

# NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY AS "WANDERING THROUGH THE FORBIDDEN"

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**Abstract:** The aim of this work is to show the transgressive aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy described here with the phrase of "wandering through the forbidden", and applied to some of the main issues of the German thinkers philosophy, such as revaluation of all values, the superhuman, or the genealogical critique of the Western Platonic and Christian morality. The Nietzschean philosophy will be interpreted as a process of "wandering", initialized by the genealogical critique of the Platonic and Christian morality, then pointed towards redefining all values, and the idea of the superhuman. The benchmark of this work will be the analysis of Nietzsche's genealogy as the main tool used for criticising the Western morality. Questioning the traditional dichotomy of values as well as morally underpinned truth, the genealogical critique thus opens the horizon to a new kind of philosophy, the "philosophy of future", exceeding towards everything that traditional morality considers cursed and forbidden. Thus comprehended "philosophy of future" will require redefining all values and redefining the very man culminating in the plan of the superhuman. The transgressive motif of Nietzsche's philosophy will finally be illustrated through Bataille's concept of the holy day, understood as transgressing the forbidden frontiers. From this perspective, the German thinker's philosophy will transpire as consecration of transgressive, therefore transcending the moral boundary's of human life.

**Keywords:** transgression, redefining all values, superhuman, Nietzsche

The title opening my considerations on Nietzsche's philosophy could aspire to an aphoristical description of this philosophy. This is because it suggests what the philosophy of the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols* is. However, it is not my intention to integrate all of Nietzsche's philosophy, all of its threads, in one, so to say, nomadic perspective. My intention is rather to show, in general, the direction, the vector of motion of this philosophy as well

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as its transgressive (invading, exceeding) character – expressed just here as “wandering through the forbidden”.

Therefore Nietzsche as a philosopher was, in my opinion, always a wanderer whose thoughts never stayed anywhere for too long. In his reflections, he was rather constantly returning (wandering back) to some questions, to reinvestigate them, or just temporarily merely touch their surface. But if we are to speak about wandering, it is worth asking for the road and the land that the road leads through. In this case the road leads throughout the land of the forbidden.

But what could be forbidden for a philosopher who placed his thoughts “beyond good and evil”? It seems to be a paradox which the Nietzschean philosophy is entangled in. Meanwhile, this “forbidden” turns out to be what is most desired and wise in Nietzsche's thought. And just exactly what is this forbidden? Perfunctorily, extracting a short fragment from the German thinker's text we might say: everything “that is unknown and worth questioning in existence”<sup>1</sup>, as well as everything “what morality held under a curse”.<sup>2</sup>

Before we unveil what exactly lies under morality's curse let us first learn about how Nietzsche understands morality itself. Firstly, it would be suitable to ask what kind of morality we are deliberating on. A significant trail turns out to be a fragment from *Ecce homo* where we can read “I attack only victorious things”<sup>3</sup>. Morality, in the context of Nietzsche's philosophy, has various appearances. However, under its mask almost always lies a conglomerate of Platonic and Christian ideas, and this conglomerate is the object of Nietzsche's attacks. “Christianity is Platonism for the common ‘people’”<sup>4</sup> – as we can read in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Conclusions that follow this statement have far-reaching consequences for our considerations. A kind of an alliance of those two ideas seals their dominating influence on European culture and makes them victorious; therefore, worthy of attacking for Nietzsche. Whatever is “kept under morality's curse” lies under the shadow of this powerful alliance of Christianity and Platonism.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Nietzsche (1888). *Ecce homo. Wie man wird, was man ist*. Polish translation by L. Staff: *Ecce homo. Jak się staje – kim się jest*, Kraków, 2006, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p.16.

<sup>4</sup> F. Nietzsche (1882). *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*. Polish translation by P. Pieniążek: *Poza dobrem i złem. Preludium do filozofii przyszłości*, Kraków, 2005, p.6.

Although not only this, so to say, adventurous attitude towards Christian morality distinguishes Nietzsche's philosophy. In a certain way, the German thinker orientation is as original. It is because the German thinker never did treat morality as "morality itself". As writes the author of *Genealogy of morals*, properly studied morality should be treated as "repercussion, as a symptom, as the mask, as sanctimoniously, as illness" and also "as causation, as remedy, as *stimulants*, as a barrier, as poison".<sup>5</sup>

Thus morality, in Nietzsche's opinion, does not have one meaning - it rather boils down to various dominators. This diversity serves the genealogy, a scientific method, studying conditions of moralities nascency in terms of discovering its very origins. Thus, morality is becoming an object of philosophical inquiry.

When it comes to selecting research methods, Nietzsche follows the same tracks with many of his contemporary researchers, for instance Spencer who applied a similar method towards morality. However, what the author of *Genealogy of morals* excels in is the purpose for which genealogical examining of morality is used, i.e. criticism of moral values. "We need the criticism of moral values, the very value of these values should once be called into doubt"<sup>6</sup> - Nietzsche postulates. Let us ask: why should we criticize morality and cast doubt on moral values? One of the main reasons seems to be that "the value of these values was assumed as given, as obvious, as lying apart from all giving in doubt"<sup>7</sup>. So, from this point of view, morality, as object of Nietzsche's philosophical deliberations, is treated as a certain set of uncritically approved values. Thus, the author of *Genealogy of morals* decides to "cast doubt" upon these values. "Why just the good, rather than evil?", Nietzsche seems to ask provocatively. However, this question emerges from a reliable philosophical reflection on the value of morality itself. This reflection finally guides towards posing one of the most important questions in Nietzsche's philosophy. It reads as follows: "And if the opposite was true? How could it be? If in 'good' a manifestation of regression would also inhere, therefore an

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<sup>5</sup> F. Nietzsche (1887). *Zur Genealogie der Moral – Eine Streitschrift*. Polish translation by L. Staff: *Z genealogii moralności. Pismo polemiczne*, Kraków, 2003, p.9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*

endangerment, seduction, venom, narcotic, thanks to which the present time would live with cost of the future?"<sup>8</sup>

While questioning the value of morality, Nietzsche is suggesting, that the value of what is universally recognized as good can be completely opposite. Thus the formulated suggestion seems to be the basis for the project which, in the opinion of the German thinker, was supposed to change the history of mankind through revaluation of all values. Therefore, as we can read on the pages of *Ecce homo*: "The issue concerning the origin of moral values", since it is referring to ideas of greatest value thus far, becomes "a primary issue, forasmuch as it is the stipulation of humanities future"<sup>9</sup> – and so, it constitutes the total criticism of the culture built on values founded by Christianity. However, the task of discovering the origin of moral values has a pioneering character, thus it requires knowledge which "has neither existed until now, nor has it even been desired".<sup>10</sup>

The specificity of moral value examinations postulated by Nietzsche leads to a situation in which "it is necessary to go round this vast, extensive, but so reserved land of morality with brand new questions as well as with new eyes. And does it not mean almost the same for this land just to be discovered?"<sup>11</sup>

The Nietzschean examining method tries to bring out the hidden land of morality by applying questions forcing to look at it from a completely different point of view. This leads to a position in which before the eyes of the questioning unfolds an all-new view of morality. The land of morality transpires immense and hidden. Now it is philosophers' task to discover it, just like one discovers an unknown land. Let us notice that rediscovering the "land of morality" constitutes a unique "truth test". That is because the issue of morality becomes most urgent when a speculation, in accordance to which the value of moral values is thoroughly opposite, is considered to be true. An attempt to solve this "truth test" seems to be an essential impulse of revaluating all values. I suppose that it is the "first step into the forbidden". However, we have not yet reached the factor which provoked that first step. To this factor Nietzsche seems to guide us on the pages of *Beyond Good and Evil* where he writes: "Will of the truth, which will still tempt us to not one bold enterprise; this famous

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.9-10.

<sup>9</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op.cit.*, p.53.

<sup>10</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, *op.cit.*, p.9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p.10.

truthfulness about which all philosophers spoke yet with esteem: what questions has this will of the truth not put before us? What strange, evil, problematic questions!”<sup>12</sup> It is the will of the truth that seems to be the mysterious factor which impelled Nietzsche to ask the problematic question about the value of moral values. All at the same time, however, on the pages of *Beyond Good and Evil* the “will of the truth” is also being questioned by the German thinker. “Let us assume that we want the truth: and why not untruth rather? And the uncertainty? Not to say ignorance?”, Nietzsche asks, problematizing the appropriate subject of the “will of the truth” – the truth itself. This way, as the German thinker indicates, “does the problem of the value of the truth stood before us – or maybe it is us who stood up before this problem?”<sup>13</sup>

It appears that according to Nietzsche “will of the truth” constitutes the main motive inducing the man into setting “strange, evil and problematic questions”. Among such questions we could include the question about the true value of moral values, as well as the question about the value of the truth alone – one of the paramount values of traditional morality. Let us notice here that questioning one value involves questioning the remaining ones. And so, for example, questioning the value of morality leads to questioning the value of the truth proclaiming it. However, on the pages of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche formulates a couple of significant questions reading as follows: “Irrespective of the value which it can be entitled for what is real, truthful, unselfish: whether it would be possible that for appearance, will of the illusion, self-interest and for desire one should assign higher and more fundamental values for all life? It would even still be possible that what accounts for the value of these good and honoured things would rely exactly on the fact that they are in an ambiguous way related, tied together, tangled up, perhaps even identical with those evil, seemingly opposing, things. Perhaps!”<sup>14</sup>

So firstly, the German thinker, just like on the pages of *Genealogy of morals*, seems to ask whether “the contrary was not the truth”: that is, whether what, according to traditional assessing, would be recognized as “evil” would have higher value, relative to what in the framework of the same assessing would be recognized as “good”.

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<sup>12</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, *op.cit.*, p.11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p.16.

Next, he formulates a speculation that it is possible, that what is universally recognized as “good” (regarded as “good”) is in some way lined and tangled up with what is “evil” and in its essence does not differ from “evil”. Therefore, according to Nietzsche, it is possible that anything morality “wields under its curse” is in conclusion its ineffaceable part and “perhaps” shows a greater value.

And thus he starts to shake the disturbed classical dichotomy of values. Differences between the good and the evil fade away, and the scale pan is starting to lean over to the benefit of values so far cursed. What is interesting, however, is that no sophisticated argument provokes it. It is rather clean inquisitiveness, “famous truthfulness”, the “will of the truth” itself that becomes a point of passing across the border, of what so far has been undisputable, to what stays only a “dangerous ‘perhaps’”.<sup>15</sup> That “will of the truth” tempts us to make an attempt to jump “into the unknown”. But whoever is attracted by the risk which is involved in this new question, which Nietzsche drew by “the will of the truth”, unfolds before us? Risk that “probably has no greater”.<sup>16</sup> Has it attracted philosophy till now? Well – as the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* seems to suggest – so far the critical question about the value of truth did not attract philosophers. In Nietzsche’s opinion, thus far the truth was the mainstay of certainty for philosophers: anything dangerous, variable, spontaneous, continually elusive was something not entitled to be true, endangering truth as its opposition and considered bad as well as undesirable. Therefore, the German thinker anticipates: “we must wait until a new species of philosophers come, a species of different, opposite taste, and such inclinations to previous philosophers – philosophers of dangerous ‘Perhaps’ in every meaning”.<sup>17</sup>

In Nietzsche’s opinion, the new concept of truth will require a new species of philosophers. This is how the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* anticipates a new type of philosophy – philosophy of “dangerous ‘Perhaps’”. Let us notice that when Nietzsche writes about these new philosophers, he does point out that they should be philosophers of “dangerous ‘perhaps’ in every meaning”. Therefore we can assume that the philosophy they would practice should affirm everything that

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p.12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p.11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p.12.

is mysterious and therefore dangerous, this way renouncing itself from its classical counterpart, secured by a metaphysical dogma.

At the same time, this new species of philosophers would have to fundamentally differ from the current philosophers – unwilling to ask dangerous questions. The very tendency to setting off such dangerous questions such as these asked by Nietzsche in relation to morality and truth seems to prove an essentially different attitude from the one ruling in hitherto prevailing philosophy – at least in Nietzsche’s opinion. Thus the German thinker appears to suggest that there could exist a completely new “species of philosophers” able to answer the most dangerous questions.

But let us ask: why venture into the dark? Could it be about sheer curiosity? What kind of truth is worth the danger that lurks near its gateway? Nietzsche replies: “What amount of truth can the spirit bear, how much can the spirit dare upon? More and more it became a typical measure of value for me”.<sup>18</sup>

The truth, as previously morality, is not a value in itself for the German thinker. It rather becomes a value verifier of anyone who dares the truth. Next, the value of the very truth seems to lie in danger on which it exposes anyone who looks for truth because “every acquisition, every step forward in the cognition results from the courage, from the hardness towards oneself”.<sup>19</sup> That is because seeking truth always means exposing oneself to danger, but this danger, as Nietzsche claims, is able to bring out what has the highest value in one. Only facing danger does the value of a human being become clear.

At the same time the author of *Ecce homo* remarks that “mistake (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, a mistake is cowardice”.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, a (cognitive) mistake, which Nietzsche identifies with “faith in the ideal”, will result from cowardice towards truth. So cowardice would mean fear of everything which is unfamiliar with our ideals and which would require treading dangerous grounds with courage and “hardness towards oneself” to gain recognition.

So it seems that the main charge Nietzsche puts against Christian values and ideals is that they generate fear. That is because they turn out to be streaked with fear before what is strange towards them. That fear makes the human being incapable of authentic recognition which,

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<sup>18</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, *op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*

in Nietzsche's opinion, is always associated with entering dangerous grounds of the forbidden. Therefore, the German philosopher, availing himself with words of Ovidious, writes: "*Nitimur in vetitum*: under this sign will my philosophy prevail, because until now it has only been the truth that was fundamentally forbidden".<sup>21</sup> And so, heading towards the forbidden seems to mark the road towards the truth. However, under the conception of truth lies nothing that was familiar with it before, since now it would mean nothing but jibbing from truth. This is where the entire subtlety of Nietzsche's philosophy and its main message unfolds.

Recognizing what is forbidden as truth leads to a situation when we understand truth as everything that is seeming, covetous, passing and sensual, therefore everything that cannot be captivated by certain and ultimate knowledge, and what is more, everything that brings danger and uncertainty. At the same time, these anti-Christian values are essential to the Nietzschean plan of redefining all values that would be realized by "freeing oneself from all moral values in bearing out and believing everything which until now has been forbidden, spurned and damned"<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore, within Nietzsche's philosophy we could interpret searching for the truth as tantamount with the aspiration to reevaluate all values. However, this aspiration does not rely only on "freeing oneself from moral values". Because, as we know, the truth – the measure of danger, which accompanies acquiring it – also measures the value of a human being. And so, heading towards the forbidden (towards the truth) means reevaluating all values, also redefining the very meaning of a human being which seems to find the overtone in the Nietzschean project of superhuman...

It seems that also in the conception of the superhuman, as it is one of the most important in Nietzsche's philosophy, we may find traces of "wandering through the forbidden". Reading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the German thinker's leading work, we may come across a statement that "the man is something which is necessary to overpower".<sup>23</sup> And according to Zarathustra's teachings, the result of overpowering will make the man into the superhuman.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>23</sup> F. Nietzsche (1980). *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, based on: *Sämtliche Werke*. Polish translation by S. Lisiecka and Z. Jaskuła: *To rzekł Zaratustra. Książka dla Wszystkich i dla nikogo*, Wrocław, 2005 p.8.



We could describe the very act of overpowering as exceeding human limits. Let us notice that the limits, as Nietzsche seems to show us, are appointed by moral values – including the classically comprehended truth – securing them with a dogmatic status. “It is not your sin - it is your moderation that is outrageous, your stinting even in the sin shouts to the sky!”<sup>24</sup> – says Zarathustra to people. Here it is not the sin – recognized by Christian morality as a forbidden act – but “moderation” and “stinting even in the sin” that becomes worthy of reprimand. Moral values seem to be tethers here through whose sanctioning character forms a modest but stingy human being. In Nietzsche’s opinion, freeing oneself from these values would initiate a radical change of human attitudes symbolized through “frenzy” and “lightening” of the superhuman.<sup>25</sup> At the same time this radical metamorphosis would mean that humanity has been overpowered – that complete transformation would mark the overcoming of man.

Listening intently to one of Zarathustra speeches we may deduce that this transformation will be the fulfillment of humanities destiny. According to Zarathustra, the man can be described as “a rope tied between the animal and the superman – a rope above the abyss”.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, within Nietzsche’s philosophy a human being (like morality) is not an established entity, but only some transitional life form placed between “the animal and the superhuman”. Nevertheless, as proclaims Zarathustra, being “a bridge rather than a purpose” decides about the greatness of man and the weight of the task it is destined for, as it turns out to be difficult and dangerous. The rope, a metaphor, through which Zarathustra conceives the human being’s status, is suspended over the abyss and the human being is described as “a dangerous transition from one side to another, a dangerous road, dangerous looking backwards, dangerous hesitating and fitting”.<sup>27</sup> Let us notice that in the fragment quoted above the man is described as a “dangerous road”, therefore – a process that is not certain to end successfully.

As we already ascertained, danger is a crucial element of Nietzsche’s philosophy. It results from rejecting laws established so far – the ones regulating the status of the man by means of morality – and also from setting a philosophical orientation towards the unknown

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p.10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p.27.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*

sphere of what so far those laws have been “wielding under the curse of”. We could say that the author of *Ecce homo* understands “wandering through the forbidden” as a certain model of philosophy as well as a model of the human being. The philosophical model may be found in the project of reevaluating all values – the new model of humanity seems to manifest in the superhuman project. Both of these projects develop from the criticism conducted by Nietzsche on moral values.

In order to demonstrate that Nietzsche's philosophy is inseparably tied with transgression I would like to refer here to the reflections of Georges Bataille. I understand the transgression as exceeding some established law, and, in my opinion, this is also the proper meaning of Nietzsche's “wandering through the forbidden”.

In order to gain better comprehension of the transgressive character of Nietzschean philosophy I suggest referring to Georges Bataille work titled *The Holy Day that Transgresses Prohibitions*. It may seem that the direction of our deliberations has dangerously kinked. In the end, a Holy Day is a religious element of the human life, a time of “celebrating sacred” values. Let us ask here: where is the connection between the Holy Day and the “forbidden” philosophy of Nietzsche? In Bataille's text we may come across a fragment that directs us towards answering that question. We read in it: “in a completely fundamental way what is sacred is what is forbidden”.<sup>28</sup> According to Bataille's interpretation, the *sacrum* is the transformed beastly nature of the human being – therefore something that we have already comprehended as the forbidden (sensuality, sexuality, lust, earthly corporality) – uplifted to the rank of sacredness.

We may notice a distinct resemblance here to the Nietzschean perspective that effaces differences between opposite values and reduces them to the lowest common denominator. Let us notice that within Nietzsche's philosophy categories of sacred and forbidden play an equally substantial role in the process of self-aggrandizement of the human being. On the one hand, what is sacred is redefined as forbidden, on account of its sacredness; on the other hand, what is forbidden allows one to come close to divinity (the frontier of sacredness). Therefore, in both Nietzschean criticism of Christian morality and in projects resulting from it – the reevaluation of all values

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<sup>28</sup> Georges Bataille (1976). *L'Histoire de l'erotisme*. Polish translation by I. Kania: *Historia erotyzmu*, Kraków, 1992, p.78.

and the superhuman – the intention is not just to reverse existing values but to change the existing way of valuation. And so, from this perspective every value becomes a challenge to us, as something “that is unfamiliar and worthy of questioning in existence”.

Let us further explain Bataille’s understanding of the Holy Day as transgressing the forbidden. The French thinker describes the Holy Day as “breaking away from the rules, a rupture, a disturbance in the regular course of living; what at the beginning was a restriction, now is breaking restrictions”.<sup>29</sup> In my opinion, through Bataille’s description of the Holy Day we may observe the fundamental trait of Nietzsche’s philosophy. And so, the divine character of the Holy Day seems to realize both in the project of reevaluating all values as well as in the superhuman project.

Both of these projects are inseparably combined with “freeing the man from moral values” - when the sacred ceases to be a restriction, on the contrary, as Bataille writes “the sacred announces the new opportunity: it is a leap into the unknown”. Therefore, taking Bataille’s vision of the Holy Day as transgressing the forbidden we can try to show the relation occurring between “the sacred and the forbidden” within Nietzsche’s philosophy and indicate their association with the transgression.

From this point of view, everything that is forbidden seems to be sacred as it announces new possibilities. Behind every boundary appointed with “a sacred prohibition” lies a new chance – transgressing the boundary implies communing with something sacred, coming near divinity. We may say that the Nietzschean “wandering through the forbidden” means wandering through an unknown land of new possibilities and, therefore, it can be recognized as philosophy of transgression. At the same time, in this transgression the sacralization of all these new possibilities would take place. We may conclude that in sanctifying everything which is unknown and forbidden the not-entirely-closed of Nietzsche’s philosophy seems to realize itself.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*

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