

NIETZSCHE AND WAGNER

A STORY OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

First a word of warning: I am not qualified to speak about Wagner's music. Therefore I shall limit myself strictly to Wagner's and Nietzsche's writings, particularly those which have influenced nazi ideology.

Both Nietzsche and Wagner have a lot to answer for the crimes committed under Hitler, yet the two men were just two symptoms of a much deeper soul sickness from which Germany suffered.

It goes back to pre-history, when one half of what is now Germany and Austria, that is south up to the Danube and the Main River and west along the Rhine were settled by Celts and hence romanised. These two rivers formed the northern borders of the Roman Empire, and were joined by a short fortification line called the Limes,(i.e. the border) . It remained an invisible border between two German attitudes ever since.

In the so called Dark Aged the Limes was overrun by Germanic tribes, the Celtic population, if not massacred, enslaved and gradually absorbed.

After the fall of Rome Germanic tribal dukes called in Irish monks to reorganise the administration of their new possessions. In the eighth and the ninth century the Frankish kings became their overlord with the blessings of the pope. That was the beginning of the Holy Roman Empire, so-called .

North of the Limes there were impenetrable forests which were eventually cleared and settled by a mixed population. Whole Slavic tribes, like the Pruzzi or Prussians and the Sorbs were exterminated or absorbed in a rather murky process historians don't want to know about. But somehow the demarcation line between North and South and a certain animosity between the two halves of Germany survived into the twentieth century. Please note that both Wagner and Nietzsche were Saxons, Northerners, and hence never quite accepted in the South.

Nevertheless their life story shows a constant romantic nostalgia for the South, for warmth, for beauty, for feeling values, which in the North are called “romantic”, yet they never quite reach the southern ease and *joie de vivre*. Now turn full forward a thousand years to the end of the Thirty Years’ war, the so called Westphalian Peace of 1648. The Thirty Years’ war has been called a war of religion. In reality, as always, it was a power contest between France and Austria, with Sweden mixed up in the fray. It had been one of the most devastating wars in history. The majority of the German population had been exterminated by sword and famine. The war had wiped out all free institutions which the cities had built up against their political overlords. Ever after Germany had been backward politically and the very word “freedom” – “Freiheit” was *verboten*. People kept to themselves, read the Bible and made music to comfort their souls.

Another turn full forward to the year 1815, Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna. Now the princes of Europe had seen two royal head rolls and they had become edgy. Determined that it should never, never happen again, the Austrian Minister, Prince Metternich, introduced draconian laws which changed the whole of Europe into one vast police state. Thirty years later, in Spring 1848 the subverted population exploded in one vast revolution from Hungary to Spain and from Berlin to Italy. This was the so called March Revolution in which Wagner participated and won his first glory as a freedom fighter.

Richard Wagner

Wagner was born in 1818 at Leipzig, where he studied music, married his first wife Wilhelmine Ploner and became a conductor. He wrote music and opera in the then fashionable style, but it was only after the revolution that he found his true voice. It was at Leipzig that he first met Nietzsche, an acquaintance which turned into a deep friendship after Nietzsche visited him in exile in Switzerland. Nietzsche was born in 1844 in Roecken in Saxony, the son and grandson of Lutheran pastors.

It has been said that what in German is called *Kultur* has mainly blossomed in the families of Lutheran pastors and Jewish intellectuals. Nietzsche was very aware of this legacy. He was a brilliant scholar, the first German who became a University professor at the age of twenty seven. His tragedy was a sick body, the early death of his father and a youth spent among adoring and overprotective womenfolk. The German writer Ricarda Huch once wrote: "The troubles of the world are not men as such, but weak men who want to be heroes." That precisely was the case of Friedrich Nietzsche.

He broke down in 1888 and remained in a vegetative state until his death in 1900, tenderly cared for by his mother and sister Elisabeth, who, by the way, had altered some of his writings to make them more acceptable.

The Nietzsche-Wagner friendship was based on a misconception on Nietzsche's side. After the inauguration of Bayreuth Nietzsche realised that Wagner did not possess the integrity of character which he had expected. He was deeply disappointed and quietly withdrew.

In 1887, after his great friendship with Wagner had ended, Nietzsche wrote the following:

Wagner belongs to the demagogues of Art, knowing how to play upon the instincts of the masses and thereby knowing how to win the instincts of such youth as crave power, agitators dressed up as heroes like Siegfried. The invariable success of intellectual charlatanism in present day Germany is a consequence of the sad state of the German mind, the cause of which can be sought in an exclusive diet of newspapers, politics, beer and Wagnerian music...Richard Wagner is leading Germany to ruins."

(From *Die Unschuld des Werdens: Der Nachlass* (ed. A.Baeumler, Leipzig 1931, I,160)

As it turned out, Nietzsche's prophecy was right. Even to-day it is surprising to discover that Wagner and his Bayreuth Circle were the most important single fountainhead of Nazi ideology. Though widely circulated, his proto-Nazi tirades in his official Bayreuth magazine *Bayreuther Blaetter* scarcely reached the broad German masses directly.

The popularisers of his ideas and those of his good friend, the French Count Gobineau, were known as the exclusive “Wagner circle”, and after the master’s death they were known as the “Bayreuth Circle”. The most familiar names of this elitist club were his widow Cosima , illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt and the French Countess d’Argoult, his son Siegfried and his English wife Winifred , his son-in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and their friends Alfred Rosenberg, Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels and of course Hitler.

Houston Steward Chamberlain was the son of an English Admiral and what you may call an “elective German”. He was enthralled with Wagner’s music and married Wagner’s daughter, whom he later treated rather shabbily. But that is not important here. Much more important is his authorship of the book *Foundations of the nineteenth Century*, which became the racists’ bible.

Alfred Rosenberg later became the official Nazi philosopher with his book *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (*The Mythos (not the Myth) of the twentieth Century.*) If Chamberlain was the Jesus Christ of Nazi ideology, Rosenberg was his St.Paul. Both books trumpet the absolute superiority, not just of the white race, but of the blond and blue-eyed Nordic master race, which has created all that is good, true and beautiful in this world. All other races are only good as hewers of wood and drawers of water as the Bible says of Ham and Shem, the wicked sons of Noah. According to Chamberlain’s gospel all great men in history had been Aryans, including Jesus Christ, who as a blond Galilaean had certainly not been a Jew. The Aryan race was destined to rule the world and that time was near.

It is important to mention that all these people were incredibly superstitious, and influenced by what can only be called pseudoscience. Theirs was not just an ideology, it was a new pseudo-religion that had nothing to do with philosophy. This new religion founded on “racial purity” and on German superiority believed in the remnants of paganism such as the ancient Germanic gods and Celtic relics such as the Grail and the Sacred Lance.

Long before Hitler, Chamberlain claimed that the Holy Lance of Longinus (the very lance that plays such an important role in Wagner's *Parcival*) was kept among the Habsburg Crown Jewels in the Vienna Hofburg, where it had fascinated Hitler since his Vienna years. Even before WW I Chamberlain claimed that it should be returned to Kaiser Wilhelm as his rightful owner. He even wrote about this to Wilhelm, and the Kaiser devised a plan to get it. He organized a world exhibition at Berlin and asked the Austrian Emperor for a temporal loan of the imperial Crown Jewels. Francis Joseph was graciously disposed to oblige, had not Chamberlain blabbed out the real intentions of the loan. So Berlin received a curt refusal and the Crown Jewel remained in Vienna. Fifty years later, in 1938 when Hitler marched into Austria, he only stayed in Vienna long enough to grab the Crown Jewels with the hoary old lance and have it transported to the Castle of Nuernberg.

Why the Lance, which has absolutely no material value ? It is a colorful legend. According to tradition this old Roman Lance is the very weapon with which the Roman centurion Longinus had opened the side of Christ after the crucifixion. Subsequently Longinus converted to Christianity and later the lance passed into the possession of the Roman general Mauritius, who became a Christian Martyr. It later was held by all great Christian war leaders from Carl Martell and Charlemagne to the best German emperors, Otto the Great, Henry the Fowler, Frederick Barbarossa and of course Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, who spoke Arabic fluently and who envisaged a union of the Christian and the Islamic world. Frederick where are you now?

It was believed that whosoever held the Imperial Lance also controlled the fate of Europe for good or ill. Hence Hitler's haste to grab it. He actually believed in its power, just as he believed in the power of the stars and in the prophecies of Nostradamus. But of course, the German Volk must never know about this.

Needless to say, this is also the Holy Lance which plays such an important part in Wagner's operas: the lance or spear of Wotan is its pagan version.

In *Parsifal* it completely overshadows the Holy Grail: the lance that the magician Klingsor claims for evil ends, and which young Parsifal wins to heal the sick king Anfortas.

Speaking of evil magicians, Trevor Ravenscroft writes that Hitler's mentor Dietrich Eckart was also dabbling in black magic, much in the vein of Alister Crowley. In daily life Dietrich Eckart was a bawdy alcoholic poet of the Munich bohemia, who later became the editor of the Party paper *Voelkischer Beobachter*. Yet it was he who taught Hitler the theory of racial purity which Count Gobineau, Chamberlain, Wagner and a few others had concocted.

Perhaps Dietrich Eckart's form of Black Magic would have remained rather silly hokus poskus, had it not joined forces with the secret Thule Society which had rather sinister aims. Whether General Haushofer, the inventor of Geopolitics and a former German diplomat in Tokio, was a member of the Thule Society is not clear. But it is well known that Haushofer was one of the few European members of the ultra secret Green Dragon Society in Japan. It may have been Haushofer who was instrumental in Hitler's alliance with Japan. In any case the University of Munich was full of Japanese students and they were accepted as "honorary Aryans". Later Haushofer and his son joined the German Resistance Movement and son was murdered by the Gestapo.

It was the occultist Rudolf Steiner who denounced the dark aims of the Thule Society and the Nazis made several attempts on his life before he fled to Switzerland. Steiner's followers, the Anthroposophists were an offshoot of the German Theosophical Society. Led by General von Moltke, they were firm believers in reincarnation. They maintained that Hitler was either the Antichrist and/or the reincarnation of the castrated South Italian sorcerer and tyrant Arnulf

of Capua, mentioned in Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic. Hitler's ambiguous sexuality lent credit to this belief.

Wagner used Wolfram's Parzival story for his final and grandest opera.

Thematically it just a variation on his Tannhaeuser Opera, namely the battle between heathen orgiastic licentiousness and good German Christian purity.

Needless to say, Nietzsche detested both plots as philistine and petty bourgeois.

Yet under the Nazis the purity of German blood, exemplified by the Pure Fool Parzifal, became the central theme. It must be admitted however, that contrary to Goebbel's propaganda Hitler never liked Parzifal.

In 1923, Eckart brought Hitler into the fold of Frau Cosima Wagner.

Cosima, called the Mistress of Bayreuth, was much amused by Hitler's rough manners and his nature boy image. It was she who taught him social graces, table manners, how to kiss ladies' hands, and generally made him acceptable in polite society.

After Siegfried Wagner's death Hitler was supposed to marry Siegfried's widow Winifred, but for some reason nothing came of it. Still Hitler remained Winifred's great friend and the adored uncle of her children.

But back to Wagner.

Here my main authority is Peter Viereck's study *Metapolitics, The Roots of the Nazi Mind*, published in New York as early as 1940.

It has been said that "the one great need of Wagner's life apart from music was his lust for domination", an aspect in which he closely resembles Hitler.

One biographer, Max Nordau, has called him "the last mushroom on the dunghill of romanticism," and his most objective admirer, Thomas Mann, finds that "the concept of the romantic is still the best label for him."

(Thomas Mann, *Leiden und Groesse der Meister*, Berlin 1935, pp. 135-6)

Wagner started his political life as a revolutionary in the general European uprising of 1848/49, when he assimilated many ideas of the French Revolution.

He also became a democratic internationalist. Like the young Mussolini he wrote manifestoes against “the vanity” of nationalism. As a student in Leipzig he was inspired by the dashing Polish aristocrats who were refugees from the Russian czar, but also by the patriotic ideas of the German Students’ League.

In 1834, in his first published essay, he prayed that “the master will come who writes in neither Italian, French nor German fashion.” Instead art’s mission is to rise above “national vanity” to a “feeling of universality”. In such a mood Wagner moved to Paris in 1839.

In those early days he called himself proudly an “anti-mystical materialist”. Philosophically he belonged to Feuerbach’s “Young Hegelians”.

Feuerbach was an atheistic thinker who stood midway between Hegel and Marx, preaching a more materialistic and socialistic version of Hegel’s philosophy. According to Hegel the State was always greater than the individual. Feuerbach denied this and preached freedom of the individual, and this was also Wagner’s opinion.

In Paris, Wagner’s chief patron and money lender was the composer Meyerbeer, whilst intellectually his best friend was the expatriate German poet Heinrich Heine. Both men were Jewish and both were great in their own field.

Wagner virtually lived at Meyerbeer’s expense, particularly as his operas *Rienzi* and *Lohengrin* turned out to be flops in Paris.

And here we may observe the fundamental flaw in Wagner’s character: he was consumed with envy against Meyerbeer, both for his money and for his success as a composer. Perversely, he never forgave Meyerbeer his generosity towards him. It is here that his vitriolic antisemitism had its origin.

In his writings he is constantly exalting Nordic spartanism and damning the luxurious and effeminate decadence of the French. Yet paradoxically he developed a taste for French perfumes, for ermine gowns, brocade roses and all kinds of French luxuries he could not afford.

By 1842, after three years in Paris, Wagner's inevitable anti-French reaction begins, mainly caused by the flop of his operas. In his *Autobiographical Sketch* of 1843 he accuses Frenchmen of "making music only for gold". Here we already note the Wagnerian leitmotiv of gold, symbol of materialism in his operas, and symbol of Judaism and French decadence in his thinking.

In France "he had not only suffered material miseries; his idealism had been outraged." The 1843 autobiography ends with the sincere admission:

"For the first time I saw the Rhine. With hot tears in my eyes, I, a poor artist, swore eternal fidelity to my German Fatherland."

In Paris he had always felt a foreigner. The fatherland was the greater unity that is now trusted and beloved. Ever after his longing was to fuse with the "Volk", the very people that Nietzsche calls "the rabble".

In 1845 Wagner begins to work on his opera *The Meistersingers of Nuremberg* and henceforth his operas are based on Germanic, or at least on would-be Germanic themes. (Both Lohengrin and Parsifal are of Celtic origin, but Wagner did not know this.)

In *The Meistersingers* Wagner identifies with the medieval folk poet Hans Sachs, a cobbler of Nuremberg, and in the final chorus he warns against the corrupting influence of the romanised West. Later Nietzsche was to call *The Meistersingers*, which was Hitler's favorite, "a lance against civilization."

Paradoxically, Hitler sometimes liked to identify with the cobbler-poet Hans Sachs, and this was one of his reasons for choosing Nuremberg, the city of Hans Sachs, as the official site of his party congresses. The other reasons of course were Nuernberg's medieval past, its grand imperial castle and its central position within Germany.

Wagner and the Revolution

In 1849 the revolutionary wing of the Saxon Parliament seized Dresden, the capital of Saxony, and Wagner was an active leader in this revolution.

How active was his participation ?

Evidence includes storage of hand grenades, revolutionary articles in a secretly produced paper, distribution of mutinous handbills to the army and his job as tower watchman over the proletarian barricades, a rather safe post to be sure.

His motives to participate in this pan-European revolution were twofold:

1. The disdain with which he found his artistic ideals regarded “by the more classical taste of aristocratic society”.
2. His huge debts which amounted to twenty times his annual income !

He hoped that the revolution would unify the thirty something German principalities into a super state, abolishing class distinction and property. To emancipate humanity at one stroke he demanded the abolition of money, which to him was a “demoniac idea”. He also wanted to abolish “poverty and work”, so that everybody could go and enjoy his operas. (Viereck, p. 99)

In 1849 the conservative, anti-nationalist governments regained power in Germany and Wagner barely escaped to Switzerland with a price on his head. His exile lasted eleven years, under imminent death sentence.

Such conditions made him receptive to the mystic pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer. Just as Wagner typified the German nationalism of the 1840s, so in the 1850s he typified Germany’s sudden Schopenhauer cult.

Schopenhauer’s book *The World as Will and Imagination* had been published in 1819, but not until a generation later was it read by the public. This sudden popularity was a social symptom of the lost revolution’s high hopes.

The impact of Schopenhauer’s philosophy had a marked effect upon Wagner’s opinions and behavior. He suddenly repudiated what he now contemptuously called his former “optimistic faith in reason and progress”. He also repudiated Feuerbach’s Young Hegelians and their doctrines of materialism, progress and universal happiness. Most importantly he became convinced that individuals cannot plot their own destiny, nor can reason and consciousness serve them.

Events are shaped solely by Schopenhauer’s pan-theistic *will*, which is

unconscious, supernatural and eternal – a headlong blind impulse. (Viereck, P.102/103)

Consequently, not only were all individual politics futile, but also any conscious politics of the “Volk”, such as democratically elected parliaments.

From that time onward Wagner consistently abstained from urging any narrowly political measures.

Sometime in the 1840's Wagner made his apparently original 'discovery', that music can be divided into German and Jewish. The former is a “good thing” the latter “a bad thing”. In 1850 he published this mad idea in the essay *Judaism in Music*. The whole anti-Semitic tract is an ungrateful tirade against his friend and former patron Meyerbeer.

Between 1847 and 1851 Wagner wrote a collection of aphorisms which are the quintessence of his so called 'metapolitics'. Crucial here are his definitions of *das Volk* about which he writes:

The Volk deals unconsciously and for that very reason from a natural instinct. The art of the future must rest on the principle of communism. The Volk must break the chain of hindering consciousness. (In other words: learn to act from instinct, from gut feelings !) The Volk are those who act instinctively. The hidden dynamite here is the concept that only collective, but never individual freedom exists .

This explains why Nazis and also Communists would forever spout “freedom”, and yet the individual had absolutely no rights at all.

As mentioned before, this illogical train of thought goes back to Hegel, who categorically placed the State over the individual: the masses must be made collectively free from state contracts or capitalism, Jewish plutocracy, even at the cost, if necessary, of enslaving each of its individuals.

As the Nazi storm troopers' song puts it: “We spit on freedom. The Volk must be free.” (from Viereck, p.105)

But since all political and conscious measures are futile, how is Schopenhauer's unifying, all important *will* to manifest itself to the German people ?

Here we come to Wagner's Fuehrer concept.

As an individual the leader is a mortal man. But as the personification of the German Volk he shares its divinity. In this context Wagner must be conceded amazing powers of prophecy. It was Wagner which bequeathed the Fuehrer concept to modern German history. He must have found the idea in Grimm's or Herder's historic writings. These writers extolled the old Celto-Germanic principle of royal succession by acclamation and the "lifting upon the shield" of the chosen leader.

Later his son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and that weird, drunken poet Eckart instilled Wagner's concept into their young disciple Hitler.

By the existing system, Wagner complains, a German ruler is a monarch, defined as merely the first among his peers. The revolution must transform him as the first of the "Volk", the "man of Providence". This is why Hitler always claimed to be led by "Providence". The fact that his henchmen intended to make him into a Christ, or rather Antichrist, a god-man, was only known to an innermost circle and of course kept top secret until "the final victory".

So here you have the evolution of nazi ideology:

1. Hegel's idea that the State is absolute and the individual does not count.
2. Schopenhauer's idea that the unconscious Will to Life and Nietzsche's Will to Power are paramount and inescapable .
3. The Volk is the collective in which the Will comes to fruition
4. The great enemy of the Will is Jewish intellect, logic and rationality which must be abolished at all cost.
5. The Leader (*Fuehrer*) is the providential executor of this mystic Will which permeates all life.

Wagner and the King

In 1865 Wagner openly repudiated Germany's revolution of 1848 as a Jewish importation of French rationalism. In this he had an ulterior motive: he had been

accused of thereby selling out his ideals in order to please his newly acquired royal patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

History and the Bavarian parliament in Munich have called Ludwig mad, and he died a tragic, mysterious death. Yet he was the most popular king Bavaria ever had. My grandmother swore that his mysterious death was all a wicked Prussian plot hedged out by Bismarck. (The old antagonism of South versus North!)

It is true that Ludwig's brother was mad, and Ludwig feared the same fate.

But had Ludwig lived in England for instance, he would have been admired as an ingenious eccentric and allowed to die in his bed. Since then his fairyland castles have brought the State of Bavaria billions in tourist money, without counting the Bayreuth enterprise.

The story of the relationship of Wagner and the King is a tragicomedy in itself and shows Ludwig as a man of truly angelic forbearance and Wagner as a first class scoundrel.

How did a musical genius like Wagner come to settle down in philistine backward Bayreuth in the middle of the German woods?

This is an interesting story.

In 1864 the young king, newly crowned after his father's death, was enthralled with Wagner's music, just like our modern youngsters are enthralled with pop music. He called Wagner to Munich, paid all his debts from his private coffer and asked him to produce his new opera *Tristan and Isolde* in this fair city, where a monumental opera house was to be built for him. Later Wagner's biographers maintained that the beer swilling Bavarians did not recognize Wagner's genius. The opposite is true. Since its alliance with France under the Napoleonic wars Bavaria had become a centre of German art. It had its Court opera, like any other royal residence, but planned a grander building. What caused Wagner's exile from Munich was his shameless greed for money, his intolerance of other musicians and last not least, his affair with his best friend's wife, Cosima von Buelow.

In 1857 Cosima had married the young conductor Baron Hans Guido von Buelow, an ardent Wagnerian. In 1864, Buelow, his wife Cosima and two little daughters moved to Munich, where Buelow was to conduct "Tristan und Isolde". In no time at all Cosima fell in love with Wagner. In the next year, Cosima had another little daughter, Isolde whose paternity was open to speculation. Everybody loves a scandal and Wagner, was already unpopular enough to be the suspected father.

We must remember that Bavaria is a particularly straight laced Catholic country (well, now they even have produced a Pope) and King Ludwig and Queen Victoria were practically neighbours at the Duchy of Coburg. Personally, the king could not care less who slept with whom, but in an effort to clear the air he asked Wagner pointblank: "Is this story true or not." "Not true your Majesty," said Wagner. "Have I your word of honour?" Asked the king. "My word of honour, your Majesty" said Wagner. (This dialogue was conducted in a much more flowery language, but I will be short.) Thereupon the king wrote a blistering letter in all the German papers, defending the lady's honour and Wagner's integrity.

A few week's later the affair of Richard and Cosima became public knowledge and the king was deeply embarrassed. After this scandal he could have dropped Wagner like a hot potato. But the king showed greatness. He differentiated between Wagner the man and Wagner the artist. He stuck to the artist.

Wagner went to Switzerland, Cosima followed in secret, had another daughter, Eva Maria and a son Siegfried.

After a divorce from Buelow, Cosima and Wagner finally married in 1870 and could now decently return to Germany. Understandably, the king let Wagner know that he was not to return to Munich. Still, he was prepared to keep his word and build an opera house big enough to perform his operas with their enormous orchestras and also a private residence at the place of Wagner's choice.

Wagner had heard of a magnificent court opera which the Marquioness Wilhelmine, sister of Frederick II of Prussia had built in the 18th century at her residence at Bayreuth. But on inspection Wilhelmine's delightful creation proved much too small for Wagner's purposes. Yet Wagner liked Bayreuth and so the *Festspielhaus* was built and the Wagner family moved into its new residence, the Villa Wahnfried, ironically built in close proximity to the Bayreuth Psychiatric Asylum, where in the name of "healthy blood" thousands were later murdered on Hitler's orders.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The new opera house was ceremonially opened with a performance of Wagner's last opera *Parsifal*. This was Wagner's version of the Grail story, the crowning glory of his work. Wagner did not call it an opera but a *Buehnenweihfestspiel*, a drama of stage consecration, and he ordained that it was never to be performed at any other place than at Bayreuth, making of that city a kind of Wagnerian Oberammergau.

When the pomp and ceremony was over, two very disappointed men returned home: one of them was King Ludwig of Bavaria, and the other was Wagner's erstwhile friend and disciple Friedrich Nietzsche, professor of Classics at Bale in Switzerland, but now retired because of illness.

After 10 years of teaching, Nietzsche fell seriously ill and had to resign his chair. From then on he lived an unsteady life as a "roving philosopher", travelling in the Engadin, in the south of France and in Italy.

Initially his guiding spirit had been Schopenhauer with his "Will to Life" and of course, Wagner with his music. But by 1888 he had learnt to look through Wagner. He wrote: "Is Wagner a human being? Is he not rather a disease?"

His essay *The Case of Wagner* was the last work he was able to write with a clear mind. Soon after he broke down and sank into incurable madness. His mother

and his sister, good Lutheran women, possessed the loving compassion he had fought against all his life and cared for him until his death in 1900.

It was only after his death that the public began to take notice of his writings. His early essays were moderate, educational, and written in a beautiful lyrical style which is hard to render into English. He also wrote some sublime poetry. Yet later his writings became the ravings of a lonely man, shrill, arrogant, full of spite. His well balanced prose morphed into staccato aphorisms, an art form he copied from the French. In the end his works betray the onset of madness. By then his whole philosophy became an argument against Schopenhauer and Wagner, his former masters and contained very personal confessions.

As a philosopher, Nietzsche never created a system like Kant or Hegel.

In any case this would have been impossible at his time. It was too late for that. Instead he gave us his whole life – a life that was a personal catastrophe and a prequel to the catastrophe of Europe.

He prophesied a century of world wars, of revolutions and of Earth convulsions. He hoped that these disasters would destroy everything that was false and sick, weak and unworthy in his time. He hoped that new potentates would emerge and a rule of the strong and the reckless would begin.

His was a Darwinian philosophy of sorts: Life was a continuous struggle to survive and only the continuous Will to Power and struggle for power would win out in the end.

From my reading of *Mein Kampf* I remember a phrase which is straight out of Nietzsche: “Life is a continuous combat, and he who refuses to fight does not deserve life.”

Nietzsche praises the total amoralists in history, men like Cesare Borgia and other figures of the Renaissance, and he preaches the great Nordic “blond beast”. According to Nietzsche Christian virtues are a big lie invented by the weak, and by those who cannot fight for themselves. All this of course are ideas which were later popularized in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.

As a prophet of war and a preacher of power you would expect Nietzsche to exalt Bismarck's creation of the German Reich. Instead he loathed it. He longed for the classical Germany of Goethe, the old powerless patchwork empire, not that of Bismarck. To him, a politicized Germany had lost its virtue of old.

This is what he wrote:

"Power must be paid for dearly. Power stultifies. The Germans, once the nation of thinkers have stopped to think....We live in an age of the dumb masses, adoring anything that is done for the masses...The Germans *suffer* from Francophobia and they hate the Poles. They suffer from Christian romanticism, or Wagnerism and from teutomania or prussomania...."

He was a declared enemy of German nationalism and saw in it a treason of all great European traditions. As for anti-Semitism he detested it.

"Never converse with a man who takes part in this racial swindle!" He wrote.

"Where are now those Germans who had walked on the lofty heights of European spirit? The Goethe, Schopenhauer, Heinrich Heine? Where were the deep thinkers, the psychologists, the masters of pure prose, the connoisseurs and creators of everything great? One has to look for them in Paris."

Nietzsche called himself "a good European", not "a good German", and he never forgave Wagner for having betrayed Europe for Germany.

In his last manifesto *Ecce Homo* he describes the terrible disappointment that befell him when visiting Bayreuth. He wrote:

"What has happened? Wagner has been translated into German. The Wagnerian has overcome Wagner! German art! German masters! German beer!...

I think I know the Wagnerians! No cretin is missing among them, not even the antisemite!"

His criticism of Wagner overboarded.

Nietzsche the highbrow never forgave Wagner to have wooed the masses.

Now the writings of the lonely man became a shrill, immoderate criticism of Christianity and everything to do with it. He ridiculed the Christian virtues of

compassion, charity and care of the weak and helpless, but also the belief in equality, fairness, brotherhood, democracy and socialism.

On the one hand he wrote against the romanticists, the downtrodden, those who knew too much, on the other hand he cursed the generals and the factory managers. What did he want ? Sadly, he did not know himself. If anything he was the great iconoclast.

Writing in pre-Darwinian, pre-Freudian, pre-Einsteinian time, we can forgive him a lot. Looking at the decadence of the early industrial era in which he wrote, his revolt is understandable. He did not need Darwin, Freud and Jung to understand that in spite of the economic boom, Western society was woefully underperforming and woefully hypocritical. Long before Lord Russell he understood that the ignorant are always cocksure and ignorance creates fanatical zealots.

The trouble with Nietzsche is that he went over the top. From praising Epicure and condemning the Pope, he went to praise Cesare Borgia and “the great blond beast”. Then he throws his hottest damnation against Christianity. The Cross has become the symbol for the most subterranean plot that ever existed, a plot against health, beauty, decency, courage, spirit – against Life itself. Nietzsche wanted to topple idols and ideals alike. In his *Ecce Homo* he writes that he needs the rarified atmosphere of altitudes to live, describing his walks amongst the glaciers as his greatest elation:

“The ice is close, loneliness huge: yet everything up there is bathed in light. One can breath freely. Philosophy is a voluntary life among ice and high mountains.”

And later he writes:

“My *Zarathustra* is my greatest gift to humankind. He speaks to prophets, not to founders of religion, who are but half casts of sickness and the will to power. “ (That, incidentally, was Nietzsche himself: a half cast of sickness and the will to power.) “And what does not kill him makes me stronger.”

Half a century later the Nazis gave this motto to German youth, and it still holds good. But it did not work for Nietzsche.

Another idea he promulgates is the idea of the “eternal return”, which of course is an age old idea of Hinduism.

In a nutshell, Nietzsche’s maxims were: “Live dangerously, scorn compassion (with the weak and sick), strive for happiness and kick down what is meant to fall .”

At this point his writings become an embarrassment. The philosophers of the past he calls sick codweb spinners, but he himself was the sickest of them all. He suffered of his loneliness, of his poisoned body and of his hypocritical age. Therefore we must not take him literally. His writings solved nothing. On the contrary: in the end, goaded on by Nietzsche’s rhetoric the Germans allowed themselves to be hypnotized by a great criminal.

By 1914, twentyfive years after Nietzsche’s breakdown and fourteen years after his death most young German soldiers carried Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* in their kit bag as they marched to their death on the battle fields. Mercifully Nietzsche was spared to witness the aftermath.

But by the nineteen thirties even girls in Germany had to read *Zarathustra*. I was enthralled by its beautiful language, yet rather shocked when the hero is advised to take the whip to women. His very first work *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* was written in homage to Wagner and we found it rather boring. Still, his *The Antichrist* , written shortly before his breakdown is great social criticism, a shrewd analysis of St. Paul’s character and the true origins of Christianity.

I was a teenager when I read *Zarathustra*, and I completely forgot that it was written for men only. Men were to be educated for war, women for the solace of warriors. Apart from that, women did not exist for Nietzsche, except one:

Lou Andreas-Salome, who later became the *femme inspiratrice* of Rilke and Freud. Nietzsche proposed to her twice, but understandably she declined.

I found one quotation in *Zarathustra* that made sense to me - at that time at least. " If you wish for a child, don't just procreate ! Procreate upward! See to it that your children will be better specimens than yourselves. !" My father took it to give me a better education than he had had himself and that was to my benefit.

Yet the way Nietzsche preached it is pure eugenics, beloved by Nazis and still in fashion in some circles. It would be interesting to hear Nietzsche on stem cell research. I am afraid he would be against it.

Another thing I learned through Nietzsche: In his *Antichrist* he writes that women, like inferior races, are good for slavery and the solace of warriors. I took the hint and fled to Australia. It was the best thing I ever did.

Summing up:

In the last analysis National Socialism was a pseudo religion with roots in Wagner's anti-Semitism and Nietzsche's Darwinian "Will to Power".

Both these men were great artists in their own fields (Nietzsche was also a consummate poet) and neither of them would have been evil enough to take their ideas to the last consequences. Yet history has shown that ideas can assume a life of their own and overtake their creators.

Wagner's writings have greatly contributed to Auschwitz and Buchenwald, an accusation of which Nietzsche must be acquitted. Yet Nietzsche's chauvinistic Darwinism has unwittingly caused the infamous Nazi Aktion T4, which organized the murder of hundreds of thousands of handicapped men, women and children. Ideas can have horrible consequences.

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