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# Nietzsche's Philosophy of Conflict and the Logic of Organisational Struggle

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# CONCLUSION

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have defended the thesis that Nietzsche's philosophy should be read as valorising *both* measured *and* unmeasured conflict. This position is one that I have developed in opposition to hard and soft readings of Nietzsche, which tendentiously portrayed him as a proponent of *either* measured *or* unmeasured conflict. I have first substantiated this claim by showing, in Chapters 1 and 2, how he valorises both *Vernichtungskampf* (unmeasured) and *Wettkampf* (measured) throughout his writings. On the other hand, in Chapters 3 and 4, I have shown how he promotes a struggle for *organisation*, which consists in the dual process of a measured struggle for the *Einverleibung* of that which is useful, and an unmeasured struggle for the exclusion of that which is not.

Due to the imbalance inherent to virtually all readings dealing with Nietzsche's thoughts on conflict, I primarily concerned myself with the exegetical task of reconstructing his position as faithfully as possible whilst also endeavouring to coherently account for both the measured and unmeasured trends in his writings. By way of conclusion, I will now enumerate the coherent set of claims that I have attributed to Nietzsche's mature philosophy of conflict, I will then raise some potential objections to these claims, and close by collating some of the most detrimental philosophical errors against which my reading of Nietzsche warns us.

## 1. NIETZSCHE'S COHERENT SET OF CLAIMS

While we have found myriad discrepancies in Nietzsche's writings (particularly with respect to his thoughts on war and violence), we have also uncovered an underlying

coherence to his descriptions of, and prescriptions regarding, the various forms of *Kampf* – particularly as we move into the mature phase of his thought. It is worthwhile briefly tallying this systematic set of philosophical claims:

1. Everything and everyone struggles for power augmentation – primarily by means of incorporating or *organising* that which is serviceable into an exploitative hierarchy;

2. This general impetus can express itself concretely in a range of different ways;

3. The most effective mode of exploitative struggle is attentive to the demands of the subordinate power, and measures its struggle to exploit accordingly;

4. At a social level, one such way exploitative relations can be established is through struggles to the death (i.e. war and violent conflict), which can act as a means to either enslaving the individuals or exploiting the resources that were previously protected by the eradicated party (the spoils of war). However, this is not the most effective means of establishing exploitative relations;

5. Though violence may be an ineradicable *Urfaktum* of life, and the genetic source of culture, it is within our human capacities to employ alternative means of establishing the exploitative relations we need to live, and as far as possible, we should do so;

6. While it may not be necessary for us to engage in *violently* unmeasured conflict, life *is* nonetheless conditioned by unmeasured struggle insofar as the organisation upon which any living unity rests is preconditioned by the active exclusion of that which is, or has become, harmful;

7. Notwithstanding, where two powers realise they are too equally matched to establish exploitative relations, they can, and should, engage in agonistically

measured conflict in order to strengthen themselves in the struggle to exploit parties *outside* of the agonistic contest.

As this list makes evident, claims (2)–(7) all cohere with the logic of the will to power (1). It further demonstrates that affirming the world as will to power does not entail affirming *either* measured or unmeasured conflict, but a synthesis of both under the higher goal of organisation. In suppressing one or the other of these two dynamics, the hard and the soft readers can, by Nietzsche's own standards, be charged with dubiously constructing a life-denying philosophy out of Nietzsche's writings. I have tried to initiate an aspect change whereby these two sides, rather than being understood as mutually exclusive, are seen as two ways of looking at single impetus toward organisation. Hopefully, this makes it difficult, if not impossible, for readers to return to identifying only one of these two aspects.

In trying to vindicate my attribution of these interlocking claims to Nietzsche, I have often not had space to critically assess them in their own right. For example, we might ask whether the agonistic appropriation of Nietzsche's thought, while not representative thereof, is perhaps a better normative philosophy given the challenges faced by contemporary society; indeed, is it, as Nietzsche argues and the agonists deny, truly impossible to cultivate agonal relations between unequals – that is, is it unrealistic to call on people to raise weaker individuals up to their level instead of subjugating them? Might people not want to have their present inferiors as equal competitors in the future, for example? Should we not sometimes decline the opportunity to exploit those who are weaker and *could* be exploited?

In Chapter 4, I endeavoured to underscore that we should not take Nietzsche's affirmation of *Einverleibung* and exclusion to entail an affirmation of selective immigration, chattel slavery, wars of enslavement, eugenics or even ethnic cleansing. Indeed, he forces us to search for new ways in which *Einverleibung* and *Ausscheidung* can be realised. Yet a criticism we might formulate in response to this is that there seems to be *so* much flexibility in how we might imagine these processes being fulfilled, that their affirmation makes little ethical demand upon us. For

example, we saw that Nietzsche indicates that anyone in gainful employment might be considered an exploited slave. Moreover, while I have also tried to give as cogent an account as possible as to why Nietzsche identifies a parallelism between the organism and society, I have not fully explored the many critiques of organic models of society that emerged in the twentieth-century, particularly in response to structural functionalism. Since there is not the space for a full treatment of all the possible objections and replies, I leave these comments as an indication that my attempting to comprehensively reconstruct Nietzsche's position should not be equated with my unquestioningly concurring with this position.

## 2. PHILOSOPHICAL OBSERVATIONS

According to Nietzsche, one of the ways in which humans most definitely *differ* from lower organisms is insofar as they possess consciousness ("Bewußtsein" or "Geist"), which far from being evidence of their superiority, he views as proof of the "Unvollkommenheit des Organismus, als ein Versuchen, Tasten, Fehlgreifen, als eine Mühsal" (AC 14). Indeed, seeing "through a glass darkly", so to speak, it would appear that we are condemned to misjudge the state of affairs that characterises both ourselves and the outside world. But throughout this thesis, we have identified various ways in which we are prone to fallacious descriptions of the world that specifically impact upon how we practically manage conflict in our lives. Moreover, these errors are usually both harmful and preventable. With respect to ourselves, one of the most obvious examples is our tendency to over-estimate our power relative to others (a foible specific to organic organisations, according to Nietzsche[1]), which as we saw in Chapter 2, can lead us into violent, self-detrimental struggles in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau's critical analysis of *amour-propre*.

[1] See e.g. NL 35[59] 11.537: "Der Übergang aus der Welt des Anorganischen in die des Organischen ist der aus festen Wahrnehmungen der Kraftwerthe und Machtverhältnisse in die der unsicheren, unbestimmten."

However, our analysis of Nietzsche, and the critical literature dealing with his thought, has also uncovered a range of subtle ways that our arbitrarily favouring one possible conceptual description of conflict over others can lead us to take particularly bad ethical stances towards certain modes of opposition. The identification of these pitfalls is, I believe, one of the principal philosophical contributions of both Nietzsche's thoughts on conflict, and our study of these thoughts. It is accordingly worthwhile enumerating some of these. First, in Chapter 1, we discerned that the description of physically destructive conflict in terms of the cathartic release of essentially destructive energy sabotaged the project of qualitatively transforming this mode of conflict. While I focussed on the way in which this blocked the agonistic project, this goes equally for any attempts that might be made to modulate physically destructive conflict into measured exploitative conflict, or into modes of exclusionary struggle that are not physically destructive. Thus, as suggested, we might opt to incarcerate or exile (i.e. ostracise), rather than physically eradicate, problematic members or groups of society; or we might even choose completely non-physical modes of negation – for example, rather than eradicating troublesome individuals and social groups, we might focus on merely eradicating the values and drives that make those individuals or social groups problematic (as a truly "reformatory" prison system aims to do). The idea that physically destructive impulses grow unstoppably stronger until they inevitably erupt is a dangerous assumption, one that Nietzsche inherited from Schopenhauer and Burckhardt, though eventually outgrew and abandoned.

In Chapter 2, with respect to the secondary literature, I brought into relief how the tendency to equate the agon with destructive conflict neutralised the agonal dimension of Nietzsche's transformative project before it had even begun. Namely, since it failed to conceptually distinguish the form of conflict Nietzsche wants to be *subjected* to transformation from the form of conflict that he hopes will *result* from this transformation. Second, holding productive agonal relations to be founded on the counterbalancing of powers alone was seen to lead commentators to neglect the foundational importance of cultivating *self*-limitation. Finally, the description of the

agon as based solely in a subjective shift of attitude (towards respect) was seen to blind us to the fact that establishing certain *social institutions* is a precondition of agonal relations.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we then witnessed how the error of thinking that organisational struggle is enabled by identifying a metaphysical telos within ourselves or nature only serves to frustrate the process of organisation. The goals towards which both humanity and the human individual strive must be forged *by humans themselves*, and in such a way that they remain provisional and malleable. Prematurely fixed conceptions of one's ideal self or one's ideal society can, on Nietzsche's account, lead us to exclude digressional inclinations and avenues of development that may prove highly advantageous to our evolution.

In Chapter 4, I then clarified how, according to Nietzsche, our picture of the natural world, and of our values, has a serious impact on our normative orientation towards conflict. To see the natural world as governed by pure mechanism and universal natural law was criticised by Nietzsche as unfounded, whilst also serving to vindicate universal *moral* law. Indeed, we have a tendency to misconceive of our values as being of transcendent origin, and thus we completely overlook the fact that many of these values are the vestiges of a prudential rear-guard ethical policy created by weak power organisations. These two related errors (*viz*. concerning the structure of nature and the origin of our values), lead us, in the first place, to neglect the struggle to organise our values. This is because the apparent transcendent origin of our values makes them seem beyond our practical reach. But in addition to this, since these entrenched values are herd-values, which are explicitly opposed to social conflict, the errors buttressing these values further blind us to the necessity of cultivating healthy social struggle.

In the closing chapter, we then saw how Nietzsche exposes our predisposition to misidentify that which presents us with difficulty as that which is useless and to be excluded – how "[man] verwechselt das Unbrauchbare und das Schwerzuerwerbende" (NL 11[134] 9.492). We are thus often led, in our hasty reactivity, to strive for the full negation of that which could be of positive value for

us. But the inability to correctly identify that which is serviceable does not only occasion the unnecessary destruction of the potentially useful; for Nietzsche, this error also leads us to excessively consume that which *cannot* be used, which we saw was an underlying cause of the anarchy associated with the historical sense. Nietzsche thus alerts us to the need to carefully screen phenomena according to their employability in order to establish the most prudential conflictual relations with them.

Finally, we then located two more such errors in Chapter 4 by reading Nietzsche against his one-sided commentators. First, describing exploitation as intrinsically unmeasured led these commentators to ignore the possibility and task of finding "softer", more symbiotic forms of exploitation (which, incidentally, can be found in Nietzsche's writings themselves). Contrariwise, viewing measured modes of contest as divorceable from unmeasured, exclusionary ones, caused agonistic commentators to overlook the fact that exclusion may be ineradicable and, consequently, that it is vital that we actively search for forms of exclusion that are as "soft" as possible.

This wide range of cognitive biases to which we are prone when it comes to thinking about conflict are therefore not comparable to the life-preserving errors of which Nietzsche often speaks (e.g. the "Unwahrheit als Lebensbedingung" he refers to in JGB 4). They are intellectual predispositions that lead us into modes of conflict that are harmful either for ourselves or the social whole, or that cause us to shirk modes of conflict that are beneficial. Though we can often impute these errors to Nietzsche himself, in his strongest and most coherent moments he shows us that we make these at our peril.

If we wish to optimise our conflictual relations with ourselves, others, and the world in general, then it is exigent that we carefully scrutinise our understanding of the nature and value of conflict. Such an enterprise can help us harness our impulses and become more effective individuals, or it can prompt us to work on establishing the agonal institutions we need to stimulate cultural flourishing, or again, it can teach us the worth of acting virtuously towards those who may be

subordinate to us. Indeed, I have endeavoured to illuminate the multifarious ways in which refining our understanding of struggle enables us to cultivate modes of contest that can be profoundly beneficial to our lives, not just as individuals or specific social groups but also as communities and even as an entire species.