NIETZSCHE AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CONTRADICTORY WILL TO POWER

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Nietzsche ve Gücü Ele Geçirme Arzusunun Evrenselliği

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nietzsche, güce ulaşma arzusu, tabiali kuvvetler, tabiat karşıtı kuvvetler

Summary
The point of departure of the paper is contradictory interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy. One large section of such interpretations emphasize the naturalistic tendencies in his philosophy while the second stressing the antinaturalistic counterparts. In order to fully grasp this diversity of interpretations it is important to

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acknowledge Nietzsche’s idea of the will to power as an important element of his thinking and writing. There are two kinds of power: the naturalistic and the antinaturalistic. Nietzsche accepts both of them. Therefore his will to power, wanting to be all-powerful, leads him to accept both natural and antinatural powers and thereby contradictory views. It must be thus said that those interpretations which pay a due attention to the importance of contradictions in his thought are the closest to the right understanding of his thought.

The same logic of the contradictory will to power can be found in both Christianity and other religions. The question is raised whether the contradictory will to power is a universal characteristic to be found in all human world-views. At the end of the article it is underlined that philosophical or interreligious dialogue might be in danger as long as the partners are unaware of the traps set by the often unconscious work of the contradictory will to power.

**Key Words:** Nietzsche, the will to power, naturalistic powers, antinaturalistic powers

1. **The Problem of Contradictions**

If one wants to categorize the interpretations of Nietzsche’s philosophical views, one can say that there are two major groups of interpretations: one is that which emphasizes his naturalistic tendencies, and the other is that which emphasizes his rational and spiritual tendencies. Looking from the viewpoint of the naturalistic interpretation, which is the most common interpretation and has been adopted by many authors, one may underline his emphasis on the value of all that is spontaneous and natural: the instincts, the body, physical strength, the fight against the Christian negation of the body, the positive attitude towards women, nationality, and towards the mythical as well as the fight against the negation of the conceptual cognition. Some interpreters of this category also emphasizes the value of cruelty, which is supposed to be, according to Nietzsche, a necessary element of intrinsically evil nature, and stress his reluctant attitude towards the foreigners, e.g., the Jews in his genealogy of morality. From the perspective of the antinaturalistic interpretation, which is vocalized by such researchers as Walter Kaufmann and Paul Valadier, one may stress his tendency to distance himself from the instinctive and the natural: reason, self–overcoming, sublimation, enlightenment, being a good European, his

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1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Interim World Philosophy Congress at Delhi University, India, in December 2006.

2 The will to power “is essentially a striving to transcend and perfect oneself,” and life itself, according to Nietzsche, is that “which must always overcome itself”, W. Kaufmann, Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, Vintage Books, New York, 1968, 248.

positive attitude towards the foreigners like the Jews, the Frenchmen, the Italians, and the Poles, his fight against the prejudices as well as his appreciation of the spiritual value of suffering. Some authors within this trend of interpretation point to Nietzsche’s negation of women as well as of the human body in general.

Apart from these two interpretations, there is another kind of interpretation, which although is represented by fewer scholars, I think is closer to the most accurate understanding of Nietzsche’s philosophy. As rightly maintained by philosophers and scholars such as Karl Jaspers⁴, Giorgio Colli⁵ or Pierre Klossowski⁶, contradiction is a leading characteristic of Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, one should point out that there is still needed a reasonable and satisfactory explanation as to the reason why the element of contradiction plays such an important role in his thought, and I think that the aforementioned scholars failed to provide such an explanation.

2. The Contradictory Will to Power

It seems that Nietzsche employs contradiction as a means to the will to power, which is one of his most fundamental reactions to the death of God and to the feeling of weakness that arose thereof⁷. It is important to underline that Nietzsche takes the will to power as a hermeneutical tool not only to describe and explain nature or civilization, but also to develop his own will to power via his own means, e.g., literature, art, and philosophy.

If one asks, however, why his will to power should be contradictory, we can say that because one can achieve power not only through order as we normally think, but also through chaos and contradiction. Let us have a closer look at this matter.

There are naturalistic powers that are powers for Nietzsche as well as for us. Of such powers, one may mention health, sex, physical strength, domination, political power, or sense of belonging to one’s family or nation.

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⁵ G. Colli, Dopo Nietzsche, Adelphi, Milano, 1974.
And when we speak of power, we usually mean these powers first. Nietzsche, while following his own will to power in his texts, naturally accepts and glorifies these naturalistic powers, including the power of the German people. This glorification of the natural has become the most salient feature of his philosophy.

In this context, one should, however, stress that naturalistic powers are not the only powers. Study of religions teaches us that power can also be negation of life and negation of naturalistic powers. In other words, study of religions shows that there are antinaturalistic powers, too. These powers arise when one succeeds in dominating any or all naturalistic powers, mainly the powers of one’s own body but also the powers of family or society. A clear example comes from the Hindu religion in which the power of asceticism, which is called tapas, is regarded as a spiritual energy obtained by the ascetic. Tapas may become so great that it can enable an ascetic to incarnate the gods. Nietzsche was quite aware of this power and it meant for him the power of self–overcoming (Selbstüberwindung). He praised and made it an essential part of his teaching. By this power he explained, for instance, the reason why the people venerated the Catholic priests. Nietzsche regards them as being able to overcome the beast in man, in particular the main need of the body, namely, the need to survive. In fact, the acquisition of the power to overcome oneself was re-

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8 After the abuse of Nietzsche made by the Nazis, some may doubt that he really accepts for his own sake the power of a nation, the power of the German people. We all know after all how severely he criticized Germans. The problem is he mainly criticized the contemporary cultural and political situation in Germany (although I may also quote many of his statements in which he expresses all but the negation of Bismarck). It is certain however that he admired Germans for their past achievements and for the achievements they may gain in the future.

9 “This term ["tapas"] (lit. “heat,” “ardor”) is used to designate ascetic effort in general. (…) Its powers are creative on both the cosmic and the spiritual planes; through tapas the ascetic becomes clairvoyant and even incarnates the gods. Prajapati creates the world by “heating” himself to an extreme degree through asceticism (…). For Brahmanic speculation, Prajapati was himself the product of tapas (…). M. Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, trans. W. R. Trask, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1969, p. 106. We can observe the same attitude in Jainism. A Jain can accomplish the spiritual goal not only through asceticism but also by praising asceticism with enthusiasm and devotion. See: J.E. Cort, Singing the glory of asceticism: devotion of asceticism in Jainism, Journal of the American Academy of Religion 2002 70(4), p. 719-742.


11 Ibidem, p. 37.
garded by him as the only achievement in his life. Nietzsche made use of this antinaturalistic power in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which his Zarathustra saw the will to power in overcoming the “bitch sensuality” (die Hündin Sinnlichkeit), in which he declared his disgust for women and described the natural as infamous.

One should point out that since he had a strong feeling of weakness after the death of God and was sensitive to the phenomenon of power, Nietzsche realized that power exists not only in the naturalistic but also in the antinaturalistic form. In other words, power exists in its richest form only in this ambivalence of power. He was too sensitive to the problem of power to fail to sense that there is power in Dionysus, in a Catholic priest, in the cruel Cesare Borgia, in the peace-loving Michel de Montaigne, in being a “deep German”, and in being a free Spirit, who is *vogelfrei*. His philosophical thirst for power caused by the vacuum of the death of God made him follow not just the will to power but also the will to “all-power”. In conclusion, one can say that since he sought these contrary powers, Nietzsche felt forced to express contradictory views. So, it is the contradictory will to power that accounts for the presence of the contradictions in his writings. Since the naturalistic and antinaturalistic interpretations of his philosophy miss this ambivalence, they are one-dimensional approach to Nietzsche and therefore cannot explain his statements that are in disharmony with both.

3. Nietzsche as an Educator

Nietzsche can be an educator. But I doubt if he could teach us how to live, though he insists he could. I do not think he can be a master in the philosophy of life. For instance, his admiration at the ruthless decrees of the

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14 “What is womanish (von Weibsart ist), what stems from slavishness and especially from the mob hotchpotch: that now wants to become master of mankind’s entire destiny – oh disgust! disgust! disgust!” Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Of the Higher Man, 3, p 298. And the little old woman from the chapter Of Old and Young Women warns Zarathustra saying, “Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!”. Ibidem, Of Old and Young Women, p. 93.
Aryans towards the Chandala can lead us nowhere. Nietzsche, however, can be an educator as a philosopher of culture, namely as a philosopher of unmasking the will to power, particularly of the contradictory will to power in its different forms of hidden ambivalence. In this context, one should note that while Nietzsche as a philosopher of unmasking the will to power was quite aware of his task, it is not equally sure if he was aware of his hidden ambivalence. And it is less sure if he has ever been able to denounce both forms of the will to power in his writings. But this lack of clear philosophical self-awareness as well as his inability to perform the self-unmasking process are quite understandable because the will to power is much less an intellectual formula than a vital force that by its nature remains beyond one’s conscious decision or reflection, as the philosopher himself emphasized many times.

4. The Contradictory Will to Power in Christianity

Nietzsche’s ambivalence towards the will to power sheds a fresh light on the crucial anthropological views of those whom he would regard as his philosophical opponents. I think we can unexpectedly see similar ambivalence in the Christian anthropology, particularly Catholic and Orthodox, in which God is not declared to be dead, yet the operation of the will to power can be easily spotted.

Saint Thomas Aquinas maintained that the body is part of the human being and this is clearly expressed by his acceptance of the Aristotelian hylomorphism. There is no doubt that he thereby accepted the legitimacy of the naturalistic powers. On the other hand, he glorified the opposite, namely, the antinaturalistic powers. As regards the questions of sexual ethics in particular, he in fact did no more than repeating the old strict concepts. He argued that sexual lust enslaves human mind and is impure. Like for Augustine, sexual pleasure resulted for him from the original sin. He also described marriage to be “impurity” (immunditia), “stain” (macula),

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18 S. Th. 2–2 q. 55 a. 8 ad 1.
19 J. Fuchs, Die Sexualethik des heiligen Thomas von Aquin, Bachem, Köln, 1949, p. 52.
“disdain” (*foeditas*), “baseness” (*turpitudo*), “dishonor” (*ignominia*)20, “perversion” (*deformitas*), “sickness” (*morbus*) etc21. He reiterated that virginity is superior to marriage, predicting that the celibatarians will obtain in Paradise one hundred percent of happiness whereas widows will obtain only sixty percent and the married only thirty percent22. The present day teaching of the Catholic Church follows the same contradictory line. On the one hand, it declares the superiority of virginity and chastity23, but on the other hand, it firmly refuses to acknowledge that sex and marriage are bad24. And apparently nothing can convince the Catholic theologians that there is a fundamental contradiction in this position. They do not accept the clear fact that if one thing is superior to another, the latter must be logically inferior to the former. This failure of seeing what is self-evident may strike us, but once we understand the significant function of contradiction as a tool of the contradictory will to power, the situation becomes much clearer. So, we can understand that the position of the Catholic thinkers is contradictory because it is held by the most powerful will to power, i.e., by the contradictory will to power. They say that the natural is good not only because it is created by God, but primarily because they experience its forces in everyday life. On the other hand, the will to power makes them realize the *krateophany* perspectives that are open to anyone who is ready to overcome the forces of the natural. Hence, they are forced, as it were, to maintain both the “goodness” of the natural and the superiority of virginity and chastity, that is to say, the overcoming of the natural.

5. The Contradictory Will to Power in Non-Christian Traditions

In this context, one should ask if the contradictory will to power exists only in the postmodern and secular Nietzsche and in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity or it is a universal phenomenon. I believe that in every culture and doctrine that takes asceticism as the highest ideal, which is the case in most of the Buddhist and Hindu schools, the contradictory will to power always comes into play and they themselves fall prey to contradictions in the domains of anthropology and axiology. This results from the

20 See: Ibidem, 50 et seqq.
21 S. Th. 1 q. 98 a. 2.
22 See: S. Th. 2–2 q. 152 a. 5 ad 2.
23 See: John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 16; Vita consacrata, 18.
fact that the ascetic ideal, which means the overcoming of the natural, can never exist independently and self-sufficiently; rather, it is always based on the acknowledgment of the naturalistic powers. This is because one might overcome life, but one is still a living being that must eat and drink. And if one fails to earn his livelihood by himself, one must be supplied with food by those who do such, and it is inevitable in either case to accept the naturalistic powers of life.

Though there are some traditions like Islam that reject the ascetic ideal in its excessive form, they are not free from the contradictory will to power, either. One can infer the presence of this will from their attitude towards women. The full appreciation of women is a clear indication of the acceptance of the naturalistic powers because it involves the acceptance of sexuality. As we have already pointed out, Nietzsche in his quest for the antinaturalistic powers does not eschew expressing his disgust for women, which is in fact disharmonious with his loyalty to the Earth. In this context, one should note that it is not accidental that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, which attach a great value to chastity, avoid ordaining women, and by following St. Paul’s and St. Peter’s advice, they still encourage women to be obedient to their husbands.

As far as Islam is concerned, it seems to suppress women and thus can be described as a doctrine that enjoys a will to power in its search after the antinaturalistic powers. But, since the suppression of women cannot be absolute and women’s equality with men must be accepted in the end, it is clear that one can expect the presence of the same contradictory will to power in Islam, too. Concerning the status of women, it is the Qur’an which makes some statements that can be taken as contradictory by a non-Muslim reader. For example, on the one hand, the Qur’an clarifies that men and women are equal from their very creation, on the other hand, it declares that men are superior to women; a wife should obey her husband; a husband has right to punish and beat his wife if she disobeys him; and, a husband may have sex with his wife whenever he wants.

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25 Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18, Titus 5.
26 1 Peter 3:1, 3:5.
29 See: The Qur’an 4:38.
30 See: The Qur’an 4:38.
31 See: The Qur’an 2:223.
Conclusion

The contradictory will to power seems to be very strong because it functions as a human response to the ambivalent nature of life itself. On one hand, it is a response to human being’s necessary participation in life, its instincts, needs and in its exigencies, which accounts for the search after naturalistic powers and on the other hand, it is a response to the unavoidable facts of growing old, sickness, and dying, which accounts for the search after antinaturalistic powers with his/her pretension to overcome life. When one rejects God and refuses to rely on his support as the case with Nietzsche, the contradictory will to power becomes and probably must become stronger and almost fully self-conscious. However, it operates effectively even when the power of God is not questioned. Therefore, it seems impossible to get rid of it completely. Nevertheless, though this will probably cannot be eradicated altogether, I hope it can be diminished to a considerable extent.

What is especially annoying about the way in which the contradictory will to power operates is that it has a tendency to bury itself deep in the human unconsciousness. Just as the will to power is the opposite of humility, which is to accept and gladly confess one’s weakness, the lack of humility and the desire to be admired, if not venerated, is what prevents one from discovering this will to power, not to mention weakening its impact.

However, we must keep in mind that a clear understanding of the contradictory will to power is necessary not only to philosophical but also to intercultural and interreligious dialogues. What is so ruinous about the will to power is that as long as it works somewhere sneakily, each party of any dialogue will certainly think that the other party is lying. And, even worse, this conviction may be justified to some extent. Though we cannot be sure whether the contradictory will to power can ever be exterminated, it is certain that we can never communicate efficiently and achieve some kind of peace among the people of different faiths and doctrines as long as that will works as an unconscious force.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, (arabic) فكره إسراة الحصول على القدرة عند (فريدريش نيتزش)