

Gabriel Marcel and Friedrich Nietzsche: Existence and Death of God

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Abstract : Nietzschean thought flows like a current throughout Marcel's philosophy. Marcel is in constant dialogue with him. He wants to give homage to him, making him one of the most eminent representatives of existential thought. His enthusiasm is triggered by Nietzsche's phrase: 'God is dead,' the fil rouge that ties all of the Nietzschean references scattered through marcelian texts. The death of God is the theme which emphasises both the greatness and simultaneously the tragedy of Nietzsche. Marcel wants to substitute the idea 'God is dead' with its original meaning: a tragic existential characteristic that imitators of Nietzsche seemed to have blurred. An interpretation that Marcel achieves aiming at double target. On the one hand he removes the heavy metaphysical suit from Nietzsche's aphorisms on the death of God, that his interpreters have made them wear - Heidegger especially. On the other hand, he removes a stratus of trivialisation which takes the aphorisms out of context and transforms them into advertising slogans - here Sartre becomes the target. In the lecture: Nietzsche: l'homme devant la mort de dieu, Marcel hurls himself against the metaphysical Heidegger interpretation of the death of God. A hermeneutical proposal definitely original, but also a bit too abstract. An interpretation without bite, that does not grasp the tragic existential weight of the original Nietzschean idea. 'We are probably on the wrong road,' announces, 'when at all costs, like Heidegger, we want to make a metaphysic out of Nietzsche.' Marcel also criticizes Sartre. He lands in Geneva and reacts to the journalists, by saying: 'Gentlemen, God is dead'. Marcel only needs this impromptu exclamation to understand how Sartre misinterprets the meaning of the death of God. Sartre mistakes and loses the existential sense of this idea in favour of the sensational and trivialisation of it. Marcel then wipes the slate clean from these two limited interpretations of the declaration of the death of God. This is much more than a metaphysical quarrel and not at all comparable to any advertising slogan. Behind the cry 'God is dead' there is the existence of an anguished man who experiences in his solitude the actual death of God. A man who has killed God with his own hands, haunted by the chill that from now on he will have to live in a completely different way. The death of God, however, is not the end. Marcel spots a new beginning at the point in which nihilism is overcome and the Übermensch is born. Dialoguing with Nietzsche he notices to being in the presence of a great spirit that has contributed to the renewal of a spiritual horizon. He descends to the most profound depths of his thought, aware that the way out is really far below, in the remotest areas of existence. The ambivalence of Nietzsche does not scare him. Rather such a thought, characterised by contradiction, will simultaneously be infinitely dangerous and infinitely healthy.

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