

## THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN NATURE IN THE FACE OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S ATHEISM – BERNHARD WELTE ON *THE DEATH OF GOD* AND *ÜBERMENSCH*

KRISZTIÁN VINCZE<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The most widely known sentence in *The Gay Science* is "God is dead." Nietzsche himself is fully aware that with the disappearance of God, all human ideas and acts lose their foundations, and what was formerly built upon God as a basis, suddenly loses its footing, and floats in the endless nothing. The rejection of the Christianity, is the moment for Nietzsche when man re-gains his free will and abandons all limiting powers over his all-surpassing self, and starts his journey to the new quality of becoming *Übermensch*. The willpower, the will to existence and the will to power play central roles in the birth of the *Übermensch*. Bernhard Welte reminds us that man's desire to exist is an a priori that Christian anthropology also finds important. Man is created in the image and likeness of God, and carries on himself the shine of the face of God. Our want of existence is indeed an a priori of our selves, it is indeed the dynamism which is the source of all our specific willful actions, then this will is, in the interpretation of Christian anthropology, a will to bring us closer to God. Man wants to be God somehow, moves towards a divine existence. Consequently, atheism is a human capability and opportunity possibly derived from the innermost essence of the human race. There is a divine element in every human being, that is why man wants to become god, and that is why man makes himself godless when, in his rebellion, he rejects God.

Is it really possible that the most extreme atheism is fed by man's divine origin and roots? Bernhard Welte provides an explanation through the dialectics of the original, essential structure of human existence - this explanation is presented in the following paper.

**Keywords:** death of God, *Übermensch*, human nature, man created in the image of God, christianity, grace, willpower, actual and desired human existence

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Krisztián Vincze, Catholic University Pázmány Péter, Faculty of Theology, Chair for Christian Philosophy, Budapest 1053, Veres Pálné u. 24., vincze.krisztian@htk.ppke.hu.

## 1. What has Friedrich Nietzsche got to Do with the Teaching of Christianity?

Similarly to many others, the German Catholic priest and philosopher, Bernhard Welte also finds Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas shocking and unsettling. It is indeed frightening that somebody has been able to create a concept of human nature in history that is permeated with violence, an immeasurable amount of skepticism, a disdain towards morals, ungodliness, and an antagonistic feeling towards God. For Nietzsche, however, the latter is an indispensable requirement for a potential new beginning. Since there was somebody who was thinking along those lines, in Welte's opinion we may no longer pretend, and "no longer live as if there had never been anyone with those ideas."<sup>2</sup> In Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Physicists* we hear the sentence: "Nothing that has been thought can ever be taken back,"<sup>3</sup>—and, in the belief that thoughts are eternal, Welte thinks that the 19th century German philosopher exerts a great and unerasable influence on mankind.

It is well-known to all of us that Nietzsche would have never become the famous philosopher as we came to know him without his long mental illness, his symptoms and his nervous breakdown that all influenced him. When he was writing *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*<sup>4</sup> the "breath of pathology blew upon him," as in these writings he "no longer observes any of the rules of scholarly discourse." In these works of Nietzsche, allegedly scholarly observations are mingled with subjective value judgments, and it becomes increasingly clear that chains of thoughts that belong to basically positivistic analysis sometimes trigger complete identification and sometimes disgusted rejection in Nietzsche.<sup>5</sup> Norbert Fischer therefore appropriately points out that "for him, the efforts aimed at refuting the belief in God is a religion itself," since behind his vehemence to destroy everything all we find is a set of self-contradictory sug-

<sup>2</sup> WELTE, B., Nietzsche's Atheismus und das Christentum, in WELTE, B., *Denken in Begegnung mit den Denkern II, Hegel – Nietzsche – Heidegger*, in *Gesammelte Schriften II/2*, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2007, 47-83, 47.

<sup>3</sup> DÜRRENMATT, F., *The Physicists*. Act II, scene 7. Transl. James Kirkup.

<sup>4</sup> The works were published in 1886 and 1887 respectively.

<sup>5</sup> KISS, E., *Friedrich Nietzsche filozófiája. Kritikai pozitivizmus és az értékek átértékelése* [F. N's Philosophy. Critical Positivism and the Re-Valuation of Values] Gondolat, Budapest, 1993, 446-447.

gestions.<sup>6</sup> His ideas are unable to fit into a logical framework, his ideas are not organized into a well-organized system. As the end of his life was drawing near, his worsening general condition and declining health made him pathologically and desperately narcissistic, until he eventually declared himself the anti-Christ "only capable of, and destined to, saving the world."<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche was therefore unable to epistemologically approach reality; instead, he created an entirely subjectivistic and anti-humanistic myth!

Bernhard Welte is, however, dissatisfied with using Nietzsche's mental illnesses and his inability to be objective and to think in a strictly logical and straightforward way as an excuse. Welte is more interested in digging down to the roots of Nietzsche's atheism in order to find out to what extent the roots are present in the *Zeitgeist* of our time or, for that matter, in our very selves. That Nietzsche had a lot of unfair and obviously disputable ideas is undeniable. Despite all that, our thinking requires a "brotherly attitude"<sup>8</sup> towards him, that is, we must exercise patience and we need to understand the origins of his thinking, to survey to what extent his ideas affect the essence of humanity in general, believes Welte. Naturally, Welte is not the only deeply Christian thinker who is curious about Friedrich Nietzsche. Welte is not the only one who, instead of delivering prompt and sharp criticism of Nietzsche, wishes to pay patient attention to the philosopher. Hans Urs von Balthasar asserts that whoever wishes to understand Christianity, must know Nietzsche.<sup>9</sup> Eugen Biser does not balk at making daring statements when, in one of his writings, he points out that Nietzsche is not only one of the arch enemies of Christianity, but he also refers to the fact that the philosopher may at the same time promote the renewal of Christianity (2002).<sup>10</sup> All this, however, does not mean that now we should also begin to make contradictory remarks, once we have just made critical remarks of Nietzsche's illogical way of thinking. It merely means that the more false sentences are recognized, to the

<sup>6</sup> FISCHER, N., *A filozófusok istenkeresése, (Die philosophische Frage nach Gott. Ein Gang durch ihre Stationen* 1995., transl.: T. KAPOSÍ; quotations from sources originally in Hungarian translated by the author of this essay) Agapé 2001, 208, 211.

<sup>7</sup> SZÉLL, Zs., Bevezetés, in NIETZSCHE, F., *Válogatott írások*, [Introduction to N's Selected Works] (transl.: E. SZABÓ) Gondolat, Budapest <sup>2</sup>1984, 5-42, 11.

<sup>8</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar, when he was young, compiled a Nietzsche-anthology (without identifying himself), and included the texts that Balthasar regarded as of key importance.

<sup>10</sup> BISER, E., *Nietzsche – Zerstörer oder Erneuerer des Christentums*, Darmstadt 2002.

larger extent we shall be able to see the real weight and significance of truth. The more mistakes are identified, the clearer we see the truth. John Henry Newman effectively argues that Christianity best expressed some of its teachings, made it explicit in the form of a major dogma, when that dogma was forced to emerge clearly as a negation and refusal of different false or heretic ideas.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche's atheistic ideas may thus motivate people through their mistakes and false charges to concentrate on God and the features of human nature.

## 2. The Death of God as an Uttered Sentence

The most widely known sentence in *The Gay Science* is "God is dead." The cause of the death of God, that is, the murderer of God is man himself. This same terrible deed is philosophically recorded in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*<sup>12</sup> as well. In the first work a scene from a work of Diogenes Laertius is repeated, when the cynic Diogenes of Sinope lights a lamp in broad daylight, and walks out to the marketplace, calling out, "I am looking for a human!"<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche often used a mask in his writings, when he wanted to utter one of his serious ideas, and he was aware that those ideas were serious especially because they were highly unusual and alien to their own age. *The Gay Science* suggests that the searcher, hiding behind a mask, will not find God, since God no longer exists, God is dead. Eugen Biser believes that in that scene we may see a reversed version of the Biblical story when Elijah, the prophet, confronted the priests of Baal, summoning them to Mount Carmel, in order to offer a sacrifice. Elijah and the four hundred and fifty false prophets prepare the sacrifice. The stake prepared by the priests of Baal, however, does not lit up, no matter how hard they shout and pray to their alleged God. The wood, upon which Elijah's sacrifice is placed, is wet, as local people poured water on it at the request of Elijah, but it catches fire miraculously, without human intervention, and the oblation is duly devoured by the fire. At one point in the story, Elijah says the following to the false prophets, who are futilely praying and shouting to their false god: "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either

<sup>11</sup> FROSINI, G., *John Henry Newman. Una biografia teologica*, Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna 2014, 39, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche wrote *The Gay Science* in 1882, and *Zarathustra* between 1883 and 1885.

<sup>13</sup> DIOGENES, LAERTIUS, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. English transl.: Robert Drew Hicks. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives\\_of\\_the\\_Eminent\\_Philosophers/Book\\_VI#Diogenes](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers/Book_VI#Diogenes). accessed on 1 November 2017

he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”<sup>14</sup> The scene drawn up by Nietzsche in his *The Gay Science* shows the silence when the idol does not answer, when silence prevails, when there is no sign whatsoever that idol is present. In this case, however, it is not the god of the priests of Baal who fails to reply; this is the God of Elijah, the God of Christianity.

In Welte’s opinion, this terrible scene primarily means that God used to be well visible, His presence was tangible in the spiritual atmosphere, in human thinking. What is more, God was the dominant power in people’s life, and a vivid element of people’s spiritual horizon. God’s death, however, puts an end to all that, and this fact has a direct historical relevance, since a power permeating the entire human history now disappears, and philosophy, with all its arguments for the existence of God, is unable to restore it.<sup>15</sup> At that point, the name of Jacob Burckhard is mentioned. Burckhardt, in one of his letters, calls the period of Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas the time of revelation and release, since the very *concept* of God, covering all areas of human existence, is now vanishing. Hölderlin’s recognition, that God is now turning His face away from humans, no longer contemplating His creatures<sup>16</sup> is mentioned with a touch of existential influence. The most distressing in the whole thing is that Nietzsche himself is fully aware that with the disappearance of God, all human ideas and acts lose their foundations, and what was formerly built upon God as a basis, now suddenly loses its footing, and floats in the endless nothing. A vacuum is thus created in that event, and that vacuum gravely jeopardizes humanity and the entire *Zeitgeist*.<sup>17</sup>

After the declaration of the death of God, dramatic images appear on the pages of *The Gay Science*. The delinquents pose the questions themselves: ”But how

<sup>14</sup> BISER, E., *Gott ist tot. Nietzsches Destruktion des christlichen Bewusstseins*, München 1962, 29-31. The Biblical section: 1Kings 18,20-40

<sup>15</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> BURCKHARD, J., Briefe, Leipzig o. J., 90.; HÖLDERLIN, F., *Brot und Wein*, Sämtliche Werke, Gedichte nach 1800, 90-95, 94.

<sup>17</sup> „Nietzsche spürte, in solchen Dingen überwacht, dass mit dem Ausbleiben des lebendigen Gottes eigentlich kein Gedanke und keine Frage mehr einen echten Grund, kein Handeln mehr kein belebendes Ziel haben könne, und dass also nach diesem Ereignis jeder Gedanke und jedes Tun in einem Nichts ohne Ende schweben bleiben müsse. [...] Er spürt das Nichts ohne Ende als die lebensgefährdende Bedrohung des Zeitalters und der Menschen.“ WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 54.

did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?<sup>18</sup> The first image is that of the sea, a metaphor of greatness and the unsurpassable energy of God in patristic literature. God's unsurmountable greatness is described as "quo maius nihil cogitari potest" by Anselm of Canterbury, and as "summum cogitabile" by Duns Scotus, and the superior creature thus described disappears with the water of sea drunk up.<sup>19</sup> The destruction of God means for Nietzsche the destruction of everything else, because in his ideas God used to be the focus of all idealistic thinking that began with "Socrates and Paul",<sup>20</sup> and that subdued Christianity to Platonism,<sup>21</sup> creating the framework of morals in which the most important merits are mercy, altruism, solidarity and love,<sup>22</sup> and in which the supreme value is truth.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again?" NIETZSCHE, F., *The Gay Science*. 2001. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. (ed. Bernard Williams, transl. Josefine Nauckhoff), Cambridge University Press, 149.

<sup>19</sup> BISER, E., *Gott ist tot*, 51-56.

<sup>20</sup> BICZÓ G., *A tragédia délelőttje – az ifjú Nietzsche filozófiai perspektivizmusa*, [The Morning of Tragedy–Philosophical Perspectivism of the Young N) Osiris, Budapest 2000, 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> BISER, E., *Gott ist tot*, 131. This opinion of Nietzsche's sounds natural, since for him Christianity is just Platonism (for the common man).

<sup>22</sup> STONE, A., Existentialism, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, (ed. by BULLIVANT, S. – RUSE, M.), Oxford University Press, 2013, 278-292. The author believes that Nietzsche and Sartre think alike, as for consistent atheism it is necessary to completely destroy the system of Christian morals: "Here he prefigures Sartre [...] Consistent atheism requires the destruction of the entire ethical edifice deriving from Christianity and the creation of an entire new table of evaluation in its place. Until these highly demanding tasks are completed, we remain amidst the remains of Christian morality, so that in practice no Europeans can be complete, consistent atheist."

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger delivered several lectures in 1939, and in those lectures he placed Nietzsche as a metaphysical thinker in the traditions of metaphysics of the will, in

### 3. The Meaning of the Death of God in the Face of *Übermensch*

The entire meaning of "the death of God" is, as we see, not easy to determine. Gábor Biczó believes that this declaration by Nietzsche is a special statement the "meaning and importance of which is impossible to summarize within one single dimension of meaning." Biczó refers to Gilles Deleuze, whose opinion is that the statement "God is dead is not a speculation, but a par excellence dramatic declaration." The vacuum that follows the declaration, however, means the total destruction of everything "that European culture has created over the almost two thousand years of Christianity."<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* also reports the death of God. Many people believe that *Zarathustra* is the prominent work of the German thinker, the essence of his philosophy,<sup>25</sup> in which the death of God is closely linked to the advent of the man beyond man. The writing containing these two statements can in this way be regarded as a "challenge against all religions", a "new holy scripture," which is the fifth Gospel, the "atheistic anti-Bible."<sup>26</sup>

In order to understand the concept of the *Übermensch*, the concept of the man beyond man, Bernhard Welte finds it imperative to detect and see the willpower

---

the face of Nietzsche's own ideas regarding *the want of power*. Heidegger believes that Nietzsche follows Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer, and the novelty in Nietzsche's philosophy is that the existent, man himself, is the embodiment of the want of power. Since Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, it has been well known what a major role arts play in our life, and this important role is complemented by the validity of sensualism in Nietzsche's works. While Nietzsche turns away from Platonism, truth for him is entirely different from what it meant in the philosophical traditions before his time. Human cognizance is, basically, nothing but a "schematization of the chaos according to our daily needs." What perspectively serves the benefit of man is therefore to be regarded as truth; truth is but a "perspectively functioning manifestation of life." N. FISCHER, in his *A filozófusok istenkeresése*, [Philosophers In Search of God] 207, finds the following quotation as the best summary of Nietzsche's concept of truth: "Our needs explain the world; our needs and our instincts, and what speaks for or against us. Every instinct is some sort of a longing for power, a want of power. Each one has its own perspective, and they want to impose that perspective as a norm onto all other instincts." (NF 7, /60/, KSA 12,315)

<sup>24</sup> BICZÓ G., *A tragédia délelőttje*, [The Morning of Tragedy] 97-98.

<sup>25</sup> Endre Kiss quotes the univocal opinion of Karl Löwith, Wolfgang Taraba and Karl Schlechta. E. KISS, *Friedrich Nietzsche filozófiája* [F. N's Philosophy] 399.

<sup>26</sup> FISCHER, N. 2005., *The Philosophical Quest for God. A Journey through its Stations*. 205.

of man to live. This willingness to live is the prime condition of the empirical forms of our specific actions and will. In the background of every single willful act of man there is the original, primeval condition that is manifested in the following words: "I want to be, I want to exist!" This elementary human feature that says yes to existence and that at the same time motivates man to use various competences and to achieve power, to ensure and support man's ability to survive. Without that feature, humans would not strive to unfold their own life, it is therefore clear that the core essence of man is his affirmative approach to his own existence.<sup>27</sup> A frequent idea in both *The Gay Science* and *Zarathustra* is that, after the death of God, a new, empty horizon opens up in front of man. The concept of *God* is, for Nietzsche, a power that limits and controls man's possibilities. Since man's instinct to survive always motivates man to go further, to rise higher, it is logical that God is a restricting power. If there is anything or anyone that wishes God to die, then it is nobody else but man, because of his unlimited longing for freedom. Nietzsche is convinced that where there is life, there is also will, and that will is not just a mere longing for life, but a will reaching out for power<sup>28</sup>—that is how man's innermost desire ultimately becomes a rival of God. Another well-known part of *Zarathustra* is the one in which Nietzsche outlines a process of metamorphosis. There is first a camel, an allegory of weight bearing and carrying, matching the motif of "must", in reference to man, who carries the unpleasantly heavy load of culture and morals. The camel is followed by a lion, the representation of "I want," when man turns against the burden, and intends to replace it with unlimited liberty. Finally, the new human, as hoped for and anticipated by Nietzsche, appears in the image of the playing child. The new human

<sup>27</sup> „Der Daseinswille, der als apriorisch Ermöglichendes allen empirischen Formen des Willens zugrunde liegt, [...] Ich will sein. Dies ist die Stimme des anfänglichen Daseinswollen [...] Sein ist das Gewollte und ist als Gewolltes angesprochen... Das Sein, in diesem Zusammenhang als Gewolltes verstanden, gewinnt die Gestalt der Macht. Ich will sein, heisst jetzt: Ich will mächtig sein. Sein als Macht ist so das anfänglich Gewollte des Daseinswollen und erscheint damit als das Ursprünglichste und Innerste dessen, was der Mensch je und je ist, in dem er es will. Im Zuge der Macht fängt aller Vollzug des Daseins an. Dies ist es, was sich für Nietzsche zeigt.“ WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. NIETZSCHE, F., *Válogatott írások, Így szólott Zarathustra*, [Selected writings/Thus Spoke Zarathustra] 219-296, 257.

is going to create himself new values, overcoming, and forgetting the old values that he used to carry and drag along like a camel.<sup>29</sup>

Nietzsche wants man to abandon, shed all the European, Christian morals in this metamorphosis! The transformation is not even limited to morals, as it is to include the entire analytical framework that determines European man as an intellectual being. In Nietzsche's interpretation, God's death terminates man's moral and intellectual captivity.<sup>30</sup> Welte argues that Nietzsche's demand is probably the most powerful expression of man's willpower to survive.<sup>31</sup> It is indicated by the scene in *Zarathustra*, when Zarathustra wishes to deliver new stone tables to the people living in the valley, because with the help of these new tables, man will be able to surpass himself: "*Behold, here is a new table; but where are my brethren who will carry it with me to the valley and into hearts of flesh? Thus demandeth my great love to the remotest ones: BE NOT CONSIDERATE OF THY NEIGHBOUR! Man is something that must be surpassed.*"<sup>32</sup> The new tables are, naturally, meant to replace the old ones that came from Moses and contained the Ten Commandments. The rejection of the old tables, which is at the same

---

<sup>29</sup> "Three metamorphoses of the spirit do I designate to you: how the spirit becometh a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child. Many heavy things are there for the spirit, the strong load-bearing spirit in which reverence dwelleth: for the heavy and the heaviest longeth its strength.

My brethren, wherefore is there need of the lion in the spirit? Why sufficeth not the beast of burden, which renounceth and is reverent? [...] To create new values--that, even the lion cannot yet accomplish: but to create itself freedom for new creating--that can the might of the lion do. [...] But tell me, my brethren, what the child can do, which even the lion could not do? Why hath the preying lion still to become a child? Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea.

Aye, for the game of creating, my brethren, there is needed a holy Yea unto life: ITS OWN will, willeth now the spirit; HIS OWN world winneth the world's outcast." NIETZSCHE, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. 2016. Transl. Thomas Common. Project Gutenberg e-book.

<sup>30</sup> BISER, E., *Gott ist tot*, 54. Biser, in his other work, also remarks that Nietzsche's destructive power is aimed at the entire culture and civilization of his age, especially the religion of Christianity that emerged through Judaism. BISER, E., *Nietzsche – Zerstörer oder Erneuerer des Christentums*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 64.

<sup>32</sup> NIETZSCHE, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. 2016. Transl. Thomas Common. Project Gutenberg e-book.

time the rejection of Christianity, is the moment for Nietzsche when man regains his free will and abandons all limiting powers over his all-surpassing self, and starts his journey to the new quality of becoming *Übermensch*. The relevant point of *The Gay Science* is that the followers of Christianity (and, in Nietzsche's view, those of Buddhism) are weak people, individuals, whose willpower is feeble: "Faith is always most desired and most urgently needed where will is lacking; for will, as the affect of command, is the decisive mark of sovereignty and strength. (...) From this one might gather that both world religions, Buddhism and Christianity, may have owed their origin and especially their sudden spread to a tremendous sickening of the will."<sup>33</sup> This central role of human will, its culmination in *Übermensch*, is given further emphasis in the philosopher's later works. Once there is no longer God to keep us under control, Nietzsche makes human willpower his guiding spirit, and this way we may hope that man will rise. In this new, free world, man's instincts are fully liberated, and the strong ones will finally have the opportunity to rule over the "flocks of... grey people."<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. *Übermensch* and Man Created in the Image of God

Bernhard Welte—when he analyses Nietzsche's thoughts—reminds the reader that man's desire to exist is an a priori that Christian anthropology also finds important. Man is created to the image and likeness of God, and carries on himself the shine of the face of God.<sup>35</sup> These ideas, at the first sight, appear to be extremely far from the author of *Zarathustra*. Still, the fact that man is created to the image of God means that man is a creature who strives, longs to be similar to his creator, to his ultimate model. Man is determined by his own image, his own appearance, and in that appearance he struggles to become similar to the one he originates from. If our want of existence is indeed an a priori of our selves, it is indeed the dynamism which is the source of all our specific willful actions, then this will is, in the interpretation of Christian anthropology, a will to bring us

<sup>33</sup> NIETZSCHE, F., *The Gay Science*. 2001. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. (ed. Bernard Williams, transl. Josefine Nauckhoff), Cambridge University Press, 205-206,

<sup>34</sup> NIETZSCHE, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. 2016. Transl. Thomas Common. Project Gutenberg e-book.

<sup>35</sup> „Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine.“ St. Thomas Aquinas, ST, I. q 79, a 4. Welte refers to this detail of a psalm several times. It was St. Thomas Aquinas who made this motto well-known (Man was made in the image and likeness of God)

closer to God. Man wants to be God somehow, moves towards a divine existence. In Nietzsche's twisted interpretation it appears as follows: "Since man wants to be God, he doesn't want to see any other gods there!"<sup>36</sup> Consequently, atheism is a human capability and opportunity possibly derived from the innermost essence of the human race. There is a divine element in every human being, that is why man wants to become god, and that is why man makes himself godless when, in his rebellion, he rejects God. Nietzsche's atheisms is exemplary and edifying, since it springs up from the deepest core of human soul. How is that possible that the most extreme atheism is fed by man's divine origin and roots? Welte provides an explanation through the dialectics of the original, essential structure of human existence. This dialectic is shown by the following: on the one hand, man possesses the ability of self-determination, and in this way strives for an absolute and infinite existence, by excluding any and all contradiction and partiality. On the other hand, everything human is determined and restricted by the circumstances; everything human suffers limitations; hence Nietzsche's tragic suffering!<sup>37</sup>

Welte makes the staggering observation that this very dialectic, characteristic of our existence, that man always carries a duality of possibilities all through his life. The two extreme poles sometimes attract man with magnetic a power, and sometimes repulses him with equal intensity. Sometimes man must say an unconditional Yes to God or, in the pain of his finite existence and despair, he rejects the belief in God, and chooses the (entirely futile) struggle aimed at becoming God himself. It is certainly not an accident that the first book of the Bible contains the promise: "ye shall be as gods."<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, in his writings, shows the most extreme dimension of the dialectic of human existence.<sup>39</sup> If man is defined as will, then his essential possibilities are open, containing a dialectic contradiction, and must move either to one or to the other pole.

---

<sup>36</sup> „Weil der Mensch Gott will, will er, dass kein Gott sei.“ WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> „Es ist der Widerspruch, der darin liegt, einerseits in der Macht der eigenen Verfügung als Wollen absolut und unendlich sein zu wollen, göttlich, übermenschlich und ohne Widerspruch und Teilung, andererseits aber den Widerspruch der immer nur begrenzten Verhältnisse alles Menschlichen gleichwohl erleiden zu müssen [...] Dies war im Grunde Nietzsches großes Leiden.“ WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> (Gen 3:5, King James version, public domain)

<sup>39</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 72-73.

Bernhard Welte has another, a shorter writing, which also discusses the duality of the character of the *Übermensch*. One is, as suggested in *Zarathustra*, the one that overcomes and surpasses the old type of man. The difference between the old type of man and *Übermensch* is so enormous, that the *Übermensch* will be ashamed when thinks back to his imperfect ancestor. The closing part of Book 1 of *Zarathustra* contains the triumphant exclamation that looks upon the death of God as a necessary condition of the emergence of *Übermensch*: "Dead are all the Gods: now do we desire the superman to live!"<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche therefore believes that God, that is, the *concept* of God is an obstacle to be done away with so that the superhuman, the man beyond man, may arise. We have seen earlier that man is characterized by an a priori dialectic which, as Bernhard Welte describes it in that writing, a feature inseparable from our soul, we carry it as an identity, the starting point and at the same time the motivation of pursuing our goals. That feature, however, contains a permanently disturbing and burdensome dimension, as man always wants more than what his actual existence is able to provide.<sup>41</sup>

### 5. *Übermensch* and the concept of grace

After considering all that, we must now realize, in Welte's argumentation, that this dialectic cannot be dissolved by human means. Everything human is too little, dissatisfactory for man. Pascal is therefore right when he asserts that man infinitely surpasses man.<sup>42</sup> Knowing that, we are able to understand Nietzsche's intention to find an answer to the mystery of man beyond man, since only superhuman is able to satisfy man, only the divine, fully complete existence is ac-

<sup>40</sup> „Tot sind alle Götter, nun wollen wir, dass der *Übermensch* lebe!“

<sup>41</sup> „Hier ist offenbar vom Sein der Menschen die Rede. Und dieses Sein ist als Vollzug zu begriffen. [...] Aber der Selbstvollzug als Identität findet sich in Schwierigkeiten, er hört zwar nicht auf, aber er entdeckt in sich selber eine lästige und immer wieder störende Differenz. Differenz im Vollzug der Identität. [...] Ihr Wille und ihre Sehnsucht wollen und erstreben mehr als das, was die Menschen jeweils de facto sind [...] was sie sind, und was sie sein möchten.“ WELTE, B., Nietzsche's Idee vom *Übermensch* und seine Zweideutigkeit, in WELTE B., *Denken in Begegnung mit den Denkern II, Hegel – Nietzsche – Heidegger*, in *Gesammelte Schriften II/2*, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2007, 84-101, 93.

<sup>42</sup> PASCAL, B., *Gondolatok* [Thoughts], 194.

ceptable for him.<sup>43</sup> Zarathustra in part four of the book, talks about *Übermensch* as something very close to his heart, something which is indeed the first and the last. As if hope and desire, side by side, become increasingly intensive while Nietzsche anticipates the arrival of someone who is more than a man, a creature without contradictions who, despite his limitations, aspires towards the unlimited.

Welte assumes that the problem in the background of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is the dilemma of reconciling human features with divine characteristics, how to bridge the menacing and enormous distance between the two, how man is able to approach what is eternal and divine. A key element of Christian teaching is that the desire that man has towards the divine, can only be fulfilled by God himself, who freely and gracefully elevates that desire to himself. The concept of grace in theology means that God offers himself, God is the one who elevates man to himself in love, and God is the one who is able to live within us,<sup>44</sup> eliminating, dissolving the constraints that man struggles with during his mortal life. "What is understood as purely *Übermensch* shall be understood as pure grace," Welte argues, and that is how Nietzsche, inadvertently, becomes an author who refers to the gospel of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> In Chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation we read, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." The kingdom of God is shown as something that is to descend from Heaven, that is, something that is not man-made, but presents itself to man (Rev 21,2). In the following lines the idea of re-creation appears ("I am making everything new!," Rev 21,5), complemented with the promise that there will be no night and no day, "They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light." (Rev 22,5). In Welte's interpretation these Biblical images

---

<sup>43</sup> „Darum ist es von Nietzsche genau und konsequent gedacht, wenn er als Entwurf seiner Lösung des Rätsels Mensch nicht auf den Menschen, sondern über den Menschen weist: Über dem Menschen ist das, was einzig den Menschen lösen und erfüllen kann und ins reine Ja des ungeminderten und ungeteilten und darin schliesslich göttlichen Daseins bringen kann.“ WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 75.

<sup>44</sup> PUSKÁS A., *A kegyelem teológiája*, [The Theology of Grace] SZIT 2007, chapters 4.2.1 and 5.2.2.

<sup>45</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Atheismus*, 80-81.

show that graceful and perfect state in which human and divine merge into one, where man has finally acquired superhuman.<sup>46</sup>

The difference<sup>47</sup> hiding in our human identity—that is, our efforts to stretch beyond our limits—has an obvious symptom! The creatures in science fiction, supermen and other fictional characters with extraordinary capabilities all tell about our elementary instinct to reach beyond our limits. Welte, however, believes that this desire was expressed with such power and intensity in the 20th century that we actually want to play god! The technologies of the 20th century, nuclear physics, astrophysics, are ample examples that demonstrate that we cross our borders, we break through our limits. Man, with his skills, advanced technology and thirsts for knowledge, aims at nothing less than rule over the whole world. Our god-complex is no longer deniable,<sup>48</sup> and a part of it is our efforts aimed at becoming almighty.<sup>49</sup> Man's god-complex has, however, another, easily predictable consequence: it is understandable that God is no longer necessary, and he has to die, since He is an obstacle in the way of man leading to omnipotence. The void after the death of God is expected to be filled by the debut of *Übermensch*, which can be indicated by man's ability to break through its barriers with the help of technology, or the expansion of human autonomy in which totalitarian systems

---

<sup>46</sup> Welte, in the same logic, believes to grab the concept of Jesus, the Godman in the analysis of the openness of humans to superhuman. VINCZE, K., *Antropológia és krisztológia összekapcsolódása Bernhard Welte gondolkodásában*, in *Athanasiana* [The Link between Anthropology and Christology in B. Welte's Ideas] (41) 2015, 66-79., and K. VINCZE, *Praeambula fidei a fenomenológia nyomán – Bernhard Welte vallásfilozófiájának központi gondolatai*, in *Teológia* [Praeambula fidei, following on phenomenology - the central ideas in Bernhard Welte's philosophy of religion] 48 (3-4) 2014, 206-215.

<sup>47</sup> „Diese Differenz in der Identität, die zur Natur des Menschen gehört...” WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Idee vom Übermensch*, 94.

<sup>48</sup> At this point, Welte mentions the names of Habermas and Horst Richter, who cannot only see the stunning effects of the astounding god-complex, but also draw our attention to its dangers, and the considerable damage it has done to philosophy (also in the form of ideology)! HABERMAS, J., *Wissenschaft und Technik als Ideologie*, 1968., RICHTER, H. E., *Der Gotteskomplex. Die Geburt und die Krise des Glaubens an die Allmacht des Menschen*, 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Here we may recall Nietzsche's far-reaching remark that he is actually foretelling the history of the following two hundred years. NIETZSCHE, F., *Werke*, III, 634, *Aus dem Nachlass der Achtzigerjahre*. (The point of reference is provided by Welte.)

and absolutistic political formations may lead to the rule of people who play god, and bring others to their knees.<sup>50</sup>

Welte's anthropology therefore shows a close interrelation between two apparently antagonistic concepts, one of which is the dream of an atheistic philosopher, and the other is a key idea in theology. The two might appear to be remote from each other at first sight, but it is possible to detect their close connection: *Übermensch* and the concept of grace in fact illuminate each other, and they help us in understanding them both. That man is an active creature, always in motion, is caused by the fact that there is a difference between his actual situation and the desired one. Man's identity means that he must accomplish his self-fulfillment like he carries out an assignment. The process of self-fulfillment, however, always and inevitably contains the desire to reach beyond, to grow above human. In Welte's interpretation what makes a man a man is that his attention is aimed at the realm beyond his own existence, at the infinite. This is, however, not only a motivation, but at the same time a grave danger! Man's identity may be disturbed if his inherent difference is not lived properly. In one of the most well-known definitions of Søren Kierkegaard, man is a synthesis, the synthesis of finite and infinite, temporary and eternal, freedom and necessity.<sup>51</sup> Kierkegaard warns that human life may contract a "mortal disease," when man, in his efforts to achieve his synthesis, does not place the appropriate emphasis on the opposing poles, and the poles get into a disharmonic relationship with each other.

Similarly to Kierkegaard, Welte also believes that man takes his factual finite existence infinitely serious, and when he wants to achieve the infinite with his own resources, or he wishes to achieve that infinite through his own finiteness, it will lead to nothing good. Perhaps the gravest danger in human existence that we attempt to find superhuman in the extension of our finite characteristics. Out of that, naturally, no success or satisfaction comes, but "the desperate violence of willpower" "and the distorted and terrible figure of the *Übermensch*."<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche

<sup>50</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Idee vom Übermensch*, 94-95.

<sup>51</sup> Creating the synthesis is, however, not that easy. The balance of body and soul may be disrupted, there may a discrepancy emerge between the poles longing for synthesis, and it may lead to the "hystery of the soul" and "mortal illnesses of man," eventually causing the total loss of the human self. Cf. K. VINCZE, *Az emberi én szemben az abszolútummal – Kierkegaard a kétségbeesésről és az istenhitről*, in *Athanasiana* [The Human Self vs. The Absolutum – Kirkegaard on Despair and the Faith in God] (43) 2016, 175-183.

<sup>52</sup> WELTE, B., *Nietzsches Idee vom Übermensch*, 100.

became a pioneering philosopher at this very point, at the point of divergence between theism and atheism, when he concentrates on his own Übermensch, and not on God. That is how he became the philosopher described by Heidegger as the "de profundis thinker," by Karl Barth as "the prophet of humanity without philanthropy", and Martin Buber as "the pathos-filled witness to the ever extending crisis of religion."<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche, however, unintentionally demonstrated that man is naturally open to the superhuman, he longs for that, and seeks what is beyond his factual existence. Man's identity means that he wishes to overcome the difference between his actual and desired existence, thus becoming superhuman.

### Bibliography

- BICZÓ G., *A tragédia délelőttje – az ifjú Nietzsche filozófiai perspektivizmusa*, [The Morning of Tragedy–Philosophical Perspectivism of the Young N) Osiris, Budapest 2000, 97-98.
- BISER, E., *Gott ist tot. Nietzsches Destruktion des christlichen Bewusstseins*, München 1962.
- BISER, E., *Nietzsche – Zerstörer oder Erneuerer des Christentums*, Darmstadt 2002.
- HÖLDERLIN, F., *Brot und Wein*, Sämtliche Werke, Gedichte nach 1800, 90-95.
- DIODES, LAERTIUS, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. English transl.: Robert Drew Hicks. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives\\_of\\_the\\_Eminent\\_Philosophers/Book\\_VI#Diogenes](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers/Book_VI#Diogenes). accessed on 1 November 2017
- DÜRRENMATT, F., *The Physicists*. Transl. James Kirkup.
- FISCHER, N., *A filozófusok istenkeresése, (Die philosophische Frage nach Gott. Ein Gang durch ihre Stationen 1995.*, transl.: T. KAPOS; quotations from sources originally in Hungarian translated by the author of this essay) Agapé 2001.
- FROSINI, G., *John Henry Newman. Una biografia teologica*, Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna 2014.
- KISS, E., *Friedrich Nietzsche filozófiája. Kritikai pozitivizmus és az értékek átértékelése* [F. N's Philosophy. Critical Positivism and the Re-Valuation of Values] Gondolat, Budapest 1993.
- NIETZSCHE, F., *The Gay Science*. 2001. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. (ed. Bernard Williams, transl. Josefine Nauckhoff), Cambridge University Press.

<sup>53</sup> BISER, E., *Gott ist tot*, 279.

- NIETZSCHE, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. 2016. Transl. Thomas Common. Project Gutenberg e-book.
- PASCAL, B., *Gondolatok* [Thoughts].
- PUSKÁS A., *A kegyelem teológiája*, [The Theology of Grace] SZIT 2007.
- STONE, A., Existentialism, in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, (ed. by BULLIVANT, S. – RUSE, M.), Oxford University Press, 2013, 278-292.
- SZÉLL, Zs., Bevezetés, in NIETZSCHE, F., *Válogatott írások*, [Introduction to N's Selected Works] (transl.: E. SZABÓ) Gondolat, Budapest <sup>2</sup>1984.
- VINCZE, K., Antropológia és krisztológia összekapcsolódása Bernhard Welte gondolkodásában, [The Link between Anthropology and Christology in B. Welte's Ideas] in *Athanasiana* (41) 2015, 66-79.
- VINCZE, K., Praeambula fidei a fenomenológia nyomán – Bernhard Welte vallásfilozófiájának központi gondolatai, [Praeambula fidei, following on phenomenology - the central ideas in Bernhard Welte's philosophy of religion] in *Teológia* 48 (3-4) 2014, 206-215.
- WELTE, B., Nietzsches Atheismus und das Christentum, in WELTE, B., *Denken in Begegnung mit den Denkern II, Hegel – Nietzsche – Heidegger*, in *Gesammelte Schriften II/2*, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2007.