

### Chapter 3

## FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE AND HIS STATEMENT:

### “GOTT IST TODT [sic]!”

#### 3.1 NIETZSCHE AS THE PROPHET OF NIHILISM

In his book, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, originally written in 1882, Nietzsche narrates the following story (a story that I must cite at length to understand its context):

Habt ihr nicht von jenem tollen Menschen gehört, der am hellen Vormittage eine Laterne anzündete, auf den Markt lief und unaufhörlich schrie: “Ich suche Gott! Ich suche Gott!” – Da dort gerade Viele von Denen [sic] zusammen standen [sic], welche nicht an Gott glaubten, so erregte er ein grosses [sic] Gelächter. Ist er denn verloren gegangen? sagte der Eine [sic]. Hat er sich verlaufen wie ein Kind? sagte der Andere [sic]. Oder hält er sich versteckt? Fürchtet er sich vor uns? Ist er zu Schiff gegangen? Ausgewandert? [sic] – so schrieen [sic] und lachten sie durcheinander. Der tolle Mensch sprang mitten unter sie und durchbohrte sie mit seinen Blicken. “Wohin ist Gott? rief er, ich will es euch sagen! Wir haben ihn getödtet [sic], – ihr und ich! Wir Alle [sic] sind seine Mörder! Aber wie haben wir diess [sic] gemacht? Wie vermochten wir das Meer auszutrinken? Wer gab uns den Schwamm, um den ganzen Horizont wegzuwischen? Was thaten [sic] wir, als wir diese Erde von ihrer Sonne losketteten?

Wohin bewegt sie sich nun? Wohin bewegen wir uns? Fort von allen Sonnen? Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach allen Seiten? Giebt [sic] es noch ein Oben und ein Unten? Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts? Haucht uns nicht der leere Raum an? Ist es nicht kälter geworden? Kommt nicht immerfort die Nacht und mehr Nacht? Müssen nicht Lanternen am Vormittage angezündet werden? Hören wir noch Nichts von dem Lärm der Todtengräber [sic], welche Gott begraben? Riechen wir noch Nichts von der göttlichen Verwesung? – auch Götter verwesen! Gott ist todt [sic]! Gott bleibt todt [sic]! Und wir haben ihn getödtet [sic]! Wie trösten wir uns, die Mörder aller Mörder? Das Heiligste und Mächtigste, was die Welt bisher besass [sic], es ist unter unseren Messern verblutet, – wer wischt diess [sic] Blut von uns ab? Mit welchem Wasser könnten wir uns reinigen? Welche Sühnfeiern [sic], welche heiligen Spiele werden wir erfinden müssen? Ist nicht die Grösse dieser That [sic] zu gross [sic] für uns? Müssen wir nicht selber zu Göttern werden, um nur ihrer würdig zu erscheinen? Es gab nie eine grössere [sic] That [sic], – und wer nur immer nach uns geboren wird, gehört um dieser That [sic] willen in eine höhere Geschichte, als alle Geschichte bisher war!" – Hier schwieg der tolle Mensch und sah wieder seine Zuhörer an: auch sie schwiegen und blickten befremdet auf ihn. Endlich warf er seine Lanterne auf den Boden, dass [sic] sie in Stücke sprang und erlosch. "Ich komme zu

früh, sagte er dann, ich bin noch nicht an der Zeit. Diess [sic] ungeheure Ereigniss [sic] ist noch unterwegs und wandert, – es ist noch nicht bis zu den Ohren der Menschen gedrungen. Blitz und Donner brauchen Zeit, das Licht der Gestirne braucht Zeit, Thaten [sic] brauchen Zeit, auch nachdem sie gethan [sic] sind, um gesehen und gehört zu werden. Diese That [sic] ist ihnen immer noch ferner, als die fernsten Gestirne, – und doch haben sie dieselbe gethan [sic]!” – Man erzählt noch, dass [sic] der tolle Mensch des selbigen [sic] Tages in verschiedene Kirchen eingedrungen sei und darin sein Requiem aeternam deo angestimmt habe. Hinausgeführt und zur Rede gesetzt, habe er immer nur diess entgegnet: “Was sind denn diese Kirchen noch, wenn sie nicht die Grüfte und Grabmäler Gottes sind?”

(Nietzsche 1973:159)

One cannot help but wonder what exactly Nietzsche meant with his statement: “Gott ist todt [sic]! Gott bleibt todt [sic]! Und wir haben ihn getödtet [sic]!” What was he trying to say? Over the years, there has been a great deal of speculation regarding Nietzsche’s statement and the meaning thereof. Reading Nietzsche one cannot help but think that he went to his grave with a secret (cf Porter 2000:i). Bergoffen (1983:35) admits: “This is not to suggest, however, that distance has rendered Nietzsche’s thought clear to us; it has not; for though we are closer to understanding Nietzsche, we are still quite far from comprehending him.”

When we study the writings of Nietzsche, it becomes clear that he most probably intended for his philosophical heritage never to be fully comprehensible and understandable as historical facts. As a philologist he deemed it important that his words should be interpreted as often as they were read. In this regard Schrift (1995:126) makes the following remarks:

Over a century ago, Nietzsche noted the posthumous character of his work, predicting that a century hence, he would find his rightful heirs, the "philosophers of the future" to whom his works were addressed. To be the sort of reader Nietzsche himself sought, we must recall, means not to receive his words as truths or to follow him as a disciple, two situations he openly tried to forestall. Instead of an aesthetics of reception, Nietzsche's works call for a performative hermeneutics.

Nietzsche distanced himself from his own writings. In *Ecce Homo* (1888) he states that his person as an ordinary philosopher differs from his philosophical insights and works. "Aber es wäre ein vollkommener Widerspruch zu mir, wenn ich heute bereits Ohren und Hände für meine Wahrheiten erwartete: dass [sic] man heute nicht hört, dass [sic] man heute nicht von mir zu nehmen weiss, ist nicht nur begreiflich, es scheint mir selbst das Rechte. Ich will nicht verwechselt werden, – dazu gehört, dass [sic] ich mich selber nicht verwechsele" (Nietzsche 1969b:296).

No wonder Nietzsche’s statements can be interpreted in so many ways! It is widely known that several different interpretations, with varying nuances of Nietzsche’s philosophical heritage abound (cf Klein 1997:33-39). In our time it is the interpretations of Heidegger and Derrida that shaped the minds of philosophers. However, it is important to stress that the followers of Heidegger and Derrida have their own way of expressing and understanding the master models. Fraser (2002:14) notes that many influential theologians, such as Jüngel, read Nietzsche through the lenses of Heidegger’s understanding. The issue of whether or not Fraser is right in his analysis of Jüngel’s interpretation of Nietzsche, falls beyond the scope of this paper.

I agree with Schrift (1991) that Heidegger and Derrida interpret Nietzsche’s sayings in a totally different manner than Nietzsche originally meant them to be interpreted (cf Vallega 2001:61, note 15). It seems as if Heidegger interprets Nietzsche’s philosophy as being centred on the aspect of metaphysics and that the themes of his philosophy, such as the “Übermensch”, nihilism, the “Wille zur Macht” and the “Umwertung aller Werte”, need to be interpreted and understood in a metaphysical way (cf Heidegger 1950:200, 231-232; 1983:20, 42, 135, 212; 1990:5-9; 1996:2, 22, 64-65, 402-405, 417-423, 429-432; Stegmaier 1985:173; see Von der Luft 1984:272-276; Heidegger 1997:24-25, 45; 1999:44-47; Schmidt 2001:37; Hemming 2002:166; 170-177; 220-234). I agree with Schrift (1991:19) that Heidegger is wrong in his assumption that Nietzsche is *only* a metaphysical thinker.

Derrida (1979) reads the texts of Nietzsche in a deconstructive way (cf Michelfelder & Palmer 1989). He doesn't pretend to overcome the metaphysical, but rather attempts to get past the borders between the metaphysical in the present tradition and the tradition from the outside. When reading the texts of Derrida, it becomes clear that he uses the same themes that Nietzsche does and follows Nietzsche's criticism in his philosophy (cf Schrift 1995:9).

Both of these interpretation models pose some hermeneutical problems. On the one hand it seems as if the interpretation of Heidegger assertively goes beyond the meaning of the Nietzschean text, impounding Nietzsche's thought as being a discourse on ontology – the meaning and truth of being. On the other hand the deconstructive reading of Derrida can underscore the Nietzschean text. It seems that "more traditional interpreters...exhibit a relativistic tendency toward 'underdetermining' the same text, thereby walking that fine line between use and abuse, and making problematic any judgement as to the lack of fitness of certain interpretations" (Schrift 1991:119).

I agree with the solution Schrift (1991:123-143) offers to this problem, namely to interpret Nietzsche's philosophy in the light of his philosophical language (cf Klein 1997:50-55; see Van Tongeren 2000:51-103).<sup>7</sup> According to him, Nietzsche's critique of philosophical language has been directed at releasing the activity of interpretation from the dogmatic, life-negating constraints of divine and linguistic authority. Nietzsche's deconstruction of epistemology opens the text of becoming an unending, pluralistic play

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<sup>7</sup> Hart (1998:319) agrees when he adds that God is an effect of grammar as far as Nietzsche was concerned.

of interpretation. This insight helped me to understand Nietzsche’s statement that God is dead.

I am of the opinion that Nietzsche’s statement (that God is dead) should be seen as a reaction to his time (cf Nietzsche 1969a:168; Küng 1978:383-384; Pannenberg 1984:10; Maurer 1994:102-122; Ruprecht 1996:23-32; Heilke 1998:58; Kee 1999:37-38; Van Tongeren 2000:295; Hatab 2001:45-46; Murphy 2001:12-13; Roodt 2001:319-347).<sup>8</sup>

With this statement he announced the death of the god of modernity (Ward [1997] 1998:xxix; cf Macintyre & Ricœur 1969:67-68). Nietzsche did not share his fellow scholars’ enthusiasm for “Fortschritt” (cf Lampert 1993:276, 283-286).<sup>9</sup> In his 1873 essay, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* and in his book *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (1873-1876) he deals with this issue of his time. The doctrine of “Fortschritt” states that history has proven that human beings develop to greater heights of their own accord and that the potential for progress is intrinsic to humankind. God’s existence and providence could then be proven on account of this optimistic progress in the course of history. This potential to progress is both actual and necessary. Nietzsche was convinced that a crisis had developed in German culture as a result of the enormous and fast expanding influence of Hegelian philosophy. This

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<sup>8</sup> “The term ‘modernity’, in Nietzsche’s sense, refers both to a condition or self-conception on the one hand, and a philosophical response to this experience on the other. These two components inform and sustain one another within Nietzsche’s critique of his age” (Roodt 2001:326). The transition from premodern tradition to modernity was experienced in theology as a crisis in history in the doctrine of historicism (cf Roberts 1998:192-193).

<sup>9</sup> Tassone (2002) explains that the idea of progress is underlain by a philosophy of history. According to him positive and negative philosophies of history can be found. The difference between the two does not lie in their different conceptions of time and history “but in the different value judgements they attach to the course of history” (Tassone 2002:340).

philosophy had led to a way of thinking, which had accustomed Germans to talk about the *Weltprozeß* and to justify their own age as the inevitable result of this world-process. Thus God became associated with this world-process. "Man hat diese Hegelisch verstandene Geschichte mit Hohn das Wandeln Gottes auf der Erde genannt, welcher Gott aber seinerseits erst durch die Geschichte gemacht wird" (Nietzsche 1972a:304; cf Tassone 2002:64-68).

Therefore, I would attempt to read and understand Nietzsche's prophecy that "Gott ist todt [sic]!" in the light of his rebellion against the modernistic period's belief in progress. The period from Descartes to Whitehead (with Nietzsche being included in this frame) is widely known as the modernistic period (cf Küng 1987:199-200). This period is characterised by the secular idea of progress, which was expanded to include every aspect of life as a temporary model of all history (cf Moltmann 1988:31). "Die Menschheit stellt nicht eine Entwicklung zum Besseren oder Stärkeren oder Höheren dar, in der Weise, wie dies heute geglaubt wird. Der 'Fortschritt' ist bloss eine moderne Idee, das heisst eine falsche Idee" (Nietzsche 1969a:169). I will attempt to indicate that Nietzsche did not, *per se*, affirm or deny the existence of God. He was reacting to the Christian concept of God of his day (cf Madelon-Wienand 1998:302, 306-309; Ward [1997] 1998:xxviii). Nietzsche's atheism must be seen relative to a particular definition of God (cf Haar 1998:157). He wanted to show the people of his time what the terrible consequences of the death of God, whom they had murdered, were (cf Haar 1998:158; Roberts 1998:187). He was in actual fact looking for a concept of God that transcends modern atheism and theism.



Der christliche Gottesbegriff – Gott als Krankengott, Gott als Spinne, Gott als Geist – ist einer der corruptesten Gottesbegriffe, die auf Erden erreicht worden sind; er stellt vielleicht selbst den Pegel des Tiefstands in der absteigenden Entwicklung des Götter-Typus dar. Gott zum Widerspruch des Lebens abgeartet, statt dessen Verklärung und ewiges Ja zu sein. In Gott dem Leben, der Natur, dem Willen zum Leben die Feindschaft angesagt! Gott die Formel für jede Verleumdung des "Diesseits", für jede Lüge vom "Jenseits"! In Gott das Nichts vergöttlicht, der Wille zum Nichts heilig gesprochen!

(Nietzsche 1969a:183)

Several reasons can be given for Nietzsche's quest for a concept of God that would be neither atheistic nor theistic. The confessional institution lost credibility during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when a change occurred in theological thought, brought on by the modern views of the *Aufklärung*, as embodied in German idealism and Romanticism. Modern theology had become integrated with the empirical world, which changed the general understanding of the human condition, the community, the world and even of God.

Modern theology found itself in a crisis because of modern scientific views, in particular as embodied in the philosophies of philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel,

Heidegger and Whitehead; modern democracy; modern critique against religion from Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud; modern anthropology and social science; modern exegeses such as the historical critique by De Spinoza, Semler and Strauss; and modern liberal movements (cf Küng 1987:199-200). Theology was in a crisis because humanity, rather than God, had become the centre of attraction. Modern theology became a human tool: for humankind, and in the service of humankind. The question whether there would still be any place for God on earth at all, arose.

By reading Nietzsche it becomes clear that he distanced himself from all the theologians of his time; from the German philosophy in its entirety; and from the superficial atheism of the natural scientists, which left them apathetic in the wake of issues of which they did not suffer the consequences.

Ah diese Deutschen, was sie uns schon gekostet haben! Umsonst – das war immer das Werk der Deutschen. Die Reformation; Leibniz; Kant und die sogenannte deutsche Philosophie; die Freiheits-Kriege; das Reich – jedes Mal ein Umsonst für Etwas, das bereits da war, für etwas Unwiederbringliches...Es sind meine Feinde, ich bekenne es, diese Deutschen: ich verachte in ihnen jede Art von Begriffs- und Werth-Unsauberkeit [sic], von Feigheit vor jedem rechtschaffnen Ja und Nein.

(Nietzsche 1969a:249-250)

Nietzsche (1969a:169; 1972a:304) could not accept the views of Hegel in terms of which the existence of God was proven by human progress in history, as if the human race embodied the development of the better, the stronger and the highest good (cf Hegel [1970] 1979:234-235; [1971] 1979:408-410; [1969] 1980:280-281; [1971] 1980:456-457). According to Nietzsche, this belief was based on a false idea, because progress was not necessarily coupled with growth and development. Nietzsche pointed out that the Christian faith was based on the ideas of progress, growth and development. It is progress when an impious person, after having repented and confessed his or her guilt, is forgiven by God and is able to continue his or her life as a good and just person.

In paragraph 3.3.3 I will deal with the important influence Darwin had on the idea of progress in the nineteenth century. In 1859 Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle of life*, was published. As an exponent of modern science, Darwin argued that humans have a place in the cosmos and in the creation and evolution of the world, and that they form part of creation in such a way that they are both creator and participant in a unique way. Nietzsche opposed this optimism in modern science, but whether he had direct contact with Darwin remains uncertain (cf Nietzsche 1969c:153).<sup>10</sup>

Modern exegesis with historical criticism as method also came in for criticism by Nietzsche. Strauss, a well-known exponent of this approach, had significant influence on

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson (2001) says that it is not far from the truth to assume that Nietzsche did not actually read all of Darwin's work. He believes Nietzsche's contact with Darwin came through his study of Friedrich Albert Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (1876, vol 1; 1877, vol 2).

Nietzsche's ideas, as I will point out in paragraph 3.3.4. Strauss, author of *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (1836) and *Der Alte und der neue Glaube* (1873), was influenced by modern exegesis and orientated the Christian faith to reflect an optimistic, evolutionist and mechanistic philosophy. According to Strauss, the Christian faith developed scientifically to become a new faith – disbelief. Heaven was now on earth, with Jesus as an eccentric figure and eternal life as an illusion or mistake. Nietzsche saw Strauss's shameless, materialistic optimism as an insult. This optimism, moulded on progress, was dangerous. Nietzsche did not want to talk about the universe as a set of natural and developing laws. Neither did he want to understand it as a metaphysical reality and call it God. Strauss was therefore to Nietzsche a big heretic because he did not realise the consequences of his views. He robbed the modern human being of any hope for a life hereafter (cf Nietzsche 1972a:155-238).

### **3.2 WHO WAS NIETZSCHE?<sup>11</sup>**

Nietzsche was born on 15 October 1844 in Röcken, near Lützen in Saxons. From his fifth year, when his father died, Nietzsche was at the mercy of women – his mother, a sister, a grandmother and two aunts (Kee 1999:11; cf Van Tongeren 2000:20). They presented him with a view of God that could not stand up to the realities of life. To the young Nietzsche, God was presented as a gentle, compassionate God who only forgives through love. To him such a God was not realistic and was not in touch with the world.

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<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche's biographical details are discussed in order to show the development in his thinking. I agree with Lackey (1999:739) that it is a misconception to treat Nietzsche as if there was no progress in his philosophical endeavor. Lackey distinguishes between Nietzsche's early (1869-1876), middle (1877-1886) and late (1886-1888) writings.

The world was full of anger and hatred. How could God then be the one who knew nothing of this? No one would understand such a God (Nietzsche 1969a:181; cf Fraser 2002:32-44).

He never learnt that the God who so easily forgave, was also just. This one-sided image of God which he was presented with, led to his misunderstanding of the depth of the Christian faith, and his inability to accept the evangelical appeal thereof. During his school years he came in contact with modern exegesis and the historical-critical method of interpretation of the New Testament. This method of interpretation questioned the supernatural truths of the Bible. The Bible had become a scientific object of study. This provoked a struggle of faith and disbelief. At the age of twenty, he started his studies at the University of Bonn. At first he was interested in theology, but Nietzsche said that it was the hermeneutical nature of theology that attracted him. He took an interest in theology for the philological aspect of gospel criticism and the study of New Testament sources. He was convinced then that history and historical research could provide a direct answer to certain religious and philosophical questions (Van Tongeren 2000:21-23).

During this time he read the book *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (1836) by Strauss, which resulted in his final break with the Christian faith (Kee 1999:12-13; see Brobjer 2001:141). He turned to the philosophy of Schopenhauer, of which he said: “Der Atheismus war das, was mich zu Schopenhauer führte” (Nietzsche 1969b:316; cf Van Tongeren 2000:22; Fraser 2002:49-53). Schopenhauer did not share in the progress

optimism of his time. He was of the opinion that behind every event in history was the desire to live. The assumption that God was furthermore evident in the course of history was not true. Authentic philosophy did not ask about the origin (where from), or the purpose (where to), or the reason (why) of world history, but about the actual events. It is thus obvious where Nietzsche's pessimism with regard to the belief in progress stems from. Schopenhauer did not believe in the efficacy of history at all, but in the reality of the present, or otherwise, in the *what* thereof.

Despite all Hegel's arguments in favour of an optimistic and developing consideration of history, Schopenhauer was convinced that the course of history was without any efficacy or system. The course of history and the passage thereof were devoid of any hidden meaning. Schopenhauer saw in the study of art and music the deliverance of the educated person. According to him, Wagner's music could become the ideal replacement as the educated person's religion. Nietzsche strongly doubted whether this could be the case especially after ending his own friendship with Wagner. Schopenhauer had, of course, realised that this deliverance would be brief. He therefore recanted that the authentic, quality deliverance was not to be found in the arts, but in the ethics of the Good Samaritan – of compassion and self-denial. (This explains his later asceticism.)

It is against this ethic of self-denial and compassion in Christianity (which also exists in Buddhism) that Nietzsche directed a vigorous attack. "Schopenhauer war in seinem Rechte damit: durch das Mitleid wird das Leben verneint, verneinungswürdiger gemacht, – Mitleiden ist die Praxis des Nihilismus" (Nietzsche 1969a:171). According to

Schopenhauer, history does not have a purpose, nor does humankind have a heavenly goal. All that is left for people are their insignificance.

In Wagner, Nietzsche found a good replacement for Schopenhauer, even though this friendship was not to last very long (Van Tongeren 2000:25-26). In 1869 Nietzsche, without a doctorate, was appointed as professor in Greek at the University of Basel on the recommendation of Ritschl, his mentor (Van Tongeren 2000:26; Leiter 2002:31). Here he befriended the historicists Burckhardt and Overbeck. After taking part in the French-Prussian war, Nietzsche's interest shifted from philology to philosophy. Pre-Socratic Greece replaced primitive Christianity as his model and norm for true humanity. It was during this period that Nietzsche completely distanced himself from Schopenhauer. He felt that no religion had ever uttered a truth. Reality and access to the truth could not be gained through religion, neither as allegory nor as dogma. During 1876 he ended his friendship with Wagner because Wagner, the disciple of Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, the revolutionary activist of the uprisings in 1839 and 1849, had converted to the Christian faith.

After his break with Wagner, Nietzsche's health deteriorated rapidly. This forced him to resign from the University of Basel in 1879 (Van Tongeren 2000:31). Nietzsche became even more negative about the cultural optimism of his time – for him, heaven on earth was unacceptable. His faith in the modern era was shattered to the extent that he described it as the era of decay (Nietzsche 1969a:169; 1969c:99-100). In 1881 his book *Morgenröte* was published. In this book he sharply and severely criticises the morals that

stem from the Christian faith. According to Nietzsche, Christian morals, as a type of morals in itself, are the consequence of a particular view of reality. Nietzsche sees this type of morals as the slaughter of life.

Nietzsche in his fifth book *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, written in 1882, declared that God was dead and that the effect thereof was casting a shadow over the whole of Europe. The faith in the Christian God changed to scepticism and disbelief (cf Nietzsche 1973:255). It became a problem that threatened culture, Socratic philosophy and the Christianity of Europe. It was for this reason that Nietzsche needed to spell out the real consequences of the death of God. He said that the only atheism that existed in this world is the belief in the God of reality, because this God does not exist. The consequences of reality are thus not necessarily divine.

God cannot be the prisoner of history. The question that follows naturally from this is: does reality have any meaning and can there be any talk of progress in history? Nietzsche tries to show the consequences of such atheism by means of the story about the madman with the lantern looking for God in the market square. He aims the words of the madman not only at theologians, but also at the superficial atheists who do not realise the reality of the death of God. They do not realise the meaning thereof. Humanity is not apathetic towards these happenings either. The people, especially Nietzsche's contemporaries, have murdered God with their false assumptions. Furthermore, nobody realises the outcome of these happenings.



We must understand Nietzsche's statement, "Gott ist todt! [sic]!" theologically.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche rejects any god, but more specifically the Christian God. "Wir leugnen Gott als Gott...Wenn man uns diesen Gott der Christen bewiese, wir würden ihn noch weniger zu glauben wissen" (Nietzsche 1969:223). This statement is not part of word play, but part of a reality where everything is plunged into nothingness. Nihilism is the only reality that is left. That is why the deprived reality of godliness, as also in the case for Schopenhauer, becomes Nietzsche's target for divesting. People have to realise what truth really is. The death of God means the complete collapse of everything that exists, or a living emptiness of which the horizon is wiped away. Nietzsche (1973:159) rightly asks questions such as: Where are we moving to? Are we moving away from all suns? Are we continually plunging into a landscape without horizons?

All that is left is the darkness of nihilism, the empty nothingness and chaos. Nietzsche is prepared to accept the consequences of the death of God and to take them upon himself. He wants to make people aware of the murder of God. The belief in God and the implications of this belief have to be overcome. God is dead, leaving a shadow that stretches across the whole world. This shadow has to disappear. Therefore, for Nietzsche, there is no finality in and of creation. The course of history will not unfold to greater heights. The whole character of world history is forever chaos.

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<sup>12</sup> Thiede (2001:464-500) states that Nietzsche's theology is the secret of his philosophy. He believes Nietzsche was destined to become a theologian like his father and grandfather who were Lutheran pastors. His critique was anti-Christian and not anti-religious or anti-theological. He must be seen as an atheistic theologian, who sought the true God, the God that is between good and bad. He came to the theological conclusion that all gods are dead (cf Maurer 1994:102-122). With his philosophy he wanted to find a new God (cf Esterhuyse 1998:254-255; see Figl 2000:82-101).

The shadow of the belief in God can only disappear by virtue of a human exalting himself or herself to a greater and higher humanity, that is the "Übermensch", who will surpass the ape, and thus also humankind. The goal of development and progress in history is not God and his kingdom, but the "Übermensch" and his reign. After the death of God he will take God's place. He will also be able to handle the consequences of this death. He will be the new type of person, the strong and the wise, the destroyer and the loving. "Einst sagte man Gott, wenn man auf ferne Meere blickte; nun aber lehrte ich euch sagen: Übermensch. Gott ist eine Muthmaassung [sic]; aber ich will, dass [sic] euer Muthmaassen [sic] nicht weiter reiche, als euer schaffender Wille" (Nietzsche 1968a:105). There is, however, also a negative task for humankind: a Dionysian task that entails the hardness of a hammer and the urge to destroy.

Nietzsche is against any kind of morality that forsakes and denies life. If one says that God looks into the hearts of people, one is denying the freedom of the human will and is thus suppressing the human heartbeat for life. Nietzsche is looking for a healthy morality that is dominated by the vital urge. The Christian concept of God as the God of the sick and God as Spirit is, in his view, unacceptable. God has become the excuse or alibi for everything that happened in the world and in history. God is also the lie of the world; now and hereafter. In God, insignificance and nothingness are deified and the aspiration to nothingness is exalted and sanctified (cf Nietzsche 1969a:183). The morality of life of the "Übermensch" is acceptable to Nietzsche. This view is the alternative that Nietzsche offers with regard to the problem of morality.

Nietzsche's beliefs in civilization, culture, progress and modernity were violated. He did not believe in anything anymore. He was convinced that he was living in a time of uncertainty, decay, destruction and insignificance. Behind each of his statements were the interrogations of nihilism. Nihilism is the denial of everything that exists and the rejection of all systems (Flew 1984:249; cf Küng 1978:454-455). According to Nietzsche, there was no goal at all.

Nihilism questions the belief in progress, because this belief strives for a goal, which does not exist in the conceptual hardware of nihilism. In the place of moral values there have to be natural urges and instincts; in other words, natural values based on vital urges. Religion and metaphysics have to be replaced by the doctrine of the "Ewige Wiederkehr" as the philosophy of the future. "Prinzipielle Neuerungen: An Stelle der 'moralischen Werte' lauter naturalistische Werte. Vernatürlischung der Moral...An Stelle von 'Metaphysik' und Religion die Ewige Wiederkunftslehre (diese als Mittel der Züchtung und Auswahl)" (Nietzsche 1930:323-324).

Nietzsche's nihilism was the result of his experience and observation. As a result of his circumstances he lived without God or any kind of morality. Küng (1978:436-437) shows us that we should take the challenges of nihilism seriously and that we have to be prepared to deal with the consequences. "Denken wir diesen Gedanken in seiner furchtbarsten Form: das Dasein, so wie es ist, ohne Sinn und Ziel, aber unvermeidlich wiederkehrend, ohne ein Finale ins Nichts: 'die Ewige Wiederkehr'. Das ist die extremste Form des Nihilismus: das Nichts (das 'Sinnlose') ewig!" (Nietzsche 1930:44).

On January 3, 1889, at the early age of 45, Nietzsche became mentally ill. After he had spent some time in an asylum, his mother looked after him at home (Van Tongeren 2000:44-45). His sister took over after the death of their mother. On August 25, 1900, Nietzsche died, and was buried beside his father. His memory will live on through his writings:

- *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 1872
- *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, 1873-1876
- *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 1878
- *Morgenröte*, 1881
- *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882
- *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, 1883-1884
- *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 1885
- *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887
- *Der Fall Wagner*, 1888
- *Götzendämmerung*, 1888
- *Der Antichrist*, 1888
- *Ecce Homo*, 1888
- *Der Wille zur Macht*, 1889
- *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, published in 1901

### **3.3 AGAINST WHOM WAS NIETZSCHE REACTING**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

It is clear that Nietzsche reacted against all the theologians of his time; the entire German

philosophy; as well as against the shallow atheism of the natural scientists, because they remained apathetic towards issues under which they did not suffer.

Ich sprach vom deutschen Geiste: dass [sic] er gröber wird, dass [sic] er sich verflacht. Ist das genug? – Im Grunde ist es etwas ganz Anderes, das mich erschreckt: wie es immer mehr mit dem deutschen Ernste, der deutschen Tiefe, der deutschen Leidenschaft in geistigen Dingen abwärts geht. Das Pathos hat sich verändert, nicht bloss die Intellektualität. – Ich berühre hier und da deutsche Universitäten: was für eine Luft herrscht unter deren Gelehrten, welche öde, welche genügsam und lau gewordne Geistigkeit!

(Nietzsche 1969c:99)

I will illustrate how Nietzsche reacted by focusing on three themes or ideas in his work, namely:

- his reaction against the idea of the subject that knows himself or herself, God and his or her world, as propagated by the German philosophy of his time (although Descartes and Hume were not Germans, their influence on German philosophy will become apparent);
- his reaction against the idea of progress in history,<sup>13</sup> as propagated by the philosophy of Hegel<sup>14</sup> and used in the evolution theory of Darwin;

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<sup>13</sup> "Mit seiner theologisch-moralisch-politischen Chiliasmuskritik will Nietzsche die ganze europäische Fortschrittsgeschichte treffen" (Maurer 1994:111).

- his reaction against the ideas of theologians who did not practice what they proclaimed such as Strauss, who caused Nietzsche's break with Christianity.

### **3.3.2 Nietzsche as reacting against the idea of the subject<sup>15</sup> that knows himself or herself, God and the world**

"Aber mein Gefühl schlägt um, bricht heraus, sobald ich in die neuere Zeit, in unsre Zeit eintrete. Unsre Zeit ist wissend...." (Nietzsche 1969a:208). With these words, Nietzsche summarised his feelings about his time.

During the Enlightenment period the individual or the centered subject was discovered and found expression in the words: "Cogito, ergo sum" (Descartes [1911] 1984:92, 150; cf Milovanovic 1997:www.soci.niu.edu/critcrim/papers/drag-pomo.html). Descartes, the father of modern intellectual knowledge, gave the subject knowing abilities on which many truths could be founded (cf Pippin 1991:23). Descartes occupied himself with the problem of his time, namely how to turn philosophy into a science that would work with

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<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche reacted against the conception of history as teleology, which results from a certain reading of Hegel's philosophy of history. The central problem here relates to the emphasis on teleology and the achievement of goals (cf Roodt 2001:327). It however remains an open question whether Nietzsche himself studied Hegel intensively (cf Stegmaier 1990:99).

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche tried to create with his philosophy a new subject, one to overcome the old constructed subject. But as long as God existed, such a subject could not come into being. By killing God, he made it possible for human beings to construct a new subject. Lackey (1999:754) says "...for in killing God and metaphysics, he has set into motion the creative self-overcoming of 'self' which will empower individuals to expand the borders of what was once known as humans." Nietzsche wanted to free the subject from humans, so that individuals could achieve something more dignified and more improved. Nietzsche had a problem as far as the subjectification of knowledge and the subjectification of *praxis* was concerned. There is a general scepticism in history concerning the "value of an objective reality that bears no relation to subjective experiences" (Roodt 2001:329). The problem is that subjective experiences are used, above the objective reality, to acquire sure knowledge. Instead of "cogito ergo sum" Nietzsche prefers the reference of "vivo ergo cogito" (Nietzsche 1972b:325).

provable facts and truths, such as those that were discovered by Copernicus, Kepler and Galilei (cf Küng 1978:47).

It therefore became important that philosophy should also work with provable certainties. Descartes ([1911] 1984:92) designed a method, consisting of four rules, whereby it could be indicated how a human being can acquire knowledge. The first rule he applied was to accept everything which, when perceived, can be recognised as true. The second was to divide the problem into smaller fragments and to solve each part separately. "The third was to carry on my reflections in due order, commencing with objects that were the most simple and easy to understand, in order to rise little by little, or by degrees, to knowledge of the most complex, assuming an order, even if a fictitious one, among those which do not follow a natural sequence relatively to one another" (Descartes [1911] 1984:92). The fourth rule was to look at the whole of the problem so as to see whether all the arguments had been taken into consideration. Descartes moved from the unknown to the known, from doubt to knowledge. It is therefore rather apt that Descartes' method is called the method of methodological doubt.

Descartes made it possible for human beings (as subjects) to know. The human race no longer depends on the object to know. Humans have rational abilities, which help them in the process of knowing.

But immediately afterwards I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the "I" who

thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth "I think, therefore I am" was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.

(Descartes [1911] 1984:101; cf Descartes 1993:18)

Descartes does not mean to suggest that the human being knows and understands his or her being completely. The only certainty with regard to the human being's existence is his or her existence (cf Descartes [1911] 1984:150; 1993:18). From this self-certainty, Descartes then sets out to prove the existence of God based on the idea that everything the human being may think of, must be certain and truthful. He concludes that because God is perfect, he cannot be the cause of any error. Descartes thus argues that, from the certainty of the thinkable abilities of the human being, God definitely exists. If one thinks of God, one must conclude that God exists (cf Descartes [1911] 1984:178; 1993:25; Cahoon 1988:45).

Another reason Descartes offers to prove the existence of God is that God is the creator to whom everything belongs. He realises that all things depend upon God. Descartes ([1911] 1984:184; 1993:25) comes to the conclusion that his perception of God cannot be untrue and that nothing causes him to doubt this truth. This certainty of the existence of



God opens the doors to other modes of being in the external world (cf Flew 1984:91). It was important for Descartes and his time to have certainty about the existence of God. God alone could make the subjectivist world coherent. Without God or without concepts equally as transcendent, the definitively modern notion of the thinking subject tends to lose the grounds of its relation to the rest of reality (cf Cahoon 1988:69). It was also important that this certainty begins within the rational powers of human beings; that the existence of God is dependent on the rationality of human beings. European history reached a turning point with the philosophy of Descartes when basic certainty was no longer centered on God, but on humans (cf Küng 1978:36).

Nietzsche (1968b:23) did not share the same enthusiasm for and certainty of the human being as subject. He called Descartes and his following "harmlose Selbst-Beobachter" who believed in things such as "unmittelbare Gewissheit", "absolute Erkenntnis" and "Ding an sich" which were contradictions in terms (cf Madelon-Wienand 1998:303). To him the event expressed in the word *cogito* (I think) attained a series of statements which were difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove. When Nietzsche spoke of knowledge and the certainty thereof, he came to the conclusion that this certainty of knowledge could not exist.

What was certain to Nietzsche was the needlessness of rational proof of the existence of God. To him an intuitive feeling could not prove God. Nietzsche realised that in the knowing subject the idea of knowledge outside the borders of the subject was not possible; that no truth, no certainty and no knowledge existed outside the knowing

subject. Humanity could not decide upon the truth or untruth of certain questions. All problems relating to values and morals were beyond human reason. True philosophy to him was to understand the limits of reason. Nietzsche distanced himself from the system-based thinking of his time (the modernistic period). The universal whole was not the only reality that existed. He found it problematic that the philosophers, the scientists and the theologians obtained their truths and thoughts within certain systems. He claimed that truths could also lie behind and outside certain systems. Derrida agreed with Nietzsche that the subject was not the only given and certain existence within any and every context. In dispersing the subject within a system of textual relations, Derrida adopted a Nietzschean strategy of refusing to hypostasise the subject. For Nietzsche, this refusal was grounded in the affirmation of a multiplicity of perspectives, of seeing the world with new and different eyes, that animated his philosophy of will to power as active force within the infinite play of becoming (cf Schrift 1995:30). The only way to escape systems was through creativity as we find in art (see Beukes 1995:24).

Nietzsche agreed with Kant in rejecting the claims of the knowing subject. Kant focused on the importance of the limits of reason (cf Plaisier 1996:234). Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God can be viewed as a result of the speculative process of thought made possible by the limits imposed on reason by Kant's critique of this human faculty (cf Lawler 1986:1).

Kant replaced Descartes' idea of the infinite as the *primum cognitum* with the transcendental ideal of reason. He (Kant) set up certain criteria on the grounds of which

the rational could know. Kant agreed with the empiricists that knowledge is possible from experience, but he was not prepared to say that all knowledge must be derived from experience (cf Flew 1984:190). For Kant there are two types or categories of knowing, namely theoretical and practical knowing. Theoretical knowledge is knowledge that can be obtained empirically through that which we can see. Practical knowledge is obtained on another level. It pertains to knowledge of the unknown (that which cannot be seen), such as faith and God. He rejects any notion of knowledge of God in the theoretical sphere.

To Kant, knowledge of God from his revelation is not possible, because God cannot be empirically seen as an object amongst others. To know faith, he set up a second category of knowing, namely to know the unknowable by practical reason. Kant believed that the imagination ("Einbildungskraft"), is in a sense the root of all objective knowledge, a claim it shares with the transcendental unity of apperception (cf Cahoon 1988:62). Faith is not knowledge, but a useful function of rationality in its practical capacity. "Ich kann also Gott, Freiheit und Unsterblichkeit zum Behuf des notwendigen praktischen Gebrauchs meiner Vernunft nicht einmal annehmen, wenn ich nicht der spekulativen Vernunft zugleich ihre Anmaßung überschwenglicher Einsichten benehme....Ich mußte also das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen...." (Kant [1899] 1976:28). It is a function all humans must fulfil. The idea of God originates from rationality and is based upon the human acceptance of moral laws. God becomes something of a protector and guarantor of the moral order of the world (cf Maimela 1990:23).

Nietzsche (1969a:176-177) rejected Kant's idea of the practical reason, which included knowledge of God and faith. He blamed Kant for inventing a type of reason for something such as morality, that one was not supposed to reason about. Nietzsche (1969a:193) also rejected the "sittliche Weltordnung" of Kant as a lie of the philosophers and the church. To Kant humans were moral beings that had to perform certain moral duties. God was not an object, but an idea of the rational mind. The idea of God rested on moral grounds, that is, on practical reason's willing of the good and its acknowledgement of moral law. Moral considerations must lead us to suppose that such a God did in fact exist (cf Schacht 1984:257). Any reference to God was grounded in morality. However, Nietzsche did not agree with this.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche accused Kant of escaping his rational conscience by inventing a scientific method of reasoning to accommodate morality such as practical reason (Nietzsche 1969a:176-177).

For Kant, Jesus was the example of the ideal moral man. Jesus was the ideal man that satisfied God. Similarly, every human must strive for morality. Nietzsche did not agree with Kant, because to Nietzsche, morality meant danger. "Eine Tugend muss [sic] unsre Erfindung sein, unsre persönlichste Nothwehr [sic] und Nothdurft [sic]: in jedem andren Sinne ist sie bloss eine Gefahr" (Nietzsche 1969a:175). For Kant, morality served as humankind's redemption. Kant reinterpreted religion in terms of rational morality (cf Maimela 1990:26).

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<sup>16</sup> To Nietzsche there is no transcendent source of values. God is not the true source of legitimation of values. The source is to be found in the "Wille zur Macht" for which those values are real values (cf Ibanez-Noé 2001:9).

Kant rejected metaphysics, because knowledge could not be derived from the metaphysical world as a project of the empirical sensing of the order of things in the world. Sensing could never become a (false) deed. A metaphysical world that did not exist, could not be supposed. Nietzsche pointed to another reality, one that refused to invent ideal worlds, to visualise false abstract schemas, or to interpret the world in terms of reality, certainty and appearance. This was in opposition to the ideal world of Kant and of theology (cf Wilson 1994:17). In his book *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878), Nietzsche rejected any notion of a Christian metaphysical worldview. Such a worldview had no value since it could not help resolve the questions of life. If such a world existed, the knowledge thereof would be irrelevant like the knowledge of the chemical analysis of water to the sailor in danger in a storm (cf Nietzsche 1967:25-26).

But why did Nietzsche accuse Kant of metaphysics, when Kant was supposed to have rejected metaphysics? "In particular...it is Immanuel Kant whom Nietzsche castigates for continuing the agenda of metaphysics. This castigation is tinged with irony because Kant was supposed to have rejected metaphysics" (Wilson 1994:16). Von Schelling (1994:95) solves this problem by explaining that: "...Kant's critique was initially directed against the metaphysics accepted in the schools, but that from another side and, as it were, unintentionally, it also again became a defence of precisely this metaphysics."

Pascal (1966:150)<sup>17</sup> was the first person in the history of modernity to show that it was rationally acceptable to speak and reason of God without having to prove it with reason (cf Martin 1990:229-232). The question of the existence of God is a wager. He is or he is not. Reason cannot help in deciding between the choices. Reason is always limited. The choice lies in the hands of human beings and not in reason (Pascal 1966:151). Faith exists of more than reason. Faith exists within the hearts of people (Pascal 1966:154). To prove the existence of God logically is impossible. It is interesting to note that Pascal does not give much thought to arguments about proving the existence of God. God is a neutral possibility, which everybody must take into consideration. With this, he rejects atheism in principle (cf Rohrmoser 1969:220).

Nietzsche agreed with Pascal that morality provides no answers. It draws the human race away from its absolute basis (Plaisier 1996:36; cf Voegelin 1996:153-171). However, they differed on the issues concerning anthropology (Plaisier 1996). Pascal wanted to help humans understand themselves from the perspective of the crucified God. According to Pascal, meaning in the lives of human beings is only possible through a godly revelation (Plaisier 1996:233). Nietzsche saw humans as prisoners of their time, as the result of the constructions that they had built, which was why it was important for Nietzsche to create another stronger form of human being, the "Übermensch".

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<sup>17</sup> Voegelin (1996:145-171) states that Nietzsche adapted his "Wille zur Macht" from Pascal's concept of "libido dominandi". Parallels are also to be found between Pascal's concepts of "ennu", "ressentiment", "divertissement" and the "moi haissable" and Nietzsche's "ressentiment" and nihilism.

Throughout most of his works, Nietzsche (1968b:64-65) used Pascal as an example of being a Christian,<sup>18</sup> although he thought that Pascal had lost his reason. Nietzsche criticised Pascal for believing in God for the wrong reasons. Nietzsche (1971:81) said that no one was more expressive than Pascal was in talking of and providing reasons for the hidden God. Nietzsche was certain that although Pascal convinced himself of God's hiddenness, it seemed as if this were a false façade. Only someone who is afraid, speaks loudly. Pascal spoke as loudly as he could because he was afraid to admit that this hidden God carried the traces of immorality.

Hume (1993:14-24, 29-89) was the first thinker of his time to doubt the theology of nature. To him the God of Descartes, of De Spinoza and of Leibniz is nothing more than a psyche, that is in contact with the universe. God is a being of the outer space, which the human race cannot get to know (cf Molnar 1980:79). God, who cannot be known, cannot be an object of study. Anxiety and hope are the grounds for religion. Hume pointed out that the foundation of religion was to be found in primordial humanity's yearning for happiness, the fear of future misery, shock of death, desire for revenge, hunger for food and the other necessities. The human race preferred these necessities rather than love for truth (cf Maimela 1990:19). There is for Hume no ground for a rational, universal, natural and acceptable religion which would be open to all human beings. Hume had several theories on the origin of religion. He also rejected any notion of proving the existence of God on the grounds of cosmology and world order. Hence one could not

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<sup>18</sup> Voegelin (1996:144) says that when Nietzsche refers to "the Christian", he means Pascal.

proceed from observation of nature to the conclusion that our universe was the work of a loving Creator and not of some demon (cf Hume 1993:14-24, 29-89).

Nietzsche agreed with Hume on the origin of religion.<sup>19</sup> This becomes evident in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* where Nietzsche (1973:271-272) says that the founders of religion are those who select a certain way of living and interpret their way of life to justify all their actions.

### **3.3.3 Nietzsche as reacting against the ideas of progress in the philosophy of Hegel<sup>20</sup> and the science of Darwin**

Hegel exerted much influence in Europe, especially in the sphere of historical research. "Hegel is our only thinker who has made the forward movement of advance the very center [sic] and ground of pure thinking itself, and that advance is inseparable from the dark mystery of *Trieb*" (Altizer 1993:15). He expanded the Kantian categories of rationality and knowledge, which were related only to nature, to the sphere of history. Everything that happens in creation is purposeful and part of the duration of history. There is progress in the duration of history, because everything in history points to a teleological development. To Hegel this history is found in the divine idea where God as Spirit is part of a process of revealing himself in the world. He is bound to his revelation (Hegel [1969] 1980:194-195; [1970] 1980:32-33; cf Walker 1989:89-96).

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that Nietzsche criticised the English as not being a philosophical race. In his writings he merely said that Hume was the English philosopher whom Kant reacted to.

<sup>20</sup> Although Hegel and Nietzsche differed on many accounts, it is not to suggest that there are no common ground in their thinking. After having discussed Nietzsche's and Hegel's different opinions on their critique of metaphysics, Horstmann (1993:301) concludes that in the end both ask the same question, namely: "wieviel Objektivität braucht der Mensch?"



Hegel rejected the anthropomorphic and naive idea of God above the world. He also rejected the idea of a rational deistic God who created the world but then left it to its own devices. However, this does not mean he rejected God. To him (Hegel [1971] 1980:456-457; [1971] 1979:408-409) God existed in the sphere of thinking in general, in the form of representation and for experience, for subjectivity and in the subjectivity of Spirit, in the innermost being of subjective Spirit.

He places the existence of God in another sphere, that of relational relatedness with God. God is transcended above any reason or rational activity. Hegel differed from Kant in the sense that Kant made a distinction between God and humans. God stands opposite human reason. Hegel interpreted God, truth and the rational as events in the history of the human race. God is Spirit; he is the unconditional motion (Hegel [1969] 1980:221, 280).<sup>21</sup> In his religious philosophical thought De Spinoza influenced Hegel. For De Spinoza, God is the one who did not live apart from the world. He said that God is in the world and the world in God.

An otherworldly (transcendent) God was no longer acceptable. Humans wanted a God who was close to them and in whom they could trust. This becomes evident in Hegel's definition of religion. To him religion is objective with regard to the content of religious consciousness and subjective in the fact that God as Spirit is manifesting himself in the religious self-consciousness.

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<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche attached another meaning for "Geist". To him it meant life, which is not necessarily associated with God (cf Stegmaier 1997/8:300-318).

To Hegel the death of God is a historical event and a reality. This suffering and death of God mean that the human race shares in the divine history, that they are part of God himself. It is the nature of the divine to die a sacrificial death. With this philosophy Hegel ([1969] 1980:291-293) tried to reconcile the finite human with the infinite God. God reconciled himself eternally in his death with the world and himself.

The death of Christ must not be seen in a moral light, but as the forsakenness and hopelessness of the absolute, godly Self. It is not just the death of an individual but also the death of God himself, which says something of his nature. He had to die in order for human beings to live. This task of satisfying God lies only in the hands of God. No human can ever achieve this. But Hegel does not see the death of God as the end. The god-forsakenness of the world is captured in the forsakenness of God himself. God identified himself with the world. He overpowered death. Three days after Jesus was crucified and buried, he was resurrected. "Auf die Auferstehung folgt die Verklärung Christi, und der Triumph der Erhebung zur Rechten Gottes schließt diese Geschichte, welche in diesem Bewußtsein die Explikation der göttlichen Natur selbst ist" (Hegel [1969] 1980:291).

In his philosophy Hegel tried to put God at the top of the order of all things, as the only principle for knowledge. To do this, he created a system (cf Küng 1978:171). Hegel called the way in which the "absolute Geist" manifested itself in history, phenomenology. "Die Geschichte des göttlichen Geistes selbst: beschrieben vom Philosophen getreu nach der Stunde, wie sie ihm schlug. Insofern ist die Phänomenologie eine theologische

Geschichtsphilosophie und eine philosophische Geschichtstheologie” (Küng 1978:176). With his phenomenology Hegel tries to show how God is related to the world. God is part of the world in development and in history. He leads the world as Creator and as Spirit to himself and to his infinity and divinity (cf Küng 1978:177). This development of God in the world is a mighty, self-moving circle, where God turns from outside himself to within himself. There is a continuous dialectical movement in God. Hegel prefers to speak of God as Spirit, because Spirit is the expression of a God who comes to himself out of forsakenness and suffering. To Hegel, God is the ultimate reality in the world, in humans and in world history. Hegel was convinced that world history was driven on by an unknowable force, which he called a “Weltprozess” (Hegel [1969] 1980; cf Marlaud 1982:26; Hespé 1991:177-179). He saw the history of the world as the realisation of the kingdom of God on earth (Hegel [1969] 1980:280-281).

After Hegel, it would have been impossible to return to the old concept of a deistic God. Hegel paved the way for a new concept of God, namely God as the immanent in the transcendent, the God which is here and now. Hegel called it *bestimmte Religion* (Hegel [1969] 1980). To him God is no longer a being above and beyond this world, an unknown being whom the human race does not know. Humanity knows God because he has revealed himself in the process of history as the “absolute Geist” (see Hegel [1971] 1979:408-409).

Nietzsche (1972a:305), however, distanced himself from any notion of humans being trapped in the manifestation of historical events, which he called “Macht der Geschichte”.

Nietzsche rejected the idea of human beings as the authors of the progress of history as it would eliminate the future of humanity and would lead to stagnation. Nietzsche (1972a:304) was of the opinion that the philosophy of Hegel was dangerous in its views. Nietzsche could not commit himself to accept the idea that God could be derived from history.

Hegel, according to Nietzsche, did not realise the consequences of his philosophy of history as a world-process. His philosophy of history as a self-moving force is the beginning of nihilism.

Anfang und Ziel des Weltprozesses, vom ersten Stutzen des Bewusstseins [sic] bis zum Zurückgeschleudert-Werden in's [sic] Nichts, sammt der genau bestimmten Aufgabe unserer Generation für den Weltprozess, alles dargestellt aus dem so witzig erfundenen Inspirations-Borne des Unbewussten und im apokalyptischen Lichte leuchtend, alles so täuschend und zu so biederem Ernste nachgemacht, als ob es wirkliche Ernst-Philosophie und nicht nur Spass-Philosophie wäre: – ein solches Ganze stellt seinen Schöpfer als einen der ersten philosophischen Parodisten aller Zeiten hin: opfern wir also auf seinem Altar, opfern wir ihm, dem Erfindereiner wahren Universal-Medizin, eine Locke – um einen

Schleiermacherischen Bewunderungs-Ausdruck zu stehlen.

(Nietzsche 1972a:310)

Nietzsche (1973:280) believed Darwin owed much of his ideas to Hegel.<sup>22</sup> He was convinced that were it not for Hegel, there would have been no Darwin. In his book, *On the Origin of Species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle of life* (1859), Darwin demonstrated that organisms had evolved from a simple beginning into new forms by means of natural selection (cf Brooke 1991:275). Through this theory of evolution he explained several phenomena in nature. All species on earth try to increase their replicate to ensure their own survival. "In one respect, Darwin's theory, no less than Genesis, implied one ultimate origin; in another, however, it could be used to underwrite the notion that different races were incipiently distinct species, the 'fittest' of which had their superiority demonstrated by the very fact of their power and success" (Brooke 1991:280).

In his second book, *Descent of man* (1871), Darwin deals with the evolutionary processes of the human race. Many scientists welcomed the evolution theory, because it brought new insights into science. Furthermore, it opened doors to other scientific fields of study. But it also brought about theological reaction. There were the "creationists" who believed either in God, in the evolution theory, or in the "big bang" (cf Drees 1993:20).

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<sup>22</sup> However, Nietzsche was "suspicious and highly critical of the projection of Hegelian philosophical notions into Darwin" (Johnson 2001:71). Johnson (2001:65-69) pays attention to Nietzsche's critique of Strauss, whom he castigates for using Darwin's theories to attack "established religion, superstitions, and

The evolution theory can be classified as positive (optimistic) or negative (pessimistic). "...[O]ptimistic in that natural selection invariably worked for the good of the species, pessimistic in that nature was riven with struggle and strife" (Brooke 1991:289).

Nietzsche (1930:460-461) sees in evolution a form of finality, which he rejects. He rejects any idea of humans progressing to a greater species. Human beings do not exhibit any sort of progress. Instead, the ideal cases of evolution are exposed to every form of decadence (Nietzsche 1930:461). Nietzsche (1930:674) sees in humans a combination of the "Untier" and the "Übertier", "Unmensch" and the "Übermensch" with the opposites belonging together. Nietzsche (1968c:329-332) argues that it is important to know that whenever there is growth within humans towards greatness, there is also another side that needs to be considered; a side that conveys their growth into their own desires – desires, which would eventually destroy them. Decadence is a vital necessity and there is no progress without constant regress.

This evolution in species is the product of natural processes, with no sign of progress. It is humanity's will to survive. Nietzsche (1930:462-463) perceives the ultimate reason and character of all change in the will to power, which is part of nature. The principle of the will to power entails "wie man wird" (Nietzsche 1969b:291), where identity, and not change, plays a decisive role (cf Marlaud 1982:30). For Nietzsche the dogma of evolution is nothing but faith in the universal goal of human beings. In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche (1968a:10-11) said that the greatness of a human being resided in the fact that

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discredited theological doctrine." Johnson (2001:65-69) states that as far as Nietzsche was concerned, Strauss did not fully understand the theories of Darwin.

he or she is a bridge and not a goal. Nietzsche did not contest the scientific facts of evolution (cf Johnson 2001:70-79). He questioned the idea that the human race developed as an ideal, perfect utopia. Nietzsche argued that if this were true, humans would already have attained such a stage. He dismissed the idea of infinite progress as an unreasonable assertion (cf Marlaud 1982:30).

Nietzsche accepted progress only on the grounds of the growth of power. Evolution is nothing but the will to live. "Der Kampf um's [sic] Dasein ist nur eine Ausnahme, eine zeitweilige Restriktion des Lebenswillens; der grosse [sic] und kleine Kampf dreht sich allenthalben um's [sic] Uebergewicht [sic], um Wachsthum [sic] und Ausbreitung, um Macht, gemäss dem Willen zur Macht, der eben der Wille des Lebens ist" (Nietzsche 1973:267-268).

Nietzsche was of the opinion that the reality of his world differed from the one Darwin and the philosophers claimed to know. "Ich sehe alle Philosophen, ich sehe die Wissenschaft auf den Knien vor der Realität vom umgekehrten Kampf ums Dasein, als ihn die Schule Darwins lehrt, – nämlich ich sehe überall Die [sic] obenauf, Die [sic] übrigbleibend, die das Leben, den Wert des Lebens kompromittieren" (Nietzsche 1930:463).

### **3.3.4 Nietzsche's contact with Strauss and his break with Christianity**

Strauss was a student of Hegel. In 1835 he published *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*. He was one of the nineteenth century thinkers who prepared the ground for

Nietzsche's conclusion (cf Lawler 1986:1). The rationalists and the naturalists removed all the supernatural elements from the Bible and turned Jesus into a figure that everyone could follow. His sayings could be obeyed because they related to reality. Strauss claimed that the Gospels were the interpretations of the disciples of Jesus, who lived in a world filled by myth and legend. Strauss and Nietzsche agreed that the biblical writers clad Jesus in some unhistorical ideas. The statement that Jesus was the Messiah gave rise to many heresies, such as that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and was the prototype of Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha.

Jene seltsame und kranke Welt, in die uns die Evangelien einführen – eine Welt, wie aus einem russischen Romane, in der sich Auswurf der Gesellschaft, Nervenleiden und "kindliches" Idiotenthum [sic] ein Stelldichein zu geben scheinen – muss [sic] unter allen Umständen den Typus vergrößert haben: die ersten Jünger in Sonderheit übersetzten [sic] ein ganz in Symbolen und Unfasslichkeiten [sic] schwimmendes Sein erst in die eigne Crudität, um überhaupt Etwas davon zu verstehn, für sie war der Typus erst nach einer Einformung in bekanntere Formen vorhanden....

(Nietzsche 1969a:199-200)

Strauss ([1836] 1984:273) found similar examples throughout the Bible. He distinguishes between two tendencies in the myth of the incarnation of Jesus. The first is



the desire to see Jesus as the incarnation of Moses in a higher form. The second is to bring Jesus as the Messiah in contact with his predecessors, so that he could be exemplified as fulfilling the kingdom of God.

Strauss and Nietzsche tried as philological scientists and with the help of modern science, to reveal the real facts about Jesus because these facts were hidden behind unhistorical myths and legends that were retold by the disciples in their interpreting of Jesus. Strauss and Nietzsche could not find anything of the life of Jesus in the Gospels. To them the Gospels are nothing but the opinions of his disciples, for they are filled with contradictions. "At this point the similarity of outlook stops, for each critic has different arguments as to just how obscured the life [sic] and religion [sic] of Jesus are and as to just how much of this can be recovered from the Gospels" (Wilson 1994:28).

Nietzsche (1969a:197), unlike Strauss, was not concerned with the contradictions in the various traditions in the Gospels. He was more concerned with the "psychologische Typus des Erlösers" (Nietzsche 1969a:197). He was not concerned about the authenticity of the deeds and sayings of Jesus or the real facts about his death, but whether Jesus as a type of redeemer was still credible at all. He was not sure whether this type of redeemer was delivered by tradition.

Strauss admitted that Jesus was a historical person who acted in public and who gave the impression that he was the Messiah. He denied the claims of Jesus as the incarnate God on the basis of historical criticism and on the basis of speculative philosophy (Lawler

1986:45). To him it was part of the dogmas promoted by the church. The dogmatic statements of Jesus could, according to Strauss, be neither traced nor proved.

According to Strauss the history of Jesus had to be dogmatically reconstructed. He attempted to do so through a Hegelian understanding of the history of Jesus (cf Sandberger 1972). Strauss agreed with Hegel that the dogmatic statements about Jesus originated from conversations the disciples had after Jesus' death. The fact that the disciples believed in the resurrection is not enough reason for us to believe in it too (cf Brooke 1991:269). Nietzsche distanced himself from any human-made image of Jesus, such as Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus as the Christ. He tried to find the historical Jesus to free him from all the dogmas and interpretations surrounding his life. Nietzsche wanted to do away with the "man mache Jesu".

Nietzsche (1972a:155-238) called Strauss a "Philister" and a poor writer. He felt that Strauss did not practice what he had proclaimed (Nietzsche 1972a:196). Nietzsche accused Strauss of ignorance. Strauss proclaimed that he (Strauss) was no longer a Christian and that he did not want to influence anyone. He nevertheless still did. His views led others to also break with Christianity. Furthermore, he was not wholly honest with the readers of his book *Der Alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis* (1873). Nietzsche did not hold this book of Strauss's in high regard.

In der That [sic] diese Vereinigung von Dreistigkeit und Schwäche,  
tollkühnen Worten und feigem Sich – Anbequemen, dieses feine

Abwägen, wie und mit welchen Sätzen man einmal dem Philister imponieren, mit welchen man ihn streicheln kann, dieser Mangel an Charakter und Kraft bei dem Anschein von Kraft und Charakter, dieser Defekt an Weisheit bei aller Affektation der Ueberlegenheit [sic] und Reife der Erfahrung – das alles ist es, was ich an diesem Buche hasse.

(Nietzsche 1972a:196)

According to Nietzsche (1972a:206) the themes in this book were not logical. Strauss assumed, for instance (in his first chapter) that all humans were Christians, as if “alter Glaube” simply and solely refer to Christianity. Nietzsche said that this reflected Strauss’s true nature – he remained a Christian theologian. He was not a philosopher either, because he could not distinguish between faith and knowledge and he constantly referred to his so-called new faith and the new science in the same breath (Nietzsche 1972a:206). Nietzsche questioned the goal of Strauss’s work, which presumably was to expound a “neuer Glaube”. To Nietzsche (1972a:207) this new religion propounded by Strauss was neither new faith nor modern science. It was actually no religion at all. He concealed to his followers what he actually did with God, and instead turned to metaphysics. “Er wagt es nämlich nicht, ihnen ehrlich zu sagen: von einem helfenden und sich erbarmenden Gott habe ich euch befreit, das ‘Universum’ ist nur ein starres Räderwerk, seht zu, dass [sic] seine Räder euch nicht zermalmen!” (Nietzsche 1972a:195).

### 3.4 IMPLICATIONS OF NIETZSCHE’S PHILOSOPHY

Now that we have heard Nietzsche’s voice, it is evident that he indeed had a message for the people of his time (and for ours). The whole idea of progress and historicism is nihilistic. The idea that humans can *know* – and know everything – is going to destroy humankind.

Ueberstolzer [sic] Europäer des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, du rasest!  
 Dein Wissen vollendet nicht die Natur, sondern tödtet [sic] nur deine eigene. Miss [sic] nur einmal deine Höhe als Wissender an deiner Tiefe als Könnender. Freilich kletterst du an den Sonnenstrahlen des Wissens aufwärts zum Himmel, aber auch abwärts zum Chaos. Deine Art zu gehen, nämlich als Wissender zu klettern, ist dein Verhängniss [sic]; Grund und Boden weichen in’s [sic] Ungewisse für dich zurück; für dein Leben giebt [sic] es keine Stützen mehr, nur noch Spinnefäden, die jeder neue Griff deiner Erkenntniss [sic] auseinanderreisst [sic].

(Nietzsche 1972a:309)

To Nietzsche, the “Ewige Wiederkehr”, as a myth, is the replacement for all religions (cf Van Tongeren 2000:294-296). It is ironic that Nietzsche, who himself suffered so much because of the onslaughts of life, propagates this theory and as a consequence, a love for life. Nietzsche never justified atheism. To him, it was a datum. He did not want to

either affirm or deny the existence of God. He wanted to show the psychological reasons for belief in God. Humans believe in God because they strive for power and cannot bear the feeling of powerlessness. It is these psychological reasons explaining the Christians' belief in God that make the Christian faith unacceptable to him (see Nietzsche 1969a:223).

If Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is correct, then, we have to concede Nietzsche his anti-Christianity. His critique was aimed at a church estranged from life (the tomb of God); at the priests who thrived on people's feelings of guilt; and at the contemporary view of God. Contemporary society saw God as the Santa Claus of the weak, the sick and the poor, and as the enemy of life.

Küng (1978:452) therefore asks:

Wird man nicht zugeben müssen, daß diese Kritik an Gott um des Menschen willen geübt wird: um gegen einlähmendes Wissen, eine kleinliche moralische Beaufsichtigung, eine erdrückende Liebe Gottes die menschliche Identität zu bewahren? Entledigte sich Nietzsche also nicht Gottes um des Menschen willen: Gottlosigkeit nicht als Selbstzweck, sondern als Vorkehrung gegen die das Menschsein abwertende Gottgläubigkeit?

To Nietzsche the God of his time, that is the God created by the Christians (the God of progress in history, the God of morality and proven by rationality), was dead. The consequence of this death (atheism) is nihilism. The death of God means the death of everything that exists. Nietzsche’s statement “Gott ist todt [sic]!” challenged theology to have a rethink of God. If God is dead, there is only one alternative, namely that of a “dancing God”, which is both useful and harmful, friend and foe, admired by good and bad, and a contrast to the Christian concept of God (Nietzsche1968a:45; see Lampert 1986:46; Haar 1998:158; Madelon-Wienand 1998:301-312).

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I assumed that Nietzsche did not, *per se*, deny or acknowledge the existence of God. He was reacting to the concept of God that prevailed in his time, that is to say the modernistic period’s belief in progress, as propagated by the philosophy of Hegel and which was used in the evolution theory of Darwin and the anti-Christianity of Strauss (whom Nietzsche accused of ignoring the consequences of his critique on Christianity). Nietzsche did not agree with the idea of the subject that knows himself or herself, God and his or her world, as propagated by the philosophy of his time. To Nietzsche the god of his time, the god that is tied to world history, the god of morality and the god proven by rationality was dead. He spelled out the consequences of this death of God. To him the only consequence was nihilism, which means the death of everything that exists. He challenged theologians to have a rethink of God and his relation to morality, history and rationality.