THE SHADOWLESS SOUL: PARALLEL IDEAS
OF NIETZSCHE AND SWINBURNE

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THE SHADOWLESS SOUL: PARALLEL IDEAS OF NIETZSCHE AND SWINBURNE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to point out the parallels of the ideas of Nietzsche and Swinburne with the objective of exonerating Swinburne's poetry from the charge of "intellectual thinness." If Nietzsche is one of the foremost philosophers of our time, and if Swinburne's thought processes closely paralleled his, then it may follow that Swinburne's thought contained more substance than it has heretofore been credited with. In keeping with this purpose, it has seemed expedient to limit the evidence in Swinburne's works to his poetry, though all the works of Nietzsche have been utilized.

That there is a disparity in the depth of the two men is undeniable. One was primarily a poet, with philosophic leanings; the other was a philosopher who wrote poetically. This disparity is irrelevant to this paper, as are the contrasts in their ideas, and will not be dealt with. What is pertinent is their overall view of man as a creature who could have limitless and unimaginable potential if freed from creeds and convictions of an outworn past. Whether they were hopelessly romantic in their aspirations for the human race or gloriously farsighted is a question that cannot be answered, for no man is evident who has thrown off the shackles of the past to become the "overman."
As a basic for the defense of the two men as existentialists, Sartre's essay on "Existentialism as Humanism" has been used to define existentialism. Maurice Friedman's essay "The Modern Vitalist" from To Deny Our Nothingness was the source for the definition of vitalism.
CHAPTER I

POET AND PHILOSOPHER

Algernon Charles Swinburne is undoubtedly one of the most controversial English poets of the nineteenth or any other century, and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche continues to be one of the most polemical philosophers that the world has yet produced. Both men were born in the first half of the nineteenth century, Swinburne in 1837 and Nietzsche in 1844, and both grew up in an age when the progression of science and industry was matched only by the acceleration of confusion and perplexity concerning man's relationship to the universe in his new and broadening concepts of it.

The philosopher and the poet emerged from similar backgrounds, for Nietzsche's father was a pastor of middle-class means, and Swinburne was the son of a captain in the Royal Navy. Both led sheltered boyhoods and received good educations, and though Nietzsche did not leave the university as Swinburne did, his repugnance for the staid and conventional existed with only less early evidence than the poet's. Each had an aversion for the opposite sex that progressed from the subtle to the overt as a result of like experiences. "3oo", or Jane Faulkner, laughed in Swinburne's face when he proposed; thus, Rare

believes, dooming him to his algolagnia. Lou Salome, on the other hand, did not dignify Nietzsche's proposal of marriage with an answer. The evidence of algolagnia in Swinburne's poetry and the ambivalent attitude toward women in Nietzsche's philosophy probably do not result from these experiences as much as they further serve to prove that both were at least inept and uneasy in their relationships with women. The fact is that each man eventually retreated from vital and meaningful intercourse with man and life while advocating the opposite: a dynamic seeking of harmony, or "sea saying," with life. Perhaps only those completely aware of the pain and complexities of dealing with life and mankind could have so vehemently proposed solutions to the problem.

That Nietzsche attempted to deal with those perplexities philosophically is unquestionable, for his "philosophy is so profoundly relevant to the modern world that he is in many respects more our contemporary than that of his fellow-Victorians." Swinburne's works are another matter, for the charge has been made by numerous critics that his poems are "intellectually thin." As Nicolson puts it, "The main weapon of those who would dismiss Swinburne as a mere prosodist is the criticism...

that 'he lacked a central core', that he was both morally and intellectually un-original in the sense that all his ideas and emotions were plainly literary, purely derivative. If this charge is just, and this paper opposes it, then there would seem little chance of discovering parallels in the works of these two figures. However, the contention here is that while Nietzsche was a philosopher who poeticized, Swinburne was a poet who expressed a definite philosophy, and though his very method of expression precludes the depths that Nietzsche reached, there is a similarity in the ideas of the two men.

In the course of his writings Nietzsche touched upon practically every available subject, and poetry is not excepted. He felt strongly that the poets, among whom he numbered himself, had a definite mission, and he states it concisely.

THE POET AS GUIDE TO THE FUTURE. All the surplus poetical force that still exists in modern humanity but is not used under our conditions of life, should (without any deduction) be devoted to a definite goal—not to depicting the present nor to reviving and summarizing the past, but to pointing the way to the future.5

Here the poet is assigned the role of prophet, for it is his duty and privilege to reveal out of the morass of possibilities the proper course for mankind to follow. Further, he is to inspire many by divining "those cases where . . . a great,

5 Harold Nicolson, Swinburne (New York, 1926), p. 133.
noble soul is still possible, where it may be embodied in harmonious equable conditions, where it may become permanent, visible, and representative of a type, and so . . . create the future." Swinburne, within his limitations, fulfills this obligation. In "Horne" and "Hymn of Man" he discards the means that man has used in the past and advocates a new faith for man to follow.

But the morning of manhood is risen, and the shadowless soul is in sight.

and

He hath stirred him, and found out the flaw in his fetters, and cast them behind; His soul to his soul is a law, and his mind is a light to his mind.

And again in "A Watch in the Night,"

Liberty, what of the night?-- I feel not the red rains fell, Hear not the tempest at all, Nor thunder in heaven any more. All the distance is white With the soundless feet of the sun. Night, with the woes that it wore; Night is over and done.

Swinburne expresses a belief that the future will hold an enlightenment that the past has failed to yield. Like Nietzsche,

7 Olive, p. 525.
8 Algernon Charles Swinburne, Swinburne, selected and introduced by Bonamy Dobree (Baltimore, Md., 1961), p. 83.
9 Dobree, p. 97.
10 Dobree, p. 83.
he places his faith in the future of man and his ability to grow.

The stimulus and direction for this future Swinburne finds, as Nietzsche did, in hero-worship, his foremost hero being the Italian, Mazzini, to whom Swinburne wrote an ode as the champion of liberty. Other "noble souls" whom he eulogized were Whitman, Morris, Rossetti, and, in common with Nietzsche, Baudelaire and Wagner. The fact is evident that these were not all necessarily the kind of heroes that Nietzsche may have had in mind, and indeed, Swinburne utterly despises Nietzsche's prime model, Napoleon, though this may easily have been more a nationalistic than an ideological difference. But the cult of hero-worship is common to both, for, as Nicolson says of Swinburne, "... the 'internal centre' of Swinburne was, I am convinced, composed of two dominant and conflicting impulses, namely the impulse towards revolt and the impulse towards submission." Whereas on the one hand Swinburne rebelled against the conventions of his day, on the other he felt the necessity to submit himself to the worship of individual heroes who stepped outside the conventions. Nietzsche, too, chafed under any restrictions of thought while searching for those who could rise above the masses.


Although Nietzsche was realistic enough to hope that only a few men could rise above the "herd morality" to become Übermensch and Swinburne idealistic enough to advocate enlightenment for all, both clearly propagate an existential ideal. 

Nietzsche does believe that human mortality gives the thinker the freedom to experiment with his life, feels himself desperately involved in his thinking since he has to decide the terms of his tenure of life and to make up his mind on what to do about the; and nobody can help him." He concisely states the existential position in Thus Spake Zarathustra when he says, "Become who you are," and Swinburne parallels this sentiment in "Hertha" by having her charge man with the instruction, "I bid you but be." In the context of the poem, Swinburne is commanding man to be ultimately human, for he goes on to say, "I have need of you free." He and Nietzsche both are declaring man's emancipation from stereotyped creeds of what he ought to be and justifying his right to determine his own destiny. Nietzsche confirms this interpretation in Zarathustra's declaration, "O my soul, I gave you the right

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15 Dobree, p. 88.

16 Dobree, p. 88.
As both poet and philosopher have expressed the existential proposition that man must be free, free to choose his own course, so each has also expressed the existential attitude that life is an absurdity and that despair comes with the realization of the absence of meaning beyond the finite. At one point, Nietzsche has Zarathustra ask himself, "What? Are you still alive, Zarathustra?"


We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Nietzsche goes one step further by declaring, "The thought of suicide is a great consolation; by means of it one gets successfully through many a bad night." It is evident that the poet, like the philosopher, considers, at least momentarily, that life is a despairing and somewhat
ridiculous situation that man must somehow get through. Furthermore, he must get through it by making his own choices, for man is his own salvation. In Swinburne the idea of salvation is asserted by "Hornea", the world spirit; "Mind thou but thyself; thou art I," \(^{21}\) and the responsibility of men to man is stated in "Hymn of Man" when he says, "Men perish, but man shall endure; lives die, but the life is not dead." \(^{22}\) Nietzsche manifests parallel beliefs in salvation through Zarathustra, "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you," \(^{23}\) and in the universality of choice, "Higher than love of the neighbor is love of the farthest and the future." \(^{24}\) The conviction that man must act now to form the future of mankind is strongly evident in both writers. How he should do so and what he should base his actions on are subjects that both poet and philosopher dwelt upon with often parallel concepts.

\(^{21}\) Dobree, p. 84.
\(^{22}\) Dobree, p. 97.
\(^{23}\) Kaufmann, p. 190.
\(^{24}\) Kaufmann, p. 173.
CHAPTER II

RELIGION AND ETHICS

No solution for the betterment of mankind would be acceptable without a concept of ethics. Traditionally, western civilization has accepted the Christian value system, and Christian morality has dominated its society. Swinburne, like Nietzsche, rejected this system, though neither made the Victorian error of equating morality with sexual behaviour, but rebelled against the materialistic ethic inherent in a rapidly industrializing society.

Both writers dismissed Christianity for basically the same reasons. In 1871 Swinburne published Songs before Sunrise, which contains "Hymn of Man." In it he states, "Oh fools, he was God, and is dead," and later, "...thy death is upon thee, 0 Lord." In 1882 Nietzsche's Gay Science appeared, in which he declares emphatically, "The most important of more recent events—that 'God is dead', that the belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of belief—already begins to cast its first shadows over Europe." A year later, he spoke

1 Dobree, p. 98.
2 Dobree, p. 99.
3 Clive, p. 389.
through Zarathustra, "Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that God is dead?" Clearly both men felt strongly that Christianity was no longer a valid creed for modern man to follow. But why? What had brought about the death of God?

In "Hertha", Swinburne carefully builds a structure of explanation for the invalidity of God, which is echoed in "Hymn of Man" and "Mater Dolorosa." Hertha, who represents the world spirit, or freedom, begins by asserting

I am that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole;
God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily;
I am the soul.

Before every land was,
Before ever the sea,
Or soft hair of the grass,
Or fair limbs of the tree,
Or the flesh-coloured fruit of my branches, I was, and thy soul was in me.

First, life on my sources
First drifted and swam;
Out of me are the forces
That save it or damn;
Out of me man and woman, and wild-beast and bird;
Before God was, I am.

Thus, he concisely declares that the spirit of freedom, or freedom of spirit, supersedes man and God. That man was created free and chose God, rather than being created and chosen by God, is made clear in a later stanza when he says of God

4Kaufmann, p. 24.
5Dobree, p. 85.
Thought made him and breaks him;  
Truth slays and forgives;  
But to you, as time takes him,  
This new thing it gives,  
Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom and lives.  

Even as man has created God, so does he have the right, perhaps duty, to destroy Him when He obstructs truth, "For truth only is living,/ Truth only is whole."  
"Hertha" paradoxically explains how man once needed God and she "Set the shadow called God/ In your skies to give light," but "The Gods of your fashion? That take and that give:/ . . . They are worms that are bred in the bark that falls off; they shall die and not live." Man has misused God to escape the responsibility of making further choices, and he must now discard Him in order to grow up or evolve into a being who can accept the "Republic," the freedom of being equal to his own destiny.

These ideas are restated in "Hymn of Man." Here Swinburne claims, "Therefore the God that ye make you is grievous, and give not aid./ Because it is but for your sake that the God of your making is made." Unmistakably, man has fashioned a God to serve ignoble ends, to excuse himself for being less than he might be. And in "Mater Dolorosa" Swinburne condemns religion again when he asks about the present generation, "Are they sons

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6 Dobree, p. 89.  
7 Dobree, p. 89.  
8 Dobree, p. 86.  
9 Dobree, p. 86.  
10 Dobree, p. 92.
indeed of the sons of thy dayspring of hope, / Whose lives are in fear of an emperor, whose souls of a Pope?"11

It is obvious that Swinburne expects man, in effect, to assume the role of God, to fashion his own destiny existentially. For him, man is not a static entity but an evolving force in the world. Nietzsche also advocated that man evolve into a Superman. However, as Crane Brinton has put it, "The race of Supremen was not to come by any such suspiciously British process as natural selection, but by a dionysian exercise of the Will of Power,"12 Man must become what he would and should be by choosing, and choosing dynamically. Nietzsche is as concise as Swinburne in his diatribes against Christianity. In Human, All-Too-Human he says,

Christianity as antiquity. When we hear the ancient bells growing on a Sunday morning, we ask ourselves: Is it really possible this, for a Jew, crucified two thousand years ago, who said he was God's son. The proof of such a claim is lacking. Certainly the Christian religion is an antiquity projected into our times from remote prehistory; and the fact that the claim is believed—whereas one is otherwise so strict in examining pretensions—is perhaps the most ancient piece of this heritage.13

And Zarathustra dismisses God as an illusion and the world as "a drunken job for its imperfect creator."14 He goes on to explain, "Alas, my brothers, this god whom I created was

12 Brinton, p. 81.
13 Kaufmann, p. 52.
14 Kaufmann, p. 143.
man-made and madness, like all gods! Man he was, and only a poor specimen of man and ego, "15

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche's madman speaks prophetically, "Whither is God' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I... Gods too decompose. God is dead."16 And Nietzsche too asserts that God's death was a necessary sacrifice on the altar of truth.

God is conjecture; but I desire that your conjectures should be limited by what is thinkable. Could you think a god? But this is what the will to truth should mean to you: that everything be changed into what is thinkable for man, visible for man, feelable by man. You should think through your own senses to their consequences.17

It is Nietzsche's contention that man must "overcome" himself to rise to the rank of "Overman." According to him, life is "that which must always overcome itself,"18 and Zarathustra confirms this sentiment: "Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it."19 Further, beauty of spirit will be the criterion of the great man, for Zarathustra exhorts him: "And there is nobody from whom I want beauty as much as from you who are powerful; let your kindness be your final self-conquest."20 This idea is

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15 Kaufmann, p. 43.  
16 Kaufmann, p. 95.  
17 Kaufmann, p. 193.  
18 Kaufmann, p. 227.  
19 Kaufmann, p. 227.  
20 Kaufmann, p. 230.
reflected in Swinburne's final line of "Hymn of Man," "Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things." 21

When Nietzsche says, "... even the best is something that must be overcome," 22 he is clearly calling man to question all of his present values and concepts and to evolve willfully and purposely from his present state into a higher one. He, like Swinburne, obviously feels that belief in a deity and the worship of it restrain man from reaching the epiphany of humanity by weighting him down with unnecessary guilt and subservience.

This is confirmed in their similar attitudes toward prayer. Nietzsche expresses his position concerning prayer in a passage in The Gay Science.

Excelsior! 'You will never pray again, never adore again, never again rest in endless trust; you deny yourself any stopping before ultimate wisdom, ultimate goodness, ultimate power, while unharnessing your thoughts; you have no perpetual guardian and friend for your seven solitudes; you live without a view of mountains with snow on their peaks and fire in their hearts; there is no avenger for you, no eventual improver; there is no reason any more in what happens, no love in what will happen to you; no resting place is any longer open to your heart where it has only to find and no longer seek ... perhaps man will rise even higher when he once ceases to flow out into a god!' 23

He is more positive in his denunciation of it in one section of The Wanderer and His Shadow.

21 Dobree, p. 99.
22 Kaufmann, p. 317.
23 Kaufmann, p. 98.
PRAYER. On the hypotheses alone is there any sense in prayer, that not quite extinct custom of olden times. It would have to be possible either to fix or alter the will of the godhead, and the devotee would have to know best himself what he needs and should really desire. But to have a chat with God, to ask him for all kinds of pleasant things, to feel a slight amusement at one's own folly in still having any wishes at all, in spite of so excellent a father—all that was admirable invention for saints.24

Likewise, Swinburne denies the validity of prayer; "Hertha" describes its ineffectiveness.

Mother, not maker,
Born, and not made;
Though her children forsake her,
Allured or afraid,
Praying prayers to the God of their fashion,
she stirs not for all that have prayed.25

In another stanza, Swinburne expresses decisively, through Hertha, his attitude toward supplication when he says, "I have need not of payer;/ I have need of you free."26 At best prayer is a simpleton's delusion; at worst it saps man's energy and deprives him of his freedom.

If modern man discards Christian beliefs, shall he discard Christian ethics also? Both poet and philosopher seem to say, "Yes!" Swinburne's treatment of the subject is subtle while Nietzsche's is more direct. Nietzsche's position is "If 'God is dead', conscience can no longer claim to be an oracle of living truth; and indeed the history of morals makes it

24 Clive, p. 374
25 Dobree, p. 85.
26 Dobree, p. 86.
probably an oracle of error."27 Speaking of the Christian values, he says,

The intrinsic worth of these values was taken for granted as a fact of experience put beyond question. Nobody, up to now, has doubted that the 'good' man represents a higher value than the 'evil', in terms of promoting and benefiting mankind generally, even taking the long view. But suppose the exact opposite were true. What if the 'good' man represents not merely a retrogression but even a danger, a temptation, a narcotic drug enabling the present to live at the expense of the future?28

This vein of thinking leads Nietzsche to the conclusion that paradoxically "good" is "evil." "And beware of the good and the just!" he admonishes, "They like to crucify those who invent their own virtue for themselves..."29 "The good have always been the beginning of the end."30 In Nietzsche's eyes, good is a weakness, in fact, the weakness that destroyed God. According to his reasoning, God died of the virtue of pity. "You know how he died? Is it true what they say, that pity strangled him, that he say how man hung on the cross and that he could not bear it, that love of man became his hell, and in the end his death?"31 Further, the Christian ethic is not a valid one because the God who propagated it

27 Morgan, p. 168.
28 Golging, p. 155.
29 Kaufmann, p. 176.
30 Kaufmann, p. 325.
31 Kaufmann, p. 372.
was equivocal. He was also indistinct.

How angry he got with us, this wrath-
shorter, because we understood him badly!

But why did he not speak more cleanly?
And if it was the fault of our ears,
why did he give us ears that heard him
badly? . . . he bungled too much, this potter
who has never finished his apprenticeship,
but that he wreaked revenge on his pots and
creations for having bungled them himself,
that was a sin against good taste. There is
good taste in piety too; and it was this that
said in the end, "Away with such a god!
Rather no god, rather make destiny one's
own, rather be a fool, rather be a god one-
self! declared.

So Nietzsche comes around to his proposition that man must go
"beyond good and evil" to create a new ethic, that man must,
in an existential sense, play the role of God dynamically and
vitaly, for "what is done out of love always occurs beyond
good and evil."

Swinburne, too, pleads for a morality that will go beyond
the present concepts of good and evil, that man will create for
himself, when he says,

Is thought not more than the thunders and
lightnings? shall thought give place?
Is the body not more than the vesture, the
life not more than the meat?
The will than the word of the gesture, the
heart than the hands or the feet?
Is the tongue not more than the speech is?
the head not more than the crown?
And if higher than is heaven be the reach of
the soul, shall not heaven bow down?

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34. Kaufmann, p. 444.
35. Dobree, p. 96.
He also feels that the ethics of Christianity are in conflict with modern man's best interests: "Time and the Gods are at strife." For him, Christian morals have weakened man by acting as an opiate to his creative instinct and directing his energies toward life-after-death: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath; We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death." Again and again, Swinburne reiterates his position that man must overcome ideologies that hinder his growth; "For what has he whose will sees clear/To do with doubt and faith and fear . . . . His soul is even with the sun/Whose spirit and whose eye are one/ His can no God cast down . . . ." As Humphrey Hare puts it, Swinburne "recognizes that there is in man an aspect of the divine. His human pride, his courage, his latent need for action impels him to revolt. Man, being divine, is worthy of freedom." 

The poet and the philosopher have indisputably discarded Christianity and its ethic for a new morality that serves man and his ends, rather than serving a dead God and a dubious promise of an afterlife. The new religion will be freedom, the freedom to search out truth, and its ethic will be love, not love of neighbor, but love of life itself.

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36 Dobree, p. 42.
37 Dobree, p. 43.
38 Dobree, p. 73.
39 Humphrey Hare, p. 129.
CHAPTER III.

VITALISM AND THE DIONYSIAN SPIRIT

The love of life advocated by both Nietzsche and Swinburne constitutes a vitalism discovered as an essence within the framework of existentialism. As Maurice Friedman defines it, "The heart of vitalism lies in dynamic movement itself, the pulsation of creative energy, the upward thrust."\(^1\) This upward surge of man is a recurring theme in the works of both poet and philosopher, and it explains the absence of carefully charted courses and definitive values for the man of the future to follow, for "... the celebration of life and life energies, like the words 'dynamic' and 'creative' themselves, evokes enthusiasm more easily than it lends direction."\(^2\)

Vitalism is action, physical and intellectual, based on intuition, which brings about a totality of being. It is necessarily a paganistic attitude and fosters spontaneity. Nietzsche's writing itself is an example of vitalism, and he repeatedly manifests the vitalistic outlook.

\[\text{\ldots the fact that there exist nobler methods of utilizing the invention of gods than in this self-crucifixion and self-degradation of man, in which the}\]

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\(^1\)Maurice Friedman, To Deny Our Nothingness: Contemporary Images of Man (New York, 1967), p. 118.

\(^2\)Friedman, p. 63.
last two thousand years of Europe have been past master--these facts can fortunately be still perceived from every glance that we cast at the Grecian gods, these mirrors of noble and graniloquent men, in which the animal in man felt itself deified, and did not devour itself in subjective frenzy. 3

This attitude is reflected in Swinburne when he advocates that man seek joy rather than suffering and rejects the Christian approach to life.

Wilt thou yet take all, Galilean? But these thou shalt not take,
The laurel, the palms and the paeon, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake;
Breasts more soft than a dove's that tremble with tenderer breath;
And all the wings of the loves, and all the joy before death...

Nietzsche, too, felt that joy was the essential ingredient of life: "As long as there have been men, man has felt too little joy: that alone my brothers is our original sin." 5 Like Goethe, Nietzsche felt that to find meaning in life, one must feel and experience, and in The Gay Science he explains just how far man must go in his search: "...the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to live dangerously!" 6 As Morgan puts it, "By subordinating morals to life, he gives his ethics a frankly purposive basis: moral

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4 Dotre, p. 42. 5 Kaufmann, p. 200.
6 Kaufmann, p. 97.
rules are to be justified only in terms of the vital values they produce." Indeed, to establish these values, Nietzsche was prepared to "fight theism, fight beliefs that deny this life and this world." Swinburne, too, would have man "strike out from the shore as the heart in us bids and beseeches, athirst for the foam," for he believed that "man is the master of things." To achieve totality, a union with the world, is the goal of mankind.

His eyes take part in the morning; his spirit out sounding the sea
Asks no more witness of warning from temple or tripod or tree.
He hath set the centuries at union; the night is afraid at his name;
Equal with life, in communion with death, he hath found them the same.
Past the wall unsurmounted that bars out our vision with iron and fire
He hath sent forth his soul for the stars to comply with and suns to conspire.
His thought takes flight for the centre where—through it hath part in the whole;
The abysses forbid it not enter; the stars make room for the soul.
Space is the soul's to inherit; the night is hers as the day.

Here is a description of Nietzsche's return to nature, but not to a kind of natural state ever before known. It is closer to a state of intellectual nature where, in Swinburne's words,  

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7 Morgan, p. 189.  
8 Brinton, p. 141.  
9 Dobree, p. 197.  
10 Dobree, p. 99.  
11 Dobree, p. 96.  
12 Morgan, p. 188.
"his soul is at one with the reason of things that is sap to
the roots," or, as Nietzsche puts it, "Your love of life
shall be love of your highest hope."

The vitalistic tenets of "daring to be" and, further,"daring to be happy" are unmistakably evident in the works
of both authors. As Lafourcade says of "Hartha," Swinburne
"means, the earth considered as an active, living and growing
force, or, as he himself puts it, 'the vital principle of
matter'. It is this spiritual principle and no longer, as
in the Hymn of Man, the poet himself, who demands the destruction
of the 'false gods'." The command "to Be" is even more ex-
plicit in Nietzsche's "yea to life." "The 'immaculate knowledge'
of the scientist and philosopher at which Nietzsche scoffed
no longer nourishes the deepest needs of men. We learn about
the world only on condition of occupying a 'position' in it
... " But for Nietzsche, only a unique kind of man was
capable of rising above the "herd morality" to occupy a mean-
ingful position in life. In The Birth of Tragedy, he describes
the Dionysiac spirit disclosing "the desire to tear asunder
the veil of Maya, to sink back into the original oneness of
nature... " And in Ecce Homo he says,

15 Lafourcade, Swinburne, a Literary Biography
16 Knight, Literature Considered as Philosophy:
17 Golring, p. 27.
"The yeasaying to life, even to its strangest and most difficult problems: the will to life rejoicing at its own inexhaustibility in the sacrifice of its highest types—this is what I called Dionysian . . . to be the eternal joy of Becoming itself. . . ." 18

Nietzsche's Dionysian assumes further substance in contrast with his definition of the Apollonian who "may be regarded as the marvelous divine image of the principium individuationis, whose looks and gestures radiate the full delight, wisdom, and beauty of 'illusion'." 19 Thus, while the Dionysian symbolizes active participation in life regardless of creeds or consequences, the Apollonian represents a sublime, esthetic approach to existence. Apollo is the opposite side of the coin from the reality and suffering of Dionysios. Both are necessary to life for "with august gesture the god shows us how there is need for a whole world of torment in order for the individual to produce the redemptive vision." 20

Swinburne echoes this description of man as the conquerer of life, of individual man overcoming his environment.

So the soul seeking through the dark Heavenward, a dove without an ark,
Transcends the un navigable sea
Of years that wear out memory;
So calls, a sunward-singing lark,
In the ear of souls that should be free;
So points them toward the sun for mark
Who steer not for the stress of waves,
And seek strange helmsmen, and are slaves. 21

16 Nietzsche, Philosophy, p. 866. 19 Golfing, p. 22.
20 Golfing, pp. 33-34.
Here we encounter a dichotomy in Swinburne, for while he
idealistcally seems to desire freedom and enlightenment for
all mankind, there arises in this poem a suspicious tendency
to select the "souls that should be free," which implies an
affinity for a Superman theory resembling Nietzsche's. Perhaps
his sentiments and pragmatically he was forced to adopt the
attitude that all men were not capable nor even interested in
"evolving" into a higher state. Certainly there is a semblance
of the Dionysian in "transcending the un navigable sea" and to
the Apollonian in aspiring toward the sun.

Assuredly, Nietzsche does reserve a minority for the "souls
that should be free." He is careful to define just who these
Dionysian Ubermenschens will be:

Now, how are we to recognize Nature's
most excellent human product? They
are recognized by the fact that an excellent
man of this sort gladdens our senses; he is
carved from a single block, which is hard,
sweet and fragrant. He enjoys only what is
good for him; his pleasure, his desire,
caases when the limits of what is good for
him are overstepped. . . . He is strong
enough to make everything turn to his own
advantage. 22

Swinburne defines his idealization of man in similar terms.

Because man's soul is man's God still,
What kind soever waft his will
Save his own soul's light overhead,
None leads him, and none ever lead.

22 Nietzsche, Philosophy, pp. 820-31.
Save his own soul he hath no star, 
And sinks, except his own soul guide, 
No blast of air or fire of sun.

Puts out the light whereby we run 
With girded loins our lamp lit race, 
And each from each takes heart of grace 
And spirit till his turn be done, 
And light of face from each man's face 
In whom the light of trust is one; 
Since only souls that keep their place 
By their own light, and watch things roll, 
And stand, have light for any soul.

The man who keeps to the limits of his desires and his own good would seem equal to him who keeps his place by his own light. Further, the passing along of "heart of grace" and "light of face" is an idea parallel with Nietzsche's proposition "that all things recur eternally, and we ourselves too; and that we have already existed an eternal number of times, and all things with us." Thus, he proclaims the inevitability of the overman, of man's going under, and of his invariably recurring greatness. Swinburne echoes this idea with "Men perish, but man shall endure; lives die, but the life is not dead." The ideal man of both philosopher and poet will epitomize man's greatest potential. Zarathustra declares, "... man is something that shall be overcome," and Hertha reiterates, But this thing is God, 
To be man with thy might, 
To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out thy life as the light.

23 Dobree, p. 77. 
24 Kaufmann, p. 332. 
25 Dobree, p. 97. 
26 Kaufmann, p. 160. 
27 Dobree, p. 85.
Zarathustra states a like sentiment: "Verily, like the sun I love life and all deep seas. And this is what perceptive knowledge means to me: all that is deep shall rise up to my heights," and again, "It is out of the deepest depths that the highest must come to its height." Hertha, too, realizes man's ability to rise to a perfection with which she has endowed him.

One birth of my bosom;
One beam of mine eye;
One topmost blossom
That scales the sky;
Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I.

Thus, the Dionysian, or Superman, is the man who instinctively soars above the conventional, who provides his own light, a light whose fuel is the intellectual and physical experience gained by reaching into the depths of life, by "going under." Both Nietzsche and Swinburne call upon man to cast off the encumbrance of an outmoded Christian belief to rise to a new realization of his potential in the universe by experiencing life vitally. And both provided answers to how man might cope politically and historically with the world that he would encounter in his new role.

28 Kaufmann, p. 236.
29 Kaufmann, p. 256.
30 Dobres, p. 90.
Nietzsche and Swinburne shared much in common in their basic political and historic concepts, though Nietzsche outlined his ideas in much greater detail. Politically, both men bordered on anarchy, though Nietzsche confined total freedom to his overman while Swinburne was more vague about identifying his free souls. Historically, their sentiments are similar in relation to the usefulness of history to man living in the present and creating the future.

Nietzsche's concept of a political leader is most evident in his description of his overman. As Eric Bentley explains it, "Nietzsche's conception of a ruler is more like Plato's Timocracy where the rulers, though governed by honor, do not claim to lead or support the populace."¹ Bentley goes on to say that Nietzsche "tries to get beyond Plato's belief that philosophers ought to rule, with the belief that philosophers must rule, that they are the legislators of the world, though unacknowledged."² And Nietzsche himself describes a state as

² Bentley, p. 146.
having no aim of itself; "we alone give it this aim or that."  
He clarifies these sentiments in The Gene:

As little state as possible. All political and economic arrangements are not worth it, that precisely the most gifted spirits should be permitted, or even obliged, to manage them: such a waste of spirit is really worse than an extremity. ... Our time, however much it talks of economy, is a squanderer; it squanders what is most precious, the spirit.  

What Nietzsche seems to be saying is that the state must be organized and run under the directive of the high-minded without these "gifted spirits" being involved in the mechanics of government. Swinburne describes a ruler in similar terms, as one

Whose eyebeams are not as the morning's are,
Transient and subjugate or lordlier light,
But all unconquerable by noon or night,
Being kindled only of life's own inmost fire,
Truth, established and made sure by strong desire,
Fountain of all things living, source and seed,
Force that perfects transfigures dream to deed,  

His ruler, also, is a philosophic sort who is far above the ordinary man in stature. He is, so to speak, the "fountain."

In "The Eve of Revolution," Swinburne decries the present state of affairs in government as well as the way men regard liberty. He depicts men as politically asleep and unaware of their obligations, and suggests a general spiritual uprising as the solution.

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3 Kaufmann, p. 40.  
4 Kaufmann, p. 32.  
Say to my spirit, 'Take
Thy trumpet too, and make
A rallying music in the void night's ear,
Till the storm lose its track,
And all the night go back;
Till, as through sleep false life knows true life near,
Thou know the morning through the night,
And through the thunder silence, and through
darkness light.'

Till change unmake things made and love remake;
Reason and love, whose names are one,
Seeing reason is the sunlight shed from love and light.

Nietzsche's sentiments are similar, for in Beyond Good and
Evil, he describes contemporary circumstances.

It is the age of the Lassos; they lie on their belly before everything that is massive. And
so also in politics. A statesman who rears up for them a new Tower of Babel, some monstrosity
of empire and power, they call 'great!'-what does it matter that we more prudent and conserva-
tive ones do not meanwhile give up the old belief that it is only the great thought that
gives greatness to an action or affair?

Dissatisfaction with the present political situation is evident in both quotations. But both men went further and advocated what must have seemed a revolutionary solution for the politi-
cal ills of the nineteenth century.

Eric Bentley expounds upon Nietzsche's solution. "... all Nietzsche's later plans are pan-European. Europe will become one politically because it is rapidly becoming one economically and culturally. National states are an

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7 Nietzsche, Philosophy, p. 550.
anarchronism," and further, "Nietzsche recommended a union with Russia and an 'understanding' with Britain." Nietzsche confirms this view when he says that "it is Europe, the one Europe, whose soul presses urgently and longingly, outwards and upwards..." And in Human, All Too Human, he states his case concisely:

The European man and the abolition of nations. Trade and industry, book and letters, the way in which all higher culture is shared, the rapid change of house and scenery, the present nomadic life of everyone who is not a landowner—these circumstances necessarily produce a weakening, and finally the abolition, of nations, at least in Europe..."  

Swinburne, too, advocates an anti-nationalistic political structure. In "The Eve of Revolution," he bids his British readers:

Built up our one Republic state by state,  
England with France, and France with Spain,  
And Spain with sovereign Italy strike hands and reign.  

He feels strongly that the abolition of nationalism will destroy pettiness and prejudice and will permit the rise of a new type of political structure, based on "love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom and lives." For him the ideal state will exist where "Dead on whose threshold lies

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8 Bentely, p. 147.  
9 Bentely, p. 148.  
10 Nietzsche, Phil., p. 572.  
11 Kaufmann, p. 61.  
13 Dobree, p. 89.
heart-broken hate;/ Dead discord, dead injustice, dead des-
pair;/ O love long looked for, therefore wilt thou wait,/ And
show not yet the dawn on thy bright hair." 11 For both men,
the perfect political structure will provide the maximum freedom
for the individual to grow and develop into whatever potential
he possesses without moral or legal restraint. Nietzsche speaks
for both when he says, "Political superiority without any real
human superiority is most harmful." 15

In relation to history, the two men shared a common view
regarding the usefulness of historical study to modern man.
In The Use and Abuse of History, Nietzsche states, "An excess
of history seems to be an enemy to the life of a time. . . ." 16
He does not negate the value of historical knowledge, only the
extreme reverence for it that stifles initiative and ability
to innovate new solutions for new problems. Elsewhere in the
same work, he contends that "the knowledge of the past is de-
sired only for the service of the future and the present, not
to weaken the present or undermine a living future." 17

Nietzsche divides history into three categories, and
Bentley has described them concisely:

Antiquarian history is the history of such
things of beauty as appeal to the man of
reverent and conservative nature. . . .

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History (New
17 Nietzsche, History, p. 22.
Monumental history is the history of examples, teachers, and comforters, and it ministers to the needs of the man of action and power. The soul of history is found in the impulse it gives to a powerful spirit. Critical history is also necessary. It breaks up the past and applies it to life. It questions. It judges. Finally, it condemns; for former standards must be surpassed. Rather act and take the consequences than refrain from doing a good thing because one cannot do it better.

Clearly, Nietzsche is promoting a selective history which will enable man to forget as much as he retains and to rid himself of cumbersome prejudices.

There are parallels to this evaluation of the utility of history in Swinburne. He, too, seems to feel strongly that history must not deter the course of the future. This sentiment is evident in "The Eve of Revolution."

The night is broken northward; the pale plains
And footless fields of sun-forgotten snow
Pore through their creviced lips and iron veins
Such quick breath labour and such clean blood flow
As summer-stricken spring feels in her pains
When dying May bears June, too young to know
The fruit that waxes from the flower that wanes;
Strange tyrannies and vast,
Tribes frost-bound to their past;

Here he describes the entanglement in the past and the struggle to break through to the needs of the present and future. But Swinburne was also aware that the past had value for man. In "Hertha" he depicts history as

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18 Bentley, p. 140.
Thus, history is always there, a "thunder" that makes itself heard and felt, the divine voice paralleling Nietzsche's antiquarian and monumental concepts of history. Swinburne decries the present when "things long passed over suffice, and men are forgotten that were," implying that the present has selected the worse instead of the better out of its past.

It is clear, when Nietzsche says man "must organize the chaos in himself of thinking himself back to his true needs," and "everything that is born is worthy of being destroyed," that he is echoing Swinburne's thought in "The Eve of Revolution":

0 time, 0 change and death,
Whose now not hateful breath
But gives the music swifter feet to move
Through sharp remeasuring tones
Of refluent antiphones
More tender-tuned than heart or throat of dove,
Soul into soul, song into song,
Life changing into life, by laws that work not wrong.

Obviously, both poet and philosopher are, again, rejecting much of past and present systems in favor of a revolutionary approach to life. Again, in the spirit of vitalism, no dogmatic

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20 Dobree, p. 87.
21 Dobree, p. 142.
22 Nietzsche, History, p. 72.
23 Nietzsche, History, p. 21.
formula or system is advocated, but an open and fluid opportunity to explore the infinite possibilities of man's self-realization.
As tragedy played a large role in the life of the poet as well as the philosopher, so it figures largely in the writings of both men. For them, pain and suffering were the fabric from which great thoughts and deeds were woven. Swinburne expresses this attitude in "Ave Atque Vale," written in memory of Baudelaire:

Thy lips indeed he touched with bitter vine,
And nourished them indeed with bitter bread;
Yet surely from his hand thy soul's food came,
The fire that burned thy spirit at his flame
Was lighted, and thine hungering heart he fed
Who feeds our hearts with fame.

And elsewhere he describes how evil creates good, "A falcon fledged to follow a fledgling dove. And by the flame and flame of hate of ill/ The exuberant light and burning bloom of love."² Hertha, too, manifests the creed of enlightenment through suffering when she says,

Children of banishment,
Souls overcast,
Were the lights ye see vanish meant
Always to last,
Ye would know not the sun evershining the shadows
and stars everpast, ³

¹ Dobree, p. 126. ² Dobree, p. 110. ³ Dobree, p. 86.
My own blood is what branches
The wounds in my bark;
Stars caught in my branches
Make day of the dark.

And Swinburne had experienced wounds in his bark, first from his slightly grotesque physical appearance and his difficult relations with a father who could not understand him, and later from his abnormal, perhaps homosexual, tendencies and the unconventional and unstable life he led as a result of his aberrations. Added to this was his unfortunate love-affair, which may have, as Cassidy says, been with Mary Gordon rather than "Boo", a futile and last grasp at normality. The happiness of true love, the expansion of identity that comes with marriage, the deeper understanding of the cycle of life that comes with having children and watching them mature—these experiences were never his.

Similarly, Nietzsche, by the very nature of his temperament, was cut off from what is called a normal and conventional life and carried with him even into his final insanity.

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4 Dobree, p. 86.
5 John A. Cassidy, Algernon C. Swinburne (New York, 1964), Chapter I.
6 Cassidy, p. 57.
7 Cassidy, p. 61.
8 Cassidy, p. 161.
consuming and hopeless love for Cosima Wagner. Zarathustra declares,

Whence come the highest mountains? I once asked. Then I learned that they came out of the sea. The evidence is written in their rocks and in the walls of their peaks. It is out of the deepest depth that the highest must come to its height.

That evil and suffering produce good is evident when Nietzsche says, "When virtue has slept, she will get up more refreshed." Bentley explains Nietzsche's position: "Nietzsche believed that physical sickness teaches mental health. Suffering is cathartic and convalescence a sort of mental pregnancy," and later, "... Cathartic suffering and voracious yearning bear Nietzsche beyond time to eternity." This point of view is clear in Nietzsche's statement that "the discipline of suffering, great suffering—know ye not that it is only this discipline that has produced all the elevations of humanity hitherto?"

The death of his father, his youth in a matriarchal household, his strange temperament, and his final insanity conspired to imbue his life with the suffering and tragedy that mark so many of his writings. "No German has ever united so powerful an

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10 Kaufmann, Portable Nietzsche, p. 266.
11 Kaufmann, Portable Nietzsche, p. 52.
12 Bentley, p. 99.
13 Bentley, p. 100.
intellect with so fine a sensibility," says Bentley. "A born artist and a born prophet, he was not allowed to live his life. Society provided no man to father him, no woman to marry him, no credible God to protect him, no fame to flatter him."15 Further, "He was ... a man acutely aware of the loneliness of the human situation."16

These similarities in the lives of poet and philosopher seem to offer a partial explanation for their parallel viewpoints of life, but a plausible and more universal reason exists. Both men lived and wrote in the same era, an era in which Darwin and the theory of evolution had revolutionized man's concept of his relation to the universe. Dogmas had been shattered, and man had quite literally been flung against the solid wall of his own resources. Further, this was the century in which Schopenhauer introduced his theory of the Will and Hegel expounded his theory of phenomenology and the ever-questing dialectic. This same climate produced Karl Marx and his revolutionary political and social theories. The intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century was charged with scientific and philosophic innovations, resulting in dynamic reactions against the social dogmas of Victorianism and the philosophic rigidity of logical positivism.

Perhaps it is not surprising that two men writing in separate languages of cultures related by a dim and distant past should have stumbled upon nearly identical concepts.

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15 Bentley, p. 106.  
16 Bentley, p. 06.
What is remarkable is that their ideas should have been so far-sighted and that they should have so clearly envisioned the dilemma in which twentieth century man would find himself. Nietzsche and Swinburne both realized that modern man would become estranged from the material values of the nineteenth century as well as the spiritual values of the entire Christian era, and both sought to provide direction for the man of the future, but a new kind of directive without dogma and without stricture.

In a general sense, neither Nietzsche nor Swinburne was different from his intellectual contemporaries, for, as Jaspers says, "... those who contemplated the future of mankind from the most multifarious outlooks were all, during the last century, inspired with a sense of danger. Man felt that his future was imperilled." The widespread realization of human uniqueness, that "what man is, can be, and ought to become is continually changing, however, not only with each new culture and period of history, but also with each new individual." did not come until the twentieth century. But Hollo May declares that Nietzsche was a true prophet of this condition, that he "foresaw the destruction of values which would occur in our time, the loneliness, emptiness and anxiety which would engulf us in the twentieth century... saw that we cannot ride on the goals of

18 Friedman, p. 18.
the past." It is apparent that Swinburne, too, anticipated the future and its nihilistic trend as clearly as Nietzsche himself, thus fulfilling his role of poet-prophet in the Nietzschean definitive.

This explanation for the parallels must suffice, for all evidence precludes any direct influence. It is unquestionable that both admired the French, particularly Baudelaire and his philosophy of the beauty of evil. However, neither man had any notable respect for the national culture of the other.

Brinton states Nietzsche's position regarding the English:

From Anglo-Saxon thought Nietzsche got very little. He could not read English well, as he could French, in the original. He seems to have read little in translation, though as a good nineteenth century intellectual he had picked up, if only from conversation and reviews, all the necessary names and tags. He had what was in the 1880's among Germans a most foresighted dislike for the English, whom he regarded as a shallow race incapable of philosophy and devoted to the decadent illusions of Trade and Science.

Apparently Swinburne's was not even considered one of the necessary names, for there is no record of Nietzsche's ever having mentioned it. This is not surprising in view of the fact that Swinburne's works were often suppressed by his Victorian countrymen.

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21 Jaspers, p. 15.

22 Brinton, p. 80.
Swinburne, likewise, seems to have disregarded Germany and her culture except for one aspect. Mrs. Disney Leith quoted him, "I hate them otherwise, but I must say the one good thing the Germans can do--music--they do so much better than any other people that no one even comes second." Furthermore, "Among modern European literatures, that of Germany influenced him scarcely at all. He distrusted Germany, and there is no evidence that he was thoroughly acquainted with her language or her literature." Add to this the fact that Nietzsche was not accepted or widely read in Germany, much less England, until after he became insane in 1890, and the evidence seems conclusive against any chance of either of the men influencing the other.

Even so, a common complaint against both the philosopher and the poet is that while both wrote flowingly and poetically, neither carried a logical philosophy through to a consistent conclusion based upon a firm foundation. Cassidy says in relation to Swinburne that

It is a truism that no artist can rise to the full height of his powers until his feet rest on the bedrock of a settled philosophy and until he feels confident of himself and of what he is doing. He must likewise find his own answers to the great questions of life. . . . In 1861 George Meredith put his finger squarely on Swinburne's major weakness when he wrote of him: 'I... I don't see any internal centre from which springs anything that he does.'

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24 Samuel C. Chew, Swinburne (Boston, 1929), p. 271.
25 Cassidy, p. 77.
And when Cassidy describes Swinburne as "a complete romantic, and what he encountered in life, if it moved him emotionally and impinged upon his consciousness, was quite certain to come out in his writings," he could also be speaking of Nietzsche.

Indeed, Bentley says of Nietzsche's writing,

> What did evolve was neither—in a departmental sense—literature nor philosophy but a strange combination of the two, a combination characteristic of a man who could begin a paragraph with lyrical praise of a mountain and end it in philosophic technicalities."

And Kaufmann describes a common attitude toward Nietzsche's works: "... it also seems that as a philosopher he represents a very sharp decline—and men have not been lacking who have not considered him a philosopher at all—because he had no 'system'." Kaufmann goes on, however, to defend Nietzsche in this respect with the following passage from Nietzsche.

> The will to a system: in a philosopher, morally speaking, a subtle corruption, as disease of the character; morally speaking, his will to appear more stupid than he is. ... I am not bigoted enough for a system— and not even for my system.

What Nietzsche is referring to is the philosopher's refusal to question his own basic premise, and Nietzsche went further by refusing to even adopt a basic premise, for he saw too clearly

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26 Cassidy, p. 50.  
27 Bentley, p. 109.  
28 Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, p. 65.  
29 Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, p. 66.
that every issue is multi-dimensional and therefore worthy of question. He carried within him "the astonishing suspicion: Perhaps my gospel is false!" "Nietzsche insists that the philosopher must be willing to make ever new experiments; he must retain an open mind and be prepared, if necessary, 'boldly at any time to declare himself against his previous opinion!'"

The result of Nietzsche's method of eternal examination of all issues is that his works abound with contradictions and lack the firm foundation of one basic premise from which all ideas radiate. The same can be said of Swinburne, and this method could well explain the absence of a "central core" in Swinburne's writing and would refute those who deny the philosophic content of his works. The evidence suggests that if Nietzsche is a philosopher, as he undeniably is, then Swinburne must also have developed enough philosophic insight to exonerate his poetry from the charge of shallowness and "intellectual thinness." Thus, it is not only possible but logical to apply Kaufmann's critique to Swinburne as well as Nietzsche, and the same conclusions may as well be drawn of the works of one as of the other. When Kaufmann defends Nietzsche's method as being appropriate in an age of fragmentation, it is the contention here that this defense may be applied with equal validity to Swinburne.

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30 Bentley, p. 117.
31 Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, p. 71.
32 Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, p. 80.
The fact stands that both Nietzsche and Swinburne were searching in their own ways for truth and that their methods and results were remarkably similar, for both must have believed sincerely Nietzsche's statement, "Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies." Each rose above the tragedy of his personal situation to dream of the possible greatness of mankind and to propagate the hope that man could attain the "shadowless soul."

33 Kaufmann, Portable Nietzsche, p. 63.


Chew, Samuel C., Swinburne, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1929.


