Bronse i filosofi NM 2014/15: Mads Karlsrud Haugse, Nadderud vgs

Topic 3 – Kandidat 21

**“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? ... Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?”**

This statement, perhaps his most famous one, was written by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*. From his point of view, he lived in an era in which all values must be reevaluated, a turning point in the history of mankind. Henceforth, the time in which humans relied on an external, divine power to answer their most fundamental questions was coming to an end, and meaning must be found within the borders of our own species. The waves of secularity were washing mercilessly over us, leaving us stranded on an island of godlessness. And this was, according to Nietzsche, not an act of God. On the contrary: We, humanity, had killed him, thus becoming “the murderers of all murderers”. However, one might ask oneself the following question: “Did God ever exist?”. That would help us to determine whether he is dead or not.

“Yes, he exists, but only as an illusion, as a mere creation of mankind”. This would perhaps be the answer of another German philosopher, Feuerbach. According to him, God is a construction. The construction consists of all the virtues and good qualities of mankind, values that we consider fit for divination. Once the construction is finished, it is sent up to a supernatural, celestial sphere. We give it divine and ethereal attributes, thus smoothening the surface of what has become a perfect illusion. In that manner, we think that we adore a God, but we really just adore the good parts of ourselves. That position of thought could answer one of the last questions of Nietzsche’s statement: “Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us?” If God is something we have created, he is also something we are able to destroy. However, since he consists of forces and qualities we already possess inside us, we can only destroy the framework. The content, the very virtues of divinity, will continue to live on. We will simply use them in a different manner: Instead of seeking external answers, we will realize that we already have them within. We will become our own gods; not changing the values, but giving them a new shape. In that way we will, to express it in the words of Nietzsche “become gods simply to appear worthy of it”.

However, there is a possibility that God really exists. Yet, we cannot prove his existence, nor can we prove his non-existence. Therefore, this question vanishes into one of the dark holes of our reason, holes that logic cannot fill with the light of understanding. We must simply guess, or to put it in a better way, *believe*. One could therefore argue that non-believers are non-existent, given that they also have to form their conceptions of reality based on pure presumptions. Similarly, it can be maintained that a belief in God’s existence is just as arbitrary as an atheist position. The only thing that is certain is that nothing is certain. Everything apparently lacks an obvious and objective meaning, and the pillars on which we base our whole understanding of the world seem to be a mirage made of air and sand. If the universe is without meaning, if the dark hole of our reason turns out to be empty, then the freedom is so complete that it reaches beyond the most distant horizons. We find ourselves blinded by the radiant light of anarchy – as one of Dostoyevsky’s characters put it: “If God is dead, everything is permitted”.

One could, however, believe in a force that makes sense out of the chaos, that puts everything in its order, and that turns meaninglessness into meaningfulness. One could believe in God. And believing is what life really is about, according to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. What you believe in is not so important; the essential is that you believe in *something*. Kierkegaard criticized the Danish church of that time, which tried to provide people with logical reasons for religion. “One cannot prove oneself into eternity”, stated Kierkegaard, and said that it is better to devote oneself sincerely to the wrong god, than to have half-hearted faith in the right one. “To believe”, he said, “is to throw oneself out into an ocean that is 100 000 fathoms deep – and yet be happy”. Sincerity – to “be in truth” - is the highest virtue, because we are not able to understand the nature of God, or even determine whether he exists.

From this point of view, it is not possible for us to kill God. First of all, we don’t know where he is, or which shape he takes. In search for God, we find ourselves in an empty void, free from all that we know and understand. It is, however, possible to fill this void with an illusion. The illusion is the picture we create of God; how we imagine him and the qualities we attribute him. We can navigate in this illusion, steer the boat of our understanding in a sea that is both familiar and fathomable. After all, it is our own construction; we are the rulers of our own reality. We can map out the landscape, understand its nuances, and seemingly control it in our favor. By doing this, we might find God in that world of fantasy and deception. We might even kill him off. His blood might flow into the fountain of our awareness, changing the whole landscape and refurnishing the rooms of our conception. But it will still remain an illusion. What really fills the empty void will still be hidden from us. All we can do is to fumble blindly in the darkness.

To sum up, we can, and maybe already have, killed the God of our conception. Perhaps we have shattered the construction we so meticulously built up, the one we said would last forever. Maybe Nietzsche is right in that we have launched ourselves into the space of secularity, denying any supernatural existence, denying the very concept of the supernatural. In that way, we have place ourselves on the throne of our illusions, the one that was previously occupied by God. We have made ourselves the kings and queens of our reality and turned into “the murderers of all murderers”. In that way we have ascended to become gods, and made ourselves worthy of the crime we have committed. But we will never know. The blood in which our hands are stained might very well be our own, or at least the one of our fantasies. We have certainly changed our conceptions of reality, but it is hardly probable that we have changed reality itself. Thus, one can say that God is dead, but that his death only serves to reinforce our ignorance of his nature.