

Between πόλεμος and δύναμις: the notion of power as origin of the noble and slave morality in Nietzsche's *On the genealogy of morals*

Entre πόλεμος e δύναμις: a noção de poder como
origem da moral do senhor e do escravo na
Genealogia da moral de Nietzsche

Hernán Esteban Guerrero Troncoso¹

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the first treatise of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, regarding the historical origins of the noble and slave morality, and proposes the intrinsic possession or lack of power as a key notion to understand these origins. Given the significance that Nietzsche ascribed to the Ancient world, the notion of power will be elucidated through a comparison with some selected texts by Heraclitus and Plato. The first part deals with intrinsic power as the primary source of the noble morality, its consequences with regards to the notion of good and the image human beings have of themselves and their place in the world. The second part presents powerlessness as the root of all moral resentment, i.e. of the slave morality, focusing on Plato's conception of the *ἰδέα*, as well as his definition of being as the power (*δύναμις*) to perform an action or to be acted upon. The third part synthesizes the previous sections and shows the relation between the noble and slave morality regarding both power and cruelty, i.e. their own account of what good and evil are.

Keywords: Greek philosophy, Heraclitus, history of morality, Homer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, Paul Rée.

RESUMO

Este artigo destaca a Primeira Dissertação da *Genealogia da moral* de Nietzsche, sobre as origens históricas da moral do senhor e do escravo, e propõe a posse intrínseca ou falta de poder como uma noção-chave para entender essas origens. Dada a relevância que Nietzsche atribuiu ao mundo antigo, a noção de poder será elucidada através de uma comparação com alguns textos selecionados de Heráclito e Platão. A primeira parte trata do poder

¹ Profesor de la Universidad Católica del Maule, Facultad de Ciencias Religiosas y Filosóficas, Departamento de Filosofía. Campus San Miguel, Avda. San Miguel 3605, Talca, Chile. Email: herrguerrero@gmail.com.

intrínseco como fonte principal da moralidade do senhor, suas consequências em relação à noção de bem e à imagem que os seres humanos tinham de si mesmos e de seu lugar no mundo. A segunda parte apresenta a impotência como a raiz de toda a moral do ressentimento, ou seja, da moralidade do escravo, a concepção de Platão de ἰδέαι, bem como a sua definição de ser como o poder (δύναμις) para executar uma ação ou para ser posta em prática. A terceira parte sintetiza as seções anteriores e mostra a relação entre a moral do senhor e do escravo em relação ao poder e à crueldade, ou seja, sua própria explicação do que são o bem e o mal.

Palavras-chave: filosofia grega, Heráclito, história da moralidade, Homero, Friedrich Nietzsche, Platão, Paul Rée.

Vielleicht, daß man einige Jahrhunderte später urtheilen wird, daß alles deutsche Philosophiren darin seine eigentliche Würde habe, ein schrittweises Wiedergewinnen des antiken Bodens zu sein, und daß jeder Anspruch auf „Originalität“ kleinlich und lächerlich klinge im Verhältnisse zu jenem höheren Anspruche der Deutschen, das Band, das zerrissen schien, neu gebunden zu haben, das Band mit den Griechen, dem bisher höchst gearteten Typus „Mensch.“
F. Nietzsche, Nachgelassene Fragmente August – September 1885, 41 [4] (KSA 11, 679.)

Introduction

Generally regarded as one of Nietzsche's most accessible works, *On the Genealogy of Morals* could also be considered as one of his most cryptic and elusive. So much so that in a recent article it has been asserted that it could be read as a “text-book parody,” a book that, in the guise of an academic treatise on morals, promises an historical investigation on the foundations of morality, only to conclude with the assertion that any moral inquiry is completely worthless, since both morals and human beings have no intrinsic value at all (ZGM III § 28; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 411-412; Inkpin, 2018, p. 145-148.) Therefore, its genuine character would elude any casual reader, except the ones this work is intended for, anyone who “first read my earlier writings and has not spared some trouble in doing so” (ZGM prol. § 8; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 255; 1989, p. 22.) This last statement suggests something that will be further developed in Nietzsche's prologues to the new editions of his writings and at the core of his *Ecce homo* – that his thought is just as systematic as the thought of any other modern philosopher, although it should not be regarded as a system such as Hegel's, namely as a portrayal of the unfolding of the various stages of the only philosophy purely in the element of thinking. On the contrary, Nietzsche's writings should rather be read as different stages of the development of his thought, as parts of a whole that determine the place and the scope of the other parts, whose position is in turn determined by these.

While some scholars claim that the historical context presented by Nietzsche could easily be dismissed, since many of his affirmations are difficult – and sometimes impossible – to prove (Inkpin, 2018, p. 143,) it is nevertheless true that his interpretation of the Greek world is both provocative and comprehensive, because of his familiarity with the literary sources, specially of the archaic era.² It is precisely his philological background and profound admiration for the Greek world one of the features that makes this work – all its scientific shortcomings notwithstanding – to stand out in comparison to the main target of its alleged parody, Paul Rée's *The Origin of Moral Sensations*. Nietzsche's assertion that it is “certain that the *historical spirit* itself is lacking”³ in the authors he reacts to could be read as a statement about the relevance, for any moral inquiry, of the different, opposite and mutually exclusive senses in which human beings have understood their own nature along the centuries. Just as the political, religious and economical order have changed everywhere at different points in time, so has the notion of good and bad, because all these changes have their origins in a transformation of the way human beings relate to themselves, to each other, to reality, even to divinity.

This article focuses on the first treatise of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where the historical origins of the noble and slave morality are presented, and proposes power – its possession or the lack thereof – as a key notion to understand these origins. Given the relevance ascribed by our philosopher to historical transformation and as a means to bring forward his dialogue with the Ancient world as well, the notion of power will be elucidated by briefly discussing some selected texts by Heraclitus and Plato, to put the *Genealogy* into a broader historical and philosophical context. The first part deals with power as the primary source of the noble morality, insofar as it is an intrinsic drive to reach one's appointed destiny, its consequences with regards to the notion of good and the image human beings had of themselves and their place in the world. The second part presents powerlessness as the root of all moral resentment, i.e. of the slave morality,

² As Porter points out (2004, p. 12-18), in Nietzsche's time Homer had become, according to G. Vico, “not a person but an idea (*un'idea*) created by the Greeks (though believed in by them)” (Porter, 2004, p. 12.)

³ ZGM I § 2; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 258; 1989, p. 25.

focusing on Plato's conception of the *ιδέαι* – on the *ιδέα* of good in particular – as the foundations of all reality – given that all power to be, either being known as such or unfolding one's own essence, resides in them – as well as his definition of being as the power (*δύναμις*) to perform an action or to be acted upon. The third part synthesizes the previous sections and shows the relation between the noble and slave morality regarding both power and cruelty, i.e. their own account of what good and evil are.

1. Intrinsic power as the origin of the noble morality

The starting point of Nietzsche's inquiry on the origins of morals – and perhaps the main target of his criticism as well (Inkpin, 2018, p. 151-153) – is to be found in Paul Rée's identification between good and utility. According to Rée, the foundations of human morality revolve around egoistic and non-egoistic drives, the source of both good and bad behavior and desires. In general terms, non-egoistic drives – compassion (*Mitleid*), benevolence (*Wohlwollen*) and love of one's neighbor (*Nächstenliebe*) – all seem to derive from an originary unity of wills. Indeed, the opposition and contradiction of wills would be nothing but an appearance, due to the way the only will is represented to the intellect, i.e. as many different wills, in a similar manner as the Kantian thing-in-itself manifests itself in the different bodies in space. At the same time, although the egoistic drives seem to be inherent to human beings, or at least stronger than non-egoistic ones, Rée affirms that the latter are stronger in other animals, such as chimpanzees, than they are in human beings. Consequently, the "herd instinct" would be the source of all non-egoistic drives, and in a sense is typical of a previous evolutionary stage. On the other hand, egoistic drives derive from vanity and the consideration of the future, two aspects lacking in the other, inferior animals, and are stronger in human beings than non-egoistic ones. In any case, non-egoistic drives are praised on account of their utility, "because it brings us closer to a state of greater happiness," even though human beings are not aware of or simply forgot the originary identity between good and usefulness (Rée, 2004, p. 127-139; 2003, p. 89-99; Salanskis, 2013, p. 47-53. 63-65.)

In contrast to this view, Nietzsche claims that there is more than one origin for the notions of "good" and "bad," not only because there are many senses of these terms, but also because they are of a contradictory nature, i.e. what is "good" for one kind of morality is "bad" for the other. Moreover, the origin of all morality should not reside in any notion – such as egoistic or non-egoistic and the like – that could be regarded as a "real predicate," i.e. whose essential determination would deny moral content to any concept on the basis of its opposition to the principle. In the course of this article it will become evident that it is possible to conclude that both for the noble and slave morality the notions of "good" and "bad" revolve

around the possession or the lack of power. In the case of the former, not only the possession of power, but the consciousness of it as well, grants noble men autonomy with regard to their actions and to property and, above all, allows them to be authentic, true to themselves:

[...] the noble mode of valuation [...] acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly – its negative concept "low" [niedrig], "common" [gemein], "bad" [schlecht] is only a subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive, basic concept – filled with life and passion through and through – "we noble ones, we good, beautiful, happy ones!" (ZGM I § 10; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 271; 1989, p. 37.)

The relation between the noble morality and power should not be understood as if the latter were something else, separated from someone who is good – as it is the case in the slave morality –, but as goodness itself. In other words, someone is as good as his or her capacity of acting as only he or she can. "Good," therefore, is an intrinsic power, the power to become him or herself. Consequently, power, not utility – as Rée and the English moralists ultimately claim – should be the foundation of moral actions. Nietzsche's main criticism to Rée's position lies in the fact that it decides what is good or bad according to interest, whether it is for oneself or someone else, according to what will bring something useful, pleasurable, comforting (ZGM I § 2; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 258-260; 1989, p. 25-26; Donnellan, 1982, p. 609-610.) Power, on the other hand, is to be found before and beyond these considerations. It can be destructive, baneful, horrifying. It corresponds to the truth our philosopher is looking for, "plain, harsh, ugly, repellent, unchristian, immoral truth" (ZGM I § 1; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 258; 1989, p. 25.)

For the noble morality, then, the measure that decides what is good and bad consists in the power to become who one is, a measure intrinsic to every human being that depends entirely on his or her actions. This notion of power reflects the active character of this kind of morality, described by Nietzsche in the following terms:

*The "well-born" felt themselves to be the "happy;" they did not have to establish their happiness artificially by examining their enemies, or to persuade themselves, deceive themselves, that they were happy (as all men of **ressentiment** are in the habit of doing); and they likewise knew, as rounded men replete with energy and therefore **necessarily** active, that happiness should not be sundered from action – being active was with them necessarily a part of happiness (whence εὖ πράττειν takes its origin) (ZGM I § 10; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 272; 1989, p. 38.)*

According to these terms, the power described by our philosopher reflects in a certain sense what Heraclitus calls πόλεμος, “the father of all, the king of all, which has manifested some as gods and others as men, some has rendered slaves and others free.”⁴ Just like struggle, conflict and war do, active power expresses itself in order to prevail, regardless of utility or interest, uselessness or detriment. It simply acts according to what it is, and it does not refrain from acting because of the destruction or the pain it could bring. Indeed, it would have been inappropriate for Achaean warriors, for instance, to cultivate the land or to breed animals for their nourishment, in order to avoid the pain and depredation their ransackings brought about. Nietzsche's ironic example of the eagles and the lambs illustrates how both extremes, the ones that act and the ones that are acted upon, relate to one another regarding power, and how power acts without any consideration other than unfolding itself:

To demand of strength [Stärke] that it should not manifest itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength (ZGM I § 13; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 279; 1989, p. 45.)

Moreover, Achilles should be reckoned as the greatest warrior not only due to his outstanding strength, but mostly because of his determination to fulfill his destiny as a warrior. While one of his defining traits is rage – μῆνις, the opening word of the *Iliad*, its main subject and the cause of all hardships for the Achaeans at the beginning of the poem (*Il.* I, 1-7; Homer, 1920a, 1,) – he is capable either of acting out of rage – when he spares the guards sent to take Briseis away from him, because the cause of his rage is Agamemnon (*Il.* I, 326-344; Homer, 1920a, 12-13) – and of surrendering his rage, most notably, after knowing that his friend Patroclus took his place and died in battle: he makes peace with Agamemnon and returns to fight against the Trojans to avenge his friend, taking Hector's life (*Il.* XIX, 40-214; Homer, 1920b, 155-161.) His strength is such that only the intervention of Zeus prevents him from going beyond his fate and entering the walls of Troy (*Il.* XX, 1-31; Homer, 1920b, 169-170.)

In turn, the fact that Achilles should be considered good does not exclude from him actions that are hateful, such as vengeance, violence and murder. Every time he exerts violence on others, he is simply acting according to his ἦθος, to

his warlike disposition. If he had run away from Troy when the dispute with Agamemnon first arose, he would have been deprived of the possibility to become himself, the great warrior he was meant to be, even if that fulfillment implied, as his mother Thetis laments, that his life would not be long (*Il.* I, 414-427; Homer, 1920a, 15; *Il.* XVII, 94-96; 1920b, 135.) On the other hand, it is the same ἦθος that makes him surrender once again his rage, this time to Priam, and hand him over the body of his son, Hector, to be buried according to his dignity as a hero. Achilles acknowledges and respects both the courage of Priam, who risked his life to claim the body of his son, and the value of Hector, the only warrior similar to Achilles because of his disposition and strength (*Il.* XXIV, 468-676; Homer, 1920b, 275-282.)

Heraclitus conceives of this intrinsic disposition, the ἦθος, as the moving power that drives someone to become the one he or she is meant to be, that disposes everything in one's power to fulfill his or her appointed destiny (μοῖρα), as the divine element in men: ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων (fr. 119 DK / fr. 94 Marcovich / fr. 98 Fronterotta.) As S. Darcus points out, the Ephesian thinker was the first to make a philosophical use of ἦθος (Darcus, 1974, p. 393.) As a disposition, it is both intrinsic – because it determines every human being as the one he or she is, the warrior as warrior, the shepherd as shepherd – and acquired – because it is subject to change, so it can be reached or lost – and, above all, is related to what Heraclitus calls γνώμη: “ἦθος ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει” (fr. 78 DK / fr. 90 Marcovich / fr. 54 Fronterotta.) Whereas some contemporary interpreters wonder about whether Heraclitus denies human beings the possibility to reach actual knowledge of reality (Fronterotta, 2013, p. 212-214,) the fragment also raises the question about the nature of the knowledge that distinguishes mortals from immortals, and also regarding its importance, given that it is considered as the highest knowledge. Γνώμη is both judgment and inclination or purpose, i.e. a conscious decision (Chantraine, 1999, p. 224.) The gods have full knowledge of the results of their actions and their destiny, men do not, and therefore their disposition is not able to foresee whether their actions will result in happiness or disgrace.⁵ The fact that men act according to their own disposition, even if they don't know to what purpose or end – unless the gods grant them that knowledge, either directly or through an oracle or a diviner – means that, nevertheless, they are able to give themselves their own destiny. A man can choose to be authentic or not, to carry on his or her intentions or not, and this will result in his or her happiness or doom. Thus, the ἦθος appears as a divine element in men, as their own intrinsic δαίμων⁶

⁴ Heraclitus, fr. 53 DK / fr. 29 Marcovich / fr. 12 Fronterotta: “πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεὺς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.”

⁵ Cf. *Oedipus rex* 1524-1530; Sophocles, 1990, 179-180.

⁶ Δαίμων is etymologically related to δαίωμα, “to distribute, to divide,” cf. Darcus, 1974, p. 394; Chantraine, 1999, p. 246-248. According to Darcus (1974, p. 399-407), ἦθος would be dependent on δαίμων: “[Man's] potential for sharing the Divine is in the *daimon* that shapes his *ethos*.”

and, consequently, as the source of their power that enables them to carry out their actions (Darcus, 1974, p. 399.)

Actually the opposite situation regarding power is to be found in the other kind of morality. In this case, it would be the impotence of the ruling caste, the priests, their lack of power to act according to their own disposition, their abomination of many of the sinister aspects of the noble morality, such as cruelty, that renders them resentful of the powerful. Nevertheless, as Nietzsche points out, this does not mean that they are free from cruelty or vengeance, but only that they repress those sentiments while they condemn them. In their powerlessness, the priestly caste reject and resent the powerful because they would like to occupy their place, and their actions are not moved by an intrinsic power, as in the case of the noble morality, but they are caused by an external, extrinsic mover, God. He is the avenger, the one who will make the powerful pay for their haughtiness, their cruelty, who will bring justice by rendering the powerful powerless and vice versa. At the same time, this intrinsic powerlessness is not to be understood only as an appeal to an extrinsic, almighty mover that is the cause of everything, but also as a denial of all intrinsic value, a denial which results in an attribution of all power to something that transcends each individual and that constitutes the unchanging identity, the essence, the *ιδέα*, something that takes place beyond all that is subjected to change. In the following section, we will address the role of Platonism regarding power and powerlessness in Nietzsche's account of slave morality.

2. Ressentiment as a result of powerlessness

When presenting the most prominent feature of the slave morality, resentment – *ressentiment*, in French in the original, since there is not a German word that could accurately correspond to that term (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 5-10) – our philosopher mentions two main characteristics. The first one affirms that any action of that morality is essentially a reaction, because this is how “natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds” behave, “and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge” (ZGM I § 10; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 270; 1989, p. 36.) The second one maintains that “slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself;’ and this No is its creative deed” (ZGM I § 10; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 270-271; 1989, p. 36.) i.e. that it depends on something else, that lies beyond, to constitute itself out of an absolute rejection of that which differs from it.

Formally speaking, this outline of *ressentiment*, the essential character of slave morality, also reflects Plato's doctrine of ideas, particularly the *ιδέα* of Good (*Resp.* VI, 504 a–509 b; Plato, 2003, 247-255; Wieland, 1976, p. 22-27; Krämer, 2015, p. 137-145.) Presented in the first of the three allegories found at the center of his *Republic*, the allegory of the sun,

the *ιδέα* of Good appears as “the highest knowledge attainable” (τὸ μέγιστον μάθημα, *Resp.* VI, 505 a; Plato, 2003, 248,) the *ιδέα* in virtue of which not only all that is becomes known, but also all generation takes place, while “the Good is not part of being, but remains beyond being, surpassing it in nobility and power” (“οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος,” *Resp.* VI, 508 e-509 b; Plato, 2003, 255.) The relation between the *ιδέα* of Good and reality is the model according to which every other *ιδέα* is related to the things that are and are known because of it. According to this, all power and knowledge – in short, all reality – lies beyond what appears to the senses as being, in the *ιδέα* of it, which is only perceivable by the intellect. In this sense, there is no intrinsic knowledge nor power in what appears as being to the senses, because it depends completely on its *ιδέα*, which transcends the sphere of the senses (*Resp.* VI, 507 b-508 a; Plato, 2003, 253-254; Krämer, 1969, p. 16-18; Wieland, 1976, p. 27-30.)

Plato had already placed power – *δύναμις* – as something common to all beings. As Socrates says, power is something by virtue of which we have the power to do what is in our power, i.e. it enables any agent to act according to its abilities: “φήσομεν δυνάμεις εἶναι γένος τι τῶν ὄντων, αἷς δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς δυνάμεθα ἃ δυνάμεθα καὶ ἄλλο πᾶν ὅτι περ ἂν δύνηται” (*Resp.* V, 477 c; Plato, 2003, 215.) This means that the source of any action does not reside in the agent, but somewhere else, that is extrinsic to it and common to every being. Indeed, the eyes see by virtue of the power to see, the ears hear by virtue of the power of hearing, and so on. Besides, what is more relevant to the present discussion, someone is good by virtue of goodness, one that appears as power (Wieland, 1976, p. 22-27.) Consequently, no person or action is intrinsically good, they can only become good according to the degree in which they participate in the *ιδέα* of good. The power to be good as well as the parameters according to which goodness is to be found lie elsewhere, beyond the one who acts or the action that appear as good.

Moreover, Plato will later state in the *Sophist* that being is nothing but the capacity – *δύναμις* – to perform an action or to be acted upon, *δύναμις εἴτ’ εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν εἴτ’ εἰς τὸ παθεῖν* (*Soph.* 247 e; Plato, 1995, 436; Fronterotta, 1995, 320-324; 2008, p. 188-193; González, 2011, p. 65-71.) In this definition it is possible to observe a reduplication of being: it is a capacity that unfolds either by carrying out an action or by being acted upon, and, at the same time, it is common to both opposites, because the two of them constitute the unfolding of *δύναμις*, and transcends them, since capacity cannot identify itself with one or the other. Consequently, in a certain sense, this definition preserves the most intriguing feature of the *ιδέα* of Good, namely the fact that it always remains *ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*, beyond any determination, even regarding its own definition. In other words, *δύναμις* consists both in the capacity that unfolds either performing or receiving an action and in the primary power that enables this capacity. The former sense involves a determination, whereas

the latter appears as a necessary condition for any determination, a condition that transcends all determination, because it is common to them all.

Around this notion of being as power revolve all other γένη presented by our Plato as the basic structure of reality, change and rest (κίνησις καὶ στασις), identity and difference (τάυτὸν καὶ θάτερον), all of which take part in it – since they belong to the sphere of being, their mutual incompatibility or opposition notwithstanding – while at the same time no other γένος is identical to being, i.e. coextensive with it. Thus, all beings take place as long as they are able to carry out, to unfold their respective essential determination, and they are able to do so because of their taking part in being. On the other hand, being can only be conceived of as capacity in the most general sense. Should being be determined in any way, this determination would exclude from its sphere anything that contradicted it, and nothing other than pure nothingness – which is “not even one” (τὸ μηδέν) and cannot possess any determination at all (*Soph.* 236 d–239 c; Plato, 1995, 417–422,) – contradicts being.

This metaphysical structure of reality, which will remain almost intact for more than two millennia, was, according to Nietzsche, the basis for the slave morality, even before it was interpreted as a relation between a supreme being and all other beings, which are completely dependent of it, as Plato himself does on the *Timaeus*. Regarding the foundation of morality, its main feature consists in the fact that, since power is always beyond reach, with the exception of the supreme being, all the powerless should embrace their condition in order to be good. They do so, but, as our philosopher points out, they do it out of hatred and resentment against the powerful:

The wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone – and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity; and you shall be in all eternity the unblessed, accursed, and damned! (ZGM I § 7; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 267; 1989, p. 34.)

Consequently, given that the structure of reality appears as essentially powerless, because all active power resides elsewhere – in the supreme being, in the ἰδέα – moral powerlessness expresses itself in *ressentiment*. Without alluding directly to power, Nietzsche depicts the morality of resentment as being originated by a notion of political superiority (*politischer Vorrangs-Begriff*) of the priestly caste, which later developed into a notion of superiority of soul (*seelischer Vorrangs-Begriff*;) illustrated by the opposition of the “pure” against the “impure.” The goodness of the former resides in the fact that they wash themselves, avoid certain foods and women, i.e. that they do not have any intercourse with people and things considered base, dirty, deadly (ZGM

I § 6; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 264–265; 1989, p. 31–32.) The ultimate goal of this praise of purity, that developed in all the cures, all punishment against the body, all avoidance of pleasure, is to reach nothingness in the *unio mystica*, in Nirvāna, to become one with the power they lack (ZGM I § 6; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 265–266; 1989, p. 32–33.) The intrinsic powerlessness of the priestly caste, their utter dependence on an extrinsic cause for any action whatsoever, becomes their power, their hope, their way to reject the cruelty of the intrinsically powerful and to sublimate their own cruelty.

3. Both πόλεμος and δύναμις. Power as the principle of all morality

The specular behavior between the noble and the slave morality presented by Nietzsche in the treatise we’ve just examined not only reflects and parodies Rée’s proposal of egoistic and non-egoistic drives as the foundations of morals, but transcends those limits to arrive to the foundations of reality itself, at least the ones traditionally regarded as such since Plato. Given that “good” and “bad” can be – and have been – conceived of by both moralities in contradictory terms – i.e. what one regards as good is bad according to the other and vice versa – they should not be understood as having an absolute, common meaning, but rather as polar opposites, one of them being the positive, active side, and the other the negative, passive side. Consequently, their opposition shows a mutual dependence, as well as the fact that their relative position is determined by a principle they revolve around, namely power.

In the previous sections, we tried to demonstrate that this principle consists in the way human beings interpret the origin of that power, whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic to their own nature. When power is regarded as intrinsic to human nature, the resulting morality is self-affirming. Good is someone who acts according to his or her nature, whose actions show a continual struggle (πόλεμος) to reach his or her own appointed destiny (μοῖρα.) On the other hand, from an extrinsic power stems a morality that is completely dependent on something or someone else, not only to carry out any action, but also to be capable of it and to be able to recognize and qualify the action. Thus, by virtue of goodness, for instance, good actions are recognized as such, someone can perform good deeds and eventually become good, but only up to a certain point, because goodness in itself is inexhaustible, i.e. it could never be possessed in its entirety by anyone or anything, because it lies beyond all that takes part in it (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας.)

Confronted with the noble morality, the morality of those who own riches, who are of noble origin, who are never acted upon by others, of the warriors, the strong, the active, the other morality, the one of those who own nothing, who are vanquished and conquered, who are

incapable of acting, the one that emerges from an utter lack of power, express its powerlessness by resenting the powerful, regarding them as bad, arrogant, violent, cruel. Nevertheless, as Nietzsche points out towards the end of the first treatise, powerlessness does not exclude the slave morality from arrogance, violence and cruelty. On the contrary, they hope for a greater being, such as God, to exert its infinite power on the bad and make them pay for their arrogance, violence and cruelty. This is illustrated by a ferocious parody of the beatitudes and then by quoting Tertullian's graphic description of the Judgement Day (ZGM I § 14-15; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 281-285; 1989, p. 46-52.) Here, Nietzsche tries to show, step by step, how "ideals are made," i.e. how the morality of resentment takes place. First, all that implies intrinsic powerlessness – weakness, lowliness, incapacity of vengeance – is transformed into a virtue – goodness of heart, humility, unwillingness to revenge – a behavior commanded by God and that ultimately leads to eternal "bliss" (*Seligkeit*.) This is the first creative act of the slave morality, characterized by Nietzsche as a necessary "inversion of the value-imposing sight" (*Umkehrung des werthsetzenden Blicks*), one that puts the origin of all actions, both good and bad, beyond the slave morality, since it does not properly act, but reacts (ZGM I § 10; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 270-271; 1989, p. 36-37.) Secondly, for the morality of *ressentiment* even actions themselves depend on an extrinsic power, by virtue of which they are to be reckoned as good or bad. In this sense, as our philosopher points out, the slaves do not expect to overturn the strong by themselves, they do not desire retaliation, but yearn for the "triumph of justice [...] the victory of God, of the just God, over the godless" (ZGM I § 14; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 282-283; 1989, p. 48.) The relation between the extrinsic character of the power that moves them and their passive, reactive nature becomes apparent in the fact that they are just by virtue of justice, not by themselves, that they will prevail when God prevails over His enemies, not because of their actions. Thus, even in their own actions they are ultimately acted upon by an extrinsic, active principle – the virtues – and they prevail through the final victory of God on the Judgement Day.

This last step, the arrival of the "kingdom of God," is presented by Nietzsche as the fulfillment of the slaves' desire to become masters, of the weak to become strong, and, above all, of their hunger and thirst for vengeance. For Nietzsche, quoting Thomas Aquinas and Tertullian, the eternal bliss is nothing more than taking infinite delight in seeing the fall of the powerful into damnation, cast into the flames forever (ZGM I § 15; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 284-285; 1989, p. 48-52.) Ironically, in the preceding chapter Nietzsche had drawn attention to the fact that the weak desire "justice" or "the just God" to prevail over the powerful, rather than do it themselves (ZGM I § 14; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 282-283; 1989, p. 48.) Thus, by enjoying the eternal bliss of seeing their oppressors receiving the long-awaited punishment for their haughtiness, the slaves appear much

more cruel and vengeful than their enemies while, at the same time, they refuse to take any part in it, given that this cruelty is the result of the triumph of "the just God," not of their actions. They simply have been led by what God wanted, by the promise made to them in exchange for their subjection to Him.

This brings us back to the beginning of this section. By showing not only that vengeance and cruelty are common to both the noble and the slave morality, but also that the actions of the latter are informed by them – i.e. that the *ressentiment* is a product of the desire of vengeance and the cruel hope of an eternal punishment of the enemies that, in turn, are consequences of the powerlessness of the slave morality – Nietzsche has traced the origins of morality in the notion of power. All other values are deemed good or bad according to their relation to power. In other words, its intrinsic or extrinsic character, the possession or lack thereof, determines the kind of morality, whether it is active or passive, self-affirming or dependent on actions that come from elsewhere. In this sense, our philosopher seems to follow – and, at the same time, to transform – Plato's concept of power, conceived as the capacity to carry out action or to be acted upon. Whereas for the Athenian philosopher *δύναμις* is beyond *ποιεῖν* and *παθεῖν*, the latter consisting in the unfolding of the essential activity of the former, for Nietzsche power (*Macht*) is equivalent to action – one that is self-affirming, self-imposing, self-preserving – while the absence of power implies dependence on and subjection to another, being as long as one is acted upon by another.

Moreover, Nietzsche's explicit denial of proposals such as Plato's *ἰδέα* of Good – or rather the notion of *ἰδέα* itself – or Kant's "thing-in-itself," given that they conceive of the foundations of reality beyond reality, leads him to identify intrinsic power not with *δύναμις*, but rather with *πόλεμος*. On the other hand, since *δύναμις* depends on action in an active (*ποιεῖν*) and passive sense (*παθεῖν*), it would correspond to extrinsic power:

A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect – more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a "subject," can it appear otherwise. For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed —

the deed is everything (ZGM I § 13; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 279; 1989, p. 45.)

Even if Nietzsche's intention – or alleged intention, if the *Genealogy* is mainly a parody – in this treatise was to trace the origins of morality, in order to demonstrate that there are two moralities, two opposites meanings of good and bad, it is also evident that the paradox at the end of the book, his assertion that “As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness [...] morality will gradually perish now: this is the great spectacle [...] the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles” (ZGM III § 27; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 410-411; 1989, p. 161) also points in another direction. Even if the prevailing morality, Christian morality, appears as founded on nothing, the will that established that morality, that wanted and still wants that nothing, is nevertheless a power.

In fact, the will appears only when human being gives him or herself a purpose, a meaning, to explain why is he or she on Earth. The void, the emptiness, the fact that life does not have a meaning was supposedly filled with a sense that explains all suffering, that prevents anyone from feeling similar to “a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense.” But the will that arose from that sense became, according to our philosopher, a “hatred of the human [...] [a] horror of the senses, of reason itself, [a] fear of happiness and beauty, [a] longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself,” in short, “a will to nothingness, a revulsion (*Widerwille*) to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a will!” (ZGM III § 28; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 412; 1989, p. 162-163.) Therefore, instead of an absolute power that simply manifests itself, the will appears as a power that strives to reach something that is not yet or not anymore, that extends beyond its current limits, because all limitation, all “here” and “beyond” are conceived of as such.

Consequently, Nietzsche ends his *Genealogy of Morals* in an ambiguous note. Although “man would rather will nothingness than *not* will” (ZGM III § 28; Nietzsche, 1999, p. 412; 1989, p. 163.) this doesn't mean that it should always be this way. Both the noble and the slave morality, specially the latter, could be reckoned as products of the will, i.e. of a power that needs a sense, that depends on truth in order to act, but their time seems to be coming to an end. The final collapse of all morality and all search for truth predicted by our philosopher is “the most hopeful of all spectacles” as well. This could be also interpreted as the collapse of will conceived of as a δύναμις, as a power that depends on ποιείν and παθεῖν, and the resurgence of another will, a self-affirming power, πόλεμος. This resurgence brings us back to ancient, archaic times, to the times of Achilles and Dionysus, but also to an unknown time in the future, the time of the advent of the overman, whose πρωτότυπος is the Greek man, “[der] bisher höchst geartete Typus ‘Mensch.’”

References

- CHANTRAINE, P. 1999. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Histoire des mots, avec un Supplément sous la direction de A. Blanc et al. Paris, Klincksieck.
- DARCUS, S. 1974. “Daimon” as a Force Shaping “Ethos” in Heraclitus. *Phoenix*, **28**(4):390-407.
- DONNELLAN, B. 1982. Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Ree: Cooperation and Conflict. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, **43**(4):595-612.
- FRONTEROTTA, F. 1995. L'être et la participation de l'autre: Une nouvelle ontologie dans le Sophiste. *Les Études philosophiques*, **3**:311-353.
- FRONTEROTTA, F. 2008. La notion de δύναμις dans le Sophiste de Platon: *koinōnia* entre les formes et *methexis* du sensible à l'intelligible. In: M. CRUBELIER et al. (eds.), *Dunamis: Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*. Leuven, Peeters, p. 187-224.
- GONZÁLEZ, F.J. 2011. Being as Power in Plato's *Sophist* and *Beyond*. In: A. HAVLÍČEK; F. KARFÍK (eds.), *Plato's Sophist: Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*. Praha, Oikoymenh, p. 63-95.
- HERACLITUS. 1960. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Ed. H. Diels and W. Kranz. 9th ed. Berlin, Weidmannsche Verlagbuchhandlung, vol. 1, p. 139-190.
- HERACLITUS. 1978. *Frammenti*. Ed. M. Marcovich. Firenze, La Nuova Italia.
- HERACLITUS. 2013. *Frammenti*. Ed. F. Fronterotta. Milano, BUR.
- HOMER. 1920a. *Ilias I-XII*. In: D. MONRO; T.W. ALLEN (eds.), *Homeri Opera*. vol. 1, 3rd ed. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- HOMER. 1920b. *Ilias XIII-XXIV*. In: MONRO; ALLEN (eds.), *Homeri Opera*. vol. 2, 3rd ed. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- INKPIN, A. 2018. Nietzsche's *Genealogy*: A Textbook Parody. *Nietzsche-Studien*, **47**(1):140-166.
- KRÄMER, H.J. 1969. ΕΠΕΚΕΙΝΑ ΤΗΣ ΟΥΣΙΑΣ. Zu Platon, *Politeia* 509 B. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, **51**(1),1-30.
- KRÄMER, H.J. 2005. Die Idee des Guten: Sonnen- und Linien-gleichnis (Buch VI 504a–511e.). In: O. HÖFFE (ed.), *Platons Politeia*. Berlin, Akademie Verlag, p. 135-153.
- NIETZSCHE, F. 1989. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In: *On the Genealogy of Morals. Ecce homo*. Transl. by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York, Vintage Books, p. 13-163.
- NIETZSCHE, F. 1999. Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift. In: G. COLLI; M. MONTINARI (eds.), *Kritische Studienausgabe*. München; Berlin, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; De Gruyter, vol. 5, p. 245-412.
- PLATO. 1995. *Sophista*. In: E.A. DUKE et al. (eds.), *Platonis opera*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, vol. 1, p. 383-471.
- PLATO. 2003. *Platonis Rempublicam*. Ed. S.R. Slings. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- PORTER, J.I. 2004. Nietzsche, Homer, and the Classical Tradition. In: P. BISHOP (ed.), *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*. Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, p. 7-26.
- RÉE, P. 2003. The Origin of Moral Sensations. In: R. SMALL (transl. / ed.), *Basic Writings*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, p. 81-167.

- RÉE, P. 2004. Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen. In: H. TREIBER (ed.), *Gesammelte Werke 1875–1885*. Berlin, De Gruyter, p. 126-211.
- SALANSKIS, E. 2013. Moralistes darwiniens: les psychologies évolutionnistes de Nietzsche et Paul Rée. *Nietzsche-Studien*, **42**(1):44-66.
- SOPHOCLES. 1990. Oedipus rex. In: H. LLOYD-JONES; N.G. WILSON (eds.), *Sophoclis Fabulae*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 119-180.
- WIELAND, W. 1976. Platon und der Nutzen der Idee: Zur Funktion der Idee des Guten. *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, **1**(1):19-33.

Submitted on March 07, 2019.

Accepted on June 10, 2019.