

**FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S  
“TRANSVALUATION OF VALUES”  
IN THE LIGHT OF NIGERIA'S MORAL PREDICAMENT**

**MARK OMOROVIE IKEKE, PhD**  
Department Of Religious Studies And Philosophy  
Delta State University, PMB 1, Abraka, Nigeria  
*Ikeke7@yahoo.com*  
08067426895

**Abstract**

*Nigeria, like many other countries in the world, is undergoing various social troubles like terrorism, kidnapping, corruption, armed banditry, inept leadership, electoral violence and rigging, internet fraud, ethno-religious violence, incessant academic and occupational strikes, examination malpractices, etc. The fact is that the problems above border on people's ethical behaviour. If people live by ethical values the problems above will be seriously mitigated. In harnessing moral values, to combat the moral predicaments in Nigeria, various persons are inspired by various ethical systems. This paper critically and analytically interrogates the moral philosophy of “transvaluation of values” proposed by Nietzsche to see if it can help to combat the Nigerian moral predicament. Nietzsche proposes that religion in general, especially western Christianity endorses a weak lifestyle in extolling values like piety, humility, prudence, gentleness, martyrdom, etc., instead of proposing a strong lifestyle of power, vitality, strength, etc. There is need for a reversal of the values proposed by Christianity, to values that enable man to rise to become the Übermensch (superman). The question before this paper is to discuss whether the values proposed by Nietzsche can help to eradicate the moral predicaments in the Nigerian society and make it a better society. Through critical analytic and hermeneutic methods, the paper finds and concludes that the “transvaluation of values” proposed by Nietzsche will morally cripple Nigeria and make matters worse. Nietzsche does not hold the solution to the Nigerian moral crisis.*

**Keywords:** Friedrich Nietzsche, Transvaluation of Values, Moral Predicaments, *Übermensch*, *Superman*, Christianity, Moral philosophy.

**Introduction**

There is no nation on earth that is free from moral predicaments. The word, “predicament” is used here as generally understood in the English Language. The Cambridge University Press (2020) says predicament is: “an unpleasant situation that is difficult to get out of or solve.” Predicaments imply difficult problems, puzzles or issues that perplex humans. To these problems they need to give solutions. Moral predicament refers to the challenging situations of unethical behaviours that predominate in the society. Nigeria like most societies is passing through a moral predicament as the Nigerian society is inundated with many wrong behaviours and evils that impede human flourishing. While there are solutions to these wrong behaviours, many in the Nigerian society have failed consistently in accepting these solutions of living ethically to create a better society. Oguejiofor (2001) writing of human predicament paraphrases the English philosopher, G.J. Warnock as follows: “...the human predicament is

inherently such that things are liable to go badly....this inherent tendency is due to both natural and human factors: Limited knowledge, limited resources, limited rationality, limited sympathy. It is in order to obviate this tendency that morality in general finds its sense” (p. 7). Olowo (2009) rightly asserts that: “...no nation can survive when immoral and unpatriotic behaviours tend to be rampant in the society” (p. 359). Moral predicaments include what is alternatively named as moral decadence. Afolabi and Loto (2009) show that morally depraved living in Nigeria include: cultism, arson, kidnapping, rape, bunkering, drug offences, armed robbery, etc.

This paper examines whether Friedrich Nietzsche's moral philosophy of “transvaluation of values” can help to resolve the moral predicaments of the Nigerian society. In accomplishing the objectives of this paper, the life and times of Nietzsche are presented; and then it examines hermeneutically his theory of “transvaluation of values.” The paper equally undertakes a description of the moral predicaments in the Nigerian society. With this done, the philosophy of “transvaluation of Values” and the Nigerian moral predicament are dialogically interrogated. Finally, the paper ends with some concluding reflections.

#### **The Life and Times of Friedrich Nietzsche**

Friedrich Nietzsche was born in Rocken, Saxony on 5th October in the year 1844. He died on the 25th of August 1900 after being insane for eleven years. He is a German existentialist philosopher of the 19th century. According to Lawhead (2002), he is considered to be “the father of secular existentialism” (p. 416). His father and grandfather were Lutheran clergymen. His father died while he was five years old. He grew up under his mother, sister and grandmother. His aunts also were part of his upbringing. When he was fourteen years he was sent to Pfota boarding school. He studied there for six years learning religion, classics, and also German literature. He studied at the universities of Bonn and also at Leipzig. At these universities, he studied Philology and classical antiquity. In the year 1869, he was given appointment at Basel University in Philosophy, even though he had not finished his doctorate. In 1869 he gave his first lecture there at the university. He was at the young age of twenty-four when he got engaged as a professor. In 1879 he resigned from his university position due to poor health. Colombo (2007) notes that:

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote virtually on every aspect of Western culture-the history of philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, democracy, music, tragedy, and religion- seeking to name and unmask the decay and sickness of both Western culture and European society. At the root of this decadence was a cultural Platonism that denigrated the world and change as inferior to eternity and changelessness. (p. 958).

Some of the works written by Nietzsche include: (1) “The Birth of Tragedy,” (2) “Untimely Meditations,” (3) “Human, All- too- Human”, (4) “Joyous Wisdom,” (5) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” (6) “The Dawn of Day,” (7) “Beyond Good and Evil,” (8) “A Genealogy of Morals,” (9) “The Case of Wagner,” and (10) “The Twilight of Idols.”

Permit a presentation of a timeline of his life as given by Johnston (2006);

1844 Birth of Friedrich Nietzsche  
1848 Revolutions in Europe

1849	Death of Nietzsche's father
1854	Nietzsche enters local gymnasium
1859	Darwin's origin of specie
1864	Nietzsche attends University of Bonn, later moves to Leipzig
1869	Nietzsche appointed professor of philosophy at University of Basel; friendship with Wagner
1870	Nietzsche serves in Franco-Prussian War
1871	Bismarck becomes Chancellor of unified Germany
1873-79	Nietzsche's <i>Thought out of Season</i>
1876	End of Nietzsche's friendship with Wagner Inauguration of Bayreuth theatre with Wagner's <i>The Ring</i>
1882	Nietzsche's <i>Joyful Wisdom</i> published;
1883-85	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>
1886	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
1888	William 11 becomes German Kaiser
1889	Nietzsche's illness and eventual insanity
1900	Death of Nietzsche (p. 143)

The life and times of Nietzsche given above helps to better appreciate him. While Nietzsche wrote on many subjects, the concern of this paper is with his “transvaluation of values.” And this is what now occupies this paper.

#### **The Theory of “Transvaluation of Values”**

Nietzsche rejected traditional western morality especially as mirrored by the Judeo-Christian tradition. He proposed in place of traditional western morality a new philosophy that emphasises the Will-to-power in man to become the superman or “overman.” In his work, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” he gives his account of the philosophy of the superman and the new values that society requires. Higgins (2000) writes of his philosophy thus:

Nietzsche's Zarathustra preaches a new, atheistic, gospel of aspiration towards greatness. This aspiration is embodied in the figure of the *Urbemensch* (superman), a new and superior type of human being who rejects existing morality, who overturns existing values by affirming the positive values of earthly life and of the active, creative individual, and who undertakes the creation of his own life in the way the artist creates his work (p.387).

The superman or the superior type of human being can only emerge from those of the master-class. Aside the master-class is the slave-class. Each of these classes stands for the two kinds of morality. Nietzsche (2013) states as follows regarding these two kinds of morality are the Master-morality and the Slave-morality. He writes that the master-morality originated from the ruling caste who are conscious of being different from the ruled, the slaves and feeble. The ruling nobles are the ones who determine what is good and not the despicable. Nietzsche (2013) propounds that: “The noble type of man regards HIMSELF as a determiner of values;

he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgement: 'What is injurious to me is injurious in itself;' he knows that it is he himself only who confers honour on things; he is a CREATOR OF VALUES" (no 260).

For Nietzsche (2013), Christian morality is weak, perverse, unhealthy and a slave morality. It is unacceptable. What is needed is a master morality of the aristocrats. It is a morality like that of Greeks, Indian and Norse. Slave morality is the morality of those under subjugation by the masters. It is the master morality that is needed in order to produce the superman. The slave morality is for those who are slavish who live a life of pity and humility and lives like the herd. The slave morality negates and obstructs the superman from emerging. Society needs morality that espouses pride, strength, arrogance, might, conquest, etc. A slave morality is an impotent morality and cannot create the new society. Christian morality is a slave morality that endorses humility, gentleness, compassion, self-denial, meekness, love, sympathy, etc. Those living with the slave morality consider it to be virtuous. Omoregbe (1991) rightly interprets Nietzsche thus: "The slave-morality wants to bring all men to the same level through absolute and universal moral laws applicable to all men. It prevents people from developing into strong and powerful men, for it fears such people as dangerous and 'evil'. Thus the slave morality is an obstacle to human development" (p. 168). For Nietzsche (2013), the Christian religion is poisonous and perverse. It kills creativity, innovation and the capacity for greatness that lies in man.

The values of the new morality that Nietzsche advocates for are the values of the masters. The master-morality promotes strength, power, pride, war, retaliation, adventure, assertiveness, violence, ruthlessness. These values help the superman to emerge. Such a man replaces everything that has to do with God and has indeed made a "transvaluation of values." He has gained his freedom, liberated himself and makes law for himself and is beyond good and evil and has asserted his will to power. Man's assignment is the Will- to- power and becoming the superman. Stump and Fieser (2003) write that:

By revaluation Nietzsche did not mean the creation of a new table of moral values. He meant rather to declare war upon the presently accepted values....Since traditional morality is a perversion of original morality, revaluation must consist in rejecting traditional morality in the name of honesty and accuracy. Revaluation implies that all the 'stronger motives are still extant, but now they appear under false names and false valuations, and have not become conscious of themselves (p. 386-387).

Nietzsche (2016) says of Christianity that he accuses of revaluing ancient values thus: "I regard Christianity as the most fatal and seductive lie that has ever yet existed—as the greatest and most *impious lie*: I can discern the last sprouts and branches of its ideal beneath every form of disguise, I decline to enter into any compromise or false position in reference to it—I urge people to declare open war with it (p. 164). It was Christianity that re-valued ancient values and what is morality in Christianity today that they claim is virtue is not truly virtue. Destroy and reject Christianity and the true values will emerge. In every individual lies the Will-to-power and domination, and the individual must use it to exploit and dominate his environment. Universal morality does not exist. Each individual has to exercise his Will-to-power and strive to become a superman, even though some will continue to be weak and will never reach the status of the superman.

It is important to remark here that in his ethics, women have no value. The only thing that they can be used for is amusement and fun. Women are objects and properties to be owned and manipulated. They are there to simply serve the pleasure of men in the exercise of their will to power. Men are made to dominate and conquer women.

#### **Nigeria's Moral Predicament**

The question can be asked if there is a moral predicament in Nigeria. This piece seriously opines that there is a moral predicament or moral crisis in Nigeria. There is hardly any country in the world that does not experience a moral predicament. While some nations are far better than others in terms of morality, there exists in every society persons who have unethical and distorted values. In this work, moral predicament is understood to refer to the entire system of wrong and evil behaviours that are detrimental to human wellbeing and even cosmic good. It is true that most societies have their own standards of morality. In spite of this, there are globally acceptable standard of behaviours. If not, there will be no basis for a global society. And so for instance, there are codes of conduct derivable from international laws, documents and declarations. There is no society that sees corruption and embezzlement of public fund as morally acceptable. The abuse of governmental or political power is generally condemnable everywhere. Acts like stealing, murder, infanticide, human trafficking, modern slavery, child abuse, etc are seen as immoral. This viewpoint is in line with the framework of Immanuel Kant's "Categorical Imperative." Kant (1948) postulates that the human being's actions should be good in themselves not simply means. This is the moral imperative. Act in such a way that your action is a universal law. As Omoregbe (1991) will note citing Kant, exploitation and the other evils occur when you act simply using your neighbour as a means to an end.

The point being made is that Nigeria cannot be an exception to what is generally considered to be immoral and unethical. Nigeria has moral values rooted in her traditional systems, various laws, and in her constitution. Nigeria and her people can be judged either as living morally or living immorally. Also, Nigeria's National Anthem and Pledge are equally a basis for judging what is moral. In the National Anthem you find statements like: "To serve our fatherland with love and strength and faith," "To serve with heart and might one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity," "Oh God of creation, direct our noble cause; guide our leaders right, help our youth the truth to know, in love and honesty to grow, and living just and true, great lofty heights attain, to build a nation where peace and justice shall reign." Love, faith, freedom, peace, unity, truth, honesty, justice, etc are all moral values or virtues. Whatever harms the above positive values should be considered as immoral. Nigerian leaders are to live rightly and carry out the reasons why they are elected into power. They should act for the wellbeing of all Nigerians in line with what is categorically moral, not for their personal and selfish gains.

Look through the Nigerian scene and you will realise that Nigeria is experiencing a moral predicament. There is a moral problem in the land. When some Nigerian leaders and persons live against the positive and healthy values that build human society, then there is a moral predicament in the land. There is a moral predicament because immoral or unethical behaviours are not just occurring by accident or occasionally but they have occurred and persisted in the land. Think of the following persistent problems such as armed robbery, kidnapping, environmental degradation, ethnicism, electoral violence and looting of ballot boxes, absenteeism in the workplace, theft, social discrimination, poor and inept leadership,

sales of fake and expired drugs, partaking in secret cult activities, sexual abuse, internet fraud, 419, etc. These all border on human behaviours. The above-mentioned and many others are wrong behaviours. They are unethical and harm human and social wellbeing. Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (2015), Igho (2019), Jooji (2006), Bolokor (2013), Ojakimino (2015), Aluko (2006), Jooji (2003), Itelimo and Ogugua (2019) have all noted the (moral) predicament in Nigeria in their writings.

Furthermore, many persons in political and public office have used their offices to corruptly enrich themselves. Corruption and bribery in Nigeria are so rampant that the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria composed a prayer against bribery and corruption in Nigeria. Transparency International (2019) scored Nigeria 26/100 and ranked her 146/180 in the Corruption Perception Index. This is painful and tragic. You travel on Nigerian roads and you see Nigerian policemen and women, and Road Safety officers extorting money from travellers. You can even be beaten up by policemen and women if you refuse to give them bribe. Corruption is by and large a moral problem rooted in human greed and disordered values. Olurode (2005) writes that corruption is endemic to the Nigerian society and it includes abandonment of projects by contractors who have been paid, usage of poor building materials by contractors, bribing of site engineers, the police collecting bribes on the road, poor service delivery, hoarding of goods and abuse of the electoral process, etc. Corruption is a big moral problem, and if it is not seen as such, one wonders what it is.

Nigeria is gravely facing a moral predicament. In a metaphoric sense, the paper agrees with Ifeanyiichukwu (2011) who argues that Nigeria is experiencing a crisis of moral conscience arising from poor leadership and irresponsibility of the citizens. He writes further that if care is not taken, Nigerian can become a Hobbesian state of nature. Immorality and unethical behaviours reign in the land of Nigeria. Chuta (2004) notes that during the Presidency of Shehu Shagari, there was an ethical revolution and during the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo there was an anti-corruption crusade. During the time when Professor Dora Akinyili was director of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency there was much campaign on value re-orientation and re-branding Nigeria. The present federal government has championed the slogan, "Change begins with me." All these are indications that it is not morally well with Nigeria. Oladipo (1999) wrote of the Nigerian condition and described it as a form of material and moral depression because there is lack of responsibility, accountability in government, suppression of freedom, no equality before the law, lack of transparency, and many other ills. For him, a new set of values in support of social reconstruction is needed. Though those statements were written of the Nigerian condition in 1999 they are still relevant today. Using Chuta (2004), there are value contradictions undermining the ethical reconstruction of the Nigerian society.

Another serious moral problem that cannot be ignored here is bad and inept leadership. It is difficult for a society to be moral when the leaders are corrupt and embezzle public funds. This happens when leaders promote tribalism, nepotism, sectionalism, ethnic clannishness, and fill public offices with their cronies and townsmen and women. Morality in the public places is being eroded when leaders punish wrongdoings but not of their townsmen and women. Morality is being eroded when promotions and advancement in the workplace are given on the basis of ethnicity and not merit. In the light of this, the paper now proceeds to interrogate the Nigerian situation drawing from Nietzsche's philosophy.

### **Friedrich Nietzsche and the Nigerian Context**

Friedrich Nietzsche's moral philosophy looks troubling. If applied to Nigeria, it will only help to complicate issues and lead to a society in which might is right and the survival of the fittest is the norm of the land. The rich and wealthy will pervert justice and people will not be equal before the law. Rather, those who have the military might and physical prowess will gain dominance. There will be constant class conflict as everybody is striving to survive caring nothing for others. There should be one morality in the land, not one for the ruling class and another for the ruled.

What is needed in Nigeria more than ever before is a moral re-orientation and rearmament that value the human dignity of every human being, rich or poor. It will be a society based on neo-welfarist values, to use Azikiwe' term. A society that simply privileges the powerful and the wealthy will be a one-sided society. The values of Christianity that Nietzsche calls for to be re-valued are precisely the values that society needs. In African communitarian philosophy, the human being is seen as a being-with-others and there is *Ubuntu* (togetherness) and *Ujamaa* (brotherhood). Each human being is to work for the welfare of society and look out for the wellbeing of others. The desire of the human being in the African cosmos is not to be a superman above others. He is one with others and lives with others.

There is a fundamental need to re-inculcate social and moral values that have always been emphasized in the Nigerian society. These are not actually new values that are extraneous to the society. These moral values are already embedded in the Nigerian constitutions, the Nigerian National Policy on Education, the laws of the land, educational curriculum, the teachings of the religions, international human rights framework, etc. These values include: peace-making, justice, tolerance, truth, faithfulness, nonviolence, contentment, prudence, kindness, generosity, and patience. Anyanwu and Amelo (2013) rightly note that morality is the “kpim” (essence) of building social order and those values like empathy, self-control, honesty, integrity, and care and welfare of others are necessary for society. The kind of ethics that Nietzsche advocates is not what will bring *Uhuru* (freedom) and peace to the Nigerian society. They will destroy it more and create social chaos and disorder as there will be antagonistic rivalry, competition, and warfare to dominate over others. The ethics that is needed is one that promotes the social wellbeing and personal welfare of all. It is communitarian and quest for the good of every individual. Nietzsche's superman creates its own values. Each individual that strives to become the superman creates his own values. A society in which every individual creates its own values is no longer a society. There is a society because people are interrelated and interacts and there is a point of meeting. With everybody creating values that seems rights to him there will be a conflict of value systems. Society will become chaotic. Ojimba and Ikuli (2019) argue concerning Nietzsche thus:

But despite his stress on freedom, Nietzsche's philosophy was, in fact, a very suppressive inhuman ideology that aimed at enslaving others. The practical application of his philosophy to life would not only result in the survival of the fittest and the manifestation of animalistic and brute tendencies in man, but would also result in actual monstrosity. He rejected the notion of human equality and any form of fixed truth, morality or standard of behaviour; but this undermines our very notion of human rights, which presupposes a fixed and acceptable standard of behaviour. He despises weakness, compassion, and humanitarianism, preferring strength and domination. But this will only take man back to the state of nature, where there is

man's inhumanity against man (p. 24).

Pride, arrogance, domination, conquest, and vainglory proposed by Nietzsche should not be considered as values or morality. They are vices not virtues. With Nietzsche, this paper agrees that there is innate power in human beings and desire for greatness. But this desire has to be controlled and used in a healthy and virtuous manner. The desire for greatness either on a personal or communal level should be done not at the expense of the welfare and wellbeing of others but also for their goodness and social success. Each individual is not a law unto himself as Nietzsche implies. All should subject themselves to communal morality. The world that Nietzsche envisions seems to have some elements with Hobbesian state of nature. His world will be filled with vengeance, retaliation, and conquest. There is no place for consideration of the weak in his world. Ezema, Areji and Ohubuenyi (2017) buttress this fact in saying of the implications of Nietzsche as follows: "Possible implications were drawn from master-slave morality in interpersonal relationship. Moral values become relative; irresponsible freedom becomes the order of the day; while anarchy and oppression are celebrated" (p. 262).

The importance of values for a moral and ordered society cannot be overstated. Nietzsche speaks of the "transvaluation of values" by which he implies the values of Christianity and other traditional western values that existed before him need to be re-evaluated, rejected, and his so-called new values of the emergence of the superman should be accepted in their place. He discarded the values which he claimed are values of slave morality. Without communal or social values that people in a society share together there will be no common objectives for that society to obtain. It is important to define values. Value refers to what is worthwhile, noble, cherished, and acceptable to a person or a society. Edem (1993) indicates that: "value is seen as 'a conception or standard, cultural or merely personal by which things are compared and approved or disapproved, relative to one another-held to be relatively desirable or undesirable, more meritorious or less, more or less correct'" (p. vii).

There are values that may be acceptable in some societies but not acceptable in others. Despite the fact that some values may be particular to some societies; the fact remains that there are common or even global values that cut across all societies. It is on this basis that what one society considers being value can be judged. Instrumental values or values that are simply relative to a society that inhibit human flourishing or global ethics are unacceptable. Based on this we can speak of crimes against humanity, war crimes, human trafficking and child abuse as evil. There are persons who committed Crimes against Humanity who have been brought to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. These are intrinsic values in line with categorical imperative. A society may have considered some things to be value in the past that today are no longer considered to be value such as slavery, killing of twins among the Ibibio people, etc. In the light of all these, this paper categorically states that what Nietzsche considers to be value is no value at all. If his ethic is to be followed in Nigeria, the society will be poorer for it. The poor, the needy, the mentally and physically challenged, ethnic minorities, and many others will lose all their fundamental human rights. Only the rich, the aristocrats and the powerful will reign in the land. They will trample on people who are disadvantaged and see them as inferior. In their Will-to-power, they will trample on the unborn child, and people who are economically disadvantaged.

Nietzschean ethics offends against the values of a true democratic society in which government acts for the good of all and provides welfare for members of society. To use ideas drawn from Iwu (2006), this piece propounds that a Nietzschean ethics will lead to ruthless and



'senseless accumulation of wealth, greed, lack of respect for other people's humanity and outright wickedness" (p. vii). Since "God is dead" as Nietzsche opines, the implication for this paper is that you become accountable to no higher power than your drive and Will-to-power. It will be a world of rugged and egoistic individualism. Each man will be a lord and law unto himself. This cannot help in the social and moral redemption of Nigeria. Nigeria should not be a society in which only the fittest and strongest survive.

It is likely that Nietzsche drew from Charles Darwin theory of "survival of the fittest." This connection between Charles Darwin and Nietzsche should not be overlooked. Citing Paul Roubiczek, Omoregbe (1991), notes that he simply translated Darwin's notion of evolutionary struggle in which the fittest species survive to a new ethics that promotes power, ruthlessness, struggle, ambition and war. The new man, who will be the last man in history that Nietzsche roots for is brutally ruthless, arrogantly selfish and pompously proud and cares nothing for the wellbeing of the "less privileged" and 'disabled' of society. The decadence in the Nigeria society and in many other societies is not as a result of the practice of Christian-based value rather it is the neglect of those values. As Ahoyo (2012) notes in Nietzsche, 'exploitation of man by man,' anti-democratic values, slavery, cruelty are all acceptable as part of cultural praxis. A Nietzschean ethics will make Nigeria a cruel place, filled with economic and political exploitation, conflicts, violence, etc. Omoregbe (1991) notes that: "Only few people would like to see Nietzsche's ethics practised all over the world" (p. 173).

In the moral redemption of Nigeria from her moral predicaments, the cherished values of Christianity and other religions will be needed. These values are inclusive of social justice for all, option for the poor, philanthropy, Samaritanism, generosity, respect and recognition of the dignity of every human person, universal love, love for enemies, selfless sacrifice to help others, honesty, charitable works, etc.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the philosophy of "Transvaluation of values" as proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche. He proposed re-appropriating ancient values that existed before Christianity. For him, it was Christianity that came with the values of the slave-class, and propagated humility, kindness, love, patience, etc. These values need to be rejected (transvalued) for the values of pride, arrogance, selfishness, power, strength, conquest. These are the values that belong to the master-class, the aristocrats who are a law to themselves and the creators of morality. There is a natural instinct in man, the Will-to-power, to dominate and strive for greatness. The paper showed that while there is nothing wrong in striving for greatness and success, it should be done within a communal and social perspective taking into consideration the wellbeing and human rights of others. From the foregoing, a Nietzschean ethics cannot help in resolving the Nigerian moral predicament.

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