

## THE ATHEISTIC DISTINCTIVE IN NIETZSCHE'S AMORAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN YOUTHS' APATHY TOWARDS THE FAITH

By

RUTH ADEBOLA OREWEME, Ph.D

Life Theological Seminary

Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria

[orewemeruth@gmail.com](mailto:orewemeruth@gmail.com)

+2348034547302

### Abstract

*This paper is concerned about the problem of Christian youth apathy towards the Christian faith in the contemporary time. There is a generational gap and nonchalant attitude in the youths' response and commitment towards spiritual things. It is the position of this paper that one of the vital factors responsible for this is the role-play of the past anti-God philosophies such as Nietzsche's. The doctrines and tenets of Fredrick Nietzsche atheistic distinctive forms a philosophical and ideological bedrock encouraging apathy towards religion, morality and unrestraint freedom in the contemporary time. The youths are worst hit by the sabotage of this atheistic agenda without them necessarily knowing who Nietzsche is and what this distinctive in his amoral philosophy is all about. Moreover, the problem is seldom addressed in the ecclesiastical and intellectual deliberation on the factors responsible for the problem in the Nigerian and African context. This paper therefore identifies the tenets and doctrines of the atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche's amoral philosophy as fused into the postmodern and contemporary worldview as one of the major philosophical undercurrent force fuelling the problem of Christian youths apathy towards the Christian faith. Nietzsche assertively declares that 'God is dead' and the propagators of his ideas, doctrines and values leveraging on the opportunities offer by Western education, globalization, westernization, technological advancement in communication through the use of internet, social media and mass media are disseminating his ideas. They are getting through and across especially to the young people in Nigeria, Africa and other part of the world eliciting unhealthy exchange of worldview and youths' culture that are atheistic incline. This change in theistic worldview for alternative worldview includes embracing liberalism, relativism, pluralism, moral indifference and different atheistic theories; hence, the focus of this paper on this topic.*

**Keywords: Fredrick Nietzsche, Amoral Philosophy, Atheistic Distinctive, Morality, Influence, Christian Youth, Apathy, Faith.**

### Introduction

The religious and social institutions in Nigeria and other African nations are confronted with the challenge of checkmating the rising tides of amoral lifestyles, apathy, and ungodly disposition to life among the youths in the contemporary time. The church appears to be worst hit by this problem because many youths are appears to be getting disillusioned with religion and those who hang on to the Christian faith no longer demonstrate the zest and the commitment to practice the faith in the ways prescribed by the Bible and the church dogmas.

Awa and Taiwo (2016) alludes that many Christian youths no longer see any reason to attend church services especially on Sundays while some others use the time to go and play or watch football matches, soap operas on Nollywood or Telemudo and some others use the time to attend to more personal necessary or unnecessary things. Abdul Fatai (2007) also laid credence to loss of religious commitment that has given rise prevalence of amoral atmosphere among the youths and adolescence in many Nigerian universities. He was particularly concern about the involvement of universities adolescence girls, raised in both Christian and non-Christian homes involvement in prostitution. He comments,

*“There has been an atmosphere of uncontrollable freedom for universities adolescence to engage in sexual activities when they are not married. Many of them have seized the opportunity of being in campus as freedom to engage in all forms of sexual activities including prostitution, while relying on pregnancy methods.”*

The underlining tone in Abdul Fatai work points to the failure of the homes, and religion in the moral upbringing of the youths.

Giatti (2022) is more pointed in his description of the problem in relating the problem to the Christian youths and atheism, he posits that apathetic disposition to spirituality among youths pose a greater threat to the Christian faith than atheism. However, it appears the church and Christian scholarship appears to be at oblivion about the role-play and influence of the past-anti-God philosophies such as Nietzsche in the contemporary postmodern worldview and it influences disposition to life especially in religion, spiritual matters and morality. This accounts for the reason why this factor is seldom addressed in the ecclesiastical and intellectual deliberation on the factors responsible for the problem in the Nigerian and African context.

This paper therefore, is calling attention to the impact and influence of subtle but powerful flow of atheistic ideological currents of thoughts and ideas such as taught in Nietzsche’s building strongholds in the minds of the youths motivating in them apathy towards religion and morality. Kinnman (2011: 246) elaborates on how this could be possible stating that the contemporary youths falls within the age bracket of generations of young people that are totally immense from birth in the world of internet. He comments, “This generation simply reflects the idea that people who are born during a certain period are influenced by a unique set of circumstances and global events, moral and social values, technologies, cultural behaviour and behavioural norms.”

Fredrick Nietzsche amoral philosophy is highly connected to the atheistic amoral trends gaining ground among the Nigerian and Africa youths in in the contemporary time. Harvey (1989) collaborates that the present age has a distrust for absolute authority and truth showcasing amoral assumptions and hypothesis that are rooted in the past anti-God and anti-moral philosophies. He posits that Nietzsche philosophy is foundational and serves as a fountainhead to the moral ideology of the present age, placing emphasis on the fact that all the principal components of the contemporary moral perspective and culture trends are herald in Nietzsche philosophy, particularly his advocacy for ‘superman’. Moreover, Berkowitz (1996) a pro-Nietzschean scholar also accentuates that Nietzsche work has become a chief-cornerstone for postmodernity with postmodern thinkers revering him as one of their

founding fathers as well as ‘a prophet of human unrestraint freedom/liberation who unveils the ‘perspectival character of all knowledge.’

Nietzsche’s philosophical perspective therefore, is such that proclaims among all other negatives atheistic approach to life positing that for a person to find true satisfaction and happiness in life there must be a solid commitment to image of self and resistance to any external authority be it human, societal or divine. This position leads to his philosophical position being regarded as atheistic, although there have been mixed reactions to his philosophy and the conflict it has created. Hence, Leiter (2002) elucidates that attempt at resolving the conflict created by the egoistic ideology of Nietzsche is not an easy task. Moreover, Nietzsche amoral philosophy comprises of philosophical elements of thoughts of other amoral and moral indifference philosophies that deny the idea of absolute truth, absolute authority, possibility of total knowledge, the sovereignty of the Deity, and morality; while he affirms moral relativism and moral indifference.

Berkowitz in his summation of Nietzsche philosophical works acknowledges this conflict and regards his philosophy as initiating a radical departure from the religious beliefs, traditional morality and philosophical ideals of the past and present (his time). He opines that this is the reason why Nietzsche works and philosophy attract different reactions and counter reactions especially from those who regards him as conservative critic of culture. There are those like the German court of theoreticians under Nazism who revered him as their ethnocentric hero and got his works enlisted for their agenda. However, more objective scholars branded him as the Copernicus of amoral and atheistic agenda who contributes nothing but chaos and initiates radical departure from pathway of moral sanity.

Stewart (2024) collaborates that Nietzsche philosophy does not generate a unique set of normative moral claims nor justify or support the traditional and conventional moral commitments. It rather insists on the society giving up its theistic built up to empty its moral sanity and built ups. Nietzsche embraces the concept of self-worth as if that is all there is and out rightly reject the need for religious and ethical-moral boundaries. Afuye (2013) frowns at the apathy this sort of tenets is creating in the youths stating that youths preoccupation is more on how to enrich self and become controllers of great sweat-less wealth rather than thinking a better tomorrow through inventions of new things. The African youths, mostly the elites and educated, are now consciously and unconsciously embracing those trends and shifts without necessarily knowing who Nietzsche is and what his amoral philosophy is all about. The reason being that the atheistic contents in Nietzsche and other atheistic related philosophies are infused in a more appealing way into the content of information pass on to the media, internet, television, radio, school educational, and entertainment contents the youths are exposed to. The reflection of the negative outcomes from such the tenets can be seen in the godless, moral indifferent lifestyles, relativistic outlook to life and escalating theistic lifestyles of the West. The realization of Nietzsche atheistic dream has taking its toll on the West religious, moral and social fabrics tearing things apart. Moreover, in consonant with Nietzsche atheistic distinctive advocacy and that of other like minds with him the birth of atheistic absurdities in the name of human freedom is gone viral. This tenets are behind the uncontrollable force resulting in outlaw of religion from the public life and schools, legalization of ungodly issues that theistic religions particularly the Christian church frowns at such as: abortion, gay and homosexual marriages, nudity and public sex, bestiality, incest,

free-sex and pre-marital sex, distribution of condom to the young people in schools and colleges, and so forth.

Therefore, it is on the ground of forestalling the same negative outcomes going viral among unsusceptible innocent or naïve African youths that this paper choose to focus on the atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche amoral philosophy. The paper is also an attempt at contributing to resolving the conflict surrounding Nietzsche declaration that 'God is dead' and lay bare his amoral position contrary to the colouration and ambiguity the pro-Nietzschean philosophers are deliberately creating to hide the facts of atheism in his philosophy. In addition, the paper aims at reinforcing commitment of Christian scholarship to continuous education of the youths against the negative/ atheistic ideological inflows in place of abandoning them in ignorance and living in oblivion of such realities. The Bible establishes that the Christian faith is a theistic faith that requires a person to move beyond mere profession of faith to possession and participation in the life of faith of the church.

### **The Relationship between Morality, Amorality and Apathy**

The subject of morality and ethics is very significant and very central in religion, philosophy and sociology because of its compatibility with human nature. Bernard (2013) opines that morality in its normative definition involves having a set of conducts put forward by a society or an in-group to which a person belong and accepted as a guide to behaviour by members of the society. Oreweme (2023) regards the concept primarily as having a committed to and holding belief in principles of right and wrong, constructive and deconstructive behaviour, good and bad, negative and positive character. Thus, while moral behaviours are positive and constructive, the amoral behaviours are negative, destructive and deconstructive. The term amoral therefore refers to the position and persons who stand in opposition against moral principles and beliefs or do not hold a belief nor allegiance to principles of right and wrong, good and bad behaviours.

Omoregbe (2003) rightly observes that moral values forms the foundational basis on which the society connects with the power of social agreement to determine and render moral judgements on which action is good and right, and which is bad and wrong, honest or dishonest and so forth. However, Melton and Nisbet also elaborate on two of the prominent moral views to which a moral philosopher may subscribe. The first is deontological absolutism, a position that views and subscribes to morality as conformity to laws and rules. The second is eudemonism or Utilitarianism a position that views and subscribes to morality as behaviours that achieves a good outcome for the possible greatest number of people. However, Agha (2010), Dzurgba (2000) and other scholars list consequentialism and virtue ethics as inclusive in this; whereas apathy has to do with having a belief in something but not having commitment of interest and feelings towards the thing. The term is derived from the Greek word *pathos* and *apatheia* therefore, the dictionary meaning of the word regards it as lacking in feelings and interest which could be towards God, fellow humans, self or things. However, Kazeem (2005) references that it is a medical term which means no feeling, lack of interest or concern. He also enunciates that in the classical usage of the word it was used in reference to god believing that god is *apatheia* because he has no ability to feel. He stresses that to the Greek mind if god or gods could feel joy, sorrow, or anger then the insignificant and lowly humans could affect, move and influence him. Therefore, in the Greek worldview as of

Paul time the Christian message that God was above caring about worthless humans is foolishness. He opines that it was this conflict in worldview Paul alludes to I Cor. 1:18.

### **The Atheistic Distinctive in Nietzsche's Amoral Philosophy**

Fredrick Nietzsche is a 19th-century German philosopher who was born 1844 and died 1900. He is a principal founding father of modern existentialism and a leading exponent of amoral philosophy. However, in all his more than ten published philosophical works he did not make use of the term 'amoral' nor can the word be found in his philosophical ethics or moral reasoning. The term amoral is a latter invented word but the term is applied to Nietzsche moral reasoning because evident in all his works is the denial of morality in favour of amoral tenets. Nietzsche's s favoured master morality promotes amorality in denunciation of religion, faith in any absolute authority, knowledge and positive ethics which he regards as slave morality. This paper however, has its focus only on the atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche amoral philosophy.

The term "distinctive" as used in this paper simply means marking difference or outstanding characteristics that distinguishes and marks a person or thing different from others; the word is an adjective derives from the noun word distinction. However, the term atheistic is in adjective and it is derived from the noun atheism. Kaseem (2005) elucidates that the Greek etymology of the term atheism is 'atheos' meaning without God. Therefore, the term stands for denial of the existence of God; though Berkhof (1981) elaborates that there are different shades of positions under atheism. There are those who posit that the belief about the existence of God is just an illusion because the Deity has never exists. There are others who holds to the position of cessation of the Deity existence either on the ground of his disappearance with His where about unknown or voluntary withdraw of the Deity who chose to allow the universe to run on his own natural laws and principles as imbedded in nature. However, there are other positions such as that of Nietzsche who holds to the notion that 'God is dead' and that of the likes of Kant who holds to the agnostic position that God is unknowable.

Kassem commenting on agnosticism expatiated that Paul in Acts 17:23 discovered the expression of this philosophy in an inscription on a Greek altar in Athens that reads "*Agnosto Theo*" implying 'to the unknown God.' Therefore, agnosticism is a position that holds that if God exists or does not it is not possible for humans to know because God is not knowable. This position often stresses the transcendence of God at the expense of the denial of His immanency. However, theism is the belief in the existence of God; atheism is its anti-thesis holding to the denial of the existence of God. Agnosticism however is a mild form of atheism holding that God is not knowable. The declaration that God is dead therefore, is an atheistic religious element in Nietzsche's philosophy despite that some scholars attempts exonerating him that his belief in God cannot be ascertained.

Solomon (1976) and Hurrels (2020) allude that generally scholarship acknowledges that Nietzsche is a bitter critic of traditional and religious beliefs and Christianity. Moreover, since he was born into a Lutheran family and his father was a pastor he must have had early encounter with religion before he metamorphosed to a bitter critic of religion and God. Therefore, Nietzsche relationship with religion particularly the Christian religion must have grown sour in his youthful age turning him to a bitter critic of religion and the Deity. This is

evident in the atheistic and anti-ethical moral content in his philosophy. This atheistic disposition also made him regards decline in God as a cultural and philosophical shift in which positive values both conventional and religious lost their influence in the modern society. Therefore, central to Nietzsche's philosophy is the fact his moral philosophical reasoning focus more on anti-God and anti-moral values promoting amoral values. Berhanus enunciates that his philosophy is nothing more than the critique of organized religion particularly the influence of Christianity on the Western culture The doctrine of Nietzsche philosophy demands that individuals give up commitment to core moral values and socio-religious moral codes so as to realise the vision of a god-less, moral-less but super human society.

### **Nietzsche's Assertion that 'God is Dead'**

The assertion "God is dead" is a central concept in Nietzsche's philosophy and Norman (2007) alludes that Nietzsche devoted his philosophical attention to this concept in his work titled Thus Spoke Zarathustra and his well celebrated aphorism 'The Gay Science'. Norman elaborates that the idea in The Gay Science captures Nietzsche critique of traditional religious beliefs and its loss of grip over the modern society. However, Nietzsche in 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra proclaims' the death of God to the world, assuming the character of Zarathustra an imaginary intellectual prophet. However, with this assertion he also asserts the death of morality as well.

Therefore, the concept 'God is Dead' in Nietzsche philosophy has drawn different reactions and interpretations from different scholars of different worldview and intellectual persuasions. Many of Nietzsche's contemporaries and conservative modern scholars regard the concept to meaning literal proclamation of 'death of the Deity'. Therefore, the society reactions and intellectual odds were mostly against Nietzsche while he was still sane and alive. However, Nietzsche while sane and alive did not for once deny he was not pointing to the 'literal death of the Deity'. Therefore the latter intellectuals and pro-Nietzschean society of scholars mostly existentialists and postmodernists are only attempting to dry-cleaning his image and tone down his assertions as part of the attempt to reconstruct Nietzsche and his philosophy.

Kaufman (2001: 105-115) a foremost pro-Nietzsche scholar opines that Nietzsche links his amoral philosophy to death of God so as to see the controversy and the interest the notion is bound to spark and that is the reason he opines that "...but given the way of men there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown." Kaufman position is part of the attempt of the pro-Nietzschean scholars to reconstruct and tone down some of the provocative assertions in Nietzsche philosophy such as this assertion under discussion. They attempt a twist promoting the view that Nietzsche use the concept as a metaphorical proclamation of the cultural and philosophical shifts occurring in the modern society rather than the literal existence of a deity. They also claim Nietzsche intends to make traditional religious values lose significance and influence. in a metaphorical sense rather than in a literal sense.

Kaufman (1977) in particular accentuates that Nietzsche employs the term 'God is dead' to indicate the decline of belief in God in the West and its implications for the collapse of traditional religious beliefs and loss of transcendent source of meaning, value and morality. He opines that he is only foreseen the potential existential crisis and creative liberation in that

collapse, using it to challenge individuals to confront the existential implications of a world without transcendental meaning. However, Katsafanas (2020) elaborates that Nietzsche's declaration that 'God is dead' has been ineradicable in philosophy, theology, sociology, culture, ethics, and literature.

Nietzsche philosophy therefore, forms the basis for exploring the theological implications of the death of God within the larger context of existentialism, postmodernism and contemporary theology. These are the circles where his advocacy for the death of God have been more engaged and fully interpreted. However, Nietzsche is not the only proclaimer of 'the death of God' therefore cannot be regarded as sole founding father of 'the death of God theology/movement'. Kaufman attests to this stating that Nietzsche is only the first to put it more pointedly that "*God is dead*". However, Devovan (2020) elucidates that there is a distinct theological movement regarded as the death of God theologians that emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The movement laid the foundation for secular humanism attempting to reconstruct and reinterpret the Christian theology in consonance with modern secularism, existentialism and postmodernity.

The death of God theology/movement comprises of some leading enlightenment and existential philosophers, thinkers and theologians who are Nietzsche's predecessors. This includes the likes of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Soren Kierkegaard, Voltaire, Friedrich Engels and some others whose works help in shaping Nietzsche's thoughts. The movement also includes some Nietzsche's successors whose thoughts Nietzsche's works help to shape. This includes the likes of Paul Van Buren, Thomas J.J. Altizer and Gabriel Vahanian. All of these scholars challenge the traditional religious authorities and relevance of religion advocating the replacement of its values for what they consider as higher values such as what science, reason, freedom and autonomy has to offer.

Rogers (2009) included in this list Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, and also particularly alludes to and references Soren Kierkegaard's notion of 'leap of faith' and Engels' concept of 'alienation' as anticipating the themes Nietzsche explored later in his philosophy. Rogers elucidates that leading postmodern scholars such as Michel Foucault, Heidegger, and Jean-Francois Lyotard are also preoccupied with Nietzsche's ideas about 'the death of God'. However, Nietzsche alone among all others particularly declared and wrote "*God is dead*" and by so doing gives the expression a famous focal expression in his works. Therefore, it is on this ground Nietzsche qualifies as the precursor to the latter development of same view especially within the existentialism and postmodernism movements. Moreover, they all examine how the decline of traditional metaphysical bedrocks has reset human understanding of reality and discourse its implications for truth, knowledge, power and morality.

A great deal of differences exists between Nietzsche's amoral philosophy on the death of God and the major emphasis of 'the death of God theology/movement', though few similarities exist between them especially in the area of morality. However, most of the moral values and ideals Nietzsche negatively reversed and cast aspersions on are upheld as authentic by the movement, despite that the movement does not have any concrete rigid set of values or dogmas. The movement only targets engaging the challenges of modernity and the decline of traditional religious belief proposing achieving this through replacing the Biblical approach

with prowess in intellectual, ethical and meaningful existential approaches. Therefore, commitment to traditional and conventional ethical moral rules void of religious coloration is still central in the movement objective unlike Nietzsche who advocates doing away with them all and placing it with self-sovereignty.

### **The Implications of the Atheistic Distinctive in Nietzsche's Amoral Philosophy for African Youths Involvement in Moral Decadence**

Nietzsche primary goal for declaring that God is dead is to replace the traditional and theistic metaphysical bedrock on which religion and morality that enables social cohesion with rationalistic and humanistic knowledge. It is to promote the autonomy of the human power and unrestrained freedom within the limit of societal cohesion. Therefore, as observes by Anderson (2007) Nietzsche philosophies be it on religion or ethical-moral issues or in other areas of life holds in place few positive but graver consequences for individuals and the human society in general. Kaufmann (1974) accentuates to the influence Nietzsche philosophy weighs over the immediate past and present human era as follows: *'Since the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the philosophy of Nietzsche has had great intellectual and political influence around the world.* The consequences of the global influence of his philosophy are not only felt in the West, it is also more pronounced on the African young people particularly Nigeria where the Commonwealth State of the World Youths index 2016 asserts that the largest concentration of youths in the world are found.

Moreover, the African young people leveraging on internet, social media, mass media and youths migration are falling prey to this negative influences. This is making many of them discard the personal and social-religious ethics of the African people for amoral dispositions and atheistic tendencies as advocated in Nietzsche amoral philosophy. Furthermore, since atheism, moral relativism and moral neutrality appears to be at the centre of westernization the challenge becomes very significant. This is especially in regards to the fact that the doctrines of atheism are western oriented and never congenial with the 'African cultural milieu'. Nietzsche amoral philosophy therefore weakens and seeks to destroy faith in God and in religion.

However, wherever the fear of God is absent all forms of evil gain freedom of thriving there. Veith (1994: 72, 73) collaborates the devastating impact atheistic moral stand of Nietzsche amoral philosophy could have on the human personality stating that, *"If there are no absolutes, if truth is relative, then there can be no stability, no meaning in life. If reality is social constructed, then moral guidelines are only masks for oppressive power and individual identity in illusion"*. Moreover, Nietzsche critical questioning of traditional and organised religious institutions is encouraging lack of submission to these institutions in the contemporary postmodern time. Therefore, the atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche amoral philosophy offers the African youths a provocative template for questioning traditional, religious and societal values and by so doing presents challenges regarding moral relativism. Moreover, Agha (2010) also collaborates that there is a close bond between morality and religion in the history of humankind that makes them inseparable. He stresses that morality flows from religion and it is the sole basis for justification of religious beliefs. He places emphasis on the Deity, personality, relationships, conducts, and alluding that those main things are common to both religion and morality. Agha therefore affirms that the destruction of one would lead to the destruction of the other, implying that the destruction of religion would also result in



destruction of morality. Agha posits, “When men lose their hold on religion nothing but moral confusion and decay will be expected.”

The atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche’s amoral philosophy therefore is highly motivational for African youths involvement in moral decadence and provides encouragement for the youths to go in the same direction he went, having no known regard for God nor commitment to moral laws and order. Hence, many Christian African youths like their counterpart in the West now take to justifying their actions solely based on subjective perspectives and individual desires, rather than regarding commitment to the Christian faith and its moral boundaries as the objective basis for their actions. The atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche philosophy is incisive topassion for rejection of religious authority and looking down on religion and this is influencing many African youths closing up to godly parental roles, the roles of religion and the African society in shaping cultural and moral values.

### **Conclusion**

This paper therefore is a critical examination of the atheistic distinctive in Fredrick Nietzsche amoral philosophy. It exposes its controlling force and influence on the contemporary African youths’ disposition to religion and godly instructions. Nietzsche critical questioning of traditional and organised religious, religious institutions and cultural ethical moral boundaries encourages lack of submission to these institutions. Therefore, the atheistic distinctive in his amoral philosophy has negative ethical-moral implications for the African youths. He regards submission to external authorities be it human or transcendent as a weakness while he proposes a re-evaluation of values based on individual creativity, self-expression and affirmation of life. This would result in building a society where oligarchy, oppression, suppression and chaotic violence revolts thrives. Nietzsche amoral philosophy with its atheistic distinctive therefore offers the African youths a provocative template for questioning traditional, religious and societal values. This presents challenges regarding moral relativism that could motivate the youths to go in the same direction of having no regard for God and morality. Therefore, the atheistic distinctive in Nietzsche amoral philosophy targets weakening and destroying faith in God and in religion.

### **The Way Forward**

This paper recommends that, religious education and moral education should be should be stepped up at the ecclesiastical and social level in addressing the role of atheistic philosophies in fuelling apathy in the Christian youths towards the things of God. Also, the church and her educational agencies should make clear the theistic content of the Christian faith. There should be more emphasis on doctrinal beliefs rather than the undue emphasis being placed on materialism in many churches in groups.

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