

Nietzsche

The Archetype of Pauline Deconstruction

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*Das Christenthum dagegen
zerdrückte und zerbrach den Menschen
vollständig und versenkte ihn
wie in tiefen Schlamm.*

—NIETZSCHE¹

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I am discussing the proliferation of interest in Paul, namely the recent and increasing interest of contemporary European philosophers in the thought of the Apostle. Perhaps to the chagrin of Pauline interpreters, there exists a vexing interest in the Pauline corpus by Continental philosophers. Alain Badiou, for example, a French Marxist philosopher employs Paul in the service of his own philosophical interest and project. “Truth be told,” says Badiou, “Paul is not an apostle or a saint. I care nothing for the Good News he declares, or the cult dedicated to him. . . . Irreligious by heredity . . . I have never really connected Paul with religion . . . or to any sort of faith”² which, for Badiou, is a mere fable. Giorgio Agamben, in contrast to Badiou, focuses on the first few verses in Paul’s Letter to the Romans in which he “proposes to restore Paul’s Letters to the status of the fundamental

1. [1] FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *MENSCHLICHES, ALLZUMENSCHLICHES*. KRITISCHE GESAMTAUSGABE 2, ED. GIORGIO COLLI AND MAZZINO MONTINARI, 2ND ED. (BERLIN/NEW YORK: DE GRUYTER, 2002), 1:114.

2. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1.

messianic text for the Western tradition.”³ Likewise, continental philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek,⁴ Jacques Derrida⁵ and Gianni Vattimo⁶ and others engage Paul also in their own philosophizing context. To these European avant-garde philosophers, Paul does not so much matter as a first century ambassador of the message of Jesus the Messiah, but rather, he plays the pivotal role as “the indispensable instigator of, and paradigm for, a radical political project aimed at the heart of contemporary imperial capitalism.”⁷ Since the other essays in this volume examine these Continental philosophers in greater detail, the objective of this essay is a more modest one. I will focus mainly on the philosophical protagonist that the contemporary philosophers often invoke in their own discourse, namely Friedrich Nietzsche.

NIETZSCHE’S DILEMMA WITH PAUL

Why Nietzsche? The answer, in short, is that virtually all of these Continental philosophers stand in a tradition that claims Nietzsche, along with Heidegger, as an important forebear for their cause. Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity in general—possibly inspired by his reading of Kierkegaard—and of the apostle Paul in particular functions as the invisible spine in many of the discourses in continental philosophy. Following in the footsteps of Martin Heidegger, his teacher, Gianni Vattimo wrote an entire monograph on Nietzsche⁸ and frankly acknowledges the importance of both thinkers in the re-conception of his own ideas on Christianity: “I have begun to take Christianity seriously again because

3. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, translated by Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1. Agamben dedicated this book to Jacob Taubes. On Agamben, see the essay by Alain Gignac below; on Taubes, see Larry Welborn’s essay below.

4. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000) and also Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). On Žižek, see the essay below by Ward Blanton.

5. Cf. the work by Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). On Derrida, see the essay below by Hans Ruin.

6. See, for example, Gianni Vattimo, *Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). On Vattimo, see the essay below by Anthony Scigliano.

7. Theodore W. Jennings Jr., “Paul and Sons: (Post-modern) Thinkers Reading Paul,” in David Odell-Scott, ed., *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2007), 85–114, here 86. On Nietzsche and Paul as political, ideological agents, see the essay by Jan Rehmann, “Nietzsche, Paul and the Subversion of Empire,” in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59 (2005): 147–61.

8. Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

I have constructed a philosophy inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger, and have interpreted my experience in the contemporary world in the light of it.”⁹

Let us take as a starting point for our discussion a dictum by the philosopher Jacob Taubes. Shortly before his death in 1987, Taubes presented at a colloquium in Heidelberg a series of philosophical lectures on the political theology of Paul.¹⁰ In the course of his lectures he remarked: “Let someone come and really theologically challenge this.”¹¹ The reference to the expression “really theologically challenge this” is to Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, in particular as Taubes sees it, the problematic of sin, conscience, guilt and atonement in the Pauline corpus. Karl Jaspers,¹² like many interpreters before and after him, similarly sees Nietzsche entire philosophical project, including his nihilistic tendencies, as a suffering and tragic response to Christianity in general and, in Vattimo’s words, “the biblical account of original sin”¹³ in particular. In other words, one of the key dilemmas for Nietzsche was the Pauline understanding of sin. Arguably, the weight of this doctrine, at least how Nietzsche understood the Pauline teaching and observed it in his Lutheran context, was for him the root of many other struggles with Christianity and life in general.¹⁴ As we shall see, Nietzsche lays heavy charges at the feet of the Apostle, charges that are indeed so weighty that nothing less than human existence itself is at stake.

This is not to claim that the notion of sin is the only or the exclusive vantage point into our examination of Nietzsche and Paul. Nonetheless, in

9. Vattimo, *Belief*, 33. On Vattimo relation to Nietzsche and Heidegger, see Thomas G. Guariano, *Vattimo and Theology* (New York/London: T & T Clark International, 2009), 42–44; cf. also, Ola Sigurdson, “Reading Žižek Reading Paul,” in *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians*, 213–41, the section on Nietzsche, 215–18.

10. Published as Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

11. *Ibid.*, 87.

12. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche und das Christentum*, 2nd ed. (Munich: R. Piper, 1952).

13. Vattimo, *Nietzsche*, 185. In his *Belief*, 88–90, Vattimo speaks of sin in terms similar to Taubes’ when he characterizes sin as “guilt” that may be more properly spoken of in a non-metaphysical sense as a “pity” or “lost opportunity.”

14. Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity must be placed within the larger context of his rejection of Platonic metaphysics and its hierarchical ontology as it shaped Christianity. For Nietzsche, Christianity is nothing else but a cheap Platonism for the people. In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, he outlines—on a mere two pages and six points—how this “history of falsification” runs from Plato through Kant to the demise of the world; cf. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 6, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, second edition 2002), 80–81. See also Jan Rohls, *Philosophie und Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 503–5.

view of Pauline scholars and theologians who read Paul with passion and are perplexed about the beguiling interest of contemporary European philosophers in their hero, we will take up Taubes' challenge and explore the Nietzschean antagonism against Paul's "entire dialectic"¹⁵ of sin vis-à-vis its exegetical, theological and philosophical nuances. In this way, we can engage both Nietzsche and Paul and open up a larger and more fruitful dialogue for those interpreters interested in this debate. We will address the following issues: What is behind the philosopher's utter rejection of Pauline theology and what has come of it in Christian tradition? In fairness to Paul, we must ask, did Nietzsche correctly understand and interpret what the Apostle wanted to communicate about sin? And in fairness to Nietzsche, are there issues around the Pauline conception of sin that indeed justify the questions and critique that the philosopher launches at the Apostle?

NIETZSCHE ON PAUL

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche gives aphorism 68 the title "The First Christian."¹⁶ The title of this unusually long aphorism is a violent stab at the life and thought of the Apostle Paul. In a constant tirade of attacks, Nietzsche leaves no doubt as to his utter disdain for this man. The Bible, Nietzsche laments,

contains the history of one of the most ambitious and importunate souls, of a mind as superstitious as it was cunning, the history of the apostle Paul who, apart from a few scholars, knows that? But without this remarkable history, without the storms and confusions of such a mind, of such a soul, there would be no Christianity; we would hardly have heard of a little Jewish sect whose master died on the cross.¹⁷

So here we have it: Jesus may have been the master of a small, insignificant Jewish sect, but Paul was the founder of that religion we now call "Christianity." How did it happen? Nietzsche continues:

15. Cf. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 87.

16. For a discussion of this aphorism, cf. Hans Hübner, *Nietzsche und das Neue Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 159–63.

17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak. Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), § 68.

The ship of Christianity threw overboard a good part of the Jewish ballast . . . it went and was able to go among the heathen—that is a consequence of the history of this one man, of a very tormented, very pitiable, very unpleasant man who also found himself unpleasant.¹⁸

How does Nietzsche know that Paul was so “very tormented?” According to the same aphorism, Paul

suffered from a fixed idea, or more clearly from a *fixed question* which was always present to him and would never rest: what is the Jewish *law* really concerned with? and in particular, what is the *fulfilment of this law*?¹⁹

On the one hand, Nietzsche correctly discerned that the question of the law became one of the central *theological* questions for Paul. But on the other hand, he also merely echoed the nineteenth century *psychological* interpretation current among Pauline scholars, namely that before his calling Paul was personally tormented by his inability to keep the law. In recent Pauline scholarship, however, there is very little support for the view that Paul was psychologically wounded because of the insurmountable demands of Torah—and rightly so.²⁰ If the law was such a tormenting issue for Paul, how did he overcome it? On this question, Nietzsche once again has his own ideas:

At last the liberating idea came to him, together with a vision, as was bound to happen in the case of this epileptic: to him, the zealot of the law who was inwardly tired to death of it, there appeared on a lonely road Christ with the light of God shining in his countenance, and Paul heard the words: ‘Why persecutes thou *me*?’ What essentially happened is this: his *mind* suddenly became clear; ‘it is *unreasonable*’,

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. Cf. Hübner, *Nietzsche und das Neue Testament*, 163; Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983), 229–36; and Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78–96.

he says to himself, ‘to persecute precisely this Christ! For here is the way out, here is perfect revenge, here and nowhere else do I have and hold the *destroyer of the law!*’ ... The tremendous consequence of this notion, this solution of the riddle, whirl before his eyes, all at once he is the happiest of men—the destiny of the Jews—no, of all mankind—seems to him to be tied to the idea of ideas, the keys of keys, the light of lights; henceforth history revolves around him! For from now on he is the teacher of the *destruction of the law!*²¹

So now we know! Nietzsche tells us unflinchingly: the origin of Christianity amounts to the vision of a tormented man who had an epileptic seizure! “With that the intoxication of Paul is at its height . . . This is the *first Christian*, the inventor of Christianness [*Christlichkeit!*]²² The good news about the crucified master was corrupted into the vilest of news, by Paul.²³ The upshot of all this is clear: Nietzsche’s inexhaustible disdain of Christianity—with its particular vulgar imprint in the aphorisms of *The Anti-Christ*—is in the first place not so much an attack on Jesus Christ as it is a fierce reckoning with what this despicable character Paul has done with the life and teaching of this Jesus. In other words, we may say that Nietzsche’s bone of contention with Christianity is to a large extent an issue of hermeneutics: how does one interpret the life and saying of Jesus of Nazareth? On this matter, Nietzsche and Paul were worlds apart.

The theological consequences that Nietzsche attributes to Paul’s misappropriation of the simple message of Jesus are indeed far-reaching. As already mentioned above, for the sake of this essay we will focus on what Nietzsche has to say about the notion of sin in the context of Paul’s view of God, life and afterlife, conscience and guilt.

21. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 68.

22. Ibid.

23. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, translated and edited by Judith Norman and Aaron Ridley. Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Here *The Anti-Christ*, § 42: “Der ‘frohen Botschaft’ folgte auf dem Fuss die allerschlimmste: die des Paulus.” Jörg Salasquarda, “Dionysus versus the Crucified One: Nietzsche’s Understanding of the Apostle Paul,” in James C. O’Flaherty, Timothy F. Sellner and Robert M. Helm, *Studies in Nietzsche and the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 100–129, argues that “it is not until The Antichrist that Nietzsche achieves an unequivocal differentiation of the roles of Jesus and Paul in the origin of Christianity, and at the same time arrives at an unrestrained opposition to the Apostle” (here 104).

NIETZSCHE ON THE INVENTION OF SIN

At the risk of oversimplification we may say that Nietzsche's view of sin unfolds within the two poles of Paul's view of God and, related to it, Paul's idea of an afterlife, or in theological terms, the idea of eschatological transcendence. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche reduces Paul's view of God to the formula: *deus, qualem Paulus creavit, dei negatio* ("the God, whom Paul invented, is the negation of God").²⁴ In this context, the full force of Nietzsche's anti-philosophy, that is to say, his untamed hatred against the Pauline conception of God breaks open without restraint:

That we find no God—either in history or in nature or behind nature—is not what differentiates *us*, but that we experience what has been revered as God, not as 'godlike' but as miserable, as absurd, as harmful, not merely an error but a *crime against life*. We deny God as God.²⁵

The reasons for the denial of (Paul's invented) God²⁶ is that a God

who is all-knowing and all-powerful and who does not even make sure that his creatures understand his intention . . . who allows countless doubts and dubieties to exist . . . who . . . holds out the prospect of frightful consequences if any mistake is made as to the nature of truth, [how could such a God be said to be] a God of goodness?²⁷

Or else, Nietzsche keeps on mocking, perhaps God was a God of goodness, but lacked intelligence and eloquence and was himself in error about his truth. Even worse, how can we speak of a God of love and holiness and sinlessness when "he creates sin and sinners and eternal damnation and a vast abode of eternal affliction and eternal groaning and sighing!"²⁸

24. *The Anti-Christ*, § 47.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Hübner, *Nietzsche und das Neue Testament*, 217, suggests that Nietzsche's tragic "no" to the God of the Bible stems from his false caricature of the biblical God.

27. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 91.

Nietzsche's contempt for things eternal is tied to his wholesale rejection of the "state *after* death."²⁹ It is once again "Paul's invention" and his "method of priestly tyranny," namely "the belief in immortality [*Unsterblichkeit*]*—which is to say the doctrine of the 'judgment' . . .*"³⁰ Again, "Paul himself" taught this "outrageous doctrine of personal immortality"³¹ and, once more:

Paul knew of nothing better he could say of his Redeemer than that he had *opened* the gates of immortality to everyone . . . it was only now that immortality had *begun* to open its doors—and in the end only a very few would be selected: as the arrogance of the elect cannot refrain from adding.³²

Why is Nietzsche so enraged with the Pauline teaching of immortality in the world to come? Arguably, for Nietzsche the reasons for his rejection are not so much theological as they are, so often, psychological in nature. Nietzsche says it best himself: "When the emphasis of life is put on the 'beyond' rather than on life itself—when it is put *on nothingness*—, then the emphasis has been completely removed from life."³³ For Nietzsche, the idea of immortality in a world "beyond" this world is tantamount to the utter negation of life because it

28. *Ibid.*, § 113. Nietzsche seems to comfort himself when he wonders in the following sentence that "it is not altogether impossible that even Dante, Paul, Calvin and their like may also have penetrated the gruesome secrets of such voluptuousness of power" with regard to God. Hübner, *Nietzsche und das Neue Testament*, 261, argues that the anti-philosophy of Nietzsche is mutually predicated on anti-moralism because of (faith in) God and on anti-theism because of morality.

29. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 41.

30. *Ibid.*, § 42.

31. *Ibid.*, § 41.

32. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 72.

33. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 43. Curiously, the atheist philosopher Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 61, comes to rescue Paul from the fangs of Nietzsche in regard to the latter's interpretation of this very passage. "Nietzsche is not precise enough," Badiou argues. For when Paul shifted "the center of gravity of that [Christ's] entire existence beyond this existence" it was in view of a principle "on the basis of which life, affirmative life, was restored and refounded for all. Does not Nietzsche himself want to 'shift the center of gravity' of men's life beyond their contemporary nihilistic decadence? And does he not require for this operation three closely related themes of which Paul is the inventor; to wit, that of the self-legitimizing subjective declaration (the character of Zarathustra), the breaking of history in two ("grand politics"), and the new man as the end of the guilty slavery and affirmation of life (the Overman)? If Nietzsche is so violent toward Paul, it is because he is rival far more than his opponent. The result being that he 'falsified' Paul at least as much as, if not more than, Paul 'falsified' Jesus."

projects life into the realm of the not yet, the realm of nothingness. Elsewhere Nietzsche says the same thing in different words: Christians are so pathetic because they deny life *par excellence*:

Christianity is called the religion of *pity* [*Religion des Mitleidens*].—Pity is the opposite of the tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings; pity has a depressing effect. You lose strength when you pity . . . Schopenhauer was right here: pity negates life, it makes life *worthy of negation*,—pity is the *practice* of nihilism . . . pity wins people over to nothingness! . . . You do not say ‘nothingness’: instead you say ‘the beyond’; or ‘God’; or ‘the *true* life.’³⁴

At the core of Christianity lies the practice of pity and love of neighbour, a practice which at once denies the vitality of life and thereby postpones “the *true* life” to the realm beyond. In a nutshell, Nietzsche charges that Christians’ earthly life is devalued and forfeited for life in the future. Immanence is swallowed up by transcendence.

How is Paul tied into this evil of immortality in the “beyond” of a coming age? Nietzsche leaves also no doubt in this instance. Just as Paul is the inventor of Christianity and the inventor of the idea of immortality, so likewise he is the inventor of the concept of sin. In an aphorism entitled “Belief in the Sickness as Sickness,” Nietzsche comes straight to his point: “It was Christianity which first painted the Devil on the world’s wall; it was Christianity which first brought sin into the world.”³⁵ Since we already know that Paul invented Christianity, it follows for Nietzsche that he is also the culprit who is responsible for the contrivance of sin. Indeed, Nietzsche says so. Paul, he sneers, “invented the repellent flaunting of sin, it introduced into the world sinfulness *one has lyingly made up*.”³⁶ Elsewhere Nietzsche’s scorn knows no limits:

Once more: sin, this supreme form of human self-desecration, was invented to block science, to block culture, to block every elevation and ennoblement of humanity; the priests *rule* through the invention of sin.³⁷

34. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 7.

35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), § II.2:78.

36. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 29.

37. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 49.

Luther, a monk with “all the vindictive instincts of a wounded priest” misunderstood the Renaissance and the Pope in Rome. He “saw the corruption of the papacy when precisely the opposite was palpable: the old corruption (*Verderbnis*), the *peccatum originale*, Christianity, was *not* sitting on the papal seat any more! But rather, life! Rather, the triumph of life!”³⁸ All of this “imaginary sinfulness”³⁹ weakens and destroys life rather than celebrating it. Ideally, for Nietzsche, when a person reaches a high level of education (*Bildung*), one moves beyond superstitious, religious concepts (*Begriffe*) and anxieties such as belief in angels, the salvation of the soul, and the belief in original sin.⁴⁰ Even though, education alone does not seem to enlighten humanity to the danger of the belief of sin. Nietzsche detects its ramifications in all areas of life, even in the sphere of music. He argues that modern music betrays its “grand tragic-dramatic mode” because of sin. “For Heaven’s sake, however did sin get into music?” Nietzsche ponders. Music, he claims, is tragically distorted by

the *great sinner* as Christianity imagines him and desires him to be: the slow pace, the passionate brooding, the agitation through torment of conscience, the terrified praying and pleading, the enraptured grasping and seizing, the halting in despair—and whatever else marks a man as being in a state of great sin. Only . . . Christianity [holds] that all men are great sinners and do nothing but sin.⁴¹

Nietzsche’s aphorisms leave no doubt that he not only thinks the idea of human sinfulness—and consequently also the “need of redemption”⁴²—are the invention of Paul, but perhaps even more troubling for him is the fact that its presence is felt ubiquitously. In its most tragic expression, Nietzsche believes, sin is at the core destructive to all positive, vital, cultural and human manifestations of life and largely destroys at the root⁴³ what it means to become human. Below we will return to these points in our discussion of Paul and Nietzsche, but first we will review Taubes’ comments on Nietzsche.

38. *Ibid.*, § 61.

39. Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*, § I:141.

40. Cf. *Ibid.*, § I:20.

41. *Ibid.*, § II.2:156.

42. *Ibid.*, § I: 476.

43. In *Human all too Human*, § I:56, Nietzsche deconstructs the “false idea” that humanity is corrupt and sinful, but admits that “its roots have branched out even into us ourselves and our world.”

TAUBES ON NIETZSCHE AND SIN

Taubes is interested in Nietzsche because of the latter's recognition that "in Christianity something in the soul has changed profoundly."⁴⁴ Then he cites one of Nietzsche's aphorisms from *Daybreak*: "It is not altogether impossible that the souls of Dante, Paul, Calvin and their like may also once have penetrated the gruesome secrets of such voluptuousness of power."⁴⁵ [yes, repeated from above, but on purpose] In a similar vein, but as Taubes says, even more important for him, is another one of Nietzsche's sayings: "All deeper people—Luther, Augustine, Paul come to mind—agree that our morality and its events are not congruent with our *conscious will*—in short, that an explanation in terms of having goals is *insufficient*."⁴⁶ Taubes does not tell his readers that Nietzsche was actually trying to give an answer to the fundamental question: "How deep does morality go? Is it merely part of what is learned for a time? Is it a way we express ourselves?"⁴⁷ Commenting on Nietzsche's ponderings, Taubes remarks:

Whoever has understood this has understood more of Paul and of Augustine and Luther than can be found on this subject in normal exegesis. That is, they all understand that the ego doesn't call the shots in the human beings. That the autonomous human being, the I, doesn't call the shots, but that behind him there are forces at work that undermine the conscious will. They don't overcome it, but undermine. That is, if you want to express it in a formula, that in the I there is a profound powerlessness. And nevertheless Nietzsche maintains the critique of Christianity. For what he finds horrifying, and this is a very humane concern, is the cruelty of the pang of conscience. The conscience that can't be evaded. Romans 7, right? And his second accusation: that Christianity hypostasizes sacrifice rather than abolishing it. Let someone come and really theologically challenge this!⁴⁸

44. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 87.

45. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 113.

46. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, edited by Rüdiger Bittner, translated by Kate Sturge. *Texts in German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59; translation slightly altered.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 87.

Taubes analyzes Romans 7 quite ingenuously. As a philosopher he gives more credit to Paul, Augustine and Luther than to academics who engage in “normal exegesis.” For these ancient “deep people,” he claims, have understood two major things, namely the issue of the ego and the related matter of conscience. Regarding the issue of the ego, Taubes is unmistakable: the autonomous human self “doesn’t call the shots” since there are “forces at work” that undermine the will. Indeed, even though the I is not entirely incapacitated, it is nonetheless undermined by a “profound powerlessness.” Regarding the matter of conscience, Taubes points to something crucial in Nietzsche’s entire critique of the Pauline concept of sin. There is “in Nietzsche a deeply humane impulse against the entanglement of guilt and atonement, on which the entire Pauline dialectic . . . is based. This continually self-perpetuating cycle of guilt, sacrifice, and atonement needs to be broken in order to finally yield an innocence of becoming (this is Nietzsche’s expression). A becoming, even a being, that is not guilty.”⁴⁹

These words make it abundantly clear that the “entire Pauline dialectic” is for Nietzsche (and Taubes?) an insurmountable problem that he encounters on a deeply existential level. The issues hinted at here are fundamental theological questions with inescapable psychological consequences. There is Nietzsche’s encounter of this dialectic on a deeply compassionate level; then there is the loss of innocence in the cycle of sin and its attempt to overcome it; and, finally, there is the most lamentable of all, namely the near impossibility of “becoming.” How each of these points may be correlated with Paul and within Nietzsche we will discuss below, first in Paul and then in both of them.

PAUL ON SIN AND SINS

Before we are in a position to correlate Paul and Nietzsche on the questions of sin, guilt and conscience, I will first delineate the Pauline concept of sin in its major division into sin and sins. Without attempting to cast either Nietzsche (or Taubes) into a Pauline mould of theological reflection on the question of sin, in what follows, I am trying to sort out the assumptions, arguments and conclusions they each bring to the table, so to speak. My discussion is predicated on my hermeneutical and theological position of the crucial distinction between sin (in the singular) and sins (in the plural). My argument is that Nietzsche’s remarks on the cruel “pangs of conscience” can be

49. Ibid., 87–88.

placed within a Pauline matrix of the teaching on sin (hamartiology) without emptying the force they have had for Nietzsche himself.

I agree with the comment shared by many Pauline scholars that “Paul nowhere delineates his doctrine of sin, but it is clear enough that he sees it under two aspects: it is both what we do by choice, and voluntary action, and also a power whose grip we cannot escape simply by deciding to.”⁵⁰ There are two main reasons why it is crucial to uphold the Pauline distinction between sin (in the singular) and sins (in the plural)—one is philological, the other theological. In what follows, I will provide a necessarily succinct sketch based on the Pauline epistles.

In his letters, Paul makes the clear philological distinction between the use of ἁμαρτία and ἁμαρτίαι.⁵¹ The singular ἁμαρτία is typically qualified such as in Rom 3:9 where the Apostle notes that Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἑλληνας πάντας ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι. In the prepositional phrase ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίαν the term ἁμαρτία is best understood in analogy to the expression ὑπὸ νόμον. In both cases, a person is not coincidentally or merely temporarily in the sphere of influence of either the Torah or sin, but consistently and without the ability to escape that influence. The specific mentioning of Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἑλληνας in conjunction with the term πάντας leaves no doubt that Paul was thinking inclusively: all people, whether Jew or Greek, are subject to sin. Just as a Jew is obligated to keep all of Torah by virtue of being a child of Abraham, so both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin. In Gal 3:22 he expresses the same thought: συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν.

In Rom 5:12 Paul makes the further connection between Adam’s sin and death: δι’ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος. Sin entered the world through one person, but the consequence of death applies to all, because all sinned: καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διῆλθεν, ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον. In Rom 6:17 Paul further concretizes the idea that sin is an enslaving power when he says ἦτε δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας (cf. Rom 6:6: . . . τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ). Evidently, the use of the noun δοῦλος and the verb δουλεύειν in conjunction with the singular ἁμαρτία makes it hermeneutically implausible to interpret Paul’s concept of sin as anything else but the conviction that sin constitutes an inescapable power.⁵² Moreover, Paul further specifies that Christ himself died to sin (singular) once (Rom 6:10: ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν

50. John Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 71–72.

51. In my essay, “The Means and Mode of Salvation: A Hermeneutical Proposal for Clarifying Pauline Soteriology,” in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 29 (2007): 203–22, I have discussed the question of sin and sins in greater detail; cf. 205–8.

ἐφάπαξ) and will never die sin a second time. In the same way, Christians must consider themselves dead to sin. Paul's emphasis that Christ died only once and that Christians die only once to sin is a further crucial dimension of the fact that he distinguishes between the power of sin and the consequences of that power, namely the concrete acts of sin. The first is of an ontological, the second of an ethical nature. In spite of the fact that Christ died for sin—as in his resurrection he overcome and ultimately broke its enslaving power—does not automatically entail that Christians are no longer able to commit deeds of sin. Theologically there is no tension or contradiction between the broken power of sin and the still possible acts of sin. The power of sin is broken, but concrete sins need to be forgiven many times until the return of Jesus Christ.⁵³

In this context it is instructive to recognize that Paul never employs the term ἄφεσις. The reason is unambiguously clear: sin cannot ever be forgiven;⁵⁴ separation between humanity and God. It is crucial to recognize that from the ontological priority of sin now follows the consequence of the various manifestations of sin—in Pauline terminology, being “in Adam”—namely the various deeds of sin, our sins. The sequence from sin to sins is irreversible. We are sinners, therefore we sin. These various sins are concretized in human experience as the disruptions of life on all levels of existence, that is to say, various spheres such as the ethical, psychological, racial, sexual, economic, ecological, social, structural etc. In other words, sins are the immanent, routinely and unavoidable misdeeds and failures of our existence. It is precisely in this realm, in the existential-ontic dimension of life, where we must now locate our discussion with Nietzsche and Paul.

52. Jürgen Becker, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 415, speaks of Paul's singular use of the term “sin” and its “Machtcharakter.” In Rom 7:17 and 20 Paul uses the expression ἡ οἰκουῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία, an idea that has clear ontological dimensions. On this idea of in Stoic philosophy, see Anthony A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy. Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 172.

53. The expression ἄφεσις (τῶν) ἁμαρτιῶν is used 11 times in the New Testament: in Matt 26:28; Mark 1:4; Luke 1:77, 3:3, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18; Col 1:14

54. The New Testament never employs the expression “forgiveness of sin” (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτίας). On the distinction between sin and sins, see also Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2:52.[footnote]there is simply no such thing as the forgiveness of sin because for Paul sin amounts to an ontological[footnote]Cf. Jürgen Becker, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker*, 411, who raises the question of the “ontologischen Gehalt der Sündenaussagen” in Paul.

PAUL, NIETZSCHE AND SIN

We are now in a position to examine Nietzsche's critique of the (Pauline) concept of sin vis-à-vis Paul himself. We will begin with a possible common ground, and then move towards a discussion on where and why they diverge.

(1) The one aspect of the Pauline understanding of sin that Nietzsche affirms—albeit implicitly and not as much as a theological insight as a phenomenological description—is the distinction between sin and sins. Even in the midst of his angry rejection of the entire concept of sin, Nietzsche's language betrays that he is indeed somehow an heir to that Pauline distinction. In one and the same aphorism (evocatively entitled “Victory of Knowledge over Radical Evil”), Nietzsche implicitly affirms both sin and sins. It is a false idea, Nietzsche insists, “that mankind is fundamentally evil and corrupt” and hence we should give up the term “sinfulness [*Sündhaftigkeit*]” altogether. Although sinfulness is a false idea, he admits, “its roots have branched out even into us ourselves and our world. To understand *ourselves* we must understand *it*.” In the same context he notes that a person may “blunder” or “as the world puts it, sins [*sündigen*],”⁵⁵ that is to say: to commit deeds of sin.

The important point to take from this aphorism is that Nietzsche affirms both the existence of sin and its consequence as sins, expressed by him with the verb *sündigen*. It is revealing that he admits that the entire world is marked by such a distinction and that a person's self-knowledge must reckon with this fact, however negative it may be.

(2) Even though we just noted that Nietzsche speaks of both the idea of sin (in the singular) and the various deeds resulting from sin, namely concrete sins (in the plural), the tone of his language does not in any way suggest that he agrees with this central Pauline distinction. Quite to the contrary! In the same aphorism in which he mentions both *Sündhaftigkeit* and *sündigen* in one breath, he is quick to clarify: “the idea that mankind is fundamentally evil and corrupt” is a “false idea” since “there is no such thing as sin in the metaphysical sense.”⁵⁶ Since Nietzsche is convinced that Paul is the inventor of the idea of sin, it is congruent with this view that he also argues that there is no such thing as a metaphysical dimension or reality of sin. In other words, Nietzsche rejects that sin has any supernatural or theological cause, dimension or reality. In one of his

55. Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*, § 1, 56.

56. *Ibid.*

sayings he refers to the “metaphysicians” who pronounce “man evil and sinful by nature ... and thus *make* him himself bad.”⁵⁷ Nietzsche’s point is obvious. Since there is—in his view—no such reality and power as sin and the sinfulness of a person as such, the entire scheme of humanity’s sinfulness is a clever social-theological *construction*. As he contends, “metaphysicians,” i.e. pastors, priests, theologians etc. are the real culprits because *they make* a person believe that s/he is evil by nature. The real human dilemma is therefore not that people *are* sinful but that they *are made into sinners* by Christian metaphysicians.

(3) Given that Nietzsche vehemently rejects humanity’s sinfulness as a mere theological invention, it follows that he also rejects what we termed in Paul the understanding of sin as “ontological gap.” If the whole idea of sin is invented by Paul and the likes of him, then to say that humanity is separated from God makes no sense to Nietzsche. Correspondingly, the Pauline claim that the correlative of the power of sin is ultimately death finds only contempt in Nietzsche; such a belief is for him the foul root for the Christian devaluation of life and the fantasy of an afterlife.

(4) As Taubes’ comment cited above indicates, the most troubling aspect of the Pauline “invention” of sin is for Nietzsche that it has the negative consequence of guilt and a conscience tormented by guilt. This is a deeply troubling issue for Nietzsche that manifests itself in two distinct but interrelated ways: guilt characterizes the human relation to God while bad conscience is primarily a matter of human experience.

On the one hand, the issue of guilt is related to the Christian understanding of God. At one point Nietzsche scoffs that “Christians even begot children with a bad conscience.”⁵⁸ The reason for bad conscience is that it is “woven together with the concept of God” via the concepts of “guilt [*Schuld*]” and “obligation [*Pflicht*]”⁵⁹ In particular, “the advent of the Christian God as the maximal god yet achieved, thus also brought about the appearance of the greatest feeling of indebtedness [*Maximum des Schuldgefühls*] on earth.”⁶⁰ The

57. *Ibid.*, § I, 141.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, § II:21; translation slightly altered, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, revised edition, 2007).

60. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, § II:20.

“feeling of indebtedness” to God—empowered by the Christian doctrine of sin⁶¹—seeks to escape the clutches of a punishing God. For this reason, Nietzsche thinks, even the early Christians took the position that “it is better to *convince* oneself of one’s guilt rather than of one’s innocence, for one does not quite know how so *mighty* a judge [God] is disposed—but to fear that he hopes to find before him none but those conscious of their guilt!”⁶² What Nietzsche is so enraged about, it seems, is that Christians are motivated by the low and base motives of fear, punishment and guilt, rather than by noble ones. The first are a sign of the denial of life, while only the second affirm life. In other words, the problem is that Christians play into the hands of a God who requires the denial of life.

On the other hand, guilt and the experience of guilt feelings are decidedly a matter of human experience. In a series of aphorisms (16–21) in Book Two of his discourse *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche delineates his basic understanding of the concept of conscience. At the outset, Nietzsche proclaims: “I look on bad conscience as a serious illness to which man was forced to succumb.”⁶³ When our instincts and unregulated impulses were reduced to “relying on thinking, inference, calculation, and the connecting of cause and effect, that is, to relying on their ‘consciousness’, that most impoverished and error-prone organ,”⁶⁴ the consequences for humanity became enormous. For the restraint of impulses and instincts, Nietzsche maintains, if “not discharged outwardly *turn inwards*—this is what I call the internalization of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his ‘soul’.”⁶⁵ The problem that “in Christianity something in the soul has changed profoundly,”⁶⁶ as Nietzsche sees it, is that it has tragic implications for the individual person and for humanity as a whole. “The whole inner world,” was changed “to the degree that the external discharge of man’s instincts was *obstructed* . . . all those instincts of the wild, free, roving man were turned backwards, *against man himself* . . . *that* is the origin of ‘bad conscience’.”⁶⁷ In the end, this whole “bad-conscience” tragedy unfolds as the loss of instincts tied to the loss of freedom: “The *instinct of*

61. On Nietzsche’s correlation between sin, guilt and law, cf. *Daybreak*, § 68.

62. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 74. Cf. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, § II:20: “The feeling of indebtedness [Schuldgefühl] towards a deity continued to grow for several millennia, and indeed always in the same proportion as the concept of and feeling for God grew in the world and was carried aloft.”

63. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, § II:16.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

66. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 87.

67. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, § II, 16.

freedom, forcibly made latent . . . this instinct of freedom forced back, repressed, incarcerated within itself and finally able to discharge and unleash itself only against itself; that, and that alone, is *bad conscience* in its beginnings.”⁶⁸

A possible solution for Nietzsche in overcoming the feeling of guilt and to get rid of a terrible conscience is from moving away from Christian theism to atheism. Such a movement, Nietzsche claims, may be deduced “from the unstoppable decline in faith in the Christian God” which is tantamount to “a considerable decline in the consciousness of human debt [*menschliches Schuldbewusstsein*]; indeed, the possibility cannot be rejected out of hand that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might release humanity from this whole feeling of being indebted towards its beginnings, its *causa prima*. Atheism and a sort of *second innocence* belong together.”⁶⁹

(5) How does Nietzsche’s view of sin, guilt and a guilt-ridden conscience square with Paul’s teaching on these ideas?

First, Taubes is correct in discerning that Nietzsche’s critique of sin focuses on the psychological aspect of sin, namely its guilt and its corollary, the feeling of guilt in the conscience. The question that is crucial in this regard is whether Nietzsche himself understood the nature of guilt vis-à-vis sin correctly. In other words, does Nietzsche have an exegetically and theologically proper understanding of sin and guilt that does justice to Paul? Perhaps unwittingly, but nonetheless, Nietzsche finds an ally in Ed Sanders who also argues that Paul “really does *not* deal with sin as *guilt*”⁷⁰ and even more so in Krister Stendahl.⁷¹ And indeed, Sanders and Stendahl are right in that Paul never explicitly discusses the aspect of guilt and bad conscience in relation to his otherwise extensive discussion of sin, especially in Romans. Even when Paul speaks of Adam’s sin as being typical for all humanity and bringing about death, he does not speak of the aspect of guilt and bad conscience. Then where does the correlation between sin, guilt and conscience come from, where does Nietzsche get it from?

68. *Ibid.*, § II, 17.

69. *Ibid.*, § II, 20.

70. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism, A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 500.

71. Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” 78–96. See also the critique of this essay by Ernst Käsemann, “Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans,” in *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 60–78; and Stendahl’s rejoinder to the critique in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 125–33.

As even a brief perusal of the history of Christian theology indicates, the origin of these ideas can be traced to Augustine. Stendahl in particular set up a trajectory that runs from Augustine to Luther: “In Protestant Christianity—which has its roots in Augustine and in the piety of the Middle Ages—the Pauline awareness of sin has been interpreted in the light of Luther’s struggle with his conscience.”⁷² As is well known, in the Pelagian controversy Augustine not only coined expressions such as *peccatum originale*, *peccatum radicale*, *non posse non peccare* etc. but also introduced the claim that sin constitutes a person’s *reatus* or *culpa* before God by virtue of every person’s constitution as a sinner. For Augustine, the forensic aspect of sin is its guilt. We know that Nietzsche read Augustine and was very likely familiar with these fundamental concepts. Moreover, it is also very likely that Nietzsche was influenced, in a negative manner, by Luther and Calvin who embraced the Augustinian teaching on original sin in their own articulation of theology. The issue with Luther, as Stendahl argues, is that he is the culprit who painted the Pauline teaching on sin with the unrecognizable color of bad conscience. Stendahl does not mention Nietzsche at all in his study, but conceptually the portrayal of the former fits the ideas of the latter very well. At any rate, whatever the theological source of Nietzsche’s severe critique of sin and guilt, it is clear that he perceived in that doctrine very restrictive if not cruelly destructive psychological effects in relation to the becoming of a person.

Second, Pauline scholarship is split on the question of whether one may speak implicitly of sin as guilt even though there is no explicit terminological evidence in the Pauline writings. On the one hand, as Stendahl champions, Paul does not seem to have been tormented by a bad conscience. In fact, he may have had a “rather ‘robust’ conscience.”⁷³ Is lack of evidence for a bad conscience in Paul indicative of the lack of guilt in his conception of theology?

Stephen Westerholm, for example, argues that “Paul’s concern here is not with human *feelings* of guilt, but with God’s overcoming and expunging the (objective) guilt incurred by human sin.”⁷⁴ Similarly, he remarks that “the drama of sin and atonement in Romans 3 is not just a matter of bringing peace to a guilt-ridden conscience.”⁷⁵ In other words, if Paul’s position can indeed be interpreted in the sense that sin implicates guilt and the consequence of that guilt is death, then Nietzsche’s and Paul’s understanding of the term

72. Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” 79.

73. *Ibid.*, 80.

74. Stephen Westerholm, *Understanding Paul. The Early Christian Worldview of the Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 74.

75. *Ibid.*

guilt belong to entirely different realms of understanding. Nietzsche—as he says repeatedly himself—looks at guilt from a psychological perspective while Paul is, arguably, concerned with sin as an existential, ontological issue. The problem that is thus making a direct—and hence fair—comparison between Nietzsche and Paul difficult is precisely the confusion between psychological and theological concepts *as if they were operative on the same level*.

Let me be more specific: Nietzsche is certainly correct in observing the psychological effects of the doctrine of sin in his historically conditioned context as anxiety, fear of pleasure, guilt, bad conscience and anything else that amounts to the denial of life. However true these observations may be, they do not necessarily and not logically lead to the conclusion that therefore the Pauline concept of sin must by virtue of its definition include the psychological aspects of guilt, bad conscience and the denial of life. In fact, I suggest the reason why Stendahl does not find any reference in which Paul speaks of his “bad conscience” is precisely because there is no necessary correlation between the sin of guilt—in a forensic and ontological sense—and the psychological response to it. In other words, some Christians acknowledge like Paul that they are sinners, but they are not psychologically incapacitated by a guilt-ridden conscience, while others acknowledge their sin and sins but are plagued by guilt and a bad conscience. The issue is, in my view that Nietzsche seems to think that Christians *uniformly* belong to the second group.

(6) To repeat Taubes’ comment once more: in Nietzsche, he says, there is “a deeply humane impulse against the entanglement of guilt and atonement, on which the entire Pauline dialectic . . . is based. This continually self-perpetuating cycle of guilt, sacrifice, and atonement needs to be broken in order to finally yield an innocence of becoming (this is Nietzsche’s expression). A becoming, even a being, that is not guilty.”⁷⁶ Taubes’ remarks make it clear that when we speak of Nietzsche’s psychological critique of sin and guilt we are not merely comparing a psychological to a theological or philosophical understanding of sin. In other words, Nietzsche is not so much interested in what people believe on these matters, but what their beliefs do to them as human beings in their concrete lives. In his diatribe against bad conscience, Nietzsche calls the human being both a “fool” and “prisoner” by allowing bad conscience to take hold of him/her. With bad conscience “the worst and most insidious illness was introduced, one from which mankind has not yet recovered; man’s sickness of *man*, of *himself*.”⁷⁷ Humanity is sick from sin, guilt

76. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 87–88.

and bad conscience. Hence, the fundamental issue for Nietzsche is this: the Pauline-Christian teaching on sin and guilt destroys a person's possibility of truly and genuinely becoming human. How can a person become healthy?

It is decisive in this context to understand the Nietzschean distinction between being and becoming. According to Hatab, Nietzsche seeks to overcome the Western theological and philosophical tradition with its penchant of dividing reality into the binary opposites of "being" and "becoming." Opposites such as good and evil, time and eternity, spirit and nature, reason and passion, truth and appearance etc. are not mutually exclusive and cannot, therefore, be set against each other.⁷⁸ The fundamental error of the metaphysicians is precisely that at the expense of "becoming" they focus on "being" as the unchangeable, as grounded in God, as the thing-as-such. Quite to the contrary, Nietzsche asserts, "what constitutes the value of the good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things."⁷⁹ Only in "becoming" can the conflicting forces of opposites be harnessed for the affirmation of life. Put differently, the Christian denial of life, which has its roots in the static realm of being, must overcome "being" and embrace "becoming" in the midst of the fluid, dynamic, unstable, and changeable conditions of life. As Hatab puts it, "The innocence of becoming is Nietzsche's alternative to all Western moralistic scripts that portray the life-world as a fallen or flawed condition, which would require reparation according to transcendent or historical forms of transformation."⁸⁰ For Nietzsche, it is therefore nearly impossible to create a "becoming" person unless the Western intellectual tradition forfeits its view of the world as "being" in sin, guilt, and full of a bad conscience. And yet, it requires a "new kind [*Gattung*] of philosopher"⁸¹ before a new humanity is grounded in the flux of "becoming." In the treatise *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche gives that new kind of person the name *Übermensch*.

77. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, § II:16.

78. Cf. Larry J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence. Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 13.

79. *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 2, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

80. Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 62.

81. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 2.

(7) For Paul, the central anthropological issue is not how a person can “become” someone different or something more. To a certain extent, Paul would allow for human self-improvement and perhaps self-fulfillment in a Nietzschean sense of the idea of “becoming,” but not so much as a psychological than a spiritual reality. Indeed, Paul speaks of the possibility of human “becoming” when he speaks of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. This language of the fruit of the Spirit assumes the possibility of human transformation but it also assumes that something else has happened beforehand, and that is central to Paul—and in contradiction to Nietzsche.

Whereas Nietzsche emphasized a person’s “becoming,” Paul speaks of a person’s “new creation.” In 2 Cor 5:17 Paul says that εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά. When Paul announces a “new creation,” he assumes that two things have already “become” a reality. On the one hand, the person who is a new creation is so only “in Christ” and that means, on the other hand, that the “old things” have been overcome. The reference to the “old things” is for Paul an affirmation that the conditions of the old creation were the conditions under the power of sin and that precisely in Christ that power has been disempowered and definitively defeated. In other words, while Nietzsche’s vision for humanity is that of the coming *Übermensch*, as he spells out in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Paul speaks of the “new person” (cf. καινὸς ἄνθρωπος in Eph 2:15) in Christ. That person is a new being and on that basis is still in the process of becoming.

CONCLUSION

Any fair assessment of Nietzsche vis-à-vis Paul must take into consideration a certain Nietzschean idiosyncrasy without which a comparison of the two remains inequitable.⁸² The peculiarity is this: Nietzsche’s critique of everything Christian does not proceed from an “objective” theological understanding of the Christian faith but from his personal observation and experience of those around him—mother, aunts and others like them.⁸³ The issue that thus comes to the fore is that his devastatingly negative experiences enmeshed him in an awkward logic: if Christians are entangled in the denial of life then it must follow that the Christian doctrine and faith as such must be the underlying

82. For a recent excellent study of Nietzsche in relation to major Christian themes, cf. Stephen Williams, *The Shadow of the Antichrist. Nietzsche’s Critique of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

83. Cf. Hans Hübner, *Nietzsche und das Neue Testament*, 4, who argues that Nietzsche’s upbringing with his mother and two aunts presented him with a warped and distorted conception of the Christian faith; this was surely tragic for an intellectually gifted young man.

problem. In Nietzsche's observation, the real issue was not how Christians thought theologically regarding sin and guilt, but the fact that they were plagued in their everyday lives with psychological fear and guilt because of it. In other words, theology was not the problem—but life.

The ultimate anthropological difference between Nietzsche and Paul rests on their diametrically divergent hamartiological presuppositions. Whereas for Paul and—as Nietzsche has seen correctly—also for most subsequent expressions of Christian doctrines, the overarching dilemma is that of sin and its ensuing deeds, Nietzsche radically rejects the very notion of sin and sins. In other words, while for the Apostle, the core of the Christian life is inextricably linked to the overcoming of the deeds of sin, for Nietzsche the entire doctrine of sin has no other purpose than to violently destroy a person's life. For him, the psychological consequences are so blatantly dehumanizing that one must give up the belief in sin if there is even the slightest possibility for the affirmation of life. Christians must re-evaluate their constant self-devaluation.

Can Christians learn anything from Nietzsche's critique regarding sin? The answer is a qualified "yes." Irrespective of the severity and one-sidedness of Nietzsche's attack, he is right in his observations that Christianity may and does amount to a denial of life. More precisely, in certain historically, ecclesiological and theologically conditioned forms, Christianity appears as denial of life. In this regard Nietzsche's critique stands, even to this day. And yet, his critique stems from a theologically weak understanding and a historically conditioned observation of Christianity that in the end mitigates the full force of his critique. His charges, though in some sense may be traced to Paul, capture only an aspect of the Apostle's teaching on sin.⁸⁴ In this regard, Nietzsche was himself led astray. His psychological interpretation of Paul's theology of sin, while it raises many valid questions, remains ultimately fragmented and imbalanced, even tragic.

84. For Paul, guilt in its forensic sense is vindicated, overcome in the resurrection; the consequence, result of sin in the here and now, in this life, is still felt (psychologically) as guilt, although it need not to. Those in Christ have reason to let go of their guilt, especially their guilt feelings. Here Nietzsche's observations are entirely correct. He encountered too many Christians who were driven by anxiety, beleaguered by guilt feelings and thus committed the crime of denying life. Paul would have to agree with Nietzsche inasmuch as it is psychologically possible to be plagued by guilt even though theologically that guilt has been overcome.