

Nietzsche and Theodicy: As Seen from a Chinese Perspective

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Nietzsche is well-known to be highly critical of Christianity. While mainstream interpretation tends to trace this back to the alleged moral decay of the latter, or to the Nietzschean concepts of “slave morality” and “resentment”, this paper argues that it is the problem of theodicy that truly underlies Nietzsche’s criticism. The term “theodicy” was introduced famously by Leibniz, but the problem itself was considered to have rooted in Jewish antiquity (The Book of Job) and haunted Christian theology ever since the days of Augustine of Hippo. With this as backdrop this paper then turns to the analysis of a central thesis of Nietzsche, that “theodicy has never been a Hellenic problem.” In order to explicate and make sense of this lapidary statement, this paper further delves into Nietzsche’s treatise of Greek tragedy on the one hand and his understanding of Pre-Socratic philosophy (under the rubric of “philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks”) on the other, the purpose of which is to show why theodicy was for the Greeks irrelevant. In so doing, Nietzsche’s juxtaposition of the Parmenidian and Anaximandrian traditions and the reason for his preference of the latter will be discussed. Finally, relevant views from ancient Chinese philosophical texts will be cited for comparison to bring home the point of Nietzsche’s marked criticism against Christian theodicy.