

Great Influences Are Not Always Influences For Greatness

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Relative to some, I'm still just a "kid" while to many more I am an "old man." At just 60 years old, I am older than a lot of people, but in terms of society and the ever-widening age span, I'm not that far removed from the medium. Yet I have witnessed a great number of miraculous inventions and discoveries in those short 60 years. I grew up in the TV age; the Mickey Mouse Club, Howdy Doody, Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon and Captain America. I remember the terrifying fear when Russia successfully orbited the first satellite, Sputnik. I have seen technology grow to develop instruments capable of accomplishing great good, for the benefit of all the human race and to also cause great pain and suffering. I have had the opportunity to read and study some of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century, to be influenced, motivated by their ideas and fed at their banquet of wisdom. Conversely, I have had the opportunity to read the some of the intellectual counterfeits (my judgment) who promote their own ideas, desires and rantings as something worthy of consideration. In this group, I (my personal opinion) would place Frederick Nietzsche at the very top of this list.

For those who have little exposure to the world of philosophy, but are near my age, might remember the "*God is Dead!*" slogan popularized in the sixties. Though popularized on many college campuses Frederick Nietzsche introduced the slogan at the beginning of the 20th century in his book Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The slogan may have slipped from our memory, after all, "*How can God be dead?*" But, the influences of Nietzsche's writings and philosophy have permeated much of modern world thought. It seems that we may be reluctant to proclaim "*God is dead*" in our words, but we seem eager live our lives as though surly He was. The philosophy of Relativism is not original to Nietzsche, but a philosophy dependent on the denial of God or any absolute beyond the whim of the individual. Nietzsche was not a pure relativist, he did believe in the absolute sovereignty of the individual. So it is possible that the staunchest "Christian" survivalist/individualist is professing the ideas and attitudes of a devout atheist rather than anything close to the love of neighbor commanded by Christ.

Still more frightening to me than the claim for absolute personal sovereignty is the demand for a "*master morality*", an abdication of the old "*slave morality*" that is supposed to weaken society. The "*master morality*" idealizes the individual as their own master and the only moral choice is to satisfy personal ambitions at any price that doesn't injure the individual seeking their own goal. It is here that I see the greatest influence of Nietzsche's philosophy in world thought. The "*slave morality*" decried by Nietzsche is our Christian ethic and values of kindness, compassion and love for others. We are not controlled by our experiences, like puppets on a string, but we are greatly influenced and educated by what we see, hear, smell, taste or touch. Many people have said that it is impossible to be exposed to high levels of violence and sex and not be affected by these influences. I agree that it is dangerous to invest too much into mere observations, our experiences are severely limited, but *it is more dangerous to ignore the world around us and its influences, good or bad.*

As Catholic Christians, we have a greater responsibility to recognize the dangerous influences of Nietzsche's "*master morality*" as it tries to persuade society to consider only selfish self-interests attained by any means, as something worthy of humans. We, as Catholic Christians have available to us the truest teachings of Christ, the deepest deposit of wisdom if we but choose to look, to listen and to learn. We also have a greater requirement to stand up and confront the heresy of ideas and attitudes that reduce the value of life, its existence and quality, as subordinate to personal whim or convenience. (*Adolph Hitler was a disciple of Frederick Nietzsche.*)