

# What can we understand under 'conscience' by Nietzsche?

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The question about moral conscience is certainly a very important one by Nietzsche. On the fundamental, he applies to the traditional conception of conscience his criteria of *devaluation of all values (Umwertung aller Werte)*. The main work where this is developed is in his brilliant *Genealogy of moral (Genealogie der Moral)*. And as the title itself says, here is also a methodological direction of precisely genealogy applied. This means that we are in front of a history of conscience. And in coincidence with his thinking, so as Nietzsche sees history as a history of nihilism, of negation of man, world and life, so also the history of conscience is one of nihilism, of negation of conscience, which reveals itself in the sense that this history has been at the same time a history, a genealogy of a *bad conscience*. This history has then two moments: the one of a milenarian negation and the superation of this negation, proposed by Nietzsche himself. This second moment is meant as the arrival to a conscience of a "soverain individual" (Das Gewissen eines "soveränen Individuums"), that says a yes to life, world and man.

The question that arises then in the long road of these genealogy is following: how come mankind has neglected itself transforming our conscience in a bad conscience? Why the history of the conscience is a history of bad conscience?

Here we have to quote that the german language is the only under the european languages that makes a straight distinction between the psicological and the moral side of the conscience. After the german only the english language makes a similar, but no so strong, distinction between consciousness, in the meaning of 'awarness', to be aware of something, and conscience, in the meaning of a moral conscience. In German the clear distinction is between the 'Bewusstsein' (consciousness, awarness) and 'Gewissen' (moral conscience). Anyway, Spanish and other languages and children of latin, do not have this distinction.

Lets return now to our question about what is in mankind that has lead it to neglect, to reject himself through the determination of bad conscience.

With this question we are inmediatly thrown in an abyss, in a very dark zone, in a huge place without any boundaries where we can get lost very easily. This place where we are thrown in, when we dare to put this question, has to do in the 20. century specially with psicoanalysis, with Freud, Jung, Melanie Klein, Lacan, Julia Kristeva, among others. We have to say this because only then we can recognize the place that Nietzsche in the second half of XIX century is opening in the history not only of philosophy, or even the history of culture, but indeed of the history of mankind.

Surrounding this idea of a place and, in correspondance to it, of an invitation to a place, we can especially say with Heidegger that philosophy has to do with this idea. This applies to his thinking about being, language, time, and others: all this thinking (*Denken*) is developed in a certain place, an *Ort* in german, and this place is at the same time something like a non-place because for instance if being is conceived as ground, this ground is without ground, is a *groundless ground*, is the abyss of being, which is very different than the abyss of a bad conscience about which we were just spoken.

So, if it is possible, lets just jump to this place of the bad conscience. Where we eventually land, after this daring jump is, quotes Nietzsche, "the most interesting fruit of the human vegetation".

And in order to see something in this dark place certainly we need a guide, like Dante needs Vergil to get into the different levels of the escatological world of *The divine comedy*.

I think that this comparison is very special because the figure of Nietzsche has this power and this determination. He is certainly a thinker who can be compared not only with Plato, but also with Dante. In these three great examples we find something in common: as we said before, the invitation to a place, another place, and at the same moment a place where we can find a clew to mankind, life and world.

So, lets be guided by Nietzsche and if we ask how can we do this, the answer is the work: we have the work of Nietzsche, specially the *Genealogy of moral* and *Also aprach Zarathustra*; these books have to be our guide, in order to find the clew of man by exploring and laying down the question about the origin of bad conscience. And the most relevant answer to this question that we find not only in the *Genealogy*, but also in the whole of Nietzsche's work is the *introversion of instinct*. But, better spoken, this answer is more an effect than a cause, because again we have to ask: why such introversion of instinct took place? Following Nietzsche, a so called "first lords", like a sort of landlords, gave vent to, unloaded, freed their instincts to the outside. They did this without any regret, without any questioning themselves if this was bad or wrong, and the main point of it is that they did this without any sense of guilt, or better, of guiltiness or culpability. So, the answer to our former question would be: because of the birth of guiltiness in these first lords, these aristocrats, these patricians, instinct was introverted, and within this context also the bad conscience was born. This very interesting plant of the bad conscience needed only the right place, the appropriate soil, to be born, and since then she struggles mankind, she represses us, she gives cause for a perpetual remorse. Man lives since then like a prisoner in the world and has to respond for every single act he does, and he is judged not only trough established courts here on earth, but also at the end by an escatological "final judgement". Following Nietzsche, he asks about what is in mankind that leads him to the construction of such *Hinterwelt (behind world)*, and also about what is in man that leads him to carry, to sustain the biggest imaginable guilt that could ever be: the guilt about his own assesination of God, the crucifixion.

If its very well known that Schopenhauer influences the thinking of Nietzsche Already in Schopenhauer's work about *The ground of morals* we read that every single thing, sometimes the most trivial things, leave in us some remorse, a bad

conscience, and he wonders with his typical skeptical and ironical dose about the origin of such remorse: fear, vanity, superstition, custom, and so on.

But all and all, with the answer of the birth of guiltiness by the first lords we can again say that this is more an effect than the cause of the parallel birth of bad conscience. And in this spectrum we find at least three answers to our question, that can be separated, but originally they belong to the same constellation: 1. Socrates, 2. Christianity, and 3. the rebellion of the slaves.

Let's go briefly through each of these roads:

1. Socrates. Since the moment that the Greek philosopher questions about everything that for him doesn't justify, doesn't fit in, like to understand justice in relationship with power, as he does specially in *Gorgias* or in the first books of the *Republic*, in this appeal for reason (with Leibniz, we would say, of "sufficient reason", *ratio sufficientis*), we have a first step toward the introversion of instinct.

2. Christianity. Without any doubt the greatest impact that leads to the introversion of instinct is the Christian belief for Nietzsche. Here really begins something that will mean not only the so-called introversion, but also at the end the constitution of a very struggled man, like the metaphor used by Nietzsche: a prisoner that hurts himself by scratching the bars of the jail.

3. Rebellion of slaves. This can be also remarked as a metaphor used by Nietzsche to show that the profound relationship that determines all the human things, the relationship between strong and weak, which certainly has to do with his conception of the *will of power* (*Wille zur Macht*), through the so-called rebellion of the slaves, that is, of the weak, has been inverted, transposed, so that historically from one moment to the other the weak has gotten the strong.

But all these different answers would not be appropriately understood if they are not related to the interior transformation they have done in man. From the moment on that man cannot extrovert his instinct to the outside, to the world, doing what he ever will, and doing all that like playing with the world, also like a child, all these huge amount of instinct, of adventures impulsion, of longing for desert, conquest, war, is driven now to the inside and is capable, following Nietzsche's remarkable analysis, of given life to the so-called human soul. For this reason, the analysis of conscience by Nietzsche, that has a long history of bad conscience, is only partially negative, because it has also his positive side: as a result of introversion of instinct is also the soul, with all its contrasts, his light and darkness, his Apollonian and Dionysian spirit. Introversion of instinct is therefore also the retort of all lowness and greatness of mankind. Through the introversion it was built so to say, a cavity, a space in man that grew in all directions, toward the highest and toward the lowest. Zarathustra is at the end of this growth and symbolizes the *great soul* (*die grosse Seele*), a magnanimous soul, like the *megalopsiquia* by Aristoteles, but of course with a totally other significance by Nietzsche. Anyway, this great soul of Zarathustra is precisely so great that in his castle, so to say, some parasites live in it, find here their own home. And also the magnanimity of this great soul makes it possible that we can forgive, precisely because it is so great and so powerful that can do it without losing anything.

Arnold Gehlen begins his main work *The man* with Nietzsche's sentence: "The man is the non-established animal". Nietzsche means by this precisely the introversion of instinct and at the same time the *lack* of outside unclouded instinct, in

comparison with animals. Gehlen, from his point of view, interpretes this sentence emphasizing the significance of *lack (Mangel)*, and affirms that in this very lack of instinct (we don't have the same skills of seeing, tasting, smelling or running like different animals) lays the clew, the essence of man. Within this lack all the greatest things of man, like art, science, religion, philosophy, have been developed. And Gehlen conceives man also as an "interiorization of externality", which certainly has to do with Nietzsche's conception of the cavity that was built in man and that made the possibility of something like soul.

So we have Gewissen, conscience by Nietzsche in the same line of introversion of instinct, birth of soul, but also of guiltiness, of the best and worse, the most beautiful and the most ugly in man.

On the ground of Paul Ricoeur's investigation about evil in *Finitude and culpability* we have another very suggesting explanation that we can refer to the question about the origin of bad conscience. With the french philosopher we can speak about the internalization of evil, since at the beginning evil was lived as something external, not related to guiltiness or culpability. Or, we can say, making some precision about this, that if guilt plays a role in the early stages, is only in the sense of guilt (and not guiltiness) as not observing some rule, like, for instance the participation in a ritual about expiation of the evil that is affecting the tribe. And if the external ancient evil appeared as a sort of stain, through the internalization this stain has been de-materialized. What comes into being with this internalization is culpability, and so this culpability would be a dematerialized stain in us.

Also the interesting aspect for our time of this thinking of Ricoeur about evil is that with the internalization the external evil doesn't disappear. In our time as soon as evil multiplies itself because things are going bad, the external evil as stigma, scar, scourge, mark or brand appears again.

But what really is important for the association we are making with Nietzsche's thinking is that with the internalisation of evil begins of course another way of confronting evil. The strategy is now no more expiation through rituals of sacrificing animals or human beings, but of regarding the done evil to an author who is to be individualized and make responsible and guilty for it, and hence he has to be judged. Ricoeur says that in this way throughout time is generated a *curse* or a "malediction of law" and he quotes in this context a very remarkable passage of Saint Paul Roman's Letter, where he says that through the law started evil for him, so that at the end evil and sin have made him better. This is most interesting from many points of view and between these, also the ontological, because it has to do with thinking about the notion of limit. From the moment that in the field of moral or right you put a limit and so a distinction between what is allowed and forbidden, you are creating and multiplying evil. At the end of this long and struggled road you find a sort of man like a prisoner, as Ricoeur says a "penitential conception of man". And this is exactly the same conception of man against which Nietzsche is fighting. This is the sort of man dominated by a bad conscience.

Very important is also in this problematic the thinking of Georges Bataille in his way of conceiving eros, in *The erotism*, specially the concept of 'interdict' or prohibition. Erotism is conceived as transgression of interdicts that protect our individual discontinuity, which makes it possible that we flow in the continuum of life and time. And what I want here to point out is that Bataille says in a provocative way that the

interdict itself is the transgression. For instance, if a couple has no more interdicts to transgress, it's quite possible that eroticism dies. With other words, without interdict there is no transgression, and without transgression there is no eroticism. All this implies that the limit, in this case the interdict or the interdiction, is there to be transgressed. We can say that here we have a signal of the way out of the malediction of law and of every, at the end, artificial limit put by our believes, convictions, by moral or right, by religion or the state. And evidently Nietzsche is a great example of transgression of the interdicts and the limits established by tradition.

In this regard also the meaning of the title of the work where Ricoeur develops all the theory of internalization of evil, as we already said, is: *Finitude and culpability*, and this has to be considered. It also has to do with the limit and at the same time with the conception of culpability by Martin Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, which before him, is developed by Karl Jaspers in the *Theory of the world conceptions*, 1919.

First of all, on this ground of the analysis of Jaspers we can make a clear distinction between guilt and guiltiness, culpable and culpability. Only because we are previously determined by culpability, this dematerializes stain in us; we can be culpable of a certain failure, of something we didn't do and that we should have done, and others. From the opposite: if we are not determined by culpability, we would not be culpable of something in particular. Culpability is then a permanent determination of man, but it is something different than the original sin, because this sin is in relationship with some relates, the *Genesis*, while culpability is philosophically to reveal. (About this distinction between guilt and guiltiness and between guilt and sin I have some differences with Ricoeur, but now is not the moment to abord this very complex issue).

Second, this culpability is conceived on the ground of our essential finitude, in the sense that we can only realize, fulfill, carry out some possibilities and this implies that we have to discard, to put aside, to get ride of, to throw away, others.

Third, and this is exclusively so by Jaspers, since there is evil in the world, and evil has always been, we are culpable (in the meaning of culpability).

Forth, if we understand culpability in such a way, what makes us to be prisoners, dominated by a "schlechtes Gewissen", a "bad conscience", is not culpability, but the particular guilts that we carry on, that we are in disposition to carry with us, and one of this can be also the *original sin*.

So as Nietzsche sees history as a one of nihilism, also, as we said, as a one of bad conscience, and we have to add here, as a history of *spirit of revenge*, *Geist der Rache*. We can detect here an association with Ricoeur's "malediction of law". That everything what happens (of the human things, of course) has someone who is responsible for that and if he has done something that is stipulated as bad, he has to be judged because of it, this is the spirit of revenge that dominates throughout history. Spirit of revenge goes so far that takes place not only in our human courts and in our social organization, but also at the end in a "final judgement". If there is failure in our justice system and not always or even most of the time the real guilty subject is not charged and judged, he cannot avoid the final judgement. This is presented as a very noble hope, but behind it is hidden the spirit of revenge.

With Ricoeur again we can raise a sort of ethics-fictional question about what would have happened if the evil had not been internalized, if mankind would have lived longer without culpability, and just with possible guilts because of breaking some very precise and fixed rule? And as Ricoeur sees this, and we agree with him, through the internalization of evil the world has not gotten better at all. The most terrible crimes that were committed against mankind, the greatest genocides, and perpetrated with cold and rational calculation, took place in the 20. Century. Heidegger interpretes in *What means thinking? (Was heisst Denken?)* Nietzsche's spirit of revenge emphasizing specially its relationship with time. Spirit of revenge judges about the "was", it doesn't let the "was" be; the "was" has to be charged, accused and judged; we have to pay for the "was", the past; we cannot, we should not forget and neglect, ignore the past. And the non-acceptance of the past means a simultaneous non-acceptance of the "is", of the present. If the "was" has to be charged and is only accepted insofar as it has been released after our judgement, so the present. And if the past and the present are in the domain of the spirit of revenge, we can presume that also the "will be", the future. Therefore for Heidegger this means finally a non-acceptance of being and time. Only *amor fati*, love of destiny, love of the "was" and of the "is" can superate the spirit of revenge, to love indeed that the "was" is ever repeated just as it "was", without changing anything of it, without getting ride of something of it, without trying to make it more presentable. For this reason, amor fati is also the proper way to understand *the eternal return of the same, die ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen*. From a cosmological point of view, like by Aristoteles (*Peri geneseos kai ftora*) there is an eternal return, but not of the same; this "the same" is so the problem in Nietzsches "eternal return of the same". But this return of exactly "the same", is precisely the clew to understand the superation of the spirit of revenge as not having any single problem that the same terrible things of the past, our efforts, pains, destructions, war, violence, and so on, return just as they were. What we can achieve following this road would be a dionysian world *beyond good and evil*.