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Book Review

The Pious Origins of Nietzsche's Immoralism

Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief written by Giles Fraser
Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith by Bruce Ellis Benson
reviewed by David van Dusen (University of Wales)

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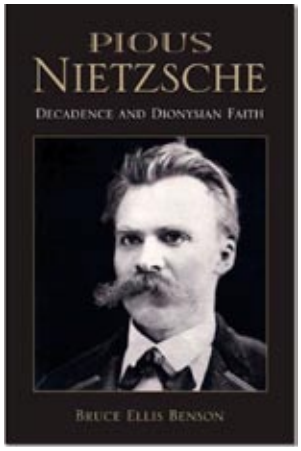

Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008) written by Bruce Ellis Benson

"Germans understand me immediately when I say that philosophy has been corrupted by theologian blood," and "Protestantism itself is its *peccatum originale*" (A §10).[1] So Nietzsche writes in *The Anti-Christ*, while he prefaces the work: "This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them are even alive yet" (A P). Thus whatever it is in *The Anti-Christ* that is futural or obscure in 1888, it is not the idea that nineteenth-century German philosophy is theologically conditioned. This is clear. Or at least, Nietzsche insists, this is clear *to the Germans.* That this self-recognition is of dubious value since it is suggested by a man who despises them,[2] or that it may derive from what Nietzsche calls their "theologian instinct" (A §10), is not our question. But it is also not irrelevant to our present concern, since the studies under consideration are alike devoted to Nietzsche's 'piety' or 'theologian instinct,' and neither is written by a German.

It would seem that the English and North Americans are still intrigued, if not mystified, when they encounter evidence of this 'original sin' in German philosophers. Perhaps this is because even when philosophers such as Nietzsche or Heidegger identify theology as a decisive factor in modern philosophy their interpreters have, on the whole, been inattentive. It is perhaps

1 *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). All citations of *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo* and *Twilight of the Idols* refer to this translation.

2 A §61: "The Reformation; Leibniz; Kant and what people call 'German philosophy' . . . I confess it, these Germans are *my* enemies: I despise them for every type of uncleanliness in concepts and values."

this neglect that results in theologically motivated interpretations such as *Redeeming Nietzsche* and *Pious Nietzsche*—a specific ignorance of the history of philosophy seems to invite and justify this sort of work.

That Slavoj Žižek can write[3] of *Pious Nietzsche*, that it "clearly formulates what even the most perspicacious readers only vaguely suspected: the subterranean link between Paul and Nietzsche," obliquely confirms this. Žižek's praise here is excessive,[4] and the reference to Nietzsche's 'most perspicacious readers' is vacuous; but it is surely correct that *most* of Nietzsche's readers have 'only vaguely suspected' his vascular connection to Paul—or to Augustine and Dante, Luther and Pascal.[5] Given this generalized lack of theological (and thus historical) subtlety in Nietzsche-interpretation, there is a sense in which works such as Fraser's and Benson's should be welcomed. But this welcome should be critical.

It is imperative that theological interpreters of Nietzsche—and their critics—recognize that their undertaking is not new. Significant works from the twentieth century, such as those of Karl Löwith, should be genuinely consulted and held in view.[6] This is a failing in Benson's study that seriously diminishes its usefulness. Despite glances at recent works by Alain Badiou and Julian Young,[7] Benson develops his interpretation with a basic disregard for his predecessors.[8] And interestingly, aspects of his reading seem to parallel failed Protestant appropriations of Nietzsche in Germany between 1900 and 1920.[9] In this regard, Fraser is more circumspect—his first chapter is devoted to a theological reception-history of Nietzsche.

Redeeming Nietzsche and *Pious Nietzsche* both assert a specific continuity between Nietzsche's childhood (or "prehistory"[10]) and his philosophy. While for Fraser this is a concern with 'salvation' and for Benson it is a concern with 'the heart,' for both it is German Pietism that

3 This appears on the cover of *Pious Nietzsche*, alongside a high commendation by John Caputo.

4 If nothing else, Badiou's far more original analysis of this connection appeared in his 1997 work *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 55–74, 94–96, 107–111.

5 As a single instance of this: "I do not read Pascal, I *love* him as Christianity's most instructive victim" (EH "Clever" §3).

6 Cf. Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997); *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (London: Constable, 1964); and "The Interpretation of the Unsaid in 'Nietzsche's Word "God is Dead"'," in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 96–127.

7 There are also desultory allusions to Lou Andreas-Salomé, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler and Merold Westphal.

8 Benson devotes a page to recent "precedents" for seeing "Nietzsche as *homo religiosus*" (*PN* 6–7). He cites Karl Jaspers in the text, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a note.

9 Cf. Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 205–206. Benson refers to this text (*PN* 220 n. 13), but misses the parallels.

10 Cf. GS §§348–49; *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). All citations of *The Gay Science* refer to this translation.

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provides the original and abiding impulse of Nietzsche's thought.[11] Nietzsche's father was of course a pastor, but he died when Nietzsche was very young, and "the decisive influence exerted by Nietzsche's mother" has long been recognized.[12] Fraser and Benson take Nietzsche's mother and his earliest written 'outpourings' as their interpretive points of departure. Benson in particular relies on the latter, and whereas Löwith sees in the "poems written by Nietzsche as a young man," that "from the very beginning his religiosity had something . . . forced about it,"[13] Benson uses them with a complete lack of critical distance—he displays none of the "ironic resistance" that Nietzsche commends to his interpreters.[14]

Neither study gives any real attention to Nietzsche's early essays, which are different in tonality from his adolescent memoirs and verse, or to early theological influences such as Feuerbach and relevant later contacts such as Bruno Bauer and Franz Overbeck. This is highly problematic. Nietzsche is far more theologically sophisticated than his rhetoric can at times suggest,[15] and a decision to interpret his last writings through his earliest—or worse, through a putative reconstruction of his earliest religious experience[16]—calls for methodological and material justifications that neither work provides.

But from the beginning, Fraser is alert to dangers that Benson courts. Benson's title alone, *Pious Nietzsche*, promises to sanctify him. And while Benson resists Nietzsche at various places, often *sotto voce*, he essentially delivers what he promises: "I argue that Nietzsche remains a person of faith and prayer" (*PN* 16). That Benson treats Nietzsche's madness, in the last paragraph of his work, as a virtual *beatification* should indicate how uncritical he is capable of being (*PN* 216).[17]

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11 For a sense of the philosophical, rhetorical and sociological diversity that characterized German Pietism at the turn of the nineteenth century, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 217–65. Neither Fraser nor Benson seems to possess a "historically valid concept" (p. ix) of the 'Pietism' they foreground in the earliest Nietzsche and claim to detect in his last writings.

12 Löwith, *Hegel to Nietzsche*, pp. 369–70; and in a note, Löwith refers to a series of publications in Germany between 1930 and 1938.

13 Ibid., p. 369.

14 Benson cites Nietzsche in his preface: "It is not necessary at all—not even desirable—that you should argue in my favor; on the contrary, a dose of curiosity . . . with an ironic resistance, would seem to me an incomparably more intelligent attitude" (*PN* x). This is one of many citations in *Pious Nietzsche* that Benson fails to effectively interpret.

15 Thus, for instance, his polemical formulation "Christianity is Platonism for the 'common people'" quite precisely reproduces Augustine's defense of the *catholica* in *De Vera Religione*. See note 43, below.

16 Benson speaks of "reconstructing the faith of the young Nietzsche" (*PN* 222 n. 6), but manifestly fails to do so—or rather, it is not clear that he makes the attempt.

17 Certain comments by Löwith may appear to anticipate his remarks on Nietzsche's madness, but on a close reading Löwith is subtler. He writes at mid-century: "Nietzsche's reflection ends in insanity. It is not easy to decide whether that insanity was a senseless, external accident, or a destiny that belonged to him inwardly, or a holy insanity at the onset of which the phenomenon of Dionysian frenzy (to which Nietzsche's first work was dedicated) was embodied in him like lightning, only to expire in idiocy" (*Nietzsche's Philosophy*, p. 10).

Fraser, on the contrary, opens his work by disavowing the impulse to construct a 'holy Nietzsche':

> from the development of the various Nietzsche cults at the turn of the twentieth century to his becoming a fetish of post-modern credibility, Nietzsche is always in danger from those who most admire him. "May your name be holy to future generations" pronounced Nietzsche's friend Peter Gast at his funeral. In challenging the ideological purity of Nietzsche's "atheism" one is not making Nietzsche holy. One may indeed be saving him from an unwanted secular saintliness. (*RN* 3)

A glance at Nietzschean iconography from the decade following his death—'Nietzsche with a crown of thorns,' 'Nietzsche naked in the mountains'[18]—should suffice to kill anyone's desire to confer an aura of saintliness on him, be it Nordic-Christian or post-modern. Still, the impulse is clearly not dead, and this is particularly intriguing given Nietzsche's negative fascination with the figure of 'the saint.'

While Nietzsche is not 'holy' for Fraser, he is yet characterized as "obsessed with the question of human salvation" (*RN* 2)—and this is, *prima facie*, a saintly obsession. Yet that the negative echo in this description ('obsessed') is intentional, becomes clear over a hundred pages on, when Fraser calls Nietzsche "a dangerous unreconstructed religious obsessive" (*RN* 145). The specific sense this phrase has for Fraser is complex, but strictly polemical. The sense that 'religious' has here is indicated by the fact that Fraser has just approvingly cited Nietzsche when he writes that "all religions are, at their most fundamental, systems of cruelty" (*RN* 145).

Fraser's text breaks down into two introductory chapters, followed by three descriptive and three polemical chapters. The polemical chapters are slovenly, and at its worst *Redeeming Nietzsche* is simply inane. Fraser writes, for instance, "Shit is a sacrament of ultimate seriousness" (*RN* 125). In the preceding chapters, however, Fraser is relatively methodical and discriminating. In this, *Redeeming Nietzsche* provides a contrast to *Pious Nietzsche*, and those who are attracted to the latter would be better served to read first five chapters of Fraser's work.

One reason for this is that Benson is dishonest. It is important that 'dishonesty' here signifies a lack of transparency, rather than intent to deceive. Indeed, given the philosophy faculty that Benson chairs, his intent is presumably to tempt a new generation of fundamentalists into the open—which is to be commended.[19] But regardless of motives, he does not confess his faith. Benson's own piety can only be inferred from allusions to the gospels and Augustine, which clarify nothing (*PN* 15–16, 20); or from an incongruous use of Jean-Luc Marion on "idolatry," when Bacon's *Novum Organum* is the pertinent (and radically different) reference (*PN* 35); or from his habit of naively appealing to "orthodox Christianity,"[20] and using only post-Nietzschean

18 Cf. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy*, plates 3, 10.

19 Benson is Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Department at Wheaton College in Illinois, a vanguard institution of twentieth-century American fundamentalism.

20 And while Nietzsche may seem to be similarly culpable here—namely, of reifying 'Christiani-

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theologians to articulate it (*PN* 136).[21] Numerous other instances could be adduced, but since theological prejudices inflect and deflect Benson's exposition throughout, *Pious Nietzsche* could only be a respectable study if he stated them.

Fraser does. He addresses himself to Nietzsche as a philosophical theologian—as a Christian—and this decision has consequences.[22] It immediately allows him to face Nietzsche without the overly subtle indirection that onto-theological discourse affords certain interpreters: "What Nietzsche hates, above all, is the cross . . . it is precisely the crucified God that is the source of all the trouble" (*RN* 21–22).[23] Fraser coolly insists that "for a conservative Protestant scholar . . . to claim that Nietzsche attacks a degenerate view of God" is "absurd." Nietzsche leaves no doubt "that he believes the principle agent of theological corruption was not Plato, or Aristotle, or St. Thomas, but St. Paul" (*RN* 22). With this, Fraser also rejects the "possibility of Nietzsche as *ancilla theologiae*" (*RN* 20–21), negatively citing a Merold Westphal essay that Benson praises in his notes.[24] And thus, when Fraser proceeds to stress "the question of salvation" in Nietzsche and to suggest that "much of his work is driven by an attempt to expose the pathologies of Christian soteriology and re-invent a very different soteriological scheme which . . . leads to genuine joy" (*RN* 30), his hypothesis at least does not provoke the suspicion that Nietzsche is being cleaned up for theologians.

Fraser's descriptive thesis can be summarized by way of the following claims, all of which rest on his assertion that "Nietzsche is obsessed with the question of salvation" (*RN* 30), coupled with an important question: "Nietzsche was unquestionably an atheist—my question is going to be: of what sort?" (*RN* 30). Chapters 2 to 5 of *Redeeming Nietzsche* argue that:

> Nietzsche approaches "the question of God" with the instincts of his Lutheran Pietistic upbringing. . . . [And] from this perspective the "first question" of theology is not "Does God exist?" but rather something like "How are we saved?" (*RN* 30)
>
> Nietzsche is unreservedly hostile to any conception of salvation that means trading in our humanity for a stake in the hereafter: "do not believe those who speak to you of super-terrestrial hopes!" he insists. (*RN* 74)

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ty'—he is not. See, for instance, A §58 on Christianity as a *type* of religion, "I mean the corruption of the soul through the ideas of guilt, punishment, and immortality."

21 Pages 152 and 153 of *Pious Nietzsche* are excruciating. Benson docilely cedes Tertullian, Augustine and Aquinas to Nietzsche, cavils at his reference to "the closure of the public baths" in Córdoba (A §21), and then to "counter Nietzsche" appeals to the life of a twentieth-century Catholic nun. Either Nietzsche lived in the wrong century or Benson's Christianity emerged in the last century.

22 Fraser is an Anglican priest and a former lecturer in philosophy at Oxford University.

23 Fraser is correct here, but Badiou is no less correct when he writes in *St. Paul*: "In reality, the core of the problem is that Nietzsche harbors a genuine loathing for universalism. . . . What Nietzsche—on this point remaining a German 'mythologue' (in Lacoue-Labarthe's sense of the term)—cannot forgive Paul for is not so much to have willed Nothingness, but to have . . . formulated a theory of a subject who, as Nietzsche admirably, albeit disgustedly, puts it, is universally, 'a rebel . . . against everything privileged'" (p. 62).

24 The essay is Merold Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," in *Nietzsche and the Divine*, ed. John Lippitt and Jim Urpeth (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), 14–29. See *PN* 241 n. 19.

> Salvation, for Nietzsche, is about healing . . . Humanity suffers from a disease brought about by . . . the imagined comforts of Christian redemption. (*RN* 87)
>
> Nietzsche seeks salvation in an inverted version of Lutheranism; that is, by urging his readers to undergo, in reverse, that process by which humanity came to hate itself in the first place. (*RN* 101)

Fraser takes up the first, less contentious claims successively in chapters 2 to 4. The last is taken up in chapter 5, commencing with Fraser's interpretation of the "Three Metamorphoses" in part 1 of *Zarathustra* and culminating in his discussions of eternal recurrence and "the invocation of eternity" (*RN* 119) in part 3 of *Zarathustra*.

Though he is not cited, Löwith anticipates chapter 5 in its basic outline[25] and indeed devotes *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* to the constellation of questions that Fraser surveys here.[26] But whereas Löwith's exposition is incisive and dispassionate—though he wrote in political exile, during the *Nazizeit*—Fraser's becomes increasingly erratic, and in the last paragraph of the chapter it is hysterical:

> Nietzsche's "Yes" is the "Yes" of praise—his own Dionysian Alleluia. But, though a relative of the charismatic evangelical "Yes," Nietzsche's post-Christian affirmation is . . . closer in spirit to something much more sinister—to the highly charged, emotionally intoxicating "Yes" of the Nazi rallies in Nuremberg. (*RN* 121)

Redeeming Nietzsche never recovers from this lapse in rigor,[27] and Fraser's stress on Nietzsche's pietistic 'instincts' and 'post-theistic soteriology' can be seen, in retrospect, to be dubious. Fraser's last, polemical chapters are being prepared by his first chapters—that is, the descriptive thesis of *Redeeming Nietzsche* is itself polemical.

Though Benson, as noted, is more hagiographical than polemical, *Pious Nietzsche* simply modulates the descriptive thesis of *Redeeming Nietzsche*. Benson mentions Fraser early on to take his distance (*PN* 7), but his debt is deeper than this reference suggests and later objections are superficial (*PN* 198–200). Of course, Benson shifts Fraser's terminology at every point of the argument that was represented above. Thus, for instance, Fraser's initial claim that "Nietzsche is obsessed with the question of human salvation" (*RN* 2) becomes, in Benson, "his writings are obsessed with these questions—who or what is god and what does it mean to *serve* this god?" (*PN* 22). And similarly, where Fraser has, "Nietzsche was unquestionably an atheist—my question is going to be: of what sort?" (*RN* 30), Benson writes that "once God is dead, the question is: what kind of 'piety' does Nietzsche put in place of Christian piety?" (*PN* 39).

The only significant advance in *Pious Nietzsche* consists in its stress on the polyvalence or, strictly speaking, the duplicity of the concept of *askēsis* for Nietzsche. Benson suggests the

25 Löwith, *Hegel to Nietzsche*, pp. 193–97, 368–73.

26 For *Nietzsche's Philosophy* see note 6, above.

27 There is a similar but less serious lapse in the last pages of chapter 4; see *RN* 96–99.

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distinction between a 'no-saying' and a 'yes-saying' *askēsis*, the former comprising Nietzsche's rhetorical "warfare against all that is 'sick' in him . . . Socrates, Wagner, Paul" (*PN* 3–4), while the latter is interpreted by way of a putatively Greek conception of *mousikē* (*PN* 5).[28] To put it crudely, Nietzsche's negative *askēsis* is philological and critical, while his affirmative *askēsis* is musical and fideistic. Though Benson's basic insight—namely, the duplicity of *askēsis* in Nietzsche—is incontestable, his exposition is badly flawed. As a single indication of this: *Pace* Benson's directional logic, in which negative *askēsis* precedes the positive and should be superseded by it,[29] Nietzsche's most destructive works *follow* the lyricism of *Zarathustra*—"after the yea-saying part of my task had been solved it was time for the no-saying"—and an ironically 'theological' gloss in *Ecce Homo* indicates that Nietzsche in some way *recoiled* from his affirmative, visionary work (EH "Books" BGE §1–2).

This sort of unclarity is characteristic of *Pious Nietzsche*. Citations from Nietzsche's corpus and *Nachlass* are highly selective, and yet Benson seems incapable—from the preface on—of seriously interrogating the passages he cites. For instance, Nietzsche consistently refers to his 'will to truth'—the epochal (and yet 'moral') *necessity* of his *unbelief* in "the 'law', the 'will of God', the 'holy book', 'inspiration'" (A §55)—as his piety. Nietzsche is pious precisely when he refuses Christianity and its god. But what Benson insists is a 'Dionysian Pietism' in Nietzsche, is what Nietzsche calls—in the epigraph to Benson's preface, no less—his *immoralism*. Nietzsche's immoralism clearly has pious roots—namely, in his *inherited* 'will to truth.' But this rhetorical opposition—'pious' Nietzsche, 'immoralist' Nietzsche—is nevertheless essential,[30] and Benson fails to address it as such.

And as he negligently collapses Nietzsche's pious-immoralist opposition into a 'Pietism,' so Benson collapses Nietzsche's faith-truth opposition into a 'faith'—which is precisely what Nietzsche excoriates in the New Testament.[31] In later works Nietzsche of course refers, on occasion, to a Dionysian 'faith'—but these *occasions* must be interrogated, and they never are in *Pious Nietzsche*.[32] Nietzsche far more consistently insists that the "imperative of 'faith' is a *veto* on

28 Benson's interpretation of Nietzsche's "musical *askêsis*" (*PN* 11) is unimpressive in its treatments of Greek *mousikē* and music in Nietzsche. For the latter see Georges Liébert, *Nietzsche and Music*, trans. David Pellauer and Graham Parkes (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

29 So that Benson will write, "the crucial question is whether Nietzsche can go *beyond* 'No-saying'" (*PN* 206). That this is not a 'crucial question'—though it is indeed at the heart of *Pious Nietzsche*—will be discussed in a moment. The remainder this paragraph should serve to indicate that it should not even be a *question*.

30 EH "Destiny" §3: "Have I been understood? . . . The self-overcoming of morality from out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of moralists into their opposite . . . that is what the name Zarathustra means coming from my mouth."

31 The last sentences of A §46 are of decisive importance for Nietzschean piety: "Do I still need to say that in the whole of the New Testament there is only *one* honourable figure? Pilate, the Roman governor. . . . The noble scorn of a Roman when faced with an unashamed mangling of the word 'truth' gave the New Testament its only statement *of any value*,—its critique, even its *annihilation*: 'What is truth!'"

32 Benson's discussion of 'faith' in the last pages of his work (*PN* 192–98) is inadequate and confused, and a discussion of this question should have appeared in its first pages.

science,—*in praxi*, the lie at any cost" (A §47), or that "in every age (with Luther, for instance), 'belief' has just been . . . a shrewd *blindness* about the dominance of *certain* instincts" (A §39), or that "'Faith' means not *wanting* to know the truth" (A §52).[33] Thus, when Benson writes that "Nietzsche ultimately comes to call his own belief system a faith that is 'the highest of all possible faiths,' one that he baptizes 'with the name of *Dionysus*'" (*PN* 38), he claims precisely nothing—since the words are indeed Nietzsche's—but the core of what he *implies* is demonstrably false.

Thus Benson insists that "Nietzsche may not be certain exactly 'who' Dionysus *is*, but Dionysus is clearly his god" (*PN* 197), whereas Dionysus is *not* Nietzsche's 'god' but a *name* he espouses. Nietzsche is a theological *nominalist*,[34] and (*pace* Benson) he remains godless. Though Nietzsche *values* what the name 'Dionysus' signifies and *devalues* what 'the Crucified' signifies, he no more *believes* in Dionysus as a god than he does in the Crucified—which is why he can utilize these ciphers as he does, at the end of *Ecce Homo*. Similarly, when Benson insists that Nietzsche's 'faith' is "*founded upon* a dogma—the eternal recurrence that should provoke an *amor fati*" (*PN* 196), he not only misinterprets Nietzsche but betrays an ignorance of the decisive historical senses of this word, 'dogma.' *If* 'eternal recurrence' is to be a dogma, it is certainly not a *theological* dogma[35] in the sense that begins to emerge in the fourth and fifth centuries and peaks in the sixteenth or seventeenth;[36] and *if* Nietzsche is to be "dogmatic,"[37] he is certainly not *philosophically* dogmatic in the sense that comes to new prominence and clarity at the end of the eighteenth century.[38]

Nietzsche is a theological and philosophical skeptic, and eternal recurrence is a *formal* concept or conceit—indeed, it is an *ascetic* (and *aesthetic*) *formula* that cannot (as such) 'provoke' but only detect *amor fati* or its absence. And since the Dionysian involves (as Nietzsche says) a 'faith,' then a subordinate sense of this word could perhaps be related to Jacobi's idea of a pre-reflective faith without which "we cannot cross the threshold, sit at table, or go to bed."[39] That is, 'faith' as it appears in the post-Humean *Glaubensphilosophen* could have some relevance. But

33 Later in A §52, Nietzsche turns explicitly on "pietists and other Swabian cows" who "take their everyday . . . lives and, using the 'hand of God,' fashion them into miracles of 'grace,' 'Providence,' or the 'experience of salvation'." On the rise of Swabian Pietism in association with the Tübingen *Stift*, see Stoeffler, *German Pietism*, pp. 88–107.

34 EH "Destiny" §7: "I needed a word whose significance lay in challenging everyone." And see TI "Ancients" §4: ". . . The word 'Dionysus' means all of this."

35 Benson goes so far as to suggest that eternal recurrence constitutes a new *regula fide* or creed: "To replace Christian faith with Dionysian faith . . . Nietzsche needs . . . new sorts of dances, prayers, songs, and even creeds" (*PN* 12).

36 When Cicero decides to render the Greek δόγμα with the Latin *decretum* at *Academica* 2.29, for instance, it has only a very distant relation to the sense that 'dogma' will take on in the ecclesiastical tradition, particularly after Constantine.

37 *PN* 196: "Nietzsche's religion *is* dogmatic."

38 There is of course a whole discourse surrounding philosophical dogmatism in post-Kantian philosophy (Fichte is essential here), and relative to this late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century discourse it is senseless to say that Nietzsche is a philosophical, much less a theological, dogmatist.

39 F. H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), p. 272.

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the decisive sense should be sought in a passage of *Beyond Good and Evil* in which Nietzsche reactivates the Pauline "formula" that sets faith over works.[40] Here, Nietzsche identifies a *real* faith with something like that Johannine vice, the *pride of life*. But whatever it is that Nietzsche espouses as a 'faith,' it *cannot* be sought in the gospels (*PN* 15–16) or by way of a received ecclesiastical virtue that Nietzsche repeatedly analyzes and always eschews.

There is a phrase on the last page of *Pious Nietzsche* which crystallizes (and finalizes) what is fundamentally wrong with this study: Benson suggests the possibility that Nietzsche feigned madness as "the only way to overcome *his own personal decadence*" (*PN* 216, my stress). And Benson is preoccupied, throughout, with the question of Nietzsche's capacity or incapacity to "*believe and live out* his own doctrines" (*PN* 49, my stress)—indeed, he says that this is "the central question" of *Pious Nietzsche* (*PN* 12). This typically Protestant formulation of a question that is neither philosophical nor historical certainly attests to *Benson's* strain of piety, but it signally and repeatedly fails to elucidate *Nietzsche's* driving concerns and most serious insights.

Toward the end of *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes:

> dismal ideas like hell, like the sacrifice of the innocent, like the *unio mystica* in the drinking of blood . . . *that* is what gained control over Rome, the same type of religion that Epicurus had already waged war against in its pre-existent form. You should read Lucretius to see *what* Epicurus had fought, *not* paganism but "Christianity," I mean the corruption of the soul through the ideas of guilt, punishment, and immortality.—He fought the *subterranean* cults, the whole of latent Christianity,—at that time, to deny immortality was nothing less than *salvation.* (A §58)[41]

Redeeming Nietzsche and *Pious Nietzsche* interpret Nietzsche's self-confessed piety and concern with redemption[42] from out of his earliest writings and a variety of German religious life they call 'Pietism.' This decision has its validity, but will also predictably yield reductive, indeed *provincial* interpretations. Serious research into the sources and sense of Nietzschean piety will proceed, rather, by way of renewed interrogations of Lucretius and Porphyry[43]—or of "Christian

40 Benson cites this passage (*PN* 84)—but overlooks it.

41 Whereas Benson writes, "In the end, Nietzsche does what he accuses Paul of doing: create 'a pagan mystery doctrine'" (*PN* 196). Benson should, indeed, read Lucretius.

42 For a sense of redemption in Nietzsche which neither work so much as gestures toward, see EH "Books" §5: "Did anyone hear my answer to the question of how to cure—'redeem'—a woman? Give her a baby. Women need children, the man is only ever the means: thus spoke Zarathustra"; and TI "Ancients" §4: "In the doctrines of the mysteries, *pain* is pronounced holy: the 'woes of a woman in labour' sanctify pain in general,—all becoming and growth . . . There has to be an eternal 'agony of the woman in labour' so that there can be an eternal joy of creation, so that the will to life can eternally affirm itself. The word 'Dionysus' means all of this." And there is, of course, a Pauline echo in the latter passage that would be worth interrogating.

43 Löwith writes that Nietzsche's "own *contra Christianos* was an exact repetition of the *contra gentiles* of the church fathers, with reversed valences. . . . If one compares Nietzsche's arguments with those of Celsus and Porphyry, it is not difficult to notice how little has been added to the ancient arguments against Christianity" (*Nietzsche's Philosophy*, p. 119). Löwith's phrase 'exact repetition . . . with

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agitators" such as Paul, Tertullian and Augustine (*AC* 59)—or of Luther and Bacon,[44] Spinoza and Hegel and Heine.

And whatever it is in Nietzsche's anti-theology that is still futural or obscure, it did not originate in his mother's Pietism and culminate in raptures at a piano, or in Nazi death-camps. It is the question, still, of what conquered *sub hoc signo*.[45] It is the question, still, of what recommenced with the Protestant revolutions[46] and commenced with European conquests of the Americas and Africa. It is also the question of pity and terror within the instant which still possesses us of eternity, and will dispossess us of time absolutely.[47] And here the only piety—and "there is no alternative"—is still this: "I will not deceive, not even myself."[48]

reversed valences' is of course inexact, but this passage is highly suggestive. One indication of this is that a fundamental contention of *The Anti-Christ*—namely, that the rise of the Christians caused the decline of Rome—is what aroused Augustine to compose the *Civitate Dei* against those "who now complain of this Christian era, and hold Christ responsible for the disasters which their city endured" in the sack of Rome, in 410. Another indication of this is that Augustine clearly anticipates (if he does not inspire) Nietzsche's endlessly cited formulation, "Christianity is Platonism for the 'common people'," as well as Nietzsche's insistence on Christian *ressentiment*, with his stress on pagan *invidentia*. (Cf. *De vera religione* 4.6.21–22; and BGE Preface, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.) It seems that a serious interpretation of Augustine and Nietzsche in relation has yet to be written—and needs to be written. It would presumably begin with Nietzsche's reading of the *Confessions* in 1885, in the months prior to commencing work on *Beyond Good and Evil*. (Cf. letter 589 in *Nietzsche Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 3/3, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982, pp. 33–35.) Nietzsche of course identifies all previous philosophy—in the opening sections of this work—as 'confession'; and though Augustine is only named several times in the work, a sensitive reading of part 3, on the 'religious neurosis,' nevertheless reveals that Nietzsche's concern with Augustine is far deeper and more diffuse than direct references suggest.

44 EH "Clever" §4: "We do not know nearly enough about Lord Bacon, the first realist in every great sense of the term, to know *what* he did, *what* he wanted . . ."

45 Nietzsche uses the variant "*sub hoc signo*" at GM I §8. Cf. A §51: "This reminds me again of the invaluable words of Paul. 'The *weak* things of the world, the *foolish* things of the world, the *base* things of the world, and the things that are *despised*, hath God chosen': *this* was the formula; decadence was victorious *in hoc signo*.—*God on the cross*—have people still not grasped the gruesome ulterior motive behind this symbol?" And for the sense of this *Anti-Christ* passage, cf. GS §353 (which has a reference, be it noted, to German Pietism): "Jesus (or Paul), for example, discovered the life of the small people in the Roman province, a humble, virtuous, depressed life: he explained it, he put the highest meaning and value into it—and thereby also the courage to despise every other way of life, the silent Moravian brotherhood fanaticism, the clandestine subterranean self-confidence that grows and grows and is finally ready to 'overcome the world' (i.e. Rome and the upper classes throughout the empire)."

46 Significantly, this is where Nietzsche closes *The Anti-Christ*; cf. A §61.

47 Cf. TI "Ancients" §4.

48 GS §344. Benson cites GS §381—"dance is [a philosopher's] ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his 'service of God'"—in a superficial way. The sense here of 'piety' as 'dance' derives from Nietzsche's discussion of the "will to knowledge" and "specific gravity" in GS §380, and first emerges at GS §346 in explicit opposition to 'faith': "one could conceive of a delight and power of self-determination . . . in which the spirit takes leave of every wish for certainty, practised as it is in . . . dancing even beside abysses . . ."

reviewed by:
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