

The Superdeath of God

Stefan Bolea, Babes-Bolyai University

1. Deaths of God

In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach argues that theology is disguised anthropology, claiming that the human being has created God in his own image and likeness. He notes, however, that there are circumstances where the existence of God is no longer “a living truth” (Feuerbach 1841/ 1989, 203): “Where ... the fire of the religious imagination is extinct ... there the existence [of God] becomes a dead, self-contradictory existence” (Feuerbach 1841/ 1989, 203). Secularization brings along the death of God, which probably hides the death of the human being: the end of theology highlights the end of anthropology. We no longer believe (we only believe we believe) in the divinity (and the humanity) of the human being. We have “retired” from numinosity like Nietzsche’s last pope.

Feuerbach seems to think that the construction of anthropology is still possible upon the ruins of theology. One can see the human being either as an enemy and vanquisher of God, or as an ally of Him, a consubstantial entity, who shares his creative traits and attributes. In the latter case, the human being is an anointed “mini-God”, the authorized servant of a powerful master. In the former instance, the godless nihilist desires to become something else entirely, perhaps a Nietzschean “superman” or a Cioranian “not-man”. Max Stirner seems to prefigure this line of thought in *The Ego and Its Own* (1844): “At the entrance of the modern time stands the ‘God-man’. At its exit will only the God in the God-man evaporate? And can the God-man really die if only the God in him dies? They did not think of this question, and thought they were finished when in our days they brought to a victorious end the work of the Enlightenment, the vanquishing of God: they did not notice that man has killed God in order to become now - ‘sole God on high’ ... God has had to give place, yet not to us, but to – man. How can you

believe that the God-man is dead before the man in him, besides the God, is dead?" (Stirner 1844/ 1995, 139) Man has killed God in order to become God (a satanic complex, if we read nihilism through the lenses of religious psychology): "God is dead, therefore I am God"/ *Deus est mortuus, ergo ego sum Deus*. But if we understand Stirner correctly, this is only part of the story: the God-man will only have died after the combined deaths of God and the human being.

"God has died and his death was the life of the world"/ *Gott ist gestorben und sein Tod war das Leben der Welt*, enigmatically wrote the post-Schopenhauerian philosopher Philipp Mainländer in his *Die Philosophie der Erlösung* (1876/ 1996, 108). He also argued that although "we have existed in God" (1876/ 1996, 108), we "no longer are in God", because we have moved from the world of destroyed "unity" [*Einheit*] to a universe of multiplicity [*Vielheit*]. The passage from transcendent unity to immanent multiplicity is, in Mainländer's vision, the secret of the creation of the world. Leaving these aside, Feuerbach argued that when the religious "fire" is extinct, the existence of God becomes "dead", and Stirner imagined that the death of God is a prequel to the God of man (what if Stirner's Ego also dies after the death of the "God-man"?). Furthermore, Mainländer is not mainly interested in cosmogony: in the macabre ending of *Die Philosophie der Erlösung* he changes the focus from God (and I include the human being in the definition/constitution of God) to death. Therefore, the question of divinity (and mankind) becomes insignificant in the context of the absolute hegemony of death, Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum* reaching its nuclear point: "Nothing will be anymore, Nothing, Nothing, Nothing! – O, this glance in the absolute emptiness! –"/ *Nichts mehr wird sein, Nichts, Nichts, Nichts! – O dieser Blick in die absolute Leere! –* (1886/ 1996, 511).

2. The Superdeath

In the 19th century, God was put to trial and sentenced to death many times (I have only mentioned three instances). A French poet (the missing link between Byron and Breton) provided in his *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869) the most gruesome deicide. Echoing Jean-Paul ("And when I raised my eyes to the boundless world for the divine eye, it stared at me from an empty bottomless socket" – Jean Paul 1796/ 1992, 182), Lautréamont's lyrical subject, the sadistic nihilistic Maldoror, looks for God and finds not mankind's highest idea, but the personification of *nihil negativum*, more precisely Goya's Saturn (a predator with a "brain-bespattered beard"): "I slowly raised my splenetic eyes, ringed with bluish circles, towards the concavity of the firmament and I, who was so young, dared to penetrate the mysteries of heaven! Not finding what I was seeking, I lifted my eyes higher, and higher still, until I saw a throne made of human excrement and gold, on which was sitting – with idiotic pride, his

body draped in a shroud of unwashed hospital linen – he who calls himself the Creator! He was holding in his hand the rotten body of a dead man, carrying it in turn from his eyes to his nose and from his nose to his mouth; and once it reached his mouth, one can guess what he did with it...First he ate his head, then his legs and arms, and, last of all, the trunk, until there was nothing left; for he crunched the bones as well ... And he would continue his savage meal, moving his lower jaw, which in turn moved his brain-bespattered beard. Oh reader, does not this last-mentioned detail make your mouth water?” (Lautréamont 1869/ 1978, 85)

Nietzsche’s famous deicide from the *Gay Science* (1882) is a manifesto of disguised piety, signifying the horror of forever losing God, compared to Lautréamont’s *superdeath* of God. Hell amounts to the deprivation of God’s love; theologians keep telling us. However, there may be deeper circles of the inferno, where hell loses all references to the idea of heaven, becoming a hell-in-itself. One of those circles is Maldoror’s, who, devaluating the alchemical work, sees God as a version, not of the sepulchral, as Nietzsche and Mainländer do, but of the excremental: “He was lying stretched out on the road, with his clothes all torn. His lower lip was hanging down like a heavy chain; his teeth had not been cleaned, and the blond waves of his hair were full of dust...Floods of wine filled the ruts which had been hollowed out by the nervous jerkings of his shoulders...Blood flowed from his nostrils: as he fell he had knocked his face against a post... He was drunk! Horribly drunk! Drunk as a bug which in one night has gorged three barrels of blood; his incoherent words resounded all around; I shall refrain from repeating them here, for even if the supreme drunkard has no self-respect, I must respect men...Man, who was passing by, stopped before the unrecognizable Creator; and for three full days, to the applause of the crab-louse and the viper, he shat on his august face!” (Lautréamont 1869/ 1978, 134-5) Nothing much can be added (there is no way out like in Nietzsche or Dostoevsky of this extreme nihilism, only madness or suicide); nevertheless, one should note the ambiguity of the superdeath of God: does Maldoror really hate God (a sound option) or is he trolling? His farcical gestures prefigure Jarry and Ionesco, and perhaps Lautréamont’s superdeath can be read as a gory comedy.

It may be argued that for the vast majority of believers the question of the superdeath of God is outrageous, because either they see divinity as an interventionist personal alterity, who provides meaning to their existence, or they are proud to inherit a somewhat mechanical faith from their ancestors, which gives them security (an answer before all questions). Nevertheless, if the issues of the superdeath and the hell-in-itself can be theorized (even in a heretical vein), this means that a few individuals should struggle dramatically with these existential ideas, as systemic anomalies which refuse to take the easy way out and are unsatisfied with the vulgata of the common sense (putting freedom before happiness, having unanswerable questions). After all, the “tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears

of men” (Nietzsche 1882, 1887/ 2001, §125). The shadow of God is everywhere, also in us, even if we are agnostics or atheists, because we are the products of a bimillenary religious programming. “And we - we must still defeat his shadow as well!” (Nietzsche 1882, 1887/ 2001, §108)

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