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| Author: | Nietzsche, Friedrich (Translator: H. L. Mencken) |
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Review: During 1888 Nietzsche worked on six short books. One of them was *Der Antichrist*, which is now a classic. The book has been translated into English more than once. The translation from 1920 by the American controversialist, journalist and critic of American life, Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956), is now available in reprint, with a short introduction by Mencken. - Walter Kaufmann's (1921-1980) edition from 1954 is, however, still the most reliable english translation.

Nietzsche's book is well known and to a certain degree still controversial. It is well known by virtue of the central question of "decadence" and Nietzsche's attack on Christianity that lie at the heart of the book. The book seems to fall in three parts. The first part (§§1-23) is a kind of Prolegomena. The fundamental axioms or the first principles of his philosophy of the will to power is introduced. - "What is good? - Whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man. What is evil? - Whatever springs from weakness. What is happiness? - The feeling that power *increases* - that resistance is overcome" (pp42-43 (§2)). - Nietzsche's critique of the philosophical tradition and the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is touched upon. And Christianity and Buddhism are compared: "Both are to be reckoned among the nihilistic religions - they are both *décadence* religions - but they are separated from each other in a very remarkable way" (pp68-69 (§20)).

The second part (§§27-47) contains a brief attempt at a biographical/historical portrait of Jesus as a psychological type and St. Paul is described as the true founder of Christianity, who reinterprets Jesus' way of life: "Hard upon the heels of the "glad tidings" came the worst imaginable: those of Paul. In Paul is incarnated the very opposite of the "bearer of glad tidings"; he represents the genius for hatred, the vision of hatred, the relentless logic of hatred. *What*, indeed, has not this dysangelist sacrificed to hatred! Above all, the Saviour: he nailed him to *his own* cross" (p119 (§42)). In short: "... the whole history of Christianity - from the death on the cross onwards - is the history of a progressively clumsier misunderstanding of an *original* symbolism" (pp107-108 (§37)). - This section is a vivid restatement of Nietzsche's attempt to show how from the very beginning resentment has been central in the so-called religion of love.

The main subject in the last part (§§48-62) is the problem of truth. Nietzsche criticises different criteria of truth in religious contexts - "- It is so little true that *martyrs* offer any support to the truth of a cause that I am inclined to deny that any martyr has ever had anything to do with the truth at all" (p150 (§53)) - and tries at the same time to outline the concept of truth which is presupposed in his own philosophy. Furthermore this part contains remarks on science and political thought.

With regard specifically to the study of religions, Nietzsche's book highlights and discusses different concepts or types of religion. Thus, the book deals especially with Judeo-Christianity and more generally with any such other-worldly religion and faith.

In addition to a "telegraphical" introduction to Nietzsche's thinking the Introduction by Mencken gives some concise examples of how Nietzsche's works have been misrepresented and misused (politically and academically) during and shortly after the First World War. Moreover the Introduction reflects Mencken's criticism of his age and his abilities as a ferocious controversialist.

Fourteen years before the translation, Mencken published *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908) in which *Der Antichrist* is assigned a prominent part in the representation of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. Here Mencken touched upon one of the elements which, as mentioned earlier, makes the book controversial, i.e. its extreme terminology and metaphors, in short: its style. Mencken writes and rightly so: "... when he [Nietzsche] came to write "*Der Antichrist*" he made his denial thunderous and uncompromising beyond expression. No medieval bishop ever pronounced more appalling curses. No backwoods evangelist ever laid down the law with more violent eloquence. The book is the shortest he ever wrote, but it is by long odds the most compelling. Beginning *allegro*, it proceeds from *forte*, by an uninterrupted *crescendo* to *allegro con moltissimo molto fortissimo*. The sentences run into mazes of italics, dashes and asterisks. It is German that one cannot read aloud without roaring and waving one's arm" (*The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p133).

Since Mencken's views in the Introduction to and translation of *Der Antichrist* are from the beginning of the last century it reproduces all the misunderstandings and philological problems that have been related to this work. Let me give two examples: Mencken states that *Der Antichrist* is the first volume of the late Nietzsche's long projected *magnum opus* "The Will to Power", which later was called "An Attempt at a Transvaluation of All Values"(pp7-8). This is incorrect. According to Nietzsche's *Nachlass* and the original manuscript to *Der Antichrist*, the book has to be viewed as a single work. Secondly, Mencken's translation of *Der Antichrist* is marked by the various omissions that are found in the first German editions, including the following spectacular and now famous description of Jesus: "To make a *hero* of Jesus! And even more, what a misunderstanding is the word "genius"! Our whole concept, our cultural concept, of "spirit" has no meaning whatever in the world in which Jesus lives. Spoken with the precision of a physiologist, even an entirely different word would still be more nearly fitting here - the word *idiot*" (§29 (Kaufmann's translation)). The last three words were suppressed by Nietzsche's sister when she first published *Der Antichrist* in 1895. They were not made public until 1931, when Josef Hofmiller (1872-1933) drew attention to the omissions; therefore, they are not included in Mencken's translation.

In conclusion: This reprint is ambiguous. On the one hand one welcomes the idea of reviving this late

work of Nietzsche. *Der Antichrist* is an exceptional and to a certain degree still unappreciated book. On the other hand reprinting a defective translation and an antiquated introduction seems not to be the best way to revive a work. - Nietzsche deserves better!

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