

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

Requiem for a deity

God, at last, is dead – and we have killed Him

One must philosophize, Nietzsche proclaims, *with a hammer*.

For too long human beings have created idols then bowed down before them and suffered. Reason, the “real world,” the soul, free will, morality – all idols. And then the greatest of them all: *God*. But when confronted with an idol – one must *start smashing*.

For some time now God has slowly been dying at the hands of the philosophers. They’ve seen that the cruder conceptions of God, as a person, a father, a judge, cannot bear scrutiny. And they have seen that the many attempts to prove God’s existence are all fatally flawed. But finally to refute the God hypothesis we must go a step further. We must examine how this belief originally arose and managed to acquire its weight. When we recognize where it came from we shall no longer be tempted by it.

Where it came from was human weakness. From everything inferior in human beings. From the worst in, and of, us. That is the shameful origin of the God hypothesis, in the form specifically of Christianity.

That lambs dislike great birds of prey is not strange; only it gives no ground for *reproaching* these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say, “These birds of prey are evil;

and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb – would he not be good?” there is no reason to find fault with this, except that the birds of prey might view it rather ironically and say, “*We don’t dislike them at all; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.*”

This is the story of Christianity. The ancient world had their powerful, their aristocratic, and their strong, but also their weak and lowly and meek. All understood that it was good to be the former and bad to be the latter. But then the priests, resenting their lower status, pulled off a dramatic *inversion of values* – by teaching that the wretched alone are the good. The poor, the impotent, the suffering, the sick, the ugly, they claimed, are alone blessed and loved by God, and all the rest are evil. The weak could not literally defeat the strong so they did the next best thing: they invented a worldview in which they are the greater.

It was brilliant and cunning. But they had to go further. Since no one seriously could believe that being weak is better than being strong they invented another world, an afterworld, where the lowly here would prosper and the superior would suffer. They did so to slander *this* world, this reality, this life, since they were such failures in it. This fiction was their mechanism for coping with their failure; and they became addicted to it, as so many still are today. People believe in God because they cannot manage in this life.

They believe in God because they are too afraid not to.
But this life is all there is.

And one must *embrace* it, and *love* it, and most of all *live* it. For life, the will to life, the will to power – this is the fundamental, the *only* value. God was born in our sickness, in our weakness.

* From Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1966), p. 44.

THE GOD QUESTION

But understanding this we become healthy and strong enough, at last, to reject Him.

And so, at last, God is dead – and we who created Him have killed Him.

RELATED CHAPTERS

56 Feuerbach, 58 Marx, 62 Freud.

PART V

CONTEMPORARY

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