
Camel, Lion, Child: Narrating Human Suffering and Salvation

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

1 Cor. 13:11¹

Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I now tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Theodicy: Theological Meaning Making and Human Suffering

One of the most haunting theological questions, for believers and theologians alike, asks how we can account for a loving, omniscient, and omnipotent divine creator, given the evil and concomitant suffering that are contingencies of human existence. The broad form of the problem is reflected in a host of specific observations: What kind of God commands a faithful follower to sacrifice his son? How can just people reconcile their proclamation of a just and merciful God

1. All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

with the God who hardens Pharaoh's heart, ultimately to the point of imposing the death of all firstborns as one of the plagues used to free the Israelite slaves in Egypt—a narrative detail so horrible that it is memorialized in the Passover Seder, when Jews affirm that the suffering of the Egyptians precludes complete joy in their celebration of freedom? How does the survivor of tragedy that takes the lives of others live with the message that God has saved her for some special purpose, given the implication that there was no special purpose for the lives of the dead? Most dramatically for Christians, what kind of God sends a Son to die a torturous death, overwhelmed with a sense of forsakenness, in order to redeem humankind from a sin committed incalculable generations before, at its very origin?

Nonbelievers not uncommonly cite this paradox as the basis for their rejection of the existence of God. Non-Christians often cite it as the illogical “truth” that betrays a fallacy at the core of Christian doctrine. It becomes a plaintive cry from believers who are suffering themselves or are witness to the suffering of others. The psalms, from which comes Jesus' cry of forsakenness, are replete with prayers begging God to offer explanation, as well as relief.² Job's story—the only Old Testament narrative in which “the Satan” is named and embodied—lays theodicy squarely at God's feet. Job demands an explanation from God, having refused either to curse God or to falsely repent for a sin he knows does not exist. The Lord answers Job out of a whirlwind, with language dripping in sarcasm:

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding,
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?

...

Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?³

2. See Matt. 27:45–46 and Psalm 22, for example.

3. Job 38:4–5, 12–13.

For many believers, the import of God's harsh response to Job's pleas is paradoxically comforting: it affirms, at least, that there is no human rationale for who suffers and how much. For others, the proclamation of otherness in God's response is too horrible to contemplate fully. Martin Luther, who developed a particularly ominous construction of divine hiddenness in his treatment of theodicy, was an accomplished exegete, a scholar of Old Testament scripture, and wrote extensive Bible commentaries. However, Luther, who names the hidden God "abyss," never wrote a commentary on Job. One imagines, with theologian David Tracy, that for Luther, Job simply "cut too close to the bone."⁴

Struggling with the problem—or mystery—of evil and human suffering, Christian thinkers have tried to make meaning of the inexplicable through narratives of sin and grace. Methodologically, this long and complex tradition of making meaning comprises historical, systematic, and constructive theology, in addition to practical theology, which speaks directly to the needs of the faithful and their clergy. Sources for theological analysis and reflection come from a broad array of contexts and genres: scripture, confessional literature, secular literature, the arts generally, and—increasingly—popular culture, as well as philosophy and critical theory. At the heart of this wide-ranging theological speculation are questions about the nature and source of human experience, in particular human suffering, and of the relationship of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—to the origins of human suffering and to redemption from the consequences of that suffering. This book approaches the problem of evil from a psychologically informed hermeneutic. It addresses the need for psychological sophistication as well as theological rigor in Christian accounts of divine culpability (or lack thereof) for the exigencies of human existence and of the possibility of human redemption from the suffering that inheres in what Paul Tillich calls the human situation.

4. David Tracy, unpublished comment in "The Hidden God," co-taught with Susan Schreiner at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

The project builds on and responds critically to Christian theologians' common appropriation of psychological constructs and language, often implicitly and apparently without full recognition of the nature and force of the psychological—especially the clinical—presuppositions at work. In short, I contend that many Christian theologians write in these psychological terms, making use of psychological constructs, with inadequate understanding of human psychology. I assert that a flawed mastery of clinical theory, as opposed to the critical theory that commonly informs theological research, has given rise to Christian accounts of suffering and redemption that too often are psychologically destructive, failing to address the human condition in ways that both resonate with the realities of human existence and offer meaningful recourse to Christian understandings of healing grace. My aim, then, is to articulate the groundwork for a fresh alternative that is faithful to Christian thought and understood through a clinically informed hermeneutic.

The book thus engages two closely related questions. First, how can Christian theologians best understand and narrate human suffering and its relationship to God and faith? Second, and more specifically, how can theologians best relate human suffering and its consequences to divine salvation? I approach these ancient questions with the presupposition that psychological—and more particularly psychoanalytic—language and theory are more effectively appropriated from a perspective that is clinical, as well as critical, in focus. As noted, theologians, like other scholars, commonly write from a position of implicit (or assumptive) expertise in this sister discipline without any clinical expertise, as if a psychoanalytic hermeneutic, arising from theoretical familiarity, is sufficient for accurate and effective appropriation. Affirming the long theological tradition of attention to human personhood, particularly as it arises after the nineteenth-century turn to the subject, I aim to address weaknesses in theological appropriations of psychoanalysis. I capitalize in particular on retrospection as a means by which we seek to understand remembered suffering, a methodology on which both theology (especially, but not

exclusively narrative theology) and psychoanalysis rely. I build my argument around the human experiences and the consequent choices that shape our participation in and response to evil.

Methodologically, I develop two innovative sources for constructive theology—early childhood development and literature for young children—which I then bring to bear on an exemplary contemporary soteriology. I begin by gesturing toward a theology of early childhood in the narrative tradition, proposing object relations theories of human development as a new and fruitful source for theologians who engage human psychology. I supplement that discussion in a turn to narrative as a constructive tool, developing a critical reading of picture books that address the young children whose lives and experience I engage developmentally. I bring both of these methods, psychological and literary, to bear on my critical reading of Marilyn McCord Adams’s soteriology, which I present as a significant exemplar of contemporary theologies of redemption.

Theologies of Human Psychology: Foundations in Mysticism and Augustine

Premodern Christian thought is not “psychological” in the contemporary social scientific sense, and the scriptural and patristic significations of *psychē* (often translated “psyche” or “psychology”) are absent strong correspondence to the contemporary disciplinary domain or even to the proto-disciplinary thought of the nineteenth century. In the original Greek, *psychē* refers to the soul, roughly speaking, or to that which enlivens being. In the New Testament, for example, *psychē* is closer in meaning to the Hebrew *nephesh*, a living being. Subsequent patristic texts generally use *psychē* in a more technical sense, related to its Platonic signification. Plotinus, for example—whose third-century philosophy was a key influence in Christian neo-Platonic thought—designates the upper level (the Universal Soul) of the two-tiered soul, *psychē*, and the lower, embodied tier, *physis* (Nature), both of which transcend visible creation.⁵

Language notwithstanding, however, the Christian canon narrates

and engages the robust range of human emotion and behavior that today are included under the umbrella of “psychology.” Both the Old and New Testaments recount human foible and disgrace, happiness and triumph, guilt and forgiveness. The gospels recount Jesus’ response to critical and varied social and personal contexts, his own and others’, and the Pauline epistles offer socioculturally nuanced portraits of new convert communities, informed by differing religious and social values. Postcanonically, a metaphysical psychology emerges in early Christian thought. From its foundations, Christian mysticism, for example, can be read from the perspective of a metaphysical psychology. Furthermore, while the mystical texts themselves do not engage human psychology in the modern sense, they gesture toward it, and contemporary scholarship on mysticism retrospectively identifies mystical experiences as psychological, at least in part. Bernard McGinn describes Plotinus as the subtlest of the ancient writers on “the psychology of mystical states with their complex passages between the consciousness of duality and unity,” and he includes an entire section on comparativist and psychological approaches to mysticism in the first volume of his authoritative series.⁶ Speaking of later Christian mysticism (after the seventeenth century), McGinn cites Michel de Certeau’s articulation of an analogical relationship between the increasingly “scientific” mystical tradition of individual experience and psychoanalysis itself.⁷

Nonetheless, there is a clear distinction between the inward focus of traditional Christian mysticism and the introspection of contemporary psychoanalysis, perhaps most clearly understood in teleological terms. The mystic turns inward toward union of the self and the divine, while the traditional analyst pursues self-knowledge in the externalizing context of the therapeutic dyad. Furthermore, while both practices are grounded in an introspective process, only the mystic hopes to find actualization in the beatific vision that arises from union of self and

5. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (London: SCM, 1992), 46. The other transcendent levels are the One and Intellect.

6. McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 45 and 326ff.

7. *Ibid.*, 312.

divine. Moreover, whereas psychoanalysis emphasizes the subjective continuity of child and adult, mysticism reflects the essentially exclusive focus on adults and adulthood of patristic and medieval theological anthropology. In early Christian thought, in particular, Jesus' attention to little children—commanding that they be allowed to come to him and pointing to them as models of the kingdom of heaven itself—is singular in its tacit acknowledgment of the human subjectivity of children.⁸

Augustine's *Confessions* bridges these distinctions between earlier Christian thought and contemporary theological appropriations of psychology. It is groundbreaking in terms of self-reflection, retrospective self-analytic narrative, and serious theological attention to childhood. In this testimonial on his life and associated exegetical and speculative thought, Augustine lays out a remarkably contemporary outline of human development, beginning in infancy and progressing through childhood and adolescence to adulthood. He describes behaviors and emotional responses typical of the progressive stages of development in terms that vividly evoke contemporary anxieties, challenges, stressors, and accomplishments. His narrative highlights the hungry infant's intense frustration, the schoolboy's confused resentment of parents who do not ally themselves with him against harsh treatment at school, an ambivalent child's confusion between identification with authority and an emerging sense of fair play, and a teenage boy's sheer pleasure at getting away with petty theft in the company of friends. In his meditations on his adult life, Augustine recounts the unexpected and unbidden love that a parent feels for the child of an unwanted pregnancy, devastating grief at the premature death of a soul mate, and ambivalence about the costs of social and professional success. His *Confessions* also evokes an emotionally ungrounded seeker's frantic desire for inner peace, an intellectual's restless and chronically dissatisfied exploration of various philosophies and religious communities, and his ultimate return as an adult to the faith of his mother. Augustine narrates a range

8. Matt. 19:14.

of human experiences that are strikingly familiar, even after almost two millennia.⁹

Moreover, these developmental ruminations are the foundation for Augustine's discourses on memory and time and his exegesis of the biblical account of creation.¹⁰ In the latter regard, *Confessions* presents an understanding of the essential goodness of creation and the "fallenness" of human nature that comes to dominate Christian thought in the West.¹¹ An organizing trope of these accounts (as early as the Pauline epistles and articulated by Augustine) is the tradition of humankind's fall from grace through the sin of the "first man" (Adam) and its eventual restoration through the grace of God, effected in the sacrifice of the "second Adam," Jesus Christ. Whether the Genesis 3 account is taken literally (as is historically less common) or figuratively-but-seriously (as it has been historically by most theologians), it informs a Christian emphasis on humankind's responsibility for its own suffering: Adam's "original sin"—defiance of God's law (in the traditional Christian reading)—welcomed (perhaps invited) into creation evil and the sin to which it leads. By extension, traditional accounts de-emphasize "natural evil"—those catastrophic "acts of God" for which it is more difficult to identify a human source. Orthodox theological anthropologies accordingly focus on the human inclination toward sin, in many accounts sufficiently pernicious as to be described as depraved, even "totally" depraved. Metaphysical alternatives that consider evil generically discrete from good (Manichaeism) or human nature as capable of achieving fundamental goodness without divine assistance (Pelagianism) have been rejected—sometimes violently—as heresy.

Although both Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, for example, express interest in the child, at least as a kind of proto-subject,

9. In Augustine's *Confessions*, see Books I and II for Augustine's account of infancy, childhood, and adolescence; Book III for his grief at the death of his close friend; Books V (first section) and VIII for his restlessness and the relief of conversion; and Book IX for his mother's death and Augustine's reflection on her life and influence.

10. Augustine's *Confessions*, Books X (memory), XI (time), and XII–XIII (creation, the Church, and Genesis 1).

11. Irenaeus, among others, offers a different account, to which some modern theologians have returned.

Augustine's successors, despite his extraordinary influence, do not share his interest either in the internal world of the human subject or (especially) with regard to the emotional lives of children. Nonetheless, Paul Tillich notes, in his argument that Christian theology legitimately draws upon psychology and the arts "in the attempt to present Christ as the answer to the questions implied within existence," that

in earlier centuries [specifically, the medieval period] a similar task was undertaken mainly by monastic theologians, who analyzed themselves and the members of their small community so penetratingly that there are few present-day insights into the human predicament which they did not anticipate. The penitential and devotional literature impressively shows this.

Tillich goes on to say, however, that "this tradition was lost under the impact of the philosophies and theologies of pure consciousness, represented, above all, by Cartesianism and Calvinism," those who sought "to repress the unconscious and half-conscious sides of human nature, thus preventing a full understanding of man's existential predicament."¹²

Friedrich Schleiermacher: The Nineteenth-Century Turn to the Subject

Hard on the heels of Kant's highly rational, late eighteenth-century categorical imperative comes Friedrich Schleiermacher's definition of piety as a feeling-state distinguished by "the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God."¹³ A German Evangelical pastor and theologian who was a contemporary of Hegel at the University of Berlin, Schleiermacher is best remembered for his thought on human relation to the divine in terms of a feeling of absolute dependence and for posing God-consciousness, manifested perfectly in Jesus, as the more highly developed corollary to (if not level of) self-consciousness. He defined

12. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 27.

13. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 12.

sin as that which interferes with development of this God-consciousness or constrains its influence on knowing, feeling, and doing—a form of “arrested development.”¹⁴ Evil, which Schleiermacher describes as secondary to sin, comprises those conditions that give rise to consciousness of life’s obstacles, closely related (as I discuss at greater length below) to perception.¹⁵ Grace, for Schleiermacher, is fellowship with God, and redemption through that fellowship is Jesus’ assumption of the believer into his perfect God-consciousness or “communication of his sinless perfection” (which is to say, his perfect attunement in knowledge, action, and feeling to his God-consciousness).¹⁶

Schleiermacher’s attention to consciousness and its centrality to sin, evil, and redemption is readily seen retrospectively as proto-psychological, although more conceptually than methodologically (his *Christian Faith* is explicitly dogmatic, for example). Schleiermacher himself describes the Knowing-Doing-Feeling language that he deploys to define “elements of the soul” as “simply borrowed from Psychology.”¹⁷ He clarifies, however, that “feeling,” as he uses the term, is always modified by “self-conscious” in order to make clear that it does not incorporate, for example, “unconscious states.” Similarly, he notes that the modification of “self-conscious” by “immediate” underscores the distinction he makes between a feeling-state (self-consciousness) and the representational process that he calls “objective consciousness.”¹⁸ This attention to right understanding of his terminology deflects critical reading of Schleiermacher’s feeling of absolute dependence as a purely psychological—by which many critics mean, affective—phenomenon, a point that Paul Tillich will underscore in his mid-twentieth-century recourse to Schleiermacher.

More correctly understood as psychological (in addition to the Knowing-Doing-Feeling construction of the soul) is Schleiermacher’s

14. *Ibid.*, 271–73

15. *Ibid.*, 185 and 316.

16. *Ibid.*, 262 (grace) and 424–25ff. (redemption).

17. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

18. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

positing of perception as the ground from which arises the human experience of suffering. Specifically, Schleiermacher argues that “the world . . . appears otherwise to man than it would have appeared had he had no sin,” so that were all human activity “determined by God-consciousness” those conditions (whether natural or social) that we see as the cause of our suffering “could never turn out to be a hindrance to the spiritual life.”¹⁹ In other words, the true source of human suffering is the perception that there is cause for inevitable suffering, that circumstances necessarily hinder our God-consciousness, either in its development or its influence on us (Schleiermacher’s definition of sin). Absent such sin, in the state of original perfection, for example, we perceive such conditions not as hindrances, but as opportunities for or stimuli to development of more perfect God-consciousness. In this way, Schleiermacher accounts for evil as “the derivative and secondary to” sin, a condition that does not so much “befall” man as is “inflicted upon him” by the sin that interferes with right-perception.²⁰ Later (as I discuss below), Nietzsche will link this idea of perspective explicitly with psychology, and much like Schleiermacher (despite critical distinctions), he will define strength of character as the ability to maintain a perspective on one’s own actions (including “evil consequences”) and suffering from which one sees struggle as opportunity, rather than a cause for resentment.²¹

From this understanding of sin and evil, as well as of grace as relationship to God, Schleiermacher thus defines salvation as perfect God-consciousness, into which Jesus assumes believers, and distinguishes Christianity by its teleological orientation to redemption, specifically through Jesus as its founder.²² He relates to Knowledge, Doing, and Feeling the categories by which he defines human life: abiding-in-self (*Insichbleiben*) and passing-beyond-self (*Aussichheraustreten*). The former he associates with the Knowing and Feeling

19. *Ibid.*, 316.

20. *Ibid.*, 318.

21. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, vol. 17 (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1909–1911), 28ff.

22. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 56ff.

domains of the soul; the latter, with the Doing domain. However, he elaborates on the complexity of the living soul, pointing out that Knowing only becomes “real” in passing-beyond-self (a Doing), whereas Feeling is instantiated only in abiding-in-self so that no superficial division of the levels of soul or the aspects of human life is legitimate. (Later, psychoanalytic thinkers will take similar care in resisting a concretized reading of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious realms of the human psyche.) Having defined piety as the consciousness of being absolutely dependent (which is to say, in relation to God), Schleiermacher defines Feeling as “the essence” of piety, but also notes that piety entails Knowing and Doing, in that, for example, it stimulates both.²³

Schleiermacher, as Sigmund Freud will do in the next century, identifies three levels (or “grades”) of consciousness, from which he infers the developmental nature of God-consciousness:

1. “the confused animal grade, in which the antithesis [of self and object/other] cannot arise,”
2. “the sensible self-consciousness, which rests entirely on the antithesis [of self and object],” and
3. “the feeling of absolute dependence, in which the antithesis [of self and object, here the divine object] again disappears and the subject unites and identifies itself with everything which, in the middle grade, was set over against it.”²⁴

This developmental construction, resonant with classical mysticism and exegetical theory, is critical to Schleiermacher’s exposition of God-consciousness, which he understands as achievable only by a fully developed individual in a sufficiently advanced society and culture. Children, for example, begin at the first level, which is largely indistinguishable from the other, “lower” animals (by Schleiermacher’s reckoning), and progress to the second level, which perdures simultaneously with the highest level and is distinguished

23. *Ibid.*, 8–9; for definition of piety, 12.

24. *Ibid.*, 18–20.

by an object constancy in relationship to the “whence” of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher’s understanding of the “original signification” of “God”).²⁵ In other words, whereas other objects to which the subject-self relates enter and leave consciousness, by its very nature that on which we depend absolutely is, in some way, conscious to us not intermittently, but continuously (or constantly). This language of self and object and especially of “object constancy” offers a ready corollary between Schleiermacher’s theological anthropology and the object relations school of psychoanalysis, on which I draw in this project. There also are considerable commonalities with Self psychology, a later psychoanalytic development that originates with Heinz Kohut and has much in common with object relations.

Schleiermacher’s construction of consciousness is the framework from which he speculates on an additional antithesis to that of self and object: the pleasant and unpleasant. Specifically, he posits that at the highest level of consciousness there is antithesis neither of self and object, nor of the sensibly pleasant and unpleasant. The bridging of the latter antithesis is the ground on which Schleiermacher concludes that in perfect God-consciousness—which Jesus knew and into which, as savior, he redeems humankind—the subject is entirely receptive, with no reciprocal effect on the object (hence, “absolute” dependence). The effect of this unilateral existence in absolute dependence on the divine is that the believer-subject no longer distinguishes pleasure and pain based on circumstances, because God ordains all circumstances, both good and evil.²⁶ This perception of all conditions as stimulus to the greater perfection of God-consciousness becomes the basis of relief (or redemption) from sin and the suffering that is consequent to it. Schleiermacher further deepens the construct to address the question of evil and suffering as punishment. Significantly, he categorizes social (or moral) and natural evil together in this and other contexts, positing that one suffers only to the degree that one sins by perceiving external contingencies as a hindrance to God-consciousness. Only in this way

25. *Ibid.*, 16 (signification of “God”), 20–22 (constancy of God as object).

26. Especially see *ibid.*, 184–86.

does Schleiermacher consider evil (the perception of conditions as hindrances or “unpleasant”) and suffering as punishment. As the key variable here is perception, the principle applies equally to any contingency, social or natural.

Elaborating on his resistance to categorizing human suffering as punishment, Schleiermacher notes that when social evil arises, the suffering it engenders is quite logically seen as a punishment for sin, but he emphasizes that these logical consequences are rightly understood as “punishment” only in a corporate sense. Specifically, he maintains that the individual cannot be understood as punished by moral evil, because the consequences of group action commonly extend beyond the direct agents of the wrongdoing (as in the sins of the father that are borne by the son). Moreover, he points to commonsense recognition that even entirely natural evil affects people without regard for their individual sin. Thus, suffering due to natural causes is not distinct in meaning from social sin, in terms of punishment, and in either case (social or natural) it constitutes punishment only to the degree that one sins by perceiving as evil a hindrance that is rightly perceived as an opportunity for more perfect God-consciousness. It is in this way that a change in perception constitutes the redeeming transition from entirely sensible self-consciousness to that level of consciousness informed by God-consciousness: the feeling of absolute dependence that bridges the antitheses of self and object and of sensible pleasure and pain.

Friedrich Nietzsche:

A Psychological Critique of Christian Soteriology

Never yield to remorse, but at once tell yourself: remorse would simply mean adding to the first act of stupidity a second.

Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*

... that which is necessary does not offend me. *Amor fati* is the core of my nature.

Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

Friedrich Nietzsche and Schleiermacher, bookends to the chronological nineteenth century, reflect its proto-psychological turn to the subject, each of them understanding personal perception as the ground of human suffering. They are useful conversation partners, in the context of my project, for two further reasons. First, Nietzsche uses Schleiermacher as an exemplar of the Christian thought he rejects, referring to him on multiple occasions, both individually and as one of a number of theologians and philosophers. In my analysis, Nietzsche's critique of Christian thought thus functions broadly as a response to Schleiermacher's work. Second, in Nietzsche's critique of Christianity and (more broadly) much of Western culture, his methodology, like mine in large measure, is profoundly psychological, indeed in Nietzsche's case proto-Freudian. Nietzsche is thus one of the first major thinkers to critique Christian thought (in particular, its narratives of suffering, guilt, and redemption) from the perspective of contemporary psychology. He identifies the danger Christianity poses as fundamentally psychological in nature, at its foundation constraining the growth of the individual and collective human spirit such that humankind is never free either from crippling shame and guilt or from an infantilizing (if comfortable) dependence on a mythical source of redemption.

Nietzsche closes the preface to his final work, the autobiographical memoir *Ecce Homo*, with a long quotation from his alter ego, Zarathustra, urging his disciples to

arm yourselves against Zarathustra . . . better still, be ashamed of him! . . . The man who remaineth a pupil requiteth his teacher but ill. . . . Take heed, lest a statue crush you. . . . Ye are my believers: but of what account are all believers? . . .

Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have found yourselves will I come back to you.²⁷

With apparent consistency, given his wholesale rejection of religion and having spoken of his intention to overthrow the idols with which he associates ideals, Nietzsche eschews the role of "prophet . . . founder

27. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 5.

of religions” for Zarathustra.²⁸ Nonetheless, Nietzsche commonly deploys traditionally theological language: “disciple” not only for Zarathustra’s followers, but also for himself as “a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus”;²⁹ insight as “revealed” to him; and “the elect” as those who have the capacity to receive Zarathustra’s message.³⁰ Moreover, the very title of his memoir (and last book), *Ecce Homo*, evokes Pilate’s words to the crowd as he presents to them the battered Jesus: “Behold, the man.”³¹ Nietzsche’s use of this phrase also suggests that he sees himself as a Christ figure, of course, albeit in the form of an Anti-Christ. If we identify Nietzsche with Zarathustra, the latter’s parting promise that he “will come back to” his disciples (cited above) is yet another Christological reference. At one and the same time, then, Nietzsche rejects all religion, especially Christianity, and offers his alter ego as a Christ figure.

At mid-twentieth century, Paul Tillich will offer Nietzsche (among others) as an example of his contention that all modern Western philosophy, even if it rejects the existence of God (or declares God “dead,” as does Nietzsche) is fundamentally shaped by Christianity, and “In [that] sense, all modern philosophy is Christian philosophy.” In other words, as Tillich observes, in order to posit an Anti-Christ (as Nietzsche does of himself—he is thus both Christ and Anti-Christ), one must necessarily acknowledge the Christ.³² The nature of Nietzsche’s opposition to religion, from his own perspective as well as Tillich’s, is thus complex, although his rejection of Christianity and condemnation of its influence on the West is not only utterly, but also in many ways violently contemptuous.

Nietzsche repeatedly identifies Schleiermacher as one of many dangerously deluded German theologians and philosophers (along

28. As becomes clear, Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and his critique of philosophy are much alike; he holds Christianity largely to blame for the shortcomings of Western philosophy (especially German Idealism), although he also targets Platonism and its influence on Christianity. He advocates a return to what he perceives as the life-engendering “Dionysian” philosophy of ancient Greece.

29. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 94, 2. Also see 131.

30. *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

31. John 19:5 (Vulgate).

32. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume I*, 27. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 60.

with Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Schopenhauer, among others), referring to him singly or in such a group in at least eleven contexts, spanning four major texts (including *Ecce Homo*) and six fragments.³³ The degree to which Nietzsche knew Schleiermacher's work is not clear, but he does play on the name itself in *Ecce Homo*, where he describes a group of thinkers (this time including Hegel and Fichte) as *Schleiermachers*—literally, makers of veils—with reference to their obscuring rather than illuminating reality.³⁴ Regardless of the particularity of the Schleiermacher references, however, the distinctions between Nietzsche and Schleiermacher are illustrative of Nietzsche's chief critiques of Christianity: that it fosters human weakness and obscures (if not obfuscates) reality.

In his argument that Christianity is the source of cultural, intellectual, and individual decay (and therefore weakness), Nietzsche characteristically focuses on Christian narratives of good and evil, suffering, guilt, and redemption. He inverts conventional Christian tropes of morality, insisting that they undermine human progress by denying the truth of human nature, including human greatness, and the contingencies of human existence. Representative is his condemnation of Christian and philosophical “belief in the ideal” as an error not of “blindness,” but of “cowardice,” one of the vices that Nietzsche most abhors.³⁵

Psychology is a prominent and explicit aspect of Nietzsche's methodology, and he elucidates a specifically psychological perspective on socially embedded morality that grows out of and is reinforced by theology and philosophy together:

33. Based on an electronic search for Nietzsche's references to Schleiermacher of the digital edition of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke* (KGW), accessed in the Intellex Past Masters database through the Mulva Library, St. Norbert College, July 18, 2011 and previously. Including fragments, these references appear in at least ten volumes of the KGW. Nietzsche refers to Schleiermacher in *Untimely Meditations* (1876), *Human, All Too Human* (1879, 1880), *The Dawn* (1881), and *Ecce Homo* (1888). (In addition, he cites Schleiermacher's translation of *Phaedre*.) Generally, the references to Schleiermacher appear in a loose cluster between 1876 and 1885. As philosopher Joel Mann has noted, this is a not insignificant acknowledgment (albeit, a critical one) by Nietzsche of another thinker (personal communication).

34. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 126–27.

35. *Ibid.*, 3.

No one hitherto has felt Christian morality beneath him; to that end there were needed height, a remoteness of vision, and an abysmal psychological depth, not believed to be possible hitherto. . . . Was a single one of the philosophers who preceded me a psychologist at all, and not the very reverse of a psychologist—that is to say, a “superior swindler,” an Idealist? Before my time there was no psychology. To be the first in this new realm may amount to a curse; at all events, it is a fatality: *for one is also the first to despise*. My danger is the loathing of mankind.³⁶

Although Nietzsche uses the term “psychology” in a range of contexts, overall he deploys it, both conceptually and linguistically, in an exceptionally modern manner. He identifies himself as the “first psychologist” (in particular, the first psychologist of several categories, including both women and the Dionysian Greeks) and as “a psychologist without peer.” He brings to bear on his discussion of human nature and meaning-making what he calls “psychical analysis,” grounded in the unconscious, that anticipates (and to some degree may have influenced) Freud himself, a commonality that is perhaps most apparent in their respective discussions of the Unconscious and of human sexuality.³⁷ Nietzsche analyzes a wide range of human characteristics, articulating what will become known as defense mechanisms: love arising to contain envy (reaction formation), hostility functioning to conceal one’s own sense of vulnerability (identification with the aggressor), rage as a response to the “nakedness” of personal transparency (narcissistic).³⁸

The force of Nietzsche’s argument against Christian narratives of sin, guilt, and (particularly) shame, is that these narratives deepen and perpetuate human suffering, in large measure by sabotaging human character (the “spirit”) itself, destroying the possibility that humankind might flourish. Nietzsche discusses at length the phenomenon of socially praiseworthy, “good” individuals who—by the Christian account—are victims of original sin and their own depravity

36. *Ibid.*, 138 (italics original).

37. *Ibid.*, 44, 64, 69. For Nietzsche’s pre-Freudian “deep psychology” see, for example, *Ecce Homo*, 49 (on the superficiality of the conscious) and 66 (on chastity as “unnatural”).

38. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 168.

and thereby become (according to Nietzsche) paralyzed by the counterproductive regret and remorse that Nietzsche ties to Christian ideology. Ever more damning, Nietzsche points to paradoxical self-righteousness among Christians. He posits that Christians strengthen their own status and self-image at the expense of those persons who assert their freedom from the dictates of emotion and will themselves forward by taking responsibility for their past without regret. Neighbor love—arguably at the heart of the Christian message—is for Nietzsche a central exemplar of this self-serving strategy, its adherents laying (false) claim to the Christian virtue of charity, while compounding, through pity, their neighbors' suffering.³⁹ He thus articulates a strong relationship between pity and counterproductive—indeed, destructive—guilt. To compound one's own suffering and shame by seeing it as punishment for sin and therefore (directly or indirectly) divinely ordained is thus one movement in a cycle that also paradoxically includes self-perpetuating guilt and self-assurance of one's own goodness through hostile and handicapping pity for one's fellow sufferers.

Nietzsche advocates for acceptance of the past and its consequences as what one willed (or would have willed), and he inverts the conventional view of selfishness into strength of character. He offers as an affirmative argument for this philosophy its ground in reality, which he opposes to reliance on a mythical, supernatural being. He argues that his "selfish" action drives a reciprocal relationship with others in which he is free to benefit from the friend, but also (tellingly) to benefit the friend in return. At times, Nietzsche even describes himself in terms that sound conventionally charitable, although more often than not he uses inverted language. In one such instance, in elaborating upon the attack mode that is instinctive to his warrior heart, he offers several delimiting criteria. He attacks, for example, only "those things from which all personal differences are excluded, in which any such thing as a background of disagreeable experiences is lacking," so that "attacking is for me a proof of goodwill and, in certain

39. See, for example, *ibid.*, 159.

circumstances, of gratitude.”⁴⁰ Here and elsewhere, Nietzsche touches on a number of phenomena that eventually will be considered defense mechanisms by psychoanalysis. These include denial and reaction formation, the defensive attempt to manage unacceptably hostile impulses by virtue of a reversal in which one insists (for example) on one’s desire to do good. In the face of shame, for example, Nietzsche points to the attempt, through Christian virtues, to defend against selfish desires, the outcome (for Nietzsche) being sabotage not only of one’s own happiness, but that of the neighbors whom one is in effect patronizing, as well. “The overcoming of pity,” Nietzsche asserts, “I reckon among the noble virtues.”⁴¹

Nietzsche thus praises those (like himself, by his account) who pursue their own desires and at the same time embrace their fate (*amor fati*), including—most dramatically—the eternal recurrence of all things, which I discuss below. He accuses Schleiermacher and others of perpetuating the psychologically defensive Christian delusion that reinforces guilt and shame by teaching that to seek above all one’s own happiness is evidence of original sin, a consequence of the Fall, and that pity is a virtue, rather than a (conventionally) selfish defense against overwhelming shame and despair. Nietzsche understands self-perpetuated guilt and compounded suffering as the logical consequences of Christian narratives that drive the penitent sufferer toward regret and (by Nietzsche’s account, ill-placed) remorse. Instead of regret and sorrow, Nietzsche advocates a detached acceptance, bearing the burden of eternal recurrence by embracing it and saying of the past that it is what we willed, not what we deserved or what befell us, either ontologically or punitively. Elsewhere, he expounds on how Christian “aid” to the sufferer wounds his pride such that charity is remembered, not in gratitude, but as “a gnawing worm.”⁴²

40. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 23–24.

41. *Ibid.*, 17–18. J. LaPlanche and J. B. Pontalis define reaction formation as a “psychological attitude or habitus diametrically opposed to a repressed wish, and constituted as a reaction against it (e.g. bashfulness countering exhibitionistic tendencies). Reaction-formations may be highly localized, manifesting themselves in specific behaviour, or they may be generalized to the point of forming character-traits more or less integrated into the overall personality” *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Nicholson-Smith (London: Hogarth, 1973).

42. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 200–1.