

BA Thesis Final Evaluation



UNIVERZITA
KARLOVA

Jan Krajc, *Nietzsche's Will to Power led by the Hands of Morality*

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General Description of the Work

The thesis consists of three main chapters and as a whole concerns itself with the most enigmatic concept of Nietzsche's philosophy: the will to power. Conscious of the almost ungraspable nature of that concept, the candidate develops a quite specific strategy to make sense of it. In fact, rather than try to address it directly, he takes a detour. Using as a point of departure Wittgenstein's claim to the effect that "what is inexpressible... is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning," the candidate identifies Nietzsche's discourse on morality as the only expression that can help us get an indirect grasp of the will to power as the "inexpressible background." Given that, as Nietzsche puts it, "life is the will to power" and that morality is characterized as a system of value judgments touching upon the conditions of "a creature's life," the tight link between the two notions is thereby established. This explains why the candidate has decided to focus on two texts in particular: *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In this way, in fact, he is able not only to textually circumscribe his study (for, it is in these two texts that the question of morality, hence its relation to the will to power, is systematically presented and discussed); he is also able to avoid having to address bombastic, and general questions bearing upon the overall significance or sense of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole (which would require a completely different approach).

In line with his strategy, the candidate has divided the work up into three parts. The first chapter (*Morality*) is dedicated to Nietzsche's conception of morality in the books mentioned above, with a special focus on the role of "emotions," their organization and relation to language. What the candidate also obtains at this stage is a preliminary account of society and of the ways values work and are established within a given society according to the distinction between pre-moral, moral and extra-moral period. Chapter two is on the contrary dedicated to an analysis of the will to power; a quite thorough discussion of Nietzsche's own phenomenology of the will is provided that builds upon the previous assessment of emotions and their hierarchical organization within the soul. Here

the conclusion is obtained to the effect that in Nietzsche's theory of the will there is no subject, no "I" and that the phenomenon itself of willing is the result, so to say, of a combination and conflict (the candidate speaks of a "struggle") between different emotions and sensations. At this stage the candidate shows quite well how for Nietzsche the transition from one emotion to another, i.e., the will to "overcome" an emotion is in the last instance understood as the will of another emotion. In light of such conclusion, the picture of the "soul" that, based on Nietzsche's account, the candidate is able to draw can be roughly presented as follows. The subject consists of a plurality of emotions, each of which being the result of a combination of sensations: what we call "emotions" are nothing else but the hierarchical organization of a plurality of sensations. Now, the hierarchy that each and every emotion is and, within the soul, the hierarchy between all the different emotions—these two inter-related hierarchies are the source-point of our value judgments. But now we also know that the very transition from one emotion to another, that is, from a certain hierarchical organization of our sensations to another (from a certain value-system to another) is the very expression of the will to power. The link between morality and will to power is thus clarified, and what is also avoided is the mistake that consists in assigning a too bombastic meaning to what Nietzsche calls *life*. For, "life" in this context is correctly, and systematically understood by the candidate as the overall system of de-egologized emotions that, so to say, make up the "soul"—which hence turns out to be nothing other than a system of hierarchies of emotions (that is, within them, of sensations) and, accordingly, of values and value judgments. Or, better: *life* is the very name of the power constantly mobilized in order for a certain emotion, and system thereof, to organize itself hierarchically. And different psychological types correspond to different moral types. The third chapter is finally dedicated to the will to nothingness and, in particular, the case of the so-called "ascetic priest" (or "ascetic ideal"). The candidate does a very good job in showing in what sense the "ascetic ideal," understood as the will to nothingness, the will to deny life, is in truth nothing else but the expression of the will to power itself, i.e., of life. Finally, in the conclusion the candidate both sums up the main outcomes of his confrontation with Nietzsche and also critically discusses two important interpretations of the latter: the ones by G. Deleuze and P. Kouba—the former being criticized for confusing will and the will to power; the latter for not recognizing, so the candidate, the connection between morality and the will to power.

Remarks and questions

The major merit of the candidate's approach to Nietzsche is *methodological* and goes beyond the specific outcomes he has been able to achieve on its basis. Having realized the difficulty, if not even

impossibility of understanding the notion of “will to power” per se taken, the decision to use the problem of morality to indirectly decipher what Nietzsche means by that proteus-like concept has been in my opinion a very successful one. In so doing, the candidate has been able to provide a systematic re-construction of Nietzsche’s position on the matter which is firmly rooted in the texts under scrutiny and that never indulges in romantic or speculative considerations (as can be the case when it comes to Nietzsche’s philosophy). This is clearly visible over the course of the first chapter (*Morality*), in which the confrontation with the Nietzschean texts is systematic and leaves no room for doubt about the candidate’s deep knowledge of them. It must be added however that sometimes (see the analysis of the structure of emotions in that very same chapter) the number of distinctions and differentiations made during the analysis is such that the reader can get easily lost and lose sight of the overall sense of the argument.

In section 2.1, for example, the distinction between emotions and sensations on the one hand (with the latter being the organization of the former), and between emotions and thinking (the latter being described as the act of one drive “standing over another”) on the other is useful and interesting: yet, it is difficult to dispel the impression that the candidate is imposing a systematic framework unto a text whose arguments and terminology are far from being systematic. “Desires” and “passions” are also distinguished and we are explained at a certain point that “emotions” stand qualitatively over them (though it is not always to understand what this means). Sometimes the talk is of sensation in the sense of *Empfindung*, most of the times the term is *Gefühl*—whereas “emotion” translates the German *Affekt*. Of course, the candidate has done a good job in also double-checking the original versions so as to avoid assuming a-critically the terminological choices made by the translators or confusing the original terms. But it is not clear, for example, while “thinking” should be taken as meaning the act of one drive becoming stronger, while one could simply assume that the drive itself becomes stronger by increasing its intensity. By the same token, it is not clear why “drive” should designate the specific relation in which a certain emotion “dominates” the others, while one could simply describe the relations between the emotions without necessarily introducing a new term. If at the beginning of the account we are told that “emotions” and “sensations” have the same “content” but differ only as regards its mode of apprehension (organization), towards the end we are reminded that: “the content of emotions are desires and passions or simply drives, and feelings” (p. 14).

The candidate has worked systematically and with great dedication. The thesis has gone through three different versions-drafts, and at each stage one could directly see the candidate’s improvement

of his writing style and argumentative strategy. During the discussion, I can suggest the candidate to focus on the following questions/topics.

- Although the candidate does not want to fall victim to the temptation that consists in wanting to characterize “the will to power” in general in the thought of Nietzsche, it would be great if he could come back to the opening definition of life (“...life is will to power...”) and try to explain what *the will to power* is in light of his connection with morality.
- I also suggest the candidate to elaborate more on the very conclusion of the work, where he asks himself the question why Nietzsche uses the term “power.” Since, so the candidate, “power” could be replaced by “feeling,” one could easily dispense with the former and use exclusively the latter. Although the candidate affirms *apertis verbis* that “there seems to be no theoretical explanation as to why ‘power’”—the argument that “feeling” can replace the term “power” does not seem convincing. If, following the candidate’s examples, we were to replace power with feeling—then we would have “feeling of feeling” and “sensations of feeling” or “Will to feeling” (see p. 44). I am under the impression that if we take out the term “power” we lose what for Nietzsche, and for the candidate himself, is the most crucial element of his account of emotions: their hierarchical organization.
- The two questions which I am here asking the candidate to address are intimately linked: it might be the case that he does not feel need to come back to the overall understanding of the will to power precisely because he takes the very concept of “power” to be dispensable. But if this is not the case, then an overall retrospective account of what Nietzsche means by “the will to power” cannot be avoided.

Depending on how the discussion goes, I propose the final grade to be between *very good* and *excellent*.

Prague, December 28th, 2021

Daniele De Santis

