

## Nietzsche's Nihilism and the Crisis of Values

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### *Abstract*

The present paper analyzes Nietzsche's ideas about the cultural crisis from the standpoint of nihilism. According to Nietzsche, nihilism takes over modern civilization and raises the question of values. To the decline, or as Nietzsche call it, "the decadence" that led to the crisis in values, Nietzsche contrasts his "active" nihilism, which has to find "new values". From a perspectivist point of view, the revaluation of all values through which the contemporary humanity must overcome the nihilism and project its future, is considered.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche, culture, decadence, nihilism, values.

### 1. Introduction

Nietzsche's problem begins with the absolute crises of intellect and culture, defined as "the death of God" (Vattimo, 2005: 7) and the rise of nihilism (Nietzsche, 1990b: 28). The "death of God" can be seen as breaking the link with the Christian medieval worldview. In the 19th century, Christianity faced a crisis of its postulates and social role, and in this crisis disappeared all the values transcendent to the world: "The destiny of every myth is to be gradually pushed into the cracks of some supposed historical reality... This is how usually religions die out – when under the strict, logical view of an orthodox dogmatism the mythical presuppositions of religion are systematized as a ready-made sum of historical events" (Nietzsche, 1990a: 114). Nietzsche raises his "active nihilism", that is, the active denial of all previous values and this active nihilism leads to the establishment of new "values of life" – "will to power", "eternal recurrence", "superman".

### 2. Philosophy and the understanding of culture

Nietzsche's philosophy marks a new stage in the understanding of culture. According to Vattimo, Nietzsche has developed a new "theory of culture" according to which "the whole culture consists in transformations guided by laws of repression and compression, sublimation in general, or, so to speak, rhetoric completely replaces logic" (Vattimo, 2005: 8). Initially, the Greek art is the decision it the human would prosper, without reason and religion. But namely, Socrates begins the decline, the "decadence", because the Socratic moral values are a "negation of life": "Dionysus was banished from the tragic scene with the help of the demonic force speaking from the mouth of Euripides. And Euripides himself was in a sense only a mask: the deity who spoke on his behalf was not Dionysus, nor was Apollo, but a newborn demon called Socrates" (Nietzsche,

1990a: 121-122). With Socrates, the tendency of nihilism is laid – the denial of what is truly valuable to human. For Nietzsche, nihilism is the loss of all values, leading to decadence. Nihilism, from “nihil” – nothing, that is a loss of meaning of existence. Higher values are devaluated: “for Nietzsche, not only the values have disappeared, but the supreme values, gathered precisely in the higher value par excellence – God” (Vattimo, 2005: 8).

According to Vattimo. Nietzsche's nihilism is “active nihilism” as opposed to “passive nihilism”, which is the point of view of “Schopenhauer's philosophy, decadence and European Buddhism” (Vattimo, 2005: 10). Nietzsche will look for an alternative to Schopenhauer's pessimism. Nietzsche transforms the basic concept of Schopenhauer – the will as “the will to life” to “the will to power”, as the will is no longer one, but there are many wills: “The unconditional, as long as that higher perfection, cannot serve as a basis for everything conditioned. Schopenhauer, who wanted to prove the opposite, had to think of this metaphysical basis as something contrary to the ideal, as an “evil, blind will; as such, it could then become the “appearing” that is revealed in the world of phenomena” (Nietzsche, 1995: 42), the will to power are emotions, intellect, instincts, taken together. Schopenhauer sees the world as pessimistic, everything in the world is suffering: “Schopenhauer's pessimism is also thought as a sure and realistic antithesis of biblical optimism” (Passy, 1997: 75). Nietzsche reinforces Schopenhauer's nihilism in the direction of eliminating what “paralyzes” life: “Schopenhauer was right in his one way: compassion denies life, makes it worthy of denial, compassion is practically nihilism. I will say it again: this depressing contagious instinct paralyzes the instincts, the striving to preserve life, to increase its value, and that represents the main tool that accelerates the decadence” (Nietzsche, 1991: 11).

For Nietzsche, the nihilism is a “terrible guest” that turns all aspects of life upside down: “Nihilism is at the door: where did the most terrible of all guests come from? – Starting point: it is a fallacy to point to “social disasters”, “psychological degeneration” or corruption as the cause of nihilism. This is the most honest and compassionate age” (Nietzsche, 1995: 29). According to Nietzsche, the nihilism means: “the radical rejection of values, of meaning, of desires” (Nietzsche, 1995: 29).

But for Nietzsche, nihilism is only the result of a crisis of values, of the possibility of human coming out of decadence. To be complete, the human must overcome the nihilism and pessimism: “The greatest danger (the depiction of nihilism as an inevitable consequence of previous assessments of values). Enormous forces are freed from the shackles: but they contradict to each other; the liberated forces mutually destroy each other” (Nietzsche, 1995: 12). The value of life seems emptied of “content”. Being comes down to nothing. Nothing does not change, it remains nothing.

### 3. The sources of nihilism

Nietzsche began his mission to discover the sources of nihilism, the devaluation of life. For Nietzsche, the task of philosophy is to reconsider everything that is accepted so far and thus to overcome the nihilism, the loss of values. So far everything has been nihilism, which must be overcome, the world, existence, values, and morality must be reconsidered. The human must return to his/her natural state. Values are also valued, “the revaluation of all values” begins. This raises the question of the content of values, and here a revaluation must be made from the view of “modern humanity”. Nietzsche is adamant that the values accepted so far are the values of the decline that has spread to all aspects of life: “Decline – you guessed it – is a decadence for me. I argue that the values in which modern humanity invests the most desirable for itself are the values of decadence” (Nietzsche, 1991: 10). The idea that all previous understandings and values have an absolute existence “in themselves” outside their relations, to which, in his opinion, their actual existence is reduced, is rejected. The meaning of values can be clarified if the state of human in the

“most compassion age” and his understandings are considered from many perspectives, from the perspectives of real life.

According to Nietzsche, the modern age is an age of decadence. Decadence is a “cultural phenomenon”, but it also brings social transformations. Decadence destroys society. Decadence arose from nihilism. Decadence is the victory of the weak over the strong, the triumph of “slave morality”, the killing of the will. The world is a struggle for power, domination over the others. Society is a struggle of wills. For Nietzsche, slavish morality dominates over the master morality: “What I am telling is the history of the next two centuries. I am describing what is coming, which cannot come in another form: the emergence of nihilism... Our whole European culture has long been moving in intense tension, which grows from century to century and seems to trigger the catastrophe: restless, powerful, impulsive: like a stream that seeks its end, that no longer make sense of itself, that is afraid to make sense” (Nietzsche, 1995: 25). Slave morality is herd, it is inherent in the weak, and it is the one that stops the development.

Nietzsche criticizes morality that leads to herding. Modernity is a set of ideals and values that form a common worldview from which Nietzsche wants to escape. He also wants to escape from the masses, focusing on the individual. Since the time of Socrates, moral values have been devaluated, turning against “life”, which is depreciating. That is how the transcendent al values appear: “The Birth of Tragedy” was my first devaluation off all values: I set foot on the ground again, giving the life juices to my claim, to my skill, I – the last student of the philosopher Dionysius, I – the teacher of the eternal recurrence...” (Nietzsche, 1992: 150).

The world is constantly reorganized under the action of the fundamental force – the will to power: “Life for me is identical with the instinct for growth, power, accumulation of strength, persistent existence; if the will to power is lacking, the being degrades” (Nietzsche 1991: 10). The idea of eternal recurrence – “the world has no beginning and no end”, everything is in a circle of repetition, and we must be adaptable to prosperity. In social aspect, Nietzsche divides people into “higher” and “herd”, “I will reveal to people the meaning of their lives: he is the supermen” (Nietzsche, 1990b: 35), “Man is something that must be overcome” (Nietzsche, 1990b: 28). Nietzsche directs our attention to “the higher type of man”, “the superman is the meaning of the earth” (Nietzsche 1990b: 28), to which everyone should strive, especially through the enrichment of cultural life and through self-overcoming. Nietzsche set out to overcome nihilism, which takes supremacy over the traditional methods: “Before me is a terrible, painful spectacle: I have lifted the veil that hides human decline” (Nietzsche, 1991: 9).

The will of power must reach “the strongest intensity” – this is the new value system: life must be strengthened, “forced”. Morality and the “traditional methods” of evaluation must be interpret in the future vision of life: “Why is the emergence of the nihilism necessary at a certain moment? Because all our values so far are those that find their final conclusion in it; because nihilism is the fully thought-out logic of our great values and ideals, because we must first experience nihilism in order to arrive at what the value of these “values” really is” (Nietzsche, 1995: 26). The revaluation of everything accepted as “great values and ideals” must lead to new values: “We need to find new values one day” (Nietzsche, 1995: 26), and these will be the values that are born from the very becoming of the new human and are his/her future.

In reaching new values, Nietzsche raises the question of the possibility of “moral judgments”. He notes that “moral judgments” arise from the will to know. Values come from the necessity of our judging, of our assessment and acceptance. Nietzsche’s philosophy can be called innovative due to the fact that it creates a path different from the previous ones, accumulating truths and virtues beyond the conventional: “To do things that time tries in vain to do, to strive for form, substance and through them to some tiny immortality – I have never been unpretentious enough to want so little of myself” (Nietzsche, 1992: 140). But how we are able to formulate our

moral judgments and whether they are also value judgments – these are innovative directions to modern theory of values.

The question of value judgments is also a way to out of the crisis of values, into the free territory of new values. But are we capable of value judgments and how they will be formulated through the perspective approach? Because the value judgments are also a kind of manifestation of truth. Authority cannot be the basis of value judgments, for Nietzsche they must be deeply rooted in reality: "The deepest instinct of self-preservation forbids the theologian to acknowledge or at least into account reality – even in the smallest. Wherever he enjoys influence, value judgments are distorted, and the notions of "true" and "false" are inevitably reversed: the most harmful to life is called "true"; what elevates, lifts, affirms, justifies life, which leads to its triumph, is considered "false" ..." (Nietzsche, 1991: 13). In modern value theory, "the problem of value judgment" is an important aspect: it must "Be able to derive its ground for the declared value in its very categorial field, relative to the value on an unconditional scale. This is why its structure will be to be able to climb upwards; on the determining grounds to the unconditionally valuable" (Kristeva, 2020: 795). But this also opens the projection to values in view of this "unconditionally valuable" in the richness of perspectives on human and life. It is the completion of Nietzsche's nihilism that can open this projection to new values.

Nihilism has its terrible side. Without God, without the pursuit of good, the world finds itself, falls into nihilism, when everything is "nothing", everything is denied: "Neither the morality nor the religion of Christianity has anything to do with reality. Completely imaginary reasons are "god", "soul", "Hell", "Spirit", "freedom of will" – that even non-freedom. Completely imaginary things are sin, redemption, "grace", "retribution", "forgiveness of sins" (Nietzsche, 1991: 17). The man of today's age must complete the revaluation of values, thus laying a redefinition of valuation as the beginning of value in general. Because in the process of globalization, which has embraced modern societies, the old basis of values, such as tradition, begins to disappear: "All this causes de-traditionalization of the life of the modern human – he feels less and less connected to his ethnicity, with his nation. Traditions, i.e. well-known and time-tested values, norms, and moral categories cease to act as traditions" (Petkova, 2013: 109). The global world must be understood and experienced as dependent on human and his new perspectives and the supreme completing the human existence offers new perspectives: "Humanity", Nietzsche writes, "must set its goal above itself, but not in a wrong world and in its own continuation... to create something above ourselves" (Dunov, 2001: 13).

#### 4. Conclusion

As an attempt to conclude the topic of "Nietzsche's nihilism and the crisis of values", it is good to say that Nietzsche considers the historical overcoming of old metaphysics. For Heidegger, this marks the beginning of a new type of philosophical thinking: "philosophy will not be able to cause an immediate change in the current state of the world. This applies not only to philosophy but also to every human plan and aspiration. Only God can save us. We are left with the only opportunity in thinking and creativity to reach the appearance of God or his absence. In view of the absent God we will fail" (Heidegger, 1993: 228). Heidegger describes nihilism as a "will to will", and this is the acceptance of the future: "For Heidegger, the being is destroyed insofar as it is completely transformed into value" (Vattimo, 2005: 7). The modern global age must judge whether to accept the balance between good and evil, but its task is to complete the human: "for Heidegger it seems possible and desirable to go beyond nihilism, while for Nietzsche completeness nihilism is everything" (Vattimo, 2005: 8). The perspective is in the overcoming the nihilism and must show the new values that are the basis for the "universal, both personal and gathering all-humanity project of our modern global civilization" (Kristeva, 2020: 796).

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