

Raymond Angelo Belliotti



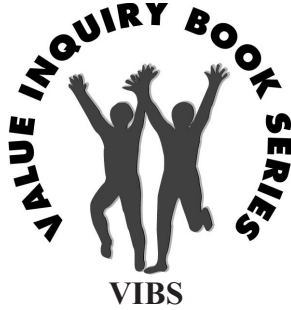
Jesus or Nietzsche

*How Should We
Live Our Lives?*

VALUE INQUIRY BOOK SERIES

vibs

JESUS OR NIETZSCHE



Volume 259

Robert Ginsberg
Founding Editor

Leonidas Donskis
Executive Editor

Associate Editors

G. John M. Abbarno	Steven V. Hicks
George Allan	Richard T. Hull
Gerhold K. Becker	Michael Krausz
Raymond Angelo Belliotti	Olli Loukola
Kenneth A. Bryson	Mark Letteri
C. Stephen Byrum	Vincent L. Luizzi
Robert A. Delfino	Hugh P. McDonald
Rem B. Edwards	Adrienne McEvoy
Malcolm D. Evans	J.D. Mininger
Roland Faber	Peter A. Redpath
Andrew Fitz-Gibbon	Arleen L. F. Salles
Francesc Forn i Argimon	John R. Shook
Daniel B. Gallagher	Eddy Souffrant
William C. Gay	Tuija Takala
Dane R. Gordon	Emil Višňovský
J. Everet Green	Anne Waters
Heta Aleksandra Gylling	James R. Watson
Matti Häyry	John R. Welch
Brian G. Henning	Thomas Woods

a volume in
Ethical Theory and Practice
ETP

Olli Loukola, Editor

JESUS OR NIETZSCHE
How Should We Live Our Lives?

Raymond Angelo Belliotti



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2013

Cover photo: Dreamstime

Cover Design: Studio Pollmann

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of “ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence”.

ISBN: 978-90-420-3658-1

E-Book ISBN: 978-94-012-0925-0

© Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2013

Printed in the Netherlands

For

Marcia, Angelo, and Vittoria

Supra lu majuri si 'nsigna lu minuri.

(“We learn by standing on the shoulders of the wise.”)

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL FOREWORD BY OLLI LOUKOLA	ix
PREFACE	xi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvii
INTRODUCTION	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Nietzsche's Life	5
3. Problems of Interpretation in Nietzsche	7
4. My (Mis)Interpretation of Nietzsche	9
ONE Jesus: The Nature of Our World and Our Mission in It	13
1. Family Relations	13
2. Associating and Identifying with Undesirables	17
3. Unsettling Established Rituals	19
4. Interrogating Prevailing Norms of Just Distribution	20
5. Material Minimalism	31
6. Jesus and the Concept of Forgiveness	34
TWO Nietzsche: The Nature of Our World and Our Mission in It	51
1. Perspectivism	51
2. Genealogical Critiques	63
3. Crafting a Worthy Self	64
4. Values	65
5. Nietzsche's Glad Tidings	66
6. Master and Slave Moralities	69
7. Going Beyond Good and Evil	80
8. Eternal Recurrence	84
9. Philosophy and Psychology	100
10. Style and Rhetoric	105
11. Tragic View of Life	110
12. Jesus and Nietzsche	114

THREE	Fundamental Understandings of Human Beings: Unconditional Love and the Will to Power	115
	1. The Power of Unconditional Love	115
	2. The Paradoxes of Agapic Love	119
	3. Parental Agape	123
	4. The Will to Power	126
	5. The Last Man and The Overman	131
	6. Nietzsche on Jesus	136
	7. Nietzsche on St. Paul and Christianity	141
	8. Nietzsche's Understanding of Jesus	143
	9. Jesus and Engagement in this World	145
	10. Daunting Normative Ideals	149
FOUR	The Perfectionism of Jesus	151
	1. Perfectionism and Unconditional Love	151
	2. Extending Unconditional Love	154
	3. Unconditional Love and Abstraction	158
	4. A Summary of the Perfectionism of Jesus	159
	5. The Ethic of Jesus and Contemporary Philosophy	161
	6. Jesus' Enduring Message	180
FIVE	The Perfectionism of Nietzsche	181
	1. Nietzsche's Vision	181
	2. Aristocratic Privilege	187
	3. A Summary of the Perfectionism of Nietzsche	194
	4. The Perfectionism of Nietzsche and Contemporary Philosophy	195
	5. Jesus and Nietzsche: Toward a Synthesis	205
	NOTES	211
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	219
	INDEX	225
	ABOUT THE AUTHOR	231

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Ethical Theory and Practice (ETP) is a special series in the Value Inquiry Book Series, and it is dedicated to works which attempt to close the gap between ethical theory and practice. One of the goals of *Jesus or Nietzsche: How should we live our lives?* is to examine the tension between the ways we theorize our moral ideals and the practicalities of human life. Jesus and Nietzsche were both sincere followers of the original Socratic mission of moral philosophy, that is, how to live the good human life not only in some distant idealized future, but also within mundane human existence. It is surely here that Jesus and Nietzsche have made a lasting impact in the history of morality, and most certainly in everyday life.

These two thinkers share an important starting point. They cast a critical eye on everyday circumstances, especially as they are regulated, dictated and controlled by established, traditional moral rules and beliefs. They both interrogate the point and purpose of this realm. They search for sense and purpose outside the conventional moralities of their day, and yearn to understand the role of moral reformation in pursuing the good human life. Yet their thinking reaches for the everlasting and transcendent.

Religion has probably been the single most influential element in the history of Western moral thought after the Greek philosophers, and it has continuously sculpted our moral reasoning, judged our motives, and dictated our goals. As such it has tended to calcify into prejudiced dogmatism and blind following of the arbitrary commands of omnipotent beings and of systems of power, backed up by all-encompassing fears of punishment. In the light of such extremism, it is easy to sympathize with the Nietzschean project of dismantling these practices and institutions, and stripping them of their undeserved dominance in defining human autonomy and potentials. Nietzsche offers an alternative image of how we might direct our lives and fashion the persons we might become.

In its reformative aspirations, Nietzsche's project bears similarities to Jesus's radical moral message. But the two part company: Nietzsche announces the death of God, while Jesus supplies a forceful rejoinder. As Raymond Angelo Belliotti convincingly shows in this book, Jesus and Nietzsche are not merely historical icons or galvanizers of power-hungry institutions. Instead, they are inspiring visionaries whose works can inform our existential choices and energize our lives today.

Olli Loukola, Editor
Ethical Theory and Practice

PREFACE

Three stories explain the origins of this work.

The First Story

I was raised a Roman Catholic. I attended parochial school from kindergarten through eighth grade. During my religious training—and religion was always the focus of the first session of every school day—we spent considerable time on the parables of the New Testament. This was unsurprising in light of the moral lessons contained in those stories. The transmission of moral lessons was, of course, the *raison d'être* of parochial school.

One day, when I was in fifth grade, we were ruminating over the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. During recess, I sidled over to our teacher, a nun in the order of St. Joseph and enthusiastically offered my judgment, “Sister, I think that Jesus was wrong on this one.” The nun made no effort to conceal her shock. As Jesus could never be wrong, just who was I to call his teachings into question.

A wiser student would have apologized for his impertinence, marched resolutely back to his seat, and cut his losses. Unfortunately, a ten-year-old boy with a big mouth and a curious, undisciplined mind rarely recognizes much less embraces prudent strategy. Predictably, I doubled down on what I took to be my wisdom. First, I outlined the reasons, expressed exquisitely and articulately in my judgment, why I thought that Jesus’ conclusions were erroneous. Second, I accepted the nun’s challenge, and provided an account of how Jesus could be wrong: given by Catholic theology that he was at once the son of God and a human being, he was susceptible to mistake when and only when his human side was in play. Thus, he could be wrong when enunciating a parable if and only if during the rendering his human fallibility clouded his typically flawless divine judgment. This, undoubtedly, must have occurred during his account of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

You must remember that this encounter occurred in the 1950s, when the Catholic Church was even less accommodating to quasi-heretical utterances than it is today. The nun acted swiftly; she convened a meeting which was attended by the parish priest, herself, my parents, and me. This unpleasant religious intervention had only one agenda item: a host of authority figures would confront an incorrigible youth and get his mind straight.

As always, my parents privately counseled a pragmatic stance: Maybe you are on to something, but do not get kicked out of school; make whatever atonements you must and get on with your education; for goodness sake (that was not the phrase they used), do not turn stubborn on this matter. So I sat, listened, was unconvinced, but feigned contrition, and returned to the good graces of the parish. The Church was always a sucker for a sinner who had