

HANS KÜNG'S ALTERNATIVE TO NIHILISM

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ABSTRACT

In his book, Does God Exist?, Hans Küng proposes an alternative to nihilism, namely fundamental trust or "Yes to Reality". Through a detailed study of Küng's interpretation of nihilism and his alternative to nihilism, I discuss whether Küng can help people to find a way out in face of the challenge of nihilism, as predicted by Friedrich Nietzsche. I conclude that fundamental trust still cannot be a more convincing choice than nihilism for those people who do not believe that there is a fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of reality, and for those who cannot experience the being of this uncertain reality, even if they venture out in trust. In my opinion, Küng is not very successful in convincing people that fundamental trust rather than nihilism is the right option for them.

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INTRODUCTION

The main object of this thesis is to examine Hans Küng's alternative to nihilism, namely non-nihilism or fundamental trust, as proposed in his book, Does God Exist?. Believing that Does God Exist? not only can stand on its own, but that in it Küng also deals with the issue of nihilism directly, I have attempted to achieve an understanding of Küng's response to nihilism mainly through the study of this book. In admitting that nihilism has become a genuine problem for modern man, Küng also points out that nihilism is still not the only alternative available for human beings: they can make a choice between non-nihilism and nihilism. Non-nihilism, which Küng later elaborates as a fundamental trust in the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality, is an alternative to nihilism. But Küng does not only want to suggest an alternative to nihilism, he also wants people to realize that fundamental trust, rather than fundamental mistrust or nihilism, is the right choice for them.

Though Küng admits that reality always appears to be so uncertain, and though he regards the uncertainty of reality, which makes nihilism possible, as a fundamental

problem for human beings, he still suggests that people should believe in the being, in the fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of reality, and is confident that fundamental trust can, in fact, overcome nihilism. Since Nietzsche, nihilism has had a strong influence throughout Europe and America. If Küng can really offer an alternate that is more convincing than nihilism, and which can, in fact, overcome nihilism, he can be said to provide a totally new direction for human beings in this modern age.

In Chapter One, we shall first study what, according to Küng, is nihilism. Küng does not only analyze the concept of nihilism by means of Nietzsche's works, he also relates the rise of nihilism to Nietzsche's background and development. In face of the challenge of nihilism, Nietzsche himself also offers solutions to the problem, but as we shall see in Chapter Two, Küng does not think that Nietzsche's alternatives can really overcome nihilism, though he admits that nihilism, as Nietzsche predicted, has become a genuine problem for modern man. In this chapter, Küng also highlights the fact that no one can really escape the challenge of nihilism, because everyone has to face the uncertainty of reality. If reality always remains uncertain, the threat that beyond this reality there is simply nothing, and that reality is actually without any meaning or goal, always persists. Yet this does not lead

Küng to draw the conclusion that nihilism is the only alternative, but human beings can still make a choice between nihilism and non-nihilism, between fundamental trust and fundamental mistrust.

Chapter Three attempts to trace Küng's main arguments for the proposition that non-nihilism or fundamental trust, rather than nihilism or fundamental mistrust, is the right choice for human beings. A detailed examination of fundamental trust will follow, because Küng does not only claim that fundamental trust is the right direction for human beings, but one that is rationally justified, that acts as a basis for both science and autonomous ethics, and, most important of all, that can overcome nihilism.

The last chapter is my own reflection on and criticism of Küng's interpretation of nihilism and his alternative to nihilism. By suggesting that even if reality is so uncertain, people can still trust that all the existent is being, and that there is a fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of reality, Küng is actually proposing a direction which seems to be in contrast to what reality appears to be. It is very questionable whether Küng has strong grounds to support his alternative. Moreover, special attention will be paid to whether the proof of God's existence is perhaps only a

problematic answer to the uncertainty of reality, if God is believed to be the primalground and primal support of reality. Finally, I will attempt to discover whether K ng's alternative to nihilism can help people to face the uncertainty of reality, which K ng believes makes nihilism possible.

CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF NIHILISM AND NIETZSCHE

In his book, Does God Exist?, Küng states:

We are giving an account not of a history of ideas but of concrete human beings made up of flesh and blood, with their doubting, struggling and suffering, their belief and unbelief, with all the questions that still stir us today.¹

Küng attributes the rise of nihilism, in his book primarily to one person: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).² He traces the development of this "little pastor"³ who had gradually become an atheist, an anti-Christian and finally a nihilist. Nietzsche, first among his contemporaries predicted the rise of nihilism in the "remote" future as a consequence of atheism.⁴ As developed by Nietzsche, the concept of nihilism became a key concept in the history of Western thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵

¹ Hans Küng, Does God Exist?, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), p. xxii.

² Ibid., p. 343.

³ The nickname of Nietzsche, ibid., p. 353.

⁴ See ibid., p. 393.

⁵ See ibid., p. 386.

Since Küng wishes to interpret the concept of nihilism through the person of Nietzsche, he makes an effort to comprehend the idea of nihilism in Nietzsche's thought through his works, as well as exploring the background and development of Nietzsche himself. In the following discussion, I intend to highlight the main elements of Küng's presentation.

1. Nietzsche's Background and Development

When Charles Darwin published his work On the origin of Species by means of Natural Selection in 1859⁶, the foundation of the old biblical faith of many Europeans was shattered. According to Darwin's evolutionary theory, the biblical accounts of the origin of plant and animal species are no longer valid. For animals and plants are not, as the Bible says, created independently of one another. The whole vast history of nature's evolution followed purely causal, mechanistic laws without preestablished goals and ends: from the simplest to increasingly complicated and more perfect forms. The principle of life in nature is the survival of the strongest and best-adapted species. Human beings are also descended from older and inferior forms of life, but stood

⁶ See ibid., p. 344 and p. 743 , footnote no. 8.

the test of the struggle for existence better than the other forms of life. Hence human beings are not, as the Bible suggests, the "image of God", but the image of animals. The hypothesis of God is no longer necessary to explain the origin either of life or of human beings.⁷

In facing the conflict between the traditional biblical doctrine and the new scientific theory of Darwin, many intellectuals of the nineteenth century eventually gave up their belief and went over to the camp of mechanistic-evolutionary atheism; among them was David Friedrich Strauss. In his work The Old Faith and the New, David Strauss states clearly that, as honest and sincere people, we are no longer Christians.⁸ It was David Strauss, with his Life of Jesus, who helped Nietzsche to see his position clearly as an atheist.⁹ Nietzsche, however, remained very skeptical regarding the optimism of those people who did not realize the destructive consequences of atheism, for example the natural scientists who propagated the idea of progress in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ and intellectuals like David Strauss.¹¹ To

⁷ See ibid., pp. 344-345 and p. 347.

⁸ See ibid., p. 349.

⁹ See ibid., p. 355.

¹⁰ See ibid., p. 343.

¹¹ See ibid., p. 350.

Nietzsche, the impacts of atheism amount to an earth-shaking event that should terrify many people.

According to Küng's analysis, three factors caused Nietzsche's anti-Christianity and turned him into an atheist. First, Nietzsche was brought up and educated solely at the hands of gentle, pious women. Hence to Nietzsche, Christianity was only a soft, feeble, decadent affair which was without any strength and depth.¹² Second, Nietzsche's critical philological training in the gymnasium increased his remoteness from the traditional beliefs of his family. From a philosophical essay that Nietzsche wrote two years before leaving the gymnasium, it is obvious that he began to doubt whether the whole of Christianity rested on assumptions of the existence of God, immortality and the authority of the Bible.¹³ Finally, Nietzsche was influenced by Schopenhauer, a deeply pessimistic and atheistic philosopher. Schopenhauer's philosophy became a substitute for religion once Nietzsche had given up Christianity.¹⁴

Besides Schopenhauer, Nietzsche admired the famous

¹² See ibid., p. 353.

¹³ See ibid., pp. 353-354.

¹⁴ See ibid., pp. 356-357.

musician Richard Wagner, who also had a high regard for Schopenhauer. Wagner regarded Schopenhauer as "the only philosopher who had perceived the essence of music."¹⁵ But Nietzsche soon dissociated himself from both of them and started his own lonely journey. Nietzsche had dissociated himself from Schopenhauer even in his first period of creativity. Instead of following Schopenhauer's rejection of willing and living, he began to defend the Dionysian—the principle of delight in the irrational, in life, in the power of instinct, in wild, primitive frenzy, in the shapeless chaos emerging from the primordial ground of everything creative.¹⁶ Moreover, when he knew that Wagner had turned to Christianity, in the sense that he composed the Christian Parsifal, Nietzsche decided to break completely with Wagner and his second wife Cosima.¹⁷ For Nietzsche was a professed atheist and anti-Christian and could not accept the fact that his good friend Wagner had finally surrendered himself to Christianity.

After his separation from Wagner, Nietzsche was finally convinced that he was living at a time of

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, letter to E. Rohde, Nov. 9, 1886, quoted in Kung, Does God Exist? p. 363.

¹⁶ See Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 365.

¹⁷ See ibid., p. 366.

uncertainty, collapse, nullity, that is, in an age of decadence. His faith in culture, in civilization, in the modern age was shattered.¹⁸ In 1878, Nietzsche published his Human, All Too-Human.¹⁹ From this work, it is obvious that Nietzsche's main concern is the human, rather than any ultimate goal or aim. He starts out from realities instead of idealities and with his truly psychological perception, he proves himself to be the most important diagnostician of modern man. In his work, he begins to question the possibility of the "inversion of customary valuations and valued customs". The question: "Cannot all valuations be reversed?" already occurs in Human, All-Human.²⁰ It does not take Nietzsche too long to find out the answer.

In The Gay Science, Nietzsche proclaims that the fact that 'God is dead', that is, the fact that the belief in the Christian God has become untenable, is the greatest recent event destined to cast its shadow over Europe.²¹ Unfortunately, the event is too great for the common people even to recognize its coming. Of course many fewer people can really understand the meaning of the event. There are only a few, according to Nietzsche, who can see the

¹⁸ See ibid., p. 387.

¹⁹ ibid., p. 367.

²⁰ See ibid., p. 368.

²¹ See ibid., p. 369.

immediate consequences of the event. And to these people, a new dawn, a free horizon is found in their immediate future. Yet, Nietzsche is more interested in making people aware of the "remote" consequences of the death of God.²² For these consequences are more destructive and terrible than most people can conceive.

In the past, it was the Christian God that provided human beings with all kinds of values and ideals--truth, justice, love, morality, religion. Now that the belief in the Christian God has become untenable and there is actually no God, everything that is built on the Christian faith will eventually collapse. The "remote" consequences of atheism are thus disastrous. There will be inconceivable loss of confidence, collapse of morality, cataclysm and ruin in the distant future.²³ It is in the well-known parable of the "madman" that Nietzsche announces these consequences most dramatically, in the vision of a keen-sighted prophet "who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours" and proclaimed the death of God.²⁴ Nietzsche uses three impressive, powerful metaphors to describe the results of this tremendous event: "How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us sponge to wipe away the

²² See ibid., pp. 369-370.

²³ See ibid.

²⁴ See ibid., p. 371.

entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now?"²⁵ Once God is dead, there seems to be no one to support the universe and everything is threatened by meaninglessness. The death of God means the great collapse. In the parable, the "madman" has already prophesied that the earth-shaking consequence of atheism would be "straying as through an infinite nothing".²⁶ This implies that "nihilism" has gradually become a great question mark for Nietzsche, the "questionable character" that marks all things. What is customary and apparently securely existing appears to be utter nothingness.²⁷

According to Küng, Nietzsche proclaims the death of God through the "madman" not simply in order to describe the spiritual situation of human beings and the world, but also to make people aware of the fact so as to change the situation.²⁸ Nietzsche himself is prepared to take up this task. Since the Christian God is no longer tenable, all those values and ideals of human beings which are based on the faith of the Christian God should also be revalued.

²⁵ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 371.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 387.

²⁷ See Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 387.

²⁸ See Ibid., p. 372.

Nietzsche begins this process of revaluation of traditional values in his later works.

The questioning of the traditional values of culture, morality and religion, as we shall see later, finally leads Nietzsche to treat the concept of nihilism systematically. But he did more. In order to help man to change his situation, Nietzsche develops new values and a new theory to overcome nihilism. Let us first examine "the revaluation of all values" in Nietzsche's works.

In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche begins to wage his war against the philosophers' famous objectivity. To Nietzsche, even human knowledge is based on a certain kind of faith and is thus not totally objective. The fundamental faith of philosophers that Nietzsche talks about is the "faith in antitheses of values", especially the basic antithesis between good and evil, true and false. Since philosophers believe that there is something called "the truth", they try to find this truth. It is only in the light of this fundamental faith that philosophers reach their "knowledge", reach something that is, finally, solemnly baptized as "the truth". But Nietzsche thinks we must first question whether there exists any antithesis at all and then whether the popular evaluations and their antitheses of value upon which metaphysicians have set their seal, are not perhaps merely superficial estimates or

provisional perspectives.²⁹ To Nietzsche, the greater part of the deliberate thinking of a philosopher is still guided secretly by instincts. Behind all logic, we encounter instinctive valuations: "For example, that the certain is worth more than the uncertain, that illusion is less valuable than truth."³⁰ Here Nietzsche raises the question of truth, of the value of truth as such, more radically than anyone before him: "Granted that we want truth: why not rather untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?"³¹

Further, Nietzsche sharply criticizes morality in his works. This he does mainly because, according to him, all moral values are totally against the instincts of life. They are anti-life and hostile to life. Nietzsche describes all morality as "an instinct of decadence", "an instinct of denial of life".³² Since he finds this to be particularly true of Christian morality, Nietzsche scolds Christian morality "a capital crime against life".³³ Though Nietzsche has already predicted the collapse of

²⁹ See ibid., pp. 381-383.

³⁰ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1964), p. 8.

³¹ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 383.

³² Nietzsche, The Will to Power, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 389.

³³ Ibid., p. 390.

European morality as a result of the loss of faith in God,³⁴ he never stops attacking morality, especially Christian morality. He also attacks the Christian concept of God severely in The Anti-Christ. He says:

The Christian conception of God - God as God of the sick, God as spirit - is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: perhaps it even represents the low-water mark in the descending development of the God type. God degenerated to the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes! In God a declaration of hostility towards life, nature, the will to life! God the formula for every calumny of 'this world,' for every lie about 'the next world'!³⁵

To Nietzsche, the Christian concept of God is totally against life.

2. The Concept of Nihilism

After questioning the traditional values of culture, morality and religion, Nietzsche finally deals with the concept of nihilism systematically in his unpublished writings, where he reflects on the various aspects of the concept. He also confesses that he is a nihilist.³⁶ To Nietzsche, nihilism means: "that the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking;

³⁴ See Kung, Does God Exist?, pp. 369-370.

³⁵ Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, quoted in Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 385.

³⁶ See Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 387.

'why?' finds no answer."³⁷ And in another fragment, he expresses this concept more precisely:

Radical nihilism is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be 'divine' or morality incarnate.³⁸

Though Küng cites the above two quotations of Nietzsche in his book, he does not really explain them before he concludes that "according to Nietzsche, nihilism means the conviction of the nullity, of the internal contradiction, futility and worthlessness of reality."³⁹ Küng only supports his interpretation of nihilism with the following ideas that he observes in Nietzsche's works.

Nietzsche predicts the coming of nihilism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Europe. According to him, nihilism is a result of historical necessity. This is because, once Christian belief is no longer tenable, people begin to realize that all the values which they traditionally associate with being human are not, as they might think dictated by God, but are the product of humanity's invention and definition. There are actually no values or ideals in a thing itself and the whole universe

³⁷ Nietzsche, The Will to power, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 388.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 388.

lacks meaning or value.⁴⁰ It is very clear to Nietzsche that behind the absolute value to which morality aspires, there is simply nothingness. Since morality is oriented towards unreal values, like God, the hereafter, or true life, morality is entirely turned towards nothingness; it is itself nihilistic.⁴¹ Moreover, as Christianity itself is oriented to the unreal value of God, it is also a "nihilistic religion".⁴² Nihilism thus represents the only logical conclusion of humanity's great values and ideals, because behind them - truth, justice, love, morality, religion - there is simply nothingness.⁴³

Nietzsche points out that even when people have abandoned God, they still substitute other authorities for God, for example, they substitute the authority of morality, conscience, reason, social instinct or history. People hope that these authorities can give them unconditional commands and goals. But all these substitute authorities cannot provide any ultimate meaning or support to human existence, because there is actually no one, once God is dead, who can demand unconditionally what one should do. Even modern sciences, natural and historical sciences,

⁴⁰ See ibid., pp. 388-389.

⁴¹ See ibid., p. 389.

⁴² See ibid., p. 390.

⁴³ See ibid., pp. 388-389.

end in nihilism because they are supposed to be "value-free" sciences, which are not concerned with the meaning of nature, the meaning of history, the meaning of the whole.⁴⁴ Consequently, the development of nihilism means: "Everything lacks meaning", "meaninglessness", "yearning for Nothing", "belief in valuelessness", "in vain so far"; "radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability"; "rebound from 'God is truth' to the fanatical faith 'All is false'".⁴⁵

Having observed the above points in Nietzsche's works, Kung thinks that the meaning of nihilism should be crystal clear. He asks:

Has it now become clear what it means: nihilism is the conviction of the nullity - that is, of the internal contradiction, meaninglessness and worthlessness - of reality? In this reality, there is no connection, no meaning, no value: everything is void.⁴⁶

Kung also points out that nihilism is not only a way of thinking. A nihilist not only believes that everything is in vain and that everything deserves to perish, but he or she takes action as well. As Nietzsche says: "One helps to destroy. --This is, if you will, illogical; but the nihilist does not believe that one needs to be logical..... The reduction to nothing by judgment is

⁴⁴ See ibid., p. 390.

⁴⁵ See ibid., pp. 390-391.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 391.

seconded by the reduction to nothing by hand."⁴⁷ But the destruction of traditional values is followed by the creation of new values. Nietzsche proceeds from a devaluation of all values to a revaluation of all values.⁴⁸ He gradually sets up his new values and from there develops an answer to nihilism. Instead of the old anti-life, metaphysical, moral, religious values, Nietzsche now takes up and celebrates the vital, natural, naturalistic values, the values of life.⁴⁹ Küng states:

According to Nietzsche at this stage, life in all its contradictoriness therefore is what is really true. Life is the - completely relative - criterion of the true or the false. Hence the true is what serves life, the life of the individual.⁵⁰

For this reason, the most important task, was "a justification of life, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious....."⁵¹

It is at this juncture that Nietzsche develops the theory of eternal recurrence - an answer to nihilism - in order to affirm life even in its strangest and sternest ambiguities, and to affirm the world as it is, without

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 391-392.

⁴⁸ See ibid., p. 392.

⁴⁹ See ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 392-393.

⁵¹ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 393.

subtraction, exception or selection.⁵² According to the theory of eternal recurrence, one will have to live the same life again and again innumerable times. There will be nothing new in one's life, but every great or small thing will return to you in the same sequence and succession.⁵³ Küng describes this theory as "both the most extreme form and the overcoming of nihilism".⁵⁴ Moreover, in order to enable human beings to contemplate existence, as an endless recurrence of meaningless finitude, and to call into being life-affirming horizons, Nietzsche teaches people the superman: "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome."⁵⁵ The Superman is true to life and this world, and he is able to face the nothingness lurking in all things. It can be said that, after the death of God, Nietzsche uses the Superman to take God's place.

3. Summary

I have attempted to outline Küng's analysis of the rise of nihilism through the person of Friedrich Nietzsche

⁵² See Küng, Does God Exist?, p.392.

⁵³ See ibid., p. 377.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 392.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p.375.

and his interpretation of the concept of nihilism. Nietzsche lived through a century during which the wave of atheism began to influence Europe strongly. Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory eventually caused many intellectuals to give up their belief. Though Nietzsche was brought up in a Christian family, he finally gave up his own religion and became an atheist and an anti-Christian. This is not entirely due to the influence of his nineteenth century cultural background. The religious education that Nietzsche received in his family gave him an impression that Christianity was only a decadent affair. His critical philological training in the gymnasium led him to doubt the truth of Christianity. Finally, Schopenhauer's philosophy became a substitute for his religion. Though Nietzsche was now a professed atheist, he was not so optimistic as those people who could not foresee the destructive consequences of atheism. He proclaimed the tremendous event of the death of God, and diagnosed the destruction of values caused by atheism. He questioned all the traditional values that are based on the belief in God and this finally led him to put forward the concept of nihilism.

Küng tries to understand the concept of nihilism through Nietzsche's works, especially his The Will to Power. According to Küng, from Nietzsche's works, it is

obvious that nihilism is a belief that in reality there is no connection, no meaning, no value; that is everything is void. In other words, to Nietzsche, nihilism means a certain kind of conviction about this reality--a belief in the nullity of reality. Moreover, to nihilists, nihilism is more than a way of thinking. Because they put their beliefs into practice, they help to destroy traditional values. Küng also points out that Nietzsche not only predicted the rise of nihilism in Europe, he also gave thought to ways of coming to terms with it. Nietzsche offered the theory of eternal recurrence as an answer to nihilism and to human beings he offered the Superman as a way to face the challenge of nihilism. In the following chapter I shall study Küng's analysis of the problem of nihilism and of Nietzsche's alternatives to nihilism.

CHAPTER II

KÜNG'S ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM OF NIHILISM AND OF NIETZSCHE'S ALTERNATIVES TO NIHILISM

After tracing the rise of the concept of nihilism, especially in the person of Nietzsche, Küng examines the problem of nihilism and Nietzsche's alternatives. He admits sincerely that nihilism, as predicted by Nietzsche, has become a genuine problem for modern man. He analyses the problem of nihilism in practical life and in philosophical reflection and finds that no one can really escape or avoid nihilism. Yet this does not mean that nihilism is the only alternative to human beings, and Küng will try to explore the possibility of other alternatives. He will also examine Nietzsche's alternatives to nihilism, in order to determine whether they can really help human beings to solve the problem of nihilism.

1. The Problem of Nihilism

Küng observes that in today's society, as predicted by Nietzsche, many people have given up their belief and there are no longer any values, reliable principles or absolute truth that can unquestionably determine their

behavior. The problem of lacking values or norms for people to follow became especially obvious after the Second World War, because many traditions and conventions were lost in the wake of the War. In many families today, despite increased prosperity and better education, parents no longer know to which values, principles, ideals, norms, and to which truth, they should cling and how they should educate their children. There seems to be simply nothing that people can raise as a norm in their lives and most people permit themselves to have a mild and private nihilism.¹ To Küng, this nihilistic lack of orientation and lack of norms is also one of the factors that causes an alarming increase in the number of social problems, for example, robberies, murders, drug addictions, suicides.² Moreover, in a society in which everyone is permitted to do anything, in which nothing seems to have any meaning or truth, some people begin to question the function of its institutions: marriage and family, school and university, even the state itself.³ In a "permissive society", there does not seem to be enough reason for the existence of any institutions. No one will be bound by institutions as these cannot give any meaning and value to people. The

¹ See Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 411.

² See ibid.

³ See ibid., p. 412.

devastating crisis of meaning today, as we see, affects not only the individual, but society as a whole.

Nihilism, however, affects not only practical life, it also challenges radically the validity of any particular certainties, whether subjective or objective. Descartes thought that ultimate certainty of human knowledge, action, and living, was entirely based on reason, while Pascal believed that ultimate certainty was based on personal Christian faith, on the revelation of God himself.⁴ This argument about the locus of the ultimate certainty--whether it lies in rationality or in faith--developed at the beginning of the modern age; but in the West there was already a long tradition of objective philosophy of being--the fundamental certainty of being and the evidence of the principles of being, in particular, the principles of identity and contradiction: being is being and being is not not-being.⁵ But all these suppositions as to where the locus of human being's fundamental certainty is, whether in rationality or in faith, whether in subject or in object, had to face the challenge of Nietzsche's nihilistic negation. According to Küng, Nietzsche not only doubted particular ways of attaining certainty as stated by the philosophers; he also disputed their common, intrinsic

⁴ See ibid., p. 416.

⁵ See ibid., p. 417.

assumption that there is perceptible meaning in things.⁶ For, according to Nietzsche, "there is no perceptible meaning in things".⁷ This includes meaning such as certainty. In other words, Nietzsche even doubts the possibility of having any fundamental certainty at all. Hence Kung says: "The doubt about the validity of particular certainties is radicalized: it has now become a doubt about the possibility of being certain at all."⁸ The answer of Nietzsche is very simple: there is no fundamental certainty and nothing is certain.⁹

Furthermore, according to the Western tradition, being one, being true and being good are the basic characteristics and basic features of everything that is and of being as a whole.¹⁰ Now that nihilism raises radical doubts about the certainty of the first principles of being, these three aspects of the concept of being are also called into question. According to Nietzsche, they are just projections of human beings.¹¹ He says: "Briefly: the categories 'aim', 'unity', 'being', which we used to

⁶ See ibid., p. 418.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See ibid., p. 417.

¹⁰ See ibid., p. 420.

¹¹ See ibid.

project some value into the world--we pull out again; so the world looks valueless."¹² To him, the overall character of existence is not to be interpreted by means of the concept of unity, nor the concept of truth, nor the concept of aim. The overall nature of existence is characterized by nothingness, contradictoriness, meaningless, valuelessness, worthlessness.¹³

But what supports Nietzsche's nihilistic view that there is no meaning or value in things and that human existence is just meaningless? Besides the fact that Nietzsche rejects God¹⁴ and hence it is not God who gives values and meanings--such as certainty, unity, truth, and a goal--but human beings themselves have invented them, Küng also wants to point out that Nietzsche's nihilistic view finds support in the thoroughgoing uncertainty of reality itself.

According to Küng, the nihilist always has doubts about reality as a whole and especially about his own life, because it all seems very evasive to him. Küng says:

¹² Nietzsche, the Will to Power, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 421.

¹³ See Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 421.

¹⁴ Küng does not think that Nietzsche's atheism is really justified, but is only assumed as a datum. Nietzsche's critique of religion presupposes Feuerbach's interpretation of religion - God is nothing but a projection of human beings[Küng, Does God Exist?, pp. 403-404].

To the nihilist, it is the totality that is suspect; reality as a whole and especially his own life seem to him profoundly unstable, fragile and ephemeral: fleeting, empty, ineffective, discordant, in the last resort useless, pointless, worthless - in a word, null.¹⁵

Instability, fragility, transitoriness, emptiness - in a word, nullity, seems to exist everywhere. Everything is uncertain, because all that is could also not be. There is always a possibility of not-being in everything and this nothingness continually puts reality in question.¹⁶ Now in view of the complete uncertainty of reality as a whole and especially of one's own life, the radical nihilist asserts:

Nothing has any support, meaning or value. The totality is not coherent, meaningful, valuable. All that is, all being and being as such, is null, insubstantial, meaningless, worthless. All that is, is good for nothing, explains nothing, aims at nothing, and indeed is nothing. Being in its entirety is nothing. Reality in the last resort is nullity and nothing but nullity.¹⁷

Küng sums up the above analysis of nihilism by saying that since reality itself is so uncertain, a denial of being is possible by insisting on the nullity of everything. The self and the world can then be regarded in the last analysis as chaotic, absurd, illusory, null. Consequently there is really nothing about which it is impossible to doubt, even the possibility of having any

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 419.

¹⁶ See ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 422.

certainty at all.¹⁸ But the uncertainty of reality as a whole is not only the problem of the nihilist, it is a fundamental problem of human beings.¹⁹ Hence no one can really escape or avoid the challenge of radical nihilism.

Küng states clearly that it is the thoroughgoing uncertainty of reality itself that makes nihilism possible, whether in practical life or in philosophical or unphilosophical reflection.²⁰ But in view of the completely uncertain reality, are we forced to say that there is no other alternative than nihilism? The answer, according to King, is definitely "no". He points out that though there is no rational argument that can refute nihilism, neither is there any rational argument that can justify nihilism. It is possible that this human life, after all, is meaningless, and that everything is null; but it is also possible that this human life is not, in the last resort, meaningless, that by no means everything is null.²¹ Since nihilism and its opposite are both

¹⁸ See Ibid., pp. 422-423.

¹⁹ See ibid., p. 422.

²⁰ See ibid., p. 423.

²¹ Nihilism is irrefutable. Küng points out that the assertion that everything is contradictory, meaningless, worthless and null, is not, as the formal logical argument against nihilism suggests, a contradiction in terms. For the very fact that this statement is made about the nullity of all being, for the nihilist is meaningless and worthless. Moreover, suicide is also not,

possible, human beings have two choices: nihilism and its opposite. And each person has to make her or his own decision.

2. The Alternatives of Nietzsche

Besides analyzing the problem of nihilism, Kung also examines Nietzsche's solutions to nihilism. Kung admits that Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence is not meant to be a coherent principle of becoming or being; it is merely an expression of the absurdity of the whole happening. He still thinks that this idea is in fact ambivalent. For, according to this theory, though human existence is without meaning or aim, yet it recurs eternally.²² Nietzsche himself could not prove this theory

as the practical argument against nihilism suggests, a necessary consequence of nihilism, because life is not an absolute value to the nihilist; consequently it is a matter of indifference whether he abandons it or goes on living. For Kung, both formal logical argument and practical argument against nihilism are not convincing. Nihilism is unprovable. Kung argues that if it has been admitted that reality is uncertain and that the being of the existent can be denied, then it must be admitted that what can be denied is also in fact being. Moreover, though reality as a whole is uncertain, this does not mean that being is then a priori nothing. For if being were a priori nothing, the nihilist would not need to deny it and keep on denying it, but would not endure denial at all and dissolve into nothing. Kung cannot be convinced that being is simply nothing [Kung, Does God Exist?, pp. 423-424].

²² See ibid., p. 401.

and it thus remained as his personal inspiration and was not scientifically justified. Küng points out that even Nietzsche's friends Peter Gast and Overbeck thought that this theory was very questionable. When Karl Jaspers examined Nietzsche's arguments for the recurrence theory, he found everyone of them unconvincing.²³ Küng thinks that we really have no alternative but to agree with what Jaspers wrote:

But no one has ever yet really believed in the eternal recurrence, in Nietzsche's Dionysus and the superman. The extraordinary vagueness of terms like 'life', 'strength', and 'will to power' seems to give them a constantly shifting meaning.²⁴

Moreover, to Küng, whether a person exists once or an infinite number of times in exactly the same way makes no difference to the person, because he or she is not aware of it. Thus this recurrence theory is really a matter of indifference to human beings.²⁵

Küng also disagrees with Nietzsche that the superman is the true alternative to human beings. He questions:

Is it, then, the superman or at least the man of power who should be sought and bred today? Who despises the mob and counts himself among the physically and mentally strong, the distinguished, aristocrats,

²³ See ibid., p. 402.

²⁴ Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche und das Christentum, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 402.

²⁵ See Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 403.

privileged? Who, while certainly also ruthless toward himself, wants to exterminate whatever is mediocre and to cultivate whatever promises hardness and cruelty? Who.....²⁶

The answer that Kung gives is definitely no. To him, though the sick, suffering, inferior, mediocre human beings--those human beings that Nietzsche dismissed - may not be or cannot be the model for being truly human, neither can the superman.²⁷ Kung points out that the appearance of the superman in our society actually caused a lot of problems. He explains that one of Nietzsche's sociological ideas is to replace education with selective breeding for desired qualities. Nietzsche wants to produce the superman, rather than to educate the mediocre, and raise them to a higher level.²⁸ Nietzsche once states:

A question constantly keeps coming back to us.....Is it not time, now that the type 'herd animal' is being evolved more and more in Europe, to make the experiment of a fundamental, artificial and conscious breeding of the opposite type and its virtues?²⁹

This idea of breeding the superman became the prescription followed by the National Socialist ideologists fifty years later. Hence experiments in human gene manipulation

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 410-411.

²⁷ See ibid., pp. 411-412.

²⁸ See ibid., p. 412.

²⁹ Nietzsche, Nachlass, Werke III, quoted in Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 413.

occurred for the first time. Moreover, Nietzsche's idea of the superman also allows people to justify war easily. For it is totally correct to sacrifice the many for the interest of the superman.³⁰

Furthermore, Küng points out that Nietzsche's ideas were exploited in the most cruel, although one-sided fashion in the present century, particularly when a kind of superman really appeared.³¹ The following statement indicates that Küng does not think that Nietzsche would expect a kind of superman like Hitler:

In the person of a German, which was not exactly what Nietzsche had expected. For Nietzsche was an anti-nationalist and European, despiser of German philistinism, squareness, beeriness, nationalistic blustering, and at the same time an admirer of latin form, French wit and Mediterranean mentality.³²

He still insists:

Nietzsche must still be described as one of the-involuntary - precursors of National Socialism (and Italian Fascism, which people like to forget today), which - understanding and misunderstanding - put into practice essential ideas of Nietzsche³³

Küng also observes that in the second half of the twentieth century, many people have been influenced by the idea of superman, though in a different way. There are a lot of

³⁰ See ibid., p. 413.

³¹ See ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

people today whose relationships with one another are determined by functional and practical values, guided only by power interests. As a result, those who are weak become the victims of those who are stronger.³⁴

It seems that Nietzsche could not see any value in democracy or parliamentary government, nor value in socialism. To him, all these forms of government are the rule of inferior human beings, the tyranny of mediocrity. Kung thinks that Walter Jens is right when he points out that Nietzsche lived his life all alone, so he did not really know what happened around him, nor did he have anyone to exchange ideas with him. To Walter Jens, Nietzsche's description of socialism - 'tyranny of the stupid', or 'the herd animal itself as master' - displayed pure ignorance. To Kung, Nietzsche also did not know what he was talking about when he compared the practical value of inferior human beings with the function of a machine, or when he described inferior men in terms of the refuse, the waste.³⁵

3. Summary

From Kung's analysis, it is obvious that nihilism does not only affect the individual and society as a whole,

³⁴ See ibid., p. 411.

³⁵ See ibid., pp. 413-414.

it also challenges radically both the assumption of a fundamental certainty introduced by Descartes and Pascal at the beginning of the modern age and the long Western tradition of the classical philosophy of being. Kung also points out that it is the uncertainty of reality as a whole and of one's own life in particular that makes nihilism possible in one's practical life and in philosophical reflection. But since the problem of the uncertainty of reality is a fundamental problem of human beings, no one can really avoid or escape the challenge of nihilism. Yet this does not mean that human beings can have no other alternative to nihilism. For there is no rational argument for the impossibility of nihilism, neither is there any for its justification. It is possible that everything is not, as Nietzsche thought, contradictory, meaningless, worthless and null, but it is also possible that Nietzsche may be right. Hence a person can choose either nihilism or its opposite. In evaluating Nietzsche's alternatives to nihilism, Kung concludes that the theory of eternal recurrence is not at all convincing and the superman cannot be the model for being truly human. These alternatives are not true alternatives for human beings. It is obvious that Kung agrees with Nietzsche's analysis of nihilism, but certainly not with his alternatives. After exploring the possibility of choosing either nihilism or non-nihilism,

Küng points out that one has to choose between these two alternatives. In the following chapter, we shall examine how Küng directs us to make a fundamental choice between these two opposite positions.

CHAPTER III

A FUNDAMENTAL DECISION - NIHILISM OR NON-NIHILISM

As we saw, though Küng regards the uncertainty of reality as a fundamental problem of human beings, and hence no one can really escape the challenge of nihilism, he does not think that nihilism is the only alternative available to human beings. This is because there is no rational argument that can refute or justify nihilism; nihilism and non-nihilism are both possible. Küng also insists that one has to choose between these two alternatives, in order to make one's fundamental decision towards reality. He says: "To be or not to be--that is the question, that is the basic question."¹ No one can really escape this fundamental decision; everyone has to take a stand. He states further:

.....in the long run it is impossible to remain undecided in regard to reality, to hover between nihilism and non-nihilism. Either-or: to see or not to see. A person who will not see is not indifferent, but blind.²

Not only has one to make a choice of one's own, but one has to make that choice a reasonable one, as well. To Küng, it

¹ Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 425.

² ibid., p. 438.

is not a matter of indifference, for one to choose either nihilism or non-nihilism, to regard reality as being or not-being, because not every direction is the right one.³ The question that Kung wants to answer is : which alternative is correct--nihilism or non-nihilism?

Moreover, though Kung admits that it is the uncertainty of reality that makes nihilism possible,⁴ in face of this uncertain reality, he still thinks that there is a possibility that nihilism can be overcome. He asks: "Can nihilism be overcome and, if so, how?"⁵ In this chapter, we shall see how King answer these two central questions of his discussion of nihilism. But before going to Kung's discussion of the two opposite alternatives to reality, I want to clarify those four elements that will be involved in his presentation. Kung asks: "But what is the self, what is the reality, presented to me here? Which 'reaction,' which 'attitude,' is meant?"⁶ A definition of these four terms is necessary for one to understand Kung's discussion of the two opposite attitudes to reality.

³ See ibid., p. 441.

⁴ See ibid., p. 423.

⁵ Ibid., p. 425.

⁶ Ibid., p. 428.

1. Küng's Understanding of Self, Reality, Reaction and Attitude

Küng first points out that the "I" is not a totally objective being. He states: "Objective and subjective, insight and feelings, rational and irrational, cannot be neatly divided in human being."⁷ Here Küng opposes Descartes: "I am never merely reason."⁸ "I" is always more than a thinking being, because reason is not an isolated function in human beings. Various functions are, rather, coordinated with one another in human beings: intellect and will, insight and feelings, mind and body, head and heart.⁹ No matter how objective "I" wants to be, "I" is still influenced by subjective feelings. "I" is tied by self-interests, passions, instincts, and emotions, and is subjected to one set of social conditions or another which provided certain experiences and encounters, traditions and authorities, habits of thought and schemes of values.¹⁰ In other words, "every human is in many ways preformed."¹¹

⁷ Ibid., p. 429.

⁸ Ibid., p. 428.

⁹ See ibid.

¹⁰ See ibid., p.429.

¹¹ Ibid.

Hence, even in a person's elemental experience of being and basic attitude to reality, it is not only reason, but the whole subjectivity that is involved.¹²

Küng also explains what he means by reality. To him, reality includes three things: the world and all that constitutes the world in space and time, human beings and the individual.¹³ The world that Küng is talking about is not the ideal or imaginary world, "but the real world in all its uncertainty: with all its concrete conditions and natural disaster, with all its actual misery and all its pain."¹⁴ Reality includes all kinds of human beings, and this implies inhuman individuals as well. Reality also comprises the whole person, not an ideal human being certainly, but one with weakness and strengths.¹⁵ Küng deliberately emphasizes that he is not concerned with an ideal reality, but with a concrete one which includes the actual world, all kinds of human beings in this world and the whole person with both bright and dark sides.

According to Küng, reality itself demands a reaction from the individual; it invites and challenges every human being to take a certain position as a human

¹² See ibid.

¹³ See ibid., p. 430.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See ibid., pp. 430-431.

being. Every person has to decide the fundamental attitude to reality which will characterize his or her whole existence, behavior and action.¹⁶ To Küng, because reality does not "thrust" itself upon us conclusively or self-evidently, it leaves scope for us to react freely. Yet this reaction is not totally free, because it does have certain limits.¹⁷ One's reaction to reality "is a question of a free reaction within certain limits."¹⁸ Now let us discuss this idea in detail.

Küng questions Sartre's philosophy of absolute freedom¹⁹ and points out that even Sartre in the end had to admit that human beings have certain limits in the form of an unchangeable "human relativity" (condition humaine).²⁰ Küng agrees with Sartre that each individual action is the expression of a more fundamental choice. Küng cites Sartre:

¹⁶ See ibid., p. 432.

¹⁷ See ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See ibid., pp. 432-433.

²⁰ To Sartre, there is a human universality of condition. He thinks that though the historical situations of human beings are different, since one may be born a slave in a pagan society, or may be a feudal baron, or a proletarian, the necessities of being in the world, of having to labor and to die in the world are unchangeable [See J.P. Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methven & Co. Ltd.), pp. 45-46].

I may wish to join a party, to write a book or to marry -but in such a case what is usually called my will is probably a manifestation of a prior and more spontaneous decision.²¹

But Küng understands this fundamental choice or decision by human beings to something very different from that of Sartre. To Küng, it is an act of freedom, but not--as Sartre thought --in the sense of a completely undetermined, free project.²² Though Sartre admitted the limitation of human beings in the form of an unchangeable "human relativity", Küng points out that human beings are also molded by environmental influences and inherited dispositions.²³ Hence an individual is not totally free in making his or her fundamental decision. This fundamental decision, nevertheless, is a free reaction, in the sense that it can be directed not only to being but also to nothingness.²⁴ Human beings can regard reality as being or nothingness. People know that they are still free to react freely to reality by their own experience.

Küng points that a person knows that he or she is free not by means of any scientific proof but by his or her

²¹ J. P. Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism, quoted in Küng, Does God Exist?, p. 433.

²² See küng, Does God Exist?, p. 433.

²³ See ibid., pp. 434-435.

²⁴ See ibid., p. 433.

own inward experience of freedom. Küng says: "In the last resort, it is not an external proof of freedom, but my own, inward experience of freedom, that tells me that I am free."²⁵ Moreover, a person encounters this inward

experience of freedom in the accomplishment of this freedom:

Precisely in the accomplishment, I can experience directly the fact that I will this but could also act otherwise, that I do now act otherwise, that I am free..... In the accomplishment, I can also immediately experience the fact that I have not done something but could have done it; that I have made a promise but not kept it.....²⁶

Hence, no matter how much a person is outwardly and inwardly constrained in his or her whole existence, the person is still free to decide whether to do this or that.²⁷ When a person makes such a fundamental decision, he or she is not considering simply this or that, but uncertain reality as a whole. To Küng, it is at the very point when a human being is deciding upon a fundamental attitude to reality that he or she becomes aware of the freedom of saying Yes or No, of adopting a positive or negative attitude.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., p. 436.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See ibid., pp. 436-437.

²⁸ See ibid., p. 437.

Though a person is free to adopt a positive or negative attitude to uncertain reality, this fundamental decision always involves a risk.²⁹ This is because reality is not--as Küng has mentioned before--self-evident or transparent. Whether one says Yes or No to reality, there is still no guarantee that one must be right.³⁰ Rather, in making this fundamental decision, one really wagers oneself without any security or assurance. The fundamental decision of adopting a positive or negative attitude to reality, is really a matter of trust or mistrust.³¹ Hence it follows that alternatives facing the human being are fundamental trust or fundamental mistrust. Küng says:

Since in this fundamental alternative it is a question of trust or mistrust in principle, we can speak of fundamental trust or fundamental mistrust corresponding to the fundamental decision and the fundamental attitude.³²

From the above analysis, it is clear that Küng believes that a person is not a totally objective being. When one chooses a fundamental attitude to reality, no matter whether it is positive or negative, what is involved is not only one's reason, but one's subjectivity as well. The reality that Küng discusses here is the concrete

²⁹ See ibid., p. 438.

³⁰ See ibid.

³¹ See ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 439.

reality which includes the actual world, all kinds of human beings in this world and the whole person. He also points out that every human being is conditioned by environment and programmed by genetic heritage. But within these limits, each person is still free and can experience freedom precisely at the very point of deciding on a fundamental attitude towards reality. Since reality itself is not self-evident or transparent, it thus leaves scope for one to regard it as being or nothingness. One's reaction to reality is still a free one, because it can be directed either to being or to nothingness. But because reality does not manifest itself conclusively as what it is, it also gives no guarantee to one's fundamental decision. To Kung, the fundamental decision of adopting a positive or a negative attitude to reality is thus a matter of trust or mistrust in reality. By clarifying what is the self, the reality, the reaction and the attitude according to kung, we can have useful background information for understanding his discussion of the two opposite attitudes towards reality.

2. The Right Direction of Human Beings--
Fundamental Trust or Fundamental Mistrust?

From a choice between nihilism and non-nihilism, a decision of a negative or a positive attitude to reality,

Küng gradually extends the discussion to a fundamental alternative of trust or mistrust. Consequently, it also come to a point where Küng wants to make an effort to show the right direction for human beings. He says: "Not every direction is the right one. But we reach the decisive point when we ask which direction is the right one."³³ Küng sets out the two positions antithetically and tries to offer a right choice for human beings by comparing the two alternatives. He first defines the alternatives and then discusses them in detail. He says:

Fundamental mistrust means that a person in principle says No to the uncertain reality of himself and the world, closing his eyes to reality, without being able to maintain this attitude consistently in practice. This negative fundamental attitude implies a nihilistic fixation on the nullity of reality and an abysmal uncertainty in regard to all human experience and behavior.³⁴

While he states:

Fundamental trust means that a person in principle, says Yes to the uncertain reality of himself and the world, making himself open to reality and able to maintain this attitude consistently in practice. This positive fundamental attitude implies an antinihilistic fundamental certainty in regard to all human experience and behavior, despite persistent menacing uncertainty.³⁵

After giving the meaning of the two alternatives, Küng does not follow up his definitions with an

³³ Ibid., p. 441.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 443.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 445.

explanation. It is not clear what he means, in his definitions, by saying No and saying Yes to reality, or what he implies by closing one's eyes to reality or making oneself open to reality. Moreover, though it is obvious that Küng intends to point to a right direction for human beings by comparing the two alternatives, he has not really contrasted them by measuring their strengths and weaknesses. Rather, Küng compares these two alternatives indirectly by discussing three various aspects which he thinks emerge from the definitions.

Küng first points out that human beings are by nature inclined to say Yes, and not to say No; to make a fundamentally positive decision, not a negative one.³⁶ In claiming such understanding of human nature, though without any supporting evidence, Küng concludes:

Man is not by nature blind to a fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of the uncertain reality of himself and the world; he is not against accepting the existent as being instead of mere appearance.³⁷

In other words, according to the nature of human beings, they can recognize a basic unity, meaning and aim in this reality. Of course, Küng has to assume first that there is a fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of reality. In conjunction with this, Küng believes that

³⁶ See ibid., p. 443, p. 445.

³⁷ ibid., p. 443.

reality influences people by manifesting its identity, meaningfulness and value to them.³⁸ He states that actually it is reality itself which invites people to rely upon it by revealing its concealed identity, meaningfulness and value. Hence it is reality which takes the initiative to start a relationship of trust with human beings.³⁹

Küng also claims that, whether one can see being despite all uncertainty or only the uncertainty of reality, depends on one's basic attitude to reality. If one reacts negatively to reality, what one sees is only the nullity of reality.⁴⁰ He states: "In this fundamental mistrust, what becomes apparent to me is nullity instead of reality....."⁴¹ On the contrary, if one reacts positively to reality, what one recognizes is reality despite all nullity.⁴² He says: "In this fundamental trust, despite nullity, reality becomes apparent to me....."⁴³ It appears that Küng is very clear about how reality responds to one's attitude. To him, reality only reveals its concealed identity, meaningfulness and value to those who

³⁸ See ibid., p. 445.

³⁹ see ibid., p. 451.

⁴⁰ See ibid., p. 444.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See ibid., p. 445.

⁴³ Ibid.

trust in it, but not to those who mistrust it. As he states later:

We saw that to anyone who regards reality merely with mistrust, its identity, meaning and value will not be revealed..... If someone regards reality trustfully in principle, it will reveal to him identity, meaning and value⁴⁴

Finally, Kung points out that, in practice, fundamental mistrust cannot be maintained consistently, but fundamental trust can be held consistently. Even if one chooses fundamental mistrust, one still needs to trust some people or things, and to take reasonable steps.⁴⁵ But Kung thinks that "a trust in the individual case is not consistent with mistrust in principle."⁴⁶ And he does not believe that it can be meaningful for one to do anything at all, even to take a single step, if one regards the whole journey as meaningless. He asks: "How can it be meaningful to take a single step if the whole journey is absurd? This alone shows that the No cannot be consistently maintained in practice."⁴⁷ On the other hand, Kung admits that even if one chooses fundamental trust, one may still mistrust people or things in individual cases. But he says: "It is quite possible to combine fundamental trust with mistrust

⁴⁴ ibid. p. 447.

⁴⁵ See ibid., p. 444.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

in the individual case."⁴⁸ The reason he gives is that "fundamental trust can also accept the element of truth in fundamental mistrust - the nullity of reality....."⁴⁹ From here, it appears that fundamental mistrust cannot be maintained consistently in practice, because if one wants to survive, one cannot mistrust all things and all people. In practice, fundamental trust can be held consistently, because one can accept the nullity of reality in fundamental trust. Hence a mistrust in the individual case is not inconsistent with trust in principle. But it is not clear what Küng means by saying that fundamental trust can also accept the nullity of reality. Obviously, he believes that by means of one's basic trust, one can see the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality. Hence if one chooses fundamental trust, though reality appears to be uncertain and meaningless, one will not accept this reality as null, but as real.

After discussing the above three aspects, Küng thinks that one can make a choice between the two alternatives. He states: "By comparing the three aspects in each case, it has become clear that we cannot speak of a stalemate between Yes or No, fundamental trust and

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 446.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

fundamental mistrust"⁵⁰ From the above discussion, we can clearly perceive Küng's position. Non-nihilism or fundamental trust is obviously a more convincing choice than nihilism or fundamental mistrust and is thus the right direction for human beings. But fundamental trust emerges as a right choice not, by means of comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the two alternatives, but rather because of Küng's own interpretation of human nature and reality. Though he contrasts the consistence of theory with practice in the two alternatives when they are put into practice, his main argument is that according to the nature of human beings, one is able to recognize a fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of reality, and reality has a goal and meaning which is revealed to people if they respond to it with trust.⁵¹ Küng has not given us any evidence to support his claim about human nature and reality. But he insists that fundamental trust is by no means irrational, but, rather, can be rationally justified.⁵²

Küng thinks that if one puts one's trust in reality despite its uncertainty, one will realize that one is

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., pp. 443-446.

52 Ibid. p. 447.

simply doing the most reasonable thing.⁵³ He points out that the existent manifests being instead of mere appearance and that reality reveals itself as long as one does not blind oneself to it. Hence in the very act of trusting, one can experience reality and its identity, meaningfulness and value, and one's trust is thus justified.⁵⁴ In other words, fundamental trust manifests its essential reasonableness in its realization.⁵⁵ Kung states:

.....in my very trust in being--which is not merely credulity--in the midst of all the real menace of the nullity of being, I experience being and with it the fundamental justification of my trust.⁵⁶

Consequently, fundamental trust is not supported by any external rationality, but by an intrinsic rationality. One cannot establish fundamental trust objectively by collecting evidence to prove that it is true, but one can experience the firm foundation of one's trust in one's very act of trusting.⁵⁷ In other words, it is only through the practice of one's trust in reality that one becomes certain that reality is meaningful and valuable. The firm

53 See ibid., p. 448.

54 See ibid.

55 See ibid., p. 447.

56 Ibid., p. 449.

57 See ibid., pp. 448-449.

foundation of fundamental trust is not grounded in theory, but in practice. Hence Küng states later:

It is not by a theoretical proof of reason, but only by a practically realized (but completely rationally justifiable) fundamental trust on the part of the whole person, that i become certain that this uncertain reality is real, that is, in principle identical, meaningful and valuable.⁵⁸

But he has to admit that the fundamental trust in the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality is, after all, only justified, if reality itself has ground, support and aim.⁵⁹ Though one can experience the firm foundation of fundamental trust in one's trust, fundamental trust can be justified in the last analysis only if reality itself is not groundless, unsupported or aimless.

Küng thinks that if God exists, God is the primal ground, primal support and primal goal of reality and hence fundamental trust is justified. He states clearly:

If God exists, then the grounding reality itself is not ultimately groundless. Why? Because God is then the primal ground of all reality.

If God exists, then the supporting reality itself is not ultimately unsupported. Why? Because God is then the primal support of all reality.

If God exists, then evolving reality itself is not ultimately without aim. Why? Because God is then the primal goal of all reality.⁶⁰

58 ibid., p. 547.

59 See ibid., p. 476.

60 Ibid., p. 566.

In conjunction with this, Küng points out that if one denies God, one cannot justify fundamental trust and one does not know why one trusts in reality. He says: "Denial of God implies an ultimately unjustified fundamental trust in reality.....If someone denies God, he does not know why he ultimately trusts in reality."⁶¹ If one does not believe that there is a God, what for Küng, is the support and goal of reality, who then will constitute the ground and aim of reality? One cannot explain and does not know why one trusts that there is meaning and goal in reality. But if one believes that there is a God, one can justify fundamental trust and know why one trusts in reality. Küng states: "Affirmation of God implies an ultimately justified fundamental trust in reality.....If someone affirms God, he knows why he can trust reality."⁶² If one believes that there is a God, one is confident that despite all nullity, God still exists. One can explain and know why one trusts in reality, despite its uncertainty, because God, who is the goal and meaning of reality, exists.

Küng does not only want to point out that fundamental trust is a right direction for human beings, and one that is rationally justified (though finally

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 571.

⁶² Ibid., p. 572.

justified if God exists), but he maintains that, whether one responds to reality with trust or mistrust, trust is still indispensable in practical life and theoretical matters.

3. The Significant Role of Fundamental Trust

Küng first emphasizes the fact that trust is absolutely necessary in our life. Without trust, it is impossible to have friendship, love, marriage, business, or politics.⁶³ One needs to trust some persons and things in one's life. As we can see:

There must be trust in human beings with whom I have to deal, in condition in which I work, in things on which I must rely, and even trust in grammar, in semantic and grammatical rules, without which language and human understanding are quite impossible.⁶⁴

Moreover, trust is also important for both science and autonomous ethics.

From the studies of various philosophers of science that Küng mentions in his book, one can easily discover that even science rests on presuppositions. These presuppositions represent certain beliefs on the part of scientists. Küng first gives the example of Karl Popper

⁶³ See ibid., p. 458.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

who thinks that methodological rules are just free "conventions". The rules of empirical sciences are also settled by scientists. The scientists decided those rules according to their own beliefs and the rules are just presuppositions. Popper also points out that all rational thinking indicated one's faith in reason. People rely on or choose rational thinking because they believe in reason. Rudolf Carnap observed that the principles and rules of argument of an artificial language are also a matter of free "choice". Since the rules are decided by people, they are also set according to the beliefs of people. Thomas Kuhn observed that every scientist already has a set of conceptual, theoretical, instrumental and methodological commitments before making a choice between scientific theories or paradigms. But all these commitments of a scientist represent beliefs in particular conceptual, theoretical instrumental and methodological models.⁶⁵ From the above brief account, it is apparent that trust also plays a central role in the theory of knowledge or science. For science is also founded on the belief or faith of scientists. But Küng regards the trust in scientific hypothesis or assumption as a kind of fundamental trust; hence to him, fundamental trust is the basis of science.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See ibid., pp. 461-462.

⁶⁶ See ibid., p. 461.

Besides being the ground of science, Küng points out that fundamental trust is the basis of an autonomous morality⁶⁷--the cornerstone of a morality that permits a human being to live a moral or human life without belief in God.⁶⁸ Hence Küng gives examples to show that ethical behavior, based solely on fundamental trust, is possible. Bertrand Russell expressed his fundamental trust in the form of a belief in "the good life.....inspired by love and guided by knowledge."⁶⁹ Ernst Bloch, on the other hand, proclaims his fundamental trust in the form of a tried and continually tested hope.⁷⁰ A last example is Albert Camus, who, declared fundamental trust in the form of a rebellion. This rebellion means living for the "humiliated" and in "insane generosity", refusing "injustice".⁷¹ All the above examples show that even an atheist or agnostic can choose to follow a moral or human life⁷² based on the various forms of fundamental trust. As

67 See ibid., pp. 467-468.

68 See ibid., p. 467.

69 Ibid.

70 See ibid.

71 Ibid., p. 468.

72 To Küng, the basic norm of an autonomous human morality is that a human being should be a human being. As a human being he or she should realize his or her being as a human being and live humanly. In other words, if one lives a human life, one is the leading a moral life[See

a result, we see that fundamental trust is the basis of autonomous ethics as well as of science. Though fundamental trust seems to be so important for both science and ethics, in view of the uncertainty of reality, how can people still have trust in reality?

As was mentioned before, Küng believes that reality reveals its identity, meaningfulness and value to people and once people respond to reality with trust, they can understand the meaning and value of reality.⁷³ Since reality is already present, fundamental trust is then given to human beings as a gift. Küng explains: "Fundamental trust is a gift. Reality is given to me from the start: If I commit myself trustingly to it, I get it back filled with meaning and value."⁷⁴ This gift, is accessible to a person only if certain prerequisites are found in the person--if his or her innate disposition has not been damaged before birth and if a normal mother-child relationship is established after birth. Hence fundamental trust presupposes the normal physical and psychological development of a person.⁷⁵

ibid., p.471].

⁷³ See ibid., p. 451.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 451-452.

⁷⁵ See ibid., pp. 454-457.

But even if a person has established basic trust during his or her childhood, the person has to continue to assert trust in reality and opt for a positive approach to it, in the face of all pressing doubts and temptations that accompany growth.⁷⁶ Though the basis of fundamental trust is already laid in one's childhood, one still needs to maintain it through one's life. This is because, even with fundamental trust, people cannot attain any definite security. Reality still remains so uncertain, even if one trusts in it. As Küng says: ".....if I trustfully affirm reality in its uncertainty, if I react positively to it, it does not on that account lose its uncertainty."⁷⁷ Hence in every new situation which calls for a decision, one still has to decide between fundamental trust and fundamental mistrust, because reality always appears to be so uncertain.⁷⁸ Küng emphasizes that "the fundamental decision cannot be made once and for all but must be taken up again and again."⁷⁹ But if trust in reality cannot eliminate its radical uncertainty, does it mean that fundamental trust still cannot overcome nihilism?

⁷⁶ See ibid., p. 458.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 476.

⁷⁸ See ibid., pp. 474-475.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 474.

4. Can Nihilism be Overcome by Fundamental Trust?

As we saw, Küng believes that one can experience the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality in one's fundamental trust, but he also admits that trust in uncertain reality cannot eliminate its radical uncertainty. Consequently, on the one hand, with fundamental trust, one can experience the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality. It thus appears that reality, in fact, has a goal and meaning, but nihilism which claims that there is no goal or meaning, is, in reality, factually overcome by fundamental trust.⁸⁰ On the other hand, reality still appears to be so uncertain despite one's trust. This reality on which fundamental trust is based seems itself without any evident ground or foundation. In view of this, Küng considers nihilism is still not overcome in principle by fundamental trust.⁸¹ Hence "nihilism is factually overcome by fundamental trust,"⁸² but "despite fundamental trust, nihilism is not overcome in principle."⁸³

Reality appears as a riddle. As Küng says: "founding, but itself unfounded; supporting, but itself

⁸⁰ See ibid., p. 476.

⁸¹ See ibid., p. 477.

⁸² Ibid., p. 476.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 477.

unsupported; pointing the way, but itself without a goal."⁸⁴ In his final analysis, however, Kung proposes that if God exists, a fundamental answer can be given to the source of this enigmatic reality and hence the riddle of reality is solved.⁸⁵ If God exists, "God is the primal source, primal meaning, primal value of all that is."⁸⁶ As a result, "in all disunion there is ultimately a hidden unity, in all meaninglessness, ultimately a hidden meaningfulness, in all worthlessness ultimately a hidden value".⁸⁷ There is a fundamental identity, meaningfulness and value of reality despite all nullity, because God who is the unity, meaning and value of reality exists. On the other hand, if God exists, we can also understand why reality appears to be so uncertain and seems to be without evident foundation or ground. Kung says:

Because uncertain reality is itself not God. Because the self, society, the world, cannot be identified with their primal ground, primal support and primal goal, with their primal source, primal meaning and primal value, with being itself.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ ibid., p. 476.

⁸⁵ See ibid., p. 566.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 567.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Since reality cannot be equated with God, who alone is the primal ground, support and goal, Küng thinks that this explains why reality appears to be without foundation. No matter whether one can be convinced or not that, if God exists, the riddle of reality is solved, obviously, to Küng, if God exists, the source of reality is known and an explanation can be given to the ambivalent character of reality.

5. Summary

In this confrontation between the two fundamental attitudes towards reality, Küng makes it clear that human beings can decide between the two alternatives. To him, fundamental trust or non-nihilism is a more convincing choice than fundamental mistrust or nihilism. Fundamental trust rather than fundamental mistrust is the right direction for human beings. This fundamental trust is justified by an intrinsic rationality. In one's very act of trusting, one can experience the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality, and hence fundamental trust is justified. But it can be finally justified only if God exists. Moreover, no matter whether one chooses fundamental trust or not, it is still indispensable for both science and autonomous ethics. and it seems that no

one can live without trust. But people can still have trust in reality despite all its uncertainty, because reality itself reveals its identity, meaningfulness and value to those who respond to it with trust. Since reality, which includes this world, all kinds of people in this world and "I", is already present, fundamental trust is a gift. Once people commit themselves trustingly to reality, they can comprehend its meaning and value. But this gift of fundamental trust presupposes a normal psychophysical development on the part of a person. It also requires constant reaffirmation through life, because reality remains uncertain despite one's trust.

Despite the strong evidence given by Küng himself that fundamental trust is a reasonable choice for human beings and that its role in both science and ethics is so important, he still cannot conclude that nihilism is completely overcome by fundamental trust. Fundamental trust can overcome nihilism factually, but not in principle. One can experience the identity, meaningfulness and value of reality in one's trust, but reality itself remains uncertain despite one's trust. This ambivalent character of reality, however, can be understood if God exists. Küng thinks that the existence of God can explain why, despite all nullity, one can experience being, and why reality always seems to be without evident foundation or

ground. After examining Kūng's discussion of the two opposite attitudes to reality, in my next chapter, I shall offer an overall evaluation of Kūng's treatment of nihilism and of his alternative to nihilism.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In the previous three chapters, I examined Küng's analysis of the concept and the problem of nihilism, his criticism of Nietzsche's alternatives to nihilism, and his discussion of the two options: nihilism and non-nihilism, in his book, Does God Exist?. As was noted, Küng traces the rise of nihilism through the person of Nietzsche and analyses the concept of nihilism in his various works, especially in his The Will to Power. Küng admits that nihilism has become a genuine problem for modern man and the uncertainty of reality is what makes nihilism possible. Yet he does not agree that Nietzsche's alternatives are true alternatives for human beings. In arguing that both nihilism and non-nihilism can neither be justified nor refuted by any rational arguments, Küng points out that people have to make a decision between these two opposite attitudes to reality. He discusses these two alternatives at length and concludes that non-nihilism or fundamental trust is the right direction for human beings. Opting for fundamental trust can be rationally justified, though only finally justified, if God exists. He also realizes that

reality itself remains uncertain despite one's trust, hence the challenge of nihilism persists; but he insists that nihilism is in fact overcome by fundamental trust, because one can experience the identity, meaningfulness and value in one's trust. Moreover, if God exists, one can understand why reality always appears to be so uncertain.

To proceed with this evaluation of Küng's treatment of nihilism and his alternative to nihilism, I would like first to present a brief survey of the various aspects of the concept of nihilism as found in the works of Nietzsche, especially in his The Will to Power: the book Küng uses as a major source. No claim is made to offer a full interpretation of Nietzsche's thought, but a study of various aspects of the idea of nihilism will help us to have a comprehensive view of the subject, in the event that Küng has not been able to give us one. In his book, Küng also equates nihilism with "No to reality" or fundamental mistrust, which he then considers to be a less convincing alternative than fundamental trust. Before discussing these two alternatives, I wish to ascertain whether nihilism, as Küng presupposes, is the same as fundamental mistrust.

Küng's main objective in this section of his book is to propose an alternative to nihilism, namely non-nihilism or fundamental trust, which he regards as the

right choice for human beings. In my evaluation, I shall study whether fundamental trust is really the right choice for human beings. The alternative of fundamental trust will be fully examined and the central question whether nihilism can be overcome by fundamental trust will be addressed. After all, we really want to know whether Kung has found a way out in face of the challenge of nihilism and what kind of direction he is proposing to us.

1. A Critique of Kung's Understanding of the Concept of Nihilism

A. Has Kung Given Us an Adequate View?

In examining Kung's section on 'What is Nihilism', I notice that two important aspects of the idea have not been taken into serious consideration. To him, it seems quite clear that "according to Nietzsche, nihilism means the conviction of the nullity, of the internal contradiction, futility and worthlessness of reality."¹ In other words, nihilism is a belief that in this reality, everything is void.² But this interpretation does not really give us a comprehensive view of the idea of nihilism in Nietzsche's thought. It only reflects a certain aspect

¹ Kung, Does God Exist?, p. 388.

² See ibid., p. 391.

of the subject. Nihilism is certainly not a simple concept in Nietzsche's thought, but one that demands a lot of discussion throughout many of his works. If we really want to have a comprehensive view of nihilism in Nietzsche's thought, one should also take into account the following two aspects which Nietzsche himself discusses, at length, in his works. First, nihilism is not only a stage during which everything seems to be void, but one that also stimulates people to seek new values. Second, the last form of nihilism is a belief that the whole world of becoming is the only reality; hence nihilism leads people to be aware that they should no longer undervalue this world by inventing an ideal world or transcendental world.

As discussed in Chapter one, K ung realizes that nihilism is a consequence of atheism. The experience that everything is void is due to the untenability of the belief in the Christian God and the Christian moral interpretation which has provided all meanings and values for the West to this point. But Nietzsche also emphasizes that this feeling that everything is void, in its turn, stimulates people to seek new values. He says:

Our pessimism: the world does not have the value we thought it had. Our faith has so increased our desire for knowledge that today we have to say this. Initial result: it seems worth less; this is how it is experienced initially. It is only in this sense that we are pessimists; i.e., in our determination to admit this revaluation to ourselves without any reservation, and to stop telling ourselves tales - lies - the old

way. That is precisely how we find the pathos that impels us to seek new values. In sum: the world might be far more valuable than we used to believe; we must see through the naivete of our ideals, and while we thought that we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not even have given our human existence a moderately fair value(Italics mine).³

The world may seem worthless at first, once the old values of Christianity are no longer acceptable. But precisely because of this experience that everything is meaningless people are urged to find new values. And the world might still be more valuable than people anticipate. Consequently, nihilism is not merely a belief that, in this reality, everything is void, because the feeling that everything is worthless is only what one experiences initially. What follows from this experience is the seeking of new values. Nihilism also leads people to seek new meanings and values, when it is clear that the old values are no longer valid.

On the other hand, nihilism is a belief that the whole world of becoming is the only reality. There is no other reality behind this ever-changing world; and what is known as the "true world" is solely a human invention.⁴ Nietzsche points out that people cannot find any goal or unity in all events, because "becoming has no goal and that

³ Nietzsche, the Will to Power, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 22, note 32.

⁴ See ibid., pp. 12-13, note 12.

underneath all becoming there is no grand unity....."⁵
But in order to escape the fact that the only reality is
the reality of becoming, people pass "sentence on this
whole world of becoming as a deception" and "invent a world
beyond it, a true world".⁶ The last form of nihilism then
comes into being "as soon as man finds out how that world
is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he
has absolutely no right to it....."⁷ It "includes
disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any
belief in a true world".⁸ When the last form of nihilism
finally arrives, then "one grants the reality of becoming
as the only reality, forbids oneself every kind of
clandestine access to afterworlds and false
divinities.....".⁹

As a result, nihilism finally leads people to
accept that the reality of becoming or this world is the
only reality, and that there is no such world as the "true
world". To Nietzsche, the nihilistic denial of a "true
world" is a very important break-through in one's
understanding of this world. He says: "One has deprived

⁵ Ibid. p. 13. note 12

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

reality of its value, its meaning, its truthfulness, to precisely the extent to which one has mendaciously invented an ideal world."¹⁰ Moreover, he points out: "The concept of the 'beyond', the 'true world' invented in order to devaluate the only world there is - in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly world!"¹¹ Once the existence of any "true world" or beyond is denied, people can no longer devalue this world and assume no responsibility for this earth. They will also stop measuring the value of the world by means of categories that refer to a purely fictitious world, categories like the concept of "aim", the concept of "unity", and the concept of "truth".¹²

A new perspective on this world is finally opened up to human beings through the stage of nihilism. People not only accept this world as the only reality, but they also recognize the meaning and value of this world and take up their responsibility for it. Nietzsche wants to teach people how to direct their way once this new horizon of the earth is revealed through nihilism. He says:

My Ego taught me a new spirit, I teach it to men: No longer to bury the head in the sand of heavenly thing,

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 218.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 334.

¹² Nietzsche, The Will to Power, pp. 12-14, note 12.