

Nietzsche and the Crisis of Modernity

Nietzsche diagnoses a particular conflict between our will to truth and our will to meaning which he claims constitutes the central crisis of modernity. The will to truth prevents us from constructing the types of mythological narrative (for instance narratives of divine creation and God's providential plan) which formerly served to give meaning to existence, hence the need to find existence meaningful remains unfulfilled. This leaves us with two possibilities: Dispense with the demand for existential meaning or create new narratives that can somehow either evade or be reconciled with the demands of the will to truth.

Part I: The Problem of Meaning

1. The Secular Theodicy Reading

Daniel Came and others have argued that Nietzsche may usefully be seen as attempting throughout his career to reconcile the following claims:

- A. The world inevitably contains a preponderance of suffering over happiness
- B. The world is a worthy object of affirmation

This is a reading that emphasizes Nietzsche as responding to Schopenhauer.

2. Argument against the Secular Theodicy Reading

The Temporality Problem Nietzsche seems to characterize himself as the diagnostician of a problem that is particular to modernity, a problem that only comes properly into focus with the death of (belief in) God. But the problem of suffering is, as Schopenhauer puts it, not time-specific suffering is an inevitable consequence of (human) nature.

Textual Problem 1: Nietzsche explicitly says that man's problem is not suffering but the of 5...

Wagner like the Romantic (e.g. Hölderlin), was exercised primarily by the problem of meaning and not the problem of suffering

3. The Romantic Reading

A: Our will to truth precludes us from believing those illusions which are necessary to give life meaning.

B: We have a basic need to find life meaningful.

This romantic reading explains why Nietzsche is a philosopher of the problem of modernity; it is he who thematises the claim that with the loss of God we eventually come to lose meaning.

4. A Refinement of the need for meaning thesis: The Descriptive Versus Normative Reading

The quotation from GM III 28 above might suggest that Nietzsche has an essentialist claim that man is the animal that needs to find existential meaning.

The generic problem is that generally Nietzsche seems to resist all kind of essentialism.

The particular problem is that Nietzsche allows that there is a kind of human, one he calls the last man, who rejects the call for existential meaning:

There will come a time when man will no longer launch the arrow of his longing beyond man .. "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" so asks the last man and blinks. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Prologue 4

Actually Nietzsche does not think it is part of human nature to seek meaning but rather he believes that humans should seek a meaning beyond themselves:

[t]he individual must be

Culturē[Kultur] theruleofartoverlife. (1)1 9[310]).Thisproposition
mustbeestablishedwelveonlythroughillusionē[Illusionen]
m u s t

