

THESIS OF PhD DISSERTATION

The power of difference and the paradox of representation

The critique of metaphysics by Nietzsche

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1. Thesis of the dissertation, delineation of the subject

The present dissertation basically undertakes the reconstruction of the Nietzschean philosophy, based upon a kind of „active” concept of difference. Nietzsche places a plural concept of truth in the centre of his critique of metaphysics when instead of the classical opposition of essence and appearance he seeks to find the origin of the value of the values, focusing on the differences, instead of contradictions. By „activating” the fundamentally negative, re-active idea of difference, Nietzsche put through the all-out critique of traditional metaphysical thinking, which neither means to exceed metaphysics, nor to ground another variant of metaphysics. Though Nietzsche himself did not apply the notion of „difference” as a *terminus technicus*, to subserve the fluency of our train of thought, introduction of an operational concept seems to be useful. The term „active difference”, which we subsequently intend to use as a technical term, should be understood as follows: the constantly changing, unfixed and un-fixable basic element of revaluation of values.

When interpreting the Nietzschean philosophy as a philosophy of difference, we will keep in mind our presupposition all the time, whose justification is the actual purpose of our dissertation. Namely, we suppose, that Nietzsche’s thinking could not be properly taken without clarifying the nucleus point of his critique regarding Kantian metaphysics, particularly Kantian epistemology, more precisely the „transcendental schematism”. Furthermore, we also state, that an overall critique of metaphysics can only be possible to base on the critique of representation, as a radical concept of difference. From our concern, we hope to benefit one more thing besides the one mentioned above, namely the possibility of reconciliation of two philosophical traditions, which are generally thought to be irreconcilable, namely of the Neo-Kantianism on the one side, and the postmodern on the other side, and the „radical” philosophy of difference within that. We mean such an extremely „activated” thinking of difference by the latter, which, for example, Jacques Derrida speaks about concerning *différance*. If we could prove it all, then we would be able to dispel at least some of the concerns regarding the reason for existence of the philosophy of difference, broadly, against the possibility of the critique of metaphysics. However, it seems to be unavoidable to critically reconsider Heidegger’s critique on Nietzsche, since if he were right, the doctrine of eternal recurrence simply wouldn’t be enough worrying, enough „tragic”. In this case we would be entitled to blame reproach Nietzsche, that there’s a huge smoke, but no flame.

In the course of our work we would like to prove the following three theses: 1. Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, which is essentially a critique of representation, stands on the ground of the Neo-Kantian criticism of Kantian philosophy. 2. The critique of metaphysics, culminating in the thoughts of the eternal recurrence and the will to power, is explained by Nietzsche as a philosophy of difference. 3. These two statements are not at all contradictory, provided on the one hand that the effect of the Neo-Kantian criticism could be shown up in a *specifically Nietzschean* falsificationism, and on the other hand, in the principle of will to power as effective, „active” difference, and in the radically anti-representationalist thought of eternal recurrence, which is kept in a contiguous becoming by this „active” difference. We attempt to unfold as the determinative, constitutive element of Nietzsche's philosophy the above introduced concept of „active difference”, but in such a way, that the thereby reasonable critical attitude neither implicates relativism, nor, God forbid, fatalism, nor even a newly grounded metaphysics. In this case, nihilism, that is the integrant, self-destroying tendency working in the depths of metaphysical thinking, can only be thought as a process, which accomplishes a kind of „disconsolation” of metaphysical thinking, therefore questioning both the reason for existence and the general possibility of the „onto-theological” needs of metaphysical thinking. In this case, the will to power and the eternal recurrence would become relevant not as the counter-movement of the self-destroying nature of nihilism, but of the onto-theologically thought metaphysical thinking itself. The „active difference”, in turn, obtains its actual sense as a basic movement, which brings the metaphysical criticism until its utmost borders: namely, until the affirmation of the tragically finished, but just so tragically unfinishable character of human being, which constantly closes itself into finitude, yet constantly strives towards the infinite. Such a criticism, which announces the necessity of continuous reevaluation, could not be based, by no means, on a verificationist argument, but rather on one, which regards as primordial the constant and consequent incrimination of the particular ways of thinking, continuously trying, or, in Popperian terms, „testing” them. However, this kind of approach we must reckon, first of all, with idealism, and with the moral world order, built upon the presupposition of oppositional thinking and the existence of metaphysical absolutes. For Nietzsche, the possibility of that would be created by the fulfillment of Kantian critics, which is the critique of the transcendental schematism and of the „thing in itself”.

2. The methods and results of research

The above reviewed theses of the dissertation are, in some sense, to be taken as methodological guidelines as well, for they suppose that Nietzsche covers a long distance, from the early, barely unconditional movements from the metaphysical criticism until the confession of the impossibility to exceed it. But we must undoubtedly speak about a journey, a walk of life both as a thinker and as a human being, which two together led to his collapse in Turin, at the beginning of January 1889. According to this, the reconstruction of the *œuvre* will also be chronologically structured, nevertheless we will continuously refer on the influential relations (both on discrepancies and on similarities), to prepare the argumentation detailed in the second chapter of the second part of the dissertation. The present essay consists of two parts, of whom the first one follows the traces of the „active difference” throughout the *œuvre*, while the second one exposes, in the possible closest reading of Heidegger’s critique on Nietzsche, and, after that, according to our thesis, attempts to raise a problem of it. During the following reconstruction of Nietzschean philosophy there is no way for us to fully discuss all the philosophers and philosophies, which had made an impact on Nietzsche’s thinking in various degrees. We will only mark those influential relations, which have an outstanding importance in point of our topic. Such an influence was made by the Pre-Socratic philosophy, with a special regard on Heraclitus; Spinoza’s doctrine of the affects; the Kantian transcendental philosophy; Hegel’s dialectical system; just as the particular works of the Croatian scientist and philosopher, Roger Boskovich and the Neo-Kantian thinker, Afrikan Alexandrovich Spir. In the second, argumentative part an accentuated role will be given to the influence of the two latter authors, which is, otherwise, sadly underestimated. The Boskovichian theory of „material points”, as well as the „fundamental antinomy” of finite human cognition recognized by Spir, undoubtedly added to the development of the tendency, identified by us as the „active” concept of difference, which we would like to interpret as the definitive immanent impulsive force of Nietzsche’s thinking, and which, in our view, serves as the basis of the thought of the eternal recurrence, as the culmination of the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics. In the first part of the treatise we will introduce Nietzsche’s thinking as a process, in which the negation – both implicitly and explicitly – turns into affirmation, and the failure of the trial of exceeding metaphysics leads to the Dionysian affirmation of the infiniteness (i. e. of the un-revocable, „active” difference).

The first part of the dissertation will track the transformation of the meaning and importance of the „active” concept of the difference within the *œuvre*, from the earliest

writings from Pforta, until the last texts from 1888. Examining the early writings, we will take the two texts – dated back to 1868 – containing Nietzsche's critical remarks on the Kantian, and Schopenhauerian philosophy as a turning point, the same as we take his *Rhetoric Lectures* from 1873, and the short but extremely important writing *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (which was sadly left in torso), from the very same year. In the latter text Nietzsche considers truth as variable crowd of metaphors, declaring that the „correct perception”, meaning an adequate representation of object in the subject, does not exist at all. We project the anthropomorphic dimensions of space and time onto the natural relations, creating thereby the metaphors, which we falsely regard as analogous with the things they represent.¹ The conclusion: „every concept arises from the equation of unequal things.”²

The early, even more the Greek-themed writings are largely described by the effort to produce becoming as an aesthetic phenomenon. Nietzsche takes the idea of the innocence of becoming from Heraclit, who presumes a constant becoming instead of the opposition of physical and metaphysical reality, concluding, that things only exist in their relations to the other things. Thus something is existent inasmuch as it is effective, but the continuity of becoming is guaranteed by the very fact, that victory could only be instantaneous – the change, the differentiation itself is eternal. The aim of the first chapter is, to find out the „active difference”, the operative agent of Nietzsche's philosophy, which is present from the very beginning, in the Pre-Socratic-inspired thought of continuous becoming. This period might have been the most decisive one in point of influences. It would be a mistake to vindicate the importance of the Greek idea solely for the artistic-metaphysics, since, even for Nietzsche, it was much better the Pre-Socratic ontology, even more its epistemological consequences, which were actually substantive. As we will see it: the doctrine of continuous becoming echoes both in criticism on Kant and Schopenhauer appearing quite early, and in the thought of plural, metaphorical truth noted down only a few years later. It seems to be reasonable to suppose that Roger Boscovich's atom-theory, whose consequences regarding the space-time constitution has had to be taken into account by the philosopher since 1873. The fragment, upon which this invention was based and the importance of the Boscovichean theory of „material points” will be fully investigated in the first Excursus.

The subject of the second chapter will be the so-called „positivist” phase of Nietzsche's thinking, in which the need for revaluation already explicitly appears. The

¹ Cf. TL pp. 79-88.

² TL p. 83.

concept of „active difference” is reflected in the themes of alteration, self-emancipation of mind, and perspectivism. Nietzsche’s interest from the second half of the 1870s turns to the less „human”, more rigorous, more scientific cognition, that is when he comes by the aphoristic style, which he calls the „stronger concentration of words”.³ He had distanced himself from arts, religion, morality, basically from everything, which supposes an absolute essence of things, which latter, according to him, is only a merely logically significant postulate of the possible interpretations of reality. However, says Nietzsche, the will of truth leads to the logical denial of the world, as it presumes that reality is a human construction. In the background there is the seduction of grammatics, by means of which we assume an acting subject behind the action. All this leads us back to the writing from 1873, which introduces the idea of metaphorical truth, and which we find programmatic. In our view, the final breakup with the Kantian-Schopenhauerian grounds was highly supported by the familiarization with the critique of „transcendental schematism”, presented by Afrikan Spir. Spir’s critics on Kant has its focus on the thought on the continuous becoming as well, considering „transcendental schematism” as a way of violence committed against empirical reality. According to him, the „fundamental antinomy” of human existence, namely the controversy between the sensual diversity and intellectual unity, is truly irreconcilable, for he regards change as something permanent, but at the same time he maintains the priority of the self-identity which exists in each and every second. Our belief is that Spir’s train of thought, whose guidelines are to be reviewed in the second Excursus, supplemented by the Boscovichean atom-theory, is essential for the thought of eternal recurrence.

When analyzing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* we attempt to introduce it as the zenith of Nietzsche’s development as a thinker, more precisely, the completely „Nietzschean” articulation of those substantive and formal tendencies, which were already outlined in his writings from the end of the 1860s. The poetic that is essentially metaphorical language of the *Zarathustra* is perfectly capable to explicate the thoughts of the will to power and eternal recurrence, which are intrinsically connected to each other. On the other hand, in the vision of Overhuman, there is a critique to be heard, affecting the whole moral world order, disclosing the necessity of its change. This critique was anticipated in the „Free-Spirit Trilogy”. God’s death and the dionysian principal of *amor fati* are getting their actual weight through the reading of *Zarathustra*. From now on, inside of the „terrible” thought of eternal recurrence, there is finally the force of „active difference” in process, which erases all the borders, but at

³ HH I:195. §

the same time exactly because of this aggression is radically affirmative. That is the same force that manifests itself in the self-willing of power whereby „active difference” is able to continuously re-create itself in process of the eternal return. In the third Excursus we retrace the parallelisms of the Nietzschean thought of the will to power and the Spinozean doctrine of affects, keeping in mind, that only a few days before writing down the idea of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche himself referred on Spinoza as his intellectual predecessor.⁴

In the next, much shorter subsection following the analysis of *Zarathustra*, we will go ahead with the investigation of Nietzsche’s critique of morals. The quest for the origin of values points out, in the foreground of their apparent contradiction, the inherent consubstantiality of „good” and „bad”. By the analysis of the genesis of moral, Nietzsche unfolded the concept of genealogy, meaning the principle of the evolving and self-destruction of moral world order, whose investigation will hopefully lead us again to identify the work of „active difference” in its depths. The emergence of the „great thought” in August 1881 was followed by unbelievably fertile years. Nietzsche worked on a quasi-organon of the „revaluation of all values” since 1883, and it is known, that these texts (the eldests were dated back to 1888) were later, let us say, „interleft” under the title „Will to Power”, so we also refer to it this way. We think that the absolutely legal doubts emerging against the Förster-Gast compilation still can neither release the value of the single texts in it nor questionate their authority. We must, at many times, refer to the side issues of the editorial „work”, nonetheless must we admit that Nietzsche himself used to plan to draft the *Will to Power*, precisely, he wanted it to be his main work,⁵ in which he wanted to sum up his thoughts, beyond Good and Evil, revaluating all the values, bringing along the twilight of all the idols. Both the fragments from the period of 1885-88, concerning the European nihilism, and the texts defining the will to power as the „principle of a new valuation”, are extremely important. The fragments from the second and third chapter of the fourth book of the Förster-Gast compilation are indispensable to have better understanding of the relationship between nihilism, eternal recurrence and will to power. Nietzsche says goodbye to common sense with the *Twilight of the Idols*, summing up his radical critique of metaphysics, while *The Antichrist*, radicalizing the criticism against christianity, same as the *Ecce Homo* and the *Nietzsche contra Wagner* already show the signs of the increasing neurosis. Although the

⁴ Cf. BVN-1881, 135. „Brief an Franz Overbeck.”

⁵ Cf. eg. Nietzsche’s layout from March 17th 1887. (KSA 12.318)

referred works do not introduce any new in Nietzsche's basic concept, their analysis still seems to be essential to understand the *œuvre*, meaning the coherent unity of life and work.

The stake of the second part of the dissertation is the confrontation with Heidegger's critique on Nietzsche, which we could easily call the „touchstone for every Nietzschean”.⁶ Heidegger's train of thought is the following: the idea of eternal recurrence of the same is included in the thinking of will to power as the moment of fulfillment. The two thoughts fancy the same thing, and in their inherent unity the metaphysic, which is approaching consummation, speaks out its final word. The fact, that this essential unity is still unspeakable grounds the age of perfect meaninglessness in which modernity reaches its own point, i. e. nihilism. Such a fulfillment is the main characteristic of the transition which covers all that's past and at the very same time prepares the future. The actual exceed of metaphysics could only be thought as the opposite of the above mentioned process where the beings (as the totality of beings) loses their power over the truth of Being.⁷ The central statement of the Heideggerian critique is that Nietzsche stood inside of metaphysical tradition, namely because he had not recognized the „ontological difference”, whose oblivion, according to Heidegger, the most ultimate, but hence the nature of the difference itself, also inevitable failure of Western metaphysics. To support his standpoint, Heidegger was especially fond of citing the 617. § of the *Will to Power*, already during his lectures, which served as a basis of his monography, so we will similarly consider it as a starting point when trying to question the Heideggerian critique.

In the second chapter of the second part, we first of all talk about the problem of interpretation, which is especially important in the case of both Nietzsche and Heidegger, then we can proceed with disclosing our own doubts regarding Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche. We believe, that, considering Heidegger's own philosophy, declaring the necessity of „fundamental ontology” and the primacy of Being within „ontological difference”, one can raise the possibility of such an interpretation, according to which the above mentioned, specifically Heideggerian thoughts could be found at the grounds of Heidegger's critique on Nietzsche. The other way around: we hypothetize, that in Heidegger's approach, Nietzsche's „metaphysics” has very similar function to the Kantian „transcendental schematism”: i. e. they guarantee the necessary grounds for the outlines of a „fundamental ontology”, which

⁶ Reference on Nietzsche's statement, according to which the understanding of the problem of *Hubris* is „touchstone for every Heraclitean”. Cf. PTG 7 p. 61.

⁷ Cf. NI II:7-9.

keeps eye on the ontic-ontological primacy of Being over beings. Among the various difference-philosophies, based upon the Heideggerian idea of „ontological difference”, there are two which proved to be significant for us. Deleuze’s immanent concept of difference, and his Nietzsche-interpretation, culminating in the idea of „selective ontology” derived from the thought of immanent difference still seems to be a bit „Heideggerian”, hereby less plausible for us.

We believe that the most problematic stage of the argumentative part of the dissertation should definitely be the one which puts its theses to the test, so we had to begin to investigate the „problem of Kant” burdened with this presupposition. This latter one means the reconsideration of first Nietzsche’s, then Heidegger’s position against the „transcendental schematism” for us, but already from the viewpoint of Nietzschean philosophy as a philosophy of difference. Afterwards we can finally get round to the accurate and detailed exposition of the influential connections, which we already mentioned in the first part of the dissertation, such as the role of Roger Boscovich’s atom-theory and Afrikan Spir’s critique on Kant in the evolution of the doctrine of eternal recurrence, and also the parallelisms between the Spinozean theory of affects and the Nietzschean concept of the will to power. Eventually, we give voice to our belief that the only capable epistemological criterion of a critique of metaphysics, based on a critique of representation can be the falsificationist one, which is unlike the Popperian intentions dares to enter even the territory of metaphysics, inasmuch as it denies its epistemological principle, i. e. the possible adequacy of subject and object. As far as we would like to consider Nietzsche’s thinking as the *par excellence* philosophy of difference, and we found Deleuze’s immanent concept a bit too „moderate”, at the end of our treatise we cannot avoid to discuss a quite radical philosophy of difference which also harmonizes with the concept of „active difference”. Accordingly, the argumentation will be confined by the interpretation of Jacques Derrida’s relevant thoughts. We assume that an interpretation of Nietzsche’s thoughts, focused on the criticism of representation, could might also relieve Derrida’s philosophy of the „charge” of transcendental thinking, given, that the idea of „différance” is meant to tell off the concept of Being as a *presence* of beings.

3. Conclusion

During the interpretation of Nietzschean thinking as a radically falsificationist philosophy of difference, based on the critique of representation, we considered our operating

term, i. e. „active difference” as the basic element of the way of thinking, which makes the general critique of metaphysics as such possible at all. This kind of thinking wants to make impossible to think about „reality” as something fixed in absolutes, as something statically self-identical. To this extent we cannot even speak about the failure of the Nietzschean attempt to exceed metaphysics as in case if we take his lifelong intention to reevaluate all the values seriously, then we must turn back to the inherently coherent thoughts of continuous becoming and metaphorical truth again and again, explicated already in his early writings. But if these two ideas do play a relevant role within the Dionysian philosophy of will to power and eternal recurrence, then it could also be thought that without the critique of Kant’s philosophy, which seemed to inspire these ideas, the attempts to reconstruct the Nietzschean thinking would already be doomed to failure.

Friedrich Nietzsche: *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*. Trans. J. R. Hollingdale. Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 2004.

Friedrich Nietzsche: „On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.” In: *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the early 1870s*. Ed., trans. Daniel C. Breazeale. Humanity Books, New York, 1999.