

Doctoral thesis summary

In my dissertation I would like to show that the central idea of power in Nietzsche's philosophy is closely linked with the ability to create meaning. According to Nietzsche, every being strives to develop its power, which means trying to appropriate the surrounding world in the deepest and strongest way possible. This appropriation is possible only when said being gives the world "form," one which corresponds to its own internal "form." In the case of man, this form is referred to by Nietzsche as the "self:" a particular amalgamation of desires, emotions, and, to a great extent, unconscious categories and thoughts, of which our conscious actions and thoughts are merely a superficial expression.

Nietzsche distinguishes between two main types of self or ways of being: weak selves and strong selves. This distinction is quantitative in nature and is based on a conception of power and man's ability to integrate it (or not), a conception Nietzsche develops in many of his writings. The polarization of weak and strong selves does not consist in dominion over the world or people, since the mere fact of reigning over them is meaningless from the point of view of power and may be an expression of the weak will dictated by weak desires. If strong selves are to be distinguished by their power, it is because the object of their will has a broader range. They are not motivated by passive or weak desires such as resentment; strong selves want to overcome themselves by imposing meaning onto the world. They are directed by active, originary desires which Nietzsche calls "gift-giving virtues." Such world-forming is self-giving in the sense that the copious self "overflows" into an originary unification with the world without expecting in turn any advantages from making the world fit one's needs. By creating and giving the world meaning, the self surrenders itself to change, becoming a creation of itself and the world. Irrespective of whether this is the self of a "great person," artist, philosopher, or child, creating oneself is a process that binds us to the element of a life of meaning, where meaning emerges from the self and the "body" – from the desires, emotions, and unconscious thoughts thereof.

Such creating, such a relation with the element of meaning is at the same time, according to Nietzsche, a living relation with chaos, where chaos on Nietzsche's view constitutes the substrate of the world, as it were. In contrast both to all the established platitudes of culture and to the original thoughts stemming from the intellectual stance that denies chaos, living thoughts affirm and integrate chaos, thereby giving it form. For Nietzsche, the Greeks are a

model of such a creation of meaning that derives from the “body” and affirms chaos, this being demonstrated in even the most formally sophisticated works of antiquity, such as the Attic tragedies. Here, the two great tendencies of human symbolic life, Dionysian and Apollonian, were combined and reinforce each other, reaching the peak of human power to create meaning.

Nietzsche believed that, in contrast to the world of the Greeks, the modern world had gradually broken away from the “body” as a source of creating meaning, especially under the influence of ascetic Christianity. Two values which seem most prevalent in the modern era that continues to today – morality and hedonism – are most often an expression of relatively weak human desires. No new meaning is created through them, and, what follows, none of the three primary aspect of power are expressed: the ability to form a body with the world, the reciprocal reinforcement of strength in creation, and profundity. The two pseudo-values of morality and hedonism in part serve to conceal the greatest event of modernity that the process of decadence led to: the “death of God,” that is, the loss of all higher values, something that poses the greatest challenge with respect to creating meaning in the present day. Nietzsche attempts to respond to this challenge by showing that modern nihilism is the inevitable result of resentment towards a life expressed in the ideals that have prevailed in history. He takes pains to create an affirmative vision of the world free of resentment. In this dissertation, following Nietzsche, I show that examples of such affirmations of life, though rare, can indeed be found in modernity and provide hope for humankind’s new divinization of the world.

Thesis structure:

1. Introduction
2. Chaos
3. Living thinking and affirmation
4. Living thinking – the Greek model
5. Hedonism and nihilism. The weakness of contemporary morality
6. Nietzsche’s solution
7. Conclusion