The Wisdom of Love

Introduction: The Abyss of History

In the United States we are on the verge of democratic collapse. Increasingly democracy is being endangered by worn out but effective tactics of authoritarian regime change. Over the years I have seen this progression. I spent many hours debating a wide range of conservatives including Republicans, the Missis Institute, the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, authors, and political activists on the right. As a student of **Continental Philosophy**, I have found many conservatives drawn to the ethos of Frederick Nietzsche. In this post I want to contrast the work of Nietzsche to common themes in Wisdom Traditions. I believe this is an important moment in history to reawaken a fresh understanding of these traditions. Specifically, I want to focus more on the history and traditions of Christianity. Historically Christianity through history has played on worn out old truisms, clichés and dogma. Too much of Western thought, including certain scientific and metaphysical paradigms, is totalized as certainty by outdated and ambivalent terms such as, 'common sense', self-evident, etc. and historic binary dualisms (e.g., God/Man, mind/body, good/evil, materialism/idealism, subject/object, true/false, nature/nurture, wave/particle, aether/emptiness, material/immaterial, etc.). Not only Christianity but certain common understandings of Western science and metaphysics has lapsed into antiquated paradigms driven unquestionably from these binary dualisms and knowledge which has long since reached its expiration date. I hope to r**eawaken** a sense of questioning and wonder about what we have yet to learn and what ancient wisdom traditions may have to offer. This trends counter to what seems to have been repressed in the frenzy of social media.

On Nietzsche's "Wild Wisdom"

In "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" Nietzsche writes of his "**wild wisdom**":

"Indeed, you too will be frightened, my friends, by my wild wisdom; and perhaps you will flee from it, together with my enemies. Would that I knew how to lure you back with a shepherd's flute! Would that my lioness, wisdom, might learn to roar tenderly! And many things we have already learned together. My wild wisdom became pregnant on lonely mountains; on rough stones she gave birth to her young, her youngest. Now she runs foolishly through the harsh desert and seeks and seeks gentle turf—my old wisdom. Upon your hearts' gentle turf, my friends, upon your love she would bed her most dearly beloved."

What is virtue for Nietzsche? His ultimate affirmation of existence is eternal recurrence of the same, all will forever be repeated endlessly with no possibility for change. Only in the

nausea of heroically affirming this relieves one of contempt for mediocrity. In Zarathustra he writes:

"What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of your great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness becomes loathsome to you, and likewise your reason and your virtue. The hour in which you say: 'What good is my happiness? It is poverty and filth and a wretched contentment!'"

And on affirmation,

"Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy, around the demigod a satyr-play; and around God—what? Perhaps a "world"?

Oh, my brothers, tell me: Is not everything that has become a tragedy and satyr-play about God—was it not a good and great life that it passed through the world as the tragedy and satyr-play of its gods?"

Nietzsche's ultimate affirmation is the **eternal recurrence of the same**, and **commonly understood virtues** are the "**hour of your great contempt**" as mediocrity shamelessly basking in the garb of **one's own happiness**. His philosophy makes pain heroic—a true virtue of the high places of humankind. He calls this the "**great overcomer**". This tragic heroic path is captivating and fascinating to the political right, but I pose a counter-narrative: a wisdom rooted not in heroic contempt but in humility and contingency which answers not to history but towards the unforeseen which finds no place in knowledge that totalizes itself.

Nietzsche's dad was a Lutheran minister. Certainly, one might wonder about his relationship with his father. I know of no evidence either way in this regard. In any case, Nietzsche has always been a riddle to me. I know that much Nietzsche's writing has captivated a kind of ethos on the political right, especially among young men. It has become a guiding principle for people and organizations welding political power especially at this moment in history. It appeals to the unbridled, **unabashed ego which ignorance arouses, yet once again, into novelty.** But this post is another narrative, one that counters Nietzsche, not intended as some equally tired old **metaphysical 'God's Truth'** but simply as a question I pose.

Pain played an important role in Nietzsche's 'greater truth'. But Nietzsche made pain heroic, a virtue of the high places of humankind. It became the 'great overcomer'. But Jesus presents us with another kind of pain. One of these most dominate retreat into binary dualities is religion's symptomatic reduction of history that pitches Jesus as God-man (*Homo deus*). The history of religion is the history of gods and God. The monotheistic God is no exception and has contributed to history's binary reductions forming a launch pad for

some of the worst of humankind since Constantine. It is only a small part of the march of tired old binary metaphysics which really need to be retired.

On the Obsession with God – what about the Son of Man?

From the early scrolls Jesus, himself, preferred to refer to himself as the “Son of Man”. His immediate followers chiefly used the term “Son of God”. The early apostolic scroll of John records after Pilate's initial conversation with Jesus, his accusers told Pilate, "By our law, he ought to die because he claimed to be the Son of God." This made Pilate even more afraid (John 19:7-8). But metaphysical history since has magnified the opposition between God and man into a universally relevant binary duality. And over ages that duality has grown old and tired. We hear so often that Jesus was the ‘Son of God’ but Jesus referred to himself as the ‘Son of man’. How many times in the New Testament was Jesus referred to as the “Son of God” as contrasted to the “Son of Man” and what do scholars think about this fragment is the scrolls? What are the Greek words and how does that differ from the Son of Man?

Title	Usage & Meaning
Son of Man (*Ho huios tou anthrōp*ou)	**Used by Jesus: – 80 to 85 times.** Jesus’s preferred this self-designation. It is a Semitic idiom meaning "human being." By using it, he affirmed his full humanity and solidarity with all of humankind (Anthrōpos, ἄνθρωπος).
Son of God (*Huios tou Theou*)	**Used by Others: Numerous occasions.** This title was primarily used by followers, demons, and subsequent traditions to declare his divinity and messianic role.

*See Notes 1 below for more details.

Jesus uses ‘son of man’ far more frequently than any other title to refer to himself—over 80 times in the Gospels. This is significant because he chose to emphasize his identity with humanity. Son of Man emphasizes his humanity: The term is a Semitic idiom that simply means "human being." By calling himself this, Jesus affirmed his full humanity and his solidarity with all of humankind. This counters any idea that he was a divine figure merely pretending to be human. In short, "Son of God" is a title given to Jesus by the immediate believers and subsequent traditions and history. But he, himself, preferred to call himself a son of mankind, as human.

However, there is an interesting exchange mentioned in John 10:34. Whoever wrote the Gospel of John was only referred to as the “beloved apostle”. John tells us of a heated confrontation between Jesus and a group of religious leaders who were accusing him of blasphemy when he reportedly said, "I and the Father are one." The leaders are so angry because they took that as he was saying he was God. They were so angry that they picked

up stones to stone him. In his defense, Jesus quotes from the Old Testament book of Psalm which states “You are all gods”.

In every tradition including Christianity, God, gods, the absolute, etc. has had an ambiguous (at best) and contrary relationship to what is invested in our humanity and our incapacity to found ourselves in anything other than contingency. Contingency, in the moment of existential grief opens us up to the plight of being human. Doesn’t religious dogma tell us we, or at least some of us, are all children of God? History has conveniently polarized this distinction into oblivion. On this Nietzsche would agree. The point for this discussion is that the historic binary dualisms of saved verses sinner is irrelevant and does nothing to allow other viewpoints not committed to whether you are a believer or not. This worn-out notion that you are either one of *them* or not is all too human as Nietzsche might tell us. And all this glosses over any possible value existential grief and loss might have for us. What wisdom might we gain from a non-polarized perspective of existential grief and loss? Here is my alternate interpretation.

On Pain and Suffering in the Wisdom Traditions

The question of the pain of existence lends itself to interpretation. Certainly, there is physical, emotional, psychological, etc. pain. I will distinguish the pain of tragic loss in this discussion. Tragic loss is translated into all kinds of immediate emotions like anger, fear, regret, guilt, etc. including the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But these are secondary interpretations, which we think in some fashion help us cope and deal with tragic loss. But perhaps there is virtue in tragic loss which Nietzsche overlooked.

For example, Nietzsche relished his enemies. He mused that the noble person values a worthy enemy because that enemy provides opposition that sharpens and strengthens him. The encounter is viewed as a fair duel, and a noble person desires an enemy who commands respect. The person of *ressentiment* creates an "evil enemy" out of resentment and envy, defining their own "goodness" only in opposition to that evil. So, for Nietzsche the love of one’s enemy is the value they added to my nobility, what we might call the **hubris of our ego**. Contrarily, I find certain sayings of Jesus (and others in the wisdom traditions) which encourage us to **love our enemies,** those who persecute us, in a way Nietzsche abhorred not for our heroic selves and not to satiate our pitiable ego. This has always been an enigma for me. How is this possible? If it is possible, it is only because at bottom persecution is a form of pain which might hold open the possibility for a kind of wisdom, something which only a special kind of open-ended knowledge might hold. Whether persecution is justified or not does not yet arrive at the level of **existential pain**

and suffering which cannot be shifted into the despicable. I want to focus on this primal experience and possibilities from the Wisdom traditions that may have value.

The Value of Existential Grief

Pain and loss are the most immediate moment of **injury not yet having arrived at the just or unjust**. So why focus on this moment? What value could we possibly find in this moment? Could it only be Nietzsche's moment of pity, mediocrity, and vengeance upon life? Might we think of it differently? **What value, virtue, or ethic might come from tragic pain and loss? My suggestion is compassion.**

Compassion and forgiveness in the face of tragic loss promotes self-reflection. It opens us open toward a future of not already knowing, of what might yet be learned. Not only of ourselves but of the entire plight of existence. In a very personal fashion, tragic loss and pain *can* teach us, humble us, make us ready to learn. In the book of Job, the answer to Job was not a ready-made assumption of Job's fault or the fault of other.

The book of Job shows that suffering is not always a direct punishment for sin, a key point that Jesus reinforces. In John 9, when the disciples ask Jesus why a man was born blind—"who sinned, this man or his parents?"—Jesus replies, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." What the hell could this mean? This aligns with the book of Job's idea that suffering can have a purpose beyond current human understanding. Job was a righteous man who suffered innocently. Jesus was also a righteous man who suffered. The law of Karma, cause and effect, a kind of economic certainty, might not be so self-evident as our history reenforces. Could it be that **vindication and resolution of guilt and fault has a component imputed metaphysically by history and narrative**.

Christian history and narrative tell us if you do x, y, and z you will get the big reward in the sky after you die. Capitalism could not be prouder or should I rather say the 'zero sum game' of rationalism. In my book "Quanta, Alterity, and Love" I discuss how even the most sacred populism afforded to science is in contradistinction to how science has made itself relevant in its ability to revise or even undue itself when its paradigms shift. **Quantum physics is at least the most stern and extreme rebuke of classical physics, of the absolute law of supply and demand.** Yet there are still those entrapped in philosophical binaries of rationalism vs. metaphysics, materialism vs. spiritualism and older scientific paradigms that that still naively revoke the value of the scientific method to undo long held beliefs. The most devout empiricist against philosophy and metaphysics defies themself when they cannot recognize the overturning of dated paradigms not only in religious history but also in science itself. Knowledge is always conditional and contingent and has no

adversity to overturning itself in favor of what can longer be tenable. It is unfortunate that capital enterprises in science and academia in general can promote tired old paradigms past their due date.

The Wisdom of Love

In pain and loss, we have a moment for self-reflection, for compassion and perhaps a basis for another kind of love and understanding? Is this idea all too human, all too pitiful as Nietzsche would tell us? Certainly, that can be imputed by the strong, the self-righteous, the noble values of the overcomer translated as the just, the victors, the ones who favor themselves as holding the tragic virtues of all noble overcomers. But I find that path to be artificial, a pretense, a flash in the proverbial pan of self-righteousness and self-indignation at the plight of others who are deemed to be mediocre, the lowly, the pitiful, the ones who reap vengeance on existence and whatever other chest beating proverb comes to mind.

We must at least recognize that **there is an alternative**. Perhaps an alternative which seems hard and impossible wearing the clothes of history as indolence, inferiority, detestable, etc. How can I ever love my enemies? More to the point how can I learn **wisdom from not knowing, not having arrived, leaving tragedy and judgement as unanswerable loss and pain**? I do find that question to be unanswerable but worth the journey. Moreso, it is a journey, a journey of not having arrived, of history which cannot answer itself but yearns toward a future. Not a future of resignation, 'eternal recurrence of the same' but a future in which pain and loss deepens, questions, and seeks virtue. It is one that is not already virtuous *vis-à-vis*, in relation to, indignation and contempt or even my greatest heroic hour. The question, the quest, embarked upon in loss and grief holds open the possibility of virtue in the face-to-face encounter of the other and the loss of the other wherein we face an unbridgeable gap.

Vis-à-vis **with Levinas**

The word ***vis-à-vis*** **is a French phrase rooted in Latin literally meaning face-to-face**. It is of French origin. *Vis-à-vis* was directly borrowed from French into the English language. The French phrase is rooted in Latin. The primary Latin root is found in the word *vis*. The French word *vis* (an obsolete word for "face," now replaced by visage) comes from the Latin word *vīsus*. *Vīsus* originally meant "a look," "sight," or "vision." *Vīsus* is, in turn, derived from the Latin verb *vidēre*, meaning "to see." Therefore, the ultimate Latin root of *vis-à-vis* is *vidēre* ("to see"), which gives the phrase its core meaning of "seeing face-to-face." In both French and English, the literal meaning is "face-to-face". In English, *vis-à-vis* is used as a noun, adverb, or preposition, often to mean "in relation to," "compared with," or to indicate

proximity. Emmanuel Levinas is the French philosopher, born in Lithuanian in 1906 and died in France in 1995. He is a philosopher that wrote most eloquently of the face-to-face encounter with the other. In my book, “Quanta, Alterity, and Love” I explore his thoughts much further and simply raise some possible confluences he may have with the notions of historic totalizations and some of quantum physics astounding findings (not to draw any kind of causal relationships which would already be steeped in totalizations of history).However, in my small way I attempt to find some otherness in history which can be held open apart from the violence of certainties in ‘having already known/arrived’ (e.g. the other, the Truth, the dogmatism built into absolutes of knowledge). This quest—this humbling acceptance of contingency and the overturning of long-held binaries—has a curious resemblance to the musings of quantum physics, which offered the sternest rebuke of classical paradigms. Knowledge, like ethics, is always conditional and must always answer towards the *other we face*.

Vis-à-vis is proximity which cannot be overcome by abstractions such as ‘space’. Nor can the face- to-face encounter of the other be reduced to the ready-made historic notions that designates the other with indignation and contempt. The face to face gets leveled off with the added pretense of rationality or metaphysical mythologies of the other and even the mere Mary Shelly Frankenstein of mechanical parts. When speaking to Victor *Frankenstein* (the mad scientist), the ‘creature’ (who cannot even merit the name Frankenstein) famously says, "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel… misery made me a fiend" – **the monstrous (totalizing) self whom I am facing from whence I am spawned?** Must Nietzsche’s *virtue* prohibit an alternate, an ethos which does not undue the other in favor of a “wild wisdom”? Must existence answer to Nietzsche’s verdict of history? Must the answer be the violent and pitiful version of history? Does heroically affirming endless mediocrity become the new virtue? Isn’t that just human all too human (ironically in distinction to Nietzsche’s 1879 work “Human, All Too Human”). More so, **must the other we face become the cogs of “Modern Times” in the throes of totality?**

In summing up history as such do we do violence to the other? **In reductively pitting without excess rationalism against illusion, abstractions against ‘real life’ aren’t we evoking yet another binary dualism of history**, a reaction which covers over what we do not know or understand as in the abyss of the death of the other? Doesn’t dogmatism lie under the rug of binary dualisms in the form of abstractions which seek to cover over the pain of the death of the other? The appeal from our face-to-face encounter with the face of the other must yet still face the other in loss and grief shrouded in ‘my pain’ and ‘my grief’ in which history cannot answer, cannot efface. We desperately search for rationale to substitute for the desecration of the other. In the epitaph we assume too much. I am not naively suggesting seeking judgements are wrong, needless, or avoidable. But I suggest

that there is a contingency to our judgements which does not require an answer. This gaping void of the face that is no more, yet we still 'face us' is an existential moment for self-reflection, for humility, for reflecting on the plight of the hungry, the poor, the stranger, the orphan. And those we do not face us except in their suffering and even…in our contingent judgements.

I am suggesting that there is a radical contingency to our judgements which is the occasion for our enigmatic notion of virtue. The face-to-face of the other is not exhausted by my designs, by histories design. Rather, the other is a point of departure which cannot return back unto itself, a branch which cannot be effaced in my/history's solitude. The collapse into my judgments, sanctified as our judgements, sets us on a course. However, the desire to return to that point of departure, that face which facing us can no longer find face, can never found an origin, a point of (eternal) return unto oneself, the they-self which is no self. And this chasm is the call for virtue, to compassion, to understanding and, I think, to knowledge, reflection and humility. This is the departure point that ancient wisdom traditions offer us. Curiously enough perhaps, might we find some resemblance to this in the musings of quantum physics?

Notes 1:

How many times in the New Testament was Jesus referred to as the “Son of God” as contrasted to the “Son of Man” and what do scholars think about this fragment is the scrolls? What are the Greek words and how does that differ from the Son of Man?

The Greek Words:

Son of God: The Greek phrase is *Huios tou Theou (Yἱo`ςτοῦΘεοῦ)*. *Huios (Yἱo`ς)* means "son." *Theou (Θεοῦ)* is the genitive form of *Theos (Θε o`ς), meaning "God's*."

Son of Man: The Greek phrase is *Ho huios tou anthrōpou* (*ὋΥἱo`ςτοῦἀνθρ ω΄που). Ho (Ὁ)* is the definite article "the." *Huios (Yἱo`ς)* means "son." *Anthrōpou (ἀνθρ ω΄που*) is the genitive form of *Anthrōpos (ἄνθρωπος)*, meaning "man" or "humanity." A literal translation is "the Son of the Man" or "the Son of Humanity," which is a somewhat unusual expression in Greek. This suggests it's a direct translation of a Semitic (Aramaic or Hebrew) idiom.

The Difference in Meaning and Usage

The two titles are not interchangeable; they carry distinct theological (historical) weight and are used differently throughout the New Testament. Son of God is the title used by *others* to declare Jesus's assumed divinity and messianic role.

Son of Man is Jesus's preferred self-designation. According to biblical scholarship, the exact number of times these terms are used varies slightly depending on the translation and scholarly interpretation. However, a general consensus exists.

Jesus' Self-References:

Son of Man: Jesus most frequently refers to himself with this title. The phrase appears around 80-85 times in the New Testament Gospels, and Jesus uses it for himself in nearly all of these instances.

Son of God: Jesus refers to himself as the Son of God on a handful of occasions, though often indirectly or through implication, particularly in the Gospel of John. For example, in John 10:36, he directly states, "I am the Son of God," and in John 5:25, he speaks of the "voice of the Son of God."

References by Others

Son of God: Others refer to Jesus as the Son of God on numerous occasions throughout the New Testament. These references come from various sources, including:

God the Father (Matthew 3:17, Matthew 17:5)

Angels (Luke 1:35)

Demons (Mark 3:11, Luke 4:41)

His disciples and followers (Matthew 14:33, John 1:49, John 11:27)

The Roman Centurion at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:54)

The Gospel writers themselves (Mark 1:1)

Son of Man: Others rarely use this title for Jesus. The most notable instances are in Acts 7:56, where Stephen sees "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God," and in Revelation 1:13 and Revelation 14:14.

Conclusion

The two titles are not interchangeable; they carry distinct theological (historical) weight and are used differently throughout the New Testament. Son of God is the title used by others to declare Jesus's assumed divinity and messianic role. **Son of Man is Jesus's preferred self-designation**. He uses it far more frequently than any other title to refer to himself—over 80 times in the Gospels. This is significant because he chose to emphasize his identity with humanity. Son of Man emphasizes his humanity: The term is a Semitic idiom that simply means "human being." By calling himself this, Jesus affirmed his full humanity and his solidarity with all of humankind. This counters any idea that he was a divine figure merely pretending to be human. In short, "Son of God" is a title given to Jesus by the traditions and history which followed not the way he, himself, preferred to call himself.

Notes 2:

Let's look a little closer at what Jesus apparently emphasized and where it was written "You are all gods". Hidden by history is what the Hebrew 'Law' tells us. The passage "You are gods" is found in the Old Testament, Psalm 82:6. This is the Hebrew book of Tehillim. The full verse Jesus quoted reads:

I said, 'You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.

King David is not the author of Psalm 82. The heading of the psalm attributes it to Asaph. While King David is credited with writing a large number of the psalms (73 out of 150), he did not write all of them. The book of Psalms has multiple authors, including Moses, Solomon, and others. Asaph was a prominent Levite musician and a leader of worship appointed by King David, and he is credited with writing twelve of the psalms.