

The Active Nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche

"Among the thinkers to whom Julius Evola referred in each of the successive moments of his intellectual activity and his personal spiritual and doctrinal search, Giovanni Perez says, Nietzsche is certainly prominent. The work of the German philosopher regarding, on the one hand, the ethical problem and 'meaning of life' generally, and, on the other hand - although it remained, to say the least, unformulated - the problem of God, represented a horizon of reference to which Evola was careful to devote constant attention in each of the phases in which his complex human experience sought to clarify itself : an experience in which there was expressed a vocation, both to the domain of thought and speculation, and to that of action."

Together with Plato, Rimbaud, Novalis, Marinetti, Tzara and others, Nietzsche is thus one of the authors who contributed to the formation of the young Evola, in his 'artistic period'. "The reading of Nietzsche helped him substantially to develop an anti-realistic, celebratory notion of the creative 'I' of art, in terms of absolute freedom - or at least of the demand for this - and of 'egoism'. (...) Here, the parallel is evident with the Nietzschean need to oppose the so-called values which have led our world to its present decline, and with the Nietzschean need for nihilism, or for a radical 'transvaluation of all values', whose realisation must necessarily pass through the stage of the actualisation of nihilism, understood as absolute negation. Even then, the problem, as Evola saw it, was to decide whether, and how, it might be possible to conceive of the tabula rasa of dadaist nihilism as an originary 'zero point', not as preparatory to a final self-dissolution, but as a starting point towards what is above, towards the 'skies'. (...) The whole theoretical systematisation of Dadaism in Evola shows his determination to employ it as an opening to transcendence, a determination which, besides, is at the root of his criticism of Nietzsche...".

In what Evola himself called his 'speculative period', between 1923 and 1927, which was inspired by neo-idealism, through which he pursued "the way out of, and, at the same time, the answer to, the fundamental problem of modern philosophy, which is the gnoseological problem, or problem of knowledge (...) the meeting points between his philosophical views and Nietzsche's are easily identified : first, the need to transcend the 'I' as it actually manifests itself, if possible, which relates to the concept of the 'Superman' ; and, second, the need to interpret, and live in, the world, no longer or not only in terms of knowledge, but in terms of 'power'. The Nietzschean 'will-to-power' appeared here as the 'reagent' for the elaboration of the doctrine of 'Man as power'" - a book in which, however, Evola expressed an evaluation of Buddhism diametrically opposed to that of Nietzsche, who, in 'The Genealogy of Morals', stated that the ascetic ideal is a symptom of 'disease', of 'softening', and thus of 'nihilism'. Even then, Evola distanced himself from Nietzsche, also, with respect to the question of Dionysianism, criticising him for being unable to develop a "real overcoming of the order of nature, given that 'Nature' can only be overcome by being brought back to a 'Principle'." In other words, if the Dionysian path "is right to reject the merely devotional, consoling religiosity which negates the 'I' as incapable of transcendence, it is wrong in that it actually regresses to the 'naturalistic' horizon." In fact, the problem for Evola became that of "determining whether, and how, it is possible for the 'I' to be

absolute dominion and power over itself, and over things, as an expression of an equally absolute freedom, overcoming, thus, the merely cognitive limits within which philosophical idealism was confined. This overcoming of the merely cognitive domain was what Evola meant by the term 'magic', (...) and here, he takes up again the distinction made by Nietzsche between 'freedom from' and 'freedom for'." In sum, for the young Evola, "the true overcoming of Christianity cannot be atheism, nor, a fortiori, general irreligiosity, both of which are prominent in, and typical of, Nietzschean 'Dionysianism', but, logically, it can only be the ability, or possibility, of becoming God, of being God, of returning to one's proper identity with God, since the absurdity of the opposite path, that of God becoming man, has been established."

Various references to Nietzsche can also be found in his works of the 1930's on the question of race, 'Il Mito del sangue' and 'Sintesi di dottrina della razza'. From these, it is obvious that, "for Evola, the interpretations of the race theorists of some Nietzschean categories are completely one-sided, based on the 'worst' aspects of Nietzsche's thought, and rendered possible by the fact that the German philosopher did not manage to place these categories - that of the 'Superman', to begin with - in a frame of reference transcending the naturalistic one of 'Life'."

After his overcoming of merely philosophical categories of experience, and his meeting with thinkers such as De Giorgio, Reghini, and Guénon, Evola's reading of Nietzsche becomes even more critical. "Even though the German thinker had grasped the decadent nature of what was defined in 'Revolt' as the 'Modern World', higher points of reference which would have enabled him to overcome it were lacking. With Nietzsche, essentially, we remain within the world of 'décadence'." "From this point on, then, Evola saw his task as that of finding, in Nietzsche's reported experience, elements of higher possibilities which might have indicated an authentic overcoming of that nihilism which the German philosopher had so accurately predicted as the unavoidable outcome and fate of the whole culture originating in Socratism, Platonism, Christianity, and, finally, Wagnerism." As a matter of fact, Evola managed to find a positive, albeit partial, contribution in the Nietzschean experience : "It is not so much a philosophical idea in the narrow sense, but, once again, a precise indication of the existential attitude which a 'differentiated' human type capable of grasping the announcement of Zarathustra must give to himself."

"According to Evola, Nietzsche offers an answer to the question of the 'meaning of life after nihilism', which, to a certain extent, is not very far from the teachings of certain traditional ethics and doctrines : to assert oneself, to realise oneself, to acknowledge as one's sole law that which corresponds to one's own nature, one's innermost being, and to make it something absolute ; such has been, for Nietzsche, the only authentic 'categorical imperative'." This is precisely the core idea of the sixth chapter of 'Riding the Tiger', which is entitled 'Active Nihilism - Nietzsche', and is chronologically the eighth piece of writing dedicated by Evola to the German philosopher (leaving aside 'Nietzsche, l'incompreso', the first section of the fifth chapter of 'Heidnischer Imperialismus', which the reader will have the opportunity to read in our forthcoming English translation).

The first, 'Noi antimoderni', which echoes the chapter of the same name in 'Imperialismo pagano', was published in 'La Torre' in January 1930. The second, 'sorpessamento del superuomo' (1934), and the last, 'Nichilismo e senso della vita in Nietzsche' (1971), which became the preface to his Italian translation of Robert Reininger's 'Friedrich

Nietzsches Kampf um den Sinn des Lebens', seem to us perfectly representative of Evola's views on Nietzsche, which have never varied, from his early years to his maturity, but only become more refined.

The Overcoming of the Superman

The facility with which ideas lacking any real consistency sometimes acquire an evocative force, to the point of becoming a sort of alibi for the passions, is amazing : those who have held them to be true, experience them as such so vividly that they end up believing they have found confirmations of them in their own deepest experiences.

This can be said, for example, of evolutionism and Darwinism. The theory of the descent of man from the beast, and of the selection of the species through the affirmation of the strongest over the various conditions of the environment, through adaptation and hereditary transmission of acquired characters - this materialistic and anti-aristocratic myth of the scientism of yesterday - there isn't anyone, now, who sees it as anything more than a wavering hypothesis, which has had its day, and which, as time goes by, is progressively stripped of its presumed 'positive' bases. Nevertheless, this theory, until yesterday, appeared to a whole generation almost as a revelation : not as an hypothesis among many others, to be considered and tested within the strictly scientific field, but rather as a new and certain vision of the world, an illuminating discovery, and a new consciousness acquired once and for all by mankind.

And here we find art such as that of Jack London, a typical example of the passionate alibi which we referred to. Jack London often makes us really live the theory of evolution and natural selection. Serving as the basis for his general conception of life, in a whole series of personages, vicissitudes, descriptions and episodes, it seems true, indeed obvious, to us. The evocative force of art makes it seem as if a world really existed, in which biological heredity, the instinct of conservation, and the struggle for existence were indeed the fundamental driving forces, and the supreme human type appears more or less as that of the magnificent beast, the animal which, in the fullness of all its energies and of all its vital instincts, has prevailed over everything, has resisted everything, moreover, as sum of a series of heredities transmitted to us through the dark ways of blood, from the primordial times of the savage dweller of forests and icy deserts, if not even of ferocious pre-humanity.

The atmosphere in which the myth of the 'superman' has taken shape and developed is not very different. This is due in part to Nietzsche himself. We say, in part, because the philosophy of Nietzsche is made up of elements which are much more heterogenous and varied than most people realise. It is however undeniable that the evolutionist superstition, with its biological appendices, has greatly influenced one aspect of Nietzschean thought, which is far from peripheral, and which is naturally the worst. And it can be said that, until yesterday, what has been most widely understood in Nietzsche is generally this aspect, precisely because it was the one which was most directly connected to ideas prevalent in our time.

The Nietzschean theory of the 'superman' is an appendix of naturalism, and, as such, is something which belongs by now to the past, and, taken as it is, could only succeed in diverting the aspirations of the best of the new generation - to the extent that it begins and ends in the 'religion of life' or, better, in the 'superstition of life'. This is how we think we should describe a conception at whose centre lies pure vitality, in its simply biological meaning - which natural scientists consider from the

outside, with the same methods as those they apply to matter, while 'voluntarists', 'intuitionists' and 'actionists' try instead to know it in the form of direct feeling, of the immediate data of consciousness. But, either way, this principle is purely animal, instinctive, pre-personal life, it is the root and the deep will of that in us which is merely body and nature.

Now, it seems that the conceptions of which we are speaking cannot see anything else in man, or that, if they do discern something else, they see it only as secondary and derivative with respect to 'life'. The 'I', for them, is not a supernatural principle, it is not the expression of another reality, but is more or less the feeling of the vital force, a feeling which can be increased or diminished, fortified or exhausted.

It is solely from this that the famous Nietzschean concept of the "reversal of all values" - *Umwertung aller Werte* - and the consequent theory of power, originate and derive their meaning. A whole system of ethical, social and religious conceptions, according to this theory, conspired for centuries against 'life', and favoured an ominous mis-selection, by exalting as value and spirit all that mortifies and emasculates instinct, that veils or lowers the feeling of the vital force. These conceptions are the values of 'decline' and 'ressentment' announced by the slaves, the weak, the underprivileged, the outcasts of nature, who, through them, have overcome the basis on which, in strong and sound times, the superman, and the right of the superman as master of men, depended, and have prevailed. Nietzsche proclaims the revolt against these "values of decline", unmasks their poisonous nature, and offers as principle of a new judgement the criterion that only what confirms the vital instinct, what justifies the vital instinct, what strengthens the vital instinct, whose maximum expression is for him the will-to-power, can be said to be true, moral, legitimate, spiritual and beautiful ; that which detracts from life, limits life, condemns life and chokes off the will-to-power, is false, immoral, bad and subversive. A new religion of the will-to-power is proclaimed by Nietzsche, as prelude to the advent of a new age of the superman.

It must be recognised that, by "will-to-power", Nietzsche does not mean solely the will to outer dominion, but intends also inner dominion. The superman is not only the dominator of men, but also the one who knows to render his own instincts, developed up to an elementary, frightening vehemence, subject also to his own absolute mastery, and yet not in the sense of choking them off, but rather of holding them, almost like wild animals, ready to release whenever he so desires. However, in both cases, that is, as dominator of himself, as also in the domination of the exterior world, in the aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy which we consider here, the whole thing always ends up being reduced to mere feeling. The value of the will-to-power, arduously developed through the paths of both good and evil, through the most extreme tests, bounded only by the most insane limits, ruthless both towards itself and towards others - this value is always that of an increased and exacerbated feeling of 'life', and of an 'I' which draws its self-consciousness and its self-confirmation from nothing else but this wild feeling itself.

The wave swells, but does not find outlet, does not find transfiguration. Exasperation, basically, runs in neutral ; asceticism is dark, almost 'diabolical', enjoying itself, devoid of superior meaning.

One commentator on Nietzsche, George Simmel, has spoken about vicissitudes in which the extreme intensity of life transforms itself and almost changes into a different quality, a 'more-than-life'. But,

in the world of the Nietzschean Superman, the premises for this to achieve reality are missing : there is lacking an idea, a point of reference, which acts, so to speak, as transformer in the circuit of life, and which actualises it as 'light', as 'super-life' - as revelation and affirmation of everything supernatural. Apollo, that is, the Olympian principle, the Olympian superiority, interpreted by Nietzsche as a symbol of exteriority and unreality, always remains for him a danger, the enemy of Dionysos, that is, of life, the uncontrollable impulse of life, which gorges itself on itself, says 'yes' to itself, and does not want to be different from what it is, considering every after-life as an illusion and as an escape for impotent and sick people. The circle remains closed. And we remain convinced that, since he evoked, even though unconsciously and on the speculative plane, an apex of life to whose intensity only a supernatural point of reference could be adequate, and since he did not possess such a point of reference, so that this intensity, forced back in itself, so to speak, caused a short-circuit - we remain convinced that this situation was what really led Nietzsche to a tragic end, to madness.

If "man is something that must be overcome", if "man is a bridge which leads from the beast to the Superman", this overcoming, this passage, is illusory, unless one works from the premise of the existence of two opposite natures, two opposite worlds, and if one continues instead to consider 'life', and 'life' alone, in its various forms and intensities, as everything.

Today, racism seems to build upon the worst aspect of Nietzsche's heritage, in that it tends to reduce every value to a biological basis, to make life, blood, and race the measure and condition of every spiritual form, and thus falls into a distorting reductionism which quite simply closes off the path towards true overcoming and true super-humanity.

What we consider to be the basis of value, and what was always traditionally considered to be such, is that 'life' is not spirit and spirit is not 'life', but that spirit gives shape to 'life', and that what in 'life' shows a truly superior and dominating character does not originate from 'life', but is a manifestation, through or by means of 'life', of spirit, that is, of everything supernatural. Once the true centre is recognised in these terms, clearly the first precondition for any true overcoming is the gradual shift of one's self-consciousness, one's sense of one's own 'I', from the pole of 'life' to the pole of 'spirit'. Now, the various voluntarist, actionist, purportedly racist tendencies at work today are striving in precisely the opposite direction : by strengthening, using all possible means, the purely physical and 'vital' feeling of the 'I', they simultaneously strengthen the prison of the latter, and create a hardening, an insolence, an exasperating and materialistic perception of will, individuality, health and power, all of which represent so many obstructions to inner emancipation. And the circuits then remain closed. The point of reference for the 'self-transformation' of the 'intensively lived life' into 'more-than-life' is lacking. The Superman does not go beyond the "beautiful domineering beast" or the "demon" of Dostoevsky - this is the reductio ad absurdum of Nietzsche. Devoid of outlet, every evoked intensity cannot but give rise to a lacerating hypertension, internally - to the dumb tragedy which the 'titan' always bears in himself.

The true type of the Superman is, rather, Olympian : a calm greatness which expresses an irresistible superiority, something which terrifies and at the same time compels veneration, which prevails and disarms without fighting, establishing suddenly the feeling of a transcendent force, completely under control but totally capable of

release, the wonderful and frightening sense which antiquity associated with the concept of the numen. Supra-life - that is, spirit, totally realised in its supernatural aspect - which permeates and governs absolutely everything which is 'life', is the substance here. But this type, the true Superman, cannot be treated merely as a construction of the thought of today. There is no great tradition of antiquity, whether of the East or of the West, which did not possess it. The tradition of the 'divine right' of the legitimate Kings, because they were the virile bearers of a force from above, is its last echo. To conceive the sudden re-emergence of this ancient conception, in a world where every great horizon was dead, where, to serve as immediate ideological substance for its incarnation, there were only the profane and opaque myths of evolutionism and natural selection, and a confused need for force and liberation - to conceive this is also to understand the invisible genesis of the theory of the Nietzschean Superman, its limit, and the path which can lead beyond it.

Nihilism and Meaning of Life in Nietzsche

Among the very many books written on Nietzsche, Robert Reininger's, translated here, deserves to be pointed out, for two reasons.

The first reason is that at the heart of this book are the solutions to the problem of the sense of existence that Nietzsche tried to give in the suffering of his thought, of his very existence. The author correctly states that this problem, and the closely connected problem of the guideline to be chosen for one's existence, that is, of ethics, are central to Nietzsche, since the various theoretical positions he adopts, which differ widely from one another, only have a subordinate character. They served, so to speak, experimentally ; once adopted, lived out, and tested in relation to this problem, they were progressively left behind - as demonstrated by Reininger - in continuous 'overcomings', in a manner reminiscent of 'a flame which moves forward without leaving anything behind it'.

The second point of interest, in the examination of Nietzschean thought from the special angle chosen by Reininger, is the importance given to the 'situational value' possessed by a problematic which has not ceased to be topical. Reininger says rightly that the figure of Nietzsche has also the value of a symbol ; his person incarnates also a cause ; "It is the cause of modern man for which one fights here : man who no longer has roots in the sacred world of tradition, oscillating between the peaks of civilisation and the abysses of barbarism, searching for himself ; trying, that is, to create a satisfying sense of purpose for an existence completely left to itself." The problem takes shape as that of man of the age of nihilism, of the "zero degree of all values", of the age in which "God is dead", all the external supports vanish, and the "desert grows".

Nietzsche had foreseen "European nihilism", and considered it the fatal conclusion of modern thought, having contributed to its completion, by means of his critique of all values, ideals, and idols. The fundamental point is however that, to Nietzsche, it is not the final point, but rather something to be left behind, once it has served a special, positive function. In fact, Nietzsche considered himself to be "the first perfect nihilist of Europe, who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself". The problematic of Nietzsche is therefore that of the post-nihilist age. It addresses the man who, having passed unafraid over an abyss, feels he must not retrace his steps. (Therefore, let us notice in passing, those who, on the basis of some oscillations in Nietzsche's positions, always so saturated

with intense, restless emotional power, have fantasised about a possible religious, or bluntly Christian, conversion, have been absolutely on the wrong track). The positive function of nihilism dwells in the dangerous test of the complete liberation of the individual ; if he does not want to fall, he has to find, in himself alone, a firm point, and to make himself capable of an absolute affirmation. Therefore, nihilism is 'instrumentalised', in the service of the rising of a superior type and a new morality. By means of its spiritual destructiveness, it creates a situation of challenge. And it is precisely here that, through bitter struggle, an absolute sense of existence is sought and found, and, beyond man, the 'superman' is brought into being.

It will be worth our while to take a closer look at this position, because the situation already supposed, with the lucidity of a visionary, by Nietzsche, is not effectively different from that of the present age, providing that the deep existential crisis, which characterises it, is not covered over.

As Reininger shows, the point of maximum danger is passed successfully only if the law which the unbroken superior man sets for himself assumes the same character of unconditionality as that which was derived previously from something external or transcendent - even though it has freedom and the "beyond good and evil" as its basis, and is expressed no longer as a 'you must', but as an 'I want'. In this connection, Reininger is not wrong in noting the apparently paradoxical analogy between the ethics of Nietzsche and those of Kant : both are 'absolute moralities'. Moreover, Nietzsche himself stated plainly that he had only unmasked the decadent, false, deceitful, "all too human" realities that lay behind all common morality in order to make way for a superior morality, and to oppose this "great morality" to the "little morality" of the herd, of anxious minds, dependent on crutches and phantoms. Therefore, the 'immoralism' exhibited and proclaimed by Nietzsche so often and with such relish is merely intended to 'épater le bourgeois'.

Therefore, if we wish to grasp the positive and essential aspects of Nietzsche's solution, we must not let ourselves be misled by all those descriptions of it, almost always dictated by a controversial 'animus', in which only individualism and a glorification of 'Life' as pure immanence seem to be prominent. In fact, the individualism of Nietzsche is associated with a strict inner discipline, almost with a virile, rather than religiously self-mortificatory, asceticism. Reininger is not the only author to have noticed that, in this respect, Nietzsche's affirmation of life has more features in common with Schopenhauer's 'negation' of it, than with a passive, greedy identification with it. Not only is the 'will-to-life' transformed into 'will-to-power', but also, a sovereign principle is always postulated which distances itself from instincts, and which despises, not only hedonism, but also eudemonism (the doctrine which pursues happiness rather than mere pleasure). And even when 'dionysianism' is exalted, when a right is claimed "beyond good and evil", when openness to every sound 'heathen' experience is advocated, rejecting as cowardice all inhibition of passions and of impulses from the depths, this higher dimension is always presupposed. It is the essential prerequisite for the one who is able to remain standing and to create values in the middle of the "desert which grows", since it ensures that this desert gains no hold over him.

For this very reason, one must not make the mistake of seeing Nietzsche's glorification of 'Life' as mere naturalism. If, as has just been said, Nietzsche's position involves an absolute affirmation, beyond pure instinctive being, it is obvious that, in the concept of 'Life', even if one wishes to retain it as central,

something which transcends it is implicitly introduced, or, if you prefer, that, in 'Life', exalted against every misunderstood 'Afterlife', one must admit not only the thing itself, but also a power which transcends and dominates it. Unfortunately, Nietzsche has not found his way to the perception of the 'transcendence' at work in him, to its recognition and incorporation as such in his ideal, and this is perhaps a cause of his tragedy and final collapse.

Once this frequent, two-fold misunderstanding, involving individualism on one hand, and the concept of 'Life' on the other, is removed, we think that it may be interesting to highlight, in passing, the distance which separates the essential Nietzschean guideline from the atmosphere of anarchism which proliferates these days in many of the currents which flow between the cracked structures of a desecrated world and an absurd 'contested' society. Actually, this anarchism, whether individualistic or mass-based, reduces itself to a confused, irrational and centreless revolt. Undiscriminating intolerance for all disciplines and bonds, dictated solely by the impulses of the instinctive and natural part of the individual, who does not want to recognise anything beyond himself, is very clearly the predominant feature in these movements, beyond the various reasons or pretexts given by the 'system' or structures of the world of recent times. Thus, it is as significant as it is natural that, in these movements of today, Nietzsche is absolutely ignored, although he was the first and the greatest rebel. The fact is that, in the human material, there is nothing which corresponds to Nietzsche's thought ; the true - plebeian - elective affinities of such movements are revealed in their frequent collusions with Marxism and its by-products, in their formulæ of hysterical pacifism and absurd 'integrationism', and in their consequent collusion with the 'third world' and the lowest depths of society and race, while the limit constituted by semi-illiterate intellectuals appears in a confused increase in the value attributed to mediocre thinkers such as Marcuse, which contents itself with his more or less legitimate positions of rejection (which are not the thing of central importance for a true revolt), not perceiving the bleakness and extreme utopian-idyllic triviality of the alternative he proposes, proceeding as he does from an aberrant sociology massively dependent upon Freud. Nietzsche does not belong to this world at all, as is instinctively apparent. Because of its aristocratic and exclusivist character, its high level of engagement, and the inner stature that it implies, the Nietzschean path would be the object of specific rejection by all these 'protest' movements, which can be well defined in terms of a 'revolution of the void', if its exact relation to the most serious problematic of a nihilist age of dissolution was perceived at all.

To make this clearer, it is necessary to explore further the terms in which Nietzsche's ethics have tried to define themselves.

If one confined oneself rigorously to the principle of pure affirmation of a 'freed Life', it is clear that any evaluative position or stance would be absurd. There would be no foundation from which to assess, and to champion, for example, the forms of a full and ascending life, unfolding a 'will-to-power', as against those of the opposite, 'decadent' direction, and in particular those which, according to Nietzsche, have undermined 'sound' and 'higher' civilisations by means of their morality. They, after all, are also 'life', "beyond good and evil", part of its ebb and flow, its creation and destruction, and it would be absurd to take a stand, which however Nietzsche continuously and vehemently does, evidently with reference to a higher factor.

If this factor, to which the ethics of Nietzsche owe their specific imprint, is sought, it appears conditioned by his individuality. The

principle, in the first instance, is the affirmation of one's own nature. This becomes the only norm, the autonomous 'categorical imperative' : to be oneself, to become oneself. The 'realist' conception peculiar to the last phase of the thought of Nietzsche can then act as theoretical background, and, had the tragic darkening of his mind not occurred, would have most probably developed into an elimination of the crude 'naturalistic' and biological aspects which continue to mar it (a defect of Reininger is to stick too much to these aspects). In essence, this is a vision of a world stripped bare, denuded of everything merely human, 'idealistic', unreal, and finalistic which has been coated onto it. In part, this is almost a resumption of the tragic, 'Dionysian' vision of the first period - but, to understand Nietzsche's feelings regarding this, what he wrote among the mountain peaks, about the purity of the "free forces still not spotted by spirit", is suggestive. As after a catharsis, only the 'real' ('nature') remains, in the unique shape of 'being' and 'power'.

Given this background, which, in a way, confirms the nihilist themes, the individual can only find support and root in what he is in his own deeper nature, in his 'being', his immutable identity (1). Fidelity to this being, affirmation of it, is therefore what gives content to Nietzschean morality, as its general guideline, so to speak. It is the first dry land, at which, however, Nietzsche does not stop, since, here, basically, the same indetermination which we found in relation to 'Life' appears again. Under the sign of the pure 'to be oneself', one should be able to assume, to want, to affirm absolutely what one is, even when, in one's own nature, there is nothing which corresponds to the positive ideal of the 'superman' announced by our philosopher, when one's own life and one's own destiny show corruption, perversity, decline, ignominy. That is why, if one sticks to the aforementioned principle, the only ethical value remaining would be that of 'authenticity'. Ultimately, it would have to be said that he who, being 'inferior' by nature, is himself, has the courage of being absolutely himself, would be higher than one who would like to develop a 'superiority' which is not rooted in his authentic being.

If, more recently, some existentialists have been content to halt at these positions, they have been fatally left behind by Nietzsche. When he makes himself the imperious propagator of a new morality, he indicates what proceeds from a particular nature, a 'noble nature', projecting what he himself felt he was, or aspired to be. One is faced, therefore, with a morality of 'pride' (opposed, as indicated by Reininger, to one of love or fear) and of 'distinction' ; with a reaffirmation of the fundamental feature of which we have already spoken, that of a sovereign personality as far from the 'flock' as from the merely natural part of himself. What Nietzsche presents to us, again and again, is the type for whom it is natural to be resolute, self-confident, ready to assume every responsibility, straightforward, resistant to everything which is gross and "all too human", hard, inflexible certainly (and towards himself first and foremost), but also capable in a spontaneous way of the "virtue which gives of itself", which springs from the inward-looking attitude and the overabundance of his mind, and not from a weak sentimentalism ; one who does not seek to evade anything which can put him to the test, who remains untouched by the tragic, dark and absurd aspects of his existence, thanks to the positive and independent law which dictates to him his being.

As is superabundantly clear, Nietzsche's post-nihilistic ethics of pure self-affirmation and fidelity to oneself lead directly or indirectly to an ideal of this sort. From the generic law of 'being oneself', it is this precise law which therefore differentiates

itself in Nietzsche, and gives the specific imprint to his morality. It is in these terms - as noted by Reininger - that the type of the 'positive superman' should be understood, not taking seriously the headline-hitting references to some historical figures, or the famous "blond beast of prey", leaving aside the exaltation of pure force and of the shapeless will-to-power (a power which would beg the question : what to do with it? - as Zarathustra asks one who aspires to break free from every bond : free, for what?), leaving aside also the baroque superman of the d'Annunzian style, the fomented results of the pomposity of a presumed Herrenvolk, factually far from any aristocratic virtue, and the foibles of a misunderstood, biologicistic racism.

If we overlook the slags and waste materials of the 'less than optimal Nietzsche' - the one who often happens, unfortunately, to have aroused the greatest echo - it is in the above described terms that there appears the 'positive superman', the man who remains standing, even, and above all, in a nihilist, devastated, absurd world, without gods. The 'superman' appears therefore as an individual, élite ideal, not as a hypothetical, general, future 'evolutionary' human state, to be made almost the object of a programmed culture, as was suggested by another of the ravings of our philosopher, in a certain phase of his thought.

As the reader of his book will see, Reininger brings these contents to light by separating the essential from the accessory, throughout the twists and turns of Nietzsche's thought, thus showing the effective positive contribution that the 'immoralist' Nietzsche has made to ethics. For our part, we are convinced that what Nietzsche has to offer today in this connection has been in no way discredited in the fight for a sense of existence, provided that one avoids that collapse, that 'revolution of the void', and that plebeian, lower, anarchism, to which, as has been mentioned, the deep crisis of the modern world has given rise in such quantity. In reality, today, given adequate discrimination and adaptation, few ethics offer as many important ideas for the student of the post-nihilist problematic, who has rejected any path to the rear, and faces the test of a new and dangerous freedom. One can even consider it as a touchstone for one's nature, for one's true vocation.

It will be evident how much respect, comprehension and sense of measure the author of the present book has brought to the consideration of the person and the thought of Nietzsche. Holding a position of philosophy teacher at the University of Vienna, his exposition is closer to a philosophical study than to the present style of topical essay. We have reduced in our edition the difficulty which the use of certain philosophical terms may constitute for a certain category of readers, by explaining such terms or by using equivalents.

Note

(1) There are sporadic but illuminating intuitions in Nietzsche which seem to refer variously to a subpersonal stratum of the individual, to its transcendent root, to a Self beyond the little I, as when Nietzsche speaks of the "great reason" enclosed in the mystery of our body (of one's own individuation), as opposed to the little reason - to the great reason "which never says I but is I", which has "spirit and senses as a little instrument and toy", "the powerful dominator, the unknown wise man whom one calls his own being, or Self (das Selbst)". These allusions could even remind us somewhat of traditional 'inner teachings'. Reininger speaks of an 'esoteric' aspect to Nietzschean thought, but this would be going too far, if this expression is taken in its strict sense.

Julius Evola