Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on Redemption

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The German philosophers Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche are known for their respective agnosticism and atheism. But their hesitations with regard to theism do not encompass all topics of philosophy of religion. The central argument of this lecture is that Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have similarly and charitably engaged the topic of Christian redemption.

In Christian thought, redemption is a gracious gift from God wherein the past sins of human beings are justified in view of their faith. Kant takes up the practical idea of justification through grace as something that can counter-act potential moral despair when human beings recognize their own limitations; Schopenhauer believes that the abundance of suffering human beings go through as willing things can be justified because it leads towards the denial of the will to life; and Nietzsche argues that the affirmation of life that befalls human beings after going through moments of profound impotence can redeem any past tribulations because they have led to affirmation. In the perspective of all three authors, past infelicities are justified in view of their quasi-providential potential to lead to a higher state of being, respectively moral virtue, denial of the will and affirmation of life.

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