

УДК 1.9

**LOOKING FOR LIGHT:
AN ENLIGHTENED SEARCH?**

Beshenich C.

The article seeks to understand how Friedrich Nietzsche laid a foundation for further intellectual inquiry with his book “The Joyful Wisdom”. The author tries to implicate how Nietzsche’s work endeavoured to put the ability to find knowledge directly in the hands of the searcher. The efforts of the philosopher sought to move the person beyond the need for God and motivate him to find a new “light” to guide his search for knowledge. The article hopes to show the reader how Nietzsche’s efforts built a space for development past the confines of religious and metaphysical thought.

Keywords: Nietzsche, “The Joyful Wisdom”, development, enlightenment, French Revolution, knowledge, inquiry.

**В ПОИСКАХ СВЕТА:
ПРОСВЕЩЕННЫЙ ПОИСК?**

Бешенич К.

В статье предпринята попытка понять как Фридрих Ницше своей книгой «Злая мудрость» заложил основу будущих интеллектуальных поисков. Автор объясняет, каким образом труд Ницше указывает на возможность передавать знания непосредственно в руки ищущего. Усилия философа были направлены на то, чтобы вывести человека за пределы потребности в Боге и побудить найти новый «свет», который бы направлял его в поисках знаний. В статье сделана попытка показать читателю, как усилиями Ницше было создано пространство для развития за пределами религиозной и метафизической мысли.

Ключевые слова: Ницше, «Злая мудрость», развитие, просвещение, Французская революция, знание, исследование.

Throughout the history of philosophy, thinkers and ordinary people alike have discussed the concepts of knowledge and truth. How to find “truth” is an issue that has motivated many intellectuals in their studies. For some it seems that the best way to find the truth is knowledge. As time has marched on, knowledge has been described in various allegorical ways. One especially interesting way will be discussed in this essay – the allegory of light. Symbolically darkness may be seen as representing a lack of knowledge – an inhibition of understanding. Light, conversely, represents the idea of possessing knowledge, of knowing and actively understanding. Friedrich Nietzsche in his book *“The Joyful Wisdom”* set the stage for an interesting idea. What if this light which mankind had come to possess after centuries of searching was actually not the right light? Or what if it illuminated only a portion of the world, and mankind in the remaining part was still blind? Nietzsche opened up a path to further intellectual inquiry by suggesting with his instigative work that the knowledge held by people was not enough. To continue further in humanity’s development mankind needed to be freed of the light shone by religious and previous philosophical thought and reject the “sun” it had given to humanity in favour of deeper understanding.

The lead-up to Nietzsche

The Thomistic “Aristotelianism” that was prevalent in the years preceding Nietzsche’s declaration emphasized the need for metaphysics in the realm of science. With Nietzsche’s statement regarding God’s death, the need was seemingly discarded. Yet, in the period of thought beforehand, there was a close connection between the two and their instruments of faith and reason. Science had been divided into the realms of maths, physical science, and metaphysics. This final form of science was unique, as it “...deals with those things that depend on matter and motion neither for their being nor for their being understood” [4]. Following this mode of thought it was possible to see a unity between science and the supernatural. Similar to faith, the field of metaphysical science is based on immaterial things. Aquinas believed that “...unaided human reason cannot have direct knowledge of the positively immaterial” [4]. The Aristotelian query of “being” was therefore continued. Yet, as “being” is

intangible, it offers a frustrating challenge to those scientists who want proof. Accordingly, the search for “...common aspects of being without which a thing could not be Faith and reason were united and the use of one did not implicate the exclusion of the other,” pose a challenge to the mind as they probe the essence of the being [4]. One could believe in God through reason, yet this reason had to be rooted in faith, which does not need evidence in order to exist [2]. The onset of the Enlightenment challenged this idea, as a man set forth to rationalize his existence and interpret his being through scientific fact.

Isaac Newton’s scientific contributions during the period of the Enlightenment were lauded in a work of poetic verse by British scientist Edmund Halley. In reference to Newton, Halley famously said: “Matters that vexed the mind of ancient seers... now are seen in reason’s light; the clouds of ignorance, dispelled at last by science...” [1, p. 35]. This verse captures the spirit of the Enlightenment period. Ignorance had clouded out the “light” for centuries. Light, a synonym for knowledge, was able to enter the scene (unhindered by religious superstition) thanks to science. The Enlightenment opened the door for science to move beyond religion and to make discoveries based on itself, not religion teaching presuppositions. In 1784 Kant asked what the Enlightenment was. For Nietzsche this answer was one that changed. Initially, he supported it as something that was a “continuation” of France’s Golden Age [3, p. 599]. This was a time of beauty and nobility. Later he turned against it as he saw it synonymous with the French Revolution, which he was against and which he believed resurrected feelings from the “...long-buried dreadfulness and excesses of the distant ages” [3, p. 602].

The Prologue to the Gospel of Saint John introduces this book of Scripture with the words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... In Him was life, and the life was the light of humanity. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. A man came, sent from God, whose name was John. This one came for a witness, in order that he could testify about the light, so that all would believe through him. That one was not the light, but came in order that he could testify about the light. The true light, who gives

light to every person, was coming into the world...” (John 1:1, 4-9). A millennium and several centuries later, Nietzsche would declare humans to be “rivals of the light” who want to be lights “of the earth” [5]. This great departure from aligning with religious thought would have repercussions affecting the thinkers and centuries to follow.

Looking for light

Nietzsche was not simply preoccupied with bright, gleaming balls of gas floating in outer space. He was not attracted to light as a moth is. He was, however, concerned about humanity. In his work, Nietzsche saw people as aspiring to usurp the role of the Sun. In a figurative way, he was illustrating how people (during the time of the “Enlightenment”) had taken the pursuit of knowledge into their own hands. They, these now intellectually empowered beings, had assumed the task of writing their own futures. Rather than be constrained during their lives by “the rising of the sun to its setting”, they had broken free from the sun’s dictates and could determine the rhythm of their own lives.

In “*The Joyful Wisdom*” Nietzsche was not entirely discrediting the role organized religion and faith had played in the intellectual development of humanity. He was, however, advocating the point that a man no longer needed this organization. His changing position may then be placed into the context of this essay’s discussion of light and God’s death. Nietzsche championed the gaining of knowledge, and one may wonder if this is why he initially supported the Enlightenment. Now in the centuries that have come since his initial statement, one might wonder if he would still support the end of metaphysics. Would he see the contemporary world that developed in the years following his work as truly having found light?

An interesting depiction of the search for knowledge is Nietzsche’s “Madman”, who entered a marketplace declaring: “I seek God!” [5]. What makes this situation all the more interesting is the Madman bears a lantern, which he had previously lit and taken with him. This marketplace incident occurred, according to the narration, in the morning. As no meteorological details are given, one may assume that the day was an average day with the sun in the sky and perhaps some clouds picturesquely positioned

around it. Therefore, there *was* light, according to the average expectation. Yet, this *standard* degree of light coming from the sun was not enough for the Madman, who was seeking to share his stupendous and somewhat shocking news. Further along in the Madman's dialogue, he asked his listeners: "...How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning?" [5].

The speech goes on. Yet, from this fragment with its furious litany of queries, it is important to analyse the question: "Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon?", as well as "whither do we move? Away from all suns?... shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning?" [5]. The horizon as a location is the point in the sky where the infinity of the Heavens seems to meet the earth. Yes, of course, this is just an optical illusion. Yet, from the allegorical perspective that Nietzsche was employing, one may consider that is the point where mankind can meet God. The tangible somehow encounters the intangible along this unending line. And, if the horizon is "wiped away", it is no longer possible to have such a meeting even if we want it. Without such a possibility, the person looks for knowledge elsewhere, perhaps even: "...Away from all suns?" [5]. Nietzsche posed this as a question because he did not know. And as we continue to look for knowledge, now away from the sky and the sun that is there to enlighten us, he wondered: "...shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning?" [5].

This passage stands out from the text because, after all, mankind has done to gain knowledge, it *still* needs light. Light is necessary to continue its search for knowledge. So, even though mankind has seemingly developed so much during the period from the Enlightenment until 2023, it has not been able to grow beyond the need for light to assist in its search for knowledge. The question is what kind of light

can now illumine the darkness if we have “killed” the light that assisted us through the centuries – even the millennia? Consider that even in the morning, with the natural light available, the Madman *still* needed a lantern. What kind of situation would humanity be in, then, when all that is left to illumine its pursuit of knowledge, is artificial, as the natural light is gone?

Nietzsche recognized this type of freedom could be unfeasible for mankind. For some people, the idea of completely living at liberty is welcomed. Conversely, others need the familiarity and confinement provided by the framework of a religion. These are the people meant to be contained by the definitions of the horizon. Nietzsche did not write for them, however. He wrote for those who are “...born for the atmosphere, the pure atmosphere, we rivals of the ray of light; and that we should like best to ride like it on the atoms of ether, not away from the sun, but *towards the sun!* That, however, we cannot do: – so we want to do the only thing that is in our power: namely, to bring light to the earth, we want to be “the light of the earth’!” [5]. These are the people, who do not need a foreign light to illumine life. They do not need someone else’s influence to tell them what is a circle, what is right, or what is purpose. As “rivals” of the light, they possess a degree of knowledge on their own and are content to continue the pursuit of knowledge without being coerced into a certain perspective with which to find and view knowledge.

Nietzsche seemed to suggest that humanity was emerging from an illusion – an illusion wherein the sources, givers, and receivers of knowledge were carefully determined according to strict rules. He used the allegory of Prometheus. According to mythology, the god Prometheus stole “fire” from the gods and gave it to humanity via the vehicles of knowledge and technology [6]. Humanity, in effect, not only gained the knowledge of how to give themselves *light*, but they also learned how to use the light to make their lives better. They were freed, in this sense, from their total reliance on the gods. Instead of praying, pleading, and offering sacrifices for warmth in the winter, they could make a fire. However, rather than align wholly with the Promethean illusion, Nietzsche went further and asked: “Had Prometheus first to *fancy* that he had *stolen* the light and that he did penance for the theft – in order

finally to discover that he had created the light, *in that he had longed for the light*, and that not only man, but also *God* had been the work of *his* hands and the clay in his hands? All mere creations of the creator?" [5].

Here Nietzsche seemed to imply that man's independent pursuit of knowledge is not evil. A man is *more* than the creation of the Creator, not merely a result, but an active and acting being who can long for something so much he is moved to actively pursue and take it. From the starting point that he is given by the Creator, a man can form himself how he chooses and achieve what he desires. The reader may take this as a reason for man's independence. In the foregone centuries mankind was reliant on God for everything. If a farmer wanted a bountiful harvest, he asked God and pleaded the case of his family's need. If a family member was sick, one might donate to have Masses said, asking God to grant the infirmed person's recovery. In each case, a man seemed to have the knowledge of how to make himself better and how to improve the lives of those around him. For some, this could be seen as praying with firm faith and trust in God. For others, it was begging the empty silence for help on one's knees.

Intelligence humbled

Nietzsche appeared to sense an injustice in making such an intelligent creature as a man whine and implore for each thing needed to make life bearable: "Why has nature been so niggardly towards humanity that she has not let human beings shine, this man more and that man less, according to their inner abundance of light? Why have not great men such a fine visibility in their rising and setting as the sun? How much less equivocal would life among men then be!" [5]. From this perspective, it must be asked: if we, as humans, possess knowledge via our intellects, and can actualize our self-development, why must we beg the endless, mute sky for intercession? Why can we not see what we have at hand and set out into the world to find the answers and create better lives? And further, why should we assume the brightness of the sun is the main light that can illumine our lives? Perhaps, if we apply our intellects to the search, we may find a brighter, kinder light to meet on the horizon.

Nietzsche enclosed the sense of these questions in the words of his character, Zarathustra “Thou great star! What would be thy happiness if thou hadst not those for whom thou shinest! For ten years hast thou climbed hither unto my cave: thou wouldst have wearied of thy light and of the journey, had it not been for me, mine eagle, and my serpent. But we awaited thee every morning, took from thee thine overflow, and blessed thee for it... Therefore, must I descend into the deep, as thou doest in the evening, when thou goest behind the sea and givest light also to the nether world, thou most rich star! Like thee must I *go down*, as men say, to whom I shall descend. Bless me then, thou tranquil eye, that canst behold even the greatest happiness without envy!” [5].

As he asked “what would be thy happiness”, one gets the sense that he is indicating the *sun*’s need for humanity. Without mankind to enjoy the sunshine and benefit from what it has to offer, what point does it have? The sun knows this, but it also knows that mankind is jealous of it. Without the sun, men cannot live. They are dependent on it. Therefore, the sun does not need to *envy* the joy of men as it knows their joy would not exist without it. Yet, not content to remain in such a position of subservience as this, Zarathustra dared to declare that he *knew* the way to overcome this great inequality between him and the sun. He would go below the horizon, into the “nether world”, to find what the sun knows. Zarathustra then left his cave (i.e., his place of residence) so as to share his knowledge, as the sun shares light. And from this idea begins his adventures where he learns of the death of God.

Conclusion

Nietzsche’s work “*The Joyful Wisdom*” furthered humanity’s development by demonstrating to mankind how it needed to be freed of the light given by religious and previous philosophical thought and reject the “sun” which had been given to humanity in favour of further understanding. The darkness of ignorance is something that can be illumined by light. For a large portion of humanity’s existence, this light came from religious inspiration. Nietzsche offered something entirely different, however. His words served as an inspiration for men to take control of their lives. Instead of dwelling beneath the sun and clinging to it out of need, the person should

move beyond the known boundaries and look for their own light. With this light, the person may find knowledge. And this knowledge might be something that is not only beyond the wisdom of the light shared by the previous sun, but perhaps it is light that this very sun is concealing. Therefore, the person who wants to find the truth and deeper understanding must go outside the parameters of their understanding and move to what might even appear as darkness to find the light, and with it, further development and the truth.

Bibliography:

1. Casini P. Newton's 'Principia' and the Philosophers of the Enlightenment // Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London. 1988. Vol. 42. No. 1. P. 35-52.
2. Christianity [Web resource] // Encyclopædia Britannica. 11.03.2023. URL: <http://bit.ly/3U06Syc> (reference date: 08.03.2023).
3. Garrard G. Nietzsche for and against the Enlightenment // The Review of Politics. 2008. Vol. 70. No. 4. P. 595-608.
4. Kerr G. Aquinas: Metaphysics [Web resource] // Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2023. URL: <http://bit.ly/3U4AxGs> (reference date: 08.03.2023).
5. Nietzsche F. The Joyful Wisdom [Web resource] // The Project Gutenberg. 23.08.2016. URL: <http://bit.ly/3m2Ggjf> (reference date: 08.03.2023).
6. Prometheus [Web Resource] // Encyclopædia Britannica. 02.12.2022. URL: <http://bit.ly/3zl430U> (reference date: 08.03.2023).

Data about the author:

Beshenich Caroline – Doctoral Candidate of Faculty of International and Political Studies, Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland).

Сведения об авторе:

Бешенич Каролина – докторант факультета международных и политических исследований Ягеллонского университета (Краков, Польша).

E-mail: karolina.besenic@gmail.com.