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A Gymnosophist Speaks

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“. . . *The sacred [is] the fertile terrain of all ideologies. . .*” – Alfred M. Bonanno

When man began to talk to himself, he took the first steps into a new world. No longer was his thinking tied solely to his sensuous activity – it now had a life of its own. A ‘spirit world’, a ‘geistwelt’, with concepts as its creatures, made its home in man’s head, and there it has stayed.

It was, I suspect, *language* which liberated thought. Language is not merely *descriptive*, it is *creative*. Thus, we do not simply *reflect*, we *fantasise*. We sever ideas from their roots and manipulate them into our very own works of art.

As this capacity flowered in man, he found himself surrounded by *mystery* – *the first pillar of the sacred*. And so he took, quite naturally, to filling in the gaps in his understanding – those places where his reflective capacity could not reach – with *imagination*. Henceforth, a wedge is driven between the ideal and the real. Man does not know it though, for his uncritical mind assumes the *ordo imaginalis* and the *ordo naturalis* to be in correspondence.

Through a dialectical interplay of their environment and the mysterious vacuum of thought, each community develops a distinct culture. By this we mean a set of ideas, precepts, practices, and customs around which the community gravitate, and which becomes for them *the second pillar of the sacred*.

What, though, is this ‘sacred’ that I talk of? It is a psychic phantasm which puts up the pretence of superceding the subject, which claims for itself dominion over the individual and his, shall we say, ‘caprice’. It is “an idea that has subjected the man to itself,”¹ a spirit which demands obedience, a monarch from whom no man must rebel lest he commit the heresy of heresies and descend into the blasphemous ways of *naked selfhood*.

¹ Max Stirner – ‘The Ego and His Own’

Yes, nakedness, this is the perfect term for it.² My will, my desire, my need, what can be above these? I am not the property of culture, of morality – these things are my property, to take whatever form, and be used in whatever way I choose, because there is no ‘holy spirit’, no transcendental ‘right’ which stands above me, before which I must kneel. *Correct* culture, *right* morality, *superior* character? Babble! Like ‘God’, these concepts exist in the spirit world of thinking. Look to nature, do you see any morality to which the beasts comply? No, they simply satisfy their appetites however they can, because they are not befuddled by abstract thought. These values are not inherent to nature, hence why one finds scarce mention of them within the domain of ‘science’, as it is intended to be a purely descriptive discipline.

Extending the nakedness metaphor, we may say that all ideological bickering is ultimately over how a man should clothe himself. Apparently the obvious fact that clothes do not create man, but are created by him, is almost universally glazed over, either because people are too stupid to realise something so elementary, or have grown to love their clothes so much that they cannot bear the idea of their own naked form – *they must cover their ontological modesty with ideological fig leaves*.

And so the upright ape walks possessed, enculturated, caught up in his own myth, ever-faithful to his spiritual overlords. Clerics deck every corner, each wishing to save us from ourselves, to educate us regarding their gospel – an epidemic of messianism plagues civilisation.

But enough of the fancy imagery. What I am proposing here is simple enough: *nihilism*. Defined, in this instance, as *total denial of the sacred*. To put it another way: *ultimate profanation*.

Nihilism is popularly perceived as a demonic influence. It is the proverbial bull in the china shop which does not stop its rampage until everything is dust. In short, it is equated with radical pessimism. No doubt I

² The existentialists approached this concept when they talked of man being ‘condemned to be free’. Unlike them, however, I don’t deny that there may be a human nature – that is to say, certain psycho-biological impulses which incline men to certain behaviours. But these are not relevant to our discussion, for, wherever they cannot be contravened, there can be no philosophical discussion from the beginning as to alternatives, and where they can be contravened, they are not binding, and so cannot, ultimately, hinder man’s ‘freedom’.

loyalty. Nihilism is, one might say, a 'weak' philosophy, insofar as it has put to the torch all the idealism which any other strain of thought might use to empower itself. As ideology of anti-ideology, it ironically aids in its own defeat. Thus, the clerics of the world need not fear, Nietzsche's warnings were premature, nihilism shall not likely take hold any time soon – those who say it already has don't understand it – and this essay will "fall dead-born from the press." The world keeps turning.

am not the ideal person to defend it from this charge, having unapologetically revealed my colours as a pessimist in previous writings. This estimation is, however, based on something of a fallacy – that, in order for an action, a choice, to be justified, or to be valuable, it must have a grounding in the sacred, in some sort of absolute which prefigures my will. As much as men constantly prattle on about how 'liberty' is the highest goal, yet as soon as you put forward nihilism, which, practically realised, is the *highest form of liberty* – because it shuns concepts of 'obligation', 'duty', 'justification', etc – you are met with charges of unforgivable mutiny, of 'inhumanity'. Yes, nihilism is inhumane, insofar as the means by which we define our humanity, by which we distinguish ourselves from the animal kingdom, is by reference to the spirit – that is to say, the world of ideas, the *phantasmagoria* which is the foundation stone of 'civilisation' as we understand it. When politicians and their kind talk of 'freedom', what they really mean is *loyalty* to some sacred ideal. Even the most 'progressive' of the popular conceptions of freedom is merely loyalty to the holy principles of 'egalite, liberte, fraternite'.

Perhaps this is what Nietzsche was getting at when, in response to his recognition of nihilism, he spoke of the need for man to evolve into 'ubermensch' – overman, trans-man, superman, post-man. It is probably fair to say that nihilism is a threat to man, if we take 'man' to mean this being ensnared by transcendent ideals and thinking in terms of absolutes. To adapt to nihilism means to jettison 'humanity', 'spirituality', 'superego' – whatever you wish to call it – and, some may say 'return', some may say 'advance' to a state of *naked passion* and genuine *selfishness*.

It should now be understood why Stirner turned his nose up at those proud men who claimed to have surpassed religiosity, denouncing them as "*pious atheists*". They deny 'God' and the 'soul', sure, but they continue to pledge themselves to the sacred – now in the form of 'mankind', 'society', 'virtue', or some other abstract, imagined notion – and to indulge in covert metaphysics.

"But," a voice interjects, "nihilism must surely be rejected because it robs life of 'meaning'!" Well, it is never entirely clear what is indicated by that term, but I would propose that it is typically taken to mean pre-determined purpose and / or transcendental justification. We must wonder why the absence of these things terrifies us so – why maxims

like ‘nothing is sacred’ and ‘might makes right’ are hysterically wheeled out as examples of madness, when they are, in fact, the exact opposite. I suppose that if one was to go into an asylum and attempt to converse in a reasonable manner one would similarly be looked upon as the proverbial Anti-Christ. It is as if all a man’s self-confidence lies in his servility, in his status as a tool of something ‘greater’. Perhaps it is because independence is in fact a *loneliness*. If I am just me, and my actions are just mine, I am isolated from the world and from other people in a way which is apparently decidedly unpalatable to us as ‘social creatures’. Yes, this must be it: Nihilism dissolves the bonds which we are used to considering fundamental to our being in the world. Of course, it can really only dissolve ideas, showing that these bonds are and always were nothing but products of the imagination. Were it otherwise, who could see nihilism as ‘dangerous’? Naturally, the truth has a nasty habit of dissolving a lie, and when one is *adapted* to a lie, anything which rends one from it is rightly judged a destructive influence.

When I initially delved into the socio-political implications of nihilism, I assumed, like Stirner, that it would result in a form of anarchism being the logical outcome. For anarchism means ‘without ruler’, and nihilism undermines the sacred justification of social authority. However, in communicating with anarchists I realised that anarchism falls into the same trap as all ideology. Its rejection of hierarchical systems is not (99% of the time, at least) rooted in dismissal of spiritual ideology, but in an egalitarian moral sentiment. When the anarchists say they wish a man to be free, they mean they wish him to swear an oath to those aforementioned holy precepts of ‘egalite, liberte, fraternite’. Thus that rare breed of so-called ‘egoist’ anarchists are widely rejected because they will swear an oath to naught but their own will. Even when they are accepted as legitimate, it is usually in the belief that egoism in practice might serve as a suitable means to realise the goal of the holy teleology.

When the anarchists ascribe to themselves the will to be ‘without ruler’, they only comprehend the term ‘ruler’ as referring to fellows stomping around in suits or military regalia looking stern and serious. So whilst they proudly reject authority of one man over another in social relations, yet they wish all men to be under the authority of the *holy spirit*

of the anarchist ideal, and they wish all men to be sycophants grovelling before the *altar of the righteous way*.

All the sanctity attached to the term ‘anarchism’ thus makes it imprudent to associate with nihilism in all its *unholiness*.³ There is nothing for it, then. We shall have to stick to the most obvious term: ‘social nihilism’.

How can we define this, so as to make it clear what is meant? It is a social philosophy of *radical liberty*, which rends the authority to *evaluate* from the hands of abstract ideology and its philosophers, and puts it in the hands of the *passionate individual*. The creative will of each unique person can no longer be invalidated by reference to absolute concepts. All social interaction and structuring — all culture, all politics — is to be born not from obligation and duty to sacred morals and goals, but from the naked ‘yea’ or ‘nay’ of the individual will. This is the *wayless way*, the *systemless system*.

Does this mean, as the idealists would tell you, the wholesale, ruthless obliteration of society? I don’t see why it should. It only means putting a man’s actions in his own hands, rather than dictating them to him from the pages of some holy text. Does it mean, as is also fearfully prophesied, the inevitable end of all law and order? No, it only means recognition of law and order as rooted solely in the *will* and *power* of individuals. Not justified by reference to nature, God, or some other trans-personal absolute, but justified by reference to *me and mine*. Any ‘right’ that a man may have is not *inherently due* to him according to some cosmic normative principle, but is *won* by him, because he *wants* it. All conflict is stripped down to conflict of *preference*, not of right and wrong, true and false. No one has the authority to decide *for me* unless I choose so, for nothing trumps my own will.

To use the language of Hume, social nihilism is the philosophy which rejects the *ought* and embraces the *is*.

But ahh, here’s the rub. I have no means by which to coerce you into practicing this philosophy, because I cannot pretend that anyone owe it

³ Perhaps if it had not already been claimed by the wandering nudist mystics of the past, ‘gymnosophy’ might be a suitable term, ‘gymno’ being the ancient Greek word for ‘naked’.