

A PHILOSOPHICAL RECONSIDERATION OF NIETZSCHEAN WILL-TO-POWER AS WILL-TO-WIN

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Abstract

Nietzsche, in his writings, considers will-to-power as a psychological principle. As such, will-to-power is the ultimate drive underlying all human actions. Put differently, in all that human beings do, they search for power or to express power in the form of domination or self-overcoming. This research assesses this doctrine of Nietzsche and maintains that it is rather will-to-win and not will-to-power that is the primordial drive in human beings. Will-to-win is the will or the strong desire for success; the strong will to go beyond oneself. In all that humans do, there is always this strong desire to be a winner or a success. Nietzsche's will-to-power is flatus vocis or rather 'power-less' if power is not pursued for victory or success. If will-to-win is the primum mobile in human beings, this presupposes the fact that existence is a struggle. In other words, to exist is to strive or to be involved in struggles. Nonetheless, humans strive, not for striving sake; they strive to be winners.

Keywords: Will-to-power, Domination, Self-overcoming, Drive, Will-to-win.

Introduction

The concept of will-to-power is at the center of Nietzsche's philosophy. For Nietzsche, it is at work in every human behaviour and valuation. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he argues that it is the fundamental motive in man and that it is also found in other organic things; in his later works, he ascribes it to the inorganic nature (Paul Edward, 1967: 510). Generally, for Nietzsche, the will-to-power, which of course underlies all things, is the only thing that all human beings seek for its own sake (Paul Edward, 1967: 511).

But is the will-to-power really the ultimate reality? Is it really the ultimate goal underlying every human desire or motive? Can the human person pursue power just for its own sake? Is there no thing more primordial than power in human pursuits? In this research I wish to establish that will-to-power is not the ultimate goal of humans but rather the will-to-win. In all that humans do, they search for victory. Even power, in itself, is empty and lacks a locomotive force to move human beings for actions if not pursued for victory.

Hence, in this research I shall show how the will-to-win and not Nietzsche's will-to-power is the ultimate goal of humans. In that regard, the work is divided into five main parts. After this introduction, which is the first part, the second part analyzes Nietzsche's idea of will-to-power; the third situates the Nietzschean understanding of will-to-power and shows that it is ultimately a psychological principle; the fourth part establishes how it is the will-to-win and not the will-to-power that is the ultimate force in humans, while the fifth concludes the research work.

Nietzschean Will-To-Power

In his books and those of his commentators, the will-to-power is expressed in the following terms: "the dominating will", "an insatiable desire to manifest power", "willing to be stronger", "the will to outdo, excel and overpower one another", etc. From the foregoing, it can be said that the will-to-power, for Nietzsche, means the will to conquer or to overpower. This implies that for him, the will-to-power exists in the forms of domination and overcoming, that is, self-overcoming (Charles Ajogi, 2003:67).

Will-to-Power as Domination

Etymologically, the English word "domination" comes from the Latin *dominus*, meaning "a master or mastery". To dominate means, therefore, to be a master over another, to have power over another or to have control over others, the same way a master can have control over his slaves. Hence, the Nietzschean will-to-power as domination is the lust to dominate; the desire that others recognize us and submit to us; the drive for supremacy over others.

Because such a drive is characteristically brute and absolute, it could involve violence and injury. Thus, in his work *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche, while talking about the will-to-power as domination, says:

Man of a still natural, barbarians in every fearful sense of the word, men of prey still in possession of an unbroken strength of will and lust for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more civilized, more peaceful, perhaps trading or cattle-raising races, or upon old mellow cultures [...] The noble caste was in the beginning always the barbarian caste: their superiority lay, not in their physical strength, but primarily in their psychical – they were more complete human beings (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1973: 173).

By describing will-to-power using the instance of the 'barbarians' who violently attack and dominate weaker societies, Nietzsche affirms this uncaring, cruel and violent nature of the will-to-power as domination. Elsewhere in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche argues that life, which of course for him is will-to-power, "operates essentially, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and simply cannot be thought of at all without this character" (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1969: 76). Put differently, for Nietzsche, will-to-power as domination is the desire to brutally or violently manifest one's supremacy over another.

Though Nietzsche, as demonstrated above, accepts harmful and violent acts of domination towards others as means to express power, he does not encourage human beings to search for or to express power in such a manner. In Kauffmann's words, "he [Nietzsche] does not consider the neurotic's will to power admirable [...] The will to power is a positive motive which would make us strive for something" (Walter Kauffmann, 1974: 190). Surely, what interests Nietzsche most in his theory of will-to-power is the self-overcoming aspect of it.

Will-to-Power as Self-Overcoming

Self-overcoming as a form of will-to-power is the will to self-overcome; the will to create; the will to involve oneself in the continuous process of self-development. In a

word, it is the will to say “yes” to life in the face of nihilism resulting from the “Death of God”.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche in his poetic style writes:

Have you not heard of the madam who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, 'I seek God! I seek God!' As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter [...] 'Wither is God ' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? [...] What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? [...] Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him [...]' (Walter Kaufmann, 1954: 95)

With this death of God, comes the crumbling of all the values and philosophical doctrines associated with the God-concept. And the direct consequence of this is what Nietzsche calls nihilism. What is nihilism? Nihilism derives from the Latin word *nihil*, meaning "nothing". In philosophy, nihilism can be viewed as the perception of life as meaningless, purposeless and as having no value. In this regard, Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* argues: “what does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; “why” finds no answer” (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 1). Thus, for Nietzsche, nihilism sets in when our highest values, that is, all that we earlier thought to give meaning and purpose to the world, are considered as worthless. Put simply, nihilism means losing sense of direction, “straying as through an infinite nothing” (Walter Kaufmann, 1954: 95).

Accordingly, in the face of nihilism, one must choose between the two options: either he/she gives in to Schopenhauerian pessimism which Nietzsche refers to as passive nihilism, that is, “decline and recession of the power of the spirit”; or, he/she chooses saying "yes" to life, which Nietzsche refers to as active nihilism (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 17). In the active nihilism, the death of God is viewed differently; not as a catastrophic event, but as an opportunity for "our ship" to "venture out to face any danger" (Walter Kaufmann, 1954: 448). So, instead of resigning to pessimism because of the death of God and the consequent crumbling of the values associated with the God-concept, the active nihilist confronts the horror and terror of existence through the means of will-to-power as self-overcoming by creating meaning, purpose, value and by determining his/her life. Hence, the will-to-power as self-overcoming is a necessity for he/she who wishes to take charge of his/her existence amidst nihilism resulting from the death of God.

Having analyzed the two senses in which the expression "will-to-power" is used by

Nietzsche, let us situate it within the context of its interpretations as a metaphysical reality and a psychological principle, in view of making more vivid his perception of will-to-power.

Situating the Nietzschean Will-to-Power

a. Will-to-Power as A Metaphysical Reality

In his writings, both the published and unpublished notes, Nietzsche sometimes presents will-to-power as a foundational or an ultimate reality. For instance, in *The Will to Power*, he says that “Life is will to power” and that “the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every center of force – not self-preservation, but the will to appropriate, dominate, increase, grow stronger” (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 367; see also 35-39, 355-356). Elsewhere, he opines:

And do you know what 'the world' is to me? Shall I show you it in my mirror? This world: a monster of force, without beginning, without end, a fixed, iron quantity of force which grown neither larger nor smaller, which doesn't exhaust but only transforms itself, as a whole unchanging in size, an economy without expenditure and losses, but equally without increase... – 'This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!' And you yourselves too are this will to power – and nothing besides! (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 549-550)

In the above citation, Nietzsche appears to describe the nature or foundation of reality as "will-to-power". In this perspective, therefore, nature or reality is only a monster of force or quantum of power. The will-to-power is by implication found in everything that exists in the universe. Arguing on this, Heidegger asserts: "[t]he expression 'will to power' designates the basic character of beings; any being which is, insofar as it is, is will to power" (Martin Heidegger, 1961: 18). Thus, in Heidegger's view, will-to-power as perceived by Nietzsche, is foundational to all that is: being and becoming, change and permanence, etc. Hence, for Nietzsche, it is not only that will-to-power underlies the organic world, "it guides the inorganic world as well...." (Friedrich Nietzsche, 2009: 34).

He argues further:

Action at a distance cannot be eliminated: something draws something else closer; something feels drawn. This is the fundamental fact: compared to this, the mechanistic motion of pressing and pushing is merely a hypothesis based on sight and touch, even if it does indeed serve us as a regulative hypothesis for the world of sight (Friedrich Nietzsche, 2009: 34).

In the above, Nietzsche would want us to replace the mechanistic interpretation of the world with the interpretation of the universe simply as will-to-power. For that which underlies all events in the universe is nothing other than the “dynamic quanta [...] the will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a pathos – the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge” (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 339). Similarly, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche reduces everything in the world (organic and inorganic) to “a single fundamental form [...] of the will to power”(Friedrich Nietzsche, 1973: 3).

Here, will-to-power, as we have seen in his other works, is perceived as the underlying principle of all things, and everything in the universe can be explained in terms of its relation to will-to-power. He avers: "[...] we assume that nothing is "given" as real other than our world of desires and passion and that we cannot access from above or below any "reality" other than the direct reality of our drives [...] Seen from inside, the world defined and described according to its "intelligible character" would be simply "will to power" and nothing else" (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1973: 36). There are some other expressions in Nietzsche's writings that strongly support the claim that will-to-power is a metaphysical reality: "power quanta", "power centers", "force", etc. (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 339, 368, 222, 290, 294, 305, 366)

Certainly, as we have seen, understanding of will-to-power as a metaphysical reality finds much support in Nietzsche's works. However, many Nietzschean philosophers reject this for various reasons. The basic argument postulated by them is that the interpretation of will-to-power as a metaphysical reality is totally logically inconsistent with Nietzsche's philosophy, since he saw himself as an anti-metaphysician (Walter Kauffmann, 1954: 344), and attempted to attack metaphysicians in his writings. Another important argument employed against this position is that most texts in support of this interpretation of will-to-power as a metaphysical reality are found in Nietzsche's unpublished work. In his published works, many of the passages on will to power do not discuss it as metaphysical. This makes it even more doubtful on whether Nietzsche in the unpublished writings really understood will-to-power as a metaphysical reality (Jeffrey Beery, 2020: 28-31). Given these concerns, we have strong reasons to reject the interpretation of will-to-power as a metaphysical reality. Nietzsche mainly discussed will-to-power in psychological terms.

b. Will-to-Power as a Psychological Principle

In general, there is a motivation behind every human action/behavior towards a fellow human being or his environment. This motivation is what Nietzsche in his writings calls drives. Accordingly, among the drives, there exists will-to-power which is the ultimate drive. Put in different terms, the will-to-power is the primordial drive of human actions. In his words, it is "the most universal and basic instinct in all doing and willing" (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1967: 356). Drawing from this, it can be categorically asserted that in Nietzsche's perspective, all that human beings do are done for the sake of power. On this, Paul Edwards affirms that, for Nietzsche, "the only thing that all men want is power, and whatever is wanted is wanted for the sake of power. If something is wanted more than something else; it must represent more power" (Paul Edwards, 1967: 511). In regard to this, Walter Kauffmann maintains that for Nietzsche, "the will to power is the positive motive which would make us strive for something" (Walter Kauffmann, 1974: 190).

If, for Nietzsche, all that human beings do are done for power, it implies that, for him as well, all human acts or events can be explained in terms of will-to-power as their ultimate drive. For example, will to truth or drive for knowledge can be explained in terms of will to power as its ultimate drive? Accordingly, in one of his works, Nietzsche maintains that the will to truth is a "will to the thinkability of all [things]," and that this will is found in every human being (Walter Kauffmann, 1954: 225). That said, the drive for truth, however, never exists for its own sake; it rather exists for power. In other words, human beings search for "Truth" in view of understanding and becoming masters over nature. Put differently, truth is pursued ultimately for power. This position is much clearer in what

Nietzsche says of theologians and metaphysicians in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Their knowing is creating, their creating is law-giving, their will to truth is – will to power” (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1973: 123). Thus, will-to-truth is a manifestation of will-to-power. Drawing from the above arguments, therefore, it can be strongly affirmed that for Nietzsche, will-to-power is a fundamental human drive or a psychological driver that underlies other drives in human beings, including the drive for truth. As an ultimate drive, will-to-power is, therefore, the *primum mobile* or first drive of all human desires. But, is will-to-power really the primordial drive? Can the desire for power be the drive underlying all human desires? Can power be sought for its own sake? Do we not desire power for the sake of some other primordial need? In a word, do we not desire power for winning sake?

Will-to-Power or Will-to-Win?

Berton Barley (2023) wrote a poem entitled *The Will to Win*:

The Will to Win
 If you want a thing bad enough
 To go out and fight for it,
 Give up your time and your peace and
 Your sleep for it
 If only desire of it
 Makes you quite mad enough
 Never to tire of it,
 Makes you hold all other things tawdry
 And cheap for it [...]
 If dogged and grim you besiege and beset it,
 You'll get it!

Our interest here is not necessarily in the content of this poem whose aim is to motivate the one who strongly desires a goal; the interest is rather in the title of the poem itself which is 'Will to Win'. The title of the poem shows that there could exist 'will-to-win' in humans.

What Is Will-to-Win?

To be able to establish clearly the meaning of will-to-win, we need to underline first what 'to win' means. According to *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, to win is “to achieve”, “to be a victor”, “to gain influence”, to excel, to be successful, to reach one's potential (E. M. Kirkpatrick, 1983: 1495).

Hence, will-to-win is the drive or desire to succeed; the urge to reach one's potential; the desire to unlock the door of one's personal excellence; the drive to go beyond one's present level of ability.

But, does this desire exist really in humans? If it does, has it any ontological priority over the Nietzschean will to power?

Will-To-Win: The Ultimate Drive of Human Actions

Vincent Lombardi, former American footballer, coach and executive in National Football League (NFL), in some of his speeches affirms:

Winning is not everything - but making the effort to win is. Success demands singleness of purpose. If it doesn't matter who wins or loses, then why do they keep score? Winning is not a sometime thing... it is an all the time thing. You don't win once in a while...you don't do the right thing once in a while...you do them right all the time. Winning is a habit...Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing. The objective is to win [....] (Beau Dure, 2015)

Analyzing this literally would imply that all that really matters for humans is winning. Put differently, it is the will-to-win, the will to be a victor, the will to be successful, the will to reach one's potential that underlies all human actions.

It, that is, will-to-win, is like a driving force which propels all human activities. Thus, in all that the human person does, he/she searches to excel or to be a winner. This means that will-to-win is, therefore, the primordial drive in humans and has an ontological priority over every other human drive, including will-to-power. So, it is not the will-to-power that is the ultimate drive of human actions but rather the will-to-win. Nietzsche's worldly power is in fact 'power-less' if it is not driven by the will-to-win. Looking at it from a different perspective, human beings do desire power not just for the sake of possessing it; they search for power because it 'empowers' them to become winners and successful beings. Analyzing it in relation to Nietzschean will-to-power, humans lust for power simply because it enables them to become victorious and successful, either in the form of domination over others or in the self-overcoming.

Elsewhere, Lombardi (2023) opines that “the quality of each man's life is the full measure of that man's commitment of excellence and victory – whether it be football, whether it be business, whether it be politics or government or what have you”.

From the foregoing, it can be said that the existence of the human person is measured by the will-to-win, and that all human activities are manifestations of the will-to-win. Thus, morality, sports, businesses, politics or government, inasmuch as they are human activities, are all manifestations of will-to-win.

Analysis of 'morality', for instance, in relation to will-to-win portrays this much clearer. Morality, which of course is 'will-to-do-good' is no other thing but a manifestation of will-to-win. Evidently, it is founded on the principles of reward and punishment. By implication, those who behave well get rewarded for their good actions while those who do evil get punished for their evil actions. Surely, human beings naturally desire to win/gain reward, and purposefully do good for that reason. Drawing from this analysis, it follows therefore, that will-to-win is at the foundation of every form of human morality. A similar analysis could be applied to other human activities, portraying that they are only manifestations of will-to-win.

The basic implication of this, is that existence involves struggles or striving. Regarding this, Pope Paul VI (2023) affirms:

All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish, and insensitive to the real values of life. The very striving and hard work that we so constantly try to avoid is the major building block in the person we are today.

The above shows that struggle or striving is part of human life. Surely, human beings do

strive, not for striving sake; they strive to be winners in whatever kind of struggles they are involved in. Even earlier than Pius VI, Heraclitus did say something very similar: “we must recognize that war is common, strife is justice, and all things happen according to strife [...] War is father of all and king of all; some he made slaves, some free [...] Justice is [...] the whole pattern of domination of one opposite followed by that of the other” (Daniel Graham, 2019).

This means that for Heraclitus, existence could be equated to struggles. These ageless struggles in human beings as well as in the cosmos, keep the world and makes it what it is. Soren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus share a similar view in their existentialist writings, as analyzed in the UKEssays (2018): “[...] we struggle to make sense of the world but it keeps getting difficult as we try. [...] We live in a constant state of conflict with the world.” Hence, for them, human life is that of a struggle, a struggle for an existential meaning. And in this struggle, the human person desires winning.

In sum, human life involves constant struggles. And to exist truly, is to be a winner in the struggles, that is, to be a winner over all that militates against meaningful existence in whatever manner.

Conclusion

My enquiry on Nietzsche's 'will to power' led me to the analysis of the above concept and its philosophical implications. I demonstrated that will to power has two senses, namely, domination and self-overcoming. Situating the concept as expressed in both Nietzsche's published and unpublished works, I showed that, above all, will-to-power is a psychological principle, that is, the first drive underlying all drives or desires in humans. As the primary drive, in all their actions, human beings search for power or attempt to express power.

This research contends this position of Nietzsche, arguing that human beings have a drive more primordial than will-to-power. This drive is called 'will-to-win'. Will-to-win is that ultimate drive or desire in humans which pushes them in search of victory or success in all their actions/activities. Thus, in all that human beings will or desire, including their desire for power, they ultimately desire victory or success.

If human beings search for victory or success in all their desires/endeavors, this presupposes the obvious, that is, that the life of humans in the universe (being-in-the-universe) is a struggle or a striving, and that humans who exist authentically strive in such a way as to be victors in this struggle called life.

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