-1997) received his doctorate at Harvard and taught at Duke University prior to entering the Army during World War II and the Foreign Service after

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 97, 234. Brinton’s scorn for Nietzsche enthusiasts was apparent throughout the book, including this passage on Nietzsche’s *The Anti-Christ*: “It has become a kind of handbook for lustier anti-Christians like Mr. H.L. Mencken and for Nazis, though it is meat much too strong for the mild, vegetarian radicals who want to keep Christian ethics while discarding Christian ‘superstitions.’” Ibid., 97.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 105, 110, 171, 231. Brinton concluded that Nietzsche’s legacy would not be of a philosopher or poet, but of a founder of a new religion. Brinton doubted, however, whether the “transvaluation of values” would occur, even if Germany won the war. Ibid., 239. Brinton cast doubt on Nietzsche’s legacy and reevaluated his own claim about Nietzsche being the founder of a new religion in an article published five years later. Nietzsche, he argued, was “certainly not a major prophet, nor even a minor one.” He also “has not been a religious founder.” See Brinton, “A Century of Nietzsche,” *Sewanee Review* 54, no. 2 (April-June 1946): 259.

<sup>82</sup> Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), vii.

the war. He now is best known for his 1949 pseudonymous *Foreign Affairs* article, “Stalin on Revolution,” but his philosophical treatise on Nietzsche was a labor of love that was highly regarded by reviewers.<sup>83</sup> Morgan’s theoretically dense and systematically organized study was immersed in citations from Nietzsche’s works but devoid of much biographical or historical context. This approach reinforced the belief that Nietzsche was worthy of study as a systematic thinker producing a “philosophic unity” of thought that deserved consideration apart from a focus on his life story, insanity, or unsavory associations. For example, Morgan affirmed the primacy of the will to power in Nietzsche’s thought but rather than putting it in the context of Nazi ascendancy, he cast it as “the most suggestive name for the primal life-force out of which all special organic and psychological functions have evolved and whose generic traits they retain.” Morgan understood the will to power as explaining natural processes that can be utilized for individual self-overcoming and for the creation of new values.<sup>84</sup> Not all reviewers were pleased with Morgan’s approach. Karl Löwith, who found much to praise in the book, criticized it for not rendering a verdict on Nietzsche’s contemporary relevance. Morgan’s book lacked a “definitive judgment and a decisive evaluation” of Nietzsche’s central ideas. Löwith argued that the popular relation of Nietzsche to National Socialism should compel Morgan to offer such an assessment: “He admits that Nietzsche’s thought is

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<sup>83</sup> For Morgan’s pseudonymous article, see Historicus, “Stalin on Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 27, no. 2 (January 1949): 175-214. Cook called Morgan’s book “true intellectual history”—in contrast to the intellectual historian Brinton—and argued that Morgan “makes it abundantly clear that true salvation can only come from respect for the richness of great minds and a wrestling with the issues they so forcefully pose, even when at first sight they are cruel antagonists and bitter enemies of prejudices dearly cherished. See Cook, review of *What Nietzsche Means* by George Allen Morgan Jr. and *Nietzsche* by Crane Brinton, 604.

<sup>84</sup> Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means*, 23, 60. Hays Steilberg observes that Morgan was “the first scholar to devote his attention to Nietzsche’s concept of sublimation,” which entails “the redirection of primal energies toward higher intellectual pursuits” and places power in the context of self-overcoming. See Steilberg, “From Dolson to Kaufmann: Philosophical Nietzsche Reception in America, 1901-1950,” in Pütz, ed., *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, 252.

‘terribly alive’ in the agonies of our time but after having read his study one has the impression that Nietzsche is indeed very much alive, but not at all terribly.”<sup>85</sup>

While Brinton’s book received more popular attention, Morgan’s dense book—similar to Salter’s 1917 work—did not pierce the public consciousness despite its acclaim in academic journals.<sup>86</sup> Nietzsche did receive attention in popular journals and newspapers during the war, including the highly publicized 1943 birthday gift from Hitler to Mussolini of a complete edition of Nietzsche’s works.<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche was most often negatively associated with Hitler and the Nazi regime in newspaper articles and letters to the editor.<sup>88</sup> But Nietzsche also had his defenders in American newspapers. The *Washington Post* published an unnamed “German correspondent” who attempted to clear the air about Nazi appropriations of Nietzsche and offer a more positive assessment of his thought.<sup>89</sup> Irwin Edman, a Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, wrote a piece in the *New York Times* titled “The Nietzsche the Nazis Don’t Know” that offered a

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<sup>85</sup> Karl Löwith, review of *What Nietzsche Means*, by George Allen Morgan, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2, no. 2 (December 1941): 241. Löwith added: “The reason for this restriction may be that Morgan rightly rejects a great philosopher from the political point of view which brings him down to the level of one of the many ‘forerunners’ of National Socialism, misusing Nietzsche’s thought for its purposes. But on the other hand, there cannot be any doubt that Nietzsche’s destruction of the moral values of Christianity as well as his revaluation stands in the historical line of present German thinking and action. Nietzsche would never be terribly alive without the historical truth of his prophecy.” Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> While academic journals compared Brinton’s book to Morgan’s work unfavorably, Brinton’s book received largely positive reviews in newspapers. The *New York Times* called it “by long odds the best interpretation we have yet had of the Philosopher With a Hammer.” See John Cournos, “A Study of Nietzsche,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1941, BR20. See also Albert Guerard, “Zarathustra Himself,” *Washington Post*, 23 March 1941, L10.

<sup>87</sup> Ruth Adler, “Speaking as One Superman to Another—,” *New York Times*, 17 October 1943, SM 27.

<sup>88</sup> The same article that reported on Hitler’s gift to Mussolini introduced Nietzsche as “one of the pillars of the Nazi ideology.” Ibid. See also Hans Uppe, “Spirit of Nietzsche,” *Washington Post*, 7 October 1938, 9. Another newspaper story recounted the philosophical debate between an American and German soldier: Relman Morin, “Nazi, Yank Talk Philosophy as Shells Whine Overhead,” *Washington Post*, 17 October 1943, M1.

<sup>89</sup> “Nietzschean vs. Nazi, by a German Correspondent,” *Washington Post*, 31 December 1939, B9.

passionate defense of Nietzsche against “the dishonesty and brutality of Nazi propaganda.”<sup>90</sup>

The occasion of Edman’s piece was the one hundredth anniversary of Nietzsche’s birth. Several commentators took the occasion to assess Nietzsche’s standing in the world of philosophy as well as the world at large, given the context of World War II. Walter Eckstein (1891-1973), the Austrian-born ethicist who came to the United States in 1938 and assumed a leadership role in the American Ethical Union, delivered a paper on Nietzsche’s legacy at Columbia University. He surveyed the wide range of interpretations in Europe and the United States and asserted that there was “hardly another thinker whose posthumous career has been so eventful and challenging” as Nietzsche. Eckstein believed that Nietzsche would have been repelled by National Socialism but posited that his “irrational tendencies” and “praise of strength and power” still could have indirectly influenced “these political ideologies.”<sup>91</sup> Eckstein’s address was printed in the same journal as published papers from a December 3, 1944 centennial symposium on Nietzsche in New York in which Eckstein participated as a commenter. One striking feature of the conference was the presence of many German scholars who had left Nazi Germany, including theologian Paul Tillich, philosopher Karl Löwith, and Kurt Riezler (1882-1955), who emigrated from Germany to teach at the New School for Social Research in New York. Riezler had been associated with the Frankfurt School of philosophy, which blended Marxist sympathies with an appreciation for Nietzsche’s

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<sup>90</sup> Irwin Edman, “The Nietzsche the Nazis Don’t Know,” *New York Times*, 15 October 1944, SM14.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Eckstein, “Friedrich Nietzsche in the Judgment of Posterity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 310, 323.

critical spirit, his antipathy for mass culture, and his assault on “traditional Western morality.”<sup>92</sup>

The papers and responses from the conference were largely sympathetic but perhaps more significantly treated Nietzsche as a serious thinker whose ideas merited consideration and respect.<sup>93</sup> George de Huszar (1919-1968), a young scholar at the University of Chicago, delivered a paper on Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values with special attention given to the implications for Christianity.<sup>94</sup> Karl Löwith spoke on Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence as a revival of the ancient “controversy between Christianity and paganism” and a revisiting of debates between early church fathers and pagan classical sources over the same idea.<sup>95</sup> University of Chicago philosopher Charles Morris (1901-1979) argued in his presentation that Nietzsche was best remembered as a “diagnostician and therapist of Western civilization” and “as a prophet claiming to destroy an old world, to create a new one.”<sup>96</sup> Kurt Reizler, Columbia University philosophy professor James Gutmann (1897-1988), and Walter Eckstein

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<sup>92</sup> Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 50.

<sup>93</sup> The papers and responses were reprinted in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 259-324.

<sup>94</sup> George de Huszar, “Nietzsche’s Theory of Decadence and the Transvaluation of all Values,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 259-272. Huszar wrote that “Nietzsche saw in the murder of God the prerequisite for the utmost development of the self.” *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>95</sup> Karl Löwith, “Nietzsche’s Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 274. Löwith also reflected on Nietzsche’s centennial in a 1944 article for the journal *Church History*. Löwith hailed Nietzsche “as the prophet of our century” and credited him with knowing “every recess of the modern soul, its widest periphery and its hidden center.” He provided an overview of Nietzsche’s thought and addressed the political implications of Nietzsche given the context of National Socialism. But Löwith also focused on Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and own religious nature: “First of all, Nietzsche was by his sheer passion for and concern with an *ultimate* truth, by which to live, more religious than most contemporary Christians. Even his scepticism has the ardor of faith. Concerned with the first and the last things he was more eschatological than the professional theologians who had quite forgotten that Christianity deals with an *eschaton*, and he was himself very conscious of his religious temper.” See *idem*, “Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900),” *Church History* 13, no. 3 (September 1944): 163, 174.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Morris, “Nietzsche—An Evaluation,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 285, 290. Morris also believed that Nietzsche offered “a warning” about the consequences “a scientific and technological society, with social planning as an instrument,” could have for “individuality.” *Ibid.*, 292.

offered responses to the papers that affirmed the continuing relevance of Nietzsche's ideas to both current events in Europe and the rise of a scientific technological mass society throughout the West. These scholars affirmed Nietzsche's seriousness as a philosopher while challenging facile assumptions regarding Nietzsche's association with National Socialism.<sup>97</sup>

These centennial conference presenters were not the only emigrant scholars evaluating Nietzsche for American audiences during and shortly after the war. Eric Voegelin (1901-1985), the German-born political scientist and philosopher who fled Vienna to the United States in 1938, also discussed at length the nature of Nietzsche's ideas and their link to National Socialism. He started by addressing a bigger question: how, if at all, political philosophers effect change. Voegelin analyzed different understandings of Nietzsche's relation to the "crisis" of war and expressed skepticism at the notion of "any direct influence on specific actions," though he did envision thinkers like Nietzsche having an impact through "the more subtle means of evocation, rationalizing support, or disenchantment."<sup>98</sup> The case of Nietzsche was difficult due to the way his writings abounded "in crudities, shrillness and misnomers" and were prone to "misinterpretations." Critics also needed reminding that Nietzsche was concerned with his own historical context and was repelled by "the vainglorious nationalism" of Germany in the 1870s and 1880s. Voegelin argued that Nietzsche's later writings

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<sup>97</sup> Kurt Reizler, James Gutmann, and Walter Eckstein, "Discussion by Kurt Reizler, James Gutmann, Walter Eckstein," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 294-306. Paul Tillich had a short piece published in the same issue that addressed Nietzsche's critique of "the bourgeois spirit." See Tillich, "Nietzsche and the Bourgeois Spirit," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 3 (June 1945): 307-309.

<sup>98</sup> Eric Voegelin, "Nietzsche, the Crisis and the War," *Journal of Politics* 6, no. 2 (May 1944): 177. Voegelin also commented on what was at stake for those claiming a connection between Nietzsche and National Socialism: "The question of the misuse has become of more than ordinary importance because Nietzsche is today interpreted generously as a Founding Father of National Socialism,—by the critics who wish to stigmatize him by this relation as well as by National Socialists who wish to acquire a dignified intellectual ancestry for their movement." *Ibid.*, 201.

included political megalomania in which Nietzsche “places himself on the world-scene as the antagonist of Wagner and Bismarck” and replaces the latter “as the master of Great Politics.”<sup>99</sup>

Sympathetic considerations of Nietzsche by German emigrants were tempered with criticism in postwar reflections on the link with contemporary fascism. One such effort was offered by noted German author and Nobel Prize winner Thomas Mann (1875-1955). Mann had fled Germany for Switzerland in 1933, became an American citizen in 1940, briefly taught at Princeton before moving to Santa Monica, California for 13 years and finally returned to Switzerland in 1952. Nietzsche was the subject of Mann’s April 29, 1947 address at the Library of Congress, “Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events,” which assessed Nietzsche in the immediate aftermath of World War II.<sup>100</sup> Mann presented a lengthy biographical and professional overview that depicted Nietzsche as “a personality of phenomenal cultural richness and complexity” and praised him for being “the greatest critic and psychologist of morality known in the history of the human mind.” But Nietzsche’s philosophy of life was treated skeptically by Mann when it deteriorated into a violent repudiation of “truth, morals, religion, human kindness, against everything that might serve to tolerably domesticate that ferocious life.” Mann also regretfully concluded that Nietzsche’s ideas bore some responsibility for contemporary fascism. Mann suggested not “that Nietzsche created fascism, but rather that fascism created him” despite his detachment from politics. Nietzsche’s philosophy of power served as an “instrument of expression and registration” that “presaged the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 202, 201, 210, 211, 212.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Mann, “Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events,” reprinted in *Thomas Mann’s Addresses Delivered at the Library of Congress, 1942-1949* (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, 2008), 69-103. Mann’s lecture was edited and published the following year in *Commentary* magazine. See Mann, “Nietzsche in the Light of Modern Experience,” *Commentary* 5, no. 1 (January 1948): 17-26.

dawning imperialism” and “indicated the fascist era of the West,” which still persisted despite the end of the war. Mann credited Nietzsche with knowing that philosophy was not mere “cold abstraction” but rather was “experience, suffering and sacrificial deed for humanity”—as evidenced by his own example. Nietzsche also was a tragic figure, Mann concluded, who drifted “into the icy wastes of grotesque error” despite an enduring legacy as the herald of “the dawn of a new time.”<sup>101</sup>

These scholars were helping lay the groundwork for a different reception for Nietzsche in the United States, but the popular association of Nietzsche and the Nazis remained in the early postwar period. The Alfred Hitchcock film *Rope* (1948) provided a telling example of that impression. The film was based on a 1929 British play by Patrick Hamilton of the same name, with the Leopold-Loeb trial serving as likely inspiration. The play’s title originated from a quote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss.”<sup>102</sup> Hitchcock and screenwriter Arthur Laurents Americanized the play’s setting and characters but kept the plot of two young students who decide to kill a friend to experience the thrill of it and then host a dinner party with guests in the same room as the hidden body. A key part of the dialogue involves one of the students, Brandon, conversing with Mr. Kentley, the father of the murder victim. A jesting defense of the right to murder becomes for Brandon a passionate defense of superior individuals and a rejection of traditional notions of good and evil. Mr. Kentley suggests that Brandon must believe in the ideas of Nietzsche, which Brandon confirms. “So did Hitler,” Mr. Kentley replies shortly before dismissing himself from a

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<sup>101</sup> Mann, Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events,” 69, 83, 88, 93-94, 103.

<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1883, 1884, 1892; New York: Modern Library Edition, 1995), 14. The same Nietzsche quote appeared in and inspired the title of the 1957 Tony-Award winning Broadway play “The Rope Dancers,” written by Morton Wishengrad. See Brooks Atkinson, “The Rope,” *New York Times*, 1 December 1957, 161.

conversation in which he finds Brandon displaying “contempt for humanity” and the standards of civilization.<sup>103</sup>

*Rope* was not the only example of postwar popular culture based on the Leopold-Loeb trial that addressed Nietzsche’s consequences for civilization. Meyer Levin’s bestselling historical novel *Compulsion* (1956), along with the 1959 film version starring Orson Welles, offered its own critique in a fictional account of the Leopold-Loeb trial. Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb were transformed into the characters of Judd Steiner and Artie Straus, elite and educated University of Chicago students who crudely applied Nietzschean notions to understand society and to justify murder. Nietzsche’s superman frequently was referenced in the novel’s dialogue, especially in regard to what it meant to apply the idea to society. One exchange demonstrated that emphasis, as when a reporter has an exchange with Judd in which he notes that while “we all had a little Nietzsche in college,” it “doesn’t mean you have to live by it.” Judd’s reply reinforced the idea that the young killers were applying the ideas of Nietzsche: “Why not? A philosophy, if you are convinced it is correct, is something you live by.” Defense lawyer Jonathan Wilk, who was based on Clarence Darrow, extensively discussed during the trial the impact of Nietzsche’s philosophy on Artie and Judd. His argument insinuated that “the encounter with Nietzsche’s philosophy” triggered “a capacity for evil in Judd” that led to socially destructive and murderous acts: “Why should this boy’s life be bound up with Friedrich

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<sup>103</sup> *Rope*, DVD, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1948; Universal Studios Home Video, Inc, 2000). Like *Rope*, the 1954 film noir *Witness to Murder* also connected Nietzsche to the Nazis. Barbara Stanwyck played a woman who witnessed the murder of a woman by an author and former Nazi by the name of Albert Richter, whose ideas are described as “a hash of Nietzsche and Hegel” by the intellectually curious police officer investigating the case. See *Witness to Murder*, directed by Roy Rowland (United Artists, 1954).

Nietzsche, who died twenty-four years ago, insane in Germany? I don't know. I only know it is.”<sup>104</sup>

### **Nietzsche's Postwar Ascent: Kaufmann, Existentialism and Religion, 1950-1959**

Nietzsche's reputation, despite these lingering associations, received the most significant boost in the United States from the efforts of Walter Kaufmann (1921-1980). Kaufmann had fled Nazi Germany in 1939, received his doctorate from Harvard University in 1947 and subsequently taught at Princeton University for the entirety of his career. His book *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950) was an effort at philosophical, political and personal rehabilitation that was likely the most important book on Nietzsche published on American soil in the twentieth century. Kaufmann desired a wider audience than academia and noted in his preface that his “comprehensive reconstruction of Nietzsche's thought” was aimed at “the general reader no less than to scholars.”<sup>105</sup> Kaufmann's placement of Nietzsche “in the grand tradition of Western thought” gave evidence of his intentions to have Nietzsche treated as a serious and systematic philosopher as opposed to the madman who poisoned Germany. Kaufmann began with a prologue that offered a devastating critique of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's fashioning of the Nietzsche legend that allowed her brother to be seen both as “hopelessly incoherent, ambiguous, and self-contradictory” and as a “proto-Nazi.” Kaufmann understood his primary task as that of demythologization: “To crystallize Nietzsche's

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<sup>104</sup> Meyer Levin, *Compulsion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956; reprint, New York: Carroll & Graf, 1996), 252, 370 (page citations are to the reprint edition). Levin's book was transformed into a 1959 film by the same name starring Orson Welles as Jonathan Wilk. See *Compulsion*, directed by Richard Fleischer (Beverly Hills CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1959).

<sup>105</sup> Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, xiii. Kaufmann's work did receive attention outside academia, as Irwin Edman's newspaper review demonstrates: Edman, “The Relevant Nietzsche,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1951, 155.

own problems, and to understand his attempts to cope with them, one must forgo any temptation to picture him as the precursor of one of the many contemporary movements that identify him with their own causes.”<sup>106</sup> Kaufmann presented Nietzsche as a dialectical, experimental thinker who unfortunately failed to see that a systematic substantiation of his “fruitful hypotheses” could establish their probability.<sup>107</sup> Despite that lament, Kaufmann trusted the cogency of Nietzsche’s ideas and presented them rather systematically. Nietzsche’s views on the death of God, the revaluation of values, the state, the will to power, the overman, eternal recurrence, Christ and Socrates were all discussed.<sup>108</sup> Kaufmann drew attention to Nietzsche’s idea of sublimation, which referred to a process of control where human impulses in a “state of chaos,” were overcome and redirected, because he felt it presented a more sophisticated and less barbaric understanding of Nietzsche’s concept of power.<sup>109</sup> Kaufmann took every opportunity to debunk Nietzsche’s association with National Socialism and noted that Nietzsche abhorred nationalism, embraced race mixing, and rejected anti-Semitism.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, xiii, 8. Kaufmann included existentialism among these contemporary movements: “I presented Nietzsche neither as an existentialist nor in the perspective of existentialism,” he later claimed, though he did later include Nietzsche in existentialist anthologies like *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. See idem, “The Reception of Existentialism in the United States,” *Midway* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1968): 108.

<sup>107</sup> Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 94.

<sup>108</sup> Kaufmann’s chapter on Socrates, in which he makes Nietzsche appear more sympathetic to Socrates than was traditionally assumed, is frequently held up as an example of Kaufmann’s excessive sanitizing of Nietzsche.

<sup>109</sup> The will to power, therefore, became not a “will to affect others” or merely an instinct of survival but a “striving to transcend and perfect oneself.” Ibid., 227, 248. For Nazi misuse, see Ibid., 225-226.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 284-306. Some critics believe that Kaufmann’s rehabilitation of Nietzsche went too far. Richard Wolin, for example, is dismissive of what he deemed “Kaufmann’s liberal Nietzsche”: “The English-speaking world will long be in the debt of philosopher Walter Kaufmann, whose skillful editions and translations made Nietzsche’s writings widely accessible. Yet, ultimately, Kaufmann’s Nietzsche is remarkably un-Nietzschean. In his translations and commentaries, we are presented with a Nietzsche who is a cultured European, rather liberal and uncontroversial—all in all, a Nietzsche who resembles a mildly dyspeptic Voltaire. Missing in this account is the Nietzsche who ‘philosophized with a hammer,’ who proudly described his works as ‘assassination attempts,’ the apostle of ‘active nihilism’ who believed that if contemporary Europe was collapsing, one should give it a final shove.” See Wolin, *The Seduction of*

Kaufmann's rehabilitation of Nietzsche came not only in the form of his influential book but through a series of translations that made Nietzsche more accessible to the broader public. Historian of American philosophy Bruce Kuklick noted the popularity of Kaufmann's Nietzsche reader, *The Portable Nietzsche* (1954), with undergraduates and credited it with heralding "the introduction into American philosophy of a new array of forces."<sup>111</sup> Those forces included existentialism, a European philosophical movement whose entry into the United States is usually traced back to the introduction of religiously-minded Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and German philosophers Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969). Existentialism was not a coherent system with agreed upon principles by its proponents, some of whom had religious sympathies and others of whom were atheists. It thus remains virtually impossible to define in precise terms. Broadly speaking, existentialism included a focus on the individual as opposed to mass ideologies, an emphasis on personal responsibility and action, the exercise of the will in the service of pursuing an authentic existence, elements of dread and anxiety in the absence or silence of transcendence, and detachment

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*Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>111</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 239. Ratner-Rosenhagen persuasively cautions against an oversimplification of Kaufmann's existentialist approach to Nietzsche: "The existential tenors in Kaufmann's interpretation are indeed pronounced. However, to detect only the existential dimensions in his *Nietzsche* is to miss the real innovation as well as the historical significance of his work. Rather than narrow Nietzsche's range to place him in the province of existentialism, Kaufmann consistently drew out his ecumenicalism. By reinforcing Nietzsche's philosophical balancing act between the Dionysian 'fullness of overflow' of his intellectual and moral resources and his 'Enlightened' self-restraint and self-sovereignty, Kaufmann insisted that Nietzsche's writings not only contributed to, but improved upon, the best features of Western moral philosophy." See Ratner-Rosenhagen, "'Dionysian Enlightenment': Walter Kaufmann's *Nietzsche* in Historical Perspective," *Modern Intellectual History* 3 (2006): 268.

from traditional conceptions of God, nature or human nature.<sup>112</sup> Existentialism was “not concerned solely with the nature of Being but with the possibility of Becoming.”<sup>113</sup>

Existentialism was popularized in the aftermath of the horrors of two world wars and in some manifestations reflected among intellectuals a crisis of religious belief and authority in both Europe and the United States.

Existentialism’s growing popularity had consequences for Nietzsche’s reception in the United States due to the impetus to place and to interpret him within that tradition.<sup>114</sup> Walter Kaufmann played a role in creating “the canon of existentialism” and facilitating its popularity through his anthology *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956) that included a section on Nietzsche.<sup>115</sup> Kaufmann qualified Nietzsche’s inclusion in the canon, since “existentialism suggests only a single facet of Nietzsche’s multifarious influence,” but he also affirmed Nietzsche’s “central place” given his influence on subsequent existentialists.<sup>116</sup> This canonical status was reaffirmed in

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<sup>112</sup> For an illuminating discussion on defining existentialism, see George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 1-6. Cotkin’s book provides a useful history of both imported and home-grown existentialism in the United States. For a discussion of the importation of European existentialism to American philosophical circles, see Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 237-242.

<sup>113</sup> Cotkin, *Existential America*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. was among those who were introduced to Nietzsche through the lens of existentialism, as evidenced by this passage in his 1963 book *Strength to Love*: “During the intervening years I have gained a new appreciation for the philosophy of existentialism. My first contact with the philosophy came through my reading of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Later I turned to a study of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre. These thinkers stimulated my thinking; while questioning each, I nevertheless learned a great deal through a study of them. When I finally engaged in a serious study of Paul Tillich, I became convinced that existentialism, in spite of the fact that it had become all too fashionable, had grasped certain basic truths about man and his condition that could not be permanently overlooked.” See King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963; reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 157.

<sup>115</sup> Cotkin, *Existential America*, 134.

<sup>116</sup> Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, revised and expanded edition (New York: New American Library, 1975), 21-22. Kaufmann argued that while Nietzsche didn’t share all the same attitudes or content as other existentialists, he still fit in a broad definition: “The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, opposition to philosophic systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life—all this is eminently characteristic of Nietzsche no less than of Kierkegaard, Jaspers, or Heidegger.” *Ibid.*, 20.

William Barrett's popular 1958 study of existentialism, *Irrational Man*, which included a chapter on Nietzsche.<sup>117</sup> Barrett called on contemporary philosophers to follow Nietzsche's example in thinking "problems back to their sources" which he defined as "our whole Western tradition." Barrett perceived that for Nietzsche, the death of God was "the momentous event in modern history" and to which all other "social, economic, and military upheavals" of the nineteenth and twentieth century paled in comparison. Nietzsche fleshed out the existential consequences of the death of God not only by his intellectual rigor but by his courageous example of living without "any religious or metaphysical consolations." Barrett concluded that Nietzsche, despite the devastating consequences of the death of God, was "truly the philosopher of our age" given how secularization had stripped "those highest value, anchored in the eternal," of their worth. Barrett believed that American society, even with "its apparently cheerful and self-satisfied immersion in gadgets and refrigerators," ultimately was "nihilistic to its core."<sup>118</sup>

Several religious intellectuals and theologians sympathetic to existentialism also included Nietzsche in early postwar American surveys of the movement. Catholic existentialist Ralph Harper (1916-1996), Thomist scholars James D. Collins (1917-1985) and Kurt Reinhardt (1896-1983), and German emigrant and Catholic convert Helmut Kuhn (1899-1991) all issued religious critiques that assumed Nietzsche's importance in the existentialist genealogy.<sup>119</sup> German emigrant and Quaker scholar William Hubben

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<sup>117</sup> See Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 238-239 and Cotkin, *Existential America*, 144-147 on the context, popularity and impact of Barrett's book.

<sup>118</sup> William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 205, 184, 185, 204.

<sup>119</sup> I am grateful to Cotkin's book for pointing me to the religiously inclined works of these Catholic scholars. See Cotkin, *Existential America*, 140-143. Ralph Harper was a priest and part-time lecturer who considered himself a Catholic existentialist. His works that addressed Nietzsche include *Existentialism, a*

(1895-1974) included Nietzsche along with Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Kafka as one of the *Four Prophets of Destiny* (1952). Hubben believed that for all the flaws and distortions of Nietzsche, he would serve as “the spiritual nutriment for many in this ‘age of longing’” among those “who have lost their faith in religion, church, politics, and society.”<sup>120</sup> The most prominent example of religious engagement with Nietzsche in existentialist terms was Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who was very influential in postwar American theological circles. Tillich’s introduction to Nietzsche followed a searing experience as a German army chaplain in World War I. His exposure to the deaths of friends and colleagues in the trenches had led him to a rethinking of theology and a discovery of Nietzsche, whose “affirmation of life” was very attractive to Tillich.<sup>121</sup> He had left Germany in 1933 due to his opposition to National Socialism, became a citizen in the United States, and taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York alongside his friend Reinhold Niebuhr. Tillich’s perspective on Nietzsche clearly was shaped by both his theological disposition and his German background. Nietzsche was for Tillich an important figure from whom “Christian theologians can learn very much,” despite Nietzsche’s apparent hostility to the faith. Tillich found theological value in

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*theory of man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948) and *The Seventh Solitude* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965). James Collins was a philosophy professor at St. Louis University who believed that Nietzsche’s individualism and atheism were important intellectual influences on later existentialists. See Collins, *The Existentialists* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952). Kurt Reinhardt, a Germanic languages professor at Stanford University, presented Nietzsche as a canonical figure in the existentialist movement in *The Existentialist Revolt: The Main Themes and Phases of Existentialism: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Marcel* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1960). Emory University philosophy professor Helmut Kuhn engaged Nietzsche in a less enthusiastic treatment of existentialism that still explored its religious possibilities. See *Encounter with Nothingness: An Essay on Existentialism* (Hinsdale IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1949). Walter Kaufmann was less than impressed with the Thomist treatments of Collins and Reinhardt. Kaufmann notes, “What matters far more than most of the opinions of our so-called existentialists, not to speak of their remarkable personalities, is not their relation to God and Aquinas but that they pose the problem of the future of philosophy.” See Kaufmann, “Existentialism Tamed,” *Kenyon Review* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1954): 490.

<sup>120</sup> William Hubben, *Four Prophets of Our Destiny* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 126.

<sup>121</sup> Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966), 53-54.

Nietzsche's philosophy of life and defended several Nietzschean attacks on Christianity as justifiable assaults on inadequate expressions of Christian doctrine.<sup>122</sup> The value of Nietzsche for theologians is what made it all the more lamentable to Tillich that Nietzsche "could be so misused by Nazism." The "vulgarization and distortion" of Nietzsche's ideas by the Nazis misunderstood the spiritual elements of Nietzsche's thought.<sup>123</sup>

Nietzsche appeared in Tillich's brand of existentialist theology, which eschewed traditional doctrinal formulations in favor of a philosophical language of "Being." *The Courage to Be* (1952) was one of Tillich's seminal works and reflected his appreciation for Nietzsche in existentialist terms. Tillich defined Nietzsche as an existentialist because of his "courage to look into the abyss of nonbeing" with acceptance of "the message that 'God is dead.'"<sup>124</sup> Tillich considered him the "most important of all the Existentialists" due to his vivid account "of European nihilism" that depicted "a world in which human existence has fallen into utter meaninglessness." But Tillich did not see Nietzsche's message as one of utter despair. He described Nietzsche as "the most impressive and effective representative" of the "philosophy of life." Nietzsche was a prophet and

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<sup>122</sup> Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 503. For example, Nietzsche's attack on the Christian idea of love was not without merit: "He is the greatest critic, not of the Christian idea of love, although he thinks it is the Christian idea of love, but of the sentimentalized idea of love, where love is reduced to compassion. In the name of power, the will-to-power, self-affirmation of life, he fights against this idea which undercuts the strong life. Nietzsche made a good point which we ought to remember in our preaching of love. He said, you speak of selfless love and want to sacrifice yourself to the other one, but this is the only way for the weak person to creep under the protection of somebody else." Ibid., 496.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 503, 499-500.

<sup>124</sup> Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 30. Tillich approvingly cited Nietzsche's attack on traditional theism: "This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control. This is the deepest root of atheism. It is an atheism which is justified as the reaction against theological theism and its disturbing implications. It is also the deepest root of the Existentialist despair and the widespread anxiety of meaninglessness in our period." Ibid., 185.

philosopher “of courage in opposition to the mediocrity and decadence of life” evident in the “period whose coming he saw.”<sup>125</sup>

Tillich’s sympathetic interpretation of Nietzsche was not the only religious treatment of Nietzsche in the early postwar period. Other theologians and ministers, both liberal and conservative, addressed Nietzsche in the context of the aftermath of war and the arrival of the Cold War. Liberal Protestant minister, theologian and philosopher Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884-1953) acknowledged in a 1948 *Christian Century* essay the intense hostility many felt toward Nietzsche. He was perceived as the reason for two world wars, an aggressive opponent of Christianity and the holder of many troubling social views. But Brightman argued that Nietzsche had been misunderstood and judged solely on the basis of his most offensive statements. Nietzsche may have had his flaws, Brightman argued, but he also provided an “impetus to braver, stronger, more honest living.” Nietzsche’s life was marked by “sincerity” and an intellectual courage that manifested itself in many useful ideas, despite lingering objections. Brightman suggested that Nietzsche’s rejection of tradition and call for new values was “something very Protestant” and comparable to the Sermon on the Mount’s reassessment of Old Testament tradition. Brightman praised Nietzsche’s support for “the active freedom of the individual man” that countered the philosophical and theological determinisms of the day and was particularly important in “the age of mass man.” Mass politics were something Nietzsche

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 136, 27-28. Tillich believed the death of God was vital in understanding existentialism and Nietzsche’s role in embodying it: “The decisive event which underlies the search for meaning and the despair of it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the loss of God in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Feuerbach explained God away in terms of the infinite desire of the human heart; Marx explained him away in terms of an ideological attempt to rise above the given reality; Nietzsche as a weakening of the will to live. The result is a pronouncement ‘God is dead,’ and with him the whole system of values and meanings in which one lived. This is felt both as a loss and as a liberation. It drives one either to nihilism or to the courage which takes nonbeing into itself. There is probably nobody who has influenced modern Existentialism as much as Nietzsche and there is probably nobody who has presented the will to be oneself more consistently and more absurdly. In him the feeling of meaninglessness became despairing and self-destructive.” Ibid., 142-3.

got right, Brightman suggested, given that he was “one of the most acute critics of nationalism.”<sup>126</sup>

More conservative Catholic and Protestant interpreters were less eager to show such charity to Nietzsche’s philosophy, especially in light of its implications for Christianity in a Cold War context. Popular Catholic radio and television broadcaster Archbishop Fulton Sheen (1895-1979) connected Nietzsche with the threat of the Russians, who “started with the idea of Nietzsche that God is dead” and erased religion from their society.<sup>127</sup> Prominent Protestant evangelist Billy Graham (1918- ) warned that the example of Nietzsche’s influence in Germany was instructive for Americans in the Cold War era. Nietzsche’s ideas in Germany “contributed to a religious, moral and intellectual vacuum” filled by Hitler and the National Socialists. An American rejection of God could also lead to a vacuum whereby a “totally secularistic and materialistic” set of ideas such as fascism or communism could prevail and create “anarchy and chaos.”<sup>128</sup> Similar themes were sounded by evangelical scholar Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003), whose 1947 book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* symbolized a new

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<sup>126</sup> Edgar Sheffield Brightman, “Great Thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. 1. How Much Truth is There in Nietzsche?” *The Christian Century* 65, no. 24 (June 16, 1948): 593-595.

<sup>127</sup> “Russians Likened to Guards at the Tomb,” *The New York Times*, 10 April 1950, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Billy Graham, “God is Not ‘Dead,’” in Billy Graham, Bernard Ramm, Vernon C. Grounds, and David Hubbard, *Is God ‘Dead’? A Symposium with Chapters Contributed by Dr. Billy Graham, Dr. Bernard Ramm, Dr. Vernon C. Grounds, Dr. David Hubbard* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 69-70. Graham previously had stated his belief that Nietzsche’s ideas gained “popular acceptance with the American people” at the turn of the twentieth century and that the consequences of that acceptance were becoming painfully evident by mid-century. He warned that the “behavioristic philosophies” of Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Schleiermacher had an immeasurable impact. They contributed to an environment in which confidence in Christianity was weakened and where education was encouraging the “degeneration of morals and abandonment of religious ideals.” See idem, *The Secret of Happiness: Jesus’ Teaching on Happiness as Expressed in the Beatitudes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1955), 77-78.

It should be noted that Graham’s references to Nietzsche were infrequent, but they did serve to illustrate his larger points about Nietzsche’s contemporary relevance and threat to Protestant Christianity. This was a common practice throughout the history of Nietzsche reception among Protestant ministers, but these sporadic citations still reinforced arguments and cemented impressions in their audiences.

era of evangelical engagement and a rejection of the fundamentalist model of cultural and intellectual withdrawal. Henry's 1957 work *Christian Personal Ethics* was an evangelical response to "the crises in ethics" that afflicted "present-day civilization" in light of cataclysmic world events and declining Christian influence.<sup>129</sup> Henry's exposition of Nietzsche's ethical system argued that it was not Christianity, as Nietzsche suggested, but the will-to-power which proved to be a negative and destructive force in civilization. Henry credited Nietzsche for the ruthless consistency of his naturalism but condemned his ideas as being fully "realized in German Nazism and Russian Communism" during the modern era.<sup>130</sup>

### **Nietzsche, Culture and Counterculture in the United States, 1956-1969**

Cultural critics considering Nietzsche in the 1950s and 1960s also were interested in Nietzsche's value for assessing contemporary society but showed less interest in debates over the historical use or misuse of his thought. They dealt with Nietzsche's work in ways that demonstrated the culture change that had occurred in Nietzsche reception. Nietzsche emerged as a canonical figure in modern literature and philosophy, as literary critic Irving Howe (1920-1993) noted in his reflections on modernism. Howe is often associated with the "New York Intellectuals," a group of predominantly Jewish literary critics who produced journals such as *Partisan Review*, *Commentary* and *Dissent*, embraced leftist politics (though some famously moved rightward) and became for the

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<sup>129</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 13. Henry linked Nietzsche's thought with the dire situation of modern man as evidenced by world events in his introduction: "In our day the 'might makes right' credo of Thrasymachus and Machiavelli and Nietzsche has become a politico-social option beyond the worst dreams of the tyrants who shaped it." *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 65, 59.

most part vocal critics of Stalinism and communism.<sup>131</sup> Howe's literary criticism focused on modernism and it was from that perspective that he considered Nietzsche. He described Nietzsche as "a writer whose gnomic and paradoxical style" embodied the "modernist sensibility." Howe asserted that Nietzsche's notion of the death of God meant that "a confrontation of the nihilistic void becomes the major premise of human recovery," which became a key theme in modernist literature.<sup>132</sup> Fellow New York Intellectual and Columbia University literature professor Lionel Trilling (1905-1975) attested to Nietzsche's modern credentials in his notable 1961 essay "On the Teaching of Modern Literature." Trilling, drawing from pedagogical experiences, marveled at the banality of higher education that reduced volatile and subversive modern works like *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals* to elements of a curriculum that could be superficially or glibly discussed by middle class students.<sup>133</sup> Susan Sontag (1933-2004) complained that many scholars themselves had not fully wrestled with the death of God that they claimed to embrace. Sontag, the radical literary and art critic whose essays gained prominence in the 1960s, singled out Walter Kaufmann for "operating within the Nietzschean 'God is dead'" framework while still preserving some vague and "soft-headed" notion of religion. Sontag concluded that the efforts "of modern secular

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<sup>131</sup> Some New York Intellectuals such as Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz moved rightward and laid the foundation for modern neo-conservatism. For an overview of the New York Intellectuals, see Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>132</sup> Irving Howe, "The Culture of Modernism," *Commentary* 44, no. 5 (November 1967): 51, 58-59. Howe contrasted modernism with tradition in terms that makes the application of Nietzsche to modernism natural: "Upon the passport of the Wisdom of The Ages, it stamps in bold red letters" *Not Transferable.*" *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>133</sup> Trilling, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," in Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), 3-27.

intellectuals to help the faltering authority of ‘religion’” should be resisted by believers and atheists alike.<sup>134</sup>

Nietzsche often was utilized alongside other influential figures of modern thought that were approaching canonical status, particularly Sigmund Freud. Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Norman O. Brown (1913-2002) and Philip Rieff (1922-2006) all drew generously from Nietzsche in works that used and/or evaluated Freudian categories of social and cultural analysis. Marcuse, a German emigrant and Frankfurt School scholar who became popular with the New Left in the 1960s, blended Freudian and Marxian interpretation of society, with an assist from Nietzsche, in *Eros and Civilization* (1955). Marcuse believed that widespread affluence might actually inspire a potentially radical social transformation and in a later preface to the book explained its objective with a nod to Nietzsche:

*Eros and Civilization*: the title expressed an optimistic, euphemistic, even positive thought, namely that the achievements of advanced industrial society would enable man to reverse the direction of progress, to break the fatal union of productivity and destruction, liberty and repression—in other words, to learn the gay science (*gaya sciencia*) of how to use the social wealth for shaping man’s world in accordance with his Life Instincts, in the concerted struggle against the purveyors of Death.<sup>135</sup>

Marcuse understood Nietzsche’s value as exposing “the gigantic fallacy on which Western philosophy and morality were built—namely, the transformation of facts into essences, of historical into metaphysical conditions.”<sup>136</sup> Marcuse viewed Nietzsche’s spadework as vital preparation for a profound transformation of the social order.

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<sup>134</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1966), 251, 253. Sontag’s comments came in a review essay, “Piety without Content,” that critiqued Kaufmann’s book *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus*.

<sup>135</sup> Marcuse, “Political Preface 1966,” in *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), xi (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>136</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 121.

Norman Brown, a professor of Classics at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, also offered a radical re-imagination of the individual and society through a blend of Freudian, Marxian and Nietzschean analysis in *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (1959). Brown's work reverberated through the 1960s with its non-traditional, psychoanalytic framework through which human nature, individuality and sociality were understood. "This book," Brown proclaimed, "is addressed to all who are ready to call into question old assumptions and to entertain new possibilities."<sup>137</sup> Brown reinterpreted Christian language, theology and history—which he found inadequate in their explanations of human desire—through the lens of psychoanalysis. He frequently used Nietzsche to affirm a Freudian understanding of human nature and praised Nietzsche for being the first to recognize that "world history" was a tale "of an ever increasing neurosis." Brown approvingly cited Nietzsche's discussion of Apollonian and Dionysian principles for offering a more fruitful perspective on "instinctual reality" than ones leading to "repression, guilt and aggression" and thus denying who human beings are in nature. Nietzsche's genealogy of guilt, "climaxing in Christianity as a theology of unpayable debt," was linked by Brown to Freud's notion of "the repression of full enjoyment of life in the present."<sup>138</sup> Brown thus saw Nietzsche as an important precursor

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<sup>137</sup> Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: the Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), xi. One complimentary reviewer understood the radical intention of Brown's work as nothing short of "a total jettisoning of what we take to be our highest values." See Eliseo Vivas, "Metaphysics for 632 A.F.," *Sewanee Review* 69, no. 4 (October-December 1961): 677. Conservative critic Frank Meyer argued in *National Review* that Brown's book possessed "a power somewhat akin to Nietzsche's" and elicited "a profound effect in scholarly and literary circles" throughout the 1960s. Meyer interpreted it as "an attack across the board on all restraints, moral, customary, psychological, which stand in any way opposed to the unbridled reign of the instincts." See Meyer, "The LSD Syndrome," *National Review* 19, no. 11 (March 21, 1967): 301.

<sup>138</sup> Brown, *Life against Death*, 15, 174, 175, 267, 268. Brown made clear what was being rejected by a Freudian and Nietzschean understanding of reality: "We on the other hand cling to the position that Adam never really fell; that the children do not really inherit the sins of their fathers; that the primal crime is an infantile fantasy, created or of nothing by the infantile ego in order to sequester by repression its own unmanageable vitality (id); that the sexual organizations are constructed by the infantile ego to repress its

to Freud in the assault on traditional and “repressive” belief systems understood to be contrary to nature.

University of Pennsylvania sociologist Philip Rieff’s book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966) explored the victory of Freudian categories and the displacement of traditional sources of cultural authority in less enthusiastic terms. Rieff’s work represented another example of cultural criticism in which Freud loomed large but in which Nietzsche was deemed valuable for understanding the modern condition. Freud belonged to a “succession of great minds from Rousseau through Nietzsche” depicted by Rieff as “psychologues who would transform our emotions into ideas, who would spin new universes of discourse out of their own seething discontent.” Rieff argued that every society produced a “cultural elite” who expressed “in a symptomatic language of faith, the self-effacing moral demands” for the community. Freudian displacement of that authority left a void and “no successor therapists to the religious professionals have emerged.”<sup>139</sup> That loss of cultural authority allowed other sets of ideas and thinkers to emerge for consideration.

Other cultural critics appropriated Nietzsche in the growing cultural turmoil of the 1960s. Michael Harrington (1928-1989), whose book *The Other America* (1962) was said to have helped inspire Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty, followed that work with *The Accidental Century* (1965). Harrington argued that the twentieth century had produced an “accidental revolution” triggered by scientific and technological dominance. Scientific and technological authority was “antidemocratic” in nature and disconnected

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bodily vitality; and that adult life remains fixated to this world of infantile fantasy until the ego is strong enough to undo the basic repression and enter the kingdom of enjoyment. ‘Atheism and a kind of second innocence complement and supplement each other,’ says Nietzsche.” Ibid., 270.

<sup>139</sup> Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 39, 246.

from “economic, political, social, and religious consciousness” with the result being the unsettling of “every faith and creed in the West.” Harrington incorporated Nietzsche as an insightful critic of “western decadence” and utilized Nietzschean ideas in his description of and prescription for what ailed the West. But he also acknowledged Nietzsche’s rejection of democratic socialism, which Harrington believed was the system that provided the remedy for the social and cultural ills of the day.<sup>140</sup>

It wasn’t just the Left that addressed Nietzsche’s thought in the cultural criticism of the 1960s. The burgeoning modern conservative movement also engaged his ideas. Stephen J. Tonsor argued in the flagship conservative journal *National Review* that Nietzsche was the “prophet of modernity” who would define the modern age just as Dante “expressed the thirteenth century.” Tonsor praised Nietzsche for his intellectual courage as evidenced by his excoriation of “the easy certainties, the hollow pretensions, the orthodox hypocrisy” of his era. But Tonsor also perceived dark consequences to Nietzsche’s intellectual example and repudiation of Western culture and religion. Nietzsche’s admirably consistency resulted not just in living in a world with a “dethroned God” but in being “brave enough to accept the hell which it is bound to be.”<sup>141</sup> Norman R. Phillips’ *National Review* article made the case that rather than understanding Nietzsche in quintessentially modern terms, he actually could be “classified as a conservative.” Nietzsche was understood by Phillips as a traditionalist who also embraced “an elitism of the strongest kind.” Phillips contended that Nietzsche’s misuse by “intellectual radicals and liberals” was unfortunate, given that Nietzsche “viewed radicalism as a manifestation of sick minds” and as the enemy of a robust individualism.

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<sup>140</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Accidental Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 41, 151-153.

<sup>141</sup> Stephen J. Tonsor, “Prophet of Modernity,” *National Review* 20, no. 2 (January 16, 1968): 41, 42, 43.

Phillips portrayed Nietzsche's concerns about the infringements of the state, the threats to the cultivation of a noble and superior elite, and widespread "educational and cultural mediocrity" as consistent with historical conservatism.<sup>142</sup>

The Russian immigrant, philosopher and popular novelist Ayn Rand (1905-1982) was another reader of Nietzsche who worried about the infringements of the state and the threats to individualism, although not within the mainstream of American conservatism. Rand's ideas received mixed reviews in conservative and libertarian circles despite some ideological affinities. But Rand distanced herself from these political philosophies and developed her own philosophy of Objectivism through several novels and philosophical writings.<sup>143</sup> How much Rand's unique brand of individualism drew from Nietzsche continues to be a source of debate. Former Soviet spy turned anti-communist writer Whittaker Chambers (1901-1961), in a sharply critical review of *Atlas Shrugged*, asserted that Rand was "indebted" to Nietzsche for her characters—both the heroic supermen and the "ulcerous Leftists" who resembled Nietzsche's "last men."<sup>144</sup> Rand confidant Leonard Peikoff contended that Rand's early notes and writings contain Nietzschean traces, culminating with her 1943 novel *The Fountainhead*, but that subsequently

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<sup>142</sup> Norman R. Phillips, "An Historical Understanding of Conservatism," *National Review* 21, no. 11 (March 25, 1969): 279.

<sup>143</sup> Rand defined "objectivism" in a 1962 column written for the *Los Angeles Times*: "My philosophy, Objectivism, holds that: 1—Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man's feelings, wishes, hopes or fears. 2—Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses) is man's only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, and his basic means of survival. 3—Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life....4—The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit." See Ayn Rand, "Ayn Rand Ties Her Beliefs to Today's World," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 June 1962, B3.

<sup>144</sup> Whittaker Chambers, "Big Sister is Watching You," *National Review* 4, no. 25 (December 28, 1957): 595.

“Nietzsche is not even an error to be refuted.”<sup>145</sup> Yet some scholars contend that Rand herself acknowledged the tremendous impact of Nietzsche.<sup>146</sup> Rand biographer Jennifer Burns argues that despite genuine philosophical differences and suggestions that Rand only went through “a Nietzsche phase,” she shared with Nietzsche an interest in a “transvaluation of values” and a “call for a new morality.”<sup>147</sup> Rand addressed the association with Nietzsche in a 1968 special introduction to *The Fountainhead* on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary. Rand acknowledged choosing a quote from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* at the beginning of her manuscript before removing it prior to publication. Rand’s rationale was her “profound disagreement” with Nietzsche’s philosophy. She described him as “a mystic and an irrationalist” who “subordinates reason to ‘will’ or feeling or instinct of blood or innate virtues of character.” Rand could not reconcile these attributes with the strong rationalism inherent in her philosophy. But Nietzsche’s comment that “the noble soul has reverence for itself” described for Rand “the emotional consequences for which *The Fountainhead* provides the rational philosophical base.”<sup>148</sup> Rand’s belief in self-creation and her conviction that

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<sup>145</sup> Leonard Peikoff, foreword to *The Journals of Ayn Rand*, ed. David Harriman (New York: Dutton, 1997), ix.

<sup>146</sup> Rand responded to a fan letter in 1963 by distancing herself from the suggestion that Nietzsche influenced her rational philosophy: “You are wrong when you see any parallel between my philosophy and Nietzsche’s. Nietzsche was an arch-advocate of irrationalism (see his *The Birth of Tragedy*.” See Rand, *Letters of Ayn Rand*, ed. Michael Berliner (New York: Plume, 1997), 614. But Lester H. Hunt notes that Rand acknowledged extensive reading of Nietzsche in her early student years in Russia and perceived him “as her first adult intellectual ally.” Her first book purchased after immigrating to the United States was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which she read repeatedly. Her journals also give evidence to Nietzsche’s tremendous impact on her. See Lester H. Hunt, “Thus Spake Howard Roark: Nietzschean Ideas in *The Fountainhead*,” *Philosophy and Literature* 30, no. 1 (April 2006): 99.

<sup>147</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 304.

<sup>148</sup> Rand, “Introduction,” *The Fountainhead* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1943; reprint, New York: Scribner, 1968), xii-xiii. Rand confidant and lover Nathaniel Branden said that one character in *The Fountainhead* served as a means to indict Nietzsche: “In my later teenage years I would have many arguments with people who accused Ayn Rand of being a Nietzschean. By the time I knew who Nietzsche was, it seemed obvious that the character of Gail Wynand was intended to be an indictment of Nietzsche—a conviction that Ayn would subsequently confirm.” See Nathaniel Branden, *My Years with Ayn Rand* (San

Christianity's social emphasis stymied individualism gave further credence to the striking affinity drawn with Nietzsche.<sup>149</sup>

Rand was not the only writer of fiction who engaged Nietzsche's thought. Saul Bellow's 1964 novel *Herzog* revealed the impact of Nietzsche on modern writers. Bellow's title character Moses Herzog was a Jewish intellectual undergoing a series of personal crises and professional difficulties including a failed second marriage, separation from his children, a new relationship and a faltering career as a professor.<sup>150</sup> One strategy that Herzog uses to work through his adversity was to write but not send a series of letters to real friends and family as well as to historical figures including Nietzsche. The letter to Nietzsche revealed a mixture of admiration and reservations in a postwar context. Herzog wrote, "You speak of the power of the Dionysian spirit to endure the sight of the Terrible, the Questionable, to allow itself the luxury of Destruction, to witness Decomposition, Hideousness, Evil." But given the cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, "we've seen enough destruction to test the power of the Dionysian spirit" and now wonder "where are the heroes who have recovered from it?" Herzog expressed "great admiration" for Nietzsche's call "to live with the void" and to live life with ruthless honesty without any "abject comfort." But Herzog also noted that

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Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 16. But Hunt argues that despite Rand's "spirited disclaimer," *The Fountainhead* contains "Nietzschean themes" that are "deep and pervasive" throughout the book, particularly in regard to notions such as master and slave morality. See Hunt, "Thus Spake Howard Roark," 79-101.

<sup>149</sup> Burns noted the correspondence between Rand and Nietzsche: "Like Nietzsche, Rand intended to challenge Christianity. She shared the philosopher's belief that Christian ethics were destructive to selfhood, making life 'flat, gray, empty, lacking all beauty, all fire, all enthusiasm, all meaning, all creative urge.' She also had a more specific critique, writing that Christianity 'is the best kindergarten of communism possible.' Christianity taught believers to put others before self, an ethical mandate that matched the collectivist emphasis on the group over the individual. Thus a new system of individualist, non-Christian ethics was needed to prevent the triumph of communism." See Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 42-43.

<sup>150</sup> One way in which the novel swam in contemporary intellectual currents was by having Herzog's love interest Ramona read Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse, both of whom Herzog regarded with suspicion.

while Nietzsche believes much must die, his “immoralists” must find a way to survive and make ends meet in the world: “No survival, no Amor Fati.”<sup>151</sup> Herzog’s mixed review of Nietzsche included a reminder that “humankind lives mainly upon perverted ideas” and in that regard Nietzsche’s ideas were no less susceptible to distortion than “those of the Christianity you condemn.” Herzog concluded with a proposal that “any philosopher” who wanted to influence humanity “should pervert his own system in advance” to determine the outcome “a few decades after adoption.”<sup>152</sup>

Bellow’s novel reflected the interest of novelists, cultural critics and social activists in Nietzsche during the 1960s, though it was not confined to those groups. Nietzsche continued to be a subject of interest and respect in the field of professional philosophy. The year 1965 was especially noteworthy for several publications. An English translation of Karl Jasper’s 1937 German language work on Nietzsche was published, reinforcing the links with existentialism.<sup>153</sup> English biographer R.J. Hollingdale’s *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* received wide acclaim on

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<sup>151</sup> Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), 319. “Amor fati” was a Latin expression that Nietzsche used to connote his affirmation of life that included acceptance of fate. He wrote in *The Gay Science*: “Today everybody permits himself the expression of his wish and his dearest thought; hence I, too, shall say what it is that I wish from myself today, and what was the first thought to run across my heart this year—what thought shall be for me the reason, warranty, and sweetness of my life henceforth. I want to learn more and more about to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth!” See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 223. Nietzsche elaborated in *Ecce Homo*: “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it—all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity—, but to *love* it...” See idem, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 99.

<sup>152</sup> Bellow, *Herzog*, 319.

<sup>153</sup> Karl Jaspers, *An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965). Reviewer Norman S. Care appreciated scholarly efforts that sought “to absolve Nietzsche of responsibility for such philosophical underpinnings as Nazism and similar nonsense,” but he felt that Jaspers went “too far.” Jaspers was excessive in his eagerness to whitewash Nietzsche’s “‘aberrations’” through an existentialist emphasis on Nietzsche’s “philosophical activity” as opposed to his doctrines. See Norman S. Care, “The Inner Activity of Friedrich Nietzsche,” *New Republic* 152, no. 26 (June 26, 1965): 24-26.

American shores. Hollingdale and Kaufmann produced a number of English translations of Nietzsche's works in the 1960s that led to a wider reading audience.<sup>154</sup> Columbia University philosophy professor and *Nation* art critic Arthur Danto (1924- ) presented Nietzsche as a systematic philosopher and assessed him in light of contemporary philosophical trends in the scholarly but accessible *Nietzsche as Philosopher*.

Danto's book epitomized the success of Walter Kaufmann's efforts to reconstruct Nietzsche as a serious and intelligible philosopher. Danto presented Nietzsche's ideas according to the "logical and linguistic" emphases of "contemporary analytical philosophy." Danto went further than Kaufmann in detaching Nietzsche's philosophy from his life story or cultural context. Danto acknowledged that "Nietzsche's not altogether undeserved reputation as an intellectual hooligan, as the spiritual mentor of the arty and the rebellious, and, more darkly, the semicanonized proto-ideologist of Nazism" presented an obstacle to fair consideration of his ideas. Danto expressed regret that Nietzsche failed to communicate "more plainly and with less conflagrating a language." He conceded that Nietzsche could be "too self-indulgent and too self-dramatizing" in his writings. But Danto saw the purpose of his book as providing coherence to Nietzsche's body of work in a form amenable and useful to the trends of professional philosophy. One of the major themes of Danto's work was that "the central concept" of Nietzsche's philosophy was Nihilism. Nietzsche's thought represented "a sustained attempt to work out the reasons for and the consequences of Nihilism," which Nietzsche saw as cause not for despair and descent into nothingness but for liberation and exhilaration. Subsequent chapters of *Nietzsche the Philosopher* systematically explored prominent Nietzschean

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<sup>154</sup> Columbia University philosophy professor James Gutmann wrote that "Nietzsche's extraordinary relevance in the present juncture" made the translations and scholarly work of Walter Kaufmann "a particularly notable occasion." See Gutmann, "The Relevance of Nietzsche," 479.

themes such as perspectivism, morality, religion, the superman, eternal recurrence and the will-to-power through the framework of that Nihilism.<sup>155</sup>

Evangelical, liberal and radical Protestants were less interested in the solidification of Nietzsche as a professional philosopher than they were in the application of his ideas in a radical cultural, political and theological context. The reading of Nietzsche helped spawn a highly publicized if brief phenomenon known as the Death of God movement.<sup>156</sup> Its leading proponents and theologians included Syracuse University's Gabriel Vahanian (1927- ), Emory University's Thomas J.J. Altizer (1927- ), Colgate University's William Hamilton (1924- ) and Temple University's Paul Van Buren (1924-1998). These young scholars took existentialist theology in a more radical direction and argued through a series of books, articles, lectures and interviews that the lost cultural authority of Christianity in general and theology in particular had created the need for a new rendering of God.<sup>157</sup> Altizer argued that "the American character," with its

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<sup>155</sup> Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher: An Original Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 13, 149, 22, 34. For a useful review that identifies nihilism as the key not just to Nietzsche's thought but to the structure of Danto's book, see Frederick C. Copleston, S.J., review of *Nietzsche as Philosopher* by Arthur Danto, *Philosophical Review* 77, no. 1 (January 1968): 103-106.

<sup>156</sup> Susan Anima Taubes discussed the religious undertones of Nietzsche's Death of God in 1955: "When Nietzsche announced that God is dead, he planted the seed for a new kind of atheism which has become a major theme of European thinkers in our century and which found its most uncompromising formulation in the posthumously published notes of the French philosopher-mystic-saint, Simone Weil. Atheism, which used to be a charge leveled against skeptics, unbelievers, or simply the indifferent, has come to mean a *religious* experience of the death of God. The godlessness of the world in all its strata and categories becomes, paradoxically and by a dialectic of negation, the signature of God and yields a mystical atheism, a theology of divine absence and nonbeing, of divine impotence, divine nonintervention, and divine indifference." See Taubes, "The Absent God," *Journal of Religion* 35, no. 1 (January 1955): 6.

<sup>157</sup> The subtitle of Gabriel Vahanian's first book associated with the movement indicated the cultural context that he believed he was facing. See *The Death of God: The Culture of our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1961). Church historian and *Christian Century* editor Martin Marty offered this observation about the cultural context of Death of God movement: "Such spokesmen have listened to the nineteenth-century announcer of the death of God, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the twentieth-century celebrator of his absence, Albert Camus. They have carefully studied the cultural effects of the announcements. As they observe man in action, man busy closing off his world and his view of himself without necessary reference to God, they point to the crisis of faith and concur that, in profound cultural and spiritual senses, 'God is dead!'" See Martin Marty, *Varieties of Unbelief* (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 5-6.

“detachment from the past,” made the United States a particularly ripe environment for such a rendering. Altizer spoke of the “post-Christian” era in which “the acceptance of Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God” amounted to “the real test of a contemporary form of faith.”<sup>158</sup> The death of God meant acknowledging the post-Christian context of the West, but it also meant the end of the traditional concept of a personal, transcendent God in favor of more immanent, ecumenical, and interdisciplinary expressions of religious faith and practice.<sup>159</sup> The Death of God movement and its provocative reinvention of Christianity received a significant amount of media attention, culminating in a famous and controversial April 9, 1966 *Time* magazine cover that asked, “Is God Dead?”<sup>160</sup> The Death of God theology spilled over to scholarly journals, popular magazines and newspapers. It provoked a wide range of responses, including criticism from the likes of evangelist Billy Graham, neo-orthodox theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian existentialist Paul Tillich.<sup>161</sup> The radical theology dominated the American theological landscape in the 1960s, although by 1969 *Time* was already writing the post-mortem “Is ‘God is Dead’ Dead?”<sup>162</sup> The Death of God movement reflected the unique

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<sup>158</sup> Thomas J.J. Altizer, “America and the Future of Theology,” in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, ed. Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), 9, 11.

<sup>159</sup> Traditional notions of God already had been challenged by the writings of modern theologians like Tillich and by widely discussed works such as *Honest to God* (1963), by John A.T. Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich in England. Harold O.J. Brown, an evangelical Protestant reviewer of *Honest to God*, described the book as “a serious Protestant attempt to realize Nietzsche’s assertion, ‘God is dead. You have killed him.’” Brown also acknowledged that the book came at a time when the cultural authority of Christianity was under threat: “There is no question but that the historic Christian faith does not have the hold on people that one might wish, nor does it appeal as readily as one might hope.” See Harold O.J. Brown, “Death of God in Modern Theology,” *National Review* 16, no. 22 (June 2, 1964): 456.

<sup>160</sup> John T. Elson, “Toward a Hidden God,” *Time*, 8 April 1966, 82-87.

<sup>161</sup> Graham contributed to the previously cited *Is God Dead?*, an evangelical book of essays seeking to counter the claims of the Death of God movement. See Graham, *Is God Dead?*, 59-81. Reinhold Niebuhr defended traditional religious categories as meaningful and criticized the lack of mystery in the radical assessments of faith and modernity. See John Cogley, “Nietzsche Scores Death-of-God Theory,” *New York Times*, 12 June 1966, 62.

<sup>162</sup> “Is ‘God is Dead’ Dead?” *Time*, 2 May 1969, 44.

intersection of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity with the decline of Protestant cultural authority in what the theologians deemed a "post-Christian" society.

The cultural upheaval of the Sixties appeared to vindicate assertions of Nietzsche's influence within an increasingly "post-Christian" society. California State English professor and libertarian critic Kingsley Widmer (1925- ) suggested in a *Nation* essay that Nietzsche was among a group of thinkers behind the ideas of "rebellious modern culture," whether "young rebels" realized it or not. "What were once the solitary musings of the enraged poets and nihilistic critics," Widmer mused in 1968, "now become the tangible style of the ten thousands who march up country from the mainline society."<sup>163</sup> Nietzsche's contemporary significance did not escape the attention of Columbia University philosophy professor James Gutmann during the same year.

Nietzsche's thought and vision are increasingly relevant. His analyses of human weakness and his vision of the possibilities of human power, his awareness of the dissolution of traditional values of Christendom, his sense of urgency of a revaluation of traditional values, the almost apocalyptic anticipation of wars to come, make his writings singularly topical. Of course he has been foolishly held responsible for the conditions which he foresaw—much as a physicians' diagnoses are blamed as being a cause of a disease.<sup>164</sup>

Gutmann's comments indicated his belief that the "ruthless scramble for social, economic, and political power" made Nietzsche's observations about power especially relevant. "The struggle for black power" was one example that he cited.<sup>165</sup> Huey P. Newton (1942-1989), founder of the Black Panther Party, confirmed in his memoir that Nietzsche's ideas "had a great impact on the development of the Black Panther philosophy." While acknowledging some disagreements, Newton found Nietzsche's notion of the will to power compelling and applicable. He focused on Nietzsche's emphasis on language as power, defining terms and assigning value in ways that affirm

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<sup>163</sup> Kingsley Widmer, "Thrust of the Underculture," *Nation* 207, no. 23 (December 30, 1968): 716.

<sup>164</sup> Gutmann, "The Relevance of Nietzsche," 482.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

one's power. Newton suggested, for example, that African-Americans had redefined the word "black" to mean something positive, proud and empowering in reaction to previous negative connotations. He understood this strategy as a demonstration "of Nietzsche's theory that beyond good and evil is the will to power."<sup>166</sup>

Nietzschean notions of power were not the only aspect of his thought that proved influential in the 1960s. Dionysian elements of his thought were also emphasized. These aspects were first discussed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* and focused on the irrationality, impulses, energy, ecstasy and sensuality of human beings. Those in a Dionysian state participated in a "festival of reconciliation" with nature while free from the constraints of social construction. Art forms such as music and dance reinforce this "primordial unity" which Nietzsche compared with being in a state of intoxication.<sup>167</sup> Notions of Dionysian liberation were prominent throughout the 1960s, including the writings of the aforementioned Norman O. Brown. He explored "Nietzsche's Dionysus" through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis in *Life Against Death* and described Dionysus as "the image of the instinctual reality which psychoanalysis will find the other side of the veil." His call for "Dionysian consciousness" reverberated through the 1960s.<sup>168</sup> Harvard theologian Harvey Cox's 1969 work *The Feast of Fools* sought to incorporate Dionysian elements into theology while reconciling different elements of the counterculture—"the world-changers and the life-celebrators." Cox (1929- ), who described the book as "more Dionysian" than previous works such as *The Secular City*,

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<sup>166</sup> Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), 163, 164. Newton also compared the decision to call policeman "pigs" was similar to how Nietzsche described the Christian strategy of using language to impose new ideas on the Romans. See *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>167</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>168</sup> Brown, *Life Against Death*, 174, 175.

affirmed the need for less rational expressions of faith and for more focus on celebration, festivity and mysticism. He argued that it was fitting that “the death of God” occurred “in Western industrial society” given that it was the West that “festivity has reached its lowest ebb.” It thus was appropriate that Nietzsche was the messenger to deliver the news about the death of God since he “deplored the disappearance of festivity in Christendom.” Cox quoted selections from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* intended to highlight Nietzsche’s emphasis on joy, festivity and dance. Cox also saw the emergence of rock music and “guerrilla theater” on college campuses as evidence of the “festive radical.”<sup>169</sup>

Cox’s comments about rock music gave evidence to its growing cultural significance and its identification with Dionysus. Ralph J. Gleason (1917-1975), music critic and founding editor of *Rolling Stone* magazine, addressed Dionysian currents in rock music while referencing Nietzsche in a 1967 essay for *The American Scholar*.<sup>170</sup> Gleason’s essay “Like a Rolling Stone” suggested that the “new music” was indicative of the fact that “the old ways are going and a new set of assumptions is beginning to be worked out.” Rock music and its accompanying dances were filled with the “Dionysiac currents” that Nietzsche noted in *The Birth of Tragedy* would be evident in periods where folk music thrived. Nietzsche confirmed for Gleason that “orgiastic movements of a society leave their traces in music.” That development was happening in the Sixties, Gleason concluded, and those who turned away from this truth had “no idea how cadaverous and ghostly their ‘sanity’ appears as the intense throng of Dionysiac revelers

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<sup>169</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), viii, vii, 26. Quotes from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are found on Ibid., 21, 48.

<sup>170</sup> I am grateful for being pointed to both Harvey Cox’s *The Feast of Fools* and Ralph Gleason’s essay “Like a Rolling Stone” by John Carlevale’s article on Dionysian currents in the Sixties. See John Carlevale, “Dionysian Myth-History in the Sixties,” *Arion* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 77-116. Carlevale discusses both Cox and Gleason on p. 88-90.

sweeps past them.”<sup>171</sup> Once again, Nietzsche was invoked as a symbol and instrument of radical cultural change.

### **Postscript**

This chronological survey of Nietzsche’s American reception gives evidence of an uneven and unexpected ascent in American intellectual and cultural life, given the obstacles of two world wars and hostility to predominant expressions of American religion and politics. It supports an argument that will be developed further in the following three chapters, namely that the correspondence between Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority explains in part Nietzsche’s growing reputation in the United States. The panoramic view of this chapter will be complemented by the zoom lens approach of Chapters Two, Three and Four. These chapters will explore the formative early decades of Nietzsche reception in the realms of professional philosophy, independent intellectual life, and theology and popular religion. These chapters will reinforce the point made in the concluding epilogue of this dissertation: later successes in establishing Nietzsche as a serious and influential thinker were made plausible by the groundwork laid in earlier decades.

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<sup>171</sup> Ralph J. Gleason, “Like a Rolling Stone,” *The American Scholar* 36, no. 4 (Autumn 1967): 557, 556, 563.

**CHAPTER TWO:  
Nietzsche, Academic Philosophy and Protestant Cultural Authority in the Age of  
Professionalization and Specialization, 1895-1925**

For many generations, from father to son, the people have been knit by many strong and tender ties and associations to the Word of the living God. Its influences upon the customs and life of the people have been many and potent. Only those whose minds are blinded will deny the mighty influence which the Bible has exerted as a factor in the national prosperity of the English-speaking countries. The great universities have been their pride, and have been counted among the great national bulwarks; and the Bible has been the foundation stone of the universities. But now a change has come—so swiftly and so stealthily that we can scarcely realize what has happened. The universities have discarded the teaching of the Bible and have repudiated its *authority* as the divinely inspired teacher...No greater danger menaces the younger men and women of the present generation than the danger that some man, some smooth-tongued, learned, and polished professor, may make prey of them by means of philosophy and vain deceit.”

—Philip Mauro, “Modern Philosophy,” *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915)<sup>1</sup>

“It would be curious, and something very sad, if the institutions founded by our fathers as training schools for Christian service should come to be centers of influence destructive to that same Christianity.”

—William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago (1905)<sup>2</sup>

“That seems to me the great issue in philosophy today, as always, between a merely naturalistic view of the world, based essentially on the principles of physical science, and a spiritualistic view, which does involve the recognition of something that isn’t a phenomenon in time, like other things, but cannot either be envisaged as a substance or entity with the quality of inseity, as the scholastics used to predicate of God.”

—J.E. Creighton, Editor of *The Philosophical Review* (1922)<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche’s achievement of respectability and popularity in American intellectual life directly corresponds to the decline of Protestant cultural authority in the United States. Nietzsche’s ideas were taken seriously and often appropriated in an environment where Protestant Christianity had become increasingly marginalized in intellectual and culture-shaping institutions. American colleges and universities were at the forefront of this phenomenon. One historian went so far as to suggest that many institutions moved

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Mauro, “Modern Philosophy,” in *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths*, ed. R.A. Torrey and Charles L. Feinberg (1910-1915; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 584-5, 590.

<sup>2</sup> William Rainey Harper, *Religion and the Higher Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1905), 132.

<sup>3</sup> “Letter from J.E. Creighton,” November 27, 1922, Folder 4, April 8-1920-March 2, 1924, Gustavus Watts Cunningham Letters, #14-21-796, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

“from Protestant establishment to established nonbelief.”<sup>4</sup> Professionalization, specialization, curriculum changes, a growing emphasis on practicality and on relating education to the industrial age were all part of this landscape, as was a transfer of authority from religion to science. This chapter explores those transformations as they pertain to the first several decades of Nietzsche reception in the United States. I examine five prominent institutions in particular and the scholars they produced with the goal of assessing the critical response to Nietzsche and his critique of Christianity amidst the early decades of professionalization and specialization. I selected Harvard University, Cornell University, Columbia University, the University of Chicago and Johns Hopkins University for their prominence in the field, their exemplification of the new academic climate and for their own distinctiveness in terms of their engagement with Nietzsche’s thought. I survey monographs, articles and reviews from nascent philosophical journals that relate to Nietzsche. My focus is on what scholars did with Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity in a new academic environment and what impact that environment had in the short and long term for Nietzsche’s influence and his eventual reputation as a “serious” philosopher. Institutional and cultural changes within the academy both created and limited opportunities for Nietzsche scholarship in the short term. However, they also laid the groundwork for a venue in which Nietzsche was slowly transformed into a formidable thinker whose critique of Christianity demanded to be taken into account.

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<sup>4</sup> George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Marsden also posits that Protestants themselves contributed to their own disestablishment through embracing ideals that were eventually used against them.

## Nietzsche in the Age of Professionalization and Specialization

American philosopher and Harvard professor William James (1842-1910) was well aware of the transformations occurring in American higher education at the turn of the twentieth century. James lamented the “PhD Octopus” that institutions of higher learning had become. The obsession with higher degrees symbolized the growing professionalization and specialization of the academy. James believed that philosophy needed “the open air of human nature” and not the stultification of academic “shop tradition.” He observed that German universities, so influential in changing the face of the American academy, were where “the forms are so professionalized that anybody who has gained a teaching chair and written a book, however distorted and eccentric, has the legal right to figure forever in the history of the subject like a fly in amber.”<sup>5</sup>

Friedrich Nietzsche shared James’ disdain for German universities and the culture of professionalization and specialization that they promoted. Nietzsche’s critique was informed by his own experience teaching at the University of Basel and expanded into a broader indictment on German culture. He lamented to friends the “philistinism” of specialization and the tedium of academic life: “it is only too natural that the daily burden, the hour-by-hour concentration of thought on a particular field of knowledge should somewhat dull one’s free receptivity and attack the philosophical sense at its root.”<sup>6</sup> He confided to his friend Erwin Rohde in 1870 his readiness to depart academic life: “Let us drag on in this university existence for a few more years; let us take it as a

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<sup>5</sup> William James, *A Pluralistic Universe; Hibbert Lectures to Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1909), 17. See also idem, “The Ph.D Octopus,” *Harvard Monthly* 36 (March 1903): 1-9.

<sup>6</sup> “14. To Carl von Gersdorff, Naumburg, April 11, 1869,” in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 44.

*sorrowful* lesson which must be tolerated with seriousness and astonishment.”<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche’s 1872 series of lectures titled “On the Future of Our Educational Institutions” compared the scientist in an age of specialization to “a factory workman” whose entire existence revolves around “turning one particular screw or handle on a certain instrument or machine.” This grim reality was then dressed with “the glorious garments of fancy” because of how “this narrow specialisation” was admired and celebrated in Germany.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche continued his critique on specialization and academic expertise in his *Untimely Meditations*, a series of short works published between 1873 and 1876. He blamed deference toward scholars and academicians for promoting Germany’s “philistine culture.” Scholarly opinions were “admixed, diluted or systematized, as a medicinal draught” for the German public.<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche’s meditation on the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) also revealed his great disdain for the academy, with a particular focus on philosophy, which was “now the object of universal disrespect and scepticism.” Nietzsche’s observations focused primarily on the relation of the university to the state, but he went further by suggesting that professional philosophy was divorced from real life and stifled independent thought. He considered it advantageous for Schopenhauer to not have been “destined from the first to be a scholar” and to have real life experience

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<sup>7</sup> “28. To Erwin Rohde, Basel, December 15, 1870,” in *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Volume Six, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. J.M. Kennedy (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1909), 39.

<sup>9</sup> “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer” in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39, 38. Nietzsche elaborates in another meditation titled “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”: “The education of German youth, however, proceeds from precisely this false and unfruitful conception of culture: its goal, viewed in its essence, is not at all the free cultivated man but the scholar, the man of science, and indeed the most speedily employable man of science, who stands aside from life so as to know it unobstructedly; its result, observed empirically, is the historical-aesthetic cultural philistine, the precocious and up-to-the-minute babbling about state, church and art, the man who appreciates everything, the insatiable stomach which nonetheless does not know what honest hunger and thirst are.” *Ibid.*, 117.

outside the university. Philosophy had been made “ludicrous” by its professionalization and specialization, which led Nietzsche to suggest “that philosophy should be deprived of any kind of official or academic recognition” in order to create the independence and life experience necessary for a philosopher of significance. Nietzsche favorably quoted American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) in regard to the effect a true thinker can have on a society. Emerson compared it to “when a conflagration has broken out in a great city” and contained in its path many things held dear, including “any literary reputation,” the precedents of science, and cherished beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche continued his criticism after leaving his position at the University of Basel in 1879 due to a series of health problems. He titled a section of *Beyond Good and Evil* “We Scholars” and offered further acerbic reflections on German higher education, its wider cultural consequences, and its impact on philosophy in particular. Nietzsche took note of the supremacy—and in his view, arrogance—of science in the academy that resulted in a detachment from and condescension toward philosophy. Science had already dismissed the “handmaiden” of theology and had turned its sights on marginalizing philosophy, to Nietzsche’s chagrin. He resented the elitism of science, mocked the culture of specialization, and rejected the obsession with practicality:

My memory (the memory of a scientific man, if you will!) is teeming with the arrogantly naïve comments about philosophy and philosophers that I have heard from young natural scientists and old physicians (not to mention from the most erudite and conceited scholars of all, the philologists and schoolmen, who are both by profession—). Sometimes it was the specialists and the pigeon-hole dwellers who instinctively resisted all synthetic tasks and skills; at other times it was the diligent workers who smelled the *otium* and the noble opulence of the philosopher’s psychic economy and consequently felt themselves restricted and belittled. Sometimes it was that color-blindedness of utilitarian-minded people who considered philosophy to be just a series of *refuted* systems and a wasteful expenditure that never did anybody ‘any good.’ Sometimes a fear of disguised mysticism and changes to the limits of knowledge sprang up; at other times, there was

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<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 187, 181, 190, 193.

disdain for particular philosophers that had unwittingly become a disdain for philosophy in general.<sup>11</sup>

Nietzsche's critique of the university included complaints about the weaknesses of German culture, the limits of specialization, the mediocrity of intellectual life and the marginalization of philosophy. These complaints informed his belief that turning universities and other institutions into halls of mediocrity were ultimately exercises in futility: "The door will stay barred against these intruders, however much they push or pound their heads against it! You need to have been born for any higher world...you need to have been *bred* for it: only your descent, your ancestry can give you a right to philosophy—."<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche argued that like other institutions shaping German culture, universities failed to produce great thinkers and individuals due to the failure to acknowledge the reality of hierarchy in nature.

Nietzsche's philosophy in general and critique of the German university model in particular would not appear to endear him to American academics at first glance. Indeed, his ideas were more attractive to "independent intellectuals"—those philosophers, critics, and activists outside the academy who positioned themselves on the frontlines of cultural and social conflict in the early part of the century.<sup>13</sup> Independent intellectuals and professional academicians did not always agree on matters of Nietzsche's substance and utility. But the same factors—the decline of Protestant cultural authority, the belief that science was the basis of social progress, the emerging industrial capitalist order— informed the context of both independent intellectual and academic critics of Nietzsche.

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<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93-94.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> See Steven Biel, *Independent Intellectuals in the United States, 1910-1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

The transformation of American colleges and universities proved to be vital to Nietzsche reception in the United States. Evolving academic goals and curriculums, the emergence of professionalization and specialization, and the new role of professional philosophy in the academy all contributed to both creating and marginalizing opportunities for the study of Nietzsche. Consideration of how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was received amidst these transformations is especially important in view of Protestant Christianity's declining status and authority in modern American colleges and universities.

The story of how American colleges, many of which had religious affiliations, became modern, research-oriented universities is a familiar one.<sup>14</sup> The founding of public universities through means such as the Morrill Act of 1862, the influence of the German university model, the growing authority and reach of science, and the reflection of industrialization's emphasis upon rational order and management all served as evidence of the transition from antebellum colleges to modern universities.<sup>15</sup> The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the modern university achieve "ascendancy" over other forms of collecting and disseminating knowledge such as professional schools, private

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<sup>14</sup> See Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*. Marsden writes of the broader Western context of these changes: "Rather the American developments are part of changes in Western culture that have been going on since at least the Reformation and accelerating since the rise of science, technology, and Enlightenment thought in the early modern era. Such massive transformations as disestablishment, secularization in all its complexities, disenchantment of reality, rationalized approaches to work and other human activities, and revolutions in technology, politics, economics, intellectual life, culture, and in all human relationships were parts of more general Western cultural trends, even if they took distinctive forms in America." *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Wilson, "Introduction," in Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and Secular University* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.

and governmental research institutions, and unaffiliated amateur scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Reflecting a culture of professionalism that existed beyond the academy, the professions within the academy were made possible by the “multiplication and differentiation of bodies of esoteric knowledge.” This division of intellectual labor was reinforced by the overthrow of the classical curriculum and replacement with the elective system.<sup>17</sup> R.M. Wenley (1861-1929), a University of Michigan philosophy professor, expressed concern in 1910 at how the elective system had damaged classical education and even noted Nietzsche and James as symptoms of the disease. Wenley stated that he “could name you men whom Nietzsche has turned into fanatics” or “whom even the urbane William James has turned into echoes.” But Wenley dared one to try and “distil fanaticism or fashion” from the great classical authors such as Plato, Thucydides, Cicero and Livy.<sup>18</sup> Wenley’s comments are ironic considering Nietzsche’s background as a philologist well-versed in classical texts, yet they reflect not only early perceptions of Nietzsche but the shifting fortunes of certain fields of study in the modern American university as well.

Philosophy briefly managed to play an important role in this changing academic universe by assuming some of the responsibilities formerly overseen by theology—another discipline in decline and evidence of a shift in academic authority. Professional philosophers assumed the tasks of contextualizing other disciplines, of affirming the accumulation of knowledge in the academy, of reinforcing the authority of science, and

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<sup>16</sup> Edward Shils, “The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 19-32.

<sup>17</sup> John Higham, “The Matrix of Specialization,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America*, 3-17. On the rise of the professions, see Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1976).

<sup>18</sup> R.M. Wenley, “The Classics and the Elective System,” *The School Review* 18, no. 8 (October 1910): 526.

of dividing labor between writing for their peers and for the general public.<sup>19</sup> The authority of science was manifested in what Daniel J. Wilson termed “prevailing scientism,” which led philosophers to reconstruct their practice in a more “technical” and “professional” manner, culminating in “logical positivism and analytic philosophy.” Professionalization not only meant the establishment of journals, associations, and departments, but also the use of a set methodology and the pursuit of a collegial consensus. This methodology was to produce a group of experts surrounding “a newly specialized body of knowledge.” The consensus, according to Wilson, was never fully achieved.<sup>20</sup> The pursuit of it remained important because it led to not only the establishment of associations but of academic journals. Professional journals such as the *International Journal of Ethics*, published by the University of Chicago, and *The Philosophical Review*, started by Cornell University in 1892, gave scholars an outlet to explore increasingly diversified fields of study, including the philosophy of Nietzsche.

These manifestations of professionalization and specialization arose at a time when philosophy’s historical alliance with theology was rapidly dissipating in the post-Enlightenment, post-Darwinian academy. Laurence Veysey depicted American philosophy in the 1880s as “an elaborate effort to deal with religious doubts.” It cultivated its sense of abstraction and isolation while restructuring its educational practices and building ties within the discipline. Philosophy became “a highly specialized acquired taste,” but maintained a healthy percentage of graduate students and gradually

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<sup>19</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101-102, 106-108. See also Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 224-225.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel J. Wilson, *Science, Community, and the Transformation of American Philosophy, 1860-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 2, 5.

organized at regional and finally national levels.<sup>21</sup> The American Philosophical Association, though largely made up of Northeastern representation, was established in 1901.<sup>22</sup> Popular success was marginal at best, however, as the field of philosophy increasingly became a venue for peer-driven professionalization and specialization.<sup>23</sup>

These dynamics had a direct and yet paradoxical impact on how Nietzsche's ideas were distributed, assessed, and appropriated in the academy. They both marginalized and preserved interest and opportunities in the study of Nietzsche. His ideas did not fit easily into a distinct field of study given the decline of his own field of philology, the continuing advance of specialization, and the wide range of subjects his writings addressed. Philology, classical studies, German literature and languages, music, sociology, literature, history and especially philosophy were the fields that predominantly engaged Nietzsche's thought. Other issues affected Nietzsche's reception, such as the lack of a dependable flow of English translations of a kind that would have made his work more accessible, and the lack of sympathy generated by his hostility toward Christianity and democracy. The various discourses and debates in which Nietzsche's American reception can be considered, from culpability over world wars to the direct engagement of Protestant scholars and clergy with Nietzsche's discussion of Christianity, was the subject of Chapter One. This chapter explores how Nietzsche's critique of

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<sup>21</sup> Laurence Veysey, "The Plural Organized World of the Humanities," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America*, 78, 79.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Kuklick noted five developments in Harvard University's Philosophy Department that reflected growing professionalization: 1) "the disappearance of the amateur philosopher" who lacks "institutional affiliation"; 2) "the hiving-off of various areas of study from what was known as philosophy in the 1860s"; 3) "the beginning of the discipline of philosophy" with its own "special techniques" and "accepted set of doctrines"; 4) "the concomitant growth of departmentalism" that defined "disciplinary integrity" through "the number of positions in a given field that the university would finance"; and 5) "the training and placing of teachers in this field by an intensified apprenticeship leading to the doctorate and appointment as a college professor." See Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts 1860-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), xxii. For the relationship between professionalization and specialization, see *Ibid.*, 233-258.

Christianity was received by American professional philosophers at a time when higher education's transformation included the marginalization of Protestant cultural authority.

### **Nietzsche, Christianity and the Golden Age of Harvard Philosophy**

Friedrich Nietzsche did not receive an extraordinary amount of attention at Harvard University during the transformative period of professionalization and specialization. But the attention he did receive, particularly in light of Harvard's history and development, is instructive. Harvard University, originally founded as Harvard College, had been established in 1636 for the purpose of theological education. Church leadership was not the only goal, however, as it also served to train educated clergy to exercise social and cultural authority in Puritan New England.<sup>24</sup> Harvard went on to enjoy a reputation as the premier institution in the United States for theological, and later philosophical, education into the twentieth century. Harvard made the transition to a modern research university in the nineteenth century under the influential leadership of President Charles W. Eliot (1834-1926). Eliot oversaw decades of reform that included a move toward professional schools, graduate departments, specialization within disciplines, strengthened admissions standards, and an elective system that replaced the traditional classical core. Eliot also was a Unitarian who believed that universities should reflect the changing nature and authority of religion in the modern world. "The decline of the reliance upon absolute authority," he wrote in a 1909 book *The Religion of the Future*, "is one of the most significant phenomena of the modern world." He saw signs of its decline in prominent spheres of modern life: "in government, in education, in the church, in business, and in the family." Eliot acknowledged the importance of authority

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<sup>24</sup> Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 40-41.

in the history of Christianity, whether it was the Catholic emphasis on Church authority or the Protestant emphasis on the authority of the Bible. However, both sources of authority were “already greatly impaired” and overwhelmed by the modern “tendency towards liberty” which among “educated men” was found to be “irresistible.”<sup>25</sup>

Eliot also oversaw the transformation of Harvard’s Philosophy Department that ushered in the “Golden Age of American philosophy” between the 1880s-1910s with the hiring of professors such as William James, Josiah Royce (1855-1916), George Santayana (1863-1952), and Hugo Münsterberg (1863-1916).<sup>26</sup> By the time Nietzsche’s ideas began percolating to the United States, Eliot had transformed Harvard University’s Philosophy Department and encouraged certain aspects of the German model higher education while maintaining the need for a distinctly American brand.<sup>27</sup> However, the preeminent professors of the “Golden Age” had little time for Nietzsche’s ideas beyond the wartime reflections of Ralph Barton Perry (1876-1957), a student of William James who went on to a long teaching career at Harvard. Ultimately, it was scholars on the fringes who sought to promote his ideas. The scant attention paid to Nietzsche during Harvard’s transformation into a modern university is both instructive and ironic. It demonstrates the starting point for Nietzsche’s ascent and shows how the conditions were created in the academy that made a positive, engaging reception more possible.

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<sup>25</sup> Charles W. Eliot, *The Religion of the Future* (Boston: John W. Luce and Company, 1909), 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> See Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy*, xx. Eliot’s 1869 inaugural address offered his own reflections on the study of philosophy. He distinguished philosophy from “established sciences” and suggested that they should therefore “never be taught with authority.” Teachers therefore should not end speculation, settle questions, or propose “one set of opinions as better than another.” See “Inaugural Address as President of Harvard College, October 19, 1869” in Eliot, *Educational Reform: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> Eliot’s influential *Atlantic Monthly* article on the “New Education” stressed the need for a distinctly American university: “When the American university appears, it will not be a copy of foreign institutions, or a hot-bed plant, but the slow and natural outgrowth of American social and political habits, and an expression of the average aims and ambitions of the better educated classes. The American college is an institution without a parallel; the American university will be equally original.” See Eliot, “The New Education. I.” *Atlantic Monthly* 23, no. 136 (February 1869): 216.

When George Santayana, William James, and Josiah Royce did pay attention to Nietzsche, matters of religion were at the core of their concerns. Santayana ridiculed Nietzsche's attack upon Christianity as hysterically overwrought while James dismissed Nietzsche's belief that religion had no utility and ultimately proved pernicious in human affairs. Royce pondered the implications of Nietzsche's critique of religion for the foundations of morality. All three critiques were offered in the context of a heightened sense of decline for traditional religion, influence, and authority.

George Santayana might be considered the most likely candidate of all the prominent Harvard Philosophy Department members to have expressed sympathy for Nietzsche. Santayana taught at Harvard from 1889 to 1912 and experienced disenchantment as an outsider in relation to American ideas and institutions. Santayana famously indicted the "genteel tradition" of American intellectual and cultural life—a phrase meant to express the decay, conventionality and smugness present in the intellectual and literary establishment.<sup>28</sup> This critique attracted the enthusiasm of many of the same independent intellectuals who were reading Nietzsche. Santayana was not drawn to Nietzsche despite some surface affinities. Santayana had a European background and a shared disdain for the modern university and its implications for intellectual vitality.<sup>29</sup> He and Nietzsche both considered themselves outsiders in their

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<sup>28</sup> Santayana elaborated on this concept during an August 1911 lecture at the Philosophical Union of the University of California. The lecture was reprinted in Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 37-64.

<sup>29</sup> Santayana's lecture on the genteel tradition came toward the end of his Harvard tenure. He expressed his disdain for professional philosophy in the lecture as follows: "But professional philosophers are usually only scholastics: that is, they are absorbed in defending some vested illusion or some eloquent idea. Like lawyers or detectives, they study the case for which they are retained, to see how much prejudice they can raise against the witnesses for the prosecution; for they know they are defending prisoners suspected by the world, and perhaps their own good sense, of falsification. They do not covet truth, but victory and the dispelling of their own doubts." See Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition*, 49.

respective intellectual fields.<sup>30</sup> They both displayed a mix of materialist and idealist assumptions in their writings. But Santayana remained deeply unimpressed with the rigor and consistency of Nietzsche's philosophy. Santayana characterized Nietzsche's writings as "poetical, fragmentary, and immature" and suggested that his brilliant style and phrasing were compromised by thoughts that "were seldom just."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Santayana recognized Nietzsche as someone with whom to be reckoned and whose critique of Christianity was central to his thought.

Santayana's most extensive reflection on Nietzsche actually came four years after his tenure at Harvard was over. It was found in *Egotism in German Philosophy*, a 1916 work that Santayana acknowledged was inspired by the war in Europe. Santayana asserted that "egotism," which he defined as "subjectivity in thought and wilfulness in morals," was the "soul of German philosophy" and the driving presence behind Nietzsche's idiosyncratic writings.<sup>32</sup> Santayana found Nietzsche's focus on the will-to-power and its application to morality to be excessive and, at times, contradictory. Nietzsche's disparagement of morality, Santayana suggested, specifically targeted "Christian virtues" as manifested by "a certain Protestant and Kantian moralism" to which he had been exposed in Germany. Santayana pointedly remarked that Nietzsche's opposition was not to morality in general, since Nietzsche offered "to impose" his own

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<sup>30</sup> John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 218, 259. Santayana did not feel compelled to rely on Nietzsche in defense of naturalism. He wrote in a 1929 letter to English writer and critic John Middleton Murry that while he understood the appeal of writers such as Nietzsche, he didn't "need their influence." The idea that "things moral are natural" and are thus "the fruition of things physical" was an idea that he could glean from Aristotle without having to appeal to modern figures such as Nietzsche or D.H. Lawrence. See Santayana, Letter to J. Middleton Murray (December 11, 1929), in Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana*, ed. Daniel Cory (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 246.

<sup>31</sup> Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916; reprint, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 114, 127.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

“enthusiastic master-morality” in place of Protestant Christianity. He found Nietzsche’s denunciation of Christianity to be absurdly overwrought and answered with mockery: “How beastly was the precept of love! Actually to love all those grotesque bipeds was degrading.” Santayana had little patience with Nietzsche and his “boyish blasphemies” and concluded that Nietzsche “hated with clearness, if he did not know what to love.”<sup>33</sup> Santayana’s condemnation of Nietzsche was rooted in the belief that Nietzsche’s effort to dismantle the objective foundations of thought and morality were guided by an overriding fascination with power and the glorification of the will.

Santayana and his old colleague William James had their share of disagreements, but belief in Nietzsche’s overly harsh treatment of religion provided a modicum of common ground. Nietzsche merited only the occasional mention in William James’s writings and letters, though in those instances the subject regarded religion. James, well-known for his philosophy of pragmatism and his writings on the psychology of religion, taught at Harvard University from 1873-1907. He was not a proponent of orthodox Christianity and advocated ideas that advanced the marginalization of theology’s pedigree in the academy.<sup>34</sup> However, James was unsympathetic to Nietzsche’s hostility toward religion and argued for its practical value in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). It was this work that contained James’s most lengthy comment on Nietzsche in a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 124, 130-131, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Despite James’s stated intention to defend “the legitimacy of religious faith,” his advocacy of scientific authority, philosophical pragmatism, and religious pluralism represented a sea change from previous conceptions of religious authority in the university and culture at large. For example, James wrote: “The truest scientific hypothesis is that which, as we say, ‘works’ best; and it can be no otherwise with religious hypotheses. Religious history proves that one hypothesis after another has worked ill, has crumbled at contact with a widening knowledge of the world, and has lapsed from the minds of men. Some articles of faith, however, have maintained themselves through every vicissitude, and possess even more vitality today than ever before: it is for the ‘science of religions’ to tell us just which hypotheses these are. Meanwhile the freest competition of the various faiths with one another, and their openest application to life by their several champions, are the most favorable conditions under which the survival of the fittest can proceed.” See James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1912), x, xii.

discussion on “saintliness.” James cited Nietzsche as “the most inimical critic of the saintly impulses” that he knew of and noted Nietzsche’s preference for the ideal “embodied in the predaceous military character.” James included an extensive quote from *The Genealogy of Morals* in which Nietzsche cast the weak as an insidious threat to the strong and as an obstacle to the “vitality of the race.” Nietzsche’s hostility was “itself sickly enough,” but it nevertheless effectively highlighted the contrast that James wanted to examine between the saintly ideal and “the carnivorous-minded ‘strong man.’” James believed these ideals revealed two essential divides in regard to our orientation in this world: first, whether one’s “chief sphere of adaptation” was either the seen or unseen world; and second, whether one’s “means of adaptation” consisted of either “aggressiveness or non-resistance.” James, like Nietzsche, wanted to move the discussion of saintliness out of the realm of theology. They both were post-Christian in the sense of rejecting theology’s authority in life and thought. But unlike Nietzsche, James retained sympathy for the saint even as he sought new categories for judgment. Religion could still be beneficial if it passed the test of “practical common sense and the empirical method.”<sup>35</sup>

William James found little time for Nietzsche in large part due to the latter’s militancy against religion and the ideal of the saint. His colleague and fellow “Golden Age” stalwart Josiah Royce expressed more detailed concern at Nietzsche’s critique of

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<sup>35</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature; Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), 371, 372, 373, 374, 377. Despite James’s disapproval of Nietzsche’s militancy against religion and the ideal of the saint, he did express faint praise for “Poor weak N.” due to his “occasional command of language.” But he also complained that Nietzsche tended to offer opinions “in his high and mighty way” despite current events often proving him false. He noted the example of Nietzsche’s faith in Russian autocracy at the time of Russia’s “disintegration.” See “William James to Giovanni Papini, Aug. 22, 1905” and “William James to Thomas Sargeant Perry, Aug. 24, 1905” in James, *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 11 April 1905-March 1908*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 90, 94.

religion. Just as James had emphasized the post-theological utility of religion and dismissed Nietzsche's indictment of the saint, so Royce sought post-theological, rationalist grounds for morality and believed Nietzsche's critique of its foundations to be flawed.<sup>36</sup> Royce's concern with moral foundations and with Nietzsche's assault upon them can be viewed in terms of his wrestling with the implications of declining Protestant cultural authority. Royce did so by elaborating a philosophy of "loyalty" that could serve to buttress crumbling foundations for morality. His 1907 lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston, later published as *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, elaborated on that philosophy and challenged one of conventional morality's sharpest critics, Friedrich Nietzsche. He found both strong grounds for disagreement and surprising reasons for sympathy.

Royce found himself "troubled and bewildered" at the challenge offered by "that philosophical rhapsodist," Nietzsche.<sup>37</sup> Moral standards were needed to establish the worth of both religion and science, Royce argued, and therefore must be rescued through the concept of loyalty, which brings coherence and unity through devotion to a cause outside of us.<sup>38</sup> Royce dealt with objections, such as the argument that "loyalty" had been a pernicious force in history and that what was needed was a celebration of individual judgment and freedom. Nietzsche was often held up as an exemplar of this sort of ethical individualism, Royce noted. But Nietzsche and all serious ethical individualists who

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<sup>36</sup> George Santayana wryly observed the following about Royce's philosophical interests and influence: "His reward was that he became a prophet to a whole class of earnest, troubled people who having discarded doctrinal religion, wished to think their life worth living when, to look at what it contained, it might not have seemed so;" See Santayana, *Character & Opinion in the United States; With Reminiscences of William James and Josiah Royce and Academic Life in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 119.

<sup>37</sup> Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), 5, 4. The cultural critic James Huneker also described Nietzsche as a "rhapsodist." See Huneker, *Overtones: A Book of Temperaments; Richard Strauss, Parsifal, Verdi, Balzac, Flaubert, Nietzsche, and Turgéniéff* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 109-141.

<sup>38</sup> Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, 16-48. Royce defines loyalty as "*the willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause.*" (Italics in the original.) Ibid., 17.

sought control over their own destinies had been misunderstood. Royce found more than “a glorification of elemental selfishness” in Nietzsche’s writings, for Nietzsche longed for “influence over his fellow-men” through the pursuit of “power idealized through its social efficacy.” This power was envisaged through a “vague dream of a completely perfected and ideal, but certainly social, individual man.” Nietzsche’s pursuit of power, in Royce’s estimation, was tragic in the sense that he was attempting to escape his own personal turmoil through a vision promoting the control of “social conditions” for the sake of “individual interests.”<sup>39</sup>

Royce also portrayed it as a striking projection of spiritual longings. Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God led him to fill the void with a “cult of the ideal future,” with the Superman fulfilling the divine role. Royce found this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought useful to his own philosophy of loyalty. He contended that life indeed needs the “superhuman” to make sense, though not necessarily in “magical” or superstitious terms. Royce wanted to unify “the interests of morality and religion” by comprehending “righteousness, in a perfectly reasonable and non-superstitious way, in superhuman terms.”<sup>40</sup> *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, therefore, viewed Nietzsche as both a threat and an ironically useful lens for Royce to establish post-Christian foundation for morality.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 85, 86. Later in the same chapter, Royce expressed the following frustration with Nietzsche and other ethical individualists: “In view of such considerations, when I listen to our modern ethical individualists,—to our poets, dramatists, essayists who glorify personal initiative—to our Walt Whitman, to Ibsen, and, above all, when I listen to Nietzsche,—I confess that these men move me for a time, but that ere long I begin to listen with impatience. Of course, I then say, be indeed autonomous. Be an individual. But for Heaven’s sake, set about the task. Do not forever whet the sword of your resolve. Begin the battle of real individuality. Why these endless preliminary gesticulations? ‘Leave off thy grimaces,’ and begin. There is only one way to be an ethical individual. That is to choose your cause, and then to serve it, as the Samurai his feudal chief, as the ideal knight of romantic story his lady,—in the spirit of all the loyal.” Ibid., 98.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 382, 383. For further discussion on Royce’s understanding and uses of the Übermensch, see Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Neither Rock nor Refuge, 234-242.

Nietzsche's brand of individualism, in Royce's estimation could not be divorced from his critique of Christianity. A posthumously discovered essay of Royce's published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1917 noted that Nietzsche viewed "with aristocratic contempt" those who were content with their lot in life or who were willing to remain enslaved to a particular "ethical destiny" or "religious tradition." But those awakened by his call were to rebel not only "against tradition" but against one's "own narrowness and pettiness of sentiment," thereby paving the way to "win through strenuous activity the discovery of what that higher ideal individual is to mean."<sup>41</sup> Royce believed Nietzsche proved insightful with his observations of the foibles of "conventional Christian morality," but he did not find in Nietzsche a "historically accurate estimate of Christianity." Royce ultimately believed that there was a rich irony at the heart of Nietzsche's individualism: "He glorifies the aristocratic self; but the self of which he speaks turns out to be an invisible and ideal self, as unseen as is the risen and ascended Lord of the ancient faith; as much an object of service as was ever the God against whom Nietzsche revolted."<sup>42</sup>

The attention of the "Golden Age" philosophers toward Nietzsche, though illuminating, was limited during the age of professionalization and specialization at Harvard University. Peripheral figures served to fill the gaps and promote attention to his ideas. Several European scholars—one permanent, one exchange and one visiting professor—included Nietzsche in their lectures, courses or writings.<sup>43</sup> Kuno Francke (1855-1930), for example, came to Harvard in 1884 and taught German language and literature for over thirty years. He chiefly was interested in understanding American

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<sup>41</sup> Royce, "Nietzsche," *Atlantic Monthly* 119, no. 3 (March 1917): 323.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 330, 331.

<sup>43</sup> One noticeable exception was the German scholar Hugo Münsterberg, who taught at Harvard from 1892 to 1916, with the exception of a brief period back in Germany. His professional focus was on psychology and he rarely mentioned Nietzsche in his writings.

culture and introducing American audiences to German culture.<sup>44</sup> These efforts included editing a twenty-volume series called *The German Classics: Masterpieces of German Literature*, published in 1914. One volume contained nearly two hundred pages of translated selections from Nietzsche's work and included samples of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Eugen Kuehnemann (1868-1946) was a popular exchange professor from the University of Breslau in Germany who taught at Harvard in 1906 and 1908-9. His focus at Harvard was on German literature and drama, though he also gave public lectures on Nietzsche. The student newspaper, *The Harvard Crimson*, reported on his "important lecture" that sought to correct misunderstandings of Nietzsche, even the notion that Nietzsche was a philosopher at all. Nietzsche marked "the turning point at an exceedingly low epoch" in German thought, but should be considered in terms of "mental attitudes" instead of ideas. Kuehnemann devoted attention to Nietzsche's religious views

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<sup>44</sup> Francke and Hugo Münsterberg both wrote books comparing German and American culture. Each author mentioned Nietzsche as an example of German aristocratic impulses but drew opposite conclusions about his relevance to American society. Francke discussed his study, *Die Amerikaner*, in a *New York Times* interview, where he contrasted the American appreciation for the common man with the German appreciation for aristocracy. He observed, "In literature and art, too, modern Germans are aristocrats, one and all. Goethe, Schiller, the romanticists, Heine, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner—is there one of these who would have desired to figure as a believer in the good sense of the average man?" Hugo Münsterberg's study of Americans drew the opposite conclusion on Nietzsche's applicability: "The suppression of the Chinese in California, the barriers erected against the undesirable types of immigrants from Europe, above all, the adroit laws to deprive the negro of his vote,—all speak the same language, all demonstrate the same way of feeling: the aristocratic morality of a powerful and noble nation, what Nietzsche called the morals of masters—so different from the democratic morals of slaves, who try to make the world believe that all men are equal." See "'The Americans;' Prof. Kuno Francke of Harvard Analyzes Their Traits. Their Characteristics and Comparisons with Germans. Suggestive Study of National Character as Evolved from Composite of Many Types," *The New York Times*, 27 June 1909, SM2. See also Münsterberg, *American Traits from the Point of View of a German* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1901), 226-227.

<sup>45</sup> Kuno Francke, ed., *The German Classics: Masterpieces of German Literature*, Vol. 15 (New York: The German Publication Society, 1914), 253-440. Francke did suggest in 1915 that Nietzsche, Wagner and William II were the most responsible for shaping "the feelings and ideals of the present generation of Germans most conspicuously." See Francke, *A German-American's Confession of Faith* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1915), 22. Ralph Barton Perry approvingly quoted Francke's statement in *The Present Conflict of Ideals*. See Perry, *The Present Conflict of Ideals: A Study of the Philosophical Background of the World War* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), 150.

as well, rejecting the claim that Nietzsche was an atheist and claiming that he was actually “a God-seeker” who longed “for the holiness of an eternal ethical value in life.”<sup>46</sup>

While Francke and Kuehnemann considered Nietzsche from the perspective of promoting a better understanding of German culture, Henri Lichtenberger (1864-1941) was a Nietzsche scholar from the Sorbonne in Paris who served as a visiting lecturer at Harvard from 1914 to 1915. Lichtenberger’s stint at Harvard revealed a lack of interest in Nietzsche at the university.<sup>47</sup> Lichtenberger taught a course on Nietzsche in 1914 that was not even offered through the Philosophy Department but rather the Comparative Literature Department. His course, “Nietzsche,” only resulted in two students signing up—one graduate and one undergraduate student.<sup>48</sup> The student newspaper, the *Harvard Crimson*, noted that Lichtenberger most likely counted on “genuine and widespread interest here in so important a figure of modern philosophy.” Instead, “the meager enrolment in the course” indicated otherwise. The author attributed this disappointing class size to either “the concentration and distribution system” of Harvard’s curriculum or simply to the fact that American students may not have “the same absorbing interests” of their European counterparts.<sup>49</sup> The only dissertation explicitly covering the topic of Nietzsche up to 1920 was not written by an American student but by a British clergyman. Alfred Stanley Mellor, minister of Hope Street Church in Liverpool, England, wrote a

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<sup>46</sup> “Professor Kuehnemann on Nietzsche,” *Harvard Crimson* (Tuesday, April 6, 1909), accessed March 5, 2011, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1909/4/6/professor-kuehnemann-on-nietzsche-pprofessor-eugen/>.

<sup>47</sup> Harvard did, however, University of Berlin philosophy professor Dr. Alois Riehl to give a series of lectures on Nietzsche in November 1913. See “Lectures by Dr. Alois Riehl, Noted German Philosopher to Speak on Nov. 17 and 18 at 4:30,” *Harvard Crimson* (Nov. 8, 1913), accessed March 5, 2011, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1913/11/8/lectures-by-dr-alois-riehl-pdr/>.

<sup>48</sup> Harvard University, *Reports of the President and the Treasurer of Harvard College, 1914-1915; Reports of Departments: Faculty of Arts and Sciences* (Cambridge: Published by the University, 1916), 42.

<sup>49</sup> “Lichtenberger on the Drama,” *Harvard Crimson* (Dec. 12, 1914), accessed March 5, 2011, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1914/12/2/lichtenberger-on-the-drama-pwhen-professor/>.

study of German individualism “with special reference to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer” in 1909.<sup>50</sup>

It was left to Ralph Barton Perry to offer the most extensive critique of Nietzsche from a Harvard professor in a book written in the midst of World War I. *The Present Conflict of Ideals* (1918) explored the “philosophical background of the world war.” Perry understood Nietzsche not as “a madman” or “a miscreant” but as a sharp critic of “the reigning tendencies and sentiments of his age.” He perceived that Nietzsche intentionally assaulted “the code by which most of civilized European mankind conduct their lives” with particular venom reserved for Christianity. Perry argued that there was “a distinctively Darwinian strain” in the ethics of Nietzsche which corresponded with his attack on Christianity on the grounds that it “tends to excuse incompetence, lower standards, and negate aspirations.” Nietzsche was not content to stop at demolition, Perry observed, but offered a “new gospel” centered on the will to power. Perry acknowledged Nietzsche’s criticisms of Germany and described Nietzsche as “a professed cosmopolitan” as opposed to a nationalist. But Perry did suggest that Nietzsche inspired Germany to fight not for territorial gain or “commercial rapacity” but rather for “that claim of dominion that comes from a conviction of innate superiority.” Perry concluded that “a profound moral agreement” existed “between the teachings of Nietzsche and the spirit of modern Germany.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Harvard University, *Doctors of Philosophy and Doctors of Science Who Have Received Their Degree in Course from Harvard University 1873-1916 with the Title of Their Theses* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1916), 107.

<sup>51</sup> Perry, *The Present Conflict of Ideals*, 150, 154, 160, 168, 427. Perry elaborated on Nietzsche’s use and misuse by contemporary Germans: “It is true that there is in this a certain injustice to Nietzsche. His Superman was an intellectual hero, rather than a hero of muscle and iron. And Nietzsche thought that the heroic lie was redeemed by suffering, as it was in his own case. But the fact remains that he proclaimed the will to power to be the central motive in life; and that he encouraged men to acquire strength and to

Perry's wartime reflections revealed a level of engagement with Nietzsche unsurpassed by his peers. Nietzsche ultimately received little consideration at Harvard University during its Golden Age and while it was transformed by the forces of professionalization and specialization. The sparse attention demonstrated by faculty writings, curriculum offerings, course attendance, and scant dissertation offerings revealed that Nietzsche's reputation as a serious philosopher had not yet come to fruition. Nietzsche's critique of Christianity did receive attention, though largely unfavorably, when discussed by Harvard scholars. Ultimately, it was a competing institution, Cornell University, that treated Nietzsche and his critique of Christianity as a topic perfectly suited for professional philosophy.

### **Nietzsche, 'Old and Dear Beliefs' and Professional Philosophy at Cornell**

The founding of Cornell University in 1868, fueled in part by the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, was a quintessential example of the changes enveloping American higher education. Cornell was not founded with the explicitly religious heritage of Harvard and other prominent colleges and universities. Cornell University President Jacob Gould Schurman (1854-1942) observed in his 1892 inaugural address that the college, "free from all party and sectarian control," offered "a curriculum which is designed for the liberal and practical education of all classes of the people." Cornell, he envisioned, would focus both on liberal and mechanical arts while being more socially

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exercise it by the subordination of the weak. His readers are scarcely to be blamed for having interpreted power in terms of war, and the caste of Supermen in terms of a superior race or nation." *Ibid.*, 428.

inclusive than previously established institutions.<sup>52</sup> Cornell's self-consciously non-sectarian profile was promoted by its first president and co-founder Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918), who by the 1890s had become a lightning rod for the controversy regarding the competing claims for authority of science and religion.<sup>53</sup> White, who was selected by benefactor and liberal Quaker Ezra Cornell to head the new institution, had himself had moved from away from his traditional Christian upbringing while studying at Yale University. His "distrust for prevailing orthodoxy," he later wrote in his autobiography, was due to his studies that reinforced skepticism about Christianity's historical claims, his sympathetic exposure to liberal Protestant clergymen, and his disappointment over the orthodox support for slavery leading up to the Civil War.<sup>54</sup> White's embrace of liberal Protestantism, religious pluralism and tolerance had been strengthened by the time he assumed the Presidency at Cornell, where he supported liberal components of the faith while maintaining a non-sectarian approach.

White's successor emerged out of Cornell's Philosophy Department. Jacob Gould Schurman came to Cornell as a professor of Christian ethics and moral philosophy in 1886. He assumed the Presidency in 1892 and oversaw the transformation of Cornell into a research university until his departure in 1920. Schurman wrote extensively on the relation between theology and science and was well-versed in the debates surrounding

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<sup>52</sup> Jacob Gould Schurman, "Inaugural Address," in Cornell University, *Proceedings and Addresses at the Inauguration of Jacob Gould Schurman, LL.D. to the Presidency of Cornell University, November 11, 1892* (Ithaca NY: Published for the University, 1892), 56.

<sup>53</sup> White's 1896 book *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* took a dim view of religion's historical record in regard to the spirit of intellectual inquiry, even if White's understanding of the history of religion and science was shaped by contemporary battles in the academy. For more background see Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 117-119.

<sup>54</sup> White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White, Volume Two* (New York: The Century Co., 1905), 532-533. For a fuller description of the development of White's religious views, see *Ibid.*, 529-541.

conflicting sources of authority in the academy and modern society.<sup>55</sup> Schurman's ascendancy to the Presidency secured a prominent status for the Philosophy Department at Cornell. The Sage School of Philosophy established a professional journal, *The Philosophical Review*, which became a venue for Cornell professors and students and a standard bearer in professional philosophical circles. The department secured a contract with the Macmillan Company to publish completed student dissertations deemed significant in a series called the "Cornell Studies in Philosophy."<sup>56</sup> Cornell's relatively young age, lack of sectarian connection, and rapid professionalization and specialization under Schurman appeared to create an environment in which scholars were free to engage more recent philosophical trends. These institutional advantages enabled Cornell to produce the first American Nietzsche specialist, Grace Neal Dolson (1874-1961), who as a woman in a predominantly male field fittingly embodied the school's emphasis upon social equality.

Grace Neal Dolson completed both the first American dissertation and monograph on the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, thus making her a pioneer in asserting his credibility in the world of American professional philosophy. The New York native, who

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Schurman writes: "And scientific thinkers have already developed a natural theology, though in their zeal to destroy the old, they have almost lost sight of their own discovery. Has not the man of science an object of worship? He calls it Nature rather than God; but what's in a name? It is an object that inspires awe, and the scientist's most frequent complaint against popular Christianity is that it is too familiar with that Eternal Being before whom prophets of old hid their faces in the dust....As the priests of old knew how to win the favor of the gods, so the scientist understands how to gain the co-operation of Nature. If, in its revolt against traditional Christianity, modern science has been forced to construct *de novo* a religion of its own, what it has attained is an object of worship resembling the God of Sinai, though conceived altogether in terms of cosmic science. And as the anthropic theism of ecclesiastical Christianity is destined to take on also a cosmic character, it seems not rash to predict that the cosmic theism of secular science will complete itself by taking account of human ideals, and so go on to add to the awe of Judaism the loving confidence of Christianity." See Schurman, *Belief in God: Its Origin, Nature, and Basis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 234-235. See also idem, *The Ethical Import of Darwinism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903).

<sup>56</sup> For an overview of these developments and of the history of the Sage School of Philosophy, see Frank R. Holmes and Lewis A. Williams, Jr., *Cornell University: A History, Volume Two* (New York: The University Publishing Society, 1905), 66-80.

received her A.B. in philosophy at Cornell in 1896, served as a fellow in the philosophy department during the 1898-9 academic year, and earned her Ph.D. in 1899, expressed surprise at the American neglect of the philosopher despite the opportunities presented by a growing number of professional journals and translations of Nietzsche works.<sup>57</sup>

Dolson's dissertation was later published in book form by Macmillan in 1901 and was supplemented with one article and eleven reviews on Nietzsche for the *Philosophical Review*. She engaged other Nietzsche scholarship both in Europe and North America and secured teaching positions at Wells College and Smith College. Her reviews were primarily informative in nature, with subtle and yet pungent criticism occasionally being offered.<sup>58</sup> Dolson also engaged subsequent American critics of Nietzsche, taking prominent authors such as classicist Paul Elmer More and independent philosopher Paul Carus to task for their unfair portrayals of Nietzsche.<sup>59</sup> Yet Dolson also guarded against unwarranted enthusiasm for Nietzsche as well, as evidenced by her final publication in a

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<sup>57</sup> Grace Neal Dolson, review of *Nietzsche als Philosoph*, by Hans Vaihinger, *Philosophical Review* 11, no. 6 (November 1902): 661-663.

<sup>58</sup> The following reviews are predominantly explanatory and not evaluative: Dolson, review of *Nietzsche's Stellung zu den Grundfragen der Ethik Gentsch Dargestellt*, by Georg A. Tienes and Ludwig Stein, *Philosophical Review* 9, no. 5 (September 1900): 565; idem, review of *Friedrich Nietzsche und seine Herrenmoral*, by M. Kronenberg, *Philosophical Review* 10, no. 5 (September 1901): 567-568; idem, review of *Nietzsche's Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik: Darstellung und Kritik*, by Rudolf Eisler, *Philosophical Review* 13, no. 2 (March 1904): 252; idem, review of *Friedrich Nietzsche: Darstellung und Kritik*, by Jakob J. Hollitscher, *Philosophical Review* 14, no. 3 (May 1905): 372-373. Her strategy is similar in reviewing Danish Nietzsche admirer George Brandes' book. See idem, review of *Friedrich Nietzsche*, by George Brandes, *Philosophical Review* 24, no. 5 (September 1915): 566-567. The following review offers more critique: idem, review of *Friedrich Nietzsche, sein Leben und sein Werk*, by Raoul Richter; *Friedrich Nietzsche und das Erkenntnisproblem: Ein Monographischer Versuch*, by Friedrich Rittelmeyer.; *Frederic Nietzsche: Contribution a l'Histoire des Idees Philosophiques et Sociales a la fin du XIXe Siecle*, by Eugene de Roberty; *Nietzsche et l'Immoralisme*, by Alfred Fouillee, *Philosophical Review* 13, no. 1 (January 1904): 100-103.

<sup>59</sup> Dolson stated that More's monograph was hampered by his tendency to resort to "bare assertion" rather than "reasoned argument" in his "popular" treatment of Nietzsche. See Dolson, review of *Nietzsche*, by Paul Elmer More, *Philosophical Review* 22, no. 5 (September 1913): 567. She charged Carus's book with being full of repetition, vague generalizations and factual errors. See idem, review of *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism*, by Paul Carus, *Philosophical Review* 24, no. 5 (September 1915): 568. Ironically, Dolson received a much more favorable review of her own work fourteen years earlier in the journal Carus edited. See "Book Reviews," *Monist* 11, no. 4 (July 1901): 635-636.

professional journal: a review of William Mackintire Salter's 1917 book *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*. Dolson credited Salter with writing the best English work to date on Nietzsche, though she criticized him for "an excessive sympathy with the philosophical fortunes" of Nietzsche. She recognized Salter's desire to clear Nietzsche of fault for the Great War, and agreed with him that ignorance was largely to blame for hostility to Nietzsche. While it was "absurd" to blame Nietzsche for causing the war, Dolson believed it possible to look to his theories for a "justification for all that his countrymen have done or may still do."<sup>60</sup>

Dolson's reference to the Great War certainly demonstrated an important discourse for Nietzsche reception, but she also considered Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in her writings. Dolson recognized that Nietzsche devoted "much space and not a little harsh language" to Christianity, which explained why he had such a hold on "the popular mind." She contextualized Nietzsche by placing him among "a large body of learned men," especially from Germany, "who find nothing to praise and everything to blame" in Christianity. While finding some merit in their criticisms, Dolson wondered whether they undermined their position while displaying a level of "intolerance even more unyielding than that which they blame in their opponents." Nietzsche's primary objections to Christianity, as understood by Dolson, were that it was untrue, that it failed to live up to its own values, and that it had very negative practical effects in society and throughout history.<sup>61</sup> Dolson elaborated upon these criticisms in the broader framework that she offered for Nietzsche's thought, one in which divided his work into three loosely

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<sup>60</sup> Dolson, review of *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*, by William Mackintire Salter, *International Journal of Ethics* 28, no. 4 (July 1918): 555, 558.

<sup>61</sup> Dolson, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 53, 56, 66-68.

chronological periods. Nietzsche's early writings embodied his aesthetic period, in which he elevated beauty over the moral and intellectual aspects of life and proclaimed it "the supreme reason for existence." Nietzsche's middle writings encapsulated his intellectual period, when he wrote about "the nature of truth and man's relation to it." Nietzsche challenged the metaphysical assumptions of truth claims, the scientific foundations of culture, the authority and beliefs of religion, and the legitimacy of Christian ethics in these works. Finally, Nietzsche's ethical period deepened his "destructive criticism of existing standards" but also offered positive prescriptions culminating in *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Dolson argued that this final period represented Nietzsche's most enduring contribution to philosophy.<sup>62</sup>

Dolson closed her work by assessing Nietzsche's significance. Her conclusions were suggestive of the shifts in cultural authority, for she understood Nietzsche's legacy and utility as matters of ethics and recognized the centrality of his indictment of Christianity to any moral or ethical alternative. The "extreme individualism" of Nietzsche, culminating in the development of the Over-man, meant the destruction of "sympathy with others, old and dear beliefs, cherished aims and ambitions" that were such crucial elements of the "social ideal."<sup>63</sup> Dolson recognized that for Nietzsche, Christianity represented not merely a religious system but one with enormous social and cultural implications. This expansive understanding of Christianity, in Nietzsche's estimation, was what made it so insidious. But she also criticized Nietzsche's alternative vision for being arbitrary and elitist. "A morality that is to apply only to a favored few of the race might seem at first to require less justification than a more universal system,"

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 21, 34, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 98, 101.

Dolson argued, “but in reality it requires more; for it must justify the acceptance of such an arbitrary division, and this Nietzsche never pretended to do.”<sup>64</sup>

Dolson’s career as the first American Nietzsche specialist was indicative of the keen interest in modern philosophy that was exhibited through curriculum and the publishing interests of their faculty from the turn of the century through the Great War.<sup>65</sup> Ernest Albee (1865-1927) joined the Cornell faculty in 1892, the same year in which he published a *Philosophical Review* essay on a German book about Nietzsche.<sup>66</sup> Albee taught a course multiple times on “German Pessimism, with special reference to Schopenhauer and E. von Hartmann” from 1907-1916 and included Nietzsche in the course description. During the 1918-1919 and 1919-1920 academic years, he taught a course on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.<sup>67</sup> Albee’s colleague Frank Thilly (1865-1934) embarked upon a twenty-eight year career at Cornell in 1906 that included classroom and publishing explorations of Nietzsche’s writings. Thilly’s lecture notes on Nietzsche reveal a wide-ranging survey of his thought, including an awareness of its broader social and religious aspects. Thilly observed that Nietzsche represented “opposition to tradition” and called for liberation from “carrying the burden of past thoughts and institutions upon our shoulders.” But he expressed skepticism that Nietzsche could free himself from the burdens of history and society in his quest for a “transformation of values.” When

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>65</sup> Dolson herself left the academy after teaching at Smith College to join a religious order of the Episcopal Church: “In 1915 Dolson resigned to enter the Community of St. Mary’s on the Mountain in Sewanee, Tennessee. In 1929 she became superintendent of a children’s hospital associated with her order. Eventually, Dolson became assistant superior of St. Mary’s Convent in Peekskill, New York.” See Sandra L. Singer, *Adventures Abroad: North American Women at German-speaking Universities, 1868-1915* (Westport CT: Greenwood Publishing Group Co., 2003), 146.

<sup>66</sup> Ernest Albee, review of *Max Stirner und Friedrich Nietzsche, Erscheinungen des Modernen Geistes, und das Wesen des Menschen*, by Robert Schellwien, *Philosophical Review* 1, no. 6 (November 1892): 661-662.

<sup>67</sup> Cornell University, *Official Publications of Cornell University: Announcement of the College of Arts and Sciences 1918-1919*, 9, no. 10 (Ithaca NY: Cornell University, April 15, 1918), 17.

describing Nietzsche's brand of individualism, Thilly suggested that it was selective, aristocratic and devoid of acknowledgment of how much society was needed to preserve individual "personalities." Nietzsche failed to realize how much his supermen needed "the old-fashioned virtues" such as "self-control, justice, truthfulness, kindness, self-sacrifice, discipline." Nietzsche also misrepresented Christianity, according to Thilly. Nietzsche viewed it as the product of a herd mentality and came at the expense of "the worth of the individual," but Thilly suggested that Christianity made its own claims for individual dignity. He taught that Nietzsche greatly overstated the herd mentality of Christianity. Thilly reminded students that "Christianity is not an easy religion" and that "people with the herd-instinct do not die on crosses and the stake!"<sup>68</sup>

Thilly's writings sounded similar themes while also assessing Nietzsche's historical context and contemporary impact. Nietzsche was symptomatic of modern "dissatisfaction with the methods and results of our rationalistic science and philosophy" and emblematic of a phenomenon echoing well beyond the sphere of intellectual debate: "We are dissatisfied; economically, politically, socially, morally, religiously and intellectually dissatisfied; and our philosophies are mirroring the turmoil of our souls."<sup>69</sup> The contemporary utility of Nietzsche's thought, however, became a point of contention

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<sup>68</sup> See Box 5, "Lectures, 1933-1934," Frank Thilly papers, #14-21-623. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. His notes give the dates Nov, 1928-Nov, 1932 and are listed in a section called "Criticism of Nietzsche."

<sup>69</sup> Frank Thilly, "Romanticism and Rationalism," *Philosophical Review* 22, no. 2 (March 1913): 114. Thilly edited and translated a 1900 book by German ethicist Friedrich Paulsen that mentioned the fascination of the young with Nietzsche and connected it with shifts in traditional belief and authority: "What draws them to Nietzsche? Is it his impressive style? Is it his dazzling, blending, lightning-like, instantaneous illumination of things? Or is it the fact that all the old truths have come to be regarded as trite by our youth, and that they are insanely fond of the most unheard-of paradoxes? The young always have a predilection for the new and unheard-of; it has at least the merit of being opposed to the old and established forms, under the weight of which we are groaning, to the trivial truths of the Sunday School class, the trivial truths of morals, and those upon which candidates for degrees are examined." See Paulsen, *A System of Ethics*, ed. and trans. Frank Thilly (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 153-154.

with Thilly. His views on the matter serve to highlight the different assessments of Nietzsche's value offered by professional philosophers in comparison to cultural critics and social activists outside the academy. Thilly's evaluation of Nietzsche's usefulness was colored not only by his opinion of Nietzsche's thought but by his own expectations of what a philosopher should be. Nietzsche believed, according to Thilly, that "the function of the philosopher" was "to create new values, new ideals, a new civilization." This belief was fundamental to understanding the primary "motif" of Nietzsche's philosophy, which saw life as a striving for power in a world of struggle and conflict. Civilization's purpose in this world was to facilitate "the development of the will for power, the creation of strong men, of great individuals, of powerful personalities."<sup>70</sup>

But Thilly dismissed Nietzsche's description of life as a "noisy, furious, bloody battlefield" where we should seek out "'higher' types of men." The civilization needed to raise these higher men would require new values, the creation of which Nietzsche assumed to be his role. Thilly rejected Nietzsche's presumptuous claim to be a creator of new values, arguing that "values cannot be created by self-constituted lawgivers." Thilly asserted that "the creating and legislating business" should be left to others and that "philosophers must content themselves with the more modest task of discovering the values to which mankind has given expression and which it is striving to realize in all its institutions."<sup>71</sup> Thilly's parameters for philosophers put him at odds with cultural critics and social activists who appropriated Nietzsche for their respective agendas. He

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<sup>70</sup> Thilly, "The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche," *Popular Science Monthly* 67 (1905): 708, 715. Thilly also offered a similar, brief summary of Nietzsche's thought in idem, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 574-577.

<sup>71</sup> Frank Thilly, review of *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* by Friedrich Nietzsche and translated by Helen Zimmern (*The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 5, no. 3 (January 30, 1908): 77.

understood Nietzsche's disenchantment with traditional morality and the current democratic vogue to be reflective of current trends in modern thought. But he operated in the realm of academic philosophy, where the culture of professionalization and specialization reinforced his view of philosophers as accumulators of knowledge as opposed to creators of value.

### **'A Travesty Upon Philosophy': Nietzsche at Columbia University**

Nietzsche's utility was also questioned at Columbia University, as demonstrated by the observations of its influential president Nicholas Murray Butler (1862-1947). He was a formidable and academically engaged presence at Columbia—to an extent that elicited controversy in several cases—who took a particular interest in the direction of the Department of Philosophy.<sup>72</sup> Butler, who served as Columbia's president from 1902-1945, oversaw the transformation of higher education and offered his own preferences about the nature and study of philosophy in the modern university. He believed that the Department of Philosophy played an important role in Columbia University's mission and organization. Butler, aware of the onset of specialization, contended that “the faculty of Philosophy” represented “the unity of knowledge and the true catholicity of scholarly investigation.”<sup>73</sup> But given such a responsibility, one that previously was held by religion, the content studied in philosophy departments became especially important. Butler bemoaned the “anti-philosophies” that dominated the contemporary academic climate. He named several examples of philosophical trends that distracted the field of

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<sup>72</sup> Butler was involved in several controversies regarding academic freedom. See Julie Rueben's discussion of academic freedom and the firing of James McKeen Cattell and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana at Columbia in *The Making of the Modern University*, 198-201.

<sup>73</sup> Nicholas Murray Butler, *The Meaning of Education: Contributions to a Philosophy of Education*, revised and enlarged edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 278.

philosophy from the superior insights of classical philosophy, where Butler highlighted Plato and Aristotle in particular. The psychological emphasis of John Locke and William James and the dominance of “the natural and experimental sciences” had left modern philosophy lacking depth and direction.<sup>74</sup> Butler believed that philosophy should focus on “the genuine masters of philosophic thinking.” He certainly did not believe Nietzsche belonged to that select group. Butler dismissed “the clever intellectual posing and attitudinizing of Nietzsche,” which he judged “a travesty upon philosophy.”<sup>75</sup> Butler built a faculty that gave limited attention to Nietzsche but that ironically helped create conditions in which Nietzsche would get a more favorable hearing in the future, including at Columbia.

The embrace of professionalization and specialization, along with the building of naturalist-leaning faculty, contributed to the marginalization of Protestant Christianity at Columbia and combined with other factors to open intellectual channels to Nietzsche in future decades. But even the limited attention of the first few decades of reception at Columbia is instructive. John Dewey (1859-1952), the prominent American philosopher whose influence coincided with the expanding authority of the modern university, was one of the “guardians of a national intellectual culture” during the early and middle

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<sup>74</sup> Edward C. Elliott, ed., *The Rise of a University II: The University in Action; From the Annual Reports, 1902-1935, of Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 325.

<sup>75</sup> Butler, *Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 23. Butler’s full quote which precedes his comment on Nietzsche: “This view of the teaching of philosophy, which I hold to be the correct one, is the reason why students of philosophy, particularly beginners, should concern themselves with the works of genuine masters of philosophic thinking, and not waste their time and dissipate their energies upon the quasi-philosophical and the frivolously-philosophical writing, chiefly modern and largely contemporary, which may not be inappropriately described as involving Great Journeys to the Homes of Little Thoughts!” Ibid.

decades of the twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> The enormous influence of Dewey, a member of the Philosophy Faculty at Columbia from 1904-1930, meant that the instrumentalist brand of pragmatism would be a dominant paradigm from which to engage philosophy.

Instrumentalism focused on the naturalistic environment and the role of experience in shaping the process of knowing. Dewey rejected the existence of ideas detached from experience or environment and suggested that they gained significance through “implementation,” which “necessitates action.”<sup>77</sup> He focused on knowing as a form of behavior rather than as any kind of transcendent act: “It means that knowing is literally something which we do; that analysis is ultimately physical and active; that meanings in their logical quality are standpoints, attitudes, and methods of behaving toward facts, and that active experimentation is essential to verification.”<sup>78</sup>

Dewey’s instrumentalist framework of knowing and evaluating led to a brief, dismissive comment on Nietzsche in his 1916 work *Essays in Experimental Logic*, where an unimpressed Dewey suggested that Nietzsche claims too much self-credit for heralding a “transvaluation of all values.” Any judgment or valuation, Dewey responded,

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<sup>76</sup> Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 230.

<sup>77</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 48. Dewey framed instrumentalism in the following terms when responding to Josiah Royce’s idealist critique: “Let us try, with a more unbiased sympathy, to take that point of view from which ‘human opinions, judgments, ideas, *are part of the effort of a live creature to adapt himself to his natural world,*’ where beliefs are organic functions, and experiences are organic adaptations involving such functions; and where the issue—the success or failure—of these adaptations constitutes the *value* of the beliefs in question.” See Dewey, “A Reply to Professor Royce’s Critique of Instrumentalism,” *Philosophical Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1912): 73. Dewey also suggested that the “origin, structure and purpose of knowing,” according to instrumentalism, rendered irrelevant “wholesale inquiries into the nature of Being.” See Dewey, “Some Implications of Anti-Intellectualism,” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* 7, no. 18 (September 1, 1910): 479.

<sup>78</sup> Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), 332.

was “a revaluation” to an extent.<sup>79</sup> Beyond scant references, however, Dewey’s voluminous writings gave little attention to Nietzsche and expressed disrespect for the German philosopher on those rare occasions. Dewey was well-versed in German philosophy but preferred Kant to Nietzsche. Dewey’s effort to explain the relationship between German philosophy and the political and military crises of the day, when the Great War broke out, revealed that preference. The uniqueness of German civilization was summed up by Dewey as a “combination of self-conscious idealism with unsurpassed technical efficiency and organization in the varied fields of action.” It was Kant’s thought that most fully represented these specifically German characteristics and that offered valuable insight into the crisis of the German soul at the time of the Great War. Nietzsche’s philosophy, by contrast, was dismissed by Dewey as “a superficial and transitory wave of opinion” that offered little in terms of longevity or immediate explanatory value.<sup>80</sup>

Dewey’s colleagues at Columbia also largely ignored Nietzsche, if published writings were any indication. Longtime colleague, professor and dean at Columbia, Frederick J.E. Woodbridge (1867-1940), never mentioned Nietzsche in his writings. He did begin the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, an academic journal which contained articles and reviews on Nietzsche.<sup>81</sup> But his own philosophical

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Dewey’s co-written volume *Ethics* barely mentions Nietzsche as well and does so superficially. In depicting the “Might Makes Right” position, Dewey and co-author James Hayden Tufts write, “The essence of this view is, therefore, that might is right, and that no legislation or conventional code ought to stand in the way of the free assertion of genius and power. It is similar to the teaching of Nietzsche in recent times.” Dewey and James Hayden Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1908), 121-122.

<sup>80</sup> John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), 28.

<sup>81</sup> Two articles by leading Nietzsche scholar William Mackintire Salter were published in the journal. See Salter, “Nietzsche’s Superman,” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 12, no. 16 (August 5, 1915): 421-438; Salter, “Nietzsche’s Attitude to Religion,” *Journal of Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (February 15, 1923): 104-106.

emphases, similar to Dewey, were more pragmatic. William Pepperell Montague (1873-1953), an advocate of what was known as the “new realism,” rarely referenced Nietzsche in his writings until the eve of the Second World War.<sup>82</sup> One minor exception in the department was George Stuart Fullerton (1859-1925), who noted the appeal and content of Nietzsche’s thought in a 1922 book, *A Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Fullerton, perhaps drawing on his experience with students, observed that Nietzsche made “a strong appeal to young men” who embraced the radical individualist prior to taking social responsibility for building their own communities. Fullerton maintained that Nietzsche was a difficult case for a professional philosopher focusing on ethics, given that he was not “systematic and scientific” in his writings. But he recognized that Nietzsche’s appeal lay less in a coherent body of systematic philosophy and more in his status as “revolt incarnate.” Nietzsche’s rebellion consisted of a repudiation of the morality “accepted heretofore by moralists and communities of men generally.” It was left to “the serious student of ethics” to determine “scientifically” just how far one may accept and apply Nietzsche’s alternative, as manifested in the radically individualist Superman.<sup>83</sup>

Ethical and religious concerns were primary on those occasions when Nietzsche was discussed in the classroom. Dickinson Sergeant Miller (1868-1963), who taught in the department from 1904 to 1919 and served simultaneously as a professor of Christian apologetics at the General Theological Seminary, taught a course during the 1908-1909

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<sup>82</sup> See Edwin B. Holt, Walter T. Marvin, William Pepperell Montague, Ralph Barton Perry, Walter B. Pitkin and Edward Gleason Spaulding, *The New Realism: Cooperative Studies in Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912). For discussions of Nietzsche in later works, see Montague, *The Way of Things; A Philosophy of Knowledge, Nature and Value* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940); *Great Visions of Philosophy; Varieties of Speculative Thought in the West from the Greeks to Bergson* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1950).

<sup>83</sup> George Stuart Fullerton, *A Handbook of Ethical Theory* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), 282, 283, 285. Fullerton, similar to Dewey, believed that Nietzsche and his followers took too much credit for originality.

academic year for upperclassmen and graduate students in the Philosophy Department that looked at Nietzsche in depth. The course, “Modern Ethical Ideals,” discussed Nietzsche’s ideas in conjunction with those of Jean-Marie Guyau, Leo Tolstoy and Henrik Ibsen. Miller’s course description stated that the goal was to understand and evaluate their ethical ideals, in order “to reach a more complete view.”<sup>84</sup> Other fragmentary evidence suggests that Nietzsche was read by Columbia students by 1914. A publication that offered “reading lists based on Columbia University courses” included a course on “Contemporary Philosophy and Metaphysics,” in which several Nietzsche works were included on the reading list.<sup>85</sup> One 1920 university pamphlet more explicitly highlighted the importance of understanding Nietzsche’s implications for religion and ethics in general and Christianity in particular. It listed graduate student reading lists and examination questions for various philosophical themes and time periods. “German Philosophy from Kant to the Present” included William Mackintire Salter’s *Nietzsche: The Thinker* on its list of eight readings as well as subjecting students to the critiques of Nietzsche by Santayana and Dewey. Two of the thirty-five questions dealt with Christian morality” and to “describe his own ideals, especially as embodied in the superman.”<sup>86</sup>

Beyond negligible attention from faculty members and fragmentary evidence from the classroom, Nietzsche was evaluated most thoroughly by a prominent Columbia faculty member and former Butler classmate outside the parameters of the Philosophy

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<sup>84</sup> Columbia University, *Columbia University Bulletin of Information; Division of Philosophy, Psychology, and Anthropology; Announcement 1908-1910* (Morningside Heights NY: Columbia University in the City of New York, 1908), 6.

<sup>85</sup> Nietzsche’s inclusion on the list involved selections from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *The Will to Power*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Human, All Too Human*. See Columbia University, *Reading Lists Based on Columbia University Courses; Extension Teaching* (Morningside Heights NY: Columbia University in the City of New York, 1914), 30.

<sup>86</sup> Columbia University, *The History of Philosophy; Bibliographies and Questions, Philosophy 61-62, 161-162* (Morningside Heights NY: Columbia University in the City of New York, 1920), 42.

Department. Harry Thurston Peck (1856-1914), was an early American critic of Nietzsche who recognized the religious implications and context of his ideas. Prior to a spectacular scandal that led to his professional and personal ruin, Peck held the prestigious Anthon Professor of Latin Language and Literature chair at Columbia University and was a recognized public intellectual in New York with a keen interest in philosophical ideas.<sup>87</sup> He was a scholar Nietzsche's field of philology, edited and wrote for *The Bookman*, and in 1898 published an article on Nietzsche. Nietzsche was still alive at the time of publication, but Peck already perceived him as a tragic figure due to both his personal story and misguided views. Peck's piece on "The Mad Philosopher" also cast Nietzsche's thought in religious terms. His "philosophical pilgrimage" began as a devotee of Schopenhauer before he forged his own identity as an "open enemy of Christianity." Peck argued that Nietzsche's enmity toward Christianity was due to the "mistaken identification of the modern Christian spirit with mediaeval asceticism." This misunderstanding led to "a sweeping attack" on the Church and a belief that Christianity was "absolutely negative" in terms of offering joy or understanding desire.<sup>88</sup>

Nietzsche responded, according to Peck, by seeking a novel, alternative vision with "a spirit of intense dogmatism." Nietzsche's efforts, self-consciously detached from the traditions of the past and relying upon his own intellectual capabilities, produced tragic and "terribly pathetic" results. Not only did Nietzsche descend into insanity, Peck noted, but he also never was able to create anything new. Nietzsche's rejection of past traditions resulted in his not adding "one atom" to what had been previously written,

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<sup>87</sup> For a thorough account of Peck's scandal, which involved letters he had written to a mistress being published in New York tabloids, see Michael Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous: The Amazing Career of the Redoubtable Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 198-217.

<sup>88</sup> Harry Thurston Peck, "The Mad Philosopher," *Bookman* 8, no. 1 (September 1898): 28, 29.

particularly by the ancient Greeks.<sup>89</sup> Nietzsche's descent into atheism also provided lessons for those wandering "in the darkness of uncertainty" due to reliance upon their own reason. They might, like Nietzsche, end up overwhelmed by the "depths of infinite despair" and remain negligent of the illumination, stability, harmony and beauty offered by "the House of Faith." Peck attached his observation to a larger assessment of Catholic and Protestant viability in the face of modernity. He suggested that modern Protestantism was less equipped—due to its fractious and splintered nature—than Catholicism to convey that truth and respond to the intellectual challenge of Nietzsche and modern atheism.<sup>90</sup> More than any other professor at Columbia, Peck connected Nietzsche's religious critique with Protestant Christianity's authority and ability to withstand formidable intellectual challenges in a modern setting.

### **Nietzsche and the 'Shackles of Reigning Dogmatism' at Chicago**

The University of Chicago offers another example in the history of Nietzsche reception in the age of professionalization and specialization in which a scholar outside the confines of the Philosophy Department proved to be the central source of interest and scholarship in Nietzsche. The institution, with the patronage of industrialist and Standard Oil Company founder John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937), was established as a Baptist university in 1891 and quickly became enmeshed in the controversies throughout American Protestantism regarding the authority of Scripture, miracles and traditional dogma. Its philosophy department, under the influence of John Dewey until his 1905

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 30, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 32. See Ratner-Rosenhagen's discussion of Peck in "Neither Rock nor Refuge," 47-49. She notes the religious component of Peck's explanation of Nietzsche's insanity and observes the following: "In Nietzsche's insanity, Peck found a tragic exemplar of the dangerous tendency of modern man to attempt to apprehend the nature of existence via secular, rational, and scientific methods." Ibid., 49

departure, became a hotbed for instrumentalism and contained faculty members with Protestant backgrounds who were interested in addressing the tensions within American Protestantism. Scholars such as Edward Scribner Ames (1870-1958) explicitly sought to reconcile Christianity with the social sciences, modern learning, and alternate sources of authority.<sup>91</sup>

University of Chicago founding president William Rainey Harper (1856-1906) lamented the prospect of college and universities, which often originated “as training schools for Christian services,” becoming “centers of influence destructive” to Christian faith and practice.<sup>92</sup> Harper, who served as President from 1891 to 1906, acknowledged that subjects were studied and professional careers pursued outside the purview of Christian service. He also noted that many students had come to question Christianity due to a shift in authority from parents, teachers and pastors to an embrace of “the scientific attitude of the mind cultivated in most colleges as well as universities.” Harper did not believe, however, that the modern research university necessitated a lack of religious faith, despite the fact that the very structure and emphases of the curriculum marginalized the role of religion and shifted authority to other sources such as science. In fact, Harper called for “chairs of Bible instruction in every institution” and took a particular interest in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago.<sup>93</sup> Harper made a critical hire in George Burman Foster (1858-1919), whose liberal Protestant outlook triggered controversy at

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<sup>91</sup> Ames was both a philosophy professor and a pastor of Hyde Park Church of Disciples of Christ who wrote numerous works on the psychology of religion. See Edward Scribner Ames, *The Psychology of Religious Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910); and idem, *The Higher Individualism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915).

<sup>92</sup> Harper, *Religion and the Higher Life*, 132.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 139.

Chicago and who became one of the leading exegetes of Nietzsche during the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup>

Foster's exposition of Nietzsche will be taken up in more detail in Chapter Four as a reflection of liberal Protestant engagement with Nietzsche. What was significant about Foster in the context of Nietzsche reception during the age the professionalization and specialization was his changing position in the university. Foster was such a source of tension at the Divinity School that he was transferred to the Department of Comparative Religion, where he served as Professor of Philosophy of Religion.<sup>95</sup> This enabled Foster to project his interest in Nietzsche more broadly in the life of the University. Foster's lectures and writings prompted controversy due to his rejection and reframing of traditional Christian teachings. He called for readers to focus religion's worth and function rather than accepting traditional beliefs and assumptions about God, the Bible, and miracles which were promoted by the "religion of authority." He encouraged them to exchange "the world of Thomas Aquinas for that of Kant and Lotze and Charles Darwin."<sup>96</sup> Foster praised Nietzsche for recognizing "the danger of our being smothered beneath the burden of the past" at the expense of the present.<sup>97</sup> It came as no surprise, therefore, to hear that Foster's colleague at the University of Chicago, Hiram Van Kirk, once described Foster's mission as breaking "the shackles of the reigning dogmatism."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For a succinct overview of George Burman Foster's life and career, along with additional context on the University of Chicago Divinity School, see Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, vol. 2, *Idealism, Realism and Modernity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 156-161.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>96</sup> George Burman Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 147.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>98</sup> Hiram Van Kirk, "The Growth of Authority Religion," George Burman Foster Papers (Box 8, Folder 9), Special Collection Research Papers, University of Chicago Library. Van Kirk added that Foster's mission

Foster did so by offering a series of fifteen lectures on Nietzsche in the summer of 1917 that later served as the basis of a posthumously published book.<sup>99</sup> Foster discussed Nietzsche's life, writings, his relation to Schopenhauer and Wagner, and his relevance in regard to key themes such as feminism, the state, militarism, democracy, science, art, morality, skepticism, Jesus, atheism and the superman.<sup>100</sup> Foster's lecture series coincided with a course taught that same summer by visiting Professor Ralph Barton Perry of Harvard on "Present Philosophic Tendencies," which considered Nietzsche among other contemporary thinkers.<sup>101</sup> While the onset of the Great War undoubtedly piqued interest in Nietzsche, Foster's interest pre-dated and transcended that event, as he continued to draw out the social and religious relevance of Nietzsche at a time when Protestant cultural authority was being challenged, or at least transformed, at a university with a religious heritage.

Foster's interest in Nietzsche especially was palpable given the Department of Philosophy's comparable disinterest. John Dewey was the central figure in the department prior to his 1905 departure to Columbia University, though a like-minded group remained at Chicago. The "Chicago Pragmatists" included longtime University of Chicago professors George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), Edward Scribner Ames, Addison Moore (1866-1930) and James Hayden Tufts (1862-1942).<sup>102</sup> Their writings and courses

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was to follow German theologian and biblical critic David Strauss in that regard. He gave this address before the Philosophical Union on October 25, 1907.

<sup>99</sup> Foster, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Curtis W. Reese, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931).

<sup>100</sup> University of Chicago, *University Public Lectures, Summer Quarter 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 14.

<sup>101</sup> University of Chicago, *Circular of the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Education 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 15.

<sup>102</sup> See Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 179-185.

reflected scant interest in Nietzsche, who was rarely mentioned at all.<sup>103</sup> Department curriculars and course descriptions give little indication that Nietzsche was studied.<sup>104</sup> The department did bring in William Mackintire Salter in 1909 to teach a course called “Nietzsche and Kindred Phases of Modern Social Speculation.” The focus of the class, in addition to understanding and contextualizing Nietzsche and other thinkers, was “to bring into clearness a certain attitude of the social problem.”<sup>105</sup> A concentration on Nietzsche’s contemporary social relevance was in line with the department’s interest in pragmatic problems and solutions and was consistent with Foster’s subsequent case for Nietzsche’s social importance. But beyond the gesture of having Salter teach a one-time offering, the Department of Philosophy demonstrated little enthusiasm for Nietzsche.

Nietzsche’s reception at the University of Chicago during the age of professionalization and specialization parallels that of other institutions. Peripheral figures such as Salter or persons outside the domain of the Department of Philosophy such as Foster ended up being the primary conveyors of his thought, at least initially.

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<sup>103</sup> For example, see the writings of Moore, Tufts, and Mead. Moore published one book review with a Nietzsche reference. See Moore, review of *Un Romantisme Utilitaire: Étude sur le Mouvement Pragmatiste. Le Pragmatisme chez Nietzsche et chez Poincaré*, by René Berthelot, *Philosophical Review* 21, no. 6 (November 1912): 707-709. Dewey and Tufts, who served as Department of Philosophy Chairman, co-wrote *Ethics*. This 619-page work contained four scant references to Nietzsche, two of which were in footnotes. See Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, 82, 122, 370, 398. George Herbert Mead remarkably did not even mention Nietzsche in his work, *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936).

<sup>104</sup> Courses on modern philosophy were taught, though there is little indication of whether or not Nietzsche was covered. For example, Tufts taught a course on “Social and Ethical Content of Modern Philosophy” during the 1905-1906 academic year. While the course description is inconclusive in regard to Nietzsche, Tufts’s writings on ethics rarely mentioned Nietzsche. Mead taught a class on “Movements of Thought in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” but if his book by the same title was any indication, Nietzsche likely was not considered. See University of Chicago, *Circular of Information; The Departments of Arts, Literature, and Science* 5, no. 2 (Chicago: Published by the University, 1905), 33. Stanford professor Henry Walgrave Stuart later taught a 1920 summer course at the University of Chicago on “Ethical Principles and Practical Life” that included Nietzsche. See idem, *Circular of the Departments of Philosophy, Psychology, and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920), 15.

<sup>105</sup> University of Chicago, *Annual Register July, 1908-July, 1909* (Chicago: Published by the University, 1909), 219. Salter also delivered a series of lectures on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in the Spring of 1909. See “The University Record,” *University of Chicago Magazine* 1, no. 6 (April 1909): 264.

Despite the lack of attention given to Nietzsche by major figures in the Department of Philosophy, they were contributing to the creation of an academic culture that would enable future philosophers to grant more attention and influence to Nietzsche through the diminishment of Protestant cultural authority. George Burman Foster's writings and career served as a flashpoint for those tensions given his status as a Protestant who was undermining traditional understandings of Christianity and appropriating Nietzsche in the process.

### **Nietzsche, Lovejoy and Religious Authority at Johns Hopkins**

The Johns Hopkins University is another example of a school whose explicit engagement with Nietzsche's ideas during the first part of the twentieth century was present, if limited, but whose intellectual framework established future openings for consideration of his thought. The university was founded in 1876 with the purpose of establishing the premier institution for graduate education in the United States. Central to that vision was a self-conscious and explicit declaration of non-sectarianism in matters of religion. While George Marsden notes the religious backgrounds of the founding trustees and the "moderately liberal Congregationalist" convictions of its influential first president Daniel Coit Gilman (1831-1908), Johns Hopkins cast itself in self-consciously secular terms.<sup>106</sup> The 1876 inauguration of its first President, Daniel C. Gilman, provided an occasion to publicly state the university's intentions. None other than Charles W. Eliot reminded the audience that, "The University which is to take its rise in the splendid

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<sup>106</sup> Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 150.

benefaction of Johns Hopkins must be unsectarian.”<sup>107</sup> Gilman echoed those sentiments in his inaugural address while framing that approach in “the spirit of an enlightened Christianity.”<sup>108</sup>

Gilman, like other aforementioned presidents, took an interest in the Philosophy Department. Bruce Kuklick observes that Hopkins may have presented a challenge to Harvard’s philosophical supremacy had Gilman not dismissed Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) from their faculty in 1884. Johns Hopkins had produced students the caliber of Josiah Royce and John Dewey, but losing Peirce along with other professors of high reputation such as G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), George Sylvester Morris (1840-1889), and John Dewey from the faculty cemented the secondary status of the department.<sup>109</sup>

Johns Hopkins may have existed in the shadow of Harvard, but the 1910 hiring of Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873-1962) proved to be a source of stability and credibility for its Philosophy Department. His arrival also brought in a scholar who wrote very little about Nietzsche, but who did consider his ideas in the classroom throughout his twenty-eight year career at Johns Hopkins. Lovejoy expanded his intellectual repertoire beyond philosophy to include intellectual history. He discussed just ideas in themselves, but their historical development as well. He founded the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1940, which subsequently became a venue for discussion on Nietzsche’s relation to Nazi Germany. Lovejoy’s interest in the genealogy of ideas and their impact would seem to be

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<sup>107</sup> Charles W. Eliot, “Congratulatory Address,” *Addresses at the Inauguration of Daniel C. Gilman as President of the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, February 22, 1876* (Baltimore: Murphy & Co., 1876), 8.

<sup>108</sup> Daniel C. Gilman, “Inaugural Address,” *Addresses at the Inauguration of Daniel C. Gilman as President of the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, February 22, 1876*, 62.

<sup>109</sup> Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 144-145.

matched by an intrigue by a thinker such as Nietzsche. Yet his published writings contain little mention of Nietzsche.<sup>110</sup>

The rare exceptions are revealing in terms of how Lovejoy understood the moral implications of Nietzsche. One example of that understanding was contained in a Lovejoy book review of Josiah Royce's *The Philosophy of Loyalty* in 1909. Writing in the *American Journal of Theology*, Lovejoy praised the "genuine moral power" of Royce's "philosophical idealism" and approvingly quoted Royce's own impatience with Nietzsche's individualism and its seeming inability "to justify moral distinctions."<sup>111</sup> But otherwise, Lovejoy's attention to Nietzsche was reflected more in the classroom than in published writings. Lovejoy offered a course on "Schopenhauer and Nietzsche" several times at Johns Hopkins during the 1910s and 1920s. Lovejoy provided an overview of their doctrines and sought to put each thinker historical context, especially as they pertained to his interest in Romanticism. Lovejoy's papers contain notes covering a range of Nietzsche topics presumably covered in the classroom, including ideas such as the Superman, the Will to Power and eternal recurrence. He stressed power as a motivating force in Nietzsche's philosophy and drew from works of his that extensively critiqued

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<sup>110</sup> One critical reviewer of Lovejoy's major work *The Great Chain of Being*, John Herman Randall Jr. of Columbia University, explained how Lovejoy's intellectual framework precluded him from studying Nietzsche: "In that history, the discoverable units seem to be not atomic ideas neatly abstracted from diverse contexts, but great complexes of related ideas bound together in historic traditions, and subtly reacting upon each other so that when in the face of a fresh problem one is modified, there is a reverberation throughout the whole structure. Such are, for example, the different national traditions in philosophy that have emerged in modern times, with their persisting assumptions and controlling tendencies—assumptions and tendencies discernible among the English in men as different as James Mill, T.H. Green, Russell, and Whitehead; or among the Germans, in Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Husserl. These national traditions Professor Lovejoy has excluded by his insistence on a comparative and cosmopolitan study. Within their contexts the historian can indeed record the career of the various assumptions they comprehend; but he can write no history if he disregards those contexts and their national bases in the cultures they have come to express." See John Herman Randall Jr., review of *The Great Chain of Being*, by Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Philosophical Review* 47, no. 2 (March 1938): 218.

<sup>111</sup> Gerald Birney Smith and Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Two Important Books on Ethics," *American Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (January 1909): 138.

Christianity, such as *The Anti-Christ*, though it is not clear how much Lovejoy explicitly addressed the issue.<sup>112</sup>

Lovejoy's intellectual interests correlated to Nietzsche in that both thinkers recognized the ramifications of the Enlightenment and evolutionary theory for traditional belief in God. Lovejoy, also the son of a minister, had explored notions of truth and authority in the realm of philosophy as opposed to theology. His religious background gave context to his intellectual journey, with early writings delving into how the theological and philosophical acceptance of "an absolute conception of the universe" had given way to a belief in plurality, diversity and change.<sup>113</sup> These changes were fueled by Enlightenment deism, whose impact Lovejoy highlighted as being just as significant as nineteenth century challenges to traditional beliefs and systems of thought—whether Christian or classical—such as evolutionary theory.<sup>114</sup> Lovejoy had discussed the consequences of the Enlightenment for Christian beliefs and historical claims in an essay written shortly before arriving at Johns Hopkins. Lovejoy argued that Christianity had established dogmas on the basis of historical claims that had become a burden by the time of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Deism, Lovejoy suggested, had brought about "the definite impeachment of the historical" in Christianity with its intense rationalism and Cartesian standards of knowledge and certitude. But it was part of a revolution in science and philosophy that promoted new ways of discovering truth, new discoveries about the nature of the universe, and a new sense of the vastness and multiplicities of time and

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<sup>112</sup> See Box 7, "Murphy-Nietzsche," in Arthur O. Lovejoy Papers Ms. 38, Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, The Johns Hopkins University.

<sup>113</sup> Daniel J. Wilson, "Arthur O. Lovejoy and the Moral of *The Great Chain of Being*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41, no. 2 (April-June 1980): 249-250. See also Lovejoy, "Religion and the Time-Process," *American Journal of Theology* 6, no. 3 (July 1902): 439-472.

<sup>114</sup> Wilson, "Arthur O. Lovejoy and the Moral of *The Great Chain of Being*," 252.

space. Christianity, by contrast, appeared as “a religion that centred its interest chiefly upon a small number of historical transactions in Palestine seemed singularly meager, parochial, out of scale.” Lovejoy concluded by favorably quoting from Nietzsche enthusiast George Burman Foster of the University of Chicago from his work *The Finality of the Christian Religion*. There was no mention of Nietzsche, however.<sup>115</sup>

Despite Lovejoy’s shared history with Nietzsche as a son of a minister, his similar rejection of traditional religious belief, and his extensive teaching on Nietzsche at Johns Hopkins, it is not clear how or even whether Lovejoy was directly influenced by Nietzsche in formulating his own understanding of the history of ideas. Lovejoy’s seminal 1933 work, *The Great Chain of Being*, suggested that the implications of understanding the world in all its plurality gave rise to questions “not merely about the minor details of the history included in the Christian belief, but about its central dogmas” such as the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>116</sup> John Patrick Diggins observes that “the idea of God did not survive” Lovejoy’s book.<sup>117</sup> But outside the classroom, the relation between Lovejoy and Nietzsche remained at the level of affinity, with any explicit connection left tantalizingly oblique.

Despite evidence that Lovejoy lectured on and treated Nietzsche as a serious philosopher, it was left to an outsider and peripheral figure to highlight the moral and religious implications of Nietzsche’s works. William Mackintire Salter, who figured prominently as the recognized American authority on Nietzsche during the age of

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<sup>115</sup> Lovejoy, “The Entangling Alliance of Religion and History,” *Hibbert Journal* 5, no. 2 (1907): 265, 266, 272.

<sup>116</sup> Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being; A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 109.

<sup>117</sup> Diggins, “Arthur O. Lovejoy and the Challenge of Intellectual History,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 1 (January 2006): 206.

professionalization and specialization, gave a series of ten lectures during the 1921 spring semester at Johns Hopkins. While Salter did cover Nietzsche's biography, intellectual development and political thought, he focused heavily on the theme of morality. Salter discussed Nietzsche's moral criticism as well as the alternatives to traditional morality, so heavily associated with Christianity.<sup>118</sup> His lecture series, as well as Lovejoy's teaching, was indicative of the intersection of declining Protestant cultural authority and interest in Nietzsche at a self-consciously secular institution.

### **Nietzsche, Christianity and Authority in Professional Journals and Monographs**

*An 'enemy of Christianity in all its manifestations': The Useful Example of Nietzsche*

One expression of the changing environment of higher education during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was the proliferation of professional journals and the credentials that they implied and granted. Three major journals were started by three of the institutions discussed above and served as venues for Nietzsche scholarship. The *International Journal of Ethics* was started in 1890 out of the University of Chicago. The *Philosophical Review* began in 1892 at Cornell University and helped launch the career of Grace Neal Dolson. The *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* originated out of Columbia University in 1904 and was edited by Philosophy Professor Frederick J.E. Woodbridge. These journals provided avenues for Nietzsche scholarship both for those at their respective universities and for those at other universities or at the margins of professional philosophy. Translations of his works into English were reviewed. The latest German and French Nietzsche scholarship was assessed. Nietzsche's

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<sup>118</sup> Johns Hopkins University, *The Johns Hopkins University Circular 1921* 40 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1921), 602.

implications for ethics and for democracy were frequently discussed, as were central ideas such as the will to power and the Over-man, or superman. European as well as American scholars published in these journals and engaged Nietzsche's thought.<sup>119</sup> The early professional attention invariably addressed Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, which even at an early stage of reception was seen to be central to understanding his appeal and significance.

Charles Montague Bakewell (1867-1957) offered an early assessment of Nietzsche's ramifications for Christian belief and authority in an 1899 *International Journal of Ethics* article. Bakewell received his doctorate at Harvard, studied abroad in France and Germany, and taught at Bryn Mawr College, the University of California and Yale University before embarking on a political career.<sup>120</sup> His overview of Nietzsche's ideas, which he suggested were "so bizarre, so absurd, so blasphemous" that one may be tempted to dismiss them as "unworthy of serious consideration," focused on their religious implications. Nietzsche cast himself as "the outspoken enemy of Christianity in all its manifestations." Bakewell, rather than simply discussing Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, related it to the issue of cultural authority by discussing how "meet and proper" it was that Nietzsche's ideas were resonating in Germany, where traditional orthodoxy was being challenged by higher criticism. Bakewell recounted a trip to Berlin

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<sup>119</sup> I have focused on the response of American professional philosophers in this chapter. But examples of European engagement with his critique of Christianity that occurred in American professional philosophical journals include A.C. Pigou, "The Ethics of Nietzsche," *International Journal of Ethics* 18, no. 3 (April 1908): 343-355; Maurice Adams, "The Ethics of Tolstoy and Nietzsche," *International Journal of Ethics* 11, no. 1 (October 1900): 82-105; Herbert L. Stewart, "Some Criticisms of the Nietzsche Revival," *International Journal of Ethics* 19, no. 4 (July 1909): 427-443; Bertram M. Laing, "The Metaphysics of Nietzsche's Immoralism," *Philosophical Review* 24, no. 4 (July 1915): 386-418; Laing, "The Origin of Nietzsche's Problem and its Solution," *International Journal of Ethics* 26, no. 4 (July 1916): 510-527; Alfred W. Benn, "The Morals of an Immoralist—Friedrich Nietzsche. I," *International Journal of Ethics* 19, no. 1 (October 1908): 1-23; Benn, "The Morals of an Immoralist—Friedrich Nietzsche. II," *International Journal of Ethics* 19, no. 2 (January 1909): 192-211.

<sup>120</sup> Bakewell was elected to Congress as a Republican from the state of Connecticut in 1932.

where a religious synod explored the possibility of changing a creed, given their shared belief “that no intelligent man to-day could believe what all Christians are made to profess.” The synod decided to leave the creed unchanged so as not to unsettle the people or to destabilize the Empire. Bakewell argued that Christian theologians stood at a crossroads. Either they could reject German higher criticism and “reassert the supernatural, the miraculous,” and the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition, or they could become rationalists. Like Nietzsche, Bakewell expressed skepticism at “the ‘soft’ theologian” who attempted to “steer a middle course, be critical, agnostic, and at the same time Christianly pious.” Bakewell warned that “the present crisis” presented “an arduous task” for the theologian in the face of challenges to Christian teaching and authority. Nietzsche’s example was instructive.<sup>121</sup>

Bakewell was not alone in his belief that Nietzsche’s religious implications provided a cautionary tale for the twentieth century. Other American scholars writing in professional journals recognized the significance of his critique. Arthur Kenyon Rogers (1868-1936), who did his doctoral work at the University of Chicago and who later in his career served with Bakewell on the Yale University faculty, also remarked upon the historical context in which Nietzsche’s teachings were being received. He noted how difficult it was for a “thinker of the present day to reconcile the scientific dogma of natural selection” with the seemingly contradictory “ideals that are called Christian, and the social practices professing to embody these.” Modern Christianity espoused “charity and brotherly love” and argued for the salvation and dignity of the “unfit” in society, while natural selection seemingly called them into question. Democracy, in Nietzsche’s

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<sup>121</sup> Charles M. Bakewell, “The Teachings of Friedrich Nietzsche,” *International Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 3 (April 1899): 314, 330, 331.

eyes, was associated with Christianity and repudiated due to its insistence on a social equality that nature did not seem to support. Rogers suggested that Nietzsche's critique of democracy and "theory of human degeneration" may enable a more positive reception given the claims of natural selection at the expense of modern Christian social doctrines.<sup>122</sup>

Rogers's focus on democracy and Nietzsche's suggestion that democracy's roots were in Christianity brought the wider social implications of Nietzsche's ideas into view. Gustavus Watts Cunningham (1881-1968), a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas who later moved to Cornell University, recognized that the "abstract individualism" of Nietzsche's "gospel of the Superman" offered an approach to ethics and life that ran contrary to Christian civilization. Cunningham rejected Nietzsche's gospel of hyper-individualism and affirmed in the language of liberal Protestantism that "the Christian ideal of the 'brotherhood of man'" provided a better "goal of moral endeavor and the standard in terms of which moral valuations are to be judged." Cunningham even suggested that Nietzsche's brand of individualism ran counter to evolutionary theory, which assumed "correlation" in the form of social relations with others was essential to life.<sup>123</sup> Charles Bakewell, A.K. Rogers and G. Watts Cunningham all treated Nietzsche's philosophy seriously, critically, and with an awareness of how it related to current religious and social thought.

*Paul Carus, The Monist, and Nietzsche's Implications for Cultural Authority*

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<sup>122</sup> A.K. Rogers, "Nietzsche and Democracy," *Philosophical Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1912): 48. See also idem, "Nietzsche and the Aristocratic Ideal," *International Journal of Ethics* 30, no. 4 (July 1920): 450-458.

<sup>123</sup> G. Watts Cunningham, "On Nietzsche's Doctrine of the Will to Power," *Philosophical Review* 28, no. 5 (September 1919): 488, 490, 489.

Academic philosophers also wrote about the implications of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in books and journals on the outskirts of professionalization. A prominent example during the late nineteenth and early centuries was *The Monist*, an idiosyncratic philosophical journal founded by Paul Carus that published both academic philosophers and thinkers outside the academy. It did not have the support that institutional affiliation brought other academic philosophical journals but instead depended on the patronage of Carus's father-in-law, Edward C. Hegeler. Carus, who was German-born and educated, received his doctorate from Tübingen University in Germany in 1876. Tübingen deeply shaped Carus professionally and personally, as exposure to higher criticism of the Bible and openness to other religions precipitated a challenge to any lingering traditional understanding of faith. Carus's career was characterized by an interest in the harmony of religion and science and an interest in the common "interfaith" ground of world religions.<sup>124</sup> *The Monist* began in 1887 to explore these and other ideas while also witnessing the concurrent rise of professional philosophy and Nietzsche's reception in the United States.<sup>125</sup> Carus published articles and book reviews in the journal that addressed Nietzsche's thought while also writing a book himself on Nietzsche.

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<sup>124</sup> For a useful and detailed introduction to Carus's life and thought, see Martin J. Verhoeven, "Introduction: The Dharma through Carus's Lens," in Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha according to Old Records* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1895; reprint, Peru, Ill.: Open Court Publishing, 2004), 1-101 (page citations are to the reprint edition.) Carus advocated tolerance of religion not simply to allow multiple perspectives but to welcome "light from whatever source it comes." The religions of the world would bear testimony to the "one religion, the religion of truth." See Carus, *The Dawn of a New Religious Era and Other Essays* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1916), 20.

<sup>125</sup> A study in the very first issue of *The Monist* in 1890 demonstrated a growing awareness of the transformations happening in philosophy departments. The subject was the state of philosophy in American colleges and universities. Concern was expressed over the elective system, over the inability of philosophy departments to keep up with departments such as history and economics, and over the lack of cooperation between departments. *The Monist* surveyed department descriptions and syllabi from the University of California, the University of Pennsylvania, Clark University, the University of Wisconsin, Boston University, and Johns Hopkins University. Findings included the diversity of course offerings, the decline in metaphysics, the emergence of social sciences, the emphasis on logic and ethics, and the decline of

Carus's German background and abandonment of traditional Lutheran Christianity did not generate much sympathy for Nietzsche, who also experienced a profound loss of faith as a young man. Carus's hostility toward Nietzsche had to do as much with his concerns over the present condition of modern philosophy than it did specific objections to Nietzsche, though the two are interrelated. Carus believed that philosophy was not be the exclusive domain of the professional but instead had broader social relevance. He explained in a letter of response to a layperson writing to *The Monist* that philosophy was not to "be a mere intellectual legerdemain," but should instead supply people with "the daily bread of their spiritual needs."<sup>126</sup> Nietzsche's broad appeal was therefore worrying, particularly as Carus was focused upon harmonizing religion, philosophy and science as sources of stability and authority. Carus was dismayed at the rampant subjectivity and irrationality of contemporary thought. Nietzsche represented to the worst offender in this regard and a distinctly modern threat to Carus's own quest for rebuilding sources of authority upon the ruins of traditional notions of faith and reason. Nevertheless, he viewed Nietzsche's influence in the United States with a sense of inevitability while translating the meaning of Nietzsche's likely conquest as the "disintegration of philosophy, science, and ethics."<sup>127</sup> It was for Carus a "sign of the times" to hear the news in 1903 that a young lecturer at the University of Leipzig was lecturing on Nietzsche.<sup>128</sup>

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religion. See "Philosophy in American Colleges and Universities," *Monist* 1, no. 1 (October 1890): 148-156.

<sup>126</sup> Carus, "Criticism and Discussions: Where Philosophy Fails," *Monist* 16, no. 4 (July 1904): 597-603

<sup>127</sup> Review of *Friedrich Nietzsche, ein Kämpfer gegen seine Zeit*, by Dr. Rudolph Steiner, *Monist* 6, no. 3 (April 1896): 461.

<sup>128</sup> Carus, review of *Friedrich Nietzsche, Sein Leben Und Sein Werk*, by Raoul Richter, *Monist* 16, no. 1 (October 1903): 160.

Carus gave a fuller treatment of Nietzsche to *Monist* readers in a full-length essay in 1907. Carus observed that while professional philosophers had little enthusiasm for Nietzsche, he maintained mass appeal due to his pointed style, appeal “to sentiment, to passions, to our ambition, and to our vanity” in addition to ideas that were “easily understood.” Carus depicted Nietzsche as one whose megalomania was matched only by the destructiveness of his thought and categorized his writings as saturated with “youthful immaturity.” Nietzsche was described “as a brooding thinker, a representation of the dissatisfied, a man of an insatiable love of life, with wild and unsteady looks, proud in his indomitable self-assertion, but broken in body and spirit.”<sup>129</sup> These charges would not have seemed out of place or unfamiliar to Nietzsche’s other American critics. But Carus went further by pointing out the deeply religious undertones of Nietzsche’s thought—an opinion he shared with the sympathetic Salter. Nietzsche’s philosophy possessed “an intensely religious character” that led Nietzsche to indulge in “mystic ecstasy” and exhibit a “Dionysiac enthusiasm” that had brought “so many poetical and talented but immature minds under his control.”<sup>130</sup>

Carus’s latter observation was important because he believed Nietzsche’s admirers would seek to appropriate his ideas in such a way as to produce nefarious social consequences. Despite his own turning away from traditional faith, Carus had no patience for those interested in overthrowing the prevailing institutions, traditions, and “rules, religious, philosophical, ethical or even logical” and who sought to appropriate Nietzsche

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<sup>129</sup> See Paul Carus, “Friedrich Nietzsche,” *Monist* 17, no. 2 (April 1907): 244, 230, 246, 247. Carus also took up the subject of Nietzsche in a previous *Monist* article. See idem, “Immortality as a Philosophic Principle,” *Monist* 9, no. 4 (July 1899): 572-616.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 235. See also idem, “Max Stirner, The Predecessor of Nietzsche,” *Monist* 21, no. 3 (July 1911): 376-397.

as a weapon in the quest for social transformation and cultural power.<sup>131</sup> Carus extended his mediation on Nietzsche in a full-length book that addressed the social and cultural implications of embracing Nietzsche's ideas: "Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher who astonishes his readers by the boldness with which he rebels against every tradition, tearing down the holiest and dearest things, preaching destruction of all rule, and looking with disdain upon the heap of ruins in which his revolutionary thoughts would leave the world."<sup>132</sup> Carus recognized that at the root of Nietzsche's philosophical project was the issue of authority. He believed that Nietzsche was so eager to dismiss morality as it was "represented in the institutions and thoughts established by history," that he missed the need for "an authority above the self by which the worth of the self must be measured." Carus therefore branded Nietzsche's ideas inadequate not only because of their detrimental social effects but because of their inability to ground individualism itself. A vacuum of authority was created by Nietzsche's willingness to demolish "the authority of other powers, the state, the church, and the traditions of the past," Carus suggested, with the result being that one could not determine the "respective worth" of selves.<sup>133</sup>

Paul Carus wrote amidst a shifting intellectual terrain, both in terms of the changing world of professional philosophy and of the challenges to traditional sources of

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<sup>131</sup> Carus, "Friedrich Nietzsche," 245.

<sup>132</sup> Carus, *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1914), 5-6. Carus's commitment to a scientific approach toward philosophy did not preclude him from writing a rather anecdotal refutation of Nietzsche. He quoted favorably University of Michigan professor R.M. Wenley's comment that "German professors when they die go to Oxford," adding that they also traveled to "Concord, Boston, Washington and other American cities." He included a chapter on the recollections of Paul Deussen, a close friend of Nietzsche. He anonymously quoted "an admirer of Nietzsche" to support his claim of Nietzsche's logical inconsistencies in a chapter on the "Overman." Carus analyzed a picture of Nietzsche in a soldier's uniform, as a volunteer in the German artillery, but suggested that Nietzsche "plays the soldier only" and "would have found difficulty in killing even a fly." See Carus, 6, 42, 62. See Ratner-Rosenhagen's comments on Carus's analysis of Nietzsche's military picture in Ratner-Rosenhagen, "Conventional Iconoclasm: The Cultural Work of the Nietzsche Image in Twentieth Century America," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 3 (December 2006): 747.

<sup>133</sup> Carus, *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism*, 128, 33.

cultural authority. Carus attempted to navigate that new world by firmly establishing scientific authority while also harmonizing it with philosophy and religion. He viewed Nietzsche as a threat because of how Nietzsche seemingly exacerbated the crisis of authority with his irrationalism and rootless individualism. Carus may have jettisoned traditional understandings of Christian orthodoxy after encountering biblical criticism and other religious ideas in Germany, but he was not willing to go to the lengths that Nietzsche did in demolishing traditional notions of authority. Nietzsche's audacity combined with Carus's belief about the social importance of philosophy led Carus to diminish Nietzsche's status as a professional philosopher and lament his influence among those who sought to appropriate Nietzsche in the quest for cultural power.

*William Mackintire Salter on Nietzsche and Christianity*

The most substantial treatment of Nietzsche during the era of professionalization and specialization—in the form of a dense monograph, numerous articles in burgeoning professional journals, and several book reviews—came from a scholar located on the margins of professional philosophy by the name of William Mackintire Salter.<sup>134</sup> The Iowa native and Knox College graduate attended Yale and Harvard Divinity Schools, studied at the University of Gottingen in Germany, and served a brief stint as a Unitarian minister. In 1883, Salter took leadership of the recently established Ethical Society of Chicago. He frequently lectured on the organization's behalf after working with its

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<sup>134</sup> See Salter, *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917); idem, "Nietzsche's Moral Aim," *International Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 2 (January 1915): 226-251; idem, "Nietzsche's Moral Aim and Will to Power," *International Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 3 (April 1915): 372-403; idem, "Nietzsche's Superman," 421-438; idem, "Nietzsche on the Problem of Reality," *Mind* 24, no. 96 (October 1915): 441-463; idem, "Nietzsche and the War," *International Journal of Ethics* 27, no. 3 (April 1917), 357-379.

founder, Felix Adler, in New York. Salter, who had socialist sympathies, became active in labor politics in addition to his work in ethical philosophy. He involved himself in the Haymarket Affair by petitioning for a fair trial for anarchists and later opposing the death penalty in the case. The rest of his life was devoted to philosophical and ethical lectures, writings, and teachings. He served as a lecturer in the University of Chicago's Philosophy Department from 1909-1913 and for a year at Johns Hopkins University in 1921. He also had a familial link with William James in that their wives were sisters.<sup>135</sup> Salter, despite not being a lifelong institutional academic, took advantage of the channels provided by the recently professionalized and specialized discipline to present the most exhaustive and sympathetic American treatment of Nietzsche to date.<sup>136</sup> His peers recognized his book *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study* (1917) as an accomplishment even if they did not share the degree of his sympathy.<sup>137</sup>

Salter's comprehensive treatment of Nietzsche in his book, articles and reviews dealt with many themes, but prominent throughout his writings was a concern for the religious and moral implications of Nietzsche's thought. Salter took a personal interest in the topic, given that he shared with Nietzsche an abandonment of traditional Christianity. "All the prevailing forms of religion" were unpalatable to Salter, though he sought to salvage vestiges of Christianity through gleaning moral and ethical teachings from the

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<sup>135</sup> Biographical information in this paragraph was drawn from Richard Gambino, "Introduction," *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917; reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1968), v; and "W.M. Salter Dies; Author, Lecturer," *New York Times*, 19 July 1931, 22.

<sup>136</sup> Salter observed in 1915: "Nietzsche was aloof from the world of to-day, and had and has plenty of opposition. Is not his an evil name in the mouths of most men now? I hear little but dispraise of him, or at best condescension and pity toward him, in America." See Salter, "Nietzsche's Superman," 434.

<sup>137</sup> Examples of respectful reviews of Salter's *Nietzsche the Thinker* include: Wilbur Urban, review of *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*, by William Mackintire Salter, *Philosophical Review* 27, no. 3 (May 1918): 303-309; Alfred H. Lloyd, review of *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*, by William Mackintire Salter, *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 15, no. 4 (February 14, 1918): 103-110; Grace Neal Dolson, review of *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*, by William Mackintire Salter, *International Journal of Ethics* 28, no. 4 (July 1918): 554-558; R.M. Wenley, "Nietzsche—Traffics and Discoveries," *Monist* 31, no. 1 (January 1921): 133-149.

dross of dogma. “The future,” he argued, was “for those who cut loose from the old-time forms and creeds” and pursued a higher moral culture.<sup>138</sup> Salter recognized that both he and Nietzsche wrote at a time when “the old Christian thought of heaven and hell” were “no longer regnant,” and instead were replaced by a “vague and more or less lazy confidence” in progress.<sup>139</sup>

It is no coincidence—given Salter’s beliefs and desire to rehabilitate Nietzsche’s radical, anti-religious image—that Salter wrote about Nietzsche in both professional philosophical and theological journals. Writing in the *Harvard Theological Review*, he sounded a theme that he consistently emphasized: Nietzsche’s hostility toward Christianity did not translate into enmity against religion in general. Salter suggested that “the temper of religion remained with him always” and that “his mind was essentially reverential.”<sup>140</sup> Indeed, Salter depicts a Nietzsche who was proud of his Protestant heritage and who managed to keep “something of the old spirit,” despite needing to depart “the ancient ways” as a matter of “intellectual necessity.” Nietzsche’s philosophical project itself could be construed as “finding a substitute for the lost God” of his youth. Salter understood the “moral aim” of Nietzsche’s philosophy as the effort to replace God with other sources of transcendence, such as the idea of supermen, “the future lords of the earth.”<sup>141</sup> These religiously tinged ideas, despite Nietzsche’s use of “violent and even virulent language” in regard to religion, demonstrated that he still was

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<sup>138</sup> Salter, *Ethical Religion* (London: Watts & Co., 1905), 5, 110.

<sup>139</sup> Salter, “Nietzsche’s Superman,” 426. He later adds, when discussing Nietzsche’s view of modern life: “Wars are for the time-being the greatest stimulants of the imagination, now that Christian transports and terrors have become feeble.” *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>140</sup> Salter, “An Introductory Word about Nietzsche,” *Harvard Theological Review* 6, no. 4 (October 1913): 467. Salter elaborated in a subsequent article: “As I read him, deep instincts of reverence preponderate in him, instincts that have their ordinary food and sustenance in the thought of God. But as his scientific conscience forbade him that belief, the instincts were driven to seek other satisfaction and found it measurably in the thought of the possibilities of mankind.” See Salter, “Nietzsche’s Moral Aim,” 234.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 226, 234-5, 235.

“more a religious than irreligious man” and were favorably contrasted by Salter with the “immediate aims and narrow horizons” of a type of “secularism” that Nietzsche presumably rejected.<sup>142</sup> Speaking before an Ethical Culture Society audience in Philadelphia, Salter summed up this characteristic of Nietzsche aptly: “He disdains heaven, but believes that man can create something like heaven.”<sup>143</sup>

Salter’s insistence on delineating between Nietzsche’s religious impulses and his specific objections to Christianity nevertheless compelled an explanation as to why the latter were so virulent. What is striking about Salter’s explanation is the manner in which he links Nietzsche’s enmity toward Christianity with the issue of its cultural and moral authority:

Here is the secret of the antagonism, violent at times, which Nietzsche manifests to Christian morality. By its very attractiveness and sweetness, by the very validity it has within a limited area...it seduces us to give it an absolute authority and takes us away from the thought of those higher possibilities of mankind that alone, to his mind, make life greatly worth while. The carrying life to new and [practically] superhuman heights, not security, happiness and comfort for the mass, is Nietzsche’s ideal.<sup>144</sup>

Christianity’s presumed cultural authority over the masses hindered the development of Nietzsche’s superior individual by offering a moral vision that deemed such pursuits as unacceptable, according to Salter’s understanding.

Salter expanded his reflections on Nietzsche, Christian morality and cultural authority in *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*. Salter mused that the increasing focus upon Christian morality in itself was in part due to “uncertainties about Christian dogma.”

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<sup>142</sup> Salter, “Nietzsche’s Attitude to Religion,” 106. Salter was replying to a passing comment in a previous article in the journal by University of Miami professor Daniel Sommer Robinson, who wrote: “Of course Nietzsche has become a classic example of a philosopher motivated from the beginning and throughout his career by an ineradicable and insane prejudice against all forms of religion, and especially of the Christian religion.” See Robinson, “The Chief Types of Motivation to Philosophic Reflection,” *Journal of Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (January 18, 1923): 35.

<sup>143</sup> Nietzsche and Superman Subject for Lecture,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 February 1908, 7.

<sup>144</sup> Salter, “Nietzsche’s Moral Aim,” 237. Salter elsewhere argues that for Nietzsche “persons are the summit of human evolution” and that a select few will reside as “a kind of semi-divine race above” the rest of humanity. See Salter, “Nietzsche’s Moral Aim and Will to Power,” 396.

Salter therefore was drawing attention to a widespread crisis in cultural authority, especially given the fact that morality itself was always “invested with authority, even visible authority—and authorities are not to be questioned but obeyed!” Salter argued that Nietzsche recognized the crisis of authority and understood it as characteristic of modernity: “Nietzsche admits that our institutions no longer fit us, but he says that the trouble is with us, not with them.” In other words, the decline of Christian belief had led to an embrace and/or fear of Christian morality to bring order to social and individual life.<sup>145</sup>

Christianity may be a source of comfort for many people, but that doesn't mean it corresponds to reality, according to Salter's Nietzsche: “There is no way of going back to the old ideas without soiling the intellectual conscience.” He depicted Nietzsche as fearless in face of a chaotic universe deprived of theism or metaphysics but as confident that any consolation in “gentle moralism” only encouraged the “euthanasia of Christianity.”<sup>146</sup> But Christianity could not be uprooted easily. Salter was aware that Nietzsche did not merely understand Christianity as a collection of doctrines but as a social and historical force whose tentacles were entrenched deeply in soil of civilization. Nietzsche, in Salter's estimation, believed that religious doctrines “may be refuted a thousand times” and still have adherents due to a deep belief that it was “necessary for life.” Change was difficult, and Salter argued that Nietzsche was advocating “a subtle, slow, secular revolution in the mental and moral realm” that could take millennia to accomplish.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Salter, *Nietzsche the Thinker: A Study*, 2, 207, 422.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 186, 260.

### **Conclusion: Nietzsche and the Secular Revolution in Professional Philosophy**

William Mackintire Salter represents a fitting conclusion to the story of how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was received in a philosophical environment transformed by the trends of professionalization and specialization sweeping American higher education. Salter existed on the margins of professional philosophy and yet was able to write the most well-received work of the early reception period. Salter's religious background prepared him to be sensitive to the religious consequences of Nietzsche's thought. R.M. Wenley's lengthy review of Salter's work made the connection between the author's interest in Nietzsche and the story of American Protestantism. Wenley speculated that Salter, "subjected to the precious conventions of the American denominational college," was likely drawn to the excitement of Nietzsche after being subjected to the standard, stultifying philosophical and theological curriculum of mid-nineteenth century American higher education. Salter surely "felt the powerful inhibition peculiar to American Protestantism half a century ago," Wenley mused, which resulted in a travail of the soul that left him "forsaking at length the dogmatic implications" of Christianity "while retaining the sharp, almost painful, ethical interest." Wenley conjectured that perhaps Salter's "experience" was "akin to that of Nietzsche himself." Whatever the case, it was clear to Wenley that Salter had "built his temple anew in his own fashion" and had drawn from Nietzsche in the process.<sup>148</sup> Wenley's assessment of Salter is speculative but revealing in explaining the context and lure of Nietzsche's reception in the age of burgeoning professional philosophy.

Higher education had undergone a transformation in academic emphases and curriculum that reflected a shift in the tectonic plates of cultural authority. Protestant

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<sup>148</sup> R.M. Wenley, "Criticisms and Discussions. Nietzsche—Traffics and Discoveries," 138-139.

Christianity in particular was experiencing increasing marginalization in the modern American university. The intersection between the decline of Protestant cultural authority in the modern university and the professional philosophical reception of Nietzsche is intriguing because Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was vital to understanding his thought. While Protestant Christianity, particularly in its more liberal expression, maintained some residual staying power at institutions like the University of Chicago, the groundwork was being laid for a more sympathetic appraisal for Nietzsche. William Mackintire Salter, for example, was as enthusiastic about Nietzsche as Walter Kaufmann proved to be in 1950. The landscape of reception, however, had changed rather dramatically. These changes were underway during the early period of reception, of which professionalization and specialization played a significant role.

While major thinkers such as William James and John Dewey had little apparent regard for Nietzsche, even the minimal engagement of professional philosophers was instructive in revealing how Nietzsche's assessment of Christianity was impacting his American reception during a time of transformation in American intellectual and cultural life. Moreover, the cause of taking Nietzsche as a serious philosopher and wrestling with the centrality of Christianity in his thought often was left to outsiders or minor figures, whether foreign exchange professors, younger scholars seeking to establish themselves, or scholars on the fringes of professional philosophy. Whether sympathetic or hostile, these scholars shared a sense that Nietzsche's critique was coming at a timely moment in American—and western—history. It was left to independent intellectuals, many who studied in these very departments, to wrestle with how to appropriate Nietzsche's critique

of Christianity in the cause of the political, cultural and social changes that they championed.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**Nietzsche, Independent Intellectuals and Protestant Cultural Authority, 1901-1929**

“Friedrich Nietzsche was until recently almost unknown in America’ but nowadays his name constantly appears, in all sorts of connections. He is a peculiarly fascinating thinker, and those who have once fallen under his spell are not likely soon to escape it.”

—“Some American Criticisms of Nietzsche,” *Current Literature* (1908)<sup>1</sup>

“Amazing anchorite,  
 Sick god,  
 Why were you an arrow of longing for the Superman?

Not even *Man* is here:  
 Children in masks and savages with manners  
 Is all that we are—  
 We are striving to be—human...  
 And even—all-too-human...

You ask for a Superman?  
 First then produce—a Man.”

—James Oppenheim, “To Nietzsche” (1916)<sup>2</sup>

“Our generation spans too short a time to free the soul of man. Nietzsche, to the end of his days, remained a Prussian’s pastor’s son, and hence two-thirds a Puritan; he erected his war upon holiness, toward the end, into a sort of holy war.”

—H.L. Mencken, “The Dreiser Bugaboo” (1917)<sup>3</sup>

“The old world is dead; long live the new!”

—Will Durant, “The New Morality” (1929)<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation explores how the intersection of Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority shaped Nietzsche’s reception in the United States. This chapter focuses on an eclectic group of journalists, cultural critics, and social and political activists who expressed great interest in both aspects of that intersection from 1900 to 1917, when the war had a decisive impact on Nietzsche’s reception. The early period will be the primary focus of the chapter, but it also will examine how these readers of Nietzsche engaged Nietzsche in the aftermath of the war from 1918 to 1929. These critics and activists were largely enthusiastic readers of

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<sup>1</sup> “Some American Criticisms of Nietzsche,” *Current Literature* 44, no. 3 (March 1908): 295.

<sup>2</sup> James Oppenheim, *War and Laughter* (New York: The Century Co, 1916), 49.

<sup>3</sup> H.L. Mencken, “The Dreiser Bugaboo,” *Seven Arts* 2 (August 1917): 515.

<sup>4</sup> Will Durant, “The New Morality,” *Forum* 81, no. 5 (May 1929): 309.

Nietzsche who sought to apply Nietzsche's critique to their respective agendas.<sup>5</sup> Many of these "independent intellectuals" self-consciously positioned themselves outside the confines of professionalized and specialized modern American universities—despite the fact that many of them were educated in these elite schools.<sup>6</sup> They often set themselves, their ideas and their institutions up as alternative sources of cultural authority. These critics and activists—despite their differing social visions, political views, and institutional expressions—shared a belief that the shackles of tradition were to be cast aside in favor of modernism. More to the point, these thinkers appropriated Nietzsche's ideas in their respective quests to marginalize the influence of Christian doctrine and morality in American society and to accelerate the decline of Protestant cultural authority.

This chapter will look at three groups of intellectuals and activists who examined Nietzsche's thought with great interest in the implications for traditional Christianity in a modern context. First, I will examine the group of cultural critics and journalists whom the historian Henry May once described as "the *Smart Set* circle," which included James

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<sup>5</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, one of the critics discussed in this chapter, reflected back on the interest in Nietzsche during this period in his 1952 work *The Confident Years: 1885-1915*. Brooks recalled the "cult" of Nietzsche "in a world in which democracy seemed to be triumphing everywhere and socialism was rising in every country." Brooks surveyed the Nietzsche literature and made light of the "crop of little Nietzsches" that emerged, including another figure considered in this chapter, Benjamin De Casseres. Dancers, novelist and cultural critics "were diverted for a while" by the German philosopher. Brooks noted that Nietzsche especially appealed to "cosmopolitan minds" like the journalist H.L. Mencken and theater critic George Jean Nathan, who "were bent on destroying 'tradition.'" Mencken was portrayed as one who "seemed to agree with Nietzsche" about the intrinsic evil of Christianity in particular. Greenwich Village intellectuals, Brooks reflected, also read Nietzsche while repudiating "traditional ideas believed to be false." Brooks used Nietzschean imagery when noting the "idol-smashing mood of the new generation" in both the United States and Europe. Brooks argued that Nietzsche and other European writers "unmasked" the world for American writers, "shattered" any lingering optimism about the world, and left them uncertain that progress was certain or inevitable. See Brooks, *The Confident Years 1885-1915* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1952), 461-463, 487, 498, 587.

<sup>6</sup> The term "independent intellectuals" is drawn from Steven Biel, *Independent Intellectuals in the United States, 1910-1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

Gibbons Huneker, Willard Huntington Wright and especially Henry Louis Mencken.<sup>7</sup>

They comprised a group of fierce individualists who, while skeptical of the social democratic instincts of other cultural critics discussed in this chapter, shared their appreciation for Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and its utility in marginalizing Protestant cultural authority in the United States. Secondly, I will look at a group of cultural critics self-described as the "Young Americans," with a concentration on Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks. They wrestled with Nietzsche amidst efforts to re-imagine and renew a distinctly American culture set free from the more stultifying traditions of the past. Thirdly, I will survey the socialist, anarchist and feminist appropriations of Nietzsche in the service of radical politics. This group of independent intellectuals produced monographs and articles and journals while providing venues such as Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth* and Margaret Anderson's *Little Review* to explore the content and application of Nietzsche's ideas. These thinkers often linked the decline of Protestant cultural authority with the success of their respective movements and believed that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity could be used to expedite the process. Finally, I will examine how some of the figures mentioned in the earlier part of the chapter such as Mencken, Brooks, and radical political activist and writer Max Eastman engaged Nietzsche after the war. Nietzsche had his critics before, during and after the war, but it is Nietzsche's defenders who take center stage in this chapter.

Historians have categorized these assorted intellectuals in several ways and placed them in different narratives. These scholars, despite differences in framing, emphases and

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<sup>7</sup> Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917*, 2d. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 208. I will also look at another member of the *Smart Set* circle, Benjamin De Casseres, in the postwar section of this chapter, given that the majority of his reflections on Nietzsche occurred after the war.

cast of characters, all point to a fundamental transformation in American intellectual and cultural life that explained a great deal about the uses and abuses of Nietzsche's thought in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Several works in particular provide context for Nietzsche's role in early twentieth century cultural criticism and social activism. Henry May's classic account describes these intellectuals as agents of a loss of innocence, catalysts of the transformation from Victorianism to modernism, and forceful opponents of the "genteel" tradition. May challenges the idea that World War I itself brought on modernism, instead suggesting that the efforts of various "insurgents" against the "custodians of culture" in the years prior to American entry into World War I were crucial in ushering in a new age.<sup>8</sup> Steven Biel focuses on the emergence of "independent intellectuals," who operated outside the academy, started journals, sought wider influence, and offered alternative visions for social order and morality from 1910-1945.<sup>9</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears examines secularization and a turn-of-the-century "crisis of cultural authority" that was evidenced in "a broader shift from a Protestant to a therapeutic orientation within the dominant culture." Lears explores how Protestant Christianity's declining authority in the United States resulted in "hazy moral distinctions and vague spiritual commitments." Lears notes Nietzsche's observation that modernity was antithetical to Christianity because it encouraged "a general blurring of moral and cultural boundaries and loosening of emotional ties, a weakening of the conviction that certain

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<sup>8</sup> David Hollinger, "Foreword to the Morningside Edition," in May, *The End of American Innocence*, xii-xiii. May described the "custodians of culture" as "neither an aristocracy nor a plutocracy" but a collection of men who "belonged consciously to the middle class, and yet recognized nothing above them." They hoped that the United States would "reproduce all that was good in English civilization without its grossness and cruelty." See May, *The End of American Innocence*, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Biel notes that his narrative is different from Russell Jacoby's "bleak tale" of the decline of the public intellectual. Biel rejects "the nostalgic vision of a Golden Age of public intellectuals," instead suggesting that "this century" has never seen "circumstances" that were "especially conducive to a general critical discourse." See Biel, *Independent Intellectuals*, 3.

principles, certain standards of conduct, must remain inviolable, and a loss of gravity imparted to human existence by a supernatural framework of meaning.”<sup>10</sup> Sociologist Christian Smith emphasizes the efforts of activists who were seeking “to overthrow a religious establishment’s control over socially legitimate knowledge.” His account stresses not the impersonal inevitability of “modernization” but the personal, proactive agency of a disparate group of activists, journalists and cultural critics.<sup>11</sup>

Other works have narrowed their focus onto specific communities or subsets of these activists and critics, such as Casey Nelson Blake’s study of four cultural critics—Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford. These critics, writing in response to modern industrialism and its social consequences, wanted to put “the reconstruction of selfhood and the revival of creative experience at the forefront of a new democratic politics.”<sup>12</sup> Christine Stansell’s *American Moderns* concentrates specifically on Greenwich Village bohemians and the traffic that came through their salons, socializing, political activities, and cultural productions. Greenwich Village, she suggests, became a vital staging point for activists and intellectuals to promote a democratic modernism based upon the art of conversation and defined in contrast to Victorian “prudery,” patriarchy and social hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Stansell’s work serves as a reminder that the primary association in regard to Nietzsche explored by many of these independent intellectuals was his relation to modernism.

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<sup>10</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), xviii, 32, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Smith, “Introduction: Rethinking the Secularization of American Public Life” in *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*, ed. Christian Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, & Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 1.

Understanding the efforts of independent intellectuals to reconstitute American culture and social order and to hasten the decline of Protestant cultural authority—and their use of Nietzsche in the process—requires the effort to make sense of the slippery notion of “modernism” itself. It is a term imbued with multiple meanings and contexts. Daniel Joseph Singal suggests that it represents “a *culture*—a constellation of related ideas, beliefs, values, and modes of perceptions” that began exerting tremendous influence in the United States in the early 1900s and continued through the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> David Hollinger, aware of the many manifestations and definitions of modernism, offers a distinction between “the Knower and the Artificer,” whose prototypes would be “science-admiring intellectuals” and artistic and literary modernists, respectively. The “Knower” represented the modern attempt to place “faith in science” and organize society and culture around its authority. The “Artificer” expressed the desire “to make meanings anew, out of the resources of the self.” Hollinger notes that both strategies of modernism have common elements. They each are “bourgeois in social base,” possess “acute self-consciousness,” express “resoundingly post-Biblical” ideas, promote “humanist principles of authority” and explicitly reject “inherited religious authority.”<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche’s identification with modernism became especially important in light of these religious repercussions, though the term “modernism” was applied in numerous settings. Modernist writers and artists expressed the sense of fragmentation and crisis brought on by war, industrialization, urbanization, and secularization. Political and social activists embracing the modernist ethos sought the establishment of social democracy and the

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Joseph Singal, “Toward a Definition of American Modernism,” *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 7.

<sup>15</sup> David Hollinger, “The Knower and the Artificer,” *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 37, 38, 49, 50.

overhaul of traditional morality and religious authority. “Modernism” in American philosophical circles indicated an engagement with the multifaceted legacy of the Enlightenment, particularly in regard to “the problem of belief and the limits of cognition.”<sup>16</sup> Catholic and Protestant modernists attempted to reorient faith to modern realities, using Nietzsche as both a foil and inspiration in the process. Common to these disparate movements was a sense that a new world was on the horizon that would require a dramatic transformation of values, beliefs, and social structures.

Independent intellectuals writing in the first decades of the twentieth century conveyed an awareness living and writing in that new world. Paul Rosenfeld (1890-1946) expressed that awareness in his book *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (1924), which among others covered Young Americans and fellow *Seven Arts* writers Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks. Rosenfeld, a Jewish-American writer who edited the *Seven Arts* before becoming better known for his music criticism, offered a contemporary chronicle of American modernism. He referred to “the new orientation” at the turn of the century, when the compulsion “to restate ideas of work and growth and love” grew strong.<sup>17</sup> The effort to “restate” fundamental aspects of American social order also meant dismantling their traditional sources of authority. American modernists, while often viewing change as inevitable, also took the role of active agents in bringing it to fruition. These cultural critics, journalists and social activists believed that new authorities, a renewed American culture, and new visions of social and political order were emerging to supplant the old order, which had been shaped by Protestant cultural

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<sup>16</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 7.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924), 294.

authority. Nietzsche provided both a substantive resource and a stylistic model for their efforts at cultural transformation.<sup>18</sup> A survey of the three clusters of thinkers considered in this chapter reveals that they did not envision cultural transformation in the same manner but instead acted according to their respective agendas and ideologies. But they did share a belief that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was an important component in bringing a "new orientation" to fruition. This chapter, therefore, will explore both the different ways in which these three groups conceived of and pursued cultural and social change—and how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity was applied in the process.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> William Marion Reedy (1862-1920), literary editor and critic, offered a typical appraisal of both Nietzsche's style and substance. He praised Nietzsche for "a style splendidly rhetorical, lyric, and of a sophisticated cadence and candescence." He also noted that Nietzsche's description of Jesus' "self-deceit" which registered for Reedy as "the most scornfully infidel utterance to be found in all the literature of what the orthodox would call blasphemy." See "Some American Criticisms of Nietzsche," *Current Literature* 44, no. 3 (March 1908): 295-296. Not all independent intellectuals were pleased with how Nietzsche's writings were being appropriated. An unnamed reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*, who very likely was Nietzsche enthusiast Willard Huntington Wright, indicted "the newly intellectual" for being guilty of "vulgarization" in their efforts to exploit his aphorisms for their respective purposes. American audiences already suffered from a fragmented introduction to his thought that focused on select translated aphorisms, a condition that hid the full force and "profundities" of his thought. See "Reviews of the Week. Nietzsche: Third Paper." *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 1912, III23.

<sup>19</sup> Ratner-Rosenhagen takes a thematic approach in a chapter titled "The 'Gay Science' of Cultural Criticism." It explores, among other considerations, how "young American intellectuals discovered a 'philosophy of the future' that blended a vivisection of Judeo-Christian conventions and Western rationalism with a playful aesthetic imagination that envisioned the world anew." Sections include critics' interest in Nietzsche's insanity ('Hamlet Nietzsche'), Nietzsche's language as model for criticism, and the importance of "personality" to these critics. See Ratner-Rosenhagen, "Neither Rock nor Refuge," 180-223. My chapter takes a more chronological, biographical and institutional approach in considering critics and activists in clusters of shared commitments. Critics and activists from each cluster did interact with each other personally and professionally—and did not always delineate between the cultural, social and political in their lives and work. But a consideration of these writers as distinct groupings accentuates the specific uses to which they put Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in their respective ideological and institutional visions.

### Nietzsche and the Individualists: The *Smart Set* Circle

The writers associated with the *Smart Set* circle did not of course write exclusively for that journal.<sup>20</sup> They were journalists who wrote about Nietzsche in other books, journals and newspapers as well but who overlapped briefly at the journal during the prewar period. The journal also symbolized the friendship and shared commitment of these individualists, whose libertarian instincts reinforced their skepticism of the “mobocracy” of American society and politics.<sup>21</sup> While other critics and activists focused on Nietzsche’s compatibility with social democracy and other expressions of radical politics, the *Smart Set* critics expressed doubt that Nietzsche could be used to support any social or political agenda beyond a defense of the individual against mass ideologies. They appropriated Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity in that context, given their assumption of Protestant dominance in the United States.

Three writers in particular were notable for their prewar interest in Nietzsche. James Gibbons Huneker (1860-1921) was a prolific cultural critic who was credited by H.L. Mencken with first introducing Nietzsche to American audiences and whose work provoked great admiration in the typically acerbic Mencken. Mencken was skeptical of many American cultural critics during the first decades of the twentieth century, due to

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<sup>20</sup> The *Smart Set*, edited by Mencken and George Nathan during its 1914-1923 heyday, offered wide-ranging criticism of the arts and literature, published opinionated essays by the likes of Mencken on contemporary cultural issues, and introduced many modern writers in its pages.

<sup>21</sup> Mencken’s skepticism about American democracy and mass politics was evident in this passage: “The pressure of environment, of mass ideas, of the socialized intelligence, is too enormous to be withstood. No American, no matter how sharp his critical sense, can ever get away from the notion that mobocracy is, in some subtle and mysterious way, more conducive to human progress and more pleasing to a just God than any systems of government which stand opposed to it. In the privacy of his study he may observe very clearly that mobocracy exalts the facile and specious man above the really competent man, and from that observation he may draw the conclusion that its abandonment would be desirable, but once he emerges from his academic seclusion and resumes the rubbing of noses with his fellow-men, he will begin to be tortured by a sneaking feeling that such ideas are heretical and unmanly, and the next time the band begins to play he will thrill with the best of them—or the worst.” See H.L. Mencken, “The Genealogy of Etiquette,” *Smart Set* 47, no. 1 (September 1915): 307.

their “endless amateurishness, so characteristic of everything American, from politics to cookery,” but he exempted Huneker from the charge.<sup>22</sup> Huneker’s cultural criticism, Mencken asserted, reflected the musings of “a true cosmopolitan,” one whose “world is not American, nor Europe, nor Christendom, but the whole universe of beauty.” Mencken went so far as to suggest that Huneker deserved “a larger share of the credit” in raising American cultural awareness and challenging the “firm entrenchment” of Puritanism than many of his contemporaries.<sup>23</sup> The Philadelphia-born Huneker studied and performed music before beginning a career as a critic in not only music but drama, art and literature. He introduced American readers to many European musicians, artists and writers through his voluminous output in newspapers such as *The New York Sun*, journal articles and a range of books. He was credited by Mencken as “the first to see Nietzsche’s rising star” as early as 1888.<sup>24</sup> Huneker affirmed that perspective in a letter to *Sun* editor E.P. Mitchell, in which he described himself as “the first Nietzschean to write of him in this country” and added, “Nietzsche is in the air; he is quoted by the reporter, by the sporting editor. He has become an uncanny nightmare in the public mind.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mencken, *A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1917), 155. I am indebted to Henry May’s account for pointing me to Mencken’s discussion of Huneker. See May, *The End of American Innocence*, 202.

<sup>23</sup> Mencken, *A Book of Prefaces*, 161, 163-164. Mencken was not alone among the *Smart Set* critics to lavish praise upon Huneker. Benjamin De Casseres described Huneker as “our foremost critic of the Seven Arts” and offered the following lavish tribute: “He is a metabolist. He is a monstrous organism that has taken into its system and assimilated all the culture of the world. Through his rapid psychic and nervous metabolic processes he has shapen images of rare beauty. He has transformed dead theological tissue and atrophied epigrams into vital tissue. Whatever has passed through that sensibility with its tremendous vibrations, comes forth new and strange...He is himself an Era.” See De Casseres, “The Metabolist of Genius,” *Bookman* 52, no. 3 (November 1920): 267-268.

<sup>24</sup> Mencken, *A Book of Prefaces*, 162.

<sup>25</sup> James Gibbons Huneker, *Letters of James Gibbons Huneker*, ed. Josephine Huneker (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 58. Huneker elsewhere expressed concern that the Nietzsche vogue would produce misunderstandings and ironies: “The danger of the Nietzschean deluge is this: the very culture-philistines he so heartily despised when alive are going about with tags and aphorisms caked in their daily conversation. They utterly mistake his liberty for license, not realising the narrow and tortuous paths he has prepared for his true disciples.” See *idem*, *The Pathos of Distance: A Book of a Thousand and One Moments* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 321.

Huneker, in addition to being an early Nietzsche enthusiast, was also known for inspiring younger critics and identifying new talents. One of these promising talents was Willard Huntington Wright (1888-1939), an author of art criticism, fiction and an overview of Nietzsche's works. Wright grew up in southern California, where he studied at local institutions St. Vincent's and Pomona College before taking classes at Harvard and in Paris and Munich—though he never took a degree. He became the literary editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1910, where he became known for taking controversial positions and savaging his hometown.<sup>26</sup> He also introduced readers to Nietzsche, as he did subsequently as *Smart Set* editor from 1912 to 1914 and in a 1915 monograph. Wright later became known as an art critic before a nervous breakdown led him to pursue a new career path as a mystery novelist under the pseudonym S.S. Van Dine. During the earlier stage of his career, however, Wright became interested in Nietzsche's individualism and his critique of Christianity. Wright agreed with Nietzsche's assessment that despite intellectual challenges to the faith, Christian morality still exercised a significant amount of cultural authority in the bourgeois culture that both Wright and Nietzsche loathed.

That disdain for the lingering influence of Christian morality in middle class America was shared by H.L. Mencken (1880-1956), the prominent *Baltimore Sun* journalist and *Smart Set* editor who helped further the careers of Huneker and Wright.<sup>27</sup> Benjamin De Casseres, another critic whose career was furthered by opportunities

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<sup>26</sup> For more on Wright's denunciations of Los Angeles as a hotbed of "Puritanism," see Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 133-134. May also wrote of Willard Huntington Wright: "In the hygienic and uncongenial sunshine of prewar Southern California, Wright for some years had been denouncing the stupidity of the American masses and pleading for art, erudition, and an end of bourgeois moral restraints." See May, *The End of American Innocence*, 205.

<sup>27</sup> Wright dedicated his book *What Nietzsche Taught* (1915) to Mencken.

provided by Mencken, wrote that Mencken “in twenty years exerted a greater liberalizing influence on American public life and the youth of the country” more than any other contemporary.<sup>28</sup> Mencken was one of the most well-known and widely read columnists in the country who also published the most influential monograph on Nietzsche during the early reception period. “There is no escaping Nietzsche,” Mencken observed. “You may hold him a hissing and a mocking and lift your virtuous skirts as you pass him by, but his roar is in your ears and his blasphemies sink into your mind.”<sup>29</sup> Mencken was well aware of Nietzsche’s appeal outside the world of professional scholarship and of his own role as a non-academic enthusiast and evangelist for the philosopher. People were starting to read and grapple with Nietzsche, “for all his unprofessorial (and hence mystifying) clarity.”<sup>30</sup> Mencken’s own career as an extraordinarily prolific journalist, cultural critic and provocateur-at-large drew richly from Nietzsche’s thought. His attention to Nietzsche was fueled not only by an interest in German philosophy and culture due to his ethnic origins, or the force of Nietzsche’s ideas in themselves, but by a belief that they possessed a prophetic quality directly pertinent to modern Americans. Nietzsche posed a direct challenge to the very Protestant cultural authority in the United States so loathed by Mencken.<sup>31</sup> Henry May once suggested that the *Smart Set* circle

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<sup>28</sup> De Casseres, *The Superman in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Book Store, 1929), 17.

<sup>29</sup> Henry L. Mencken, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Boston: Luce and Company, 1908), vii. Mencken also noted that “Nietzsche’s astonishingly keen and fearless criticism of Christianity has probably sent for wider ripples than any other stone he ever heaved into the pool of philistine contentment.” *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> Mencken, “The Prophet of the Superman,” *Smart Set* 36, no. 3 (March 1912): 153.

<sup>31</sup> While Mencken believed in the relevance of Nietzsche’s ideas, he also acknowledged that their time had not yet come: “The time for him is not yet, nor will it be tomorrow or the next day. The sponge of democracy is not yet squeezed dry. And so we are not ready for Nietzsche’s doctrine of essential *inequality*, with its scale of natural castes and its plea for an aristocracy uncompromising and unashamed. Folks still gabble about brotherhood and the duty of the strong to give of their strength to the weak, and so the law of the survival of the fittest, for all Nietzsche’s eloquence, is forbidden the house, though made welcome in the stable. Our ‘good’ is still ‘meek’; our ‘bad’ is still ‘ruthless.’ However much our practical acts may war upon these definitions, we still give lip service to them.” *Ibid.*

found “three uses” for Nietzsche: his opposition to democracy, his “anti-Puritan” celebration of “art and joy,” and his importance for understanding Europe.<sup>32</sup> May’s observation is not unjustified, but a closer look at Nietzsche’s *Smart Set* admirers through the lens of Protestant Christianity’s lingering if challenged cultural authority reveals that they each understood Nietzsche’s importance in unique ways.

*The Smart Set Circle: Nietzsche, Christianity and the Individual*

While H.L. Mencken’s book on Nietzsche was the most significant publication of the early American reception period, Mencken himself credited James Gibbon Huneker for first introducing Nietzsche to American audiences. Huneker differed from other Nietzsche aficionados in the *Smart Set* circle in that he was more willing to understand Nietzsche not just as a critic of religion but as one who was religious himself. Nietzsche “was not a man of barbarous instincts,” Huneker observed, but rather was one who maintained a “religious temperament.”<sup>33</sup> Huneker could have been speaking of himself, despite remaining on the periphery of the institutional church. He acknowledged the profound impact that his Catholic upbringing had upon him: “Some men outlive this feeling. I cannot.” He professed a love for “the odour of incense, the mystic bells, the music, the atmosphere of the altar, above all the intellectual life of the church.” Huneker openly acknowledged that religion gave “an emotional colouring” to his “modes of thought.”<sup>34</sup> He recognized the same feature in Nietzsche, arguing that “theology was in his blood.” Nietzsche’s assaults on Protestant Christianity, Huneker suggested, reflected “an exponent of a theological odium of the virulent sort.” He may have “hated Puritanism

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<sup>32</sup> May, *The End of American Innocence*, 208.

<sup>33</sup> Huneker, *Letters of James Gibbons Huneker*, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Huneker, *Steeplejack, Volume 1* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 35, 55, 192.

in Protestant Christianity,” Huneker mused, but “a puritan was buried in the nerves of Nietzsche.” His asceticism, Huneker went so far to suggest, reflected “the life of a strenuous saint.”<sup>35</sup>

Huneker repeatedly cast Nietzsche’s life and philosophy in religious terms, but he also realized that Nietzsche’s intellectual consideration of Christianity involved a “great renunciation of inherited faith” and went so far as to suggest that Nietzsche “committed spiritual suicide.” Nietzsche’s rejection and critique of Christianity was commended by Huneker for its intellectual honesty due to the fact that it meant not just the rejection of specific doctrines but the transvaluation of “old moral values” as well. Unlike “Higher Criticism, Modernism, or...Christian socialism,” Huneker argued, Nietzsche’s system allowed for no compromise or half-hearted clinging to Christianity’s moral and cultural legacy. His Superman “may some day become a demigod for a new religion” as opposed to living off the capital of the old one. But Huneker also repeatedly characterized Nietzsche as unable to escape his own Protestant heritage. He once referred to Nietzsche as “an apparition possible only in modern and rationalistic Protestant Germany.”<sup>36</sup>

Huneker actually downplayed the revolutionary aspects of Nietzsche’s thought, instead characterizing him as “the perfect type of the old Greek rhapsodist.” Nietzsche, whose “sonorous, beautiful phrases charmed and soothed his listeners as he pursued his peripatetic way,” lingered in the minds of his readers but did not establish a perfectly rigorous and systematic philosophy, in Huneker’s estimation. Nietzsche was not a systematic thinker but a “stimulus to thought” whose primary purpose was to serve as an

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<sup>35</sup> Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen; Stendhal, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Anatole France, Huysmans, Barres, Nietzsche, Blake, Ibsen, Stirner and Ernest Hello* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909), 238, 242, 261.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 262, 268, 239.

“antiseptic critic of all philosophies, religions, theologies, and moral systems.”

Nevertheless, Huneker still couched Nietzsche’s philosophy in religious terms, describing him as “the apostle of the *ego*,” a “proclaimer of the rank animalism of man,” and a preacher whose doctrine of the Superman actually contained “what all great moralists and religious teachers have preached.” Huneker, when assessing the impact of Nietzsche, found him valuable if restricted in impact:

“He used a battering ram of rare dialectic skill, and crash go the religious, social, and artistic fabrics reared ages since! But when the brilliant smoke of his style clears away, we still see standing the same venerable institutions. This tornadic philosopher does damage only to the outlying structures. He lets in light on some dark and dank places. He is a tonic for malaria, musical and religious and there is value even in his own fantastic Transvaluation of all Values.”<sup>37</sup>

H.L. Mencken also wrote of Nietzsche’s implications for Christian belief and practice but without the persistent religious sympathies of Huneker. Mencken’s *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908) cast Nietzsche in a prophetic role that involved speaking out against the dominant assumptions, beliefs, and power of Christianity in the West.<sup>38</sup> Mencken was famous—or perhaps infamous—for heaping scorn on Christianity and its American practitioners. Nietzsche’s critique appealed to Mencken because of his belief that Christianity was intellectually untenable, a detrimental influence in society, and an obstacle to the other sources of cultural authority to which Mencken was drawn, especially human rationality and science. Mencken credited Nietzsche with successfully stripping bare the “antiquity and authority” of ideas and evaluating them in light of their “actual probability and reasonableness.” Mencken understood the core of Nietzsche’s

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<sup>37</sup> Huneker, *Overtones: A Book of Temperaments; Richard Strauss, Parsifal, Verdi, Balzac, Flaubert, Nietzsche, and Turgéniéff* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 140, 109, 132, 126, 133-134.

<sup>38</sup> Mencken later downplayed the quality of his work on Nietzsche in a memoir while also acknowledging its impact: “It was vealy and superficial stuff, but there was nothing better in English at the time, so it got good notices and was a considerable success.” See Mencken, *Thirty-Five Years of Newspaper Work: A Memoir by H.L. Mencken*, ed. Fred Hobson, Vincent Fitzpatrick and Bradford Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 17.

thought to include the rejection of “the universal tendency to give these codes authority by crediting them to some god” in favor of a philosophy that recognized these beliefs as “essentially man-made and mutable” as well as contingent upon society’s circumstances.<sup>39</sup>

Nietzsche’s comprehensive approach, in Mencken’s assessment, involved an “exhaustive inquiry into the origin of moral codes” that put any considerations of “authority and reverence” aside. Christian morality was targeted because of its “obvious tendency to combat free progress” and its opposition to “good health, intellectual freedom, self-defense and every other essential factor of efficiency.” Part of Mencken’s critique of Christian morality, using Nietzsche’s writings to substantiate his point, was that while the idea of “divine authority” gave “permanence to all moral codes,” this state was “constantly opposed by the changing conditions of existence.” Thus Mencken believed that Nietzsche was correct in suggesting that Christian morality attempts to impose a static morality on a dynamic world. The end result from Nietzsche’s historical perspective was a “morality that burned the books of the ancient sages,” or that “halted the free inquiry of the Golden Age and substituted for it the credulous imbecility of the Age of Faith.” Nietzsche lamented the ways in which “a fixed moral code and a fixed theology” plundered humanity and wasted their years on “alchemy, heretic-burning, witchcraft and sacerdotalism.” Mencken endorsed this perspective because it matched his view, popularized in the United States by Cornell University President Andrew Dickson

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<sup>39</sup> Mencken, *Philosophy of Nietzsche*, ix. Mencken found excellent preparation for this role in Nietzsche’s personal biography. He delighted in the fact that Nietzsche was a preacher’s son, calling it the “ideal training for sham-smashers and freethinkers.” He also noted the trajectory of Nietzsche’s own religious faith: “As a child Nietzsche was holy; as a man he was the symbol and embodiment of all unholiness.” *Ibid.*, 3-4. He praised Nietzsche for attacking Christianity with an “uncompromising thoroughness” that went straight “to the heart of things.” *Ibid.*, 36.

White in *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), that religion was historically at odds with science, reason and progress.<sup>40</sup>

Mencken also credited Nietzsche with moving beyond the usual historical arguments for or against Christianity and “tunneling down, in his characteristic way” to attack “the very foundations of the faith.” The end result of this mining expedition was the conclusion that Christianity was founded upon “contradictions and absurdities,” that it was illogical and unpractical, and that its principles were “unthinkable.”<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche demonstrated to Mencken that Christianity was intellectually untenable for the modern world, which led to the latter’s observation that twentieth century America was a place where “a literal faith” in the gospels was restricted “to ecclesiastical reactionaries, pious old ladies and men about to be hanged.”<sup>42</sup>

Mencken’s disdain for religion and mass political ideologies was fueled by his individualism, his belief in a rational universe operating by the “laws of nature,” and his endorsement of scientific authority. Mencken even suggested that Nietzsche, despite occasional “wild and imbecile flights of speculation,” was for the most part “a most logical and orderly thinker.” Mencken could have been describing himself when he wrote that Nietzsche “was an advocate of utter freedom” while recognizing “that freedom and license, instinct and emotion, were not the same.” Nietzsche’s individualism as

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 75, 74, 88, 96. Mencken actually put Nietzsche and White among a group of intellectuals seeking to challenge traditional beliefs: “Other philosophers, in Germany and elsewhere, had made the same observation and there was in progress a grand assault-at-arms upon old ideas. Huxley and Spencer, in England; Ibsen, in Norway, was preparing for his epoch-making life-work, and in far America Andrew D. White and others were battling to free education from the bonds of theology. Thus it will be seen that, at the start, Nietzsche was no more a pioneer than any one of a dozen other men.” Ibid., 35-36. See also Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 2 vol. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 129. Mencken went on to discuss how Nietzsche attacked the logic regarding the practice of prayer, the irreconcilable nature of free will and determinism, the idea that Christianity had improved the world, the rationale for Christian humility and sympathy, and Christianity’s hostility to a Darwinian view of nature and survival. Ibid., 129-142.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 128.

understood by Mencken respected “that the laws of nature stood unalterably opposed to dissoluteness.” Mencken interpreted Nietzsche as a Darwinist who believed that Christianity defied and contradicted “the law of natural selection.” Therefore, “everything which makes for the preservation of the human race” was for Nietzsche “diametrically opposed” to the ideals of Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Mencken’s rather seamless blending of Nietzsche’s ideas with Darwinism failed to address Nietzsche’s own concerns about Darwinism—which he felt misunderstood the essence of the struggle in nature—but Mencken still employed the alliance in his cultural battles with Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

Willard Huntington Wright shared Mencken’s perspective on the importance of Nietzsche’s disdain for Christianity and occasionally delighted in conveying that message when speaking to unsuspecting audiences.<sup>45</sup> Wright also addressed the subject in his book *What Nietzsche Taught* (1915), which represented Wright’s final and most comprehensive treatment of Nietzsche and which was structured as a chronological journey through Nietzsche’s published works. Wright, despite caveats about the dangers of systematizing Nietzsche, nevertheless presented him as offering “a very positive and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 146, 263, 143.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Four for a further explanation of Nietzsche’s critique of Darwin.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Wright addressed the women’s Arroyo Dinner Club in Los Angeles in 1911. From a *Los Angeles Times* report: “Mr. Wright regretted that the attitude of the public toward Nietzsche was one of appalling ignorance, and that until 1890 he was but a name in America. Christianity and the woman culture clubs, he said, had employed every known prejudice and false premise and conclusion with which to attack a philosophy of meat and wine. They sought to discredit a position they could combat, to deny the powerful works in a man’s prime simply because on his old age his mind passed under a cloud. Denouncing the foolish virgins of such an argument, Mr. Wright told of the general idea underlying the Nietzschean crusade. That he was the most denunciatory and terrible critic of Christianity and that the world has ever produced, and that his life work was devoted to doing away with the Christian virtues—humility, peace, brotherly love and self-sacrifice—was stated as the basis of Nietzsche’s philosophy. From this destructive activity the path led to the philosophy of the Superman. Because Nietzsche saw in Christianity the degradation of all the virtues with which he would endow his Superman, he denounced it as the most dangerous enemy to human progress. The quotations and the explanations which Mr. Wright made were enough to overcome the most well-made of feminine temperaments but the Arroyo Club swallowed hard and bore in silence.” See “Bing! Bang! Wright Talks on Nietzsche. High-Brow Colony Struck by Philosophical Bomb. Vigorous Talk on Friedrich Nietzsche by Willard Huntington Wright—Culture Passed Out in Strong Doses—Suffragettes Get Undigestible Food for Thought.” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 January 1911, 17.

consistent system of ethics” that met “present-day needs.” Indeed, Wright argued that Nietzsche was indispensable in understanding “the trend of modern thought,” whether in Europe or the United States. Wright, like Mencken, stressed that for Nietzsche an ethical system needed to be adaptable “to the modern man” and that Christianity failed to meet the requirement. Christianity was another example in the long history of morality described by Wright as implying “the domination of certain classes which, in order to inspire reverence in arbitrary dictates, have invested their codes with an authority other than a human one.”<sup>46</sup>

The relation between Christian morality and social order was frequently cited by Wright as an essential component of Nietzsche’s thought. The attempt to “harmonise an ancient moral code with the needs of modern life,” according to Wright’s portrayal of Nietzsche, led to “compromises” continuously “made between moral theory and social practice.” Wright suggested that Nietzsche did not intend “to shake the faith of the great majority of mankind in their idols.” Rather, he was attempting to “free the strong men” from the constraints put on them by Christianity in the service of “the weaker members of society.”<sup>47</sup>

Wright recognized that Christianity represented not only a major topic in Nietzsche’s writing but a lightning rod for ongoing historical debates. “Christian moralists,” he argued, sensed “in Nietzsche a powerful and effective opponent, have attempted to disqualify his ethical system by presenting garbled portions of his attacks on

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<sup>46</sup> Willard Huntington Wright, *What Nietzsche Taught* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1915), 11, 9, 88, 89.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 173, 181. Wright elaborated on this claim: “He neither hoped nor desired to wean the mass of humanity from Christianity or any similar dogmatic comfort. On the contrary, he denounced those superficial atheists who endeavoured to weaken the foundations of religion. He saw the positive necessity of such religions as a basis for his slave morality, and in the present chapter he exhorts the rulers, to preserve the religious faith of the serving classes, and to use it as a means of government—as an instrument in the work of disciplining and educating.” *Ibid.*

Christianity,” and omitted “all the qualifying passages.” What made Nietzsche “the most effective critic who ever waged war against Christianity,” Wright contended, was that he not only attacked Christian doctrines like previous critics but also focused on the practical effects of Christianity. Many Christians were willing to concede doctrinal ground while still touting the idea of Christianity “as a workable code” that offered the world “the most perfect system of conduct” that it had ever seen. Nietzsche demolished these claims, Wright argued, by pointing out their opposition to what nature and science tell us about humanity and the individual. Christianity’s origins, for example, were for Nietzsche “a direct falsification of all natural conditions and a perversion of all healthy instincts.” The emphasis on “turning the other cheek” and other virtues were evidence of an unhealthy psychological history that defied nature. Wright detailed Nietzsche’s belief that Christianity’s origins were rooted in a unnatural morality contrived in Jewish culture by religious leaders and later expanded by Jesus’ disciples after his death. Wright defended Nietzsche from the charge by some “ecclesiastic dialecticians” that his unmasking of Christianity resulted in nihilism. He maintained that Nietzsche’s late work *The Anti-Christ* offered not only “a complete denial of all Christian morality,” but also a “new and consistent system of ethics” to take its place.<sup>48</sup> Wright’s Nietzsche, therefore, was unique in his ability to provide an ethical system for the modern individual in the face of what Wright perceived as an anachronistic Christian morality.

Wright’s attraction to Nietzsche’s ideas resided in the affirmation they provided to his own individualism. The *Smart Set* circle critics were concerned with the preservation of individuality in the face of mass ideologies that were believed to be traced back to Christianity. Mencken, for example, saw the denigration of the strong individual

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 10-11, 252, 254, 255, 256-258, 259.

as being at the heart of Nietzsche's complaint against Christianity. "The whole of Nietzsche's protest" could be "reduced to a single question," Mencken asserted, and that was: why should the slave morality of Christianity should be allowed to dictate the course of nations? Christianity remained "the general ideal" in Europe and America, Mencken asserted, despite the deep hypocrisies of all "Christian" nations. Christianity satisfied the masses and apologized "for their vegetable existence," but it offered nothing but conflict to "men of the ruling minority." Rather, it sought to "weaken and destroy them" as opposed to honoring their "vigor and enterprise." Mencken's Nietzsche was "a prophet of aristocracy" who was willing to let the masses believe what they will but desired "a new morality" for the superior individual, one that allowed them to flourish.<sup>49</sup> The *Smart Set* critics were more distrustful of democracy and less interested in the social reform pursued by other critics and activists. Their strong individualism contrasted with these other thinkers, who were concerned about individuality but also desired a wider application of Nietzsche's ideas. Both agendas saw Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and its authority as an important resource.

### **Nietzsche and Cultural Renewal: The 'Young Americans'**

The revolt against religious sources of authority and the rebellious disposition of many critics who drew on Nietzsche's ideas masked their complicated relationship with tradition. The "Young Americans" were one such collection of prominent critics who concentrated themselves in New York, positioned themselves outside of the academy despite their elite education, and expressed themselves through books and journals such

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<sup>49</sup> Mencken, "The Bugaboo of the Sunday Schools," *Smart Set* 45, no. 3 (March 1915): 292.

as *Seven Arts* and the *Dial*.<sup>50</sup> The *Seven Arts*, during its 1916-1917 run, prominently featured three Jewish intellectuals—the poet James Oppenheim (1882-1932), the aforementioned critic Paul Rosenfeld and literary scholar Waldo Frank (1889-1967)—and two lapsed Protestants—critics Randolph Bourne (1886-1918) and Van Wyck Brooks (1886-1963). Waldo Frank was a Yale University graduate, literary critic, novelist and amateur social historian who served as an editor of the *Seven Arts* before moving on to write novels and pursue his growing interest in Latin American social history and literature. Frank explicitly endorsed Nietzsche’s contribution to the cultural vision of the Young Americans. He noted in his memoirs that while Freud was influential and read by cultural critics, “what we wanted was release from our own bourgeois culture; and this we sought in Nietzsche rather than Freud.”<sup>51</sup>

The most incisive Young American critics who appropriated Nietzsche in their reflections on American culture were two “Protestants in flight from Protestantism,” Van Wyck Brooks and Randolph Bourne.<sup>52</sup> Brooks grew up in suburban New Jersey and was raised an Episcopalian before studying at Harvard University with the New Humanist scholar Irving Babbitt (1865-1933). Brooks drifted from his religious upbringing though he maintained a lifelong fascination with, if not commitment to, Catholicism that was

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<sup>50</sup> Van Wyck Brooks described the modern university as a place where “ideas are cherished precisely because they are ineffectual.” Brooks argued that the modern university remained “the last and most impenetrable stronghold of Puritanism,” evoking a frequent target of the Young American writers. See Brooks, *America’s Coming-of-Age* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1915), 24.

<sup>51</sup> Waldo Frank, *Memoirs of Waldo Frank*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 202. Frank noted a distinction, however, between his Yale classmates and his European friends: “They got drunk on beer and sang sentimental songs, whereas my friends in Europe had sipped their liquor soberly for the most part, and got drunk on Nietzsche.” See idem, *In the American Jungle* (1937; Freeport NY: Books for Library Press, 1968), 8. Leslie J. Vaughan notes that “American moderns” were particularly interested in Nietzsche in relation to Protestant cultural authority: “To them, he was arch-rebel and unregenerate....His psychology of power became a tool for a corrosive critique of the genteel tradition and Protestant moralism in general.” See Vaughan, *Randolph Bourne and the Politics of Cultural Radicalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>52</sup> Blake, *Beloved Community*, 123.

sparked by an early trip to Italy.<sup>53</sup> Brooks embarked upon a decades-long career in literary criticism with a particular focus on American literature, where he became known for his regional literary histories of New England as well as works dealing with nineteenth century authors such as Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Washington Irving and others. The earlier stage of Brooks' career, however, saw him join other Young American writers like Randolph Bourne in evaluating the limitations and possibilities of American culture. Bourne grew up in a conservative, traditional Presbyterian home, also in suburban New Jersey, but he later drifted away from his childhood faith. Bourne overcame facial and spinal deformities and his family's relative lack of wealth to secure a scholarship from Columbia University. He came under the influence of John Dewey while at Columbia, though Dewey later would be targeted in Bourne's antiwar writings for supporting American involvement in World War I. Bourne's essays were published in journals such as the *New Republic*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Seven Arts* and the *Dial* in a quest for both cultural influence and financial stability prior to his untimely death in 1918 due to the influenza epidemic. Brooks and Bourne pursued a new grounding for American culture, identity and community in post-Protestant sources.

A key term in this endeavor for Bourne and Brooks was "personality." Bourne's 1916 *Atlantic Monthly* essay "Trans-National America" envisioned a blending of individual fulfillment and social identity by calling for "the good life of personality lived in the environment of the Beloved Community."<sup>54</sup> Historian Wilfred McClay observes

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<sup>53</sup> Biographer Raymond Nelson notes the early manifestations of a fascination with Catholicism that was evident throughout Brooks' life and career. Nelson observes that as a college student at Harvard, Brooks maintained "a melancholy fascination for Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism," often visited Boston Catholic churches, and "seriously considered converting to the Roman religion." See Nelson, *Van Wyck Brooks: A Writer's Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 33.

<sup>54</sup> Bourne, "Trans-National America, *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 97.

that for Bourne and Brooks, “personality” involved “the full blossoming and fruition of one’s deepest potentialities” that transpired “when the proper conditions of social existence were first provided.”<sup>55</sup> The Young Americans perceived their task as encouraging democratic communities that were inspired by this idea of personality. These communities would be based on “a revitalized American culture” that while not completely rejecting traditional sources of meaning and identity did develop within the context “of a larger transvaluation of values.”<sup>56</sup> This vision entailed both a recovery and revolt against the past. The Young Americans’ dual engagement with tradition in the service of cultural renewal was adumbrated by their sense of Protestant cultural authority’s decline. It was within this intellectual context that Bourne and Brooks considered both domestic and European ideas, including those of Nietzsche.<sup>57</sup>

*Van Wyck Brooks: Nietzsche and Post-Puritanism in America*

The early criticism of Van Wyck Brooks focused on identifying, cultivating and revitalizing American culture. His analysis of both the historical record and contemporary scene, however, had an air of lament. Paul Rosenfeld, who profiled Brooks in *Port of New York*, wrote that Brooks “suffered from the third-ratedness, the sogginess, the

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<sup>55</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 166.

<sup>56</sup> Blake, *Beloved Community*, 3, 32. Blake ironically notes the presence of “religiously charged language” in Brooks’ and Bourne’s explorations of ideas such as “culture, experience, and personality” but the absence of religious sources in grounding those ideas. Perhaps that response was not surprising given that they remained “troubled by their own spiritual yearnings for meaning and identity” despite jettisoning their religious upbringing. See *Ibid.*, 120, 28.

<sup>57</sup> Vaughan perceives Randolph Bourne’s cultural criticism in particular through the lenses of Nietzsche’s Apollonian and Dionysian categories. Vaughan argues that both Nietzsche and Bourne believed that cultural regeneration occurred through “the balance between order and artful creation and the vitalism and energy of the pagan.” See Vaughan, *Randolph Bourne and the Politics of Cultural Radicalism*, 4.

impotence of American civilization.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Brooks did condemn the rootless, shallow nature of American civilization in *America’s Coming-of-Age* (1915) and asserted that while “no European can exist without a thousand subterranean relationships...Americans can so exist, Americans do so exist.”<sup>59</sup>

Brooks’ frequent comparisons of European and American culture provided opportunities to comment on Nietzsche. Brooks, in one instance, criticized American writer Gerald Stanley Lee (1862-1944) for advocating a distinctly American social ideal known as the “Inspired Millionaire.” Lee was a former Congregationalist minister who left the ministry to pursue a writing career in which he celebrated the social and moral models offered by American business and advertising. His book *Inspired Millionaires* (1908) praised the likes of Andrew Carnegie for “promoting social progress” and putting a human face on oft-criticized corporations.<sup>60</sup> Brooks mocked Lee’s ideal as “a sort of Marshall Field with a halo” and compared it unfavorably with Nietzsche’s ideal of the Superman. Brooks acknowledged that some may consider Nietzsche’s Superman “a very objectionable ideal,” but it nevertheless offered a “moral attitude, a moral programme, a point of view” that made Lee’s ideal look not inspired but insipid by comparison.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Brooks, *America’s Coming-of-Age*, 60.

<sup>60</sup> Gregory Wallace Bush, *Lord of Attention: Gerald Stanley Lee and the Crowd Metaphor in Industrializing America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 90.

<sup>61</sup> Brooks, *America’s Coming-of-Age*, 145. Elsewhere, Brooks displayed reservations about crude assessments or depictions of Nietzsche’s superman: “Plainly a conception of this kind should never be intellectualized and defined. It is a living whole, as a human being is a living whole and the only way to grasp it is to place oneself at the precise angle of the poet who conceived it. But the fixed intellect of man is not often capable of rising to the height of such an argument, nor do the run of critics and interpreters rise to such a height themselves. In the case of Nietzsche, particularly they have confounded the confusion, urging precise definitions and at the same time disagreeing among themselves as to which definitions may be held valid. But indeed the Superman does not ‘mean’ this or that; it can merely be approached from different points of view with different degrees of sympathy.” See idem, *The World of H.G. Wells* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1915), 88-89.

Brooks also addressed the importation of radical European ideas into the United States. The transatlantic journey had a “very dampening effect on the gunpowder contained in them.” They become “admirably safe” and “even delightful” when abstractly transplanted to American shores. Therefore “in the American mind Nietzsche and A.C. Benson—the lion and the lamb—lie down peacefully together chewing the cud of culture.” Brooks paired Nietzsche with the strikingly different English Victorian author and poet Benson (1862-1925) to demonstrate the difficulty of understanding and appropriating the power of ideas in the American context. European thought and literature, in Brooks’ estimation, grew “denser” and grappled “to life more and more” while America remained “a vast Sargasso Sea—a prodigious welter of unconscious life, swept by ground-swells of half-conscious emotion.” Brooks added that American ideas lacked strength and boldness due to a lack of conflict between “the talents and the mass.” Nietzsche and other thinkers, Brooks suggested, were able “to quicken and exhilarate the life of one’s own people” because they brought “not peace, but a sword.” Personality, Brooks believed, grew in the context of a “muscular and earthly sense of opposition” that thinkers such as Nietzsche offered and that American thought was lacking.<sup>62</sup>

Brooks himself repeatedly returned to the theme of what American culture lacked and used Nietzsche as an illustration to support his claims. The “vista” of American society, he argued, reflected “a universe of talent and thwarted personality evaporating in a stale culture.”<sup>63</sup> It was an environment, Brooks suggested, that was difficult for thinkers such as Nietzsche to penetrate. Brooks was not surprised that a Nietzsche vogue should reach American shores. America “patronized Nietzsche” and others because, “having

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 173, 164, 172.

<sup>63</sup> Brooks, “Young America,” *Seven Arts* 1 (December 1916): 147.

ourselves undergone no kindred creative experience for them to corroborate and extend,” it was possible “to escape their slings and arrows with a whole skin.” Nietzsche’s message could not be made real in the United States because of the cultural deficiencies that limited its impact.<sup>64</sup>

Brooks blamed the staleness of American culture in large part on the legacy of Puritanism. He suggested that “the virtues of thrift and industry” that characterized the pioneering Puritans in North America left a deep imprint to the point where “sustaining the machinery of life was a kind of end in itself.” The Puritans therefore looked askance at “ritual, pleasure, light-heartedness—all those things which an established civilization can support.”<sup>65</sup> These Puritan ideals, Brooks believed, explained why industrialism “bowled us over” in the United States whereas in Europe—where a “great traditional culture” persisted—“a long line of great rebels” including Nietzsche were able to react “violently against its desiccating influences.” The pursuit of a different grounding for American culture, one in which “the foundations of our life have been reconstructed and made solid on the basis of our own experience,” was for Brooks necessary to transcend the legacy of Puritanism in the United States.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Brooks, “The Culture of Industrialism,” *Seven Arts* 1 (April 1917): 661.

<sup>65</sup> Brooks, *The Wine of the Puritans: A Study of Present-Day America* (London: Sisleys LTD, 1908), 13, 14, 15. Brooks added that Puritanism lingered in a nation that no longer fit the mold in which it was originally cast:

“Still the native-born Puritan race is the dominant race everywhere, socially at least, deeply tinged with those Puritan ideals, provincial and material still. The New England idea adequate for a small province, naturally became inadequate for the expression of a great nation. Adapted as this idea was to the needs of a frugal intellectual people whose development was strictly intensive rather than extensive, it was unable to meet the needs of great prosperity, imperialism and cosmopolitanism.” *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, “The Culture of Industrialism,” 662, 666.

*Randolph Bourne: Nietzsche, Power, Morality and the Necessity of Malcontents*

Randolph Bourne joined Brooks in attacking Puritanism and was even more direct in assailing the legacy of Protestant Christianity in bourgeois society. Unlike Mencken and the more individualistic enthusiasts of Nietzsche, Bourne's focus was primarily social. Bourne left the faith of his youth behind and embraced the cultural modernism, radical politics and new morality in the air, but he still sought sources for social cohesion and cultural renewal. Bourne understood his calling and that of his generation of cultural critics as posing a direct challenge to the "older generation" and the beliefs that sustained them. Bourne wrote that social matters mattered more than individual salvation to the younger generation. "We feel social injustice," he explained, "as our fathers felt personal sin."<sup>67</sup> Bourne recognized, as Nietzsche did, that even when religious belief in traditional Protestant dogmas waned, its authority lingered on. The "older generation" possessed "a religion, a metaphysics, an ethics, and a political and social philosophy" that cast a wide net over modern society beyond explicit adherence to "dogmas and creeds," which Bourne acknowledged were often not believed anymore by these "descendants of the stern and rugged old Puritans." Protestant cultural authority remained even in the midst of dissipating belief, Bourne suggested, with consequences that went well beyond the boundaries of church doors. The Protestant moral code "spiritually guaranteed forever all moral caste divisions and inequalities of modern society" though it now faced a substantial challenge in the form of "the rebellion of the younger generation."<sup>68</sup>

Bourne's participation in the rebellion was characterized in part by applying Nietzsche's thought and categories in an effort to reveal the dimensions of power behind

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<sup>67</sup> Bourne, *Youth and Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 48.

<sup>68</sup> Bourne, "The Older Generation," *The History of a Literary Radical & Other Papers*, ed. Van Wyck Brooks (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1920), 111, 112, 119.

the social order and cultural authorities.<sup>69</sup> “Puritanism,” a term Bourne employed to depict the lingering dominance of Protestant morality and authority, was his target.<sup>70</sup> “To the modern young person who tries to live life well,” Bourne wrote, “there is no type so devastating and harassing as the puritan.” The essay in which Bourne elaborated upon that assertion was titled in Nietzschean terms: “The Puritan’s Will to Power.” Bourne argued that the moral force of Puritanism was unmasked by “the will-to-power dogma” and shown to be about not merely “self-control” but about “the control over others that yields him his satisfactions of power.” But the influence of Puritanism was not easily disentangled. Bourne and others who emerged from Protestant backgrounds had their “puritan fling” and had “sown our puritan wild oats” prior to developing “into devout and

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Bourne used a Nietzschean understanding of power to explain the relationship between capital and labor: “Then I admit that local groups of workers are able—either through lack of competition or clever politics or display of force—to exercise temporarily a decisive pull on the surplus and divert most of it to themselves. It is all a question of power. But as long, I tell them, as the employer is entrenched in property rights with the armed state behind him, the power will be his, and the class that does the diverting will not be labor. My friend, however, does not like these Nietzschean terms. He is sure that his workmen have just as much power to exploit as he has of exploiting them. This is where we differ...He trust rights, I trust power.” See Bourne, “What is Exploitation,” *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 137-138. It was originally published in *New Republic* 9 (November 4, 1916): 12-14. Vaughan makes a distinction between Bourne and Nietzsche in regard to their perspective on power: “Put in Nietzschean terms, Bourne saw power (or the will to power) in both nature and in convention, constituting individuals and structuring their activity and discourse. While Nietzsche dissolved the concepts of community and culture (and past and future) in the interest of creating the autonomous individual, Bourne aimed to free men from both nature and convention for participation in ‘beloved community.’” See Vaughan, *Randolph Bourne and the Politics of Cultural Radicalism*, 172.

<sup>70</sup> Bourne wrote that “the Protestant inevitably gravitates either towards Puritanism or towards Unitarianism. The one petrifies in a harsh and narrow moral code, the ordering of conduct by the most elderly, least aesthetic, dullest and gloomiest elements in the community. The other mingles in endless controversy over the attributes of deity, the history of its workings in the world, and the power of the supernatural.” He also echoed Nietzsche’s death-of-God critique in his assessment of religion’s place in the modern world: “We are passing out of the faith era, and belief, as an intellectual attitude, has almost ceased to play an active part in our life. In the scientific attitude there is no place whatever for belief....The fact that in modern thinking the attitude of belief has given place to what may be called the higher plausibility. Stern, rugged conviction which has no scientific background behind it is coming to be dealt with impatiently by the modern mind.” See Bourne, “The Uses of Infallibility,” in *History of a Literary Radical & Other Papers*, 219, 227, 228.

progressing pagans.” It may very well be necessary, Bourne mused, for “a good appreciating pagan” to first be “a bad puritan.”<sup>71</sup>

Bourne praised other intellectuals for successfully appropriating Nietzsche’s understanding of power in their social and cultural criticism. Elsie Worthington Clews Parsons (1875-1941), the feminist sociologist who later published acclaimed works in anthropology and ethnography, was singled out for praise by Bourne. Her book *Social Rule* (1916) was reviewed by Bourne and credited with effectively utilizing Nietzschean categories in her social analysis. Her particular insight, Bourne wrote, was her sense of “the manifold ways in which people get their desire for power satisfied.” Bourne admired her ability to maintain her radical, pacifist ways and yet still use Nietzsche’s will-to-power as an interpretive grid for challenging “familiar social categories.” Our impulse to impose social hierarchies based on factors such as health and age was driven by the “passion for control.” Bourne presented Parsons as a model intellectual because of her Nietzschean ability to expose social conventions as tools for power and her willingness to conceive of alternative possibilities that respected both scientific authority and human personality. Parsons’ attributes represented to Bourne the type of modernism that Nietzsche pointed towards and that American culture desperately needed.<sup>72</sup>

Bourne recognized, however, that Nietzsche’s brand of modernism would be resisted by religious intellectuals. His sensitivity to that opposition was evident in “Denatured Nietzsche,” a review essay on a book, based on a series of lectures given on Nietzsche at Lake Forest College in Illinois, by British clergyman John Neville Figgis

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<sup>71</sup> Bourne, “The Puritan’s Will to Power,” *Seven Arts* 1, no. 6 (April 1917): 631, 634-635, 637. Bourne’s essay was written in part to indict his mentor John Dewey for his part in the prevailing instrumentalism of American life and for his support of the war.

<sup>72</sup> Bourne, “A Modern Mind,” *Dial* 62, no. 738 (March 22, 1917): 239-240. See also Elsie Worthington Clews Parsons, *Social Rule: A Study of the Will to Power* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916).

(1866-1919).<sup>73</sup> Bourne was not impressed with Figgis' attempt to systematize Nietzsche, given that Nietzsche was "too electric, too poetical, too subtle in his insight, too coruscating in his inconsistencies" to be categorized in any rigid way. What bothered Bourne about that attempt was in part that it was the product of "the mind of a professional Christian." Figgis gave the impression to Bourne of one with "the air of an English churchman" who came "across the sea to tell the students about Nietzsche what was good for them to hear." Figgis correctly recognized Nietzsche as "the most dangerous modern foe of Christianity," in Bourne's estimation, but he also patronized the philosopher and domesticated his ideas.<sup>74</sup>

Figgis not only patronized and domesticated Nietzsche, Bourne argued, but he also fundamentally misunderstood his philosophy of power. The "will-to-power" was not Nietzsche's attempt to set up an ethical system, as Bourne believed Figgis had suggested, it was "the beginning of his diagnosis of society, morality, culture." But Figgis and other critics of Nietzsche were too interested in attaching rigid systems to Nietzsche and blaming him for the excesses of those who followed through on his ideas rather than taking him "loosely, imaginatively, not as a mathematical problem" as Bourne suggested. Bourne also poured scorn on the idea that Nietzsche should be held accountable for how others applied his ideas in practice and noted the irony that for a clergyman this raised the specter of being held accountable for all sorts of historical misfortunes acted out in the name of Christianity. Nietzsche's attack on Christianity, Bourne argued, was "a fair one" because he attacked the ideals of when Christianity was at its historical strongest: "when

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<sup>73</sup> John Neville Figgis, *The Will to Freedom or the Gospel of Nietzsche and the Gospel of Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917).

<sup>74</sup> Bourne, "Denatured Nietzsche," *Dial* 63 (October 25, 1917): 389-390.

it appeared as Puritanism or monasticism.” Nietzsche understood that Christianity was most powerful when presented as “ascetic or otherworldly.” Bourne celebrated “the pagan, liberating, audacious message of Nietzsche” for forcefully challenging and unmasking these powerful manifestations and ideals.<sup>75</sup>

This type of unmasking, Bourne suggested in another essay with a title directly referencing a late Nietzsche work, was part and parcel of the work of an intellectual and was applicable in an American context. Bourne’s “Twilight of the Idols” promoted the Nietzschean notion of intellectuals as “value-creators” who challenged the mechanistic and materialistic foundations of modern American society: “Irritation at things as they are, disgust at the continual frustrations and aridities of American life, deep dissatisfaction with self and with the groups that give themselves forth as hopeful,—out of such moods there might be hammered new values.” Bourne painted a picture of intellectual as a “malcontent” who would critique “complacency” in society, whether in the assumption of traditional morals, support for the Great War, or the generic optimism and nationalism of the American public. A “more skeptical, malicious, desperate, ironical mood,” Bourne argued, might serve American society and culture better than banal optimism and concession to the status quo. Bourne cited the example of Nietzsche’s “intellectual ‘war and laughter,’” which he believed would provide “satisfactions” that could never be secured by the “optimism-haunted philosophies” so apparent in American intellectual life.<sup>76</sup> Bourne’s assumption of the role of Nietzschean malcontent, however, was cut short by his tragic death the year after “Twilight of the Idols” was written.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Bourne, “Twilight of the Idols, *Seven Arts* 2, no. 6 (October 1917): 700, 701, 702. Bourne echoed Nietzsche’s assessment of religion in *Youth and Life*, written four years earlier: “The old rigid morality, with its emphasis on the prudential virtues, neglected the fundamental fact of our irrationality. It believed

### **Nietzsche, Christianity and Radical Politics in the United States, 1900-1917**

Nietzsche was seen by many independent intellectuals as relevant not only to the renewal and rebirth of American culture, but to the reordering of American political and social order as well. Independent intellectuals did not always clearly delineate between the cultural, social, and political in their writings, though they did stress the importance of putting ideas into action, an emphasis which fostered political and social activism.<sup>77</sup> Many of these writers and activists self-consciously cast themselves as modern rebels in conflict with traditional morality, religion, social order and institutions and believed that a decisive break from the past was imminent. Sensing momentum from sociopolitical movements and intellectual currents in Europe, they took it upon themselves to fight against bourgeois, Victorian, and Protestant ideals, social structures and sources of authority in American society.<sup>78</sup> The anarchist activist and writer Emma Goldman, admittedly more strident than many contemporaries, nevertheless captured that sense of historical momentum when she argued that society had “degenerated to its present appalling stage” in large part due to the pernicious influence of Christianity, which

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that if we only knew what was good, we would do it. It was therefore satisfied with telling us what was good, and expecting us automatically to do it. But there was a hiatus somewhere. For we do not what we want to do, but what is easiest and most natural for us to do, and if it is easy for us to do the wrong thing, it is that we will do. We are creatures of instincts and impulses that we do not set going.” See *idem, Youth and Life*, 243-244.

<sup>77</sup> Emma Goldman, for example, defined revolution as “thought carried into action.” See Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910), 73.

<sup>78</sup> Stansell writes the following of the religious proclivities of “American moderns”: “Not in the first decades of the century would these moderns go to church, pray, or even debate the existence of God; agnosticism was in the urban air they breathed. Occasionally, much later, some Villager under a cloud of misfortune sought solace in religion, though seldom in Christianity but rather in theosophy, Oriental mysticism, Gurdjieff, peyote.” See Stansell, *American Moderns*, 62.

preserved the social status quo and enabled the “rulers of the earth” to perpetuate a virtual “slave society.”<sup>79</sup>

The radical political attraction to Nietzsche was rooted in the assumption that he provided intellectual firepower against the religious, social, cultural and political forces preventing the transformation of American society.<sup>80</sup> Many American prewar socialists and anarchists were drawn to Nietzsche’s call for the overthrow of Christian doctrine, morality and cultural authority. They found his appeal to new, created values attractive in light of the political and social possibilities in ascendant modernism. Despite the fault lines and disagreements between these groups, including anarchist skepticism that Nietzsche and socialism were compatible, both strove to incorporate Nietzsche’s critiques into their respective arsenals.

*Nietzsche and Socialist Intellectuals, 1900-1917: Background and Context*

Independent intellectuals who drew upon Nietzsche had varying degrees of commitment to socialism. Some, like Walter Lippmann (1889-1974), were broadly, if briefly, attached to socialist sensibilities and activism. Walter Lippmann’s experience with socialism was particularly short given the context of a long career in journalism, but it did provide him an opportunity to engage Nietzsche’s ideas during a stage in which he embraced a more radical political commitment. A Jewish native of New York and a Harvard University graduate, Lippmann had a long, influential career as a journalist and

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<sup>79</sup> Goldman, “The Failure of Christianity,” *Mother Earth* 8, no. 2 (April 1913): 42.

<sup>80</sup> Will Durant, in a popular philosophical work that argued for the social importance of philosophy, argued that Nietzsche’s understanding of power was useful because “he lets us in behind the scenes of the drama of exploitation.” Nietzsche taught those interested in social and political questions about “the men with whom democracy must deal” and “the greed for power that hides behind the contention that culture cannot exist without slavery.” See Durant, *Philosophy and the Social Problem* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 176.

writer. His winding intellectual trajectory included studying under William James and George Santayana at Harvard, the salons and political energy of Greenwich Village, experiments in socialist thought and politics, a central role in establishing the progressive mouthpiece *New Republic*, and the eventual affirmation of natural law as the basis for public philosophy.<sup>81</sup> Lippmann drew from Nietzsche's thought at a time when his own enthusiasm for socialism was starting to wane, as it was tempered by a brief but disillusioning experience as an assistant to a socialist mayor in Schenectady, New York in 1912. Lippmann's first book, *A Preface to Politics*, was published the following year and reflected a thinker in midstream. Lippmann was still holding on to the collective possibilities of socialism, but he was also appealing to the individualism and irrationalism of thinkers such as Bergson and Nietzsche—all while placing confidence in scientific authority.

Another prewar socialist who eventually abandoned leftist politics later in his career was Max Eastman (1883-1969). Eastman was born to parents who were both Congregationalist ministers in upstate New York before studying under John Dewey at Columbia University. Eastman was a radical activist who wrote social and political commentary as well as poetry and literary criticism. Eastman was a prominent participant in Greenwich Village salons and a publisher and writer for radical journals such as *The Masses* before the war and *The Liberator* in the 1920s. Eastman's ideological trajectory took him from support for the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and enthusiasm for the ideas of Leon Trotsky in the 1920s to criticism of the Soviet Union in the 1930s and the

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<sup>81</sup> For an overview of Lippman's life and work, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980).

embrace of anti-communism and capitalism by the 1940s.<sup>82</sup> Eastman's prewar radicalism included engagement with Nietzsche's thought. Eastman believed that socialism offered either a corrective to or a deeper fulfillment of Nietzsche's ideas. He was willing to criticize Nietzsche and recognize points of irreconcilability, but he also went to great lengths to render Nietzsche applicable to socialism.

William English Walling (1877-1936) was a leading Socialist activist and writer in the first decades of the twentieth century who also sought to reconcile Nietzsche's thought with socialist aims. Walling came from a wealthy Kentucky family before embracing socialism as a student at the University of Chicago. He and wife Anna Strunsky Walling (1877-1964) both became active in socialist and labor politics.<sup>83</sup> Walling is perhaps best known for co-founding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), but his musings on socialism and progressivism were influential at a time when socialism's prospects appeared most hopeful. Works such as *The Larger Aspects of Socialism* (1913), which contained a chapter on Nietzsche, sought to fuse socialism with American intellectual and cultural currents by suggesting its compatibility with pragmatism and the conclusions of modern science. Socialism for Walling was not just a political system or social philosophy but a "new civilization that is gradually being embodied in a social movement." Culture—

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<sup>82</sup> For an overview and interpretation of Eastman's career and gradual abandonment of leftist politics, see John P. Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual Development*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 17-73.

<sup>83</sup> Strunsky Walling offered her own appropriation of Nietzsche's ideas for the socialist cause. Writing of Nietzsche's "will to power," she argued the following: "It is this will to power which Socialism recognizes and upon which it places a wholly different interpretation. It is the will to power as a living principle of life that is steadily directing itself at the abolition of all oppressive power, at the destruction of castes and the resurrection and elevation of the Superman which dwells in every man." She added that Nietzsche's enduring legacy for "modern man" was that "He unmasked morality, the church, and all the ethics of expediency with which the lowly and the meek have been swathed." See Anna Strunsky Walling, "Nietzsche," *New Review* 3, no. 11 (August 1, 1915): 167.

“history, science, literature and art”—was central to this conflict. The “culture of the ruling class” provided support for elite political institutions and social hierarchies, Walling suggested. Fighting this cultural battle and uprooting the old civilization, therefore, became a vital task in which Nietzsche’s thought could be utilized.<sup>84</sup>

Socialist support from Nietzsche also came from unexpected and less well-known sources. Robert Rives La Monte (1867-?), was from a wealthy family but converted to socialism and briefly pursued a career as a socialist writer and activist prior to World War I. La Monte also served as a book reviewer for a Baltimore newspaper while publishing articles books on socialism. La Monte also participated in a written debate about socialism and capitalism with H.L. Mencken, published in a book called *Men vs. the Man* (1910). Little is known about La Monte beyond his early socialist writing, though Mencken fills in some of the gaps with a humorous reflection on La Monte in a memoir. Mencken enjoyed the irony of La Monte’s advocacy for socialism while coming from a wealthy family and detailed meeting La Monte at his father’s New Jersey estate that was “almost a palace.” Mencken, “the representative of capital in our debate,” traveled “in a day-coach” and was met by La Monte, “the representative of the lowly” in “an elegant carriage” with a driver. Mencken also noted that after World War I began, La Monte abandoned socialism and pursued his career as a judge in the state of Connecticut.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> William English Walling, *The Larger Aspects of Socialism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), iii, vii.

<sup>85</sup> Mencken, *Thirty-Five Years of Newspaper Work*, 21. Mencken added: “I have not heard from him for many years. He is now (1942) nearly 75 years old.” Ibid. The irony of the wealthy socialist did not go unnoticed. One commentator noted the irony evident in the debate over socialism between H.L. Mencken and La Monte: “Once he engaged in a book-length debate, in the form of letters, with Robert Rives La Monte on the subject ‘Men vs. the Man.’ Mencken argued fiercely for individualism, *les droits de seigneur*, aristocracy, and the right of the few to exploit the weak. La Monte argued with equal heat for the rights of the proletariat, the need for socialism, and the blessings of altruism and the equal chance. The joke of it is that Mencken at the time was sweating away in his shirt sleeves at a newspaper job while La Monte was

During his radical phase, La Monte explored the ways in which Nietzsche's ideas could be instructive and applicable to socialism while also acknowledging that there were limits to the uses to which Nietzsche could be put.

Emily Hamblen (1864-?) is an even more remote figure in the history of Nietzsche's American reception, in terms of what is known of her life, but her works were known and cited in the contemporary literature on Nietzsche. Hamblen was a literary critic and social activist who lived on a New Jersey farm and worked as the Supervisor of Education and Extension in the Child Hygiene Bureau for the Department of Health in her native state of New Jersey. Hamblen's unusual career saw her combine state government employment with a career as a free lance scholar who wrote several books and articles on William Blake.<sup>86</sup> Her major effort to reconcile Nietzsche with socialism, however, came before the war with her 1911 book *Friedrich Nietzsche and His New Gospel*. Hamblen was the only of these intellectuals to write a monograph exclusively on Nietzsche. She represented the exception to the fact that these intellectuals, whether long-term proponents of socialism or passing through a socialist phase, were primarily concerned with how Nietzsche's ideas could be utilized to support their larger concerns. Nietzsche's critique of Christianity became for these activists a valuable resource in re-imagining American social order.

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taking his ease on a beautiful country estate in Connecticut." See "The Literary Spotlight. H.L. Mencken." *Bookman* 54, no. 6 (February 1922): 554.

<sup>86</sup> Hamblen also wrote a volume on Nietzsche for socialist publisher Emanuel Haldeman-Julius' *Little Blue Book* series. See Hamblen, *How to Understand the Philosophy of Nietzsche*, Little Blue Book No. 11 (Girard KS: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1919).

*Nietzsche, Socialism and a Post-Christian Social Order*

Walter Lippmann recognized in *A Preface to Politics* that challenging tradition and religious authority was an important feature of social transformation. Lippmann's growing reservations about socialism did not dampen his continued sympathy for the rebel attack on tradition. Lippmann approvingly quoted from *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche "in his swashbuckling manner" attempted to undermine "the abstract and final pretensions of creeds." Religious dogmas were not eternal truths discovered but prejudiced assertions of advocacy created. "Final truth," Lippmann learned from Nietzsche, was an "idol" that needed to be eradicated. But the "citadel of truth" was not destroyed but rather preserved by illuminating the "wilful origin of creeds."<sup>87</sup> Unmasking tradition also involved a reassessment of "taboo" and social morality. Lippmann argued that the same impulses are behind both what society deems as taboo and what society considers "fine values" that advance civilization. Traditional moralists view desire as "inherently evil," while for Lippmann they were "energies of the soul, neither good nor bad in themselves." He expressed a progressive confidence that these impulses could be redirected for social good, but drew from Nietzsche in observing a deeper existential reality at work: "But he who has the courage of existence will put it triumphantly, crying 'yea' as Nietzsche did, and recognizing that all the passions of men are the motive powers of a fine life."<sup>88</sup>

Lippmann's political vision, rejecting the old constraints of traditional sources of authority, sought to organize and reinvigorate society through the initiative of "creative statesmanship." But culture must support such a political vision. Creative statesmanship

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<sup>87</sup> Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1913), 235, 236.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 52.

needs nurturing from a culture that emphasizes creation so that the temptation of “idolizing our own methods of thought,” which could foster a tradition, can be resisted. Lippmann believed that while it was not accurate “to lump all the prominent rebels together” of his generation, “the whole drift of thought” in modern culture was “from authority to autonomy.” There was no going back, as nothing short of a “new culture” was in the making. Lippmann’s sense of radical newness, of the irreversible decline of tradition, and of the shift “from authority to autonomy” all drew from Nietzsche’s emboldening critiques.<sup>89</sup> It was in his subsequent book, *Drift and Mastery* (1914), that Lippmann would explore further the implications of a lost transcendent authority. Lippmann had moved away from his early socialism and based his hopes for progress on scientific authority. He approvingly cited Nietzsche’s argument that an absence of absolute authority compelled those who don’t know “how to command” to seek a stern commander, whether it be “a God, a prince, a caste, a physician, a confessor, a dogma, a party conscience.” Lippmann hoped to avoid such a fate with a responsible embrace of scientific authority.<sup>90</sup>

Max Eastman comprehended the force of Nietzsche’s attack on tradition, and especially on Christianity, while focusing on the alternative provided by Nietzsche.

Eastman was willing to criticize Nietzsche and recognize points of irreconcilability with

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 302, 307, 310-311, 318.

<sup>90</sup> Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), 205-206. Lippmann argued that the battle against tradition had been won and that the remaining question was what political and social order would be built in its place: “The sanctity of property, the patriarchal family, hereditary caste, the dogma of sin, obedience to authority,—the rock of ages, in brief, has been blasted for us. Those who are young to-day are born into a world in which the foundations of the older order survive only as habits or by default...So far as we are concerned, then, the case is made out against absolutism, commercial oligarchy, and unquestioned creeds. *The rebel program is stated.* Scientific invention and blind social currents have made the old authority impossible in fact, the artillery fire of the iconoclasts has shattered its prestige. We inherit a rebel tradition. The dominant forces in our world are not the sacredness of property, nor the intellectual leadership of the priest; they are not the divinity of the constitution, the glory of individual push, Victorian sentiment, New England respectability, the Republican Party, or John D. Rockefeller. Our time, of course, believes in change.” Ibid., xvii-xviii.

socialism, but he also went to great lengths to render Nietzsche applicable to socialist aims and serviceable to the masses. Eastman focused on Nietzsche's depiction of the "Superman" and recognized it as a "type" that could embody and cultivate the "pagan and heroic virtues" in contrast to the timid spirituality of modern religion. Nietzsche's "ideal of the fighting superman" was particularly relevant to the "'spiritual' people of our time," who for too long had been "overfed" with "the ideal of humility and submission and long-suffering love." Eastman asserted that Nietzsche attacked "with stings of laughter and bitterness" the teachings of Christianity. Nietzsche was a "fanatical denouncer" of the gospels and the moral teachings exhibited in them, due to their exaltation of "what is base and weak and ignoble." Eastman perceived Nietzsche as attacking "the current morality of idealistic people" but argued that he did offer an alternative. Nietzsche's Supermen were "heroes" who display "self-control, intellect, action, discipline and eternal sacrifice for posterity," though there was a cost. Eastman acknowledged that for Nietzsche, "the enslavement of the many" was a necessary condition for the "development and supremacy of the few." He believed that the social hierarchy described by Nietzsche was evidenced in "the culture of today" and therefore accurate to an extent.<sup>91</sup>

Emily Hamblen recognized the presence of hierarchy in Nietzsche's thought, as well as Nietzsche's criticism of socialist efforts to remedy it, but she argued that the substance of socialism itself had changed since Nietzsche wrote. Socialism was no longer what "made it a matter of abhorrence" to the philosopher. Hamblen suggested that the contemporary version of socialism actually encouraged the "realization" of Nietzsche's

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<sup>91</sup> Max Eastman, "A Note on Nietzsche," in *Understanding Germany; The Only Way to End War and Other Essays* (New York: Michael Kennerly, 1916), 62, 63, 64, 65.

“social ideal.” Socialism, rather than manifesting itself as a “religion of uniformity in fortune, life and work” as in Nietzsche’s day, now sought “to produce conditions under which each individual may come to his own spiritual estate.” Hamblen portrayed Nietzsche as reverent toward the nobility of peasants, sympathetic to the “socialist endeavor to curb privilege,” and in support of better working conditions and hygiene. Nietzsche’s ultimate affinity with socialism, Hamblen suggested, was found in their mutual “passion for Humanity.”<sup>92</sup>

Hamblen’s hopeful suggestion about the reconciliation of Nietzsche and socialism was offered in a work that cast Nietzsche’s thought and mission in deeply religious terms. *Friedrich Nietzsche and His New Gospel* held out hope that Nietzsche’s “social and religious philosophy” would overcome the “face value” assumption that American ideals and institutions were at odds with it. Hamblen went so far as to suggest that if Nietzsche was correct, she and her generation may be “in the actual presence of one of the few great spiritual events of the centuries.”<sup>93</sup> Nietzsche’s philosophy exposed “the fallacy and fatuity of the old conceptual faith” and presented American readers with the opportunity either to demonstrate “the trustworthiness of the old beliefs” or to rebuild “civilization according to the new truths.”<sup>94</sup>

Hamblen’s enthusiasm for Nietzsche’s compatibility with socialism and belief that Nietzsche provided intellectual resources to build a new civilization was matched by

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<sup>92</sup> Emily Hamblen, *Friedrich Nietzsche and His New Gospel* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1911), 129-131.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 7, 8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 6, 8, 109, 26. Hamblen was convinced that Nietzsche’s impact in the United States would be tremendous: “After a strangely long period of indifference America is beginning to open its mind, if not its sympathies, to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche; or—as I have chosen to call it, following Nietzsche himself—The New Gospel. Here is an influence entering our land to determine for good or for evil great changes. In Europe it has been and is profound, revolutionary. It cannot fail eventually to effect us with equal strength, though in different manner because received at the angle of our own peculiar institutions, standards and ideals.” *Ibid.*, 5.

Robert Rives La Monte. His 1908 article for the *International Socialist Review*, “Nietzsche: Iconoclast and Prophet,” proposed that “working class militants” could make several uses of their “brother revolutionary” Nietzsche. La Monte believed that Nietzsche’s analysis of the “apollonian” and “dionysian” tendencies of ancient Greek culture could be applied to a modern context. The apollonian impulse was “conservative or reactionary,” seemed more interested in “representations of life” than reality itself, and was willing to check the pursuit of pleasure. The dionysian impulse by contrast was “revolutionary or iconoclastic,” believed that “real life” was infinitely important, and was the “sworn enemy of asceticism” and all efforts to deny “instincts and appetites.” La Monte believed that the latter instinct appealed to Nietzsche the most and that socialists joined him in that predilection. He acknowledged that Nietzsche’s “utmost contempt” for the masses made their camaraderie a “very limited brotherhood,” but he nevertheless continued to enthuse about Nietzsche’s usefulness to the cause.<sup>95</sup>

La Monte’s enthusiasm was predicated on Nietzsche’s assertion of life’s value without appeal to the supernatural or organized religion. La Monte, similar to Eastman, focused on Nietzsche’s conception of the superman, or “beyond-man” as La Monte called it, as the alternative purpose and end goal of man’s development. This life of “glory and dionysian joy,” however, was to be accomplished at the expense of the exploited and suffering masses, over whom the select few of beyond-men reigned. Despite this source of grief, La Monte argued, the appealing ideal of the beyond-man still justified calling Nietzsche “our Comrade.” This designation was further substantiated by Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, which was similar to the “Marxians” in understanding it as a

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<sup>95</sup> Robert Rives La Monte, “Nietzsche: Iconoclast and Prophet,” *The International Socialist Review* 9, no. 1 (July 1908): 11, 12, 13.

“slave-religion” with materialist origins. Beyond-men were discouraged by the “poverty-stricken wretches” who founded Christianity and responded to their subjugation by glorifying “weakness humility, submission and non-resistance, not to say cowardice.” La Monte believed that message was still relevant to a contemporary working class. He believed that they were encouraged by Christianity to remain content in their circumstances rather than embrace rebellion: “*To-day the World’s workers need not Jesus, but Dionysos.*” La Monte employed Nietzsche in the socialist cause due to the philosopher’s intellectual assault on traditional beliefs and social mores that stood in the way of revolution.<sup>96</sup>

William English Walling recognized that calling for the radical transformation of an entire civilization required dealing with the weight of the past. His discussion of history and his invocation of Nietzsche implied that tradition was an obstacle with which to be reckoned. Walling asserted that Nietzsche’s “*anti-historical standpoint*” was more similar to the proper socialist conception of history. Nietzsche believed that the only ones “who can understand the life of the past” were those who actively participated in the present and were “in the current of life.” Walling celebrated Nietzsche’s proposal for “an *unhistorical culture*” and supported his assertion that “historical culture” was “*necessarily reactionary.*” History as practiced burdened the present with knowledge of the past, stunted action in light of such knowledge, and therefore prevented the transformation that Walling desired socialism to accomplish.<sup>97</sup>

This transformation could be accelerated, Walling suggested, by recognizing the compatibility of Nietzsche’s philosophy not only with socialism but with pragmatism, the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 15, 16

<sup>97</sup> Walling, *The Larger Aspects of Socialism*, 103, 109, 110.

dominant strain in American moral philosophy. The moral insights of Nietzsche, cast in the hues of pragmatism, infused socialism with new possibilities in a modern American context. Walling contended that like the pragmatist, Nietzsche believed that philosophy is a product of the environment, can be judged in terms of its usefulness, and should resist ultimate judgments. Nietzsche wanted to “destroy the foundations of all social ethics, “to *invert or reverse* this social ethics,” and finally to “pass beyond” and “look behind” traditional morality. Pragmatism and Nietzsche, in Walling’s estimation, shared the belief that “past systems of morality, education, and culture” destroyed individuality and experimentation. But even the revolutionaries who opposed these traditions disregarded nature through their protests against “exploitation.” Walling reconciled this seeming objection by Nietzsche to socialism’s goals by suggesting that revolutionaries were more specifically opposing the “exploitation by more or less a hereditary ruling class.” Inequality of opportunity was the target. He also surmised that Nietzsche wouldn’t necessarily condone the permanent servility of the masses and that his “strong man of the future” would have a sense of responsibility to the race at large.<sup>98</sup>

Walling focused not on addressing Nietzsche’s explicit hostility to socialism but rather on appropriating his forceful critique of the moral order that posed a common enemy. Nietzsche’s future man rejected the oppressive ideals of the past, followed “his own deepest impulses,” and pursued enhanced “capacity.” The latter concept was for Walling the key to Nietzsche’s thought: “Capacity implies that men are to cease endeavoring to lay down laws for other men or obeying laws made by other men, and are to develop the powers that lie in themselves, which will force them to assume infinitely varied relations to others.” Socialism would benefit from this freedom from traditional

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 207, 209, 218, 219.

social relations as well. Walling believed that Nietzsche's new morality, centered on the development of individual capacity, could be applied to the masses and not merely the "superior few" to whom Nietzsche appealed. This new morality would be vital in liberating the masses from the falsehoods that enchained them and would help bring about the "revolution in civilization" that Walling saw as socialism's future.<sup>99</sup>

*Lessons and Limits in the Socialist Engagement of Nietzsche*

The enthusiasm expressed by Walling for Nietzsche's usefulness for the socialist cause was complemented by his belief that Nietzsche presented an opportunity for self-reflection. Walling was joined by Lippmann in suggesting that socialism's agenda of mass transformation needed to be complemented by a concern for the individual. Walling believed that Nietzsche spoke to the issue of what type of individual ought to be "cultivated, willed, or created" in the midst of this new social order. Walling linked the matter of the individual's nature with the "new morality" that Nietzsche—and socialism—promoted. Resisting the past and accomplishing the "reversal of the older standards" called for a specific type of individual. Walling held that Nietzsche addressed socialist concerns through his belief in individuals who rejected conformity, resisted falling into "social grooves," and no longer "repressed themselves" in favor of those who were diverse, compelled social change, and asserted their innermost beings. Walling connected Nietzsche's advocacy for the individual with the suggestion that it formed the basis of Nietzsche's moral philosophy. Morality therefore was not as interested in

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 226-227. Walling made clear the obstacle that traditional religious beliefs presented to socialism: "For as long as it is practicable to keep supernaturalism and metaphysics alive they will be used by the ruling class as a foundation on which to build up a body of doctrine for maintaining the masses in ignorance, and for furnishing some makeshift that will serve in their own minds as a defense of the inequities of class rule." Ibid., 256.

“determining the best relations between individuals, but in determining which are the best individuals.”<sup>100</sup>

Walter Lippmann also called his fellow reformers and radicals to respect individuality and to resist merely substituting one stifling “machine” of social and political order for another. These reformers, he suggested, were “utopia-makers in action,” who saw that “humanity is badly squeezed in the existing mould” but ironically offered another mould instead. This confirmed his suspicion that “they have an infinite faith in moulds.” Lippmann reflected Nietzsche’s celebration on the individual by suggesting that any social vision must respect human personality and action. He accused “orthodox socialists” of neglecting the importance of human personality. Socialists focused on the mass of people, as opposed to the unique individual, and it was out of this mass that “initiative springs anonymously.” Lippmann noted the irony that democratic movements “had no faith in human beings” due to fear of tyranny, which led them to shun individual initiative, leadership, and excellence. He concluded that socialism’s insistence on man as a “creature” that was “determined by conditions” had become, in Nietzschean terms, an “idol.” Socialism must escape its “outworn determinism” and begin to regard individuals as “moulders of their environment.” We must, Lippmann argued, “say with Nietzsche, *‘Let the value of everything be determined afresh by you.’*”

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 192, 193, 195.

<sup>101</sup> Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, 8, 16, 17, 242, 243, 245. The full quote on p. 242 amplifies his point: “But the drawbacks are becoming more and more evident as socialism approaches nearer to power and responsibility. The feeling that man is a creature and not a creator is disastrous as a personal creed when you come to act. If you insist upon being ‘determined by conditions,’ you do not hesitate about saying ‘I shall.’ You are likely to wait for something to determine you. Personal initiative and individual genius are poorly regarded: many socialists are suspicious of originality. This philosophy, so useful in propaganda, is becoming a burden in action. That is another way of saying that the instrument has turned into an idol.”

Eastman, however, expressed concern about the nature of Nietzsche's individualism and its attachment to social hierarchy. He charged that Nietzsche failed to recognize the nature of modern aristocracy. "Strength or merit" was not the basis of contemporary aristocracy, Eastman argued, but rather "wealth." Eastman recast Nietzsche's Superman in socialist terms when suggesting that the "United Mine Workers of America" was just as likely to contain Nietzsche's supermen among their members as "the Union League Club." Wealth alone did not guarantee the characteristics Nietzsche attributed to his supermen. Eastman believed that Nietzsche lived too removed from society to realize that "the *survival of the strong*, upon which he rested his hope, has been destroyed by the existence of hereditary wealth and hereditary opportunity." Nietzsche was too much of a "hermit" and perhaps a "snob" to realize what Eastman understood: "a greater ideal—the ideal of a Super-Society, in which all men are free, and those born with heroic and great gifts or characters must inevitably rise to eminence, through their sheer value to mankind." Failure to perceive that robbed Nietzsche of the privilege of being considered "one of the supreme moralists of history," according to Eastman. Nietzsche could still serve as a reminder that while there is a place for "humility and meekness and love," there also was the need for "strength and courage to command and change your world," a message that greatly appealed to the activist in Eastman. Therefore Eastman used Nietzsche's ideas, though critiqued and adjusted, to challenge what Eastman considered the passive morality of Christianity and to encourage bold action in the service of social and political transformation.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Eastman, *Understanding Germany*, 66-67. Eastman biographer Milton Cantor observes that Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity had great personal appeal to Eastman: "Like Nietzsche, Eastman also celebrated the self-fulfilling and self-transcending individual as the source of all health and joy. He also abandoned the restraints of Christian morality, believed God was dead, found modern society to be afflicted, and declared

La Monte appeared to share Eastman's concern in his comments about Nietzsche in his 1910 written debate with Mencken, two years after his enthusiastic article. La Monte shared the belief of many American socialists that the new capitalist order made social revolution "inevitable," though the shape of that revolution remained to be seen. One possibility, La Monte suggested, was "an oligarchy of Nietzschean Immoralists" while another scenario envisioned "common possession of all," the abolition of property, and a new "era of fellowship" among humanity. He suggested that "the fundamental weak spot" in the individualist position of Mencken and Nietzsche was that the social caste system prescribed by the dominance of the superman would lead to "loneliness." He referred to Mencken's "Nietzschean philosophy of aristocracy" in unfavorable terms. But La Monte continued to find Nietzsche useful to the socialist cause, especially his critique of Christianity. La Monte argued that Mencken, "a student of Friedrich Nietzsche," should recognize "that religious ideals have economic roots" and elaborated by citing a selection from *A Genealogy of Morals* in which Nietzsche discussed how early Christians "manufactured" ideals such as "humility" and turned their weakness into virtue in the attempt to overturn their social standing.<sup>103</sup>

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that the strong and the beautiful must survive, if necessary, at the expense of the feeble." See Cantor, *Max Eastman* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 45.

<sup>103</sup> La Monte and Mencken, *Men versus the Man; A Correspondence between Robert Rives La Monte, Socialist and H.L. Mencken, Individualist* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), 7-8, 129, 176, 135. La Monte began the debate by describing Mencken as "a disciple of Nietzsche" and himself as "a faithful disciple of Marx." Ibid., 1.

Not all radical thinkers agreed with the notion that Nietzsche and socialism were compatible. Anarchist sympathizer and Emma Goldman ally, Wm. C. Owen, expressed skepticism in a review of *Men vs. the Man*. Owen found the socialist La Monte's claim of Nietzsche as "our comrade" to be credulous, if not intellectually dishonest. He suggested that Nietzsche hated socialism, "attacked it with every weapon at his command," and considered it nothing more than "organized mob rule." See Owen, "Marx vs. Nietzsche: A Review of 'Men vs. the Man,'" *Mother Earth* 5, no. 7 (September 1910): 238. Sigmund Zeisler, a leftist lawyer who served as a legal advocate for those involved in the Haymarket Affair trial, recognized Nietzsche as "the most radical philosopher of the century" but did not share the belief that Nietzsche's views could be so easily reconciled with socialism. Zeisler was particularly critical of Nietzsche's attack on traditional Christian morality, especially when compared to the "unbounded license, self-glorification, and

These examples give evidence that these writers believed that Nietzsche's ideas allowed socialists to address their vulnerabilities, particularly in regard to concern for the individual. But others like Eastman and La Monte recognized the irreconcilable tensions between Nietzsche and socialism that set limits on his applicability or compelled alterations to his thought. These socialist intellectuals made use of Nietzsche most consistently, however, in relation to his critique of Christianity and the ensuing consequences for civilization. It was this aspect of Nietzsche's thought that appealed to other radicals as well.

*Emma Goldman and Margaret Anderson: Nietzsche and Anarchism—Political and Cultural*

While socialist intellectuals sought to appropriate the lessons of Nietzsche's individualism for an ideology of the masses, anarchism more easily embraced this aspect of his thought. Anarchism did not experience wide acceptance in the United States, but it did inspire an active, vocal minority to political activism and cultural production prior to World War I. Two anarchists in particular, Emma Goldman and Margaret C. Anderson, were instrumental in engaging Nietzsche's individualism for both political and cultural purposes. Emma Goldman (1869-1940) was Russian-born Jewish emigrant who worked tirelessly to expand nascent anarchism's reach in the United States after embracing the

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self-indulgence of the alternative offered by Nietzsche. It may be "necessary to revise our code of morals," Zeisler wrote, but not before overcoming the "one-sided prejudice" toward traditional morality. Zeisler argued that while Nietzsche correctly demonstrated "the hollowness and hypocrisy" of traditional moral codes, he underestimated the "positive" role Christian morality played as a necessary "purgative" to barbaric and primitive instincts in order to establish a civilization. Zeisler agreed with Nietzsche that it was unnecessary to be a Christian, but believed there still needed to be some sense of morality without which "the world would be chaos." Zeisler recognized Nietzsche's opposition to socialism but argued that despite his "ingenious, brilliant and original" critique, history continued to move toward expanded "economic and social equality." Nietzsche's "extraordinary power and genius" were unable to stop "the wheel of history" that seemed to favor socialism and its inherent ideals. See Zeisler, "Nietzsche and His Philosophy," *Dial* 29, no. 343 (October 1, 1900): 219-221.

activist impulse nurtured in the Lower East Side of New York City. Goldman and longtime comrade Alexander Berkman (1870-1936) embraced violent tactics early in their American career, as seen in the attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919), the chairman of Carnegie Steel, in Pittsburgh, PA. Goldman later eschewed violent tactics but still embraced conflict as a paradigm for her revolutionary agenda. Goldman's later activism was characterized by extensive writing and lecturing on subjects from women's rights to anti-militarism, along with pro-labor causes and a wide range of social issues. She founded the journal *Mother Earth* in 1906 and often published pieces referencing or focusing on Nietzsche in the firm belief that his ideas supported their anarchist vision.

One of Goldman's early admirers was Margaret C. Anderson (1886-1973), the founder and publisher of modernist artistic and literary journal the *Little Review*. Anderson was an Indiana native who moved to Chicago and started the *Little Review* in 1914. The journal's lasting legacy was found in its promotion of modernist literature, which included the serialization of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the publication of authors including Ezra Pound (who briefly helped edit the journal), T.S. Eliot, Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crane, Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein.<sup>104</sup> Anderson described the *Little Review* as "a magazine that believes in life for art's sake" and explained its political perspective as "applied anarchism." She rejected the notion that focusing on individual expression, particularly in the arts, did not have social or political benefits. The development of individuals, she claimed, provided models of "greatness" that made "the people conscious of their power." She described that task as "the aim of the anarchist"

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<sup>104</sup> For more on the background and "modern aesthetics" of the *Little Review* see Jayne E. Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: 'Little' Magazines and Literary History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 60-100.

and applied it to contemporary labor problems. “When people are conscious of their power there will be no labor problems,” Anderson concluded.<sup>105</sup> But Anderson primarily was interested in cultural anarchism and promoted Nietzsche in her journal as a model of individuality.

Goldman also saw Nietzsche as a model of individuality but was more specific about the political and social ramifications for anarchism. She critiqued institutions deemed hostile to the individual. The state, church and family were, according to Goldman, forces that found “a deadly enemy” in the “strong, beautiful, uncompromising personality.” Goldman countered by calling for a war on behalf of true individuality. It was a war that began at an early age and continued through a series of “fierce and fiery battles” against the forces of institutional oppression. She intoned Nietzsche’s call to eschew “private laziness” and to refuse acquiescence to these “fetters of the thoughtlessness and stupidity of the commonplace.”<sup>106</sup> Goldman viewed anarchism as a force of liberation against the enslaving institutions of the West and Nietzsche as an ally in the cause.

Goldman particularly identified with Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity. She believed Nietzsche deserved to be known among “intellectual giants” because of his effort “to transvalue the dead social and moral values of the past, especially those contained in Christianity.” Goldman acknowledged that Nietzsche opposed Christianity’s “pernicious slave morality” in favor “of a master morality for the privileged few.” But she argued that his notion of master morality “had nothing to do with the vulgarity of station, caste, or wealth.” Instead, Nietzsche was advocating mastery “in human

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<sup>105</sup> Margaret C. Anderson, “Ours Is The Life, Others Are Odd: Miss Anderson,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 August 1915, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Goldman, “The Child and Its Enemies,” *Mother Earth* 1, no. 2 (April 1906): 7, 8.

possibilities” so that “the masterful in man” would be able “to overcome old traditions and worn-out values” in favor of creating “new and beautiful things.” Goldman expressed a general agreement with Nietzsche’s notion of “slave morality,” though without specifying where, she did acknowledge that she might not entirely agree with him. She did use Nietzsche’s thought as a launching pad, however, to express her own vitriol and hostility toward Christianity. She portrayed “the rulers of the earth” as exploiting Christianity and the “potent poison” within in it for the purpose of maintaining power and social control. Goldman went on to launch an extraordinary attack on Christianity, which in her view had from the beginning had “turned the earth into a vale of tears.” False promises of eternity, distorted notions of good and evil, and bogus conceptions of sin and redemption all constituted a “stumbling-block in the world’s work.” “The extreme individualism” of thinkers like Nietzsche, Goldman countered, was preferable to “the sick-room atmosphere of the Christian faith.”<sup>107</sup>

Goldman’s lectures on Nietzsche also drew upon similar themes and connected his critique of Christianity with anarchism itself. A lecture in San Francisco titled “Nietzsche, the Intellectual Storm Center of the War” moved into a discussion of religion, which she defined in terms of “the subjugation of the human mind to the idea of power.” Anarchists by nature “respected no authority,” including religion. She approvingly cited Nietzsche’s suggestion that “God was a ‘blunder’ of man” and “concluded with a plea for the visible world” in contrast to “the flatulent promises of a

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<sup>107</sup> Goldman, “The Failure of Christianity, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47. Goldman lamented what she perceived as a misunderstanding of Nietzsche: “Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, is decried as a hater of the weak because he believed in the *Uebersch*. It does not occur to the shallow interpreters of that giant mind that this vision of the *Uebersch* also called for a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves.” See Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 50.

sphere beyond.”<sup>108</sup> Anderson celebrated Goldman’s career as a demonstration that “radical changes in society” were not the result of gradual reform or “a patching up of the old order,” but “a tearing down and a rebuilding.” This rebuilding involved repudiating “Christianity, conventional morality, immortality” and all other obstacles to “progress, freedom, health, truth, and beauty.” This outcome, Anderson concluded, would represent moving “beyond good and evil” as Nietzsche had envisioned. Goldman, Anderson concluded, could best be understood as a “practical Nietzschean.”<sup>109</sup>

Goldman published *Mother Earth* editorials and articles that affirmed Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and role in providing a modern alternative. “No one has had such universal influence as Nietzsche upon the human mind,” one editorial breathlessly intoned. No other thinker had “so mercilessly attacked the old values of religion and morality, literature and art.” Nietzsche was one of those “rare, very rare cosmic characters” whose ideas were “of incalculable value to the shaping of modern consciousness.”<sup>110</sup> A *Mother Earth* reviewer of Nietzsche’s published works observed that civilization, “permeated as it is by Christian morality,” was understood by Nietzsche as “an instrument for the subjection and taming of men.”<sup>111</sup> One writer, in an approving evaluation of Nietzsche’s ethical teachings regarding sex and marriage, favorably compared his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to the Bible: “Studying the manner of treatment of the problems it contains, one wonders whether the Christian Bible or any

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<sup>108</sup> David Leigh, “Emma Goldman in San Francisco,” *Mother Earth* 10, no. 8 (October 1915): 280. Goldman elsewhere expressed a strong belief in “the decline of theism” and the ascendance of atheism. See Goldman, “The Philosophy of Atheism,” *Mother Earth* 10, no. 12 (February 1916): 410-416.

<sup>109</sup> Anderson, “The Challenge of Emma Goldman,” *Little Review* 1, no. 3 (May 1914): 5, 6, 9.

<sup>110</sup> “Observations and Comments,” *Mother Earth* 8, no. 9 (November 1912): 279.

<sup>111</sup> B.M., “Friedrich Nietzsche,” *Mother Earth* 7, no. 11 (January 1913): 384. The anarchist reviewer couldn’t help but note Nietzsche’s particular loathing for socialists, who were described as “the last exponents of the Christian morality of charity and pity” and thus were responsible for so much contemporary misery. *Ibid.*, 383.

other religio-ethical literature can compare with his trueness of touch and breadth of understanding.”<sup>112</sup> Goldman and like-minded radicals at *Mother Earth* embraced Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity as foundational in their efforts to cast an anarchist social vision. Traditional religious sources of authority were perceived as creating and supporting the social conditions that encouraged oppression and discouraged an individualism that would be utilized in the quest for social and political transformation.<sup>113</sup>

Anderson, who was less interested in the nuts and bolts of political activism, was more interested in the cultural ideal of anarchism. She focused more on the unfettered freedom of the individual than on the pursuit of widespread social transformation.<sup>114</sup> “An anarchist is a person who realizes the gulf between government and life,” Anderson once mused. Governing anyone or even ourselves was discouraged by Anderson, who argued that Nietzsche himself “said not to preserve yourself but to discharge yourself!”<sup>115</sup>

Anderson’s anarchist impulses focused instead upon the realm of the arts, which she held out as the protector of individualism and not the realm of mass politics. “‘People’ has become to me a word that—crawls,” Anderson wrote. “‘People’ don’t become artists or ‘change.’” Individuals can change, she countered, “and that is the hope.” She held out hope that the current generation would produce individuals “brought up on Nietzsche.”

This “upbringing,” Anderson contended, brought two lessons: “first that he who goes

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<sup>112</sup> Helene Stoecker, “The Newer Ethics,” *Mother Earth* 2, no. 1 (March 1907): 22-23.

<sup>113</sup> Van Wyck Brooks admired Goldman and other revolutionaries for their tenacity but found their understanding of American culture deeply flawed. He lamented their intolerance of all things “not violently modern” and marveled at their willingness to forsake their respective traditions, their own parents, and their adopted country. Brooks, noting their enthusiastic embrace of thinkers such as Marx, Bakunin, Proudhon, Nietzsche and Sorel, found their assumption that American literature should “adjust itself to old-world ideas and models” naïve. Goldman and other revolutionaries, he concluded, secured their own marginalization by failing to understand the American cultural and social milieu that they sought to transform. See Brooks, *The Confident Years: 1885-1915*, 127.

<sup>114</sup> Anderson contrasted anarchism with socialism by stating: “Anarchism, like all great things, is an announcement. Socialism is an explanation and falls, consequently, into the realm of secondary things.” See Anderson, *My Thirty Years War* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), 149.

<sup>115</sup> Anderson, “Art and Anarchism,” *Little Review* 3, no. 1 (March 1916): 3, 5.

forward goes alone, and second that it is weakness rather than nobility to succumb to the caterpillars,” the latter term being a derisive depiction of the masses.<sup>116</sup> Nietzsche modeled individualism in Anderson’s estimation. She made the *Little Review* a venue in which Nietzsche’s ideas could be understood. Anderson’s major contribution to introducing Nietzsche to *Little Review* readers was her decision to publish a series of articles on Nietzsche by University of Chicago religion professor George Burman Foster (1858-1919), a liberal Protestant who is discussed in the following chapter. Foster praised Nietzsche for a heart “tender and rich and intimate with a pure and noble humanity” and depicted him as “a prophet of a new culture.”<sup>117</sup>

Foster also reflected on the spiritual role that art played in Nietzsche’s vision, which seemed especially relevant to his *Little Review* audience. Art became the realm where one overcame nature, transfigured death, and celebrated “self-redemption” as well as the essence of life. Foster referred to “this Nietzschean preaching of art” as “prophetic” and inspired and contrasted it with the “dead concept” of inspiration emerging from theologians and traditional interpretations of the Bible.<sup>118</sup> Nietzsche’s call for a new “artistic culture” meant for Foster “a rebirth of our entire moral and social life.”

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<sup>116</sup> Anderson, “The Artist in Life,” *Little Review* 2, no. 4 (June-July 1915): 18, 19.

<sup>117</sup> George Burman Foster, “The Prophet of a New Culture,” *Little Review* 1, no. 1 (March 1914): 14-17. Foster’s other contributions included: “Man and Superman,” *Little Review* 1, no. 2 (April 1914), 3-7; “Art and Life,” *Little Review* 1, no. 3 (May 1914): 19-24; “The Will to Live,” *Little Review* 1, no. 4 (June 1914): 23-27; “The New Loyalty,” *Little Review* 1, no. 5 (July 1914): 22-31, 66; “The Nietzschean Love of Eternity,” *Little Review* 1, no. 6 (September 1914): 25-30; “Longing,” *Little Review* 1, no. 7 (October 1914): 22-27; “Noise,” *Little Review* 1, no. 8 (November 1914): 32-39; “Personality,” *Little Review* 1, no. 9 (December 1914): 40-45; “The Bestowing Virtue,” *Little Review* 1, no. 10 (January 1915): 25-31; “A Hard Bed,” *Little Review* 1, no. 11 (February 1915): 39-45; “The Schoolmaster,” *Little Review* 2, no. 2 (April 1915): 37-43; “The Ugliest Man,” *Little Review* 2, no. 5 (August 1915): 30-35; “The New Idol,” *Little Review* 2, no. 6 (September 1915): 37-42.

<sup>118</sup> Foster, “Art and Life,” 22.

Foster argued that Nietzsche's moral and social vision paralleled that of Jesus in that it entailed "the regeneration of society through the regeneration of the individual."<sup>119</sup>

Foster's association of Nietzsche with Jesus may have raised the eyebrows of some *Little Review* readers, but his acknowledgment of Nietzsche's anarchism would have been appreciated. Nietzsche led "the van of all the poets and thinkers" who conceived of humanity's "future task" as "the negation, the overcoming, of the state." Foster elaborated by suggesting that in Europe, the State had taken the place of the Church. It was given "all power in heaven and on earth" and preached "a gospel to its believers." To question the State's "claims to omnipotence," Foster continued, was akin to "blasphemy." Nietzsche considered this concession to the State a "*new idol*," Foster contended. Some reservations about anarchism's "antidote" of radical individualism were expressed by Foster, but he did confirm for *Little Review* readers the legitimacy of couching Nietzsche's political persuasion in anarchist terms.<sup>120</sup>

### **Postscript: Nietzsche and the Critics After the War, 1918-1929**

World War I had a tremendous impact both on Nietzsche's reputation in the United States and on the lives and careers of the critics discussed in this chapter. H.L. Mencken was criticized for his sympathy for German culture and society, which he most famously outlined in his controversial 1914 *Atlantic Monthly* essay "The Mailed Fist and Its Prophet." It was there that Mencken, with frequent invocations of Nietzsche, had celebrated German culture, society and politics while seemingly admiring its militarism

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<sup>119</sup> Foster, "The Will to Live," 23, 25.

<sup>120</sup> Foster, "The New Idol," 39, 42.

at a time when war had broken out in Europe.<sup>121</sup> Newspapers were hesitant to publish Mencken, including his primary employers at the *Baltimore Sun*. Other cultural critics and radical activists also suffered professional and personal hardships. Radical journals such as the *Masses* and *Seven Arts* were no longer sustainable, with the latter losing funding due to Bourne's vociferous opposition to the war. The "Red Scare" after the war led to the 1919 deportation of Goldman. Despite these obstacles, in addition to the popular association of Nietzsche with German militarism, independent intellectuals continued to find Nietzsche's critique of Christianity insightful and relevant after the war.

Mencken referenced Nietzsche in a 1919 postwar reflection for the *Smart Set* on the state of Christianity and its cultural authority. Mencken believed that he was witnessing the collapse of "historical Christianity, both as theology and as ethic" in the aftermath of a war from which "Christian theology" emerged "with two black eyes, both ears in tatters and its tail cut off." Mencken adopted a Nietzschean posture by suggesting that the war exposed Christian moral and ethical teaching as a deeply flawed explanation for human nature. Like Nietzsche, Mencken appealed to the origin of Christianity, which was founded by "a people forced into an unhealthy resignationism by long-continued helplessness." Mencken referred readers to Nietzsche to better understand the origin of Christianity, which in his estimation was important for understanding the 1900 years of

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<sup>121</sup> Mencken, "The Mailed Fist and Its Prophet," *Atlantic Monthly* 114 (November 1914): 598-607. Mencken described the impact of Nietzsche in Germany, after the publication of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as follows: "It was as if a new Luther had begun to speak with the tongue of a new Goethe; as if a new David had been sent into Germany to rekindle her against the false gods of the past." Nietzsche was offering "a new gospel to take the place of the old gospel of brotherhood which the Socialists were turning so plausibly to their uses," according to Mencken. *Ibid.*, 600. Nietzsche's ideas "gave coherence and significance to the new German spirit, and the new Germany gave a royal setting and a splendor to Nietzsche." *Ibid.*, 606. Mencken also noted the Nietzsche cult among the young in Germany and suggested that Nietzsche launched "the most devastating attack ever made upon Christian morals in ancient or modern times." *Ibid.*, 605.

flawed social morality that followed.<sup>122</sup> Mencken later argued, however that Christianity's historical influence would not be easily shaken off by the self-consciously modern person, who remained "the fruit and slave of the environment" in which he found himself. Mencken noted that a person may read Nietzsche and "caress himself with the notion that he is an immoralist" while consciously rejecting "the revelation of God," but there remained within him "a sound Christian, a moralist, a right-thinking and forward looking man."<sup>123</sup>

Mencken offered his contribution to the difficult task of uprooting Christian morality by producing a translation of Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ* in 1920. Mencken argued that the key to understanding all of Nietzsche's philosophy was its diametrical opposition to Christianity as well as the realization that it encompassed more than a set of religious doctrines:

In truth, the present philippic is as necessary to the completeness of the whole of Nietzsche's system as the keystone is to the arch. All the curves of his speculation lead up to it. What he flung himself against, from beginning to end of his days of writing, was always, in the last analysis, Christianity in some form or another—Christianity as a system of practical ethics, Christianity as a political code, Christianity as metaphysics, Christianity as a gauge of the truth. It would be difficult to think of any intellectual enterprise on his long list that did not, more or less directly and clearly, relate itself to this master enterprise of them all....The things he chiefly argued for were anti-Christian things—the abandonment of the purely moral view of life, the rehabilitation of the instinct, the dethronement of weakness and timidity as ideals, the renunciation of the whole hocus-pocus of dogmatic religion, the extermination of false aristocracies (of the priest, of the politician, of the plutocrat), the revival of the healthy, lordly 'innocence' that was Greek.<sup>124</sup>

Mencken understood that Nietzsche's attack on Christianity was based upon the reality that it contained a cultural authority that transcended the confines of the institutional church. Nietzsche's ambition, therefore, was to uproot a deeply entrenched set of religious, social, cultural and political assumptions that were inspired by Christianity and

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<sup>122</sup> Mencken, "The Infernal Mystery," *Smart Set* 59, no. 2 (June 1919): 138, 139.

<sup>123</sup> Mencken, *In Defense of Women* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 146, 147.

<sup>124</sup> Mencken, "Introduction," in F.W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H.L. Mencken (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), 11-12.

to cast his own vision in direct opposition to that legacy. Mencken nevertheless insisted that Nietzsche was not looking “to destroy Christianity altogether” or to take “spiritual consolations” away from the common person. What he objected to, Mencken suggested, was “the elevation of those beliefs” to the level of “state philosophy” and the “pollution and crippling of the superior minority” by these beliefs. Mencken presented Nietzsche as the guardian of the fortunes of the superior individual that were threatened by the mediocrity-inducing, unnatural precepts of Christian morality.<sup>125</sup>

Mencken’s position on Nietzsche and Christianity was shared by his colleague Benjamin De Casseres (1873-1945), who wrote both for the *Smart Set* and Mencken’s postwar journal the *American Mercury*. De Casseres had a long career in newspaper journalism, wrote for cultural journals and wrote many books, many of which were self-published. His career received an early boost from friend and mentor James Huneker, who commended De Casseres’ writings in *New York Sun* column. Huneker wrote that De Casseres possessed “aptitude for saying clever aphoristic things in a manner which recalls Emerson, Nietzsche and Benjamin Franklin.”<sup>126</sup> Huneker also encouraged De Casseres to develop his writing style, which originally had a seriousness marked by De Casseres’ “pessimistic view of life” as well as his “metaphysical nihilism.”<sup>127</sup> Huneker encouraged the lighter side of De Casseres, which resulted in a more whimsical, idiosyncratic and

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Arnold T. Schwab, *James Gibbons Huneker: Critic of the Seven Arts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 150. De Casseres returned the favor by offering frequent rave reviews of Huneker’s works and publishing a book on Huneker after his death. See De Casseres, *James Gibbons Huneker* (New York: Joseph Lawren, 1925).

<sup>127</sup> Huneker, *Letters of James Gibbons Huneker*, 85.

epigrammatic approach to writing that often was compared to Nietzsche, though De Casseres did not always fare well in the comparison.<sup>128</sup>

De Casseres' Nietzschean mimicry primarily manifested itself in the 1920s, a clear sign that like Mencken, his enthusiasm for Nietzsche was not diminished by the war. De Casseres endorsed Nietzsche's notion that Christianity inhibited the freedom and development of the superior individual through its distortion of natural order and desire. Christianity provided the foundation for the prevailing political and social ideologies that De Casseres viewed as threats to his individualist ideal. "The Christian 'Kingdom of God,'" De Casseres wrote, encompassed "the weak, the stunted, the underfed and the outcasts" and remained resistant to the strong individual. He immediately followed that observation by rejecting the belief that one could rise "from lower to higher in social systems," calling it nothing more than "the redistribution of mediocrity." De Casseres also decried the popular notion of living for "posterity" or for what socialists called the "rising generation." This obligation was the latest step in a progression that began with "the first great necessary lie" of "responsibility to God" and then shifted to "social responsibility" once religious belief and authority waned. De Casseres' lament about the damage done to the ego and individual by such onerous notions of responsibility was cast in Nietzschean terms, along with the suggestion that the only posterity that concerned

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<sup>128</sup> One reviewer noted that De Casseres was "deliberately or unintentionally, an etcher cribbing Nietzsche." See "Recent Books in Brief Review," *Bookman* 57, no. 3 (May 1923): 345. Scholar, writer and critic Gorham B. Munson (1896-1969) was even more scathing of De Casseres in *New Republic* review: "One can make several minor reservations in favor of Mr. De Casseres, but beyond them he exemplifies chiefly the danger of having an idiom rather than a style. Given a capitalized, excited, hurried, paradoxical, epigrammatic, imagistic, personifying and dramatic idiom, and all one needs to do is to borrow viewpoints. It is not necessary to develop or apply or even restate accurately the original concepts. Pyrotechnics will substitute, and so Mr. De Casseres vulgarizes the thoughts of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche into a cheap display....One suspects Mr. De Casseres' continuous overemphasis to be a compensation for weakness, for his inability to criticize or deepen the philosophic concepts he accepts, and so wrest free from the grip of stronger minds." See Gorham B. Munson, "Fireworks," *New Republic* 32, no. 410 (October 11, 1922): 180.

Nietzsche was the “Overman.” De Casseres echoed Nietzsche’s assertion that a belief system like Christianity was pernicious in its repudiation of nature, whether in terms of denying social hierarchy or imposing its unnatural morality and burdensome sense of obligation—both of which inhibited the cultivation of superior individuals.<sup>129</sup> By the end of the 1920s, De Casseres was continuing to celebrate those critics, novelists and artists who were incorporating Nietzsche’s ideas in their efforts to “transvalue” the prevailing values and standards of modern America.<sup>130</sup>

Max Eastman continued to incorporate Nietzsche’s ideas in his radical political musings following the war. Eastman asserted in a 1920 essay for *The Liberator* that American Communists should disabuse themselves of “soft-headed” sentimentalism that characterized social movements infused by Christian ideals. Eastman argued that these activists suffered “from a very Christian sickness” and failed to realize that “healthier and wiser views of life” could inform and sustain their social and political efforts. The Christian emphasis on weakness, suffering, self-denial, and “pale, vaporous” promises was insufficient “for a true theory of progress.” It was for that reason that Eastman suggested that any course on Communism should begin by reading Nietzsche’s *Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche may have fallen just short, in Eastman’s estimation, of giving science its full due, but he nevertheless favorably compared it to the “dogmatic lies and sacred

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<sup>129</sup> De Casseres, *Chameleon: Being a Book of My Selves* (New York: Lieber & Lewis, 1922), 37, 166. De Casseres approvingly cited Nietzsche’s rejection of the Christian notion of conscience. Nietzsche, “the great rhapsodical psychologist,” was celebrated for challenging “the other-world roisterers” who had mired “the soul of man” in notions of sin, guilt, self-denial, and a desire for “another world, where the strong men cease from taking and the eunuchs get the best.” *Ibid.*, 144-145.

<sup>130</sup> Isadora Duncan, Ambrose Bierce, Robinson Jeffers, James Branch Cabell and Eugene O’Neill are the artists, writers and playwrights highlighted by De Casseres. See De Casseres, *The Superman in America*, 18-27. De Casseres even saw Nietzschean elements in national politics. Theodore Roosevelt was described as “a perfect caricature of Nietzsche’s Superman.” He was “born with a will-to-power in all its unscrupulous grandeur which he was compelled by law and by custom to drain off in a thousand futile directions.” Woodrow Wilson was depicted as “a mental, physical, and cultural aristocrat” who was the closest approximation of the Superman through his recognition that “the will-to-power in America” was best executed through “the mask of democracy” and appeals to “the General Good.” See *Ibid.*, 28, 29.

self-deceptions” that he dismantled. But while Eastman appropriated Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity for his social and political agenda, the issue of how to reconcile his own socialism and Nietzsche’s call for a “genuine aristocracy” remained. Eastman agreed with Nietzsche that a “flat morass of mediocrity” was undesirable but suggested that the aristocracy in place since the birth of property was an “uncouth and vulgar imitation” of the genuine article. Eastman believed that “eminence” and “lively dominance” could emerge in the people instead of a select few. The elimination of vulgar aristocratism would be replaced by a society of “people of real ability and value” taking advantage of the opportunity given to them.<sup>131</sup>

The remaining Young American critics, though no longer gathered around the now-defunct *Seven Arts*, occasionally referenced Nietzsche in connection to critiquing the culture of industrialism but without the activist bent of Eastman. Waldo Frank named Nietzsche among “the last giants to float” who defended “the human spirit” prior to the “vast flood” of industrialization and “material aggrandizement.” Frank posited that the consequences were becoming clear as “the old community of art, the old worship of God, the old economic orders” were “swept away.” Frank thus perceived Nietzsche as part of the resistance against the tide of industrialization, whose consequences included the decline of religion.<sup>132</sup> Van Wyck Brooks suggested the lack of cultural resources,

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<sup>131</sup> Max Eastman, “Nietzsche, Plato and Bertrand Russell,” *Liberator* 3, no. 9 (September 1920): 5-6. The conservative New Humanist scholar Irving Babbitt remained skeptical of the effort to combine a Nietzschean view of nature with the desire for social reform: “Nietzsche’s preaching of ruthlessness is therefore a protest against the sheer unreality of those who wish to be natural and at the same time sympathetic.” See Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 197-198.

<sup>132</sup> Frank, *Our America*, (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919), 92. Van Wyck Brooks made a similar point in a 1917 essay republished in the 1924 volume *Criticism in America*. Brooks suggested that “industrialism” overwhelmed the United States, which lacked any “great in traditional culture” to uphold “the human spirit.” Brooks blamed Puritanism for undermining “for generations our powers of resistance” and contrasted the American context with Europe. It was there that figures like Nietzsche revolted “against

including “an aristocratic tradition,” may be one reason why there wasn’t a Nietzsche to stem the tide. He drew upon Nietzsche to highlight the difficulties of intellectual life and the inadequacies of American literature in a society dominated by industrial capitalism. Brooks cited a letter from Nietzsche that equated leaving “the traditional highway” with “the sense of being an exile, a condemned criminal, a fugitive from mankind.” Brooks suggested that was truer in the United States, with its stifling “conformity,” than in the “old world where society is so much more complex and offers the individual so much more latitude.”<sup>133</sup>

While Brooks lacked confidence in the American ability to produce a compelling cultural alternative to the culture of industrialism, Harold Stearns (1891-1943) cast doubt on the very efforts of young intellectuals to do so. Stearns, a critic who had written for the *Seven Arts* and joined Brooks in the 1920s in writing for the *Freeman*, wondered if the prewar rebellion had gone too far. Stearns suggested that new intellectual developments such as a belief in “the fluidity of thought,” acceptance of the “naturalistic, instinctive origins” of humankind, and the rejection of older political, economic and social theories was worthwhile. “Nietzsche’s demand that everything be judged afresh by one had its indubitably healthy side,” Stearns continued, while affirming that “a transvaluation of values” was indeed necessary. But the war gave Stearns pause about the prewar rebellion. Perhaps “the reaction went too far” even if “the native good sense of the

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the facts of their environment” and made its citizens aware of “the poverty of their lives.” See Brooks, “The Critics and Young America,” in *Criticism in America*, ed. Irving Babbitt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924), 141.

<sup>133</sup> Brooks, “The Literary Life,” in *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans*, ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 187. Brooks reiterated these themes in 1932, when he suggested that Nietzsche and other prominent European thinkers “would have been sheer impertinences” in the United States, given its prosperous and unchallenged middle class. Nietzsche, Brooks noted, never tired of reminding Germans what they lacked. See Brooks, *Sketches in Criticism*, 13-14.

masses prevented the new radical theories from being accepted too literally in practice.”<sup>134</sup>

Whether Stearns’ assessment of the rebels was correct or not, the cultural criticism of the late 1920s made clear that the broader context of their efforts had changed. A shift away from traditional religious sources of authority was evident in many culture-shaping institutions and intellectual circles, with implications for society at large. Many of these independent intellectuals attempted to do their small part to accelerate the process. Walter Lippmann, who had long since abandoned his early socialist sympathies but was a prominent liberal journalist and critic in the postwar era, commented on this development in his book *A Preface to Morals* (1929). “We are living,” Lippmann observed, “in the midst of that vast dissolution of ancient habits which the emancipators believed would restore our birthright of happiness.” Lippmann noted that the outcome was not as “good as they thought it would be” and had created new problems, including the absence of meaning and authority. Lippmann cited Nietzsche in describing the sense of spiritual dislocation then being experienced in modern society: “Where is my *home*?” cried Nietzsche: “For it I do ask and seek, and have sought, but have not found it. O eternal everywhere, O eternal nowhere, O eternal in vain.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Harold Stearns, *Liberalism in America: Its Origin, Its Temporary Collapse, Its Future* (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1919), 174-175. Stearns described the prewar rebellion as follows: “The real attack, however, was reserved for the younger generation. From 1904-1914 was a decade of rebellion on the part of many youngsters. H.G. Wells was beginning to be read; the ferment of the ‘1890’s,’ as Holbrook Jackson called that period of revolt on the Continent and in England, had crossed the Atlantic. Our girls were often aggressively feministic; the influence of Shaw and Ibsen and Nietzsche, for all the grotesque and imitative aspects of it in the American scene, had become a genuine thing in most of our colleges. Critics like Huneker and Mencken, and younger ones like Francis Hackett and Walter Lippmann (especially before he joined the staff of the *New Republic*) and Waldo Frank and Van Wyck Brooks, eager spirits like Randolph Bourne, new writers at war with the whole commercialized scheme of fiction—all these were joining in the assault on our pioneer assumption that activity and objective accomplishment were enough. They boldly were at war with the dominant possessive impulses of the day, boldly questioned the assumptions of our national life.” *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>135</sup> Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 6, 7.

Nietzsche's elegiac words were echoed in another important work of cultural criticism published in 1929, Joseph Wood Krutch's *The Modern Temper*. Krutch (1893-1970), a journalist and *Nation* theater critic, offered evocative ruminations on the modern assault on traditional sources of meaning and authority. Krutch painted a picture of a world "haunted" by its past but not yet comfortable with its present, where modernism's displacement of tradition had left a vacuum that remained to be filled. Krutch noted that social engineering, utopian visions and even the prescriptions of modern philosophers such as Nietzsche had been found wanting. Despite the Nietzschean overtones and echoes of "the death of God" in Krutch's description of the modern world, Krutch believed that Nietzsche's attempt to offer a solution was a failure. Krutch argued that Nietzsche sought to replace traditional sources of meaning with an alternative vision of "the tragic spirit as religious faith." Nietzsche "failed, as all moderns must fail" because he over-intellectualized his understanding of tragedy, which Krutch asserted was "a vital phenomenon" that resulted from "an instinctive confidence in life" similar to that of animals in nature. Nietzsche, Krutch surmised, was yet another modern thinker who was unable to fill the void modernity presented.<sup>136</sup>

Krutch may not have found Nietzsche's answer satisfactory, but he did share Nietzsche's sensitivity to the growing loss of cultural authority that traditional religious

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<sup>136</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper: A Study and a Confession* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 139. For Krutch's expansive discussion of Nietzsche see *Ibid.*, 137-141. Here is the critical passage quoted in full: "Thus Nietzsche lived half in the past through his literary enthusiasms and half in the future through his grandiose dreams, but for all his professed determination to justify existence he was no more able than the rest of us to find the present acceptable. Life, he said in effect is not a Tragedy now but perhaps it will be when the Ape-man has been transformed into a hero (the *Übermensch*), and trying to find that sufficient, he went mad. He failed, as all moderns must fail when they attempt, like him, to embrace the tragic spirit as a religious faith, because the resurgence of that faith is not an intellectual but a vital phenomenon, something not achieved by taking thought born, on the contrary, out of an instinctive confidence in life which is nearer to the animal's unquestioning allegiance to the scheme of nature than it is to that critical intelligence characteristic of a fully developed humanism. And like other faiths it is not to be recaptured merely by reaching intellectual conviction that it would be desirable to do so." *Ibid.*

sources had exerted in the West for centuries. The independent intellectuals considered in this chapter, inspired by Europe but attuned to their American context, largely welcomed this development. Their efforts at encouraging a “new orientation” in American culture, society and politics looked to sources like Nietzsche to dismantle older sources of cultural authority. The agency of these thinkers invigorated the growing marginalization of Protestant cultural authority and assumptions in American institutions. Not only did their efforts inspire later intellectuals, but their presence symbolized the groundwork being laid for a different reception of Nietzsche’s ideas in the decades to come.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Cultural Authority in Crisis: The Protestant Response to Nietzsche, 1900-1933

“His admirers loved to consider him the latest and greatest of intellectual developments; but it is doubtful whether the coming generation will recognize in him anything more than an extravagant type among a generation of shallow heretics. There was absolutely nothing constructive in his genius.”

—*The American Illustrated Methodist Magazine* (1900)<sup>1</sup>

“How was it now that Nietzsche so soon became a leader, for many, indeed, a prophet? How is it that no one who now considers a problem of government, morality, or religion can escape him?”

—John M. Warbeke (1908)<sup>2</sup>

“Nietzsche’s cardinal doctrines are so violently anti-Christian that a task of sophistical jugglery faces a writer who takes to make him out a near-Christian.”

—W.C.A. Wallar (1917)<sup>3</sup>

“Meantime, my sense of the worth, the greatness of Nietzsche, remains. The world needs him as never before. His religion is the religion of life, of beauty, of strength, and must not perish from the earth.”

—George Burman Foster (1931)<sup>4</sup>

This chapter explores how and why a large number and diverse array of Protestant clergy, theologians and intellectuals chose to engage Nietzsche’s thought from 1900-1933. American Protestant critics, whether on one of the far ends of the modernist-fundamentalist divide or in a more moderate position on the liberal-conservative continuum, offered different perspectives on Nietzsche and considered his thought in various contexts. But what they shared, to a striking degree, was the tendency to consider Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity in conjunction with a growing sense that Christianity was enmeshed in a crisis of cultural authority. Protestant commentators on Nietzsche did not always define the precise nature or determine the causes of the crisis in the exact same manner. But they did use Nietzsche as a touchstone to try to understand its roots, to

<sup>1</sup> “Editors Table,” *American Methodist Illustrated Magazine* 4, no. 2 (October 1900): 190.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Warbeke, “Friedrich Nietzsche, Antichrist, Superman, and Pragmatist,” *Harvard Theological Review* 2, no. 3 (July 1909): 368.

<sup>3</sup> Wallar, “A New Book on Nietzsche,” *American Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (January 1918): 151.

<sup>4</sup> George Burman Foster, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 195.

make sense of the present state of the crisis, and to encourage proper action in order to secure relevance for the future.

The common narrative of Protestant cultural authority's decline as told by historians and sociologists identifies both internal and external factors to explain the change in status.<sup>5</sup> Christian Smith noted that in the United States by 1870, Christianity was assumed to be the "basis for a virtuous and prosperous civilization" and that "a Christian moral order" permeated all areas of society including education, law, reform movements, media, politics and business. The following five decades, Smith contended, brought the rout of "the Protestant establishment" that resulted in the diminishment of "social power," "cultural authority" and "institutional influence." New understandings of knowledge and science, the challenges of Darwinism and higher criticism of the Bible, and the gradual secularization of "public institutions" such as colleges and universities, public education, science, the judicial system, journalism and publishing all contributed to the shift. New cultural authorities also emerged "in the social sciences, journalism, advertising and Hollywood" to challenge the older Protestant hegemony.<sup>6</sup>

The Protestant clergy, theologians and intellectuals considered in this chapter largely were aware of living through this transformation. The decline of their authority, though not a one-time, concise event, was arguably a more significant historical occurrence for the Protestant reception of Nietzsche than the Great War due to the fact

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); William R. Hutchison, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *The Secular Revolution*, 25, 26, 27.

that even wartime reflections on Nietzsche placed him in the broader historical framework of the challenge to the Christian foundations of civilization. Current events were linked to the larger story of the changing status of Christianity in Europe and the United States and Nietzsche's role in accelerating that shift. William Joseph McGlothlin (1867-1933), a Church History professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville KY, directly made the connection between Nietzsche and Christianity's declining cultural authority. He noted in 1918 that prior to the mid-nineteenth century, "Christian ideals and ethics were usually accepted" even by those who had already abandoned doctrinal commitments to Christianity. But that changed once Nietzsche assailed "the ethical ideals of Jesus."<sup>7</sup> Even though many Protestants conceded and in some cases encouraged the weakened adherence to traditional doctrines, the attack on Christianity's "social ethic" was especially troubling. Nietzsche was recognized not only as a pungent critic of Christianity but more specifically as one who believed that despite the widespread rejection of the creeds and doctrines of Christianity, Christian social morality remained an insidious presence in western civilization.

This chapter will explore what American Protestants did with the forceful critique of Nietzsche.<sup>8</sup> First, it will examine three types of prewar responses to Nietzsche. Some

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<sup>7</sup> William Joseph McGlothlin, *The Course of Christian History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 179-180. McGlothlin added, "His doctrine of the superman, justifying all selfish aggression, was exceedingly gratifying to the carnal man and he has had a large following especially in Germany." Ibid., 180.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen discusses the religious response to Nietzsche and notes that "religious readers creatively appropriated, adapted, and domesticated his ideas in their effort to reassert flagging moral authority in modernizing America." See "Neither Rock nor Refuge," 74. My approach and scope differ. Her thematic exploration of the religious reception of Nietzsche looks at how a select group of Protestant and Catholic thinkers (including British authors published in the United States such as Catholic modernist Maude Petre and Anglican clergyman John Neville Figgis) read Nietzsche as a "herald or product of modernity," as an oppositional force, as a constructive critic, or as a religious figure who paralleled Christ. See Ibid., 69-122. My chapter is organized more chronologically, though with thematic subsets, and expands the chronology from the turn of the century through the aftermath of the Fundamentalist-Modernist debates of the 1920s. I also attempt to broaden the base of pastors, theologians

Protestants viewed Nietzsche as symptomatic of a major earthquake in Protestantism's fortunes and expressed worry over Nietzsche's direct challenge to Christianity's authority. Others engaged Nietzsche through the lens of the Social Gospel and conveyed their opposition to Nietzsche's individualism through their social activism and communal understanding of Christianity. Another type of prewar response was to view Nietzsche as a constructive critic and at times a sympathetic figure who offered the Church a variety of lessons and opportunities for self-improvement. Secondly, this chapter will look at wartime reflections on Nietzsche by American Protestants during World War I. Nietzsche represented more than an inspiration for German militarism; he was a pivotal figure in the broader crisis of Christianity and civilization of which the war was a symptom or culmination. Thirdly, this chapter looks at two strands of postwar response to Nietzsche. The first strand offered a postmortem on Nietzsche's influence in Germany and explored the repositioning of Protestant cultural authority. One of the more sober treatments concluded that Nietzsche's legacy may depend on how successfully Christianity reconstructs itself for the challenges of the modern world. Finally, this chapter considers Nietzsche through the lens of the fundamentalist-modernist divide of the 1920s. Many fundamentalists linked without hesitation or qualification Darwin and Nietzsche and

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and religious intellectuals considered with a particular focus on liberal, moderate and conservative Protestants. Despite the wide range of responses and diverse sympathies of responders, I attempt to build thematic coherence in the chapter by linking their respective engagements with Nietzsche to the larger theme of this dissertation: the correspondence of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity to the decline of Protestant cultural authority. My basis for this approach is the striking and consistent propensity of these Protestant interpreters to bring Nietzsche up in the context of challenges to their cultural authority or the presumed Christian foundations of civilization. This aspect of his reception was true whether coming from different social and cultural activist positions such as the Social Gospel movement or anti-Darwinist Fundamentalism, whether responding to current events such as the Great War or the Scopes Trial, or whether commenting on specific social issues such as industrial capitalism, democracy or the state of higher education.

expressed their alarm at declining cultural authority through activism regarding the teaching of evolution in schools.

Consideration of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity by American Protestants who were concerned about declining cultural authority raises the question of just how they went about encountering his ideas. Questions remain in some instances as to whether some Protestant ministers and theologians actually read Nietzsche or were conveying popular or secondhand impressions. Liberal Protestant and Social Gospel advocate Washington Gladden mentioned in a letter finding "flashes of insight" on the pages of Nietzsche but also acknowledged in the same letter that the Nietzsche quotation around which he based his main point in an article was from a secondhand source.<sup>9</sup> William Jennings Bryan, the populist crusader and Democratic Party stalwart who became a pivotal figure in the evolution controversies of the 1920s, made it a point to mention that after initially reading "extracts," he "secured the writings of Nietzsche" and found in them all that he feared about German militarism and the consequences of Darwinism.<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Congregationalist pastor W.C.A. Wallar urged ministers to buy and "appraise justly" Nietzsche's complete works, some of which he believed were "truly masterpieces" that merited reading, but his article on Nietzsche was tilted more toward secondary sources than Nietzsche's writings.<sup>11</sup> Conservative Southern Presbyterian scholar Thomas Cary Johnson begrudged the opportunity to extol Nietzsche, but he did offer this faint praise: "When one can forget the soaring self-magnification, the insane

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<sup>9</sup> Washington Gladden, "Nietzsche and Christianity," *New York Times*, 15 April 1915, 12.

<sup>10</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), 123-124.

<sup>11</sup> W.C.A. Wallar, "A Preacher's Interest in Nietzsche," *American Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (January 1915): 91. Wallar's article was largely critical in tone but he was complimentary of Nietzsche's works: "The world will be richer and wiser for some of these Nietzschean gifts; and the rugged mind that can stand hard knocks will find both splendid foe and worthy recompense." *Ibid.*, 90.

self-deification, and the Satanic impiety, the lure of Nietzsche's style is not inconsiderable."<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, to whatever degree he was read or appreciated by Protestant commentators, nevertheless became either a substantive or symbolic presence in their writings, speeches and sermons in the context of concerns over the fate and authority of Protestant Christianity in light of multiple modern challenges. The different levels and contexts of engagement, however, should be noted. Nietzsche was sometimes the subject of a book or article by Protestant commentators, but he more often was referenced in writings, speeches and sermons dealing with broader topics such as the Great War, the Christian foundation of civilization, the challenge of industrial capitalism or the threat of Darwinism. Nietzsche presented Protestant ministers, theologians and religious intellectuals with a striking illustration, a point of strong contrast, or an example that resonated in contemporary culture. These references also revealed their common assumptions about Nietzsche, which in turn were passed on to their audiences in what amounted to an exercise of cultural authority.

Nietzsche frequently appeared in these accounts as an oppositional spiritual force to Christian morality, an impression that was reinforced by reports from Germany regarding his negative spiritual consequences. Liberal Congregationalist scholar John H. Warbeke recounted his experience as a student in Leipzig, Germany, when thousands listening to a lecture on Nietzsche were asked to stand if they "no longer" found the idea of God necessary and if they were ready to reclaim "their native dignity as men." Warbeke described the overwhelmingly affirmative response as "tragic."<sup>13</sup> German observers writing in American publications reinforced the impression of Nietzsche's

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Cary Johnson, *Some Modern Isms* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1919), 188.

<sup>13</sup> Warbeke, "Friedrich Nietzsche, Antichrist, Superman, and Pragmatist," 384.

negative spiritual effects. Richard Lempp (1883-1945), a German student at Harvard Divinity School who later served as a chaplain for the German army during World War I, noted that Nietzsche had energized German youth to a degree “which America can scarcely imagine.” Nietzsche appealed to “the decadents” who enthusiastically embraced his immoralism, the aristocrats who reacted against “newer democratic ideas,” and the individualists—all of whom formed “the ‘Congregation of Nietzsche’” in Germany.<sup>14</sup> Fellow German theologian Karl Bornhausen (1882-1940) recounted Nietzsche’s effect on university students in particular. Students came to the university and turned their back on the church, Bornhausen observed, before finding “their religion more in Nietzsche and Schopenhauer than in the Gospel.” Nietzsche in particular exercised “enormous and dangerous power” over Bornhausen’s students. Bornhausen, though defending “intellectual wrestling” as a legitimate and worthy exercise for the university student, acknowledged that Nietzsche “brought serious peril” to students, including a few whose “spiritual agony” induced by his writings led them to commit suicide.<sup>15</sup> These reports of spiritual havoc wreaked by Nietzsche’s ideas in Germany were used by American Protestants who believed that his ideas represented a threat to the Christian foundations of civilization to call for intellectual and spiritual containment of his ideas in the United States.

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Lempp, “Present Religious Conditions in Germany,” *Harvard Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (January 1910): 118, 119.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Bornhausen, “The Religious Life of the German Student,” *Biblical World* 39, no. 5 (May 1912): 316, 320. Bornhausen embraced National Socialism later in his life and career.

**‘The Proclamation of a New Gospel’: Nietzsche and the Prewar Threat to Protestant Cultural Authority, 1900-1914**

Protestant ministers, theologians and intellectuals prior to World War I, from liberal Unitarians to conservative Presbyterians, frequently considered Nietzsche’s thought in religious terms while weighing the consequences for the presumed Christian foundations for civilization. These commentators displayed varying degrees of sympathy for Nietzsche and some found elements in his thought that they believed complemented Christian belief and practice. Most, however, expressed concern not only that Nietzsche was offering a religious alternative to Christianity but that his ideas threatened the authority of Christian ideals. Engaging Nietzsche’s ideas was not simply a matter of refuting an enemy of the faith but also an opportunity to reflect on the status and authority of Christianity in the milieu of a dynamic modernism that seemed to be sweeping through the ideas, social structures, and religious, political and economic institutions of western civilization. R.C. Schiedt (1889-1951) claimed that Nietzsche was “the embodiment of our modern civilization.” Schiedt, a German language and natural science professor at the German Reformed church school Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania, suggested that Nietzsche was “the strength and weakness of our modern life” who personified “the individualist tendencies” evident in contemporary “art and science, in religion and morals, in state and society.” Nietzschean modernism shook “our secular systems of learning and life” and thus represented a substantial challenge to traditional religious authority. Nietzsche, after all, was one “with whom every one must reckon who lives and labors with the age and endeavors to maintain his own position.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> R.C. Schiedt, “I. Nietzsche and the Great Problems of Modern Thought.” *Reformed Church Review* 16, no. 2 (April 1912): 150, 176, 147, 176, 148.

The notion of a civilization in transition and Nietzsche's participation in it became an important component of some Protestant thinkers who wrote about Nietzsche in the years leading up to World War I. John W. Warbeke (1879-1950), a liberal Congregationalist professor of philosophy first at Williams College and then at Mount Holyoke College, cast Nietzsche as an emblem of an age in transition in a 1908 *Harvard Theological Review* article. Warbeke realized that Nietzsche's quest to liberate mankind "from the shackles of convention and mere tradition" had important religious consequences. Warbeke even spoke of Nietzsche's mission in religious terms. He was "the prophet of a new age," full of "holy zeal," whose attack on Christian morality was in Germany a "kind of religion" that had *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as "its Bible." Warbeke gave attention to the reasons for and the nature of Nietzsche's popularity in Germany because he believed Nietzsche had done significant damage to religion, a prospect that concerned him as Nietzsche's reputation spread to other nations. Warbeke held out hope that once "this age of transition is past," religion would flourish and Nietzsche's brand of tradition-bucking individualism would fade.<sup>17</sup>

Warbeke was not the only prewar critic to perceive Nietzsche's philosophy in religious terms or to worry about its implications for Protestant cultural authority. John Grier Hibben (1861-1933), the former Presbyterian minister who became a Professor of Logic and later President of Princeton University, declared Nietzsche's ideas "the proclamation of a new gospel." Nietzsche was, in the theologically moderate Hibben's estimation, an enemy of "all existing social conditions and conventions" that had led to the progress of mankind. Hibben joined the chorus of commentators who portrayed the ideals of Nietzsche and Christianity as polar opposites. The gospel of Nietzsche involved

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<sup>17</sup> Warbeke, "Friedrich Nietzsche, Antichrist, Superman, and Pragmatist," 373, 384, 385.

the creation of a “new type” who was free from obligations “either to his race or to his God.” This freedom was appealing to many moderns who, Hibben mused, may not have the courage to express Nietzsche’s repudiation of “customary morality” so starkly. But Hibben argued that Nietzsche and his followers failed to deal with the realities of power, particularly that “the stability of power” may depend on those very traditions and the “wisdom and reverence” inherent in them. Hibben was skeptical of Nietzsche’s call to return to “the elemental instincts and appetites of the wild beast” because if tradition and history were to be eradicated, then “what pledge have we of the new?”<sup>18</sup>

R.C. Schiedt shared Hibben’s concern about Nietzsche’s indictment of Christianity. Schiedt, who occasionally preached in Reformed churches in addition to teaching and writing, sensed that Nietzsche was offering a religious alternative to traditional Christianity. Nietzsche’s goal, he argued, was filling the hearts of mankind “with finer and nobler ideals” than were ever produced by Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Schiedt believed this quest was driven by Nietzsche’s conviction that “the Christian principle of brotherhood and equality” was ruinous because it was contrary to nature and therefore “dangerous to life itself.” Schiedt respectfully disagreed and found Nietzsche’s emphasis on the centrality of the will to power in life to be undesirable. The “antidote” to “Nietzscheism,” he argued, was found in the teachings of Jesus, who stressed “the will to serve and the strength for sacrifice” and offered a better foundation for civilization.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Grier Hibben, *A Defense of Prejudice and Other Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 84, 91, 92, 93, 101.

<sup>19</sup> R.C. Schiedt, “Ernst Haeckel and Friedrich Nietzsche. First Part.” *Reformed Church Review* 12, no. 1 (January 1908): 29.

<sup>20</sup> R.C. Schiedt, “Ernst Haeckel and Friedrich Nietzsche. Second Part.” *Reformed Church Review* 12, no. 2 (April 1908): 228, 232.

W.C.A. Wallar, a theologically moderate Congregationalist minister from Minnesota, shared Schiedt's belief in the virtues of a Christian foundation for civilization but worried more openly about the threat Nietzsche presented to that foundation.<sup>21</sup> Wallar, in an article directed at pastors for the *American Journal of Theology*, made it clear that taking Nietzsche seriously was a way to address worries over Christianity's waning influence. Nietzsche helped churches with their "own house-cleaning," Wallar argued, that was necessary "before the right number of men in the street and shop will take our message seriously." Wallar also suggested that Nietzsche would force preachers to stop hiding behind "ambiguity" and state their beliefs on "socialism, self-sacrifice, democracy, depravity, suffering, art, nature, and the earth's future." These tasks were especially crucial considering that Nietzsche's goal was the "most radical overhauling that Christian civilization ever experienced." The "transvaluation of values" for which Nietzsche called, Wallar argued, was an attempt to reverse the effects of the "great blunder of Christianity" and provide "the decrepit and waning civilization that now marks the end of the second Christian millennium" with a completely different foundation.<sup>22</sup>

Wallar's analysis was inspired by his sense that a "spreading Nietzschean epidemic" threatened the authority and stability of Christianity. "Nietzsche is already poisoning thousands of souls whom the church of God should be ambitious to save to other ends," Wallar warned. He recounted Nietzsche's widespread appeal that drew support from the secular-minded, artists, intellectuals and those "who crave a gospel of

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<sup>21</sup> Wallar had a series of pastorates in Congregationalist churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin, was a participant in the Anti-Saloon League, and had written an article on the inspiration of Christian scriptures that expressed a moderate to liberal view of biblical inspiration. See Wallar, "The Coming Theory of Inspiration," *Public Opinion* 24, no. 30 (May 19, 1898): 626. Wallar referenced Nietzsche as "a foeman worthy of his steel" just as Edwin Dodge Hardin depicted Nietzsche as "a foeman worthy of Christianity's steel." See W.C.A. Wallar, "A Preacher's Interest in Nietzsche," 78; Hardin, "Nietzsche's Service to Christianity," *American Journal of Theology* 18, no. 4 (October 1914): 546.

<sup>22</sup> Wallar, "A Preacher's Interest in Nietzsche," 75, 80, 84, 88.

strength, a gospel for sky-scrapers and hotel lobbies and battlefields.”<sup>23</sup> Wallar imagined a future where the “Nietzschean cult” surpassed many other threats to Christianity. Pastors were called to assess Nietzsche’s works and to demonstrate the superiority of Christian love over Nietzschean power, which presented a formidable challenge to Christian belief and cultural authority.<sup>24</sup>

Some Protestants wondered, however, whether the teachings of Christianity would be afforded the opportunity to maintain that authority. Edgar Young Mullins (1860-1928) expressed this concern in *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (1913), a work that cast an eye toward modern challenges to religious authority.<sup>25</sup> Mullins was the moderate “non-fundamentalist conservative” President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville who worried that many people were repudiating “the Christian norm of both ethics and religion.” He blamed this development in part on the growing rejection of Christian institutions thanks to “the type of thought inaugurated by Nietzsche,” which charged Christianity with being completely detrimental to the health and history of civilization. Nietzsche and his followers were supported by “modern biblical students” who embraced higher criticism. The radical subjectivity to which they reduced New Testament interpretation, Mullins argued, led to the delivery of Christians “over bound hand and foot” to the militant critics of Christianity. The results were disastrous for religious authority in the modern world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 89, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>25</sup> That description of Mullins is found in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216.

<sup>26</sup> Edgar Young Mullins, *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland Press, 1913), 61-62. One of Mullin’s leading professors at the seminary was New Testament scholar A.T. Robertson (1863-1934), who also included Nietzsche on the spectrum of German higher criticism that questioned the connection between the historical Jesus and his claims of divinity: “It is assumed that criticism has disposed of the connection between Jesus and Christ. Criticism has done nothing of the kind.

### Nietzsche, the Social Gospel and the Crisis of Culture, 1901-1917

Concerns over Nietzsche's assault on the cultural authority of Protestant Christianity also contained an important social component. Liberal Protestants who embraced the Social Gospel tended to stress the antithetical impact of his ideas on Christian social morality. The rise and consequences of industrial capitalism caused many liberal Protestants to recalibrate their faith in response to the social conditions produced by an economic system that looked to them in some ways Nietzschean. The Social Gospel is a term that broadly refers to Protestant efforts to address the social problems related to the social transformations of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America such as the rise of industrial capitalism, the welfare of the working class, the arrival of large numbers of immigrants, and the explosive growth of urban life. Social Gospel enthusiasts typically were on the liberal end of the theological spectrum, emphasized immanence over transcendence, and privileged the social nature and implications of Christianity over the individualist emphasis that they believed prevailed especially among evangelicals. Social Gospel advocates addressed Nietzsche as an arbiter of modern individualism and believed that his principles were on display in the efforts of industrial capitalists. His ethical critique of Christianity, they believed, undermined their efforts to reinvigorate Christian morality for the purpose of engaging contemporary social ills and dilemmas.

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Some critics deny the historicity of Jesus altogether. In Germany there is a controversy over the historical reality of Jesus. Other critics admit the reality of Jesus, and make Christ a matter of faith. Others reject the Christ entirely and see only a good man named Jesus who is our example today. Others admit the existence of Jesus, and, like Nietzsche, rail at Him as the curse of the race by reason of the limitations on self-indulgence which He has imposed on the "super-man." See A.T. Robertson, *The Glory of the Ministry: Paul's Exultation in Preaching* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911), 102. Reuben A. Torrey (1856-1928), evangelist and Dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, included Nietzsche on a list of German "infidel or destructively critical scholars" who undermined confidence in the authority of the Bible. See R.A. Torrey, *Is the Bible the Inerrant Word of God and Was the Body of Jesus Raised from the Dead* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), 28.

Lyman Abbott (1835-1922), the writer, social reformer and Congregationalist pastor of historic Pilgrim Congregational Church in Brooklyn Heights, New York, made what became a familiar Social Gospel contrast between the ethics of Nietzsche and of Jesus. His 1901 article “Are the Ethics of Jesus Practicable?” reflected his theologically liberal and theistic evolutionary convictions while answering the question whether the moral law of Jesus provided a basis for “the development of the human race” and “a harmonious social order.” Abbott argued that all debates over social ethics could be reduced to two competing strands of thought: “enlightened self-interest” or “regard for the welfare of others.” The first strand was represented by Nietzsche, who suggested that the “end of life” was to develop the superman, while the second strand was represented by Jesus who called for “self-sacrifice and the service of others.” Abbott went so far as to imply that the pietistic Christian, “whose only aim is to secure the salvation of his own little soul,” was on the same end of the self-seeking spectrum as Nietzsche, individualism’s “radical apostle.”<sup>27</sup>

Other Social Gospel advocates not only contrasted Nietzsche and Jesus but did so in the context of Christianity’s declining cultural authority and the need to reassert it. Shailer Mathews (1863-1941), the influential liberal Protestant dean of The University of Chicago Divinity School and a leading expositor of the Social Gospel and modernist theology, made this connection in his book *The Gospel and the Modern Man* (1910). Mathews wrote out of concern for Christianity’s waning influence in the modern world. “Unless the Gospel can control the formative men of to-day,” Mathews mused, “it will require more than one generation to regain the ground Christianity will lose.” Mathews

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<sup>27</sup> Lyman Abbott, “Are the Ethics of Jesus Practicable?” *Biblical World* 17, no. 4 (April 1901): 258, 256, 259.

expressed dissatisfaction with the prospect of faith being only the possession of conservative counterparts, the “theologically simple minded” who provided “the individualistic morality” of the present day. That scenario would leave the modern person under the influence of “pessimism, moral indifference, and the practice and philosophy of force.” Mathews’ solution was to formulate Christian morality in social terms and it was in that context in which he measured the challenge of Nietzsche.<sup>28</sup>

Nietzsche represented the counterargument to Mathews’ contention that the Social Gospel represented an opportunity for Christianity in the modern world by effectively corresponding to the modern disposition of thinking in terms of a “growing sense of brotherhood” as opposed to a sense of “insulated individualism.” Nietzsche, Mathews explained, understood Christian morality as placing “a premium on weakness,” restraining “the fundamental impulse of life to master environment,” and resulting not from divine inspiration but from “passing social needs” backed by religious authority. Mathews made it clear that Nietzsche’s individualism and power-driven ethics were “fundamentally hostile” to the teachings of Jesus. But he also made the allowance that perhaps Nietzsche’s “impulse toward mastery” could be redirected for liberal Protestant ends: “May not the highest type of power be expressed in that social cooperation which lies at the basis of civilization and to which Christianity has contributed?”<sup>29</sup>

Mathews was less optimistic about Nietzsche’s usefulness in his 1916 lectures at Harvard, subsequently published as *The Spiritual Interpretation of History*, but he continued to reference him in regard to Christianity’s cultural authority. He sharply

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<sup>28</sup> Shailer Mathews, *The Gospel and the Modern Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 249, 250, 251. Mathews viewed the ethical divide between “the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of Nietzsche” as “the fundamental antithesis that lies in the world of values” which left one to choose either “reversion to ‘civilized’ savagery or advance to fraternity.” *Ibid.*, 251-2.

contrasted “the sacrificial social-mindedness of Jesus” with the “super-moral will-to-power of Nietzsche” and then suggested that Nietzsche underestimated the role that religion played in society. The charge itself that religion was a creation of “strong men” trying to exert control over “the poor and the weak” was proof of the tremendous influence of religion “in shaping public morality.” While there may be examples of that oppression, Mathews argued, Nietzsche’s “anti-religious presuppositions” blinded him to evidence of religion’s “constructive capacity” of providing ideals and shaping “social customs.”<sup>30</sup>

Mathews was not the only Social Gospel advocate to reflect upon the challenge of Nietzsche to Protestant cultural authority and social conceptions of faith. Other socially oriented liberal Protestants invoked Nietzsche in more specific critiques of industrial capitalism, such as R.C. Schiedt’s contention that Nietzsche was responsible for canonizing the “reckless competition” of the age by providing “philosophical decoration and justification” for contemporary economic theories that encouraged “the fleecing of the weak by the strong.”<sup>31</sup> Social Gospel advocates both connected Nietzsche to the principles of industrial capitalism and urged churches to exercise cultural leadership by representing the interests of the working class. Philo W. Sprague (1852-1927), the rector of St. John’s Church in Charlestown, MA who voiced Christian Socialist sympathies, lashed out at “the gospel according to Nietzsche” in a speech at the 1910 Protestant Episcopal Church Congress. Nietzsche’s gospel was embodied by “the Titans” of industrial capitalism. They represented the “strong men” of contemporary society who would not be possible without “the attendant sacrifice” of the working class. Sprague

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<sup>30</sup> Shailer Mathews, *The Spiritual Interpretation of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 93, 102, 103.

<sup>31</sup> Schiedt, “I. Nietzsche and the Great Problems of Modern Thought,” 171.

mocked the notion that “the weaklings” were a necessary sacrifice and contrasted Nietzsche’s gospel with “the gospel of the Son of Man,” which was captured in an appeal to the Gospel of Matthew: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”<sup>32</sup> Sprague’s sentiment was shared by renowned Social Gospel advocate and Congregationalist minister Washington Gladden (1836-1918), whose pastorates in Springfield, MA and Columbus, OH included extensive advocacy for better wages and working conditions on behalf of his working class constituents. Gladden also painted a stark contrast between Nietzschean and New Testament understandings of religion and human nature while imploring the “Christian Church” to fulfill its responsibility in challenging the industrial order. “A man may believe with Nietzsche,” Gladden wrote, “that the religion of a good will is a pestilent distemper; that the idea of man is hard-hearted, unscrupulous, merciless.” But Gladden rejected that Nietzschean assessment of religion and human nature while affirming the “valid principles” of “Christian civilization.” These principles were found in the “moral law” as expressed in the teachings of Christ and needed to be applied “to all human relations.” Gladden implored ministers and churches to exert influence and take on the responsibility of applying that moral law to “industrial society.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Philo W. Sprague, “The Individual and the Common Interest in Society,” in The Protestant Episcopal Church, U.S., *The Church Congress Journal; Papers and Addresses of the Twenty-eighth Church Congress in The United States, Troy, N.Y. 1910* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, Inc., 1910), 28-29.

<sup>33</sup> Gladden’s full quote on this matter is worth noting: “A man may believe with Nietzsche that the religion of good will is a pestilent distemper; that the idea of man is hard-hearted, unscrupulous, merciless. To those who hold any opinion akin to this, the entire argument of this book would appear to be, not only futile, but mischievous. It has been assumed, however, in all this argument, that the principles of our Christian civilization are valid principles; that Christ’s summary of the moral law is a true and adequate of the fundamental human obligation. It is also assumed that it is the business of the Christian Church to apply this law to all human relations; and that the Christian minister has no choice about making this application to industrial society as to other forms of society.” Washington Gladden, *The Labor Question* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1911), 208.

Baptist minister and Rochester Theological Seminary professor Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) proved to be the most influential spokesman for the Social Gospel approach to Christianity and shared Gladden's perspective that churches should deal with the realities of the modern industrial world. Rauschenbusch also not only tied Nietzsche's thought to industrial capitalism but believed that the Nietzschean economic system represented a crisis for Christianity's authority. Nietzsche's philosophy was "deeply affecting the ethical thought of the modern world," Rauschenbusch declared, but this influence wasn't simply the result of his individual genius. Rauschenbusch argued that any "regnant" philosophy was "the direct outgrowth of the sum total of life in that age" and that Nietzsche's popularity could be explained by the rise of industrial capitalism. Rauschenbusch asserted "an intimate causal connection between the industrial system which evolves the modern captain of industry and the philosophy of Nietzsche which justifies and glorifies him." The consequences of that Nietzschean system were troubling for the masses: despair over being caught up in the impersonal grind of the "evolutionary mill" and a loss of "faith in the fundamental goodness of the universe" as well as the God behind it. Rauschenbusch therefore posited Christianity's social crisis in terms of a crisis of authority. Failure to respond to these Nietzschean social and economic conditions would precipitate the rise of "a sullen materialism" and a "permanent eclipse of the light of life among us." If the Church failed to respond to the challenge of business, Rauschenbusch concluded, its authority in the eyes of the people would diminish in other realms of life as well.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 315-316.

Warren Seymour Archibald (1880-1954), long-time minister of historic South Church in Hartford CT and a writer in both academic and cultural journals, drew a similar connection between the ideas of Nietzsche, commerce and cultural authority in 1911. “America has become synonymous with money,” Archibald observed, and economic success has “produced a striking capacity to see the material and a corresponding incapacity to see the ideal.” This trend was not only a matter of economics but also philosophy, where “much of the keenest thinking of our time is materialistic.” Archibald cited Nietzsche’s doctrines “of the superman and the theory of the survival of the fittest” as “stars in the intellectual firmaments of many students.” Nietzsche’s philosophy influenced “the man in college, in the settlement house, and in the café.” Archibald understood Nietzsche’s formidable popularity as evidence not only of the rise of materialism but of the precarious position of Christianity in the United States. Materialism in its various forms offered Americans an alternative to a religion that was “openly ridiculed as a system which perpetuates the socially unfit, violently attacked as the defender of an unjust industrial system, or silently disregarded as an obsolete institution.” Archibald called for a reinvigoration of Christianity to respond to declining church numbers, faltering cultural influence and the threat of materialism, “the peculiar peril of our time and our country.”<sup>35</sup>

Social Gospel advocates and more moderate liberal Protestants who still focused on the social implications of Christianity were occasionally joined in their critiques by more conservative Protestants. A.T. Robertson (1863-1934), a New Testament professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggested that the “unrestrained desire for

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<sup>35</sup> Warren Seymour Archibald, “God in All and Over All,” *Harvard Theological Review* 4, no. 3 (July 1911): 379, 380.

gain” indicative of the Pharisees in the New Testament resembled the “ruthless ‘will to power’ at any cost” of Nietzsche and was exhibited by “modern business methods as well as war.”<sup>36</sup> Robertson charged that “a New Paganism” characterized western civilization—from Berlin to Paris to London to New York—that was “very subtle and very scornful of the pity of Jesus.” The brutal frankness and stark pursuit of individual desires evident in the “demoniacal character” of Nietzsche’s philosophy was characteristic of this New Paganism. It was found in “the policy of aggression on the part of nations and individuals, of rogues and rapists, of grafters and white-slavers, of bank-looters and oppressors of labor.” Robertson thus drew out the social implications of what he perceived to be a wide application of Nietzschean ideals in stark, antithetical terms to the ideas of Christian civilization.<sup>37</sup>

Robertson’s president at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Edgar Young Mullins, also focused on the social ramifications of Nietzsche’s ideas but did so by connecting the liberal Protestant language of “brotherhood” with conservative, evangelical doctrine. Mullins believed that “the fundamental issue in modern civilization” was the need to convert “the morality of brute survival” put into philosophical form by the “brilliant” Nietzsche with his doctrine of the “Overman,” into “the morality of brotherhood.” The Overman, Mullins asserted, repudiated Christian virtues in favor of taking the Darwinian “survival of the fittest” to its logical conclusion. Mullins echoed Social Gospel preaching by linking Nietzsche’s Overman to the modern businessman or political leader who “has won enormous power over his fellows.” Those who “grasp the high places of earth”—businessmen and politicians—need to be

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<sup>36</sup> A.T. Robertson, *The Pharisees and Jesus; The Stone Lectures for 1915-16 Delivered at the Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 145.

<sup>37</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1915), 181.

transformed from “the giant into the big brother.” The Christian response to Nietzsche’s followers, according to Mullins, was summed up in one word: “brotherhood.” But Mullins insisted that brotherhood be preceded by evangelical conversion. Christianity’s “programme” first “puts man right with God” and then imparts a “new heart” which turns into a “social force.”<sup>38</sup> Mullins thus joined his liberal and Social Gospel brethren in affirming that the social nature of Christian morality provided needed correctives and stability to social and economic practices more indicative of Nietzsche’s naturalistic individualism.

### **‘Nietzsche’s Service to Christianity’: Constructive Protestant Engagements with Nietzsche, 1900-1918**

The writings of Nietzsche inspired multiple reactions from Protestant ministers, theologians and intellectuals, from concerns over threatened Protestant cultural authority to objections based on Social Gospel principles. Some Protestants overlapped with these concerns but also either expressed more favorable feedback on Nietzsche or understood Nietzsche’s formidable challenge to Christianity as an opportunity for Protestant self-reflection and self-improvement. Nietzsche’s “service to Christianity” was envisaged in different ways by Protestant commentators. Some observers selected certain aspects of Nietzsche’s thought to admire without endorsing the whole system. Others appropriated Nietzsche in efforts to work through how Christianity should respond to modern challenges to traditional understandings of faith. Some Protestant ministers believed that the popularity of Nietzsche begot an occasion for Christianity to demonstrate its value and sharpen its self-understanding. These Protestant responders displayed varying

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<sup>38</sup> Edgar Young Mullins, *The Life in Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1917), 148, 149.

degrees of sympathy to Nietzsche and different perspectives on how to apply his thought, but all shared a belief that constructive engagement with his ideas provided an opportunity for Christianity to strengthen its social position and reassert its cultural authority.

A telltale example comes from the earliest years of American Nietzsche reception in the case of Charles Carroll Everett (1829-1900), a Unitarian minister, theologian and Harvard professor whose own career was symptomatic of these transformations of cultural authority. Everett served as the Bussey Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation from 1869-1900 as well as Dean of the Harvard Divinity School from 1878-1900. His career and range of intellectual pursuits reflected the transitional state of American higher education. Everett's writings spanned the fields of New Testament criticism, theology, literature and philosophy and were difficult to categorize in the midst of increasing professionalization and specialization. One early commentator on Everett's work described him as "a philosopher whose religious nature made him a theologian."<sup>39</sup> Everett's Unitarian convictions reflected not only the particularities of New England theology but also the displacement of traditional Christian doctrines in elite institutions. More than one of Everett's students "entered his classroom a Trinitarian and came out a Unitarian."<sup>40</sup>

Everett represented the tenuous transition between tradition and modernism and the liberal Protestant effort to remain relevant in the face of institutional and intellectual

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<sup>39</sup> William W. Fenn, "The Theology of Charles Carroll Everett," *Harvard Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (January 1910): 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Despite this relatively modern pedigree, Everett was dismissed by one young philosopher as "old-fashioned," a criticism that his successor as Dean at Harvard, William F. Fenn, admitted wasn't without merit. Fenn noted that Everett's lectures were free of the "splutter of epigrammatic paradoxes" that characterized modern thought. Everett's thought was deeply shaped by German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), but Fenn observed that "a great deal of water has flowed under philosophical and theological bridges" since Everett's formative intellectual years. *Ibid.*, 20.

challenges. One of these challenges, as Everett became one of the first American observers to recognize, was found in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Everett, who noted Nietzsche's growing popularity and formidable prose, believed that the implications of his thought for religion and its authority in the modern world must be considered.<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche called for the overthrow of "the authority to which men have bowed," Everett observed. Religious authority was at the root of "old valuations" that hindered new approaches to life and thus merited complete repudiation. Everett was sympathetic to Nietzsche's disdain of the old creeds: "One might join in the laugh of Zarathustra at the thought that this God was dead." But Everett made clear his own preference for "the milder God of gentler creeds" and suggested that Nietzsche failed to encounter or support such a conception of God. Everett asserted that for Nietzsche, the gentle and more abstract God of liberal Protestantism was merely part of the "fading out process."<sup>42</sup>

Everett's liberal Protestantism informed his explanation of Nietzsche's appeal to modern readers. Nietzsche's contemporary popularity appeared counterintuitive in light

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Carroll Everett, *Essays Theological and Literary* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 104. This chapter was previously published as an article. See idem, "Beyond Good and Evil," *New World* 7, no. 28 (December 1898): 684-703. Everett viewed the decision by the Macmillan Company to publish Nietzsche's works as evidence that his ideas should be taken seriously regardless of assumptions about his mental health: "Even if we should not insist that the utterances of Nietzsche are the ravings of a madman, it is easy to dismiss him from our thought as unbalanced and conceited and thus as a negligible quantity. When, however, we have got rid of him, what are we going to do with the multitude of his readers? Here, for instance, we have a translation of his works announced by the Macmillan Company in ten substantial and not inexpensive volumes; and the name Macmillan is generally accepted as signifying that the books on which it appears have some good claim upon the attention of the world." Idem, *Essays Theological and Literary*, 103-104.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 101, 105. Nietzsche certainly was familiar with liberal Protestantism, as his scathing attacks on Strauss demonstrate. He also had harsh words for liberal Protestantism in *The Anti-Christ*: "Any participation in church services is an attack on public morality. One should be harsher with Protestants than with Catholics, harsher with liberal Protestants than with orthodox ones. The criminality of being Christian increases with your proximity to science." See Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 67.

of his aristocratic sympathies, mockery of current social movements, condemnation of Christianity's "slave morality" and support of suffering for the sake of individual greatness. But Everett found the appeal in the "frankness and honesty" of Nietzsche's teaching as well as "its robust strength." He also sympathized with certain elements of Nietzsche's thought, including the belief that "the fundamental element in life" was the pursuit of power through "an active, invasive self-assertion." Everett challenged the assumption that Nietzsche's views could not be harmonized with Christianity. Self-assertion in the life and teachings of Jesus, Everett argued, were manifested both in his calls for submission "to whatever might occur" and in his powerful rebukes of the Pharisees. Jesus' teachings promoted a "transformation of values" fueled by an "assertion of a larger self" that completed rather than contradicted Nietzsche's ideal.<sup>43</sup>

These attempts to harmonize Nietzsche's views with Christianity from a liberal Protestant perspective also involved an element of containment. Everett believed that Nietzsche's "readjustment of values" was nothing new but rather comparable to the "robber-baron of the Middle Ages." The "world of the savage" of which Nietzsche spoke, characterized by a hierarchical struggle for power, had already been replaced with a "new valuation" brought forth by the more fully realized "moral ideal" of Christianity. It was Christianity that continued to guide "the development of man in Christian lands." Western civilization was seasoned by Christianity even where traditional beliefs and practices had been jettisoned. Everett therefore affirmed the continuing vitality of Protestant cultural authority and expressed confidence that Nietzsche's intellectual challenge could be appreciated and contained where appropriate.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Everett, *Essays Theological and Literary*, 124, 125, 126, 128.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 128, 129.

Everett's sanguine turn of the century assessment was the most optimistic Protestant response until Nietzsche enthusiast George Burman Foster (1858-1919), a liberal Baptist University of Chicago Divinity School professor who later was moved to the Comparative Religion department due to his outspoken and controversial theological views. Foster's writings eschewed traditional formulations of Christianity and focused on reframing and redefining Christian doctrine and practice in modern terms.<sup>45</sup> He found Nietzsche to be an inspirational and surprising ally in the cause. Foster wrote about Nietzsche in the widest range of venues of any Nietzsche interpreter: academic journals, cultural journals, popular magazines, avant-garde publications and a posthumously published book based on a series of wartime lectures. Foster's book *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1931) contained a revealing introduction by University of Chicago colleague A. Eustace Haydon. Haydon noted that Foster embraced a "functional interpretation" of religion and theology that led him to renounce the "empty abstraction" of a supernatural being and the traditional beliefs that accompanied it. Foster instead focused on the "the values of human creative attainment and possibility."<sup>46</sup> This opened the door for a more positive interpretation of Nietzsche. Haydon explained the deeply personal appeal Nietzsche held for Foster:

Though he concluded regarding life in more democratic terms than did Nietzsche there was much in experience common to these two men. Both knew the torture of a spirit in wrestling from its old, secure foundations on absolute truth. Both knew the sweet sadness of rejection by the good people still enfolded in untroubled security of church and creed. 'I speak as a man who has suffered as keen spiritual anguish for twenty-five years as one could well suffer and maintain his sanity and health.' These, Foster's words to his brethren in religion, would apply equally well to Nietzsche. Both men made the pilgrimage out of orthodoxy unable to find rest on any plateau of compromise until they set their feet upon the adventurous and uncharted path of pure naturalism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For example, see George Burman Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906); Foster, *The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909).

<sup>46</sup> A. Eustace Haydon, "Introduction," in Foster, *Nietzsche*, ed. Curtis W. Reese (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), x.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

Foster's "pilgrimage out of orthodoxy" thus led him to identify with a philosopher whose writings he considered timely and prophetic for Christianity in the modern age. Foster's departure from traditional orthodoxy and embrace of a functional interpretation of religion meant for him that religion depended less on belief in a personal, "anthropomorphic" deity than on shared ideals and community. This meant that for Foster—similar to the "Death of God" theologians decades later—Nietzsche could be viewed as "inveterately incurably religious" despite his atheism.<sup>48</sup>

Foster therefore understood and wrote of Nietzsche, "the most modern of all moderns," in overwhelmingly religious terms. His version of Nietzsche inspired his readers to free themselves from the burden of past traditions and to celebrate their youthfulness in a manner akin to a religious awakening. Foster contended that the "sons and daughters in America" rapidly were familiarizing themselves with "Nietzsche's gospel" and embracing his clarion call to be true to their selves. This process involved breaking "all the tables of the old values" and creating "new values" that reinforced one's "inner expression of liberation." It was no surprise to Foster, therefore, that young people were finding traditional religion less compelling: "Once the young were led by the hand of the old up to the sanctuary of the fathers. But now the young have minds of their own and the path to the old sanctuary is trod with less frequency and more difficulty."<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, Foster argued, Nietzsche was cultivating his own "congregation" in the context of Protestant cultural authority's decline. The "prophet of a new culture" was increasingly popular due to growing doubts about "the Church and its divine authority."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Foster, *Nietzsche*, 199.

<sup>49</sup> Foster, "This is Age of the Young Man," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 June 1910, E8.

<sup>50</sup> Foster, "The Prophet of a New Culture," *Little Review* 1, no. 1 (March 1914): 14, 15, 17.

Foster called Nietzsche not only a “prophet” but a “preacher” for whose words he “would gladly sacrifice whole volumes of moral and theological works.”<sup>51</sup> Foster found Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity useful due to his redirection of religious energies away from the past and toward a focus on the present and the future. Nietzsche’s moral and social vision entailed renouncing the “old loyalty” to traditional authorities, ideas and practices and creating something new in its stead—a new culture and “*a new man*.”<sup>52</sup>

Foster thus conceived of Nietzsche as a powerful and constructive foe of traditional Christianity. Nietzsche became an unlikely ally in Foster’s quest to broaden the contours of religious thought and practice in the face of modern challenges to Christianity’s authority. Foster went to great lengths to make Nietzsche as acceptable as possible, to the point where he framed Nietzsche’s dismissal of equality as rooted in the belief that “every man is an unrepeatable miracle.”<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche’s rejection of Christian charity was explained by Foster as rooted in Nietzsche’s belief that he could offer something greater than material goods: a “Zarathustra-love” that would expand beyond “what we call Christian love” and would offer a new way of life rather than offering material goods given out of spiritual self-interest.<sup>54</sup> Even Jesus may have been sympathetic to Nietzsche’s disdain for Christian pity, given that he “forbade pity for himself even in his dark and desolate hour,” Foster surmised.<sup>55</sup> Jesus, in fact, may be a kindred spirit in that like Nietzsche he challenged conventional thinking, demonstrated a “spirit of revolt” and repudiated the humdrum of life with a sense of adventure.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Foster, “Noise,” *Little Review* 1, no. 8 (November 1914): 33.

<sup>52</sup> Foster, “The New Loyalty,” *Little Review* 1, no. 5 (July 1914): 30-31; Foster, “Longing,” *Little Review* 1, no. 7 (October 1914): 23.

<sup>53</sup> Foster, “Personality,” *Little Review* 1, no. 9 (December 1914): 41.

<sup>54</sup> Foster, “The Bestowing Virtue,” *Little Review* 1, no. 10 (January 1915): 26.

<sup>55</sup> Foster, “A Hard Bed,” *Little Review* 1, no. 11 (February 1915): 43.

<sup>56</sup> Foster, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 212-213.

But Foster also acknowledged irreconcilable differences and asserted that Christianity had not faced an adversary as “sharp and inexorable as Nietzsche.” Nietzsche’s antipathy for Christian morality was partly rooted in his belief that its practicality explained the persistence of Christianity despite multiple “metaphysical, historical, and psychological” challenges to the ideas and doctrines of the faith. Foster admitted that Nietzsche rejected the notion of sin, the spinelessness of Christian virtues, and the “flight from the world” mentality that yearned for the “imaginary hereafter.” While other Protestant critics understood Nietzsche’s goal to be the “annihilation” of Christianity, Foster contended that Nietzsche’s fundamental desire was “to destroy the monopoly” that Christian slave morality had imposed on the master class. Foster was not willing to embrace fully Nietzsche’s critique of Christian morality, but he did express appreciation for Nietzsche’s “bracing, stimulating” perspective on life that provided a refreshing contrast to the “flimsy and sugary sentimentalism” that often prevailed in religion and life.<sup>57</sup>

Foster’s positive assessment of the “bracing” nature of Nietzsche’s philosophy of life was shared by liberal Protestant scholar Drake Durant (1878-1933), a philosophy professor at Vassar College. Durant, like Foster, embraced the liberal direction of Protestant theology but found “the clever but unbalanced German iconoclast” Nietzsche

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 178, 202, 180-182, 190, 191-2. For more on Foster’s “nonfoundational perspective,” which drew on Nietzsche in the search for “a new spirituality in the modern world,” see Ratner-Rosenghagen, “Neither Rock nor Refuge,” 163-174. James P. Cadello finds that Foster misrepresents Nietzsche due to his own theological and philosophical proclivities: “In short, Foster’s misconstrual of Nietzsche derived from his tenacious adherence to and unbending advocacy of the God-function as requisite for human happiness and species survival, even though Foster himself no longer believed in the metaphysical existence of God.” See Cadello, “The Last Pope: George Burman Foster’s Reading of Nietzsche,” *Journal of Religion* 72, no. 4 (October 1992): 513.

to be more useful than some antagonistic Social Gospel advocates.<sup>58</sup> Durant interpreted Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality as a complaint that it "puts a wet blanket over human powers." Morality was, in a word, boring. It was for "goody-goodies and molly-coddles." Nietzsche much preferred "the clash of combat, the tang of cruelty and lust, the tingle of unrestrained power" to the tedious precepts of Christianity. Durant suggested that perhaps Nietzsche had a point in appealing to the "adventurous" spirit of human nature that recoiled at the tame mores of Christianized bourgeois culture. But Durant located that adventure not in the "anarchic immorality" of Nietzsche but rather in "the steady march of moralized civilization" that focused on improvement of the human race, doing good works, and pursuing advances in fields such as science, medicine and engineering.<sup>59</sup>

Foster and Durant demonstrated that Nietzsche did not always have to be treated merely as an implacable foe with no usefulness for Protestantism. Edwin Dodge Hardin (1875-1948) concurred and suggested that Nietzsche provided Christianity with a very useful "devil's advocate." Hardin, a longtime, moderate Presbyterian minister in New York and Maine, wrote a 1916 article for the *American Journal of Theology* that was provocatively titled, "Nietzsche's Service to Christianity." Hardin suggested that Nietzsche presented a daunting, compelling opposition to Christianity and represented an

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<sup>58</sup> Durant deemed liberal Protestant theology necessary for the demands and complexities of modern life: "In other words, the God-idea has become fluid again, the God of the future is in the making. And this emancipation from the fixity of the conception that had become traditional has led many thinkers who would never have concerned themselves seriously with the God of popular belief, to look afresh at this, perhaps the greatest of human conceptions, and to seek to mould it into a form more consonant with man's mature experience and more serviceable for his spiritual life." See Drake Durant, "Seekers after God," *Harvard Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (January 1919): 68.

<sup>59</sup> Durant Drake, *Problems of Conduct: An Introductory Survey of Ethics* (Cambridge MA: The Riverside Press, 1914), 171, 172, 173. Drake displayed his liberal Protestant credentials by celebrating the example of Charles Darwin, "discoverer by patient labor of a great cosmic law," as an example of the approach that he was advocating. *Ibid.*, 173.

opportunity for Christianity to demonstrate its value. Hardin compared Nietzsche's relation to modern Christianity with the "prophets of Israel" calling out "a comfortably complacent generation." Nietzsche was praised for his "fearless logic" and for offering a model for Christianity to be carried "to its logical conclusion." Hardin argued that Christian principles were rarely lived out as courageously as Nietzsche lived out his convictions, which may explain why some of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as he encountered it had merit.<sup>60</sup>

One example in which Hardin found merit in aspects of Nietzsche's thought set him at odds with Social Gospel critics of Nietzsche. Hardin argued that Nietzsche's individualism did not contradict but rather paralleled the Christianity of the New Testament. Jesus' teachings were "unquestionably social," Hardin acknowledged, but "the regeneration of society" was pursued by means of "the regeneration of the individual." Hardin also remained open to Nietzsche's critique of democracy, which also demonstrated distance from the Social Gospel understanding of Nietzsche. "The social atmosphere" of modern America may be "impregnated with democratic ideas, sentiments, and even sentimentalities," Hardin mused, but he failed to see why American "political and social institutions" should be exempt from "the force of Nietzsche's judgment." Doubts about the reality of "equality," suspicion as to whether democracy was "really working well," and misgivings over the possibility that democracy was praised due to "unthinking prejudice" all haunted Hardin. "Hypocrisy and even self-delusion," Hardin pondered, "can prevail in politics as easily as in religion."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Edwin Dodge Hardin, "Nietzsche's Service to Christianity," 546, 547. See *Ibid.*, 551 for the parallel Hardin draws between Christ and Nietzsche on the grounds of shared intellectual integrity and authenticity.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* Hardin's questioning of democracy stood in sharp contrast to socialist and Crozer Theological Seminary (Upland, PA) professor Henry Clay Vedder (1853-1905), who unhesitatingly cast democracy in

Reevaluation of American political and religious ideals would come to characterize the next period of Nietzsche reception during World War I.

### **Nietzsche, American Protestantism and the Crisis of the Great War, 1914-1918**

The arrival of World War I in Europe provided the backdrop for many reflections on Nietzsche by Protestant clergy, theologians and intellectuals from 1914 to 1918. The war commonly was perceived as a crisis for Christianity, if not for religion in general. Reform rabbi Henry Berkowitz published a 1917 *Biblical World* article in that explored religion's "present status" in the midst of war. He argued that Nietzsche's ideas such as the superman, which Berkowitz perceived as focusing on the production of strong, superior individuals no matter the cost, had taken root and contributed to a difficult time for religious belief and practice. Religion faced "the entrenched forces of national hatred, race prejudices, class rivalries, and the whole brood of black immoralities that are the offspring of war" due to the presence of Nietzschean notions of force.<sup>62</sup> These immediate wartime challenges were accompanied by other long term factors in Protestant cultural authority's decline, including the advent of Darwinism and naturalistic approaches to knowledge, higher criticism of the Bible, and a shift away from Protestant belief and authority in culture-shaping institutions such as the modern university. Protestant commentators on Nietzsche during the war often focused on both the immediate impact

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religious terms: "Freedom, equality, brotherhood, are the watchwords of the new faith, yet the disciples of Jesus have ill learned this, while others have not perceived it at all, or have perceived only to reject with scorn. Among the latter is Nietzsche. 'Christianity,' said he, 'is the revolt of all that creeps upon the ground against what is elevated.' Precisely: it is the revolt of democracy against aristocracy. Christianity as Jesus taught it, the Gospel as he declared it, is just that, and what the small-souled philosopher thought its disgrace is its glory." See Vedder, *The Gospel of Jesus and the Problems of Democracy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 17.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Berkowitz, "The Present Status in Religion," *Biblical World* 50, no. 4 (October 1917): 214.

of Nietzsche in regard to German militarism as well as the enduring panoply of challenges to Christian influence in the modern world.

Popular religious accounts of the war not only made the familiar connection between Nietzsche and German militarism but suggested that his critique of Christianity shattered the foundations of German civilization in a way that gave rise to the possibility of war. One newspaper commentary told the story of a soldier and son of a Kansas minister who sent a letter home with his observations about the religious roots of the war. “Is it not natural,” the son wrote to his father, “that when the foundation of a great people is their religion, begins to crumble, after a while the whole structure of their civilization will fall with a cataclysmic crash?” The unnamed columnist elaborated upon the soldier’s reflection by asserting that the critique of Christian morality offered by “Germany’s glorified Apostle of the Superman” was indicative of a state that had “completely stamped out Christianity from its thoughts and plans.” It was all but inevitable for Germany “to crash and crumble” given their acceptance of the “bold and lying and damning” doctrine of “the raving madman” Nietzsche.<sup>63</sup>

Nietzsche’s inclusion in the cultural conversation about World War I was not simply about specific allotments of responsibility for inspiring German militarism, although that was an important component of the discourse.<sup>64</sup> It was also part of a

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<sup>63</sup> “Without Which We Would Perish,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 August 1918, II6. The young soldier’s insight was evidence to the columnist that “we need not seek the sages and the wise men, the economists, the scientists or the professors of the schools” to understand the war. The example of Germany was portrayed as instructive for the United States as well: “If America shall ever permit its religion to crumble, then its civilization will also fall and crash.” Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ministers often made the connection in wartime sermons. Dr. William Horace Day of Los Angeles’ First Congregational Church described Nietzsche as “the prophet of the philosophy of autocracy” whose ideas had led Europe to the brink of Armageddon in 1914: “Autocratic militarism is dragging its own peace-loving people and compelling seven other nations to join the worst tragedy of a thousand years—and it is the result of a half-crazy Polish genius.” See “In the Churches Yesterday,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1914, II3.

broader thematic canvas that included what Nietzsche and the war meant for the future of Christianity and for civilization itself. James Taft Hatfield (1862-1945), a Methodist classicist at Northwestern University made this connection in 1915, after the outbreak of war in Europe. Nietzsche was “Christianity’s fiercest antagonist,” Hatfield mused, and his ideas were crucial in understanding what conflict was really unfolding in civilization: “the battle now joined between his ideals and those of love and tenderness is the real Armageddon, beside which all noisy racial, dynastic, and economic warfares are merely episodes.” Civilization was in the midst of an identity crisis, Hatfield concluded, while expressing the hope that Nietzsche’s “New Gospel” would experience “a swift and decisive collapse.”<sup>65</sup> William Adams Brown (1865-1943), the liberal Protestant historian and theologian who taught for over 40 years at Union Theological Seminary in New York, argued that the war brought a choice to civilization between force and love. The outcome would be crucial in determining the fate of Christian belief and authority, Brown argued, with possible outcomes including either “a victory for faith or for unbelief.” Brown referenced Nietzsche while putting the choice in dramatic terms: “Is Christ to be the ultimate conqueror of the Superman of Nietzsche?”<sup>66</sup>

Princeton’s John Grier Hibben held a similar wartime perspective about Nietzsche and the crisis of civilization. He argued that Nietzsche’s call for “modern civilization” to

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<sup>65</sup> James Taft Hatfield, “Christianity’s Fiercest Antagonist,” *Dial* 59 (1915): 144, 146.

<sup>66</sup> William Adams Brown, *Is Christianity Practicable?* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 95. Brown previously had written that there was truth in the idea of existence as a struggle, so long as it was provided a (non-Calvinist) Christian context: “From this fact of conflict it follows that some advance further than others in character and attainment, while their neighbors fall behind or drop altogether out of the race. In the interpretation of these facts men part company. Some find in the struggle for existence the last word in the explanation of life. It is God’s will that the few should triumph and the many go to the wall. The theological name for this doctrine is election. In philosophy it finds expression in Nietzsche’s teaching that might makes right, and the world belongs to the strongest. Others see in the struggle for self-development only one side of the divine government, whose observance is the principle of self-sacrifice. This is the Christian view.” See idem, *Christian Theology in Outline* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906).

be transformed by a “transvaluation of values” amounted to a reversal of “the central virtues of Christianity.” The Christian social ideal of bearing “one another’s burdens” was defied by Nietzschean calls for individual strength and self-assertion, which Hibben feared had already “unconsciously” worked their way into the modern psyche and into the daily habits, goals, means and ends of society.<sup>67</sup> Hibben’s comments were offered in a book calling for military preparedness on the part of the United States. *The Higher Patriotism* (1915) made the case that military preparedness was complementary to taking the moral high ground in response to the war. But Washington Gladden used Nietzsche’s example to protest both the war and the policy. Gladden came across a passage from Book II of Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human* titled “The Means to Real Peace” that seemed to reveal Nietzsche as a critic of “the militaristic theology” of Germany, despite the popular perception that he was “its chief prophet.”<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche critiqued the idea of a standing army for the purposes of defense by suggesting that it masked more aggressive intentions and inevitably led to pouncing upon “a harmless and unprepared victim” at the first opportunity. He countered that peace could be achieved by having a nation from a position of strength voluntarily disarm.<sup>69</sup> Gladden trumpeted Nietzsche’s insight for exposing “the psychology of militarism” and submitted that his “flaming words” served as an “admonition” for Christians that supported militaristic policies such as “preparedness.” Gladden marveled that a person who was popularized as a “contemptuous reviler of the Christian church” articulated Christian teachings regarding

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<sup>67</sup> John Grier Hibben, *The Higher Patriotism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), 41, 42, 44, 45.

<sup>68</sup> Washington Gladden, *The Forks of the Road* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 81.

<sup>69</sup> See Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 380-1.

“international morality.” He lamented the failure of ministers to preach this gospel of peace from the pulpit.<sup>70</sup>

Gladden’s perspective, however, was less common among the large percentage of liberal Protestants who supported the war.<sup>71</sup> Charles Edward Jefferson (1860-1937) was an acclaimed preacher and Congregationalist pastor of New York City’s high profile Broadway Tabernacle who jettisoned previously held pacifist views to endorse the American war effort.<sup>72</sup> Jefferson framed his support for war in terms of supporting Protestant cultural authority and securing the preservation of a Christian foundation for civilization. He urged ministers to get involved “as guides of the people in the realm of international conduct” lest “other preachers” and sets of ideas emerge to fill the void: “When the servant of Christ is silent, then Machiavelli speaks....When Peter and John and James have nothing to say then Treitschke and Nietzsche become eloquent.”<sup>73</sup>

Isaac J. Lansing (1846-1920), a liberal Protestant minister and Social Gospel advocate who mixed church stints in Boston, MA, Scranton, PA and Ridgewood, NJ with a term as General Secretary of the International Reform Bureau, answered Jefferson’s

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<sup>70</sup> Gladden, *The Forks of the Road*, 85-86. Gladden’s support of this particular passage of Nietzsche did not mean that he exonerated Nietzsche for responsibility for the war. Gladden viewed Nietzsche as an inconsistent thinker and wrote into the *New York Times* a year earlier that Nietzsche was unquestionably the most important of the “inspirers of the present war.” See Washington Gladden, “Nietzsche on Peace,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1915, X1.

<sup>71</sup> See Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2003).

<sup>72</sup> Jefferson endorsed the war effort in 1917 and at war’s end offered reflections on why American intervention was necessary: “We Americans did not rush in a frenzy of passion, in a fury of vengeance, we walked in deliberately, knowing what we were walking into, and we walked in with unhesitating step. We were ready to pay the price. Why? Because it had become evident that the world could not be saved without the shedding of our blood.” See Jefferson, *What the War Has Taught Us* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1919), 76. Jefferson compared the sacrifice of soldiers with the sacrifice of Christ. He suggested that the sacrifice of soldiers presented “a clear demonstration that the principle of sacrifice is embedded in the structure of the world, and that it is the Divine will that the life of mankind shall be lifted to higher levels through the willingness of men to die for others.” *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Edward Jefferson, *What the War is Teaching* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 205. Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) was a German historian and strong nationalist who supported Germany’s imperial ambitions.

call but did so out of the desire to defend Christianity from wartime critics.<sup>74</sup> Lansing's book *Why Christianity Did Not Prevent the War* (1918) was based on a series of public lectures responding to the charge that Christianity was rendered weak by the failure to prevent or stop the war and the overwhelming suffering and questioning of faith that followed. Lansing answered by affirming the free will of humanity and by suggesting that if true Christianity had been followed, the war would not have happened. But he also turned the question around and asked why Germany turned to philosophies that were so abhorrent to Christianity. Lansing rebuked Nietzsche for his "contempt" for the masses and his "doctrine of inconsiderate self-assertion" while making clear that Nietzsche's influential "philosophy of individual life" was "absolutely irreconcilable to Christianity."<sup>75</sup>

Lansing and others attempted to show the consequences of putting Nietzsche's ideas into practice by pointing to specific incidents in the war. Lansing linked accounts of German soldiers degrading French women to Nietzsche, "the chief philosopher of Germany," who loathed women and suggested their value solely was "as playthings for and breeders of the 'superman.'" Any philosopher or person who despised women, Lansing railed, "that one is a devil, in whatever guise."<sup>76</sup> Conservative Southern Presbyterian minister Thomas Cary Johnson (1859-1936), also a theology professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond VA, charged that Nietzsche deserved some blame for World War I and for "the sensual barbarism" exhibited by German forces

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<sup>74</sup> The International Reform Bureau was a religious organization based in Washington, DC that was dedicated to social reform. Lansing also served as an activist on behalf of his working class constituents and in earlier writings had expressed concern about the threat Catholicism represented to Protestant cultural authority.

<sup>75</sup> Isaac J. Lansing, *Why Christianity Did Not Prevent the War* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 31, 32.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

during the war.<sup>77</sup> Princeton Seminary Professor of Apologetics and Christian Ethics William Brenton Greene Jr. (1854-1928), one of the last “Old Princeton” practitioners of traditional Reformed theology prior to Princeton’s move toward a more liberal direction, also tied Nietzsche in with specific events of the war: “Is it not the most natural thing in the world that every atrocity committed in Belgium or Poland or Serbia or Armenia should find its justification in Nietzsche’s writings?”<sup>78</sup>

Greene drew this correlation in an address given to open the academic year at Princeton in September of 1918. Greene’s address inevitably was shaped by current events, but he believed that a crisis in ethics was occurring that had its origin not in the war but in earlier intellectual developments. The last quarter century, Greene explained, brought a “revival of paganism” that led to a rejection not only of the deity of Christ but of Jesus as the ethical ideal. The call to “return to nature” and to renounce Christian ideals was done most “boldly and even shamelessly” by Friedrich Nietzsche. Greene argued that Nietzsche embarked on “the most appalling revolution” in history, one that compelled civilization to choose between the ethics of Christ and the ethics of nature. Germany had made its choice and its actions reflected the will to power in action. Greene’s answer to the “death warrant” of Nietzschean nature ethics revealed that while not a fundamentalist, he was more conservative than his liberal brethren. Greene suggested an insistence on the “historical character” of Christianity and an affirmation of the supernatural in creeds were the foundation for a viable, powerful ethical alternative to Nietzsche.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Cary Johnson, *Some Modern Isms*, 191.

<sup>78</sup> William Brenton Greene, Jr., “The Present Crisis in Ethics,” *Princeton Theological Review* 17, no. 1 (1919): 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 2, 3, 8, 18.

Protestant wartime reflections on Nietzsche were usually quick to associate Nietzsche with German ideals and behavior, but there were occasional voices of skepticism. A.C. Armstrong (1860-1935) cast doubt on the effort to link Nietzsche to the war in his 1917 *Methodist Review* article. Armstrong, a former Methodist minister who was an important figure in the early professionalization of philosophy and had a long tenure at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, acknowledged Nietzsche's rather intense disdain for Christianity.<sup>80</sup> But he argued that it was less toward doctrine and more toward its moral and ethical teachings upon which "European civilization continues to be based." Nietzsche called for "a transformation of moral values" so that "the gospel of the will to power" could supplant traditional Christian virtues and practices that lionized weakness and humility. Armstrong understood how a surface glance at current events could lead to the impression that German militarism was carrying out that new gospel of the will to power, but problems remained in trying to make the connection. Nietzsche's ideas were geared more toward the individual than the social, were aristocratic in nature, and anti-nationalistic. Armstrong also argued that Nietzsche was less influential at home and that wars were better explained by "concrete conditions" rather than "any abstract system." Nietzsche was influential, he conceded, but not "substantial and decisive" in provoking war."<sup>81</sup> Armstrong's display of caution was a minority voice in a discourse that tended to blame, or at least associate, Nietzsche for German militarism. The years following the war provided Protestant theologians, ministers and intellectuals an opportunity to draw conclusions both about Nietzsche's legacy and Protestantism's immediate future.

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<sup>80</sup> Armstrong was one of the original participants in the American Philosophical Association and served as its President in 1915.

<sup>81</sup> A.C. Armstrong, "Philosophy and the War," *Methodist Review* 33, no. 1 (January 1917): 53, 54.

### Nietzsche and the Postwar Prospects of Protestantism, 1919-1925

The end of World War I brought a series of reflections from Protestant figures evaluating the ramifications of war in regard to matters of faith. Many of these were postmortem assessments of what went wrong in Germany, often offered as object lessons of mistakes to avoid. Other reports, with differing degrees of pessimism and optimism, were focused on the role Christianity could play in the postwar era. Nietzsche once again figured in these accounts as a substantive and symbolic inspiration or foil. William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), the populist and Democratic Party stalwart as well as a pivotal figure in the modernist-fundamentalist debates over issues such as evolution in the 1920s, even invoked Nietzsche while awaiting the treaty to emerge from the Paris Peace Conference. His 1919 Washington, DC speech sponsored by the YMCA and the Billy Sunday Tabernacle Workers castigated those who believed a peace was not possible due to man's animal nature to fight as "followers of Nietzsche." The "treaty which we await," Bryan mused, would establish a lasting peace if it was conducted in the right spirit. The peace "animated by the spirit of the Prince of Peace" would be lasting, but it would fail if it were based on "the philosophy of Nietzsche."<sup>82</sup> Liberal luminary Shailer Mathews shared Bryan's lack of enthusiasm for Nietzsche in the postwar period. He affirmed the enduring "validity of American ideals" as a tonic amidst the "chaotic conditions that have always followed great wars." He expressed disdain at those who wished for "founders of a new social order" and preferred "Nietzsche to Jesus Christ" when the durable values of American society had already proven their worth.<sup>83</sup> But other Protestant observers were less convinced that Nietzsche could or should be so easily

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<sup>82</sup> "Sees Peace in League," *The Washington Post*, 31 March 1919, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Shailer Mathews, *The Validity of American Ideals* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1922), 59.

dispensed. Nietzsche remained a powerful presence for these Protestant clergy, theologians and intellectuals in the ongoing discussions about Christianity's focus, content and authority in the postwar era.

Some postwar Protestant commentators participated in these discussions by drawing object lessons from Germany's fall from grace and suggesting that the abandonment of faith was a primary reason for the havoc wreaked in Europe. Conservative Southern Presbyterian Thomas Cary Johnson pointed to Nietzsche's personal loss of faith as both an expression of the already-present decay in German education and as a pivotal moment because of his future impact in Germany and beyond.<sup>84</sup> Nietzsche lost his faith through exposure to biblical higher criticism taught in German schools, which "bore its legitimate fruit in the soil of his heart."<sup>85</sup> Nietzsche's subsequent attacks on God, Johnson argued, were based on a "caricature" that originated with "modern German theologians." Nietzsche either "misunderstood" or intentionally "misrepresented" New Testament Christianity, but that was not surprising to Johnson given Nietzsche's immersion "in the soulless externalities" of the German Christianity that was prevalent in his youth. Johnson cast Nietzsche's personal loss of faith and failure

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<sup>84</sup> The case of Johnson serves as a reminder that many Protestants were engaging or exposed to Nietzsche through the framework of their theological and ecclesiastical traditions. Johnson was an ordained Presbyterian minister and Professor of Ecclesiastical Polity and Systematic Theology for over forty years at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond VA, a citadel for theologically conservative Presbyterianism. Johnson was a deeply entrenched traditional Southern Presbyterian in terms of his perspectives on history, culture, theology and academic interests. His scholarly parochialism was evident in works largely focused on his denominational and regional background, including biographies of prominent nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian theologians Robert Lewis Dabney and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Johnson's treatment of Nietzsche was a rare departure in subject matter but also reflected that traditional framework in style and content. For example, he lamented that Nietzsche could not have seen a more favorable and muscular presentation of Christianity and the strong men it produced. He appealed to the Puritans, Oliver Cromwell, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson as examples—choices that may appear idiosyncratic on the surface but were reflective of Johnson's own historical and cultural insularity. See Johnson, *Some Modern Isms*, 174-175.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 159. Johnson dramatized the moment as a turning point in Nietzsche's life and thought: "He hauled up the anchors of his ship, left the moorings of the word of God and sailed forth on the sea of doubt without chart, or compass." He also called Nietzsche "a Julian the Apostate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century." *Ibid.*, 162.

to see true Christianity as having a large impact in Germany and beyond. Nietzsche became “symptomatic of the time” and inspired “a period of pagan-reaction against Christianity” that shared blame for the war, spread beyond German borders, and even found supporters in the United States.<sup>86</sup>

Charles Edward Jefferson of New York’s Broadway Tabernacle Church came from a very different and more liberal theological background than Johnson but similarly concluded that Germany’s militarism was due to “the collapse of an edifice whose foundation stones were rotten.” Jefferson reflected that “Germany had ceased to sing in her heart” the hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” but had instead “worshipped at the throne of Bismarck and Nietzsche and Bernhardt.”<sup>87</sup> Chicago First Presbyterian pastor William Chalmers Covert (1864-1942), was of the same mind and described World War I as “a vast welter of grossest forms of materialism” due to Nietzsche and other haters of Christianity who had poisoned Germany. Chalmers acknowledged the unpleasantness of war and the need to occasionally fight “the devil with fire,” but he expressed encouragement in the fact that “gigantic enterprises of human love and world service” had blossomed out of a new, thriving spiritual reality. Chalmers was hopeful that faith would prosper in the ashes of war and the Nietzsche-inspired materialism that fueled it.<sup>88</sup>

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s A.T. Robertson concurred and argued that

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 170, 173, 192. Johnson noted that Nietzsche gained “no small following” among several groups at home: “not only among young men and young women who wish to live free of traditional restraints, but philosophic ‘students’ who differ with him on some points radically, and professed Christians who deny the truth of his central teachings.” Ibid., 184.

<sup>87</sup> Charles Edward Jefferson, *What the War Has Taught Us*, 55. Jefferson vacillated on his views on how much individual thinkers should be blamed for German militarism. Jefferson, two years prior to his conclusion about Germany’s “rotten” foundation, expressed skepticism that Treitschke, Nietzsche and Bernhardt could be held responsible: “Most of us had never heard of any one of them before the war, nor had the majority of Germans....It is absurd to hold a great people responsible for the false philosophy of a handful of radical or eccentric writers.” See Charles E. Jefferson, “What Can Christians Do in War Time?” in *The Christian in War Time*, ed. Frederick Lynch (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1917), 57-58.

<sup>88</sup> William Chalmers Covert, *New Furrows in Old Fields: A Present Day Outlook on the Opportunities for Faith and Work* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 139-140.

disaster ensued after Nietzsche's philosophy became "the orthodox doctrine of the German state." Germany's unraveling and Europe's devastation, he concluded, was triggered by the German decision to cast off "the thin veneer of Christianity" and to embrace the gospel of might and the glorification of war inherent in Nietzsche.<sup>89</sup>

Robertson found reasons for hope despite the criticisms Christianity had been subjected to recently over its veracity and its powerlessness to prevent war. He believed that if anything, the war would serve as a catalyst for Christianity's vital role to play in the new international order. By contrast, he suggested that "crass materialism" from now on would be associated with "German philosophy." German thinkers such as Nietzsche did not need to be engaged anymore "in the presence of the great world-struggle for spiritual life and freedom."<sup>90</sup>

Nelson S. Bradley, a longtime liberal Congregationalist minister in Saginaw, MI, did not share the view that Nietzsche could be so easily discarded in the early aftermath of the war. His 1919 reflection "Christianity Facing a Crisis" placed Nietzsche at the epicenter of Christianity's ongoing crisis of cultural authority. "The great upheaval" of the postwar world was in Bradley's estimation more than political, social, or economic in nature, but religious as well. "Christian teaching must then shift its emphasis," Bradley warned, "or surrender its supremacy." Bradley was not referring to the altering of doctrines, creeds or a belief in the supernatural because as a liberal Protestant he saw those debates as settled. Christianity did not need any of those to survive. What it did

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<sup>89</sup> A.T. Robertson, *The New Citizenship: The Christian Facing a New World Order* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1919), 24, 25. Robertson, despite his denunciation of militarism, did not embrace pacifism: "So the Christian, under the leadership of Jesus, does not agree with Nietzsche, Treitschke, Bernhardt, *et id omne genus*, that war is good, glorious, and great in itself. That doctrine is repulsive to the Christian. But neither can he side with the pacifist who says all war is wrong and that it is a sin for a Christian patriot to defend his country against attack or his home against a burglar or his wife against a rapist." *Ibid.*, 138-9.

<sup>90</sup> A.T. Robertson, "The Cry for Christ Today," *Biblical World* 54, no. 1 (January 1920): 3-8.

need, however, was a vital and influential social ethic rooted in Christian morality. It was because of Nietzsche's "withering contempt" and powerful critique of the "slave morality" of Christianity that Bradley deemed him such a threat. Nietzsche's recommended alternative of a "master morality" that allowed certain individuals to write their own moral codes through "a full, vigorous expression of the "will to power" was also a great cause of concern. Bradley saw this alternative ethic at work not just in Germany but throughout American society, which appeared to be trending "strongly in the direction of the master philosophy" for the last twenty years. Bradley saw practical Nietzscheans in captains of industry, in the flippant toleration of sin and disregard for the Ten Commandments and Sermon on the Mount, and even in examples of independent, young women who returned from college and declared, "I must live my own life." Bradley's assessment of these trends was that Christianity was facing a crisis to its core—its ethical system—without which it would be reduced to merely "an unhappy memory." Bradley's liberal optimism led him to end on a note of hope that the war, fought in the name of democracy and brotherhood, would revitalize Christianity's social ethic and repudiate Nietzsche's master morality.<sup>91</sup>

Other liberal Protestants writing in the early postwar period were more willing than Bradley to concede that Nietzsche had legitimate insights to consider. Prominent liberal Protestant pastor and author Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) acknowledged the link between Nietzsche and the war but he still found Nietzsche to have a point in his description of how the world operated. Fosdick, a nationally known Baptist minister who spearheaded the modernist critique of fundamentalism, noted in 1920 that assertions of the "right of the strong over the weak" and doctrines like the Superman were "tragically

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<sup>91</sup> N.S. Bradley, "Christianity Facing a Crisis," *Biblical World* 53, no. 4 (July 1919): 382, 385, 388, 389.

influential” in world events. But Nietzsche was correct, Fosdick argued, when he claimed that many “areas of human life” did operate according to principles counter to Christianity. Fosdick surmised that “empires for conquest, industrial systems for exploitation, individual ambition rising on stepping stones of fallen folk” were all contemporary examples of that philosophy in practice.<sup>92</sup> While Fosdick found Nietzsche insightful as to the ways of the world, Drake Durant found Nietzsche to be insightful in his understanding of how the church operated in that world. Durant expressed alarm at the postwar state of Christianity in the United States due to its failure to embrace a more progressive, social role as opposed to being “the refuge of superstition, the support of reaction, and a source of mere selfish personal consolation to their members.”<sup>93</sup> He argued that Nietzsche had a point when he wrote that Christianity was “harmful” due to offering “redemption *from* reality” as opposed to “redemption *of* reality.” This observation buttressed Durant’s claim that the Church had become too “otherworldly” and forfeited leadership to “various socialistic and communistic movements” in the pursuit of ushering in “the age of Social Justice.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Service* (New York: Association Press, 1920), 45-46. Fosdick later wrote along those same lines: “Said Nietzsche, ‘I regard Christianity as the most fatal and seductive lie that has ever existed.’ Of course he thought that. He knew that in a world with brute force for its creative fact and final arbiter the ideals of Jesus are mistaken, founded on falsehood, that they involve abnormal living, and that in the end, against the deadweight of an antagonistic cosmos, cannot be made to work.” See idem, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 247. William Adams Brown gave Nietzsche credit for recognizing that Christianity did indeed “put new value on familiar and simple things” and was a faith that affirmed “the potentialities of the lowliest.” See Brown, *The Minister as Teacher: Lectures Given at Middlebury College to the Congregational Ministers of Vermont Assembled in their Annual Convocation, September 7-9, 1920* (New York: Privately Printed: William Adams Brown, 1920), 29.

<sup>93</sup> Drake Durant, *Shall We Stand by the Church? A Dispassionate Inquiry* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 7. Durant’s introduction reads like an introduction to Christianity’s crisis of cultural authority. He cites the growing postwar criticism about the church’s “lack of leadership in the moral crisis of the age,” the growing intellectual challenges and critiques of Christianity, declining church attendance, and the church’s failure to engage the world and speak to social issues. See *Ibid.*, 1-7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

Durant was not alone among liberal Protestants in calling for “the Church” to respond to a crisis. One of the more thorough liberal Protestant treatments of Christianity’s postwar crisis—and Nietzsche’s role in precipitating it—was by University of Missouri sociologist Charles A. Ellwood (1873-1946). Ellwood maintained his religious convictions in a predominantly secular field by promoting the social, ethical and reforming nature of Christianity while also embracing evolution and scientific authority.<sup>95</sup> These impulses were reflected in *The Reconstruction of Religion* (1922), Ellwood’s effort to diagnose Christianity’s dire status in western civilization, to prescribe a transformation necessary for survival, and to speak on Nietzsche’s responsibility in creating the conditions of crisis. Ellwood, as a sociologist, was skeptical of attributing too much blame or credit to an individual for transforming society. But he conceded that Nietzsche was “symptomatic of his age and of the present day” and thus merited consideration. Ellwood observed that theological attacks on Christianity were nothing new, but the modern “religious revolution” was especially noteworthy for its attacks on “Christian ethical ideals.” Nietzsche represented the “culmination” of these attacks and one who “symbolizes and embodies” modern civilization’s “movement back toward pagan ideals.” Ellwood warned that dismissing Nietzsche on the grounds of insanity would be insufficient given “the enlightened egoism, brute force, class aggrandizement, and general glorification of the brute in man” apparent on the world stage were ideas that could be attributed to Nietzsche. Ellwood used Nietzsche’s insights to crystallize his

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<sup>95</sup> A useful overview of Ellwood’s career as well as a discussion of how religion impacted his scholarship is found in Stephen Turner, “A Life in the First Half-Century of Sociology: Charles Ellwood and the Division of Sociology,” in *Sociology in America: A History*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 115-154. See especially 128-129, 142-144.

conviction that western civilization faced a “religious problem” that was less about theological doctrines and more about “the practical values of human living.”<sup>96</sup>

Ellwood argued that Nietzsche was endorsing a return to the “paganism” of ancient Greece, which Ellwood equated with “barbarism” due to what he interpreted as its inherent “domination, spoliation, or exploitation of others.” Ellwood contended that Christianity emerged with a different social ideal “of a universalized humanitarian character” backed by “religious sanction.” The choice in the modern era, Ellwood proposed, was between the “humanitarian civilization” grounded in Christianity or barbaric paganism manifested in “individual or group egoism.” There was no room for compromise between the two. Ellwood’s concern was that in the postwar world, the latter set of values appeared in the ascendancy.<sup>97</sup>

The outcome of that struggle, Ellwood speculated, would determine Nietzsche’s future legacy. Nietzsche would come to be seen either as “the leader of the re-paganization of the world” or as “the last of the great pagans of the nineteenth century” who was rendered irrelevant by the victory of Christian civilization in the twentieth century. Nietzsche’s rejection of social obligations, trumpeting of individual self-interest, and reflection of nineteenth century philosophical trends such as individualism, naturalism and materialism were reasons why Ellwood believed that Nietzsche was such a significant figure in this conflict of values.<sup>98</sup> Ellwood also saw Nietzsche’s role deriving from the fact that he had an academic career. Ellwood believed that universities naturally mirrored “the spiritual tendencies” of the age and became “chief centers of neo-

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<sup>96</sup> Charles A. Ellwood, *The Reconstruction of American Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 18, 19, 20. Ellwood believed that while Nietzsche had “millions” of followers, few of those followers “had the courage of conviction or the logical consistency which Nietzsche had.” *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97, 98, 99.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 109, 110.

paganism” in the nineteenth century. The consequences for religion, society, politics and business were enormous, Ellwood mused. Nineteenth century civilization became predominantly “non-Christian in character” and reflected the lost cultural authority of Christianity, which although present in a “conventional” sense was not allowed by “the ruling classes” to “disturb the established order.” Ellwood believed that twentieth century civilization no longer could tolerate its half-pagan, half-Christian foundation and should ultimately embrace the Christian ideal of life. But Christianity must change as well, becoming more scientific and rational in nature and social in scope.<sup>99</sup>

### **Climbing the ‘Bloody Ladder’: Fundamentalists and the Darwin-Nietzsche Nexus, 1918-1925**

Another set of postwar reflections addressed Nietzsche and the fallout of the war in conjunction with contemporary cultural battles emanating from the Modernist-Fundamentalist debates of the 1920s. While liberal Protestants worried over how to accommodate the faith in light of modern challenges, fundamentalists reacted to what they saw as an assault on the Christian foundations of society and a waning of influence in culture-shaping institutions. The debates over teaching evolution in public schools became an important venue for these dynamics and an occasion to discuss the ideas of Nietzsche in conjunction with Darwin. The association between the ideas of Darwin and Nietzsche had been suggested before, but the evolution controversies of the 1920s brought a significant escalation in making the comparison. Fundamentalists not only

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 111, 113, 115. Ellwood elaborated as follows: “There is need, at the present moment of a stalwart religion, a Christianity which shall bend its energies to making our whole civilization conform to the Christian ideal of life. Such a Christianity must be necessarily non-theological, because theology remains a realm of speculation and of disputation and divides rather than unites men. Such a Christianity must be thoroughly social; it must consider none of the great fields of the social activity alien to its interest. Such a Christianity must base itself upon the facts of life, and ally itself with humanitarian science.” Ibid., 118.

asserted the compatibility, if not outright uniformity, between the ideas of Darwin and Nietzsche, they also warned that the example of teaching Nietzsche's ideas in both Germany and the United States provided a valuable lesson in the perils of educating students about Darwinism.

Nietzsche never endorsed Darwin wholeheartedly. Though he was sympathetic to the idea of struggle in nature, Nietzsche believed Darwinism failed to appreciate fully the nature of the struggle. "The struggle for existence is only an *exception*," Nietzsche wrote, "a temporary restriction of the will to life." Struggle was more accurately understood as revolving "around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power—in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life." Darwinism did not appreciate the dynamics of power or the nature of the will, Nietzsche believed, nor was it free from its own social context: "The whole of English Darwinism breathes something like the musty air of English overpopulation, like the smell of the distress and overcrowding of small people."<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche believed that "the school of Darwin" was biased toward a preferred outcome: "the defeat of the stronger, the more privileged, the fortunate exceptions." But Nietzsche argued that the actual outcome of the struggle would be the opposite and largely because struggle was about power and not simply survival.<sup>101</sup>

Nietzsche also poured scorn on liberal Protestants like David Strauss who embraced Darwinism without realizing the implications for their view of humanity or morality.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science; With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1882; New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 292.

<sup>101</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1888; London: Penguin Books, 1968), 87 (page citation is to *Twilight of Idols*).

<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche writes on this point: "'Do not ever forget,' says Strauss, 'that you are a man and not a mere creature of nature: do not ever forget that all others are likewise men, that is to say, with all their individual differences the same as you, with the needs and demands as you—that is the epitome of all morality.' But whence sounds this imperative? How can man possess it in himself, since, according to Darwin, he is precisely a creature of nature and nothing else, and has evolved to the height of being man by quite other

American fundamentalists certainly felt as if they understood the implications of Darwinism for humanity and morality. They made him a focal point of the cultural battles of the 1920s and related Nietzsche to Darwin in the process. One of the intellectual leaders to whom fundamentalists turned in these battles was Canadian-born George McCready Price (1870-1963), a Seventh Day Adventist who spent a good portion of his career teaching at Adventist schools in California and who served as a resource for William Jennings Bryan and others at the 1925 Scopes Trial. Price was a creationist who wrote geological works designed to refute evolution. He made the connection between Nietzsche and Darwin by accusing Nietzsche of climbing the “bloody ladder of natural selection” from nature to society. His book *The Phantom of Organic Evolution* (1924) struck out at Nietzsche’s “bald glorification” of Darwinian principles as the path to social advancement. Nietzsche glorified war and threw “a halo of glory around” characteristics that for two millennia were considered “the very antithesis of Christianity.” Price credited Nietzsche with being “bold and consistent in applying the ethics of Darwinism all the way up the line” while noting that the consequences were evinced in the ethical decisions of both individuals and nations states.<sup>103</sup> Price was building upon an earlier assertion that Nietzsche’s teachings could be applied to states just as much as to individuals because

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laws: precisely, in fact, by always forgetting that the other creatures similar to him possessed equivalent rights, precisely by feeling himself the stronger and gradually eliminating the other, weaker examples of his species? While Strauss is obliged to assume that no two creatures have been exactly similar, and that the entire evolution of man from the levels of the animals up to the heights of the cultural philistine depends upon the law of differences between individuals, he finds no difficulty in enunciating the opposite: ‘behave as though there were no differences between individuals!’ Where has the moral teaching of Strauss-Darwin now gone, where has any courage whatever gone!’ See Nietzsche, “David Strauss the Confessor and Writer” in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1873; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30-31.

<sup>103</sup> George McCready Price, *The Phantom of Organic Evolution* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 183, 184. Price also took aim at Socialists by suggesting that they were opponents of Christianity and Nietzsche’s “disciples” who “constantly advertised and circulated his writings.” See idem, *Poisoning Democracy: A Study of the Moral and Religious Aspects of Socialism* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1921), 78.

“the doctrine of biological Evolution,” with which Price associated Nietzsche without qualification, made “the state absolutely supreme over the individual” due to its possession of power.<sup>104</sup>

The strong connection between Nietzsche and Darwin was especially troubling to fundamentalists given their interpretation of recent world events. John Roach Straton (1875-1929), the influential New York Baptist preacher, radio broadcaster and anti-evolutionist, made that association in his highly publicized 1925 debates with liberal Protestant Charles Francis Potter. Nietzsche “seized upon the teachings of Darwin with avidity” and used them to develop the concept of the superman. Straton alleged that Nietzsche then passed this idea to Germany along with a love of war. Straton denounced Nietzsche for giving permission to the strong to “trample on and destroy the weak” for the sake of the survival of the fittest and lamented the application of these ideas in Germany.<sup>105</sup> A.C. Dixon (1854-1925), when speaking to his fellow Baptists in 1920, offered a specific example of how Nietzsche’s ideas were applied to devastating effect in Germany. Dixon, a fundamentalist Baptist minister who edited *The Fundamentals* and embraced many causes including the anti-evolution movement, narrated the story of being approached by a German soldier after delivering a sermon in London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle that blamed “Darwinian evolution” for the war. The soldier told Dixon that while he was a Christian, his wife and daughter “had their faith wrecked by Nietzsche and his pagan gang.” Dixon charged that the acceptance of Darwinism had

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<sup>104</sup> George McCready Price, *Back to the Bible: or, The New Protestantism*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1920), 182.

<sup>105</sup> Joel Carpenter, ed., *Fundamentalist versus Modernist: The Debates between John Roach Straton and Charles Francis Potter* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 105. Potter later observed that Straton “made a lot of capital of the Darwin-Nietzsche-German aggression line in the debate of evolution.” See Potter, *The Preacher and I: An Autobiography* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1951), 259.

paved the way for Nietzsche's "pagan brute philosophy" to flourish in Germany. Nietzsche was elucidating a "philosophy of beastliness" that was rooted in Darwin's notion of the survival of the fittest and was the cause of many deleterious effects in Germany.<sup>106</sup>

The damage done to Germany by the teaching of nefarious ideas, fundamentalists argued, put the world on the path of destruction and served to remind Americans of the dangers of allowing evolution to be taught in schools. Evangelist and anti-evolution activist T.T. Martin (1862-1939) alerted American parents to the dangers of teaching evolution in schools by appealing to the case of Germany. His inflammatory book *Hell and the High Schools: Christ or Evolution—Which?* (1923) became part of the "carnival atmosphere" of the Scopes Trial when Martin came to Dayton, TN and sold copies of it along with others such as George McCready Price's *The Phantom of Organic Evolution* (1924) under a banner bearing the title of Martin's book.<sup>107</sup> Martin, who successfully advocated for anti-evolution laws in his home state of Mississippi, warned that before "Germany's 'superman' turned out to be an incarnate devil," the children of Germany had been exposed to the teaching of evolution and drawn away from a belief in the authority of the Bible or in "Jesus the Christ as Saviour and Redeemer."<sup>108</sup> The teaching of evolution thus opened the door through which Nietzsche was able to mislead a nation away from Christianity and toward provocation of World War I.

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<sup>106</sup> A.C. Dixon, "The Bible at the Center of the Modern University," *Baptist Fundamentals; Being Addresses Delivered at the Pre-Convention Conference at Buffalo June 21 and 22, 1920* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1920), 134.

<sup>107</sup> See Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>108</sup> T.T. Martin, *Hell and the High Schools: Christ or Evolution—Which?* (Kansas City: The Western Baptist Publishing Co., 1923), 147.

John W. Porter (1863-1937) also used the example of Germany and the war as a warning about the consequences of exposing a society to toxic ideas through education. Porter was a Kentucky Baptist minister and President of the Anti-Evolution League of America who became a pivotal figure in agitating for anti-evolution legislation at the state level. He was the author of *Evolution—A Menace* (1922), a popular anti-evolution work that also warned of the damaging effects of Darwinian inculcation by state institutions and some denominational schools. Porter discussed Nietzsche in that context with assistance from lengthy anti-Nietzsche quotations from fellow fundamentalist A.C. Dixon and from William Jennings Bryan. Porter listed numerous reasons why evolution should not be taught in schools, including the damage it does to society and civilization. The recent world war was an obvious example. Porter argued that the logic of evolution led to war and unsurprisingly blamed Nietzsche's ideas—"the legitimate product of Darwinian evolution"—for being the primary cause of World War I.<sup>109</sup>

Recent history also suggested to Baptist preacher, leading anti-evolution crusader, and World Christian Fundamentals Association founder William Bell Riley (1861-1947) that the combination of Darwin and Nietzsche had wreaked havoc on the world. Riley claimed that three decades of German education had been shaped by Nietzsche, "the ablest exponent of Evolution yet produced," whose doctrine of the superman was a Darwinian manifestation of "the survival of the fittest." This poisoning of German society with this Nietzschean-Darwinian education bore fruit in the war that "baptized the

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<sup>109</sup>J.W. Porter, *Evolution—A Menace* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1922), 88.

world in blood, gave birth to Bolshevism, wrought irreparable injustice to the doctrine of brotherhood, and left the whole world wondering whether, after all, it had a God.”<sup>110</sup>

Riley’s expansive scope of consequences left no doubt his views on the perils of the Darwin-Nietzsche nexus and perhaps was surpassed only by those fundamentalists who viewed their impact in eschatological terms. Popular preacher and author Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951) proposed in his 1920 commentary on the Book of Revelation that Nietzsche’s superman, along with Charles Darwin and select figures from world religions, was another expression of the coming Antichrist. Nietzsche, “the Hun philosopher whose ravings prepared the way for the world war,” offered Ironside a concept that corresponded to his vision of “a Satan-controlled, God-defying, conscienceless, almost superhuman man” whose appearance would facilitate the premillennial process of bringing history to an end.<sup>111</sup> James Martin Gray (1951-1935) linked the prophetic possibilities of the Antichrist with anxiety over Protestant cultural authority in his comments about Nietzsche. Gray, the longtime President of the Moody Bible Institute founded by famed evangelist D.L. Moody, blamed Nietzsche for the war but perceived him as prophetic in discussing the religious implications of German intentions. Gray believed that Nietzsche correctly recognized Germany’s objective as not merely the expansion of an empire but the creation of an altogether new religion. Gray’s anxiety over this prospect was linked to his worries over the status of Christianity due to the fact that the “philosophical and religious teaching” which provided the foundation for Germany intentions were “rife throughout Christendom” and taught in colleges,

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<sup>110</sup> William Bell Riley, *Inspiration or Evolution* (Cleveland OH: Union Gospel Press, 1926), 15, 257.

<sup>111</sup> H.A. Ironside, *Revelation: An Ironside Expository Commentary* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 138.

universities and even pulpits. Gray suspected that the teaching that opposed Christianity was paving the way for the inevitable arrival of the Antichrist.<sup>112</sup>

The most highly publicized event of the fundamentalist battle against Darwin, and by frequent association, Nietzsche, came with the Scopes Trial of 1925. Later popular understandings of the trial, fueled by sources such as the 1955 play and 1960 film *Inherit the Wind*, gave the impression that it represented the disastrous last stand of the fundamentalists before retreating from the cultural battles that previously occupied them. Edward J. Larson has debunked that and other misunderstandings of the trial while showing that anti-evolution activism continued to thrive in the years to follow.<sup>113</sup> However, it was undoubtedly the most sensationalized and well-covered event of the fundamentalist-modernist cultural battles at least in part due to the presence of William Jennings Bryan and nationally recognized defense attorney and professed agnostic Clarence Darrow (1857-1938). Bryan was a populist and Democratic Party statesman who in his later years became more involved in the theological and cultural battles of his Presbyterian denomination. Bryan's theological and political background cannot easily be labeled fundamentalist, but it is true that leading fundamentalists recruited him to the cause due to his name recognition and influence. His involvement culminated with the Scopes Trial, in which the defendant was Tennessee science teacher John Scopes (1900-1970), who had agreed to be a test case to challenge the state's Butler Act which prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools.

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<sup>112</sup> James Martin Gray, *A Text-book on Prophecy* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1918), 81. Gray was addressing the question whether the Papacy was the institution that would produce the Antichrist. His response, which reflected the vigorous anti-Catholicism of Protestant fundamentalists, was as follows: "To speak plainly, the Papacy is an enemy of the truth, and the Pope himself is no dim foreshadowing of the Antichrist, but that monster, when he arrives, will find his way prepared for him through Protestant Berlin as well as Catholic Rome." Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> For a discussion of the cultural impact of *Inherit the Wind*, as well as a critique of how the play and film distorted the historical record, see Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 247-266.

Bryan already had warned against the dangers of Darwin, and by association Nietzsche, prior to the trial.<sup>114</sup> His book *In His Image* (1922) stated that Nietzsche was “the most extreme of anti-Christians” due to his willingness to take “Darwinism to its logical conclusion,” which meant living as if God did not exist. Nietzsche advocated the substitution of the superman in place of God, Bryan charged, and denounced compassion and democracy. Nietzsche’s ideas reduced life to “a ferocious conflict between beasts” and “wrought the moral ruin of a multitude” in addition to a likely role in instigating the war. His system of thought was “the ripened fruit of Darwinism,” Bryan concluded, “and a tree is known by its fruit.”<sup>115</sup> Bryan repeated these claims in his 1924 book *Seven Questions in Dispute*, adding that Nietzsche “overthrew all standards of morality and eulogized war as necessary to man’s development.”<sup>116</sup> Bryan’s critique of Nietzsche, just as was the case with his protest of Darwin, was in part a fear of the social implications of their ideas. Democracy and charity, in Bryan’s view, were at risk if these ideas were applied in society.

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<sup>114</sup> Edgar Lee Masters (1868-1950), the American poet and author of *The Spoon River Anthology*, recounted an interesting exchange that he had with Bryan about Nietzsche: “In the Fall of 1908 I had already read the works of Nietzsche, so far as they had been translated and published in English. Bryan called upon me, and I do no wrong to the proprietaries by reporting what he said to me in a private conversation, since he has often delivered himself of the same thing in public since. The matter of his recent defeat having been explained by me, as best I could, and the subject for the time exhausted, I asked him in a pause of the conversation if he had read Nietzsche. His face turned red with wrath, his jaw set, the militant evangel flamed in his eyes. ‘He died crazy,’ was Bryan’s bitter and exulting retort. Then a silence reigned which made liquid of the air of the room; and he left me!” See Edgar Lee Masters, “The Christian Statesman,” *American Mercury* 3, no. 12 (December 1924): 398.

<sup>115</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *In His image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), 123, 124.

<sup>116</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *Seven Questions in Dispute* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 146. Bryan wrote the book as a response to theological modernism. He organized it around seven contentious doctrinal matters: biblical inspiration, the deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, miracles, and the origin of man.

Bryan continued to make a philosophical connection between Darwin and Nietzsche at the Scopes trial, as he had in his writings.<sup>117</sup> But Bryan drew another parallel between Nietzsche and Darwin by referring to Clarence Darrow's own words in a previously explosive and publicized trial a year earlier. Darrow had argued against the death penalty on behalf of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb a year earlier. Leopold and Loeb were on trial in Chicago for the brutal murder of fourteen year-old Bobby Franks and were said to have read and been influenced by Nietzsche's idea of the superman prior to the crime. Bryan contended that Darrow was attempting to exonerate the defendants on the grounds that "the teachings of Nietzsche made Leopold a murderer."<sup>118</sup> Bryan then read Darrow's words from the Leopold-Loeb trial to the court in Dayton:

'I will guarantee you that you can go down to the University of Chicago today—into its big library and find over 1,000 volumes of Nietzsche, and I am sure I speak moderately. If this boy is to blame for this, where did he get it? Is there any blame attached because somebody took Nietzsche's philosophy seriously and fashioned his life on it? And there is no question in this case but what that is true. Then who is to blame? The university would be more to blame than he is. The scholars of the world would be more to blame than he is. The publishers of the world—and Nietzsche's books are published by one of the biggest publishers in the world—are more to blame than he. Your honor, it is hardly fair to hang a 19-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him in the university.'<sup>119</sup>

The issue Bryan wished to raise was that Darrow himself previously acknowledged that the teaching of certain ideas in schools can lead to disastrous social consequences.

Darrow replied, however, by suggesting Bryan did not adequately represent the full

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<sup>117</sup> Bryan was influenced by British sociologist and Social Darwinist Benjamin Kidd's book *The Science of Power* (1918) in making this connection and quoted from it during the trial. See John Thomas Scopes, *The World's Most Famous Court Trial: Tennessee Evolution Case: A Word-for-Word Report of the Famous Court Test of the Tennessee Anti-Evolution Act, at Dayton, July 10 to 21, 1925, including Speeches and Arguments of Attorneys, Testimony of Noted Scientists, and Bryan's Last Speech* (Cincinnati: National Book Company, 1925; reprint, Dayton TN: Rhea County Historical Society, 1978), 336-337.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

context of his remarks and by quoting subsequent statements that appeared to exonerate schools for the consequences of the ideas that they teach.<sup>120</sup>

Bryan attempted to address that shortcoming in a prepared closing address to the court. Ultimately, counsel on both sides agreed to forego those statements, but it was published shortly thereafter and also ran in newspapers across the nation.<sup>121</sup> Bryan quoted Darrow's description of how Leopold "became enamoured" with Nietzsche's philosophy, which Darrow noted had become influential in universities worldwide. But this time Bryan quoted the fuller context of Darrow's original comments that the latter previously complained had been omitted:

'Now, I do not want to be misunderstood about this. Even for the sake of saving the lives of my clients, I do not want to be dishonest, and tell the court something I do not honestly think in this case. I do not believe that the universities are to blame. I do not think they should be held responsible. I do think, however, that they are too large, and that they should keep a closer watch, if possible, upon the individual. But you cannot destroy thought because, forsooth, some brain may be deranged by thought. It is the duty of the university, as I conceive it, to be the great storehouse of the wisdom of the ages, and to let students go there, and learn, and choose. I have no doubt but that it has meant the death of many; that we cannot help. Every changed idea in the world had its consequences. Every new religious doctrine has created its victims. Every new philosophy has caused suffering and death.'<sup>122</sup>

Bryan argued that Darrow's reasoning represented the "the flower that blooms on the stalk of evolution." Bryan portrayed Darrow as affirming the idea that it was the duty of universities to "feed out this poisonous stuff" to its students, who then act out in horrific ways, while neither the university or the student get the blame for it. The example of Nietzsche and Darrow's faulty logic, Bryan maintained, was applicable in the Scopes trial

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>121</sup> For example of newspaper reprints of the speech, see "Address Prepared by Bryan Just Before His Death," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 July 1925, 5, 6, 9; "Bryan's Last Appeal: Uphold the Bible and Protect the Children of America," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 July 29 1925, 4; "Text of Bryan's Evolution Speech, Written for the Scopes Trial," *New York Times*, 29 July 29, 1925, 1, 8.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 332.

because states “not only had a right” but an obligation to protect its students from the potential destructive social consequences of evolution.<sup>123</sup>

### **Epilogue: Nietzsche, Fundamentalism and Cultural Authority in American Higher Education**

The modernist-fundamentalist debates and divisions within American Protestantism contributed to a loss of cultural authority that already was tottering under the weight of intellectual, cultural, religious and demographic challenges. Protestantism no longer was guaranteed to exert control over culture-shaping institutions such as the university. Nietzsche frequently was referenced by Protestant writers as a symbol of or substantive reason for that decline. A 1933 snapshot of one fundamentalist work by Baptist preacher, writer and activist Dan Gilbert (1911-1962) illustrated both how deep the sense of disaffection from higher education was and how Nietzsche was used to illustrate it. Gilbert’s career as a fundamentalist activist included serving as secretary for the World Christian Fundamentals Association, starting a radio ministry, writing numerous books and booklets, editing magazines that blended fundamentalist theology and patriotic “Americanism” in magazines such as *National Republic* and crusading on behalf of a wide range of social and political concerns.<sup>124</sup> Gilbert’s fusion of religion and politics was evident in his denunciations of the New Deal as not only collectivist and dictatorial but also atheist in nature.<sup>125</sup> Gilbert tied Japan during World War II and Russia during the early Cold War to biblical prophecies interpreted through the lens of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Gilbert’s crusades included support for Prohibition. See Dan W. Gilbert, “Can We Drink Ourselves Out of This Depression?” *Watchman* 41, no. 6 (June 1932): 14-15, 31-32.

<sup>125</sup> See “Christian Group Hits Roosevelt,” *New York Times*, 8 June 1939, 2; “Clerics Charge Dictator Plot by New Dealers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 May 1940, 12.

premillennial dispensational theology.<sup>126</sup> Gilbert wrote on behalf of social causes at home including works against evolution, books lambasting the morals and political leanings Hollywood, and writings against the evils of alcohol.<sup>127</sup> Gilbert also wrote of the spiritual dangers of higher education, as evidenced in his incendiary 1933 book *Crucifying Christ in Our Colleges* which used the teaching of Nietzsche as a gauge to indicate just how poisonous American colleges and universities had become.

Gilbert's book was written with the help of four recent students whose horror stories were meant to reveal the devilish intentions of college professors and administrators to disabuse students of their faith. Gilbert saw "Nietzscheanism" as among the most pernicious forces operating in higher education. No one led more students "into the shifting sands of despair" than Nietzsche. Gilbert saw Nietzsche's life mission as "the dethronement of Christ" and perceived higher education as one of the essential locations for that task to be carried out. Nietzsche "revamped atheism in a counterfeit mold of Christianity" and captured the imagination of students. "Nietzscheanism" meant not only a refutation of Christian doctrine but also of Christian morality and ethics. "The lure of Nietzscheanism to students," Gilbert warned, was that the rejection of Christianity experienced while free from the constraints of home would remove all barriers "to the alluring temptations" faced by "modern youth." Gilbert argued that Nietzsche shared with other "atheist-evolutionists" a belief in "unrestrained self-assertion" that would result in disastrous moral consequences.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Gilbert's prophecy-laden works included *The Yellow Peril and Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervans, 1944), *The Red Terror and Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervans, 1944); *Emperor Hirohito of Japan: Satan's Man of Mystery Unveiled in the Light of Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1944).

<sup>127</sup> For example, see Dan Gilbert, *Hell over Hollywood: The Truth about the Movies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervans, 1942).

<sup>128</sup> Dan Gilbert, *Crucifying Christ in Our Colleges* (San Francisco: Alex. Dulfer Printing Co., 1933), 78, 79.

Gilbert's methodology to support his claim that the teaching of Nietzsche in colleges and universities led to pernicious social and individual consequences involved the use of an extensive case study. *Crucifying Christ in our Colleges* told in great detail the story of a student named "Wayne," whose superman-promoting philosophy professor led him astray to pursue Nietzscheanism. Wayne previously was "an exemplar of Christian manhood" who excelled at academics and athletics and was president of his student body. But Wayne's path to self-destruction began with a freshman philosophy class taught by a professor who Gilbert claimed was a notorious debunker of his students' religious beliefs. Gilbert told the story of Wayne's valiant fight to hold on to his faith before finally being victimized by his professor, whose "scholarly assaults" and reading assignments "weakened the fibre" of his faith. Wayne was too humble to trust his own reasoning skills to refute his professors, Gilbert claimed, so he went to authoritative scholarly works in the library that also denied the supernatural. The confluence of his professor's comments, assigned textbook reading, and independent library research led Wayne to renounce his faith.<sup>129</sup> Wayne then embraced the "Nietzschean faith" which led him to pursue "the perilous path through swamps of sin and sensuality, vice and even crime" before landing in a position of social disgrace and private despair.<sup>130</sup>

Gilbert chronicled Wayne's descent through the lens of a critique of modern colleges and universities, "those temples of Minerva" that contained the "dastardly" teachings of Nietzsche. He was the "suavest of all satanic spokesmen" and "debaucher of

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 82, 88. Gilbert placed a heavy emphasis on the responsibility of the professor and influence of German ideas and training on American higher education: "Let me first make clear, however, that while the prof followed the textbook's presentation of the various philosophical systems, he arrived and asked his students to arrive, at the conclusion: The Nietzschean philosophy is alone the embodiment of Truth. Being of German descent and having been educated—as so many present-day professors in our larger universities—in German educational institutions, he believed implicitly and advocated unequivocally the 'superman's' philosophy which so dominated Teutonic thought." Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

souls” to whom “the souls of trusting students” were handed by their professors. Gilbert discussed a conversation with Wayne in which the latter defended his newfound Nietzscheanism on the grounds that it must be true, “otherwise it would not be taught in so reputable an educational institution.” Gilbert portrayed Wayne as a victim of higher education whose exposure to and embrace of Nietzsche led to all sorts of practical consequences that Gilbert eagerly and elaborately narrated. Wayne exhibited less responsibility toward his family and employers, gained a campus-wide reputation for his legendary “alcoholic and amatory debauches,” paid less attention to academics, and saw the end of his athletic career due to his hard-partying ways.<sup>131</sup> Gilbert’s account ended with Wayne’s abandonment of college as a fugitive due to charges of “contributing to the delinquency of a minor.”<sup>132</sup> The example of Wayne’s self-destruction in college led Gilbert to draw the following polarity between Christianity and Nietzscheanism:

Having witnessed my one-time cherished companion’s descent into the depths of degradation following his adoption of Nietzscheanism, I am fully aware that, verily, its claim to life-transforming potency is true. For as surely as the blood of the Lamb has ‘power, power, wonder-working power’ to regenerate the sinner, so the philosophy of Nietzsche has power, diabolical power, to debase and damn the virtuous. Well might the modern world recognize Nietzsche as he longed to be regarded, as a symbol of the Anti-Christ. For as certainly as conversion to Christ makes sons of God of mortal men, conversion to Nietzscheanism makes incarnate devils of those who once were numbered in His Flock. As surely as His blood can wash away sin, Nietzsche’s word, when taken to heart, can blast away the last semblance of spirituality.<sup>133</sup>

Wayne’s life and career were in ruins due to a full embrace of Nietzscheanism, Gilbert warned. The object lesson of Wayne served to warn readers about the spiritual perils of higher education, an arena in which the disestablishment of Protestantism had led to a

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 95, 101, 99. Here is an example of Gilbert’s lively depictions of the practical consequences of living out the superman philosophy: “His erstwhile carousing cronies heralded him as the college’s most adept man of amours and related luridly of the tell-tale ‘embroidery’ on the divan on his apartment. Every time he ‘carried his point’ with a girl, he stitched into the divan a different colored thread until he’d run out of colors and had had to use the same one twice! The do-as-you-please, take-what-you want superman who had made his law the law of his flesh was taking his toll. And trusting young co-eds whose only failings were their amenability to collegiate conventions which see nothing wrong about a girl’s visiting a boy in his apartment or taking a drink or two now and then, were his victims.” Ibid., 107-108.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 81.

coterie of professors intent on robbing students of their childhood faith. Gilbert's melodramatic account may seem excessive, but it highlighted the growing alienation many fundamentalist and conservative Protestant felt toward American higher education.<sup>134</sup> It represented the culmination of three decades of Protestant engagement with a thinker believed to be supportive of, if not responsible for, the decline of Protestant cultural authority. The rapid acceleration of that decline would foster the dynamics of future Protestant engagement with Nietzsche, culminating in the 1960s. The Death of God theologians were able to utilize Nietzsche as a theological resource—and generate more debate and publicity for their views—in part because of the groundwork established in previous decades.

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<sup>134</sup> A more sober and poignant account of lost faith came from Harvard graduate Philip E. Wentworth in a 1932 article for *Atlantic Monthly*. Wentworth recounted growing up in a devout Presbyterian home in the Midwest before attending Harvard University. His college experience was characterized by an intellectual and spiritual journey away from faith. Wentworth argued that his embrace of science and the laws of nature at Harvard precluded any traditional conception of God. While going through this experience, Wentworth observed happenings at the Scopes Trial and expressed alarm at both sides—the Fundamentalists for anti-intellectualism and the expert witnesses for the defense who suggested religion and science could be reconciled. Wentworth's closing comments demonstrate that he was not ebullient either about his loss of faith or the widespread loss of Protestant cultural authority in the modern American university: "Though I am an apostate, I must admit, therefore, that it gives me no satisfaction to realize what a large company of young men and women now share the label with me. But I see no help for it. The Church has lost its power to move us. Its conceptions seem as unreal to my generation as the gods of ancient Greece. The breakdown of Christianity is particularly unfortunate in America, where our educators are so busy building new dormitories and thinking up new systems of instruction that they do not see how urgently the situation calls upon them to redefine the purposes for which their pedagogical machinery exists. In so far as the colleges destroy religious faith without substituting a vital philosophy to take its place, they are turning loose upon the world young barbarians who have been freed from the discipline of the Church before they have learned how to discipline themselves. Perhaps this was what one of my least orthodox Harvard professors had in mind when he once said: 'There are only a few men in the world who have earned the right not to be Christians.'" See Wentworth, "What College Did to My Religion," *Atlantic Monthly* 149 (June 1932): 688.

**EPILOGUE:**  
**Nietzsche, Christianity and Cultural Authority in the United States to 1969**

“The impact of astronomy not merely upon the older cosmogony of religion but upon elements of creeds dealing with historical events—witness the idea of ascent into heaven—is familiar. Geological discoveries have displaced creation myths which once bulked large. Biology has revolutionized conceptions of soul and mind which once occupied a central place in religious beliefs and ideas, and this science has made a profound impression upon ideas of sin, redemption, and immortality. Anthropology, history and literary criticism have furnished a radically different version of the historic events and personages upon which Christian religions have built. Psychology is already opening to us natural explanations of phenomena so extraordinary that once their supernatural origin was, so to say, the natural explanation. The significant bearing for my purpose of all this is that new methods of inquiry and reflection have become for the educated man today the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence, and intellectual assent. Nothing less than a revolution in the ‘seat of intellectual authority’ has taken place. This revolution, rather than any particular aspect of its impact upon this and that religious belief, is the central thing.”

—John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934)<sup>1</sup>

“Historical crises are rarely consummated in one dramatic moment. They are contained in processes that extend over periods of time and that are experienced in different ways by those affected. As Nietzsche tells us in the famous passage about the ‘death of God’: ‘This tremendous event is still on its way...it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen, before they can be seen and heard.’ It would therefore be extraordinarily naïve to expect the demise of the supernatural to be equally visible from all vantage points of our culture or to be experienced in the same way by all who have taken cognizance of it. There continues to be religious and theological milieus in which the crisis is, at its most, dimly sensed as an external threat in the distance. In other milieu the crisis is beginning to be felt, but is ‘still on its way.’ In yet other milieu the crisis is in full eruption as a threat deep inside the fabric of religious practice, faith, and thought. And in some places it is as if the believer or theologian were standing in a landscape of smoldering ruins.”

—Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (1969)<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation has explored the intersection of Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and the decline of Protestant cultural authority in the United States in several ways. It began with a panoramic overview of Nietzsche’s American reception from 1890-1969 with particular attention to the ramifications for Christian ideas, institutions and authority. It then focused on three important venues—professional philosophy in the age of professionalization and specialization, the writings of independent intellectuals, and

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 31-32. Dewey suggested that fundamentalists were more aware of what was at stake: “What is not realized—although perhaps it is more definitely seen by fundamentalists than by liberals—is that the issue does not concern this and that piecemeal *item* of belief, but centers in the question of the method by which any and every item of intellectual belief is to be arrived at and justified.” *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1969), 8-9.

the responses of Protestant theologians, ministers and clergy—in which Nietzsche was engaged during the early reception period. This engagement overlapped during the crucial first decades of Protestant cultural authority's decline in culture-shaping institutions like the university. By the 1930s, the “cultural hegemony” of American Protestantism was no longer dominant in “the nation’s scientific establishment, universities and colleges, public schools, judicial system, and mass media” and was diminished further by the realities of religious pluralism.<sup>3</sup> The resulting upheaval provided a stimulating backdrop for engagement with Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity. It was assessed, resisted and enthused over by academics, critics, activists, theologians and ministers who were increasingly aware of the ongoing seismic shifts of cultural authority.

To assert that Protestant cultural authority declined is not to suggest that religion was rendered irrelevant to the public and private lives of many Americans. Religious minorities prospered, with Catholicism and Judaism in particular expanding in numbers and gradually exercising more cultural influence after waves of immigration from the mid-nineteenth and into the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Historians have also pointed to signs of Protestant vitality while acknowledging growing religious fragmentation through the mid-twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Church attendance remained steady and the number of

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Smith, *The Secular Revolution*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Will Herberg’s *Protestant—Catholic—Jew* offered an influential mid-century analysis of the nature of religious identity and practice within these three major groups in context of secularization in the United States. See Herberg, *Protestant—Catholic—Jew; An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> For a concise overview of the mid-century status of Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism in the United States, see George Marsden, “Return to Faith and Quest for Consensus: 1941-1963” in Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1990), 207-236. For a survey of postwar religion in the United States, see Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). See also Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Wuthnow argues that American religion responded

Americans citing a “church affiliation” grew from 1910-1970.<sup>6</sup> Revivalism, rooted in nineteenth century traditions but reinvented with twentieth century technology, flourished and produced significant figures like Billy Graham.<sup>7</sup> Protestant Christianity in the United States poured financial resources and organizational acumen into international missions while exhibiting new expressions of faith such as Pentecostalism, which flourished at home and spread rapidly abroad.<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Protestantism emerged out of the shadows of fundamentalism with a blend of conservative theology, activist impulses and a model of cultural engagement that contrasted with their fundamentalist brethren.<sup>9</sup> Mainline Protestantism pursued ecumenism and relevance through organizations such as the World Council of Churches and produced theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, who managed to become prominent mid-century public intellectuals in an age when that appeared increasingly unlikely.<sup>10</sup> Expressions of “civil religion” continued in the public sphere, as seen in the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and the adaptation of “In God We Trust” as national motto during the Eisenhower presidency.<sup>11</sup>

The Civil Rights movement drew strength and structure from African-American churches

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to dramatic social changes by showing a tremendous willingness to adapt, including transcending traditional denominational identity and realigning along liberal and conservative political lines.

<sup>6</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 952.

<sup>7</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> For more on the international context of twentieth century missionary efforts of which American Protestants played an important part, see Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2d ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 414-472. For a history of the vital early twentieth century history of Pentecostalism in the United States, see Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> See Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945*, 26-28.

<sup>11</sup> A classic account of American civil religion is found in Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus; Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21. For an overview of civil religion during the Eisenhower era, see Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 3: Under God, Indivisible 1941-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 294-312.

and offered a scenario where “the irrational traditions of prophetic, revivalistic religion served the liberal goals of freedom and equality.”<sup>12</sup>

These and other examples of mid-century Protestant vitality do not mean, however, that the cultural authority of Protestant Christianity was undiminished. These signs of life were evident during a time of great social transformation and could be perceived in some cases as reactions to declining influence. John Dewey spoke in 1934 of “a present crisis of religion” sparked by the challenges that various academic disciplines, especially the sciences, were presenting to belief in the supernatural and to traditional Christian doctrines built upon that assumption.<sup>13</sup> One way of understanding Dewey’s observation and the new status of Protestant Christianity is in terms of center and periphery.<sup>14</sup> Protestant Christianity in the nineteenth century operated at the center of American culture-shaping institutions but by the 1930s was increasingly responding from the periphery. New authorities, ideas and institutions competed with Protestant norms in the realms of science, education, law, politics, entertainment, journalism and media. These changes were reinforced by new demographic and denominational realities that

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<sup>12</sup> David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 179.

<sup>13</sup> Dewey elaborated as follows: “The skepticism and agnosticism that are rife and that from the standpoint of the religionist are fatal to the religious spirit are directly bound up with the intellectual contents, historical, cosmological, ethical, and theological, asserted to be indispensable in everything religious. There is no need for me here to go with any minuteness into the causes that have generated doubt and disbelief, uncertainty and rejection, as to these contents. It is enough to point out that all the beliefs and ideas in question, whether having to do with historical or literary matters, or with astronomy, geology and biology, or with the creation and structure of the world and man, are connected with the supernatural, and that this connection is the factor that has brought doubt upon them; the factor that from the standpoint of historical and institutional religions is sapping the religious life itself.” Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> See James Davison Hunter’s discussion of “center” and “periphery” in *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36-37. Hunter makes the following distinction: “With cultural capital, it isn’t quantity but quality that matters most. It is the *status* of cultural credentials and accomplishment and status is organized in a structure that ranges between the ‘center’ and the ‘periphery.’ The individuals, networks and institutions *most critically involved* in the production of a culture operate in the ‘center’ where prestige is the highest, not on the periphery, where status is low.” *Ibid.*

diminished the older Protestant hegemony. These trends continued and expanded as the social environment of twentieth century America remained dynamic. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow observes that tremendous social changes after World War II—“new developments in technology, the changing character of international relations, shifts in the composition of the population, the tremendous expansion of higher education and in the role of government, new policies and new administrative systems”—also resulted in major adjustments in the structure of American religion.<sup>15</sup> Protestantism also embraced new theological directions in response to these changes and the world events, such as two world wars, that preceded them.<sup>16</sup> The sense that Protestant Christianity was operating in a different environment was captured in a comment by Harvard Divinity School dean Samuel H. Miller (1900-1968), who announced in 1963 that “the secular age has come.” Miller, who also pointed to Nietzsche as one of “the voices of this age,” remarked that secularism came “like a tidal wave” and that “few institutions have escaped the flood.”<sup>17</sup>

The decline of Protestant cultural authority was not “a simple linear decline” of religious influence but was a process that transpired over decades.<sup>18</sup> The suggestion that

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<sup>15</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 5. Wuthnow adds: “To the extent that American religion is a social institution, embedded in and always exposed to the broader social environment, it could not help but have been affected by those changes.” Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Two examples particularly relevant to this dissertation are the religious existentialism of Paul Tillich and the Death of God movement of the 1960s.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel H. Miller, *The Dilemma of Modern Belief; The Lyman Beecher Lectures, Yale Divinity School* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 5, 104. Miller suggested that Protestantism itself contained the seeds of the current theological crisis: “Several other historical forces have assisted in generating this climate in which religion grows more intense and God less meaningful or real, among them the fact that Protestantism itself has been extremely iconoclastic, attacking all forms, symbols, and analogies as if they were superstitious idols. This radical ‘protest against Form’ can be traced through its successive surges of rational abstraction and liberal sentimentality. In pietism God disappeared in formless emotion; in idealism He disappeared in faceless concepts; in liberalism He disappeared in abstract principles; in pragmatism He disappeared in the popular demand for practical success.” See Ibid., 44. University of Rochester philosophy professor Lewis White Beck included Nietzsche in his 1960 survey of six major “secular” philosophers. He defined “secular philosophy” as that “philosophy which is autonomous with respect to established and accepted religious views.” Beck, *Six Secular Philosophers* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1960), 9. For Beck’s overview of Nietzsche see Ibid., 79-91.

<sup>18</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 297.

the growth of Nietzsche's reputation and influence in American intellectual life corresponds with the decline of Protestant cultural authority is likewise not a case of a simple linear ascent. Nietzsche's advocates in the 1900s-1930s were not always successful in their efforts to persuade audiences that Nietzsche was an insightful and important modern thinker who may of service in re-imagining American thought, culture and society. But they were often self-consciously operating in an environment in which older sources of authority, particularly Protestant Christianity, were being actively challenged in institutions such as higher education and journalism. Their efforts, in conjunction with the decline of Protestant cultural authority that they highlighted and facilitated, helped lay the groundwork for Nietzsche's later, more positive reception. The credit for Nietzsche's changing fortunes often goes to the influence of German emigrant scholars—and especially the work of Walter Kaufmann—who fled Nazi Germany and reintroduced Nietzsche to American audiences as a serious philosopher worthy of consideration. Acknowledging the important role of these scholars is by no means unwarranted. But their ideas and arguments became more plausible in a different interpretive environment. "Ideas do have consequences in history," sociologist James Davison Hunter muses, not simply due to the quality of their content but "because of the way they are embedded in very powerful institutions, networks, interests, and symbols."<sup>19</sup> Three examples from the later reception period, one from each sector considered in earlier chapters, reflect the institutional changes that enabled their efforts to rehabilitate and appropriate Nietzsche to have influence. The professional philosophical efforts of Walter Kaufmann, the cultural criticism of Michael Harrington, and the

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<sup>19</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 44.

deliberations of the Death of God theologians each give evidence to the shifts in the interpretive environment that facilitated a different hearing for Nietzsche's ideas.

Walter Kaufmann was born and raised in Germany prior to immigrating to the United States in 1939. Kaufmann came from a Jewish German family, though his father converted to Protestant Christianity. Kaufmann gave insight to his own perspective on religion when he recounted in an interview his own rejection of Christianity as a young adolescent. His studies led to growing objections about Christian beliefs and the historical record of Christianity. Just as he had written "about Hegel and Nietzsche" because he believed "they had been much misunderstood," so he wanted "to set the record straight also about Christianity by showing how different it is from the usual interpretation."<sup>20</sup> Kaufmann received a doctorate in the philosophy of religion from Harvard University in 1947 and secured a position teaching at Princeton University, where he remained until his death in 1980. Kaufmann's dissertation became the basis for his influential 1950 monograph on Nietzsche. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* contained a substantial number of pages on Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, with chapters on "the Death of God" and on "Nietzsche's Repudiation of Christ."<sup>21</sup> Kaufmann was sympathetic to Nietzsche's critique and in later writings reflected Nietzsche's skepticism about the attempt to jettison Christian doctrine while holding onto Christian morality.

Kaufmann believed that liberal Protestantism was especially guilty of this attempt to hold on to Christian ethics while rejecting key doctrines and radically reinventing the nature of Christian faith and practice. His 1958 work *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*

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<sup>20</sup> Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, "An Interview with Walter Kaufmann," *Judaism* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 123.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1950; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 96-118, 337-390.

subjected liberal Protestantism to a scathing critique that he felt it often escaped in the United States: “Ancient Judaism and medieval Catholicism may be submitted to sweeping strictures, but of living Protestantism one speaks *nil nisi bene*, nothing but well.”<sup>22</sup> Kaufmann’s book made clear his lack of sympathy to traditional Christianity, but he targeted liberal Protestantism for reinventing Christianity in its own image. He argued that liberal Protestantism did not take seriously the claims and self-understanding of Jesus made by early followers of Christianity—which Kaufmann himself rejected—but instead presenting Jesus as if he were defined “by the morality of Harry Emerson Fosdick.” The liberal Protestant dismissal of the “fire and brimstone” of Christian dogma and history as “unchristian,” Kaufmann argued, ignored the fact that those teachings and events defined Christianity for over 1900 years.<sup>23</sup>

Kaufmann further detailed his atheistic perspective on religion and advanced his critique of American Protestant Christianity in a book bracingly titled *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961). Kaufmann questioned the inoffensive nature of American Protestantism:

But does it take such a great deal of courage to be a Protestant in the United States today? The whole tenor of American theology today is not to give offense but to show that one can well be religious and quite up-to-date, too. One can combine Christianity with Freud and Nietzsche, with Marx (in the thirties when he was fashionable) and with existentialism (after the Second World War, now that Marx is out of fashion). Whatever you have, Christianity has too. The theologians offer everything and heaven, too.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), xiv. He complained in particular about the lack of criticism in America toward Reinhold Niebuhr, Arnold Toynbee and “the Thomists.” For an example of Kaufmann’s criticism of Niebuhr, see *Ibid.*, 210-216.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 206, 208. Kaufmann’s criticism of liberal Protestantism was sweeping, as evidenced by this passage on liberal Protestant attempts to present Christianity as rational: “The liberal Protestants have allayed the fears of reason by paying generous tributes to it and by insisting that Christianity is singularly rational and reasonable. Liberal Protestantism has made a prophetic Reform Jew out of Jesus, a great liberal and Idealistic philosopher of Paul and a mild-mannered, modest, reasonable man of Luther, who is portrayed as a champion of freedom and democracy against the superstitions and corruptions of the Church of Rome. In sum, liberal Protestantism has courted reason by rewriting history in defiance of reason and evidence.” *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>24</sup> Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961; Garden City NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 342. Kaufmann took note of the fragmented state of Protestantism in which “little agreement” remained on key beliefs: “Billy Graham, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr are all twentieth-century American Protestants; indeed, there

Kaufmann contrasted his own “disbelief” with that of liberal Protestants, “who use ancient formulations of belief in order to express their own lack of belief,” if not “beliefs very different” from those expressed by historic Christianity. Kaufmann also expressed skepticism about the nature of religious practice in mid-century America. There was much discussion about a post-World War II religious revival, Kaufmann noted, but its manifestations were shallow. He referred to statistics indicating the prevalence of astrologers and newspaper horoscopes, gave examples of civil religion like ‘In God We Trust’ on currency that he claimed would have been rejected by Old Testament prophets, and suggested that denominational identity had become weak. Kaufmann also cited statistics that demonstrated substantial biblical ignorance among those who believed the Bible to be the Word of God.<sup>25</sup>

Kaufmann believed that his role in this cultural context, as a philosopher and a self-described “heretic,” was not to be a “prophet” for society as a whole but “to disturb a few people a little.” The philosopher should “not scream in the market place or disrupt religious services” but instead speak “softly, not to large masses.” Kaufmann offered this observation, ironically, in a work that was addressed to the market place. His book was an expansion of an idea first explored in a 1959 *Harper’s Magazine* article by the same title and was written for the general reader before being published by a large publisher as opposed to a smaller academic press.<sup>26</sup> Kaufmann’s own reputation, built in part by his scholarship on Nietzsche, allowed him a wider audience in which he could

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are few, if any, other spokesmen of mid-century American Protestantism who are so well known and so influential. Yet Tillich, like Niebuhr, shares few of Graham’s religious beliefs. Now compare what men like Tillich and Niebuhr actually believe and disbelieve with the beliefs of avowed fundamentalists, or of Martin Luther and John Calvin, or of St. Augustine and St. Athanasius, or of St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist: surely, the beliefs and disbeliefs of our two most celebrated Protestant theologians are much closer to mine than they are to those of millions of their fellow Christians, past and present.” *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 250, 251, 254, 275.

<sup>26</sup> Kaufmann, “The Faith of a Heretic,” *Harper’s Magazine* 218 (February 1959): 33-39.

dispense his message about another task of the philosopher. Philosophy's goal was "not to train future authorities, but men who are not cowed by those who claim to be authorities."<sup>27</sup> This dissenting spirit aligned with Nietzsche's own philosophical disposition and fit well with the emerging zeitgeist of the 1960s.

Another expression of dissent in the 1960s that reflected a different interpretive environment for Nietzsche came in the cultural criticism of Michael Harrington. His book *The Accidental Century* (1965) used Nietzsche in an effort to diagnose the ills of the West. Harrington was raised in St. Louis and grew up Catholic before doing graduate work at the University of Chicago and Yale Law School. Harrington also made the journey to Greenwich Village that cultural critics of decades past had embarked upon and worked with Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker House of Hospitality in the early 1950s. Harrington became a fixture in the Greenwich Village social scene, edited *The Catholic Worker* from 1951-1953, and embraced socialist politics. Harrington also experienced a crisis of religious faith that resulted in his rejection of Catholicism and embrace of atheism.<sup>28</sup> Harrington became an increasingly influential public intellectual after the publication, to great acclaim, of *The Other America* in 1962. Harrington offered a searing portrayal of the scope and nature of endemic poverty in the United States in a work that was said to have influenced the anti-poverty initiatives of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

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<sup>27</sup> Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> For a biographical treatment of Harrington's life and work, see Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000). For more on Harrington's departure from Catholicism and belief in God, see *ibid.*, 103-104.

*The Accidental Century* represented a major shift in direction for Harrington by looking more expansively at an “accidental revolution” in western civilization.<sup>29</sup> It was provoked by “sweeping and unprecedented technological transformation” and resulted in cultural “decadence.” Harrington used this term to depict the loss of a future hope or vision, whether a religious “City of God” or a secular “utopia.” Religion, which Harrington believed was experiencing tremendous dislocation in the twentieth century due to being replaced by scientific authority, was central to his explanation of the unfolding revolution: “The chasm between technological capacity and economic, political, social, and religious consciousness—the accidental revolution in short—has unsettled every faith and creed in the West.” Harrington credited Nietzsche with recognizing the death of God in the nineteenth century and maintained that Nietzsche’s thought was “the starting point of most serious theology ever since.” Harrington admired Nietzsche’s prescience about “the spiritual crisis” of the West and praised his “brilliant attack on the liberal myth of inevitable, effortless social progress.” Harrington argued that Nietzsche viewed “optimism, utilitarianism, and democracy” as signs of decline while seeing socialism as “a disguised form of Christian sentimentality” that refused “to break from religious traditions.” The problem, Harrington understood Nietzsche as concluding, was that the death of God was not being taken “to its ruthless, logical conclusion.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> One conservative reviewer saw Harrington’s book as indicative of a revolution in higher education itself: “There is in fact nothing more xenophile and self-disparaging than the standard content of what nowadays passes for a liberal education in America. *The Accidental Century* is a suggestive example of what, after several years of such an education, can become of a sensitive and honest intelligence.” See M. Stanton Evans, “The Education of a Socialist,” *National Review* 17, no. 40 (October 5, 1965): 881.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Accidental Century* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 16, 17, 41, 145, 152, 151, 149, 152. Harrington found much to admire in Nietzsche but was not without criticism. Writing from a socialist perspective, Harrington criticized Nietzsche for misrepresenting the working class and for discounting “both the human and technical capacity for emancipation in the society which he criticized.” He acknowledged that Nietzsche would have loathed the Nazis but still felt that Nietzsche, with “his brilliant eulogies of war and oppression,” had “been given too much for the sake of his genius.”

Harrington suggested, however, that religion did indeed take “the death of God as a fact.” He cited several examples “in Protestantism,” including “a social gospel which tried to adapt the traditional faith to the new environment.” More “despairing responses” included Tillich’s depiction of God “as a symbol” and neo-orthodoxy’s “emphasis on original sin and the limitations of man” due to “the failures of liberal religion and politics.” Harrington concluded that after the death of God, “the argument for the deity had become Pascalian: He is because He is not apparent, He is Deus Absconditus.”

Harrington saw “the emergence” of social and political theories that dispensed “with a need for God” and offered alternative visions for rationally ordering society. Harrington believed that even Nietzsche underestimated the consequences of the death of God. The elimination “of all metaphysics, final purposes, and higher values,” Harrington argued, would jeopardize Nietzsche’s “antifaith” prescriptions as well as traditional religious faith. Harrington couched his description of the consequences in terms of cultural authority: “faith and antifaith survive, of course, as professed ideas but less and less as cultural forces.” Harrington believed that he was writing in a time of great historical change in which “something enormous is dying: a good part of the Western tradition and environment.” But he concluded that “something enormous is being born.” Nietzsche, while not providing affirmation for the socialist convictions and solutions of Harrington, remained for him a vital figure in understanding the enormity of the cultural transformation taking place.<sup>31</sup>

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Harrington did suggest that “the Nietzschean problem,” stated in terms of the death of God and its accompanying social and political consequences, had been borne out by world events leading up to World War II. *Ibid.*, 153, 159, 160.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 163, 164, 173, 306. Harrington repeatedly discussed the loss of authority and relevance for religion. For centuries prior, “religion had spoken to men who were haunted by plague, famine, and natural disaster.” Science, he argued, has since taken over those “traditional domains of God” and left religion in a state of confusion. “Divinity,” he claimed, “is in crisis.” *Ibid.*, 40. Harrington later elaborated on his

Professional philosophers like Kaufmann and critic-activists like Harrington both wrote with an awareness that “the death of God” had resulted in enormous cultural consequences.<sup>32</sup> A group of theologians in the 1960s not only discussed its cultural impact but reflected it by incorporating insights from Nietzsche into their theology.<sup>33</sup> The “death of God” theologians were a group of scholars that included Emory University’s Thomas J.J. Altizer, Syracuse University’s Gabriel Vahanian, Colgate University’s William Hamilton and Temple University’s Paul Van Buren. These younger theologians took the existentialist theology of Paul Tillich and others in a more radical direction but still managed to pique popular interest through a controversial *Time* magazine cover story during Easter week in 1966.<sup>34</sup> Some of these theologians found controversy at their religiously-rooted institutions due to their views. Altizer, for example, left Emory University in 1968 for the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Their writings, beginning in the early 1960s but especially widely discussed between 1966 and 1969, frequently linked the Nietzschean idea of the divine demise to the decline of religion’s

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conviction of religion’s declining influence: “Religion has lost the discipline, solidarity, and awe of primitive hunger. Short of nuclear catastrophe, it will probably never again build upon such necessities, and in a technological time it cannot possibly construct itself as a mystery cult. The inexplicable natural events which God once made supernaturally reasonable are now scientifically explicable. Either religion will constitute itself as the expression of a higher anguish or else it will have less and less relevance to the future...The exaltation of man is not a blasphemy against religion, it is religion’s only hope.” *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Harrington later continued with this theme in his 1983 book *The Politics at God’s Funeral*. Harrington dedicated a chapter to Nietzsche titled “Catastrophic Atheism.” See Harrington, *The Politics at God’s Funeral* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), 84-107. Interestingly, he briefly criticizes Kaufmann for downplaying the political consequences of Nietzsche. See *Ibid.*, 101-102.

<sup>33</sup> The “death of God” theologians were not the first to attempt a reconciliation of Protestant theology and Nietzsche’s philosophy, though they went further than their predecessors. Some liberal Protestants of the 1910s and 1920s, who are discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation, looked for common ground. Paul Tillich, who is discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, also incorporated Nietzsche into his existentialist theology. Theologian Roger Hazelton wrote in 1942 on the question, “Was Nietzsche an Anti-Christian?” He found disparities but also affirmed “certain presuppositions held in common with ‘liberal Christianity’ itself.” Hazelton added: “If by ‘religious liberal’ is meant one who interprets Christianity in ethical rather than theological terms, reads the Gospels symbolically rather than literally, emphasizes ‘life’ rather than ‘belief,’ inner attitudes rather than ‘crowds of things and people,’ and is committed to the ‘historic Jesus’ rather than to the ‘risen Christ,’ then we may with justice so characterize Nietzsche.” See Hazelton, “Was Nietzsche an Anti-Christian?” *Journal of Religion* 22, no. 1 (January 1942), 65, 71-72.

<sup>34</sup> John T. Elson, “Toward a Hidden God,” *Time*, 8 April 1966, 82-87.

cultural authority and to culturally-situated understandings of God. Van Buren argued that “the Nietzschean cry that ‘God is dead!’” was difficult to comprehend, given the impossibility of knowing it to be true. But “the problem,” Van Buren continued, was “that the *word* ‘God’ is dead.”<sup>35</sup> Altizer assumed “the truth of Nietzsche’s proclamation” and argued for the death of God to be understood “as an historical event,” which meant that “God has died in *our* time, in *our* history, in *our* existence.”<sup>36</sup> Altizer claimed in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966) that “all established Christian authority has now been shattered and broken.” Nietzsche, whom Altizer described as “the greatest modern master of understanding man,” became an important resource for re-imagining traditional concepts of religion in response to the post-Christian context. Altizer argued that Nietzsche cast “aside every fixed source of meaning and value” and “resurrected a chaos of meaninglessness lying deeply buried within the psyche of Western man.” Altizer acknowledged that “radical Christianity” was “inseparable from an attack upon God” and dismissive of traditional understandings and doctrines of the faith, leading him to suggest “that even Nietzsche was a radical Christian.”<sup>37</sup>

Vahanian also discussed the inability of Western culture to sustain traditional concepts of religious meaning and value. He argued that “concepts” maintain their validity “only so long as their cultural framework lasts.” The present cultural framework no longer supported traditional notions of God. “The death of God marks the end of Christian culture,” Vahanian argued, and the traditional institutions and concepts that

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Matthews Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel: Based on an Analysis of its Language* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 103.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas J.J. Altizer, “Theology and the Death of God,” in *Toward a New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology*, ed. Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 95.

<sup>37</sup> Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 137, 139, 148, 27. The possibility of understanding Zarathustra “as a radical Christian image of Jesus” was also explored by Altizer. See *Ibid.*, 60-61.

supported it. “Christian thought,” he concluded, was “no longer relevant to the situation of our post-Christian age.”<sup>38</sup> Hamilton and Altizer found evidence of this irrelevance in the state of theological education. Theology, Hamilton wrote, was “a far less important discipline today than it has been for some time.” The seminary, once a bulwark of Protestant “hegemony,” was now perceived as “a way station” at which one studies “a charming but minor” subject.<sup>39</sup> Altizer contended that there was “very little theology in America today” but that what theology remained would need to “abandon Christendom” and “never return to the past.”<sup>40</sup> The rejection of the past was accomplished in part by redefining it. Hamilton cast a vision for a new understanding of Protestantism that was far different from Martin Luther and the legacy of the Reformation. “My Protestant,” Hamilton offered, “has no God, no faith in God, and affirms both the death of God and the death of all the forms of theism.” Hamilton replaced traditional theism with a move “toward the world, worldly life, and the neighbor as the bearer of the worldly Jesus.”<sup>41</sup>

The “death of God” movement was not without its critics, secular and religious, liberal and conservative.<sup>42</sup> Walter Kaufmann, writing in the preface to the third edition of his book on Nietzsche, criticized the “death of God” theologians for “remaining Christian theologians” while echoing Nietzsche. Kaufmann suggested that Nietzsche would not

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<sup>38</sup> Gabriel Vahanian, “The Future of Christianity in a Post-Christian Era,” in *Toward a New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology*, ed. Thomas J.J. Altizer (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 255, 256, 265.

<sup>39</sup> William Hamilton, “American Theology, Radicalism and the Death of God,” in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Altizer, “America and the Future of Theology,” in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton, “The Death of God Theologies Today,” in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> For more conservative religious critiques of the Death of God theology see *Is God “Dead”? A Symposium with Chapters Contributed by Dr. Billy Graham, Dr. Bernard Ramm, Dr. Vernon C. Grounds, Dr. David Hubbard* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966); Kenneth Hamilton, *God is Dead: The Anatomy of a Slogan* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966); Cornelius Van Til, *Is God Dead?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1966); John Warwick Montgomery, *The ‘Is God Dead?’ Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966); Charles N. Bent, S.J., *The Death-of-God Movement* (New York: Paulist Press, 1969); J.V. Langmead Casserley, *The Death of Man: A Critique of Christian Atheism* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1967).

have been pleased.<sup>43</sup> The evangelist Billy Graham, of altogether different religious views and sympathies toward Nietzsche than Kaufmann, concurred that the movement had moved away from Nietzsche. “Nietzsche was a deep thinker,” Graham argued, adding that the death of God “was a terrible thought” and “a tragedy” to Nietzsche—unlike the “death of God” theologians.<sup>44</sup> By the 1960s, Nietzsche’s notion of the “death of God” was frequently being linked with the decline of religious authority in American institutions. The resonance of the “death of God” theology, the *Time* cover story suggested, was found in the “acute feeling that the churches on Sunday are preaching the existence of a God who is nowhere visible in their daily lives.” Secularization meant that “slowly but surely, it dawned on men that they did not need God to explain, govern, or justify certain areas of life.”<sup>45</sup> Ohio State University philosophy professor Marvin Fox made the connection in 1965 when responding to cultural and court battles over the role of religion in public schools. Fox quoted Nietzsche and suggested that “the struggle for religion in the schools may only be a facade, masking the death of God.”<sup>46</sup> Grinnell College religion professor Howard R. Burkle added that Nietzsche’s idea was having a much greater impact in the present than it did in his own day:

“Nietzsche’s assertion that God is dead had far less effect on his contemporaries than on posterity. We, in retrospect, discern many things about the problem of God which were not generally visible a century ago: that theology had become specious, brittle, and smug; that the loyalty of Western man had shifted from a transcendent God to the false gods of nation, progress, evolution; that religious emotions had turned poisonous and reactionary. Looking back with eyes opened by Kierkegaard, Barth, and Freud and sobered by two world wars, a world-wide depression, destruction by atomic bombs, and decades of cold-war tension and violence, we see that in some sense Nietzsche, prophetically, was right: God is dead.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kaufmann, “Preface to the Third Edition,” *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, vii.

<sup>44</sup> Graham, “God is Not ‘Dead’” in *Is God ‘Dead’?*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> Elson, “Toward a Hidden God,” 83, 84. *Time* previously covered the “death of God” movement in “Theology: The God is Dead Movement,” *Time* 86, no. 17 (October 22, 1965), 61-62.

<sup>46</sup> Marvin Fox, “Religion and the Public Schools: A Philosopher’s Analysis,” *Theory into Practice* 4, no. 1, Our Religious Heritage and the Schools (February 1965), 41.

<sup>47</sup> Howard R. Burkle, *The Non-Existence of God: Antitheism from Hegel to Duméry* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 9.

Kaufmann, Harrington and the “death of God” theologians each embodied the shifting fortunes for Nietzsche’s reputation and influence in the United States. “Few philosophers are more alive,” Kaufmann wrote in 1968.<sup>48</sup> This outcome seemed unlikely decades earlier, when blame for two world wars, hostility toward Christianity, the rejection of professionalized, specialized philosophy, and a descent into insanity appeared to doom Nietzsche to the margins of American intellectual and cultural life. What changed was not simply the emergence of new advocates or the availability of translations to introduce his ideas to new audiences, but the context into which his ideas were received. The decline of Protestant cultural authority provided a vital component to that context. Not only was Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity linked to that decline, but that decline helped transform culture-shaping institutions into venues in which Nietzsche’s ideas would be taken seriously. The groundwork for these developments was laid in the early decades of Nietzsche’s reception, when Protestant dominance of American institutions was forcefully and successfully challenged.

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<sup>48</sup> Kaufmann, “Preface to the Third Edition,” *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, vii.

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