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Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

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

I. Main Direction

The aim of Jan Krajc (henceforward author) is to offer a thorough analysis of the concept of will to power as put forward in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals* (though the *Nachlass* is marginally taken into consideration as well). Rather than offering a picture of Nietzsche's will to power painted in broad strokes, the author's intention is to retrieve the concept from a close analysis of key passages.

The main line of the argument is founded on the interrelation of emotions, sensations, morality, and will to power. According to the author, since "moralities too are only a sign-language of the emotions" (p. 11), emotions and morality are key to understanding the will to power. Emotions express themselves in morality; yet it is the will to power that places the urge of morality into the human being. Thus, emotion, morality, and will to power are closely interconnected, as illustrated on the ascetic ideal in the last part of the paper.

II. Individual Sections and Critical Remarks

The author's procedure is remarkable and, in many respects, independent of contemporary scholarship and secondary literature. In developing his argument, the author meticulously follows clusters of motives. This is even more remarkable if we take into consideration that, especially in Nietzsche's scholarship, such a procedure is rare. Often authors, impressionistically "travel" from one idea to the next.

However, the author's procedure has its serious downsides. First, the attempt to attribute to Nietzsche a conceptually clear, even systematically closed philosophy of the will, is not convincing. Or, to be more explicit, we know that Nietzsche never offered anything comparable. Even Nietzsche knew. Still, this might not be a problem. After all, it is legitimate to read a text against its "spirit" and thus uncover new perspectives. Nietzsche himself might be the last to protest.



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However, at this point, we encounter the most serious downside of the chosen procedure. It would be indeed remarkable if the author managed to shed new light on Nietzsche's philosophy by means of a close reading and precise argumentative work. Yet, I do not think that he does a very good job in this regard. Often, his arguments are more confusing than Nietzsche's.

In the first part, the author is concerned with uncovering the relation of emotion, sensation, and words. He arrives at the conclusion that sensations are structures of emotions that are expressed in words; and words, in turn, can be shared with others. Thus, the author claims:

Now, the said connection can be concretized followingly: emotions and sensations are synonymous in terms of their content but differ when it comes to the content's apprehension. In other words: emotions and sensations seem to be the two sides of the same coin (p. 11).

Unfortunately, from the text, it is unclear what the "content's apprehension" is and, eventually, it is unclear too, why they are two sides of the same coin. However, the author obfuscates the analysis further in claiming that now we have arrived at a "ladder of concepts." If emotions and sensations are "two sides of the same coin," they cannot form the basis of a "ladder of concepts," which suggests that there is a hierarchy.

Further, the author claims:

Hence, we have a ladder of concepts whose first step are emotions which also means claiming that morality accompanies all the concepts that are present on that particular ladder because emotions share the content of sensations' while words express it (p. 12).

It is unclear how – from the fact that we have arrived at a ladder of concepts – *anything* about morality can be derived.



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Later, we read that emotions stand above drives and passions; they are a complex structure of drives and passions. At this stage, the author takes up yet another capacity into the equation, namely thinking: Thinking is the act of one drive “standing over another”, while emotion is the “result of this standing over another” (p. 13). Once again, such a wording is far from clear. Based on this, it seems impossible to fathom the relation between thinking and emotion. In the last step, emotions and drives are taken to be the very essence of the will.

In the next chapter, the author extends his argument: He claims that the community presides over the type of inner experiences the individual has. Thus, the individual is determined by the values of the society; sensations derive from society. In the subsequent part, the author aims at elucidating Nietzsche’s thesis, according to which the “will to overcome an emotion is ultimately only the will of another emotion or of several others” (p. 30). It needs to be said that, once again, the author’s phrasing is very difficult to decipher.

‘The will to overcome an emotion’ ultimately means to be experiencing a multiplicity of feelings and an emotion of command (resulting in another feeling, a feeling of power) that are the results of the relationship of a side of us consisting of the emotion to be overcome (commanded) and a side of us consisting of a bundle of emotions (or of their content) (p. 30).

In the last part, the author convincingly shows that the so-called ascetic ideal is the very embodiment of the will to power. Eventually, he takes up two interpretations of Nietzsche’s will to power, namely Gilles Deleuze’s and Pavel Kouba’s.

This critical digression is highly questionable, though. Both authors have put forward insightful interpretations of Nietzsche’s philosophy as such. To extract what they have to say about the will to power does not appear legitimate. Obviously, any author who interprets Nietzsche’s rich and contradictory œuvre needs to take a specific position and pay the prize for it. Evaluating one piece of this interpretative edifice does not make sense. In fact, this undertaking on the author’s part discloses the problematic nature of his own interpretation: It is very difficult to interpret the “will to power” convincingly without showing a lot more about



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Nietzsche. In fact, to offer a bigger interpretative picture is indispensable for a thinker of Nietzsche's genre.

IV. Main Critical Points in Summary

As mentioned above, numerous of the key distinctions are unclear, and often, they are unconvincing. Is it indeed the fact that the will to power is merely a higher intensity of emotions? Why would Nietzsche, if this were the case, resort to this very distinctive term "will to power"? I do not doubt that emotions have been important for Nietzsche, but so was thinking (though he certainly did not want to superimpose thinking on emotions). However, I doubt that he would trade thinking for emotions. As many authors have convincingly shown, what Nietzsche aims at is a different model of subjectivity, not a hierarchical but a homeostatic structure of cognitive, affective, even physical capabilities.¹ *During the defence, I would like to hear a clear and succinct exposition of the relation between emotion, sensation, will, and thinking.*

It needs to be additionally noticed that this BA thesis shows certain elementary flaws. It is not unusual for the author to cite an entire page of Nietzsche's work. However, the author's job is to summarize the passages concisely and adequately (see especially p. 32 f.). However, an even graver problem is that, throughout the entire paper, the author does not use *any* secondary literature. It is only in the conclusion that he criticizes Deleuze and Kouba. However, since his own distinctions are far from clear, the criticism of established scholars and philosophers seems inappropriate. In the bibliography, the author cites *two* further works of secondary literature, however, the author has not shown where and how he has used them – he *never cites them in the text!*² This is not only a formal fault, if the author engaged with secondary literature actively and explicitly, he would have succeeded to arrive at a clearer formulation of this arguments.

¹ See e.g. P. Katsafavans, *The Nietzschean Self. Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

² There are other, though less serious, problems too. The author does not use punctuation in a proper manner. Every footnote needs to end with a period, even if it comprises only of a bibliographical reference. Further, in Czech, we do not use capital letters in the titles. Thus, it is not *Mimo Dobro a Zlo*, but *Mimo dobro a zlo*.



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V. Conclusion

The work displays some major imperfections. Key distinctions have not been adequately worked out. Moreover, the author has not shown to have mastered skills that are to be demonstrated in a BA thesis. On the other hand, he has tried to put forward an original argument. Despite my critical remarks that bear both on the form and content of the thesis, I do not doubt that the author does have an original perspective on Nietzsche. Accordingly, I am convinced that the work does have its merit and that the author has shown philosophical potential. However, due to the deficiencies noted above, I suggest the work to be graded as *good*. If the defence is successful, I assume that the grade can be changed to *very good*.

In Prague, January 23, 2022

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