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## Editors' Note

“They are dying, the old oracles sent to Laius, now our masters strike them off the rolls. Nowhere Apollo's golden glory now — the gods, the gods go down.”  
— Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*

“But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential...teaching modern Christian creationism should be fought as a form of child abuse.” — Dona Haraway, *The Cyborg Manifesto*

Welcome to our spring 2021 issue of *The Agonist*: “The Antichrist.” We would like to thank all of our contributing writers and dedicated editorial team. We would also like to express our enormous gratitude to our new electronic publishers, Ibrahim Sirkeci and the Transnational Press London. We look forward to working with you! In this issue our writers present four essays that once again rethink our relationship with Nietzsche's controversial, later writings. Robert Malka explores the ways in which a story can find its basis in both the self and the world in Nietzsche's works. Gary Shapiro reimagines Nietzsche as a proto-ecologist or prophet of environmentalism. Bradley Kaye mines the strange affinities between Nietzsche and Pelagianism. And finally, Thomas Steinbuch treats us to “Cursing the Curse: Nietzsche on the Machiavellianism of Pity” in the early sections of *The Antichrist*.

Who is the Antichrist? Certainly not the Lucifer from Genesis or Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In much of Nietzsche's oeuvre, Dionysus is opposed not only to Apollo, but to Christ. We “Hyperboreans” are all familiar with this interpretation: The former is cast as a merry reveler whose infectious *joie de vivre* inspires artistic creation and the dissolution of the ego into the orgiastic “unity of nature.” The latter is often depicted as the “poor, pale, Nazarene” who infects his resentful followers with his nihilistic hatred of life—an uncritical, idiotic version of Socrates who perpetuates a dangerous slave morality that impedes the evolution of our species. Yet for all his purported histrionics, Nietzsche's Dionysus is a tease that never quite makes the desired poetic leap towards sexual potency that Nietzsche wants him to. He is more the benign, bearded voluptuary of Rubens' landscapes than Puck's “merry wanderer of the night.”

While these tropes are still very much alive and dancing around the margins of the text, I would suggest Nietzsche is after something darker, more personal in *The Antichrist*. This is Nietzsche with his gloves off: vitriolic, uncensored, and beautifully cruel. The Madman's proclamation of God's death is quaintly benign in comparison. Given that he is not attacking a specific individual, but a rather what he perceives to be an endemic mental health crisis, maybe the title should have been *Anti-Christianity*.



Perhaps sensing his own looming mental collapse, and despite his many snarky critiques of Socrates and the Stoics, maybe all Nietzsche desired in writing *The Antichrist* was a good death. Christianity offers the opposite or converse of a good death: it promotes and encourages eschatological histrionics on the part of its practitioners. Christians are instructed to die full of fear and loathing, guilt, shame, doubt, regret that can only be justified by submission to the father. The monomyths of too many world civilizations have thus far presented us with relatively few choices: patricide or submission to the patriarchy—rebellion or slavery. The former is Greek while the latter is the invective we suffer at the hands of monotheism: “Christianity finds sickness *necessary*, just as the Greek spirit had need of a superabundance of health—the actual ulterior purpose of the whole system of salvation of the church is to *make* people ill” (145). Some of us are Oedipus and some of us are Abraham, but no one gets out of here alive, either the father or the son (or both) must be sacrificed.

In other words, there are as many ways to slay the father as paths to follow in their footsteps. For Freud: “The father therefore really appears twice in the scene of sacrifice before the tribal god, once as the god and again as the totem-sacrificial-animal. But in attempting to understand this situation we must beware of interpretations which superficially seek to translate it as an allegory, and which forget the historical stages in the process.”<sup>1</sup> Compare this to section 55 of *The Antichrist*: “what was a lie in the father becomes a conviction in the son.—I call it lying to refuse to see what one sees, or to refuse to see it as it is: whether the lie be uttered before witnesses or not before witnesses is of no consequence. The most common sort of lie is that by which a man deceives himself: the deception of others is a relatively rare offence” (156). What Nietzsche and Freud ultimately have in common, is that they are both warning us that we better be careful in deciding how to best overcome ourselves.

In the following excerpts from the last three paragraph of Nietzsche’s *The Antichrist* one could argue he is addressing both his biological and symbolic father simultaneously.

With this I come to a conclusion and pronounce my judgment. I *condemn* Christianity; I bring against the Christian church the most terrible of all the accusations that an accuser has ever had in his mouth. It is, to me, the greatest of all imaginable corruptions; it seeks to work the ultimate corruption, the worst possible corruption. The Christian church has left nothing untouched by its depravity; it has turned every value into worthlessness, and every truth into a lie, and every integrity into baseness of soul...

This eternal accusation against Christianity I shall write upon all walls, wherever walls are to be found—I have letters that even the blind will be able to see.... I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are venomous enough, or secret, subterranean and *small* enough,—I call it the one immortal blemish upon the human race” (182).

But the end of Christianity’s metaphysical (and political) death grip on the West is only the *beginning* of the transvaluation of all values. In other words, Nietzsche realized almost a

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<sup>1</sup> *Totem and Taboo* Chapter 6, section 6.



century before Sartre that revolution of any kind is a necessary constant—perhaps the only physical law in a universe governed by impermanence despite his claim to the contrary in section 109 of *The Gay Science*.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche also said it would probably take centuries if not millennia to exorcise the gods from our collective psyches. We invent gods then kill them, then plant new gods in the soil using the old gods' corpses as compost to sew new values. An eternal return of the same. If you scroll through the content on any of the myriad streaming services, the majority of film and television programming offers little but tales of sacrifice and redemption. By the time Nietzsche was writing *The Antichrist*, he had little patience for mock prophecies or poetic metaphors and seemed to be bored by tales of sacrifice and redemption. This is not the spirited voice of Zarathustra who parodies the gospels by clearing a path for the 'over-humans.' *The Antichrist* is less a work of philosophy and more of a primal Oedipal scream—a final act of rebellion against an ugly and stupid world.

Editorial Team, June 2022

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<sup>2</sup> "Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature."