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The Concept of Violence in the Evolution of Nietzsche's Thought

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to present the idea of violence in Nietzsche's work, seen as a basic principle that organizes and unites different elements of his philosophy. Violence is one of its crucial categories, which he exploits in his descriptions and analyses of metaphysical, historical and social-cultural reality. In what follows, I shall examine different meanings and renditions of violence in Nietzsche, both in their negative as well as positive aspects. I shall start from an attempt to locate Nietzsche's understanding of violence within the Western philosophical tradition. Then, I will discuss it in the light of the evolution of Nietzsche's work. By analyzing the positive and constructive meaning of violence, I shall be able to conclude the essay by emphasizing that in Nietzsche's political project violence acquires a spiritual and sublime nature.

Keywords:

violence, cruelty, conflict, struggle, antagonism, domination, mastery

Violence – conveying a sense of force, cruelty, contradiction, opposition, conflict, struggle and war, and exploitation – is one of the most crucial categories of Nietzsche's thought: it constitutes the core principle of reality and determines all its levels and phenomena. It is of either metaphysical, cosmological or anthropological nature, hence its threefold manifestation: spiritual, physical-moral, and symbolic-cultural. Nietzsche will also venture to characterize another unexpected but significant aspect of violence – its existential character. In what follows, I shall examine the different aspects and meanings attributed by Nietzsche to the idea of violence and I shall

do so by looking at his philosophy from the perspective of its consequent evolution. I shall conclude with an argument that violence finds its highest, positive significance in its spiritual forms.

By way of a philosophical rehabilitation of violence and of life's fierceness embedded in it, Nietzsche opposes the idealistic-rationalist tradition of the West with its vision of the cosmos as a rational, hierarchically structured order of being which ascends toward a supreme being (idea, God) and unites with the highest values it embodies. Since Plato, the world we live in has been seen as the best of all possible worlds. Evil – this supreme categorical form of violence – was thought to be of negative, contingent and external nature. It originated either from the matter of the act of Creation (metaphysical and physical evil) or from human will violating the order of being (moral evil). Nietzsche thinks about evil in a different way; it is evil that acquires full positivity, whereas the phenomena wherein violence seemingly does not occur are posited as either its different forms or the states of its enfeeblement. Therefore, the transition from violence to a lack thereof, as well as from positivity of being to its negativity, is tantamount to a transition from existence to its disappearance: from creative becoming to pure instinct of self-preservation which amounts to life that is reactionary and passive. It is this descending movement of self-destruction and life's decline that Nietzsche analyzes as nihilism and decadence.

By denying the idealistic-rationalist tradition and by elevating evil-violence, Nietzsche radicalizes his critique of the metaphysical tradition. The aggrandizement of violence brings about the necessity to grant history philosophical significance: since Rousseau, history has become a realm of the dialectical realization of humanity. With history, this anthropogenic significance is attributed also to violence.

The forerunners of Nietzsche's dark vision of the world were the Marquis de Sade and Schopenhauer. Both thinkers ignored the historical dimension of evil and violence, inscribing it into the very order of nature (it is one of the organizing ontological principles of de Sade's philosophical system, but Nietzsche was completely incognizant of this analogy) and of being (for Schopenhauer violence-evil arises from the individualization of the metaphysical will as being-in-itself). In maintaining the speculative nature of violence, Nietzsche rejects both its apotheosis (de Sade) and its negation (Schopenhauer).

In certain ways Nietzsche is close to a historiosophical understanding of violence as the anthropogenic principle of human history. However, he goes beyond the horizon of German Idealism. Firstly, he relates the anthropogenic function of violence not only to the social dimension of human being (to Objective Spirit, in Hegel), but also to its spiritual dimension, to the genesis and evolution of human consciousness itself, including moral consciousness. Under the influence of English genealogists, he transforms historical analysis into genealogical analysis, which demystifies idealist ideas concerning the autonomy of human consciousness.

Secondly, he rejects the emancipative perspective of Romantic historiosophy, along with its utopic faith in the existence of a future society freed of evil and violence. In Nietzsche's thought we will not find a naive apotheosis of violence or a glorification of the fierceness of existence. He attenuates and relativizes them in so far as in his positive projects they are sublimated and granted more spiritual, symbolic-cultural character. It must also be kept in mind that Nietzsche's apology of violence is often characterized by rhetorical-metaphorical exaggeration and provocation directed towards the idealistic understanding of man and the world.

Nietzsche's aggrandizement of violence refers us to the opposition of master and slave: the master's violence is active, it serves his culture-creative forces. On the other hand, the slave's violence is reactive and allies itself with forces that lead to life's collapse and degeneration.

Nietzsche's understanding of violence develops along with the evolution of his thought. It unfolds within three phases: the first one is connected with *The Birth of Tragedy*, the second one opens with *Human, All too Human*, and the third one can be observed in his mature thought from the 1880s.

The Early Period

In *The Birth of Tragedy*¹ Nietzsche introduces a Dionysian metaphysics, aiming to explain the sense of human suffering and to give it a higher, cultural meaning. Connected with this tragic vision of life, violence refers to the fundamental conflicts of life and has metaphysical meaning. Although Nietzsche presents a post-Schopenhauerian metaphysics based on the opposite of being-in-itself and phenomenon – Dionysus and Apollo – he does not relate violence, like Schopenhauer, to appearances, to the conflicts of particular wills engendering evil and suffering. Instead, he locates it at the metaphysical level: violence originates from the conflict between Dionysus and Apollo, between two antagonistic principles of being and human existence. Dionysus, being-in-itself, is the Primordial Unity, an excess of existence expressing itself in contradictions, which tear it apart and engender suffering – in “the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the Primordial Unity” (BT, 55, §6). The solution of this inner primordial conflict of Dionysus is its exteriorization and its transformation into the conflict between Dionysus itself and Apollo. Due to his self-negation and self-splitting, his violation is directed against himself. Fleeing from itself, Dionysus gets Apollo, its opposite, off its chest – Apollo represents the visible order and harmony, clarity and knowledge, together with the individual as his principle.

The relationship between Dionysus and Apollo is also characterized by contradiction and opposition, it is “the strife of these two hostile principles” (BT, 43, §4), that determines the rhythm of ancient Greece's history. The relationship is characterized by their mutual violence. Apollo dismembers the primordial unity of being, annihilates the mystical union of the individual with the core of being itself – “his oneness with the primal source of the universe” (BT, 29, §2) – he separates the beings and the individuals from themselves, draws the lines between them, creating “a world torn asunder and shattered into individuals,” and “the state of individuation,” becomes “the source and primal cause of all suffering” (BT, 82, §10), that is, metaphysical suffering. However, Apollo is not able to ultimately repress Dionysus, who superseded, returns in the form of mystical longing for return to the Dionysian ground of being. This return is brought about in the state of Dionysian intoxication, in Bacchic crowds across ancient Greece. This state leads to the vanishing of subjectivity, to “the dissolution of the individual and his unification with primordial existence” (BT, 69, §8).

Due to man's belonging to both orders of being, his attitude toward the possibility to return to the Dionysian womb is tainted by ambivalence. Man's nature corresponds to, as has been described by Rudolf Otto, *tremendum fascinans* experienced before *sacrum*. It is characterized by dual affectivity, “duality in the emotions,” expressing itself in “the cry of horror or the yearning wail over an irretrievable loss” (BT, 31, §2). On the one hand, the mystical longing for the unity of being is accompanied by “the joy in the annihilation of the individual” (BT, 127, §16). That is why the sufferance connected with annihilation is rewarded with “Dionysian wisdom,” “the wisdom of suffering” (BT, 136, 135), that is, with “the metaphysical comfort that eternal life flows on indestructibly beneath the whirl of phenomena” (BT, 136, §18). On the other hand, the violence and “cruelty” of Dionysian nature, the danger of “the rupture of the *principium individuationis*” (BT, 31, §2), sets up the existential, “will-paralyzing mood” of “awe and horror,” manifesting in “nauseating reflections on the awfulness or absurdity of existence” (BT, 62, §7).

The antagonistic and agonistic relationship between Apollo and Dionysus is “an eternal conflict between *the theoretic* and *the tragic view of things*” (BT, 131, §17). According to Nietzsche, it determines all levels of human existence. It is a cornerstone of the history of Ancient Greece, Greek politics and finally Greek tragedy behind which lies the antagonism between music, poetry, myth and epos.

1) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Wiliam August Haussmann (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1910); hereafter this book will be cited in the main text as BT followed by page number and paragraph number.

However, the philosophical development of *The Birth of Tragedy* culminates in the idea of the reconciliation and “brotherhood” of Apollo and Dionysus which is tantamount to the abolition of their antagonism at all levels of their manifestation. This reconciliation is attained – and in this regard Nietzsche follows Schelling and the Romantics – in aesthetic appearance and in art conceived of as the highest metaphysical activity wherein human existence can find its justification: in Greek tragedy in which the Apollonian drama expresses the tragic “Dionysian wisdom” and in which the connection between music, lyric, myth and epos is effectuated. In this way, tragic art provides an insight into the tragic essence of being, “without a renunciation of individual existence,” and, “without demolishing its creator,” at the same time (BT, 163, §21). Nietzsche speaks here of the Dionysian contemplation of being that allows one to maintain the distance from it and that neutralizes its horror. Understood in such a way, art is for Nietzsche a foundation of tragic Greek culture which he locates in the pre-Socratic period in the history of Ancient Greece.

In his later work, Nietzsche rejects the possibility of a final mediation (including an aesthetic one) between the conflicts and contradictions of life. He admits that his early efforts at creating an artistic metaphysics, one that could annul the contradictions and antagonisms between the Apollonian and the Dionysian through the ultimate synthesis of being, were much too immersed in eschatological and dialectical thinking.²

As we know, in the *Nachlass*, which dates from the time of writing of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche, adopting a neo-Kantian position, rejected the possibility of a philosophical justification of dualistic Dionysian metaphysics. Referring to pre-Socratic thought, especially that of Heraclitus, he developed the monistic, tragic vision of the world which was continued in a speculative dimension in his mature thought. It is a vision of being as pre-human chaos and becoming that originates out of itself and then devours its finite creatures, in this way manifesting itself as a creative-destructive force that develops out of the conflict of opposites and contradictions, strife, violence and atrocity. In his struggle against meaningless, cosmic being, man illuminates the tragic obscurity of his existence by attributing to it a higher sense. With this point, Nietzsche combines pre-Socratic inspiration with Schopenhauerian Idealism in the theory of human genius. However, he does not refer idealism to an extra-phenomenal realm, but to man’s mundane effort to make sense of his existence through philosophy, myth, and religion. Culture acquires in this way an existential and metaphysical meaning. Pre-Socratic culture is regarded by Nietzsche as the realm of agonistic struggle and as a competition of philosophers for the truth that enlightens the obscurity of existence and can reveal to us “the absolute value of existence.”³ It is also a struggle for spiritual power over the masses on which the philosophers impose their interpretation and meaning of the world.

In his depiction of the ancient *polis* in *The Greek State*, Nietzsche envisages an elitist culture being the realm of the activity of genius as a spiritual guide and ideal. The task of the state is to create the conditions for the growth of genius to which the masses – that “fertile soil for the development of art” (GS, 166) – are subjected to, in the same way as is the whole social system, which is necessarily based on social oppression and slavery. It is “a cruel-sounding truth” – Nietzsche argues – that “*slavery belongs to the essence of a culture*” (GS, 166). Violence and cruelty (of the state) are thus the basic requirements for the existence of a vivid, robust culture: “the same cruelty that we found at the heart of every culture also lies at the heart of every powerful religion, and in the nature of *power* in general” (GS, 167). In addition, we can add that Nietzsche develops here the character-

2) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony Mario Ludovici (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 69, Chapter *Why I Write so Excellent Books: The Birth of Tragedy*.

3) Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Greek State,” in *On the Genealogy of Morality* [and other essays], ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 166; hereafter this work will be cited in the main text as GS followed by page number.

istic idea for his thought, one that is directed against all the contra-actual conceptions, that force and violence are the essence of all social, judicial and political relations: "Power (*Gewalt*) gives the first *right*, and there is no right that is not fundamentally presumption, usurpation and violence" (GS, 168).⁴

By serving "a much loftier designation" (GS, 171), that is, by serving the growth of culture and the formation of genius,⁵ the state holds "the blind, egoistic mass," together with "the iron clamp" (GS, 169–170). It transforms the life of the egoistic individual into a figure of a citizen who can step "*beyond* the measure that is necessary for the individual," and who is ready to sacrifice his life "in the service of the minority" (GS, 166). In this way, the state's use of violence becomes an intermediary between nature and genius in which nature gains self-consciousness and realizes its highest spiritual potential.

In his later work Nietzsche frees himself from his early idealism laced with cynicism, since he acknowledges morality to be a product of the will to power of the weak and he attributes historiosophical meaning to the cultural, that is, symbolic violence undermining in this way its cynical apology by way of its spiritualization and sublimation.

The Middle Period

Before Nietzsche develops his understanding of violence based on the theory of the will to power, in what has been called positivist period of his work, he presents, in *Human, All too Human*,⁶ a naturalistic and utilitarian vision of the evolutionary progress of mankind and culture, whereby there is progressive elimination of violence from the life of individuals, societies and nations. This reduction is meant to capture the transition from unenlightened egoism and primitive passions, resulting in superstitions, violence, cruelty, war, religious conflicts, to enlightened and rational egoism on the ground of which the individual addresses mundane life and follows its individual benefits, without limiting the similar egoism of other individuals. This rational egoism results in the elimination of atrocity, in soothing the savage beast and softening of the laws – "justice in all matters must become greater, the instinct of violence weaker" (HAH, §452).

From this perspective, Nietzsche develops his genealogy by referring to English genealogists, who demystify the idealistic, metaphysical-religious ideas of man and the world. He shows that the alleged selfless nature of moral motivations and of the activities of individuals, sanctioned by idealism, results from forgetting the egoistic nature of those individuals' activities whose consequences turn out to be useful for others, as well as from forgetting the constraints behind morality (HAH, §99), and from forgetting the balance of forces behind judicial and legal institutions (HAH, §92).

With regard to culture, genealogy, in turn, demonstrates that behind its loftiest ideals there lies violence and "coarser, commoner material, falsehood, violence, the boundless extension of every individual 'J', of every separate people" (HAH, §245). Religion and metaphysics thus stem from superstitions and passions engendering conflict and war.

Violence constitutes the basis of cultural identity for Western man and is unlikely to be removed by revolutionary means, but only by way of evolution: Enlightenment should "transfigure individuals alone, and thus

4) See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe. In 15 Einzelbänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari, and Deutscher Taschenbuch (Verlag – de Gruyter: München 1980), Bd. 7, §10 [1].

5) *Ibid.*, Chapter10 [1].

6) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Human, All too Human*, trans. Hellen Zimmern and Paul Victor Cohn (New York: Macmillan, 1911); hereafter this book will be cited in the main text as HAH followed by paragraph number.

only slowly transfiguring national customs and institutions as well.”⁷ Therefore, Nietzsche opposes socialism for the sake of individual freedom; he argues that with the introduction of socialism we risk reestablishing even worse violence – the despotic violence of the state.

In the so-called positivist period Nietzsche, however, goes even further beyond the horizon of post-Enlightenment thought, and this is for two reasons: First, science, scientific rationality, cannot lay normative grounds for man’s cultural activity and replace religion and metaphysics with their existential functions. This is because it is axiologically neutral and indifferent. Science is essentially relative in nature; as absolute, it would result in man’s debilitating naturalization and thus in the decay of his spirituality. The source of cultural activity lies in human illusions, that, due to scientific and cultural pluralism, are not of an absolute (religious-metaphysical), conflict-engendering nature, but are relative. On the other hand, Nietzsche is aware that in modernity illusions lose their normative cultural validity, exactly because they become more and more relative. For this reason, modern individuals appeal to modern ideas (nationalism) and political models (socialism and communism), which promise to replace former religious worldviews but at the same time may be the cause of more violence and the return to new (half) barbarity. Second, and as a consequence, the existence of violence and life’s irrationality cannot be explained by pointing to the lack of enlightenment and knowledge, to simple ignorance that engenders superstitions, that is violent passions and violence; for behind them there have to be – Nietzsche does not clearly express this opinion – some motivations other than utilitarian ones, for instance the drive towards dominance. Nietzsche explains in this way the ascetic-monastic practices of Christianity, seeing in them the expression of the individual’s mastery over himself, over their corporeality and voluptuousness. This mastery is to compensate them for their weakness, impotence and inability to gain control over others.

In *Daybreak*⁸ and also in *The Joyful Wisdom*,⁹ Nietzsche continually insists on the prevalence of the drive toward domination and cruelty within the instinctual economy of human life.¹⁰ In his analyses of moral psychology, he refers, as earlier on, to French moralistic philosophy. However, if the French moralists have analyzed moral life and virtues in terms of egoism, Nietzsche analyzes them in terms of the drive to mastery that he finds in different manifestations of religious life (see, for example, “ascetism”¹¹), social life (the enforcement of obedience and obligations¹²), and moral and spiritual life (pride¹³).¹⁴ He stresses the necessity of evil and violence (enmity and resistance) for man’s psychological and cultural development.¹⁵ He unveils the metamorphoses and the development of the atrocity, until it reaches its spiritual and symbolic forms and manifesta-

7) Friedrich Nietzsche, “Part III: The Wanderer and his Shadow,” in *Human, All too Human*, trans. Paul Victor Cohn (New York: Macmillan, 1913), paragraph 221.

8) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale (Cambridge and New-York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

9) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, trans. Thomas Common, Maude Dominica Petre, and Paul Victor Cohn (New York: Macmillan, 1924).

10) Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, paragraph 14 [20].

11) Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 113.

12) Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, paragraph 6 [404].

13) *Ibid.*, paragraph 14 [20].

14) “We think that hardness, forcefulness, slavery, danger in the alley and the heart, life in hiding, Stoicism, the art of experiment and devilry of every kind, that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents serves the enhancement of the species ‘man’ as much as its opposite does.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), paragraph 44.

15) Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, paragraph 19.

tions.¹⁶ For example, Germans are responsible for the barbarity of Christianity, for introducing cruelty to it,¹⁷ and Nietzsche means here the (emphasized by Protestantism) depravity of human nature, damnation, punishment and hell, eternal torments in case of the absence of God's grace.¹⁸ Nietzsche develops this view in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, by extending violence and atrocity to Christianity's genesis itself.

The emphasis put on the dominant role of the drive to dominate and pursue pleasure derived from cruelty was incited by Nietzsche's apparent difficulty in explaining in *Human, All too Human*, within naturalistic and utilitarian premises, the fact of the existence of the disinterested nature of moral motivations decoupled from their utilitarian origins. Nietzsche was not satisfied with explaining it in terms of the mechanism of forgetting, especially in the light of dominance of the altruist-humanist tendencies in European morality, but not of enlightened egoism. In rejecting the naturalistic-utilitarian assumptions of his earlier genealogical project, Nietzsche claims that socialized morality – he describes it as “morality of custom” – is not a mask, an external expression of egoism, referring to the motivations lying behind it, but possesses real autonomy. This means that the motivation of actions considered as moral are of specific moral nature: they are disinterested, but based on fallacious assumptions (free will, responsibility, faith in God).¹⁹ In other words, these motivations cannot originate from the striving for benefit and from forgetting that makes possible the illusion of selflessness. The normative-social obligation of morality, manifesting itself in the “fearful pressure of ‘morality of custom,’ ”²⁰ cannot be derived from benefit. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche embeds it in the tradition, in “obedience to tradition.” He thinks it is “what is *useful* to us, but because it commands.”²¹

In order to explain the normative coercion of the deified tradition, Nietzsche in his late work refers expressly to violence and cruelty, in this way making the drive to domination a driving force of human activity. In order to explain the possibility and the need for the social use of violence, he, in turn, makes the distinction between the strong and the weak, and between the individual and society, referring to violence as a means of domination over others. Admittedly, he considers altruistic morality, based on compassion, to be an expression of the self-preservation and profit defined by it. Nevertheless, he sees in the self-preservation the degenerate form of will to power. The recognition of the unconditioned desire for power and the qualitative difference between the strong and the weak, master and slave, means the introduction of will to power as a general principle of human life, to which Nietzsche confers cosmological-metaphysical meaning. With the will to power violence becomes the essence of life itself.

The Late Period

In its most general, speculative dimension, the will to power is connected with the theory of forces. According to it, forces are in mutual relations of domination which makes them strive to dominate each other, to overcome their resistance and establish the hierarchical centers of domination. Violence is – again – seen here as the essence of life itself.²²

16) Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, paragraph 11 [91].

17) *Ibid.*, paragraph 11 [92]

18) Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 113.

19) See Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, “Introduction: The Place of “Daybreak” in the Nietzschean Corpus,” in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), XXIV–XXXIV.

20) Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, paragraph 14.

21) *Ibid.*, paragraph 9. For more, see Clark and Leiter, “The Place of “Daybreak” in the Nietzschean Corpus,” XVI, XXIX–XXXII.

22) Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, paragraph 1 [20].

It is in terms of the will to power that Nietzsche describes cosmos as a Dionysian cosmos of forces and as the creative becoming of forces. The undifferentiated flux of forces signifies the Dionysian, whereas the imposing of a form to it by dominant forces is described by reference to the Apollonian dimension.

Faced with the difficulties of grounding the metaphysical status of the will to power, Nietzsche concentrates on the anthropological dimension of his reflection, applying this concept to the analysis of the genesis, nature and social-cultural functions of morality and religion. He conducts his genealogical analysis of nihilism as the process that encompasses all history, behind which he traces degenerate forms of the will to power and the decline of life. This “physiological” decadence of life manifests itself in the progressive atrophy of its creative potency on behalf of the instinct of self-preservation, in the negation of the active life on behalf of its inferior, reactive forms; decadence of life represents the logic of nihilism. Nihilism means the progressive denaturalization of life and its morbid spiritualization, the negation of its natural, sensual-carnal dimension and its subordination to spirituality. Also, the principle of this process is violence – reactive violence serving the passive and reactive forms of life and its self-preservation. The history of European culture, up to its highest forms, is thus seen by Nietzsche as the history of such a violence.

At the origin of social life and its moral and religious form lies a twofold cruelty. In analyzing it, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*,²³ Nietzsche refers to primitive peoples in prehistorical times. At its first level is the cruelty of individuals towards other individuals, Nietzsche speaks of the violence of a society towards offenders who breach the social contract, the basis for and model of which are provided by trade and the relationship between the creditor and debtor. This relation provides a base for the penal system which consists in compensating for the injury sustained by a victim with the whole system of cruel punishments and tortures. The measure of punishment, that is, the measure of “debt” with which the “debtor” pays off his debt to the injured person – its “creditor” – is pain, particularly the units of pain. The “debtor” pays off his debt with his own pain. The creditor derives pleasure in inflicting pain that satisfies the primitive need for cruelty as a form of compensation and gratification.

By satisfying this need, the society creates at the same time the conditions for respecting the social contract: through punishment, cruelty and torture there is engraved in the spontaneously acting individual the memory that guarantees their adherence to established agreements. In this way, along with social morality, there emerges the unified individual, identified with itself as a condition of man’s mastery over himself and nature.²⁴ The moral itself is unmoral, “is in itself a form of immorality”: “The victory of a moral ideal is achieved by the same ‘immoral’ means as any other victory: violence, lies, slander, injustice.”²⁵ Hence, Nietzsche’s observation that morality originates from amorality – the origin of good is evil.

Having determined the social-cultural conditions of the possibility of morality, Nietzsche ventures to explain the emergence of morality and of modern, humanist-altruist ethics in its secularized form.

23) Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, vol. II, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),

24) Nietzsche develops here an important motive for the dialectic of the Enlightenment: “The man who became master of the forces of nature, master of his own wildness and lowliness: follow the desire, have learned to be useful. The man, compared to a pre-humans (Vor-menschen), represents a tremendous quantity of power ...” Friedrich Nietzsche, “Nietzsche’s Notebook of 1887–1888,” trans. Daniel Fidel Ferrer, *Academia.edu*, June 2010, §11 [111], https://www.academia.edu/29304703/Nietzsches_Notebook_of_1887-1888?auto=download.

25) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, vol. I–II, trans. Anthony Mario Ludovici (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1913), paragraph 306, 308. Hereafter this book will be cited in the main text as WP followed by volume number and page number. Also, see Nietzsche, *Nietzsche’s Notebook of 1887–1888*, 11 [54].

Nietzsche connects its genesis with the slave's *ressentiment* against the master. The "slaves' revolt in morality,"²⁶ assumes the historical form of the revolt of Jewish masses against the Roman aristocracy and its values. Resentment occurs when the slave sees himself as unable to realize the noble and vital values represented by the master and for that very reason begins to detest the master. His is a desire for revenge which naturally he cannot manifest in a direct fight against the master due to his organic weakness.²⁷ Born out of this double powerlessness and weakness, vengeful desire finds its place, under threat of the disintegration of the individual, in the symbolic, imaginary realm. In this way, violence morphs into symbolic violence. Slaves put it into practice while negating and inverting the value hierarchy of the masters and establishing through this negation their own values that measure up to their weakness and powerlessness. These evangelic values are based on compassion and love for fellow men. These values express the slaves' reactive will to power and are tacitly imposed by the slaves on their masters. With this subversive act, slaves are able to gradually weaken the masters' natural forces, their vitality. They ultimately succeed in depriving them of their creative potential, exhibited in acts of inventing their *own* values and dictating them to others. Therefore, Nietzsche can argue that compassion is the very form of slaves' mastery over masters. It debases the mighty to the level of the feeble, diminishes their autonomous, creative activity and grants the feeling of empowerment to the weak, who can now render the strong dependent on their weakness. By the same token, the egalitarian, altruistic morality is a form of power and mastery. It normalizes and disciplines individuals, subjecting them to "the herd".

The evangelic morality is conditioned by the repression of drives and sensuality, which do not yet rest on the foundation of external punishment, but on channeling the resentmental aggression of the individual inwards, which is tantamount to its spiritualization.²⁸ This redirecting of resentmental energy is brought about by "the Jewish priest" who legitimizes the internal aggression through higher religious ideas, and who explains the suffering caused by the repression of drives with the categories of sin and guilt. The external conditions for the process of the internalization of aggression are created by the state, at the core of which is the violence of the invaders, "those artists of violence" who impose on human material a form-state as "the organized violence,"²⁹ "as a terrible tyranny, a repressive and ruthless machinery, and continued working until the raw material of people and semi-animals had been finally not just kneaded and made compliant, but *shaped*."³⁰ The ascetic ideals which encompass all the symbolic and spiritual effects of the internalization of resentmental aggression grant theological significance to evangelic morality, and in this way lead to its universalization.

In order to explain the emergence of Christian "ascetic ideals", Nietzsche has to explain the emergence of religious consciousness. He refers to the category of debt and of the obligation to pay it back. He relates it to the relationship of individuals with their ancestors, to whom they are indebted for their wardship. With the gradual deification of ancestors, the debt is increasing and becomes impossible to be paid back. Nietzsche regards the primitive and historic religions (without Christianity) as natural, that is, ones that used to affirm the natural life based on sensuality and cruelty. As such, he appreciated Greek polytheism which sanctioned the evil of human existence. Human life, along with its inherent evil manifested in cruel passions, fights and wars, becomes a spectacle for the gods for which they take responsibility, thus taking from men their responsibility and guilt for evil. Similarly, he considers early Jewish religion as local and tribal – as a religion of warriors

26) Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, paragraph 10.

27) "How poisonous, how crafty, how bad, does every long war make one, that cannot be waged openly by means of force." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, paragraph 25.

28) Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, paragraph 10 [157].

29) Nietzsche, *Nietzsche's Notebook of 1887–1888*, paragraph 11 [252].

30) Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, paragraphs 17–18.

supported by Jahve, the national god. Brought about only by contingent historical circumstances, there emerge in Jewish religion moral tendencies. Disasters that have affected the Jewish nation (the Exile and the loss of statehood) are considered symptoms of the wrath of God and as the punishment for the rebellion against God. In this social-historical context, Christianity surfaces. It grows out of the moral-theological tendencies of Judaism and sanctions the evangelic morality as its substance.

Christianity radicalizes the said tendencies by transforming moral violence into theological violence. For Nietzsche, Christian theology is a theology of fear based on the idea of man's infinite sin against God, which humans are unable to redeem, due to original sin, God's incarnation and his own sacrifice. In this way, Christianity radicalizes the idea of debt that is never to be paid back. In the case of primitive societies, the individual could pay back the finite debt with his physical suffering. Now, Christians are bound to compensate for their guilt in the eyes of God with an infinite *spiritual* suffering corresponding to the vision of eternal punishment – eternal torment in hell.

For Nietzsche, the cultural decline of Christianity (its self-abolishment) and the modern processes of secularization have not affected the essence of morality that has freed itself only from the historical, dogmatic-theological context of its emergence. Contemporary, humanistic, humanitarian and egalitarian morality fulfills the same role, as Christianity used to: it serves the equalization of individuals and the subjugation of them to the society which now constitutes the only horizon of human life, established in the name of the ideals of equality – liberalism, socialism, and communism.

The prevalence of these ideals is explained by Nietzsche with regard to the rise of human sensibility: "The moral sentiment in Europe today is...refined, old, diverse, irritable, and subtle..."³¹ – writes Nietzsche – and this rise, in turn, is traced back to the increase of "physiological" sensibility. By this Nietzsche means the increase of human hyper-sensitivity to pain and suffering following the process of man's denaturalization and spiritualization, that is, the detachment of human consciousness from the processes of real life: "The curve of human capacity for pain actually does seem to sink dramatically."³² Therefore, according to Nietzsche physical and moral pain "did not hurt as much then as it does now..."³³ Suffering is now seen as nonsensical and not to be endured, as the modern man – incapable of whatever cultural activity – ceases to create ideals which could give meaning to his suffering.³⁴ That is why, in Nietzsche's view, "the morality of *shared* pity,"³⁵ loses its meta-physical justification and becomes a mere "instinct" of compassion, which is a direct expression of the herd's instinct of self-preservation. It is the increasing sensitivity to physical and moral pain that becomes, according to Nietzsche, the main, ethical driving force behind the process of Christianity's self-abolishment manifesting itself in the Death of God, and that leads to the rejecting of the theological, "spiritual cruelty" of Christianity.

This sensitivity – directed against all forms of violence: physical, theological, and moral-social – produces, paradoxically, its new forms. On the grounds of the humanist-egalitarian tendencies of the era growing stronger and stronger, it unveils new dimensions of violence and suffering, especially the moral-social one, that are related to social inequalities, to the existence of the social-cultural hierarchy: "From this one results overall instinct against selection, privilege, against any kind of power and hardness, security, cruelty of the practice

31) Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, paragraph 186.

32) Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, paragraph 7.

33) Ibid.

34) "Now, when suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled *against* life, as its most questionable feature... What actually arouses indignation over suffering is not the suffering itself, but the senselessness of suffering." Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, paragraph 7.

35) Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, paragraph 202.

that, in fact, to submit themselves once the privileged classes... the note of compassion, reverence even before all that despises suffering, low, persecuted life, sounds off about all the other notes....³⁶ Moral-social compassion sets in motion the relentless modern quest and conflict for egalitarian destruction of the "hierarchies of rank," aiming to remove all obstacles, all legal and institutional constraints: "They (the modern men) are at one in their tough resistance to every special claim, every special right and privilege (which means in the last analysis, every right: for once all are equal nobody needs 'rights' any more)."³⁷

We can find in Nietzsche's thought the conviction that the increasing sensitivity to pain and physical-moral suffering culminates in hypersensitivity, because of which reality itself becomes the source of suffering and comes to be experienced as the purest and highest, that is, it becomes existential violence. This conviction corresponds to the idea that "Buddhism" marks the last period of the decadence and nihilism of European culture. "Buddhism" signifies here the exhaustion of life and the decline of its creative potential. It also results in the negation of reality and any form of activity undertaken to confront it. The whole idea of reality naturally resisting human interventions now seems pointless. Why seek even more pain and suffering in confrontation with the world?

In spite of his apology for violence, Nietzsche, in his positive program and in his vision of the overman, understates its significance in connection with his thesis on the spiritualization of man and violence. We can see it in his vague project of the future community, established out of the elite of the overmen. On the one hand, the relations between the elite and the masses reflect the relationship between the master and the slave, so they are characterized by quanta of power. On the other hand, these relations cannot be based on violence. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, because of the democratization processes and the egalitarian tendency in the modern world which the "breeding of overman", by way of violence³⁸ is to give meaning.³⁹ Secondly, the unmediated power of masters over slaves, and the common use of violence, would lead to the transformation of their cultural activity into an ideology of domination. It would rid it of its disinterested nature, and would lead to the elimination of the master's spiritual autonomy attributed by Nietzsche to the elite of overmen as "a higher and sovereign race," as "not only a ruling race whose task would be consummated in ruling alone, but a race with *vital spheres* of its own, with an overflow of energy for beauty, bravery, culture, and manners, even for the most abstract thought" (WP/II, §898). It may be said that in these "*vital spheres* of its own" violence is sublimated and takes the form of spiritual *agon* (referring to the idea of *competition* as depicted in Homer). The same is true for the conflict of ideas and the struggle for interpretations to be rendered dominant by way of force. It should be added that Nietzsche only maps modern, cosmopolitan-pluralistic culture to show its ideological nature.⁴⁰ Late Romanticism (that is, cultural modernism) which establishes its core, only simulates authentic life (its tragic conflicts, heroism, beauty and sublimity) and in this way it legitimizes capitalist, industrial civilization and

36) *Nietzsche's Notebook of 1887-1888*, paragraph 14 [182].

37) Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, paragraph 202.

38) Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, 11, 37 [8].

39) *Ibid.*, 12, 2 [13].

40) Therefore, Nietzsche claims that Romantic art is merely a "disguise and dissimulation of the soul... Romantic art is only an emergency exit from defective 'reality'" (WP/II, §829). It has, similarly to the whole modern culture, the "apologetic character now; yet, it even seems as though the small amount of intellect which still remains active to-day, and is not used up by the great mechanism of gain and power, has as its sole task the defending — and excusing of the present." Friedrich Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," in *Thoughts out of Season*, part one, trans. A.M. Ludovici (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1909). This view is developed by Horkheimer/Adorno in their conception of "affirmative culture" and "culture industry." See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–136, chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception".

the enslavement of the individuals by its technical-economical rationality with its quasi-gnostic nature (the radical negation of the bourgeois world). And that is, according to Nietzsche, besides the economical-technical and moral dimensions, the other dimension of violence specific to capitalist modernity: symbolic-cultural violence. For these reasons, “the new slavery”, one that is not based on violence, is needed. What is now needed is “European democracy,” as “the new and sublime product, slavery” (WP/II, §954), which the “new aristocracy” (WP/II, §953), “future lords of the earth,” employ “as the most suitable and supple instrument” (WP/II, §960). Hence Nietzsche’s references to the Hindu “caste system” (also to Plato’s idea of the state) and his attempt to ground it in the natural order of the world.⁴¹

It goes without saying that in the demythologized and disenchanted world, this endeavor had to fail. Perhaps Nietzsche believed that the indolence of democratic societies, of the “last men”, would make it possible for the elite to take over and to control planetary processes, that is, to take “general control of the economy of the Earth” (WP/II, §866).

Conclusion

To repeat, the notion of violence has in Nietzsche’s thought two basic meanings, one negative and one positive. The first one, critical, refers violence to the degenerate will to power and becomes a basis for the genealogical critique of nihilistic history. The second one is expressed very clearly in the philosopher’s political projects such as social hierarchy and domination, in which violence is sublimated (in spiritual agon) and in the Dionysian metaphysics.

Both understandings of violence have greatly influenced the development of philosophical reflection in the twentieth century. The critical one has been taken up, on the grounds of different normative assumptions, by Horkheimer and Adorno. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Nietzsche’s genealogy serves their purpose to present a critical diagnosis of Western civilization in the spirit of the dialectic of Enlightenment. Violence takes now the form of the universal reification of the human world and manifests itself in increasing social-cultural domination. In contrast, Michel Foucault refers to Nietzsche’s genealogy, by transforming it into a methodological-theoretical project of the analysis of power (*Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*). Foucault develops Nietzsche’s theory of forces and the will to power, but he negates the human nature of history by showing the depersonalized power structures that determine it as they are grounded in agonistic relations of pre-human forces.

Meanwhile, Georges Bataille (after him, Pierre Klossowski in his *On Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*) has been influenced by the positive, Dionysian reference to violence. In *Nietzsche, Eroticism: Death and Sensuality, The Accursed Share* he attributes a mystical meaning to Dionysian experience and shows that it can take the form of perversely erotic and sacral transgressions against the cultural order (in this way, Nietzsche and de Sade meet together in Bataille’s thought).

41) “The *order of castes*, the highest, the dominating law, is merely the ratification of an *order of nature*, of a natural law of the first rank, over which no arbitrary fiat, no ‘modern idea’, can exert any influence.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. Henry Louis Mencken (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918), paragraph 57. See Henning Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1999), 276–281, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110801477>.

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