

The Fate of Humanity

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The Fate of Humanity

Molly Roe

Victor Frankenstein aspires to achieve greatness by creating life, yet, when he accomplishes this task, he abhors his creation and eventually dies at its hands. The creature aspires to be loved, yet after exacting revenge on Victor he consents to die alone. Both creator and created fought against what they believed compromised their happiness, but to what end did they truly succeed in achieving that happiness? According to Christopher Ketcham, the failure to find happiness stems from searching for the wrong thing to begin with. In juxtaposing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Ketcham raises the question of what we strive for, and what that means for humanity. On that note, he in closing asks the following of the reader: "Whither humanity?"

To answer that question, we must first understand the two parallels of humanity that Ketcham presents the reader. In his novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche explores the potential of humanity, should we abandon religious or moral standards of good and evil. For Nietzsche, God is dead. There is no heaven or pleasant afterlife, and more importantly there are no divine punishments nor expectations. Consequently, he encourages living life to the fullest now, so that if given the chance to live our current life over and over for the rest of eternity, we would readily choose to do so without any regrets whatsoever. Thus, happiness is not the endpoint nor the guiding principle; we must instead strive to endure life's burdens (Ketcham 79). Those burdens may vary from person to person, depending on what it is that person is meant to achieve, but ultimately what matters is that we claim responsibility for what we do, and we do it well, held back by nothing.

While Nietzsche advocates for an abandonment of religious rules and constraints, Shelley demonstrates a concern for this same matter in *Frankenstein*. Often, Shelley alludes to the idea that Victor is playing God, tampering with what is out of the domain of man. However, Victor is a brilliant individual with a unique means of bettering society, should he have chosen a different outlet for his intelligence. The real issue is that his concern for bettering his own reputation and esteem overpowers his desire to serve others. In other words, he abuses his talent, focusing more on personal gain than society's needs. He has his own will but lacks responsibility and

accountability for his actions.

Just as Victor suffers from selfishness, so too the creature is unable to see past his own desires. Initially, the creature is the personification of what Nietzsche deems the “Übermensch,” the ultimate successor to humankind and an enlightened being with pure potential and power. He is innocent in a way only children are, but unfortunately, is corrupted by the pain of rejection. The creature cannot move past his need for companionship and love, and thus he begins a destructive path that seals his tragic fate. There is no opportunity for the creature to grow in a productive way and recognize his full potential. Because he gives into hate and engages in violence, the creature loses the chance to better himself, and drives, not only himself, but also Victor into ruin.

However, where did Frankenstein and his creature go wrong? Both allowed their passions to guide their actions – Victor’s immediate disgust with his creation leads him to abandon him, and the creature’s anger towards his absent creator leads him to lash out violently at innocent people. The two have the same short-term goal of thwarting (and eventually ending) the other, but neither truly pauses to reflect on what comes next until after Frankenstein’s death. At this point, the creature realizes there is nothing left for him and resolves to die as well. If Frankenstein was the true barrier to the creature’s happiness, he would have chosen a different fate for himself after Frankenstein was gone, and similarly if the creature was the true barrier to Victor’s happiness, he would have thought before bringing it into being. The focus on happiness that motivated them to action is what killed them in the end.

While Nietzsche is not asking for somber, unhappy lives, he is asking for a new purpose – one that isn’t selfish or temporary, but one that is altruistic and sustainable. Nietzsche suggests asking not how to be happy, but how to simply be. Victor and the creature fail to recognize that the happiness they seek is superficial, and that true happiness comes only from living life fully with no regrets. In other words, they forget to just be. Victor is so concerned with the repercussions of his work that he never pauses to revel in success. Had he taken a moment to move past the physical imperfections of his creation, he might have adopted a completely different perspective on his progeny that could have drastically shifted the dynamic between himself and the creature. Even if Victor failed to change his outlook, had the creature not taken rejection as an absolute setback but rather continued to focus on his own personal growth and development to assist a smoother transition into society, he might have eventually stumbled upon an opportunity for genuine connection without the need for violence. Had Victor and the creature not been so fixated on happiness and instead focused on being on the best possible version of themselves, the tragedies that resulted from their conflict might have been avoided. As Nietzsche suggests, the possibility of

enlightenment – of the Übermensch looms – just out of humanity’s reach, with the illusion of seeking happiness clouding the way.

Thus, we return to Ketcham’s question: “Whither humanity?” Where is humanity going? What is our fate? It depends. We live in a society that is driven by impulsivity and pleasure. We crave happiness, and we cannot wait patiently for it. However, we must recognize that this kind of happiness is an illusion, not attainable forever. We cannot chase our happiness or find it hidden somewhere. Instead, we must direct our focus on being who we are meant to be and engage life and its burdens. Oftentimes, this kind of being means knowing that we will undergo hardships and that we will struggle. We may not always be happy in the moment. Even though it is difficult, if we embrace living our lives to the best of our ability, fulfill our responsibilities, and strive to do the best we can, then we will naturally achieve happiness. The fate of humanity hinges on what we strive for. If we strive to be the best we can be, then we may become Nietzsche’s Übermensch after all.

Works Cited

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