

Anthony Million  
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“Fastened to the Yoke of Custom and Prejudice”: The Elaboration of Nietzsche’s  
Critiques of Christianity, 1887 – 1889

When Friedrich Nietzsche boldly declared that “God is dead,” he considered himself to be ushering in a new era in European history. Over one hundred years later, many intellectuals have agreed with him by citing his audacious statement as a catalyst for the post-modern condition, a formerly Christian Europe now without God at the center.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche’s statement that God is dead usually overshadows his arguments behind it however, including his critiques of Christianity. This paper seeks to trace Nietzsche’s critiques from 1887 to 1889 – the height of his damning reviews of a Christian-influenced Europe.

I intend to argue that Nietzsche’s most striking critiques were written and elaborated on from 1887 to 1889. Moreover, his arguments were concerned specifically with western society and what he saw as the root of its greatest problem. The problem was, in his mind, the origin of Christian moral foundations. I will reveal how Nietzsche was concerned with critiquing the origins of morality in Europe since Christianity served as the basis for it.

While most scholarship regarding Nietzsche is literary, philosophical, or theological, this paper is historical.<sup>2</sup> It will pay particular attention to *The Genealogy of*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Pippin, “Nietzsche and the Melancholy of Modernity,” *Social Research*, 66 (1999).  
<http://www.ebsco-host.com/> (accessed September 21, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Available historical scholarship on Nietzsche seems to be mostly biographical, however other approaches to understanding specific parts of his life have eluded me. For example, major works such as Walter Kaufman’s *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, R.J. Hollingsdale’s *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, which I use in this paper, and H.L. Menken’s *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* are biographical. While all of these books on Nietzsche’s life are accurate they tend to paint a picture of it as a

*Morals* (1887) and *The Antichrist* (1888) in chronological order as they formed the core of his striking attacks and represented significant charges against the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche's selected letters will serve a supplemental role to paint a picture of his most critical years.

Several events in Nietzsche's early life produced an informed opponent of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche was born October 15, 1844 as the son of a Lutheran pastor in Rocken, Germany.<sup>5</sup> His family had a tradition of involvement within the church, but this should not be taken to imply a strict environment as it was a route of cultural and social improvement to many at the time. This was the setting in which Nietzsche grew up; that of a religious family which raised him as a knowledgeable Christian, yet in a social environment tolerant of criticism.<sup>6</sup> Each of these factors opened the door to Nietzsche's critical writings in 1887 and 1888.

Nietzsche's education also guided him toward becoming a Christian detractor. After his father died in 1850, Nietzsche moved to Naumburg. While attending the Pforta school, it is assumed that the intellectual environment took a toll on the young Nietzsche as he became of the opinion that nothing, not even traditional beliefs, were above

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whole. This deflates the value of certain ideas and events which may be in themselves of historical note. His critiques of Christianity are one such example. Additionally, (and this take little but intuition to prove) Nietzsche is primarily discussed in philosophical, literary, or theological circles. The number of major works in these fields on Nietzsche are too many to even mention here.

<sup>3</sup> "Friedrich Nietzsche," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/> (accessed September, 21 2005). One only needs to look at the summaries of Nietzsche's books during this time period to see this. *On the Genealogy of Morals* directly critiqued Christianity in order to elaborate on arguments in *Beyond Good and Evil* and before. The *Antichrist* in turn elaborated on the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Each book was critical rather than constructive like Nietzsche's others.

<sup>4</sup> The examples that I present of Nietzsche's early life, while not comprehensive, are still important as a connection to the writing of his critiques. Giving too much off-topic information detracts from the subject so I have sought to keep it minimal.

<sup>5</sup> *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 3. Rocken was then part of Prussia.

<sup>6</sup> R.J. Hollingsdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

question. By the time he had moved on to the University, Nietzsche was decidedly non-religious having written that we are all “fastened to the yoke of custom and prejudice,” in regards to faith.<sup>7</sup> In forgoing his faith due to a sense of critical reasoning, Nietzsche opened to the possibility of critiquing religion by using his knowledge of it.

From 1864 to 1887 Nietzsche developed significantly as an intellectual, philosopher, and writer thus bringing him to the period where he wrote his critiques. At only twenty four years of age he became a Professor of Philology, reflecting a study of life, languages, and thought in antiquity at Basil, Switzerland. Influenced by Wagner and Schopenhauer during this time period, Nietzsche’s chronic health problems which plagued him for the rest of his life also surfaced.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he wrote to lifetime friend Franz Overbeck that he had suffered 118 days of significant illness in 1879.<sup>9</sup> This illness brought Nietzsche to resign from his Professorship that year, but the continuation of studying on his own terms. By 1887 Nietzsche had formulated several complete books, outlined a general philosophy that rejected Christianity as an inadequate basis for western morality, and hypothesized that a “will to power” should constitute what is right.<sup>10</sup> All of

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<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Fate and History*, March 1862, quoted in R.J. Hollingsdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25. Hollingsdale presented one of Nietzsche’s early essays in highlighting this. “If we could regard the teachings of Christianity and the history of the church with a free and impartial eye, we should arrive with many commonly-held ideas. But as we are, fastened to the yoke of custom and prejudice from our earliest days, hindered in the development of our intellect by the impress of our childhood,... we believe ourselves compelled to think we have committed almost a crime if we take up a free standpoint from which to pass a judgment on religion and Christianity is above partisanship and corresponds to the needs of our time.”

<sup>8</sup> David Krell and Donald Bates, *The Good European: Nietzsche’s Work Sites in Word and Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6, 39-47. It is likely that Nietzsche contracted syphilis during his student years which lead to his collapse in 1889. Although absolute proof is lacking, and other explanations for his eventual insanity exist, none of these account for the symptoms and historical medical documentation as the syphilis charge does.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, Letter to Franz Overbeck, January 1880, quoted in Malcom Brown, “1880,” *Nietzsche Chronicle*, 2005, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~fnchron/>

<sup>10</sup> Stanford, 4-7. The idea of the “will to power” was argued by Nietzsche to be the correct foundation of morality. It meant that an individual should act out of inner strength rather than according to religious commandments, out of justness, or the like.

this was done – famously of course – while staying rooted to no single place and forgoing a normal social life. It was this prior context which brought Nietzsche to write his two harshest critiques on Christianity: a wandering, chronically ill academic, familiar with antiquity, critical of Christian value origins, and with the time to write and reflect upon it all.

In the preface to *The Genealogy of Morals* of 1887, Nietzsche acknowledged the role of his earlier works in formulating his critiques by stating:

My thoughts concerning the genealogy of our moral prejudices – for they constitute the issue in this polemic – have their first, bald, and provisional expressing in ... Human, all-too-Human, [another of Nietzsche's books written ten years prior] ... They were in their substance already the same thoughts which I take up again.<sup>11</sup>

Nietzsche had thought of and dealt with the subject of Europe's moral genealogy before 1887. *The Genealogy of Morals* was meant to build upon his prior works, especially *Beyond Good and Evil* of 1886.<sup>12</sup> Unlike *Beyond Good and Evil*, however *The Genealogy* focused completely on issues that levied criticism against Christian and European moral origins.<sup>13</sup> Three issues were addressed in *The Genealogy*: slave morality, moral guilt, and ascetic ideals.<sup>14</sup> After discussing his intentions Nietzsche moved to the topic of slave morality, something he would take up again as the primary criticism of Christian morality in *The Antichrist*.

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<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, transl. Horace Samuel (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 2.

<sup>12</sup> To Peter Gast, 18 July 1887, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 269. In a letter to "Peter Gast" [Heinrich Kostlitz] on July 18, 1887 Nietzsche commented of his latest work, that, "I have at once vehemently exploited these [healthy] days and written a small polemical pamphlet which, I think, sharply focuses the problem of my last book ..."

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingsdale (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), 9. Hollingsdale remarked, "This book covers almost the whole range of Nietzsche's philosophical interests..." Since this is the case it is different than the purely critical *Genealogy*.

<sup>14</sup> Stanford, 7. It is worth mentioning that European morals and Christian morals – due to their origins – are intertwined.

The first essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* attacked Christianity by discussing slave morality or the Christian values of universal piety, humbleness, and subservience to God. It began by denying the conjecture that unselfish actions were originally labeled as “good” because they were useful, while selfish actions were labeled “bad” for being useless. Instead, Nietzsche argued that something else was the origin of the words “good” and “bad.” Looking back at these terms he wrote:

I found that [historically] they all led back to the same evolution of the same idea – that everywhere “aristocrat,” “noble” . . ., is the root idea, out of which have necessarily developed “good” in the sense of “with aristocratic soul,” . . . – a development which invariably runs parallel with that other evolution by which “vulgar,” “plebeian,” “low,” are made to change finally into “bad.”<sup>15</sup>

With this position stated, Nietzsche’s genealogical account became critical. He argued that slaves and the weak, needing a way to cope in a world of aristocratic dominance, looked to a religion and God who was on *their* side – the side of the oppressed!<sup>16</sup>

Nietzsche critiqued Christianity because its value origins were negative.

Nietzsche’s arguments did not stop at accepting that Christianity was a product of historical affairs. Since the downtrodden looked for a way to rationalize their weakness, he argued that they turned to religion neither out of faith nor love of neighbor but out of resentment.<sup>17</sup> Using an overt literary flair, Nietzsche explained how Christian resentment lead to the inversion of aristocratic to slave morality:

It is not surprising that the lambs should bear a grudge against the great birds of prey . . . And when the lambs say among themselves, “These birds of prey are evil, and he who is as far removed from being a bird of prey, who is rather the opposite, a lamb – is he not good? Then there is nothing to cavil at in the setting

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<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, 22-23. Backing up this argument Nietzsche gave the example of the German word “schlecht” (bad) and traced its connotation to “plebeian” or “slave.”

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> Ridiger Bittner, “Resentment,” in *Nietzsche: Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 127-138. Slave resentment existed because the weak were angry that they lived in a world where they could not thrive because of the aristocracy.

up of this idea, though it may also be that the birds of prey regard it a little sneeringly ... “We bear no grudge against them, these good lambs, we even like them: nothing is tastier than a tender lamb.”<sup>18</sup>

When looking past the obvious allusion between the bird of prey as a Roman imperial eagle and the lamb as the Biblical Lamb of God, we see that Nietzsche believed that early Christians – the slavish – inverted noble values by naming themselves good and their counterparts evil. In this light, Nietzsche’s presentation showed Christian teachings to be nothing more than a sham, a resentful reaction by oppressed individuals that ended in promoting their morality.<sup>19</sup>

According to Nietzsche, Christianity’s slave moral code eventually overcame the values of the Roman Empire. “Let us come to a conclusion,” he wrote in completing his critique in the first essay of *The Genealogy*:

The two *opposing values*, “good and bad,” “good and evil,” have fought a dreadful thousand-year fight ... “Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome” ... Which of them has been provisionally victorious, Rome or Judea, but there is not a shadow of doubt; just consider to whom in Rome itself nowadays you bow down ...<sup>20</sup>

Two things were done by writing this. Nietzsche brought the first essay full circle, argued its resentful roots. What was beyond was a destroyed world in which Nietzsche was versed – the Classical one. It is worth remembering that Nietzsche was a Philologist by training. Christianity replaced a world of aristocratic moral strength with weak-willed rationalization, subversion, and negative values.<sup>21</sup> As has been demonstrated, Nietzsche

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<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, 44-45.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, 50-51. “And how do they name that which serves them as a solace against all the troubles of life – their phantasmagoria of their anticipated future blessedness? “How? Do I hear it right? They call it ‘the last judgment,’ the advent of *their* kingdom, ‘the kingdom of God’ – but *in the meanwhile* they live ‘in faith,’ ‘in love,’ ‘in hope.’”

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, 53-55.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche 54, 211. Hollingsdale, 184. In order to explain Nietzsche’s contradiction regarding strength disparities between the Christian and Roman – after all the Christian actually seems stronger since she triumphed – Nietzsche explained why the Roman was superior. “[M]an will wish *Nothingness* rather than

attacked Christianity because its moral foundations existed in resentment and its teachings replaced the strong Roman notions of virtue.

The second essay of *The Genealogy*, which focused less on critiquing Christian than European morals still brought charges. Starting with a pre-Christian subject, Nietzsche attacked the genealogy of moral guilt. He wrote that in pre-classical times societies formed to make individuals predictable, allow them to recall their debts, and to exert individual will through co-operation. Morality at this point was only social custom.<sup>22</sup> Attentiveness to acting up to one's personal and social responsibility was the origin of conscience.<sup>23</sup> Guilt on the other hand formed because early cultures punished social debtors so that they did not forget their duties.<sup>24</sup> According to Nietzsche, guilt originated in the fear of punishment which was then a way of repaying debts.<sup>25</sup> With this argued, another critique was levied.

Nietzsche's second critique of Christianity held that deity worship added another dimension to the concept of guilt. With an all-powerful being in existence, it meant that *all debt* was really to God, including what would become moral debt. At one point Nietzsche said, "The appearance of the Christian God, as the record god up to this time, has for that very reason brought equally into the world record amounts of guilt consciousness."<sup>26</sup> According to Nietzsche, Christianity caused this by teaching that debt

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not wish *at all*," he said. Simplified, the Roman was superior because, according to Hollingsdale, "... a civilization deprived of positive goals destroys itself by willing the last thing left in its power – its own destruction; and it will will this rather than not will." The Romans then sought for positive goals and were destroyed in pursuing them. The Christians, on the other hand, wished only for the destruction of Rome, their "superiors," and developed negative goals. While each sought to attain certain ends the Romans did so in a way that fostered their true desires while the Christians focused only on what they resented.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, 63-64.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, 65. As opposed to the Christian belief that guilt is a reaction toward sin.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, 66. Along with the benefits they received by being in a social environment.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, 70-72.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, 109.

to God could never be paid because all men are inherently evil and undeserving of forgiveness.<sup>27</sup> To save us, Nietzsche wrote:

God personally immolat[ed] himself for the debt of man, God paying himself out of a pound of his own flesh, God as the one who can deliver man from what man had become unable to deliver himself – the creditor playing scapegoat for his debtor, from love (can you believe it?), from love of his debtor!...<sup>28</sup>

By ending this way, Nietzsche critiqued Christianity through the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*. Christianity manipulated the circumstances of its time by taking advantage of “guilt” and the fear of punishment, rationalized its environment using the concept of God, and took the idea of guilt to be a issue only curable by God. Since Nietzsche argued that guilt, debt, and the forgiveness really originated in pre-classical times, Christianity manipulatively took these ideas and adapted them to their idea of a God who shepherds the weak.

The third essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* addressed ascetic values and concluded the book. Attacking Christian priests, Nietzsche wrote, “And now we have and hold with both our hands the essence of the ascetic [Christian] priest. The ascetic priest must be accepted by us as the predestined savior, herdsman, and champion of the sick herd ... The lordship over sufferers is his kingdom...”<sup>29</sup> The role of Christian teachers in Nietzsche’s mind was to be a shepherd of the weak. In being shepherds it was argued that “it would be correct to say that the priest is the *diverter of the course of resentment*.”<sup>30</sup> That is, Christian priests made people forget their deep-seated resentment to the strong using religion. Moreover, the priest did this by easing the suffering of his fellows,

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, 111. The inherent disability for man to pay off his debts was, according to Nietzsche, the concept of “original sin.”

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, 111.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, 163. This is the resentment mentioned in essay one.

something even Christians would agree with. The priests also explained their followers suffering through false rationalization, according to Nietzsche, “Quite so, my sheep, it must be the fault of some one [that you are suffering]; but thou thyself art that some one, it is all the fault of thyself alone – it is the fault of thyself alone against thyself.”<sup>31</sup> To end suffering priests sought to dull senses, encourage herd-like selflessness, and distract the mind of the poor by blessing the value of labor.<sup>32</sup> All of these things, Nietzsche argued, helped the weak cope though they were blind to the real reason for their pain, adherence to weakness.

The final critique in the third essay of *The Genealogy* dealt with *other* priestly ways that helped the weak cope. Nietzsche said these other methods, “spell one thing: emotional excess...” and with this in mind quickly mentioned them.<sup>33</sup> He believed that teachers of Christianity taught that suffering was the result of personal actions and therefore punishment. Guilt, sin, and punishment were the methods of “emotional excess” that Nietzsche attacked as they kept individuals in situational containment. By this, he meant that individuals denied themselves human desires to live up to Christian virtues, but in doing so only made themselves feel worse. In living the life of a Christian ascetic, Nietzsche argued that Christians choose to remain weak, lowly, and plebeian yet ironically can only interpret all pain as punishment. Explaining, he wrote:

The sick [weak plebeian] man has turned into “the sinner” – and now for a few thousand years we never get away from the sight of this new invalid, of “a sinner” – shall we ever get away from it? ... everywhere the willful misunderstanding of suffering, its transvaluation into feelings of guilt, fear of retribution ...<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, 165.

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, 175.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, 177.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche 183,184.

Moreover, he reminded his readers that Christian morals had overcome Europe, writing that:

This grand old wizard of an ascetic priest fighting with depression – he has clearly triumphed, his kingdom has come: men no longer grumbled at pain, men panted after pain ...<sup>35</sup>

In critiquing Christianity and its values of self-denial, Nietzsche argued that Christian priests in order to help the weak cope taught certain religious tenets including guilt, sin and punishment to give suffering value, and that these beliefs brought meaningless pain due to regenerative feelings. Only in the afterlife was the pain of being innately bad ever guaranteed to end. To Nietzsche, Christianity cruelly elevated pain and suffering on Earth to a point of ethical masochism.

Between the writing of *The Genealogy* and *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche wrote two letters to Franz Overbeck and stated that he felt that his writings had been and would become more vicious. On February 3, 1888, he jotted down:

My latest book [*The Genealogy*] showed something of this; in the state of a bow strung to the highest possible tension, any emotion is good for me provided it is a violent emotion. No more “beautiful things are to be expected of me; no more than one should expect a suffering and starving animal to attack its prey gracefully.”<sup>36</sup>

On October 18<sup>th</sup> he wrote to Overbeck again about what would later become *The Antichrist*:

The first book of the transvaluation of values is finished, ready for press, I announce to you with a feeling which I have no words. ... This time – as an old artilleryman – I bring out my heavy guns; I am afraid that I am shooting the history of mankind into two halves.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, 184.

<sup>36</sup> To Franz Overbeck, 3 February, 1888, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 282.

<sup>37</sup> To Franz Overbeck, 18 October, 1888, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 315. Hollingsdale, 219. Malcom Brown, “1888,” *Nietzsche Chronicle*, 2005, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~fnchron/> Hollingsdale has argued that *The Transvaluation of Values* was an abandoned work from which *The Antichrist* became its own piece. While there were hints that Nietzsche was in the process of writing a four part book in which *The Antichrist* would

Nietzsche had no qualms about writing powerfully or *Allegro feroce* as he put it.<sup>38</sup> The letter of February 3, written after *The Genealogy*, hinted that Nietzsche would no longer expect himself to write in a gentle manner. It is not surprising then, that the aptly named *Antichrist* from 1888 was more hostile of Christian morality than *The Genealogy*.<sup>39</sup>

If *The Genealogy* was composed in the musical tempo *Allegro feroce*, then *The Antichrist* was *Allegro con fuoco* (with fire). According to Dartmouth professor Malcolm Brown, “Although the manuscript was completed at the time of [Friedrich Nietzsche’s] collapse [in 1889], the work was not published until 1895 ... Even when *Der Antichrist* appeared in 1895, four passages, still considered too provocative were suppressed.”<sup>40</sup> The book’s thesis argued what the first essay of *The Genealogy* did: that Christian morals formed from resentment to aristocratic Roman overlords.<sup>41</sup> Yet the detail and ferocity of *The Antichrist* made it contain some of the most overt of Nietzsche’s critiques.

In the first few pages, Nietzsche let loose his spirit upon Christian principles by arguing that:

We must not deck out and adorn Christianity: it has waged a deadly war upon this *higher* type of man, it has set a ban on all the fundamental instincts of this type, and has distilled evil and the devil himself out of these instincts: – Christianity has sided with everything weak, low, and botched...<sup>42</sup>

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have been the first, his capacity for self-critique was strong. Since writing a book based on older ideas would have done little it was abandoned.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Samtliche Briefe, Krirische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 8. (Berlin and Munich: Walter de Gruyter and Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 154, quoted in David Krell and Donald Bates, *The Good European: Nietzsche’s Work Sites in Word and Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 142.

Krell and Bates, 142. Krell and Bates presented a passage from Nietzsche’s letters where he referred to *The Genealogy*’s tone as having, “naked, raw, verdant passion.”

<sup>39</sup> Hollingsdale, 199. Because Nietzsche went insane in 1889 it seems acceptable to chalk up his works to instability. This is not a realistic approach. During Nietzsche’s late life his writings were in line with what he believed, organized as always, held an excellent command of the German language, and when delusions of grandeur appeared – they were approached *sanely*.

<sup>40</sup> Malcom Brown, “1888,” *Nietzsche Chronicle*, 2005, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~fnchron/>

<sup>41</sup> Stanford, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Trans. Anthony Ludivici (Amhurst: Prometheus Books, 2000), 6.

Moreover, “Christianity is called the religion of pity. – Pity is opposed to the tonic passions which enhance the energy of the feeling of life: its action is depressing ... On the whole, pity thwarts the law of Natural development which is the law of selection.”<sup>43</sup> In a nearly Social-Darwinist manner, Nietzsche merged his philosophical beliefs to the issue of slave morality in order to critique Christianity’s role as shepherd of the downtrodden. Nietzsche argued that Christianity subverted traditional values, but in doing so promoted weakness. Since he believed in the supreme value of strength, this was inexcusable to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche presented several minor ethical critiques of Christianity in *The Antichrist* as well. One regarded Jesus as a teacher of morality and stated, “This ‘messenger of glad tidings’ died as he lived and as he taught – *not* in order to ‘save mankind,’ but in order to show how one ought to live.”<sup>44</sup> In this passage Nietzsche critiqued the church and claimed that Christ was not a supernatural savior who opened a passage to the afterlife. Instead, he was an exemplar whose followers did not learn their master’s moral lesson. Backing this critique Nietzsche wrote, “truth to tell, there was never more than one Christian and he *died* on the Cross.”<sup>45</sup> In this critique within *The Antichrist*, he portrayed Christians as the false students of Jesus.

The final critique presented in *The Antichrist* related to Nietzsche’s Professorship as a Philologist. Because of the conversion of the ancient world to Christianity, he critiqued Christianity as responsible for the destruction antiquity’s best parts. To Nietzsche, the growth of Christianity subverted scientific thinking for religion and

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<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, 54.

aristocratic culture by replacing it with God worship, guilt, the restraint of natural tendencies, and promotion of weakness through slave moral codes.<sup>46</sup>

Two of Nietzsche's writings from 1887 to 1889 – *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Antichrist* – were very critical regarding Christianity (they argued a number of points from varying perspectives) but each book attacked the Christian faith. Moreover, all attacks centered around critiquing the origins of Christian prescriptions of moral conduct. *The Genealogy of Morals* argued that Christianity arose out of resentment, that it manipulated the idea of guilt to work with the idea of a Christian God, and that its ascetic ideals brought un-needed suffering into the world. *The Antichrist* resubstantiated Nietzsche's critiques against Christianity by arguing that it inverted aristocratic values, that Christians were not truly followers of Jesus, and that Christianity destroyed the classical world's best traits.

On January 4, 1889, Nietzsche wrote a letter to the composer "Peter Gast" after experiencing a mental breakdown from which he never recovered. It read, "To my maestro Pietro. Sing me a new song: the world is transfigured and all the heavens rejoice. The Crucified."<sup>47</sup> Regardless of his eventual insanity, Nietzsche launched an onslaught of critiques against the Christianity from 1887 to 1889 and felt that the world – the world of European morality – had been transfigured. Specifically, it was transfigured because Christianity, with roots of resentment, replaced aristocratic values with weak slave ones, changed guilt into something religious, and promoted ascetic ideas of pointless suffering.

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<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, 100-102. "The whole labor of the ancient world [was] in vain: I am at a loss for a word which could express my feelings at something so atrocious ... the whole significance of the ancient world was certainly in vain! ... All the prerequisites of a learned culture, all the scientific methods already existed ... One only needs to read any one of the Christian agitators – St Augustine, for instance ..."

<sup>47</sup> To Peter Gast, 4 January 1889, *Nietzsche: Unpublished Letters*, Ed. and trans. Kurt Lidecker (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 153.