

### **Question addressed by Essay:**

What changes do you think Monkey undergoes in the course of his journey? You might want to consider: What is his character at the beginning? What qualities does he have that recommend him for this heroic and historic journey? What shortcomings or failings does he have that show that he is not yet enlightened? What lessons does he receive along the way? What evidence (incidents, behavior) do you find that his character is changing? What is the outcome of his journey to enlightenment? What qualities has he attained that make him whole, or enlightened?

Compare the characters of Monkey and Tripitaka. Although Tripitaka is the master and Monkey is the disciple, neither is fully enlightened. What are their respective strengths and weaknesses? admirable qualities and shortcomings? How do they complement one another on the journey? What do you think the author is trying to express through the dramatic contrast between the two characters? Perhaps the author uses the two characters to show different qualities that must be attained on the path to wholeness? Maybe they represent different aspects of the religious path, or two different paths of spiritual growth and enlightenment?

You might also consider the implications, for this topic, of one of the characters being an animal. What does this say about the Buddhist journey to enlightenment, or Buddhahood? About the relative religious status of humans and animals in Buddhism?

Both Jesus and Monkey display magical powers. Taking this similarity as your point of departure, compare these characters and the meaning and roles of their exercise of magical powers. What are their respective powers? What is the source, or basis, of

those powers in each case? their differing religious contexts? What do they reveal about the characters for their authors? What is the purpose and role of the magical powers in the two narratives? Are they completely different, or are there similarities?

## **SERIOUS MONKEY BUSINESS**

### **GEORGE H. PATERSON**

Friedrich Nietzsche's treatise *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Wu Ch'eng-en's novel *Monkey* both examine the benefits and detriments of various social organizations and codes of social morality. Friedrich Nietzsche rather forcefully asserts his position on morality, proclaiming that organized religion is a source of self-destructive "bad conscience" and celebrating the most primal and basic system of human values, in which the individuals with the strongest physique and the most useful talents became the most benevolent, and most truly authoritative, leaders of their society. Wu Ch'eng-en's hero and antihero, Tripitaka and Monkey, complement each other beautifully throughout *Monkey*, each representing opposing sides of Nietzsche's social argument, which asks whether the most beneficial social organization focuses on physical strength and social utility (Monkey's) or on the more figurative "strength" associated with self-deprivation and piety (Tripitaka's). By examining the interactions of *Monkey*'s protagonists, one can begin to understand Nietzsche's most prominent arguments more thoroughly. The reader must begin by considering these arguments; then, by applying those principles to an interpretation of *Monkey*, the reader can solve some problems of understanding in each of the two texts.

Though *On the Genealogy of Morals* stumbles into paradox after confusing paradox, Nietzsche does manage to convey three key points. First, Nietzsche proposes

that the original, primal definition of social "power"—in which those who contribute most to society through physical strength or talents hold proportionate shares of social authority—is ultimately the most constructive, most productive system of values that humans have ever constructed for themselves. The two other major value systems, feudalism and theocracy, each produces artificial problems within the society that would inevitably lead either to their downfall or to the downfall of each individual's hope of realizing his or her potential. In a feudal society, power is passed from noble parents to noble sons, leaving a vast majority of the population with no chance of becoming masters of their own fate, leaving them with no recourse but to subscribe to the "slave" mentality. Such forced subversion to artificial authority often breeds resentment among those of the lower, or slave, class. In a theocracy, a fiercely exclusive circle of priests maintains an equally artificial power structure, and persecutes anyone who does not recognize such an arrangement as "righteous" and "just". Nietzsche asserts that such a society is the most reprehensible, destructive, unjust establishment ever conceived, for it not only instills in its slave class a feeling of its own worthlessness, but it also constantly encourages its followers to intensify that sentiment, that "ressentiment" (36), of abject worthlessness in their own minds' eyes. Thus the slave classes give themselves each day their daily punishment, their "repentance" for "sins" which only remain sins in the eyes of those maintaining the artificial power structure. Given these perspectives on feudal and theocratic societies, it becomes quite easy for an outside reader to realize the value of the original, primal social structure.

Second, Nietzsche expands on the theory of resentment, or "bad conscience" (62). Under natural conditions, each individual achieves his "justice" against any

"attacker" who might injure him in some way. Thus the victim is satisfied that equal compensation has been given for the trespass (64-67). In a lawful society, the abstract penalty regulated by law is so far removed from the original method of punishment that it is psychologically useless, both to the victim who needs a vent for his vengeance, and for the aggressor who must be punished to ward him away from future transgressions (71-82). This system never satisfies the victim, who remains vengeful, nor does it significantly discourage the victimizer, who could serve whatever sentence and reenter society no more "lawful" than before. Nietzsche's view of the theocratic law structure is even more harsh. When the supreme law of society is "piety", or even simply an allegiance with the theocrats, any act that is not judged pious, or a tribute to the theocracy, can be portrayed as a crime and punished accordingly. These theocrats therefore call every act of individual pleasure-seeking as a crime against authority, and in addition to punishing the "criminal" directly, force the criminal to consider himself the victim of his own instincts and desires, which are *constant* and *unavoidable* criminals against righteousness (92-94). Each individual, therefore, attempts to live his life constantly under the impression that his own psyche is plotting against him, and that at any turn he might commit unforgivable crimes against his society and himself, making him constantly the victimizer and his own victim. Here again, Nietzsche portrays primal concepts of law, in which each individual victim punishes his own victimizer according to personal standards, as the most favorable (or least destructive) social order.

Third, Nietzsche considers the embodiments of constructive and destructive society. For Nietzsche, the figure of Christ represents not salvation from sin but damnation to an unpayable debt. Christ's death is said to have repaid humans' debt to

God; instead, since he was God's own son, he effectively doubled the debt and forced all future "slave" classes to torture themselves even more fervently in the name of righteousness (92). In a feudal society, such a figure would be equivalent to a noble lord paying off the debts of all his serfs: though the original debt is absolved, the lower class becomes doubly indebted to the lord. An "antichrist", then, would not be someone who intends to destroy the world. Rather, the antichrist would be a leader who convinces everyone in society to abandon the vicious cycle of self-punishment and return to the primal social condition (148-150). One can easily see why the leaders of a theocratic society would view such a figure as an evil monster bent on destroying all that is "holy", because that figure would necessarily be concerned solely with destroying the theocrats' power base, but in Nietzsche's view, destroying the "sickness" of a religious society would be the single most constructive and beneficial event in human history. These two figures, "christ" and "antichrist", are the embodiments of Nietzsche's worst- and best-case scenarios: a society in which the slave condition is artificial yet inescapable, and a society in which masters and slaves are determined by a natural order, and neither side resents the other for its presence or actions.

The two central figures of Wu Ch'eng-en's novel, Monkey and Tripitaka, are interesting echoes of these two figures from Nietzsche. The two act as foils in the novel: Monkey is always confident, strong, and quick to act, whereas Tripitaka is physically and emotionally weaker, and more disposed to depend on outside forces -- mainly, deities -- to resolve the difficulties that arise on their journey. By applying Nietzsche's ideas about primalism versus theocracy, we may examine these two contrasting characters in a new, and interesting, light.

Monkey, the "Great Sage Equal to Heaven", is a fairly good representation of Nietzsche's "antichrist" figure. Monkey's social organization of choice is the more primal, usefulness-oriented structure, and he uses his unusually high intelligence and magical might to become a strong, benevolent leader. His fellow monkeys at the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit are still "slaves" to Monkey's rule, but they submit to his rule willingly, out of respect for Monkey's superior strength and "usefulness" to the tribe. The monkeys do not feel unworthy of, or indebted to, Monkey, but instead respect his authority and serve him willingly (3 1). In return, Monkey realizes the danger of a slave class with negative morale, and instead of using guilt or debts to keep his subjects under control, he rules them by proving to them again and again how much they need him as a leader and protector (28-30, 60-61). He abhors the abstract "punishments" dealt by the law, and (until the very end of the Scripture quest) never considers the "righteousness" of any of his actions; his justice is that of a primal, strength-based society, based not on debts and guilt, but on respect and mutual cooperation. Monkey's power never corrupts his intentions as a benevolent leader; he always works for the good of his fellow monkeys, and later, for the good of the adventuring party sent to find the Scriptures in India. Just as with his kinfolk, Monkey uses his shows of force to prove to the other members of the party that he is the strongest, the most useful, and the best leader, without making the other searchers resentful of his leadership. Monkey never considers himself a slave, either; though he comes to recognize the fallacy of his own mistakes, he does not blame himself for being attacked by others, but instead takes it upon himself to punish those who attack him. Also, Monkey works to destroy all instances of feudal or theocratic social organizations on his journey with Tripitaka (e.g., the three Taoist Strength

Immortals at Cart Slow). Monkey exhibits all the characteristics of Nietzsche's "antichrist", and in the end achieves enlightenment as a reward for his insight and leadership.

Tripitaka, however, is more representative of Nietzsche's christ figure. Physically frail, magically weak, and devoid of courage under fire, Tripitaka remains nearly useless for much of the journey to India. From the beginning, he attempts to lead his disciples through piety and righteousness, breeding nothing but negative sentiment for his authority. When he encounters Monkey, Tripitaka attempts to lord over the Great Sage with a helmet that causes excruciating pain, forcing Monkey to question Tripitaka's very right to authority (135-136). Pigsy cannot cope with Tripitaka's extreme humility and self-deprivation, and continually opposes the priest's unyielding refusal of riches of any kind (158 and elsewhere). Moreover, Tripitaka turns his theocratic punishment on himself, blaming his own lack of piety for the trials the party faces. Paralyzed by his own feelings of worthlessness and weakness, Tripitaka renders himself even more useless than he already is. Instead of becoming a more primal leader, and punishing those who attack him, Tripitaka turns his vengeance inwards, leaving him dejected, downtrodden, and defeated (162, 280-282, others). Instead of acknowledging tests of his faith as challenges to take action, Tripitaka interprets the trials as signs of faith's—and his own inadequacy and powerlessness. Tripitaka would be the target of endless scorn from Nietzsche: he constantly blames himself for the trespasses of others, and encourages a similar behavior in those around him.

Yet Tripitaka, too, obtains enlightenment at the conclusion of *Monkey*. How could the novel agree with Nietzsche's ideals so emphatically on one hand, yet dispute the

destructiveness of piety at the same time? What *Monkey* demonstrates, and Nietzsche fails to recognize, is that a well-organized society cannot focus solely on either primalism or theocracy; power and piety must coexist in a dynamic balance. Thus we realize how Monkey and Tripitaka could be so inept individually, yet so effective when working as a pair. Though Nietzsche's ideal antichrist figure, Monkey, is obviously more capable of coping with the problems that arise in his life as a leader, he needs Tripitaka's discipline to prevent further calamity caused by his own recklessness. Likewise, Tripitaka's piety does not damn him in our eyes, as it would have in Nietzsche's; those who lack the physical (or magical) might to overcome adversity must subscribe to the "slave" mentality, and in turn find some way to cope psychologically with that burden. Tripitaka maintains his strict self-denial so that he will not completely lose faith in life and indeed in himself. These lessons from *Monkey* both aid in a reader's understanding of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* and correct some of that author's narrow-minded errors. Though Monkey is the most effective figure of leadership in the novel, he must be tempered by piety and self-discipline before he can be truly effective. Similarly, though Tripitaka's weakness renders him nearly useless as a leader, his influence is not entirely detrimental to those who are capable of leadership. Thus both figures achieve enlightenment, because they represent a pair of opposites, ineffective alone, yet "greater than the sum of its parts" when interacting. The adventuring party sent to India for the scriptures could not have reached its destination by being only "Victorious in Strife", but also by possessing some degree of at least "Precocious Merit".