Hyperbole and conflict in the slave revolt in morality
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I The slave revolt in morality as a paradigm

Among the many legitimate readings of GM, two are fully at odds with each other. The first contends that GM makes no normative claim, that is, that although the story it tells might suffice to *discourage* us from committing to slave morality, it doesn't contain any *argument* against it. Such readings often leave Nietzsche's preference for an aristocratic morality to a matter of taste, and refer to the wide array of texts on taste. The other reading takes the opposite tack, and argues that GM constitutes an argument against slave morality. This is the path I shall take here. Yet, that path is fraught with difficulties. First, one should not fall into an account that would commit Nietzsche to some sort of genetic fallacy (Loeb, 1995): the argument against slave morality, if there is one, cannot be merely that the origins of slave morality are immoral. Second, any critique of slave morality cannot rely on any external criterion of value, as this would either commit us to the very kind of transcendent judgement that Nietzsche rejects in the slave morality, or take us back to the initial opposition of tastes: one is left free to choose one's scale of value according to one's taste. In short, the critique of slave morality needs to be immanent: it must show a contradiction in the slave morality or in the worldview that it relies on (if there is such a worldview and if slave morality truly relies on it). This leaves a narrow path open, which I wish to take. My suggestion is that Nietzsche intends GM to demonstrate the following contradiction in the slave morality:

1. The slave morality compares 'the apparent world' unfavourably with the "'real world,'"
2. The "'real world'" is only the apparent world '*once again*,'[1]
3. Hence, the contradiction: the slave morality compares this world unfavourably with itself.

This raises many questions, the first being: if the slave morality is guilty of such a contradiction, how come it even exists, how come it is even possible to be a follower of

it? Even more, how come it is a discourse that the masters themselves were susceptible to engage with? Nietzsche's well-known response is to point to an episode called the 'slave revolt in morality' (*der Sklavenaufstand in der Moral*). Although this episode holds a very important place in Nietzsche's overall project, the published texts from GM I 7; GM I 10 and BGE 195 are sparse on details about it. In particular, it remains very much an open question how this revolt took place, and even more, how it achieved success. Nietzsche says that it involved the slaves inventing new values, perhaps also reinforcing their self-esteem and their collective cohesion thanks to these new values. He also says that this revolt is what he calls elsewhere a silent event (Z II Ereignissen) which took millennia to unfold (GM I 8). But of the conflict itself, of the attack on the masters, of their response, of the kind of warfare involved, Nietzsche says very little. Indeed, GM says very little about any form of contact between the two castes, although it says much about how each caste regards the other and itself. It seems that the notion of the slave revolt in morality therefore plays the role of a placeholder more than an explanatory concept: it names a mysterious event, one that must be presupposed to have taken place, but which remains unexplained. In particular, it says precious little about how the slaves who were weak are meant to have overpowered the masters who were strong. What this suggests is that this paper should count as a personal reconstruction, but cannot qualify as an interpretation or an exegesis. What I shall do rather, is take up the clues Nietzsche gives us, and construct an account of the slave revolt in morality which, I suggest is the best way to fill in the gaps left by Nietzsche without violating the rest of his writings. I just emphasized how sparsely Nietzsche develops any account of the interactions between the master and slave castes. There are, in GM, three places that can serve as such clues.

The first passage is from GM I 7. There, on the very same page as he introduces the slave revolt, Nietzsche's only indication of the modus operandi of the revolt is his mention of how the 'Jews' developed the following hyperbolic discourse:

> 'Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas *you* rich, the noble and powerful, *you* are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, *you* will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!' … (GM I 7, KSA 5.267; emphasis added)

The second passage is from GM II 7, in which Nietzsche refers to 'the sickly mollycoddling [*Verzärtlichung*] and *moralizing* [*Vermoralisirung*] by means of which the animal "man" finally *learns* to be ashamed of all his instincts [*sich aller seiner Instinkte schämen lernt*]' (GM II 7, KSA 5.302; emphasis added).

The third one is from GM III 14:

> These failures: what noble **eloquence flows from their lips**! How much sugared, slimy, humble humility swims in their eyes! What do they really want? At any rate, to *represent* justice, love, wisdom, superiority, that is the ambition of these who are 'the lowest', these sick people! And how skilful such an ambition makes them! In particular, we have to admire the counterfeiter's skill with which the

stamp of virtue, the ding-a-ling golden ring of virtue is now **imitated**. They have taken out a lease on virtue to keep it just for themselves, these weak and incurably sick people, there is no doubt about it: '**Only we are good and just' is what they say**, 'only we are the *homines bonæ voluntatis*'. They promenade in our midst like **living reproaches, like warnings to us**, – as though health, success, strength, pride and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities for which penance, bitter penance will one day be exacted: oh, how ready they themselves are, in the last resort, to *make* others penitent, how they thirst to be *hangmen*! (GM III 14, KSA 5.369; italics original, bold added)

These are the only three passages in which Nietzsche says anything about the interaction between the slaves and the masters. They all have to do with one-sided discourse: the slaves use language to attack the masters. This suggests that unless Nietzsche's account is lacking (e.g. lacking an account of physical overpowering, perhaps by way of strength in numbers as has sometimes been suggested), we must entertain the possibility that the slave revolt was in some sense a rhetorical revolt. Yet, it must have been effective at undoing the masters' dominance, although that dominance was not based upon language, and therefore, presumably immune to being contradicted by way of language. On this hypothesis, the basic condition for the success of the slave revolt was that the realm of force and the realm of meaning somehow communicate. This again suggests that even these three passages, where the slaves' recourse to language seems crucial, are not sufficient to solve the problem. Nietzsche must explain how language overpowers strength. Instead, these passages invite two lines of enquiry.

The first is to see the problem as an 'energetic problem' (Siemens, 2001): if the master morality regarded 'this world' as the source of value, how could the masters ever be deceived into regarding another world (the '"real world"') as the source of value? This is an energetic problem because it asks about where the *impulse* came that motivated the masters to change their value practices. This motivation could only be thought of as a *force*, and therefore one must admit that the masters were *forced* into changing their evaluative practices. A short formulation of the energetic problem is this therefore: what was the reserve of force that the weak but not the strong had access to so that the weak ended up overpowering the strong? The second approach sees this as a logical problem. It asks about the very logical possibility of the shift whereby the source of value ('the apparent world') comes to be compared unfavourably with the '"real world"', despite the fact that the attitude that values the '"real world"' values it insofar as it is 'like' the empirical world.

It is not clear at all that the 'logical problem' and the 'energetic problem' refer to two different issues, however. Indeed, in different ways they both ask about the possibility of a reversal. What is more, it seems that they share the same solution. For instance, we can expect the solution to the energetic problem to involve locating an untapped energetic reserve that became mobilized by the slaves and was used as a motivation for the masters to change their evaluative practices. Conversely, we can expect the solution to the logical problem to involve pointing out the logical possibility of forgetting or ignoring that valuation always refers to 'the world' (this forgetting is a precondition for the trick of devaluing the world in the name of the world to work). [2]

In this chapter, I argue that both requirements are fulfilled by one key logico-energetic phenomenon that Nietzsche calls 'hyperbole'. The texts mentioning hyperbole are the other 'clues' I shall use in my reconstruction. Hyperbole, as I shall argue, is a *logical* phenomenon in which the impact of the hyperbolic expression is not dependent on its truth-conditions or even on the conceivability of its referent. For example, when the slaves in GM I 7 talk about eternal damnation, the impression made by this hyperbolic term forces me to take it seriously in spite of its ludicrous epistemic character: it frightens me and this is why I take its possibility seriously. It is also an energetic principle, because it has a motivational force, as is visible in the case of hyperbolic fear-mongering. Therefore, I argue that the appeal to hyperbolic discourse constitutes the reserve of power left untapped by the masters and mobilized by the slaves. As such, it is the crucial weapon in the war episode known as the slave revolt in morality.

We now have a string of hypotheses: first, that Nietzsche aims to show that slave morality is contradictory; second, that it emerged from a rhetorical act of war called the slave revolt in morality; third, that the fact that the slave revolt in morality was possible doesn't cancel the fact that it relies on a contradictory worldview; and fourth, that the reason why this is so, is that the slaves tapped into a hitherto unused reserve of power.

In what follows, I do not argue for the claim that slave morality is indeed a contradiction, but for the preliminary claim that Nietzsche is able to provide a consistent account of how this contradiction came about: namely, that the slave revolt in morality should be read as a hostile confrontation whose success relied on the exploitation of the logico-energetic possibilities contained in the rhetorical form of hyperbole.

My argument is in three steps. First, I trace the ways in which the slave revolt in morality succeeded in placing 'the apparent world' in competition with the '"real world,"' despite the fact that '[t]he "real world," […] was always the apparent world *once again*'.[3] I argue that this reversal is a reversal *with a difference*, one that *introduces* a new kind of force in the slave-master power-relation. In the second section, I show that the mechanism Nietzsche appeals to in order to explain the possibility of this incongruous reversal is hyperbole. In the third section, I suggest that the slave's use of hyperbole was of a certain kind, namely terrorist hyperbole.

II The problem: Detaching truth from reality

In the first essay of GM, Nietzsche presents an original human order based on a coincidence between order of force and hierarchical order and a narrowly immanent sense of reality. For those masters whose values organize these primary communities, there is no distinction between reality and value or between reality and potentiality. The warrior's health lies in their inability to lend any credence to abstract values or other-worldly entities. In the months leading up to GM, Nietzsche came to the realization that this political organization illustrates the spontaneous behaviour of the will to power (i.e. the seeking of direct and immediate discharge in the form of conquest).[4] As a consequence, Nietzsche's challenge in GM is to explain the whole of

human history and culture as variations on this single principle: conquest. We can see quickly, as Richardson (1996) and Poellner (1998) have pointed out, that such a view results in a world where reality is defined in terms of interests: Nietzsche insists that just as there is no potential, there is, even in the so-called will to power, no 'will' *stricto sensu*: the will to power is pure discharge, and it therefore recognizes the real only as the opportunity for this discharge, only as resistance: 'The feeling of power, of struggle, of resistance convinces [us] that *there is* something that is being resisted here' (NL 1887-8, 9[91], KSA 12.387).

For Nietzsche, the equation of interest and reality means that reality appears to us in one of two guises: interests or threats. In interest, I am interested in conquering the object. In threat, the object is interested in conquering me. Interest is a reversible phenomenon.

Yet, the basic civilizational problem that Nietzsche seeks to address is the dominance in modern culture of an ideology that is built around the opposite set of values and categories. This ideology he calls slave morality, and it is organized around the privilege of the unreal over the real, and the subsequent need to sacrifice the latter to the former ('asceticism'). Nietzsche's conceptual challenge therefore is to explain the emergence of slave morality out of master morality, when they are described as mutually exclusive. How did an immanent worldview ever come to transform into a transcendent one?

Nietzsche introduces the slave revolt in morality as a political cataclysm that shatters the warrior's immanent lifestyle forever. Yet, if the genealogy is to be what it claims to be, namely a reconstruction based on at least a thin sense of continuity (there is a leapless movement from master-dominance to slave dominance), this break should maintain a subtle (and likely paradoxical) continuity. Indeed, Nietzsche sees the new order brought about by the slaves as a torsion in the expression of the will to power, but in no way as an overcoming of the will to power as the principle of political relations. He continuously insists that the slaves are also defined as will to power, although they have been oppressed by the warriors throughout prehistory. Their experience is not of the discharge of their will to power, but of the others' discharge of theirs over them and of the painful containment of their own claims to power. Through this history, Nietzsche believes that the slaves have encountered new ways of playing the game of power imposed upon them by the masters (GM III 14). In this context, it is clear that the slaves aspire to reversing the hierarchical order by attaining a position of power, and that the possibility of such a reversal – one that would not count as a break but as a torsion – relies on Nietzsche's account of reality as reversible interest.

For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is a new modality *of* the will to power whose appearance is made possible by the reversibility of the will to power itself: if outward discharge was made impossible by the oppression of the warriors, one's will to power was able to find a new reality to discharge itself upon: one's very self. This 'internalization of the instincts' (GM II 16) led to an experience of the self by the self that also prefigures the forthcoming transformations of the master's soul, though it may be preferable to defer our explanation of this process. For the moment, it may suffice to mention that such reversal of the natural (outward) movement of discharge of individual instincts created an inner world whence a number of faculties sprang ('the entire inner world' GM II 16), including imagination, as GM II 18 calls 'bad conscience' the 'true womb of ideal and imaginative events'.

This new-found imagination gave birth to backworlds, which transferred the identity of reality and value established by the masters into the other-worldly. The idea that 'the world' is identical with 'the valuable' remains; simply, what is called the world is now a different, imaginary entity. The slaves intend to present these backworlds as imaginary originals, of which 'this' world is a mere copy. By contrast, the existence of the backworld is certain but not verifiable. For Nietzsche, the slave revolt in morality was precisely *not* a violent rebellion. Had it been one, it would have been crushed by the master's overwhelming force. Instead of fighting, the slaves *taught* their masters one simple lesson: there are invisible worlds that are more real than this world, but in which it is the slaves, not the current masters, who dominate (GM I 7). The fact that this act of rebellion was in essence an *educational* discourse cannot be overstated, as it carries important consequences both for the nature of morality (the focus of GM) and for Nietzsche's hermeneutics of education as warfare.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* of 1886, a text which Nietzsche himself presents as a companion piece to GM of 1887, the accounts of education are explicitly intertwined with those of the slave revolt in morality. After defining education as the spiritual complement to physical reproduction whereby 'parents unwittingly make their child into something that resembles them (they call it "education")', (JGB 194) Nietzsche extends this definition of education to other educational institutions beyond the family unit, before closing the aphorism mysteriously and brutally:

> And like fathers so teachers, classes, priests, and princes still see in any new person an immediate opportunity for a new possession, which leads us to conclude…
> (JGB 194)

Nietzsche closes his aphorism with a conspicuous ellipsis, which connects it to the next aphorism, JGB 195. Interestingly JGB 195 deals explicitly with the slave revolt as exemplified by the Jewish standoff with the Romans and the Egyptians (this is confirmed in GM I 7, which refers explicitly to that aphorism from JGB):

> The Jews, a people 'born into slavery' according to Tacitus and the entire ancient world, the 'chosen people' as they themselves say and believe – the Jews brought about that *tour de force* of a reversal of values that enabled life on earth to acquire a new and dangerous fascination for one or two thousand years. Their prophets fused 'rich,' 'godless,' 'evil,' 'violent,' 'sensuous,' into one entity and were the first to mint the word 'world' as a curse word. In this reversal of values (part of which is to treat the word 'poor' as a synonym for 'saint' and 'friend') lies the significance of the Jewish people. *The slave revolt in morality* begins with them.' (JGB 195)

It is remarkable that in this aphorism, Nietzsche's most concentrated description of the slave revolt, the entire discussion focuses on language, and the fusing of concepts operated by 'prophets'. This confirms our initial remarks in which all Nietzsche's description of the interaction between the castes is discursive. For Nietzsche, the revolt of the slaves was a linguistic revolution, and more specifically a grammatical one: the metaphysical application, in Nietzsche's words, of the 'subject- and predicate-

concept' (JGB 54). The overcoming of the slave revolt, Nietzsche insists, can only be an overcoming of our 'faith in grammar', (JGB 54) for, he says, 'I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar' (GD Vernunft 5).

Now that the emphasis on the connections between the slave revolt and discourse practices is established, it needs to be shown that the reversal of values carried out by the slave revolt is a reversal *with a difference*. The question to be addressed in the following section is then what Nietzsche thinks is responsible for the introduction of this difference.

For Nietzsche, the belief in slave valuation, which relies on the concept of God among others, is rooted in a transfer of grammatical relations to the metaphysical level. Grammar, Nietzsche suggests in another genealogical text from 1886, has a theologico-metaphysical structure; it is 'metaphysics for the people' (FW 354).

In fact, Nietzsche believes that the basic structure of any grammatical language is its ability to generalize and to unify a diversity of cases by removing their specific determinations and making them the object of qualification (FW 354). For Nietzsche, therefore, grammar is determined by the structure of attribution whereby phenomena are dismembered, with their determinations left to the predicates and their so-called essence or 'form' given grammatical independence. In note 25[168] (KSA 12), which I discuss below, Nietzsche refers to these as 'words' and 'concepts'.

Of course, Nietzsche suggests, such a separation is artificial, and it can only be maintained if we replace the objective reference of the predicates formerly fulfilled by the object of perception with a general determination, that is a principle. In GM I 10, Nietzsche presents his critique of attribution and its necessary (though fallacious) tendency to aim outside of the immanent world in terms of the slave revolt in morality. He writes:

> Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself, the slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside', 'other', 'non-self': and this 'no' is its creative deed. This revaluation of the evaluating glance – this *inevitable* orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself – is a feature of *ressentiment*: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world. (GM I 10)

The moral system that comes out of this reversal is not just analogous to the previous, master morality, it operates a transformation in the nature of thinking because for the first time it separates reality from value. It is important to understand how radically Nietzsche regards the identity of reality and value. It is not, for example, a matter of an eternal and universal coincidence of reality and goodness (as theodicies would have it); neither is it a question of making reality a criterion for value. In Nietzsche's view, warrior morality does not *judge* value to be real or reality to be good (this would already commit it to predicative reasoning); it uses both terms interchangeably. If a warrior says 'reality is good' he does not mean to use 'is' as a copula, but as an existential statement of identity: reality = goodness. In warrior morality therefore, the relation between good and reality is always one of identity. This is what Nietzsche refers to as 'the noble manner of evaluating all things [*Werthungsweise aller Dinge*]' (GM I 16, KSA 5.287).[5]

As a result, the slaves' 'reversal' of this relation is strictly speaking impossible: reversing an identity means preserving said identity. Indeed, the reversal makes an extra step, for it begins by transforming goodness into an *attribute* of reality, and only then is it able to reverse this attribution. The attribution of negativity to real objects, Nietzsche shows, requires the structure of predication, the ability to abstract goodness from reality, and their transfer from the purely grammatical context to the metaphysical.

This is, I think, why the section quoted above continues by suggesting that 'men of *ressentiment*' are 'wont to' '*lie* themselves into' being happy. For, unlike the warriors, their happiness was not self-evident or identical with their existing; rather, it was the object of a discourse, an attribute of one's life, and only thanks to this fact, could it be 'lied' about.

As a result of the political importance of grammar, Nietzsche draws a constant contrast between the linguistic equations performed by the masters and slaves' copulas. In JGB 195, he declares that the Jews' prophets 'fused "rich," "godless," "evil," "violent," "sensuous," into one entity and were the first to mint the word "world" as a curse word'. By contrast, in GM I, Nietzsche suggests that 'the noble manner of evaluating all things' (GM I 16) yields 'the aristocratic value equation: good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed' (GM I 7). This linguistic equation, he claims, was replaced by the slaves who said:

> 'Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!' … (GM I 7, KSA 5.267, cited above)

We seem to be left with two very different kinds of association, which synthesize the two competing worldviews, that of the slaves and that of the masters. We must not assume a complete parallel between them. For Nietzsche's use of the symbol '=' in master morality aims at a different form of equality than the use of the copula 'is' in slave morality. In master morality, the '=' denotes full identity and full substitutability. Among other things, for example, all the terms of a master equation have the same grammatical status; they are substantive.

Slave association by contrast, is not directed by equation but by attribution, and the equal sign is replaced by the copula. This is significant because it allows some terms to retain their original (aristocratic) meaning while losing their normative qualification: the work on language operated by the slave revolt in morality therefore counts not as a strict reversal, but also as the opening up of a new dimension of language, which operates a torsion in the warrior's equation. Where the warrior worldview made the axiological and the descriptive indistinguishable, the slave morality operates the separation between the two. This is the first move, which will enable the second move, which is to put the real and the good in competition with each other, before finally making the good triumph over the real. The difference between the master equation and the slave copula is grammatical: in the slave copula, goodness became an adjective which allows for *a* 'good' (a real individual) to not *be* 'good' (morally or ethically)

The original warrior equation 'good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed' has certainly been undone, therefore, but only in the sense that it has been distorted. If no part of this equation (which accounts for the affect of valuation in *all* humans) were left intact, the slave discourse would make no possible sense. Slave discourse, if it was to be understood by the warriors, had to operate a distortion of the aristocratic equation by transforming the meaning of *some* of its terms, and not of others. Thus it seems that beyond the slaves' distortion, the meaning of the words and their having value continue to rely on the original aristocratic equation. In short, my claim is that for Nietzsche, there is only one way anything can have value, and it is by having reality. But the history traced by the genealogy shows how this has been *forgotten*, not how it has been *changed*. It is on this basis, incidentally, that one could see Nietzsche as pointing out that slave morality contradicts itself: it still appeals to a practice of valuation that is indistinguishable from the valuing of 'this world', yet it does so in order to de-value this world. But this leaves one important question open: when Nietzsche suggests that the slaves' discourse is the paradoxical act of separating terms that are defined by their identity, how does he make this disjunction even possible, if the identity now being dismantled was originally so strict?

It is remarkable that many of the passages where Nietzsche portrays the slave revolt in morality are also those where he credits (and reproaches) the priests for inventing subjectivity. Indeed, it seems that Nietzsche's linguistic circularity problem leads into the question of another circularity: that of education and educability. This suggests that answering the question of the transfer of grammatical structures into metaphysical structures requires that we ask this further question: who is the student who can understand, yet needs to learn, the teachings of the priests?

As Nietzsche emphasizes, the predicative discourse of the slaves was precisely a discourse that could make no sense to the warriors who, relying on the equation of interest and reality, and of reality as resistance (that is to say, as immanence or absolute presence), could not understand the connection between invisibility and reality. The problem, therefore, is not so much to ask how the warriors were taught about the backworlds, but rather, how they became educable in the first place: How could the warriors *believe* in second-hand information when all they know is the identity of perceptual presence and truth?

Indeed, Nietzsche's intuition here connects with Plato's well-known insistence in the *Meno* and other dialogues that the question of education must begin with the question of educability. For Nietzsche, as for Plato, the radical alternative between knowledge and ignorance (and the correlative idea of education as the bridge over this gap) is untenable: radical ignorance is the ignorance that we ignore. This, in turn, removes any motivation for learning. For Plato in *Meno*, *Theaetetus* and *The Republic*, the memory of contemplation, even if foggy, manifests itself in the subject in such a way that their ignorance becomes visible to them, and motivates their educational trajectory upwards. For Nietzsche, of course, such solutions are impossible for a number of well-known reasons, and he is left with having to solve the problem of motivation in his own way: why would the masters even listen to the slaves?

Nietzsche's problem is to explain how the strict identification of truth and reality within presence can be loosened without being entirely broken. Keeping this

identification absolute would exclude any place for discourse (and therefore preclude the slave revolt) and testimony (FW 354), as reality would remain purely subjective and relative to the egocentric perceptual field of each subject at every moment. It would keep the masters away from the field of truth-discourses, which is the only possible battlefield for the slaves. On the other hand, divorcing truth-discourses from reality would be just as ineffective, since it would make the object of truth-discourses appear as what Nietzsche believes they are: pure fantasies. The challenge for the priests however is to present a new reality that can *compete* with the one in which they suffer oppression, the one of pure immanence dominated by the warriors. In *Daybreak* of 1881, a text that Nietzsche regarded as a prefiguration of his genealogical accounts, he remarks that the credibility of truth does not rely on the sole fact that it is true. On the contrary, if truth were to be taught, it would, in order to be credible 'have to draw power over to its side, or go over to the side of power' (M 535); and a few aphorisms further, Nietzsche declares that 'it is not so easy to learn, and not only a matter of having the will to do so; one has to be *able* to learn' (M 540).

It seems therefore that Nietzsche's account is faced with a problem of circularity: a set of beliefs needs to be put into place for education (which is about absent truths) to be possible, and yet education needs to be possible for these beliefs to be put into place. This circularity is lined with a contradiction: truth about the absent must borrow the compelling character ('the power') of the immanent. Yet, it must remain conceived as lying beyond perception (a pure object of knowledge), and further, it must be made to compete victoriously against the world of perception ('this world'). Nietzsche had already encountered this problem in M 128. There he wrote: 'the more abstract a truth you wish to teach us, the more you must entice our senses into learning it' (M 128). Educability, he suggests, relies on a perceptual interest (accordingly, M 134 establishes that all perception is interest-based), so the *abstract* needs to be *presented* in as concrete a guise as possible. What this means, therefore, is that the identity of reality and immanence needs to be undone, but not broken. This, of course, is an almost contradictory requirement, since both reality and presence are defined by way of each other (i.e. they are not predicates). For the priest seeking domination, moreover, their domination will only be as strong as the object of their teaching is abstract, that is to say, inaccessible, unfalsifiable and unverifiable. This teaching therefore needs to be as 'enticing' as possible. What is the device that can achieve such a separation of reality and presence while maintaining their mutual reliance, and how do you teach someone who has no 'interest' in the teachable? In what follows, I argue that only the rhetorical form of hyperbole can achieve this.

III Hyperbole as logico-energetic weapon

If the warriors were to take reality seriously, it was precisely insofar as it was identified with threats and interests, that is, only insofar as it was pure immanence. In consequence of this fact, the slaves sought to cast the absent (e.g. the afterlife) as present and yet maintain its absence (for otherwise there would be no need for priests) and uncover the fact that since the beginning, reality includes some sort of absence;

the real is what 'counts' as real (JGB 264), but there is no direct encounter with it. Nietzsche himself, when push comes to shove (that is to say, in GM II 16), admits that the ostensible mutual exclusion of the master on the side of complete immanence and the slave on the side of transcendence is not absolute, for all human life forms contain the possibility of transcendence and abstraction – a 'soul' – within them. Between the slave and the master, it is rather a question of degree. For the master, this capacity for transcendence is 'stretched thinly as if between two layers of skin' (GM II 16). In his subsequent writings, Nietzsche seems to invest great effort into developing and exploring this originary self-differentiation he finds in the primary soul of man, and it is then that he finally thematizes a concept that had been serving him well for a long time hitherto, the concept of *hyperbole*. For Nietzsche, hyperbole abuses our ability to engage with representations *as if* they were reality. Indeed, when confronted to hyperbolic discourses, our critical abilities are numbed. This may be because the impact of the hyperbolic images conveyed by the discourse saturates our attention, leaving no place for any critical distance, or because the perceptual faith that they appeal to is proportional to this impact. In hyperbole, extreme language and vivid imagery are convincing by the mere fact that they are extreme. It is a wedge driven into the immanent world, and our engagement with it is reliant on our primary, minimal soul.

If we are to understand the mechanics of the slave revolt in morality therefore, we must understand what the hyperbolic form of the slaves' teaching of the backworlds indicates and entails. Let us describe hyperbole as a saturation of utterance over reference, that is to say, as a reification of the word. In the setup described above, hyperbole must therefore be understood as a language *inherently* interesting or threatening (regardless of its object or of its truth value), a combination of immanence and transcendence, word made reality. Let us now see how hyperbole can be seen to occupy a central place in the process whereby the slaves overcame the masters. In order to do so, let us turn to the few places in which Nietzsche discusses hyperbole. They will serve as more clues in our reconstruction.

Nietzsche often describes hyperboles as 'sublimations' and in a note from March–June 1888, he writes of 'the semblance of *sublimation*' with reference to values: 'moral judgements are torn from their conditionality, from the ground in which they have grown and in which alone they possess meaning […] and, under the semblance of *sublimation* are *denaturalized*'.[6] As a result of this process, an experience becomes *abstracted* from its context, generalized and transformed into a piece of knowledge (NL 1883-4 24[17], KSA 10.643). Elsewhere, Nietzsche characterizes this phenomenon as the translation of 'an age-old mythology and vanity of the human into a hard fact',[7] a 'simplification'[8] and a '*Reduktion*'.[9] This has far-reaching consequences: the de-contextualization of the experience entails the forgetting of its essentially phenomenal and conditional nature and its hardening into an objective 'thing'.

As early as the *Untimely Meditation* on history of 1874, Nietzsche presents the movement from the phenomenal to the in-itself as the teaching of hyperbolic 'words':

> If only one were not compelled everlastingly to *hear* the hyperbole of hyperboles, the *word* 'world, world, world' when one ought more honestly to speak of 'man, man, man'. (UB II 9)

Further, in 1888, he proposes hyperbole as the mechanism that performed the 'leap' necessary to create a concept of truth that could be assigned to the other-worldly in-itself:

> At bottom, it has been an aesthetic taste that has hindered humankind most: it believed in the picturesque effect of truth [*den pittoresken Effekt der Wahrheit*], it demanded of the man of knowledge that he should produce a powerful effect on the imagination [*der Phantasie*]. This looks as if an antithesis has been achieved, a *leap* made [*ein* Sprung *gemacht worden sei*]; in reality, the schooling [*der Schulung*] through moral-ideal-hyperboles [*die Moral-Ideal-Hyperbeln*] prepared the way step by step for that milder pathos that became incarnate in the scientific character. (KSA 14. 439; cf. AC 13. See also Urs-Sommer 2013: 80)

Here, as in UB II, Nietzsche regards hyperbole as utterances invested with the power to inform our worldview as we 'hear' them. Hyperbolic knowledge, Nietzsche suggests, is the key resource of moral discourses insofar as it does more than inform. It produces 'a powerful effect on the imagination', which is equivalent to perception ('picturesque') and knows how to 'become incarnate'. Such extreme and vivid language achieves the disjunction of *presence* and *reality*: the human animal learns to consider as 'real' what she is not experiencing, and further, she learns to take the perception of a word or a phrase as the perception of the 'thing' itself: the thing may be absent but assigned reality *as if* it were present:

> First *images* – to explain how images arise in the spirit. Then *words*, applied to images. Finally *concepts*, possible only when there are words – the collecting together of many images in something nonvisible but audible (word). The tiny amount of emotion to which the 'word' gives rise, as we contemplate similar images for which *one* word is there – this weak emotion is the common element, the basis of the concept. That weak sensations are regarded as alike, sensed *as being the same*, is the fundamental fact. Thus confusion of two sensations that are close neighbours, as we take note of these sensations; but *who* is taking note? Believing is the primal beginning even in every sense impression: a kind of affirmation, the first intellectual activity! A 'holding-true' in the beginning! Therefore it is to be explained: how 'holding-true' arose! What sensation lies behind 'true'? (NL 1884 25[168], KSA 11.58f.)[10]

Here, Nietzsche explains how the originary status of belief means that our sensation are an object of belief: there is no such thing as direct evidence. Concepts, he suggests, rely on the similarity between the 'sensation' that arises from the words and the sensation arising from the original object of 'perceptual faith'.

This similarity gives us access to an invisible world because it allows us to transfer qualitative experiences drawn from our real-world experience to imaginary objects (JGB 193, 264) by way of adjective attribution. The expansion of man's basic animal psychology (which offered us memory, consciousness, and the soul in GM II 16) involves the expansion of perceptual faith (the sensation that 'lies behind 'true'') into *imagination*.

It is no wonder therefore that Nietzsche attaches hyperbolic discourse to slave morality (with its 'caricatures' 'monsters' 'effigies'). Indeed, in order to compete with the noble world, a world that goes *without saying*, the hyperbolic language of the slaves requires the overinflation and saturation of the faint element – 'the tiny amount of emotion to which the "word" gives rise' – which word and thing have in common.

Understanding hyperbole therefore means believing in the existence of the object mentioned *inasmuch as it is being mentioned*. The mere hyperbolic naming of the key hyperboles that structure the slaves' teaching that is 'God', 'heaven', 'hell', 'eternal damnation' makes it sufficient for them to be affirmed: God is made present by the word 'God'.

In Nietzsche's terms, of course, the critical point becomes to determine whether and how much a concept is truly what he calls a 'close neighbour' of an experience. Through this mechanism, reality (the object of experience) becomes doubled out with truth (the degree of 'closeness' between a concept and a reality). So, for Nietzsche, the *feeling* of truth (certainty) is a sublimation of the *feeling* of reality. In other words, the criterion of value remains unchanged (it remains the criterion of reality) when transferred to the ascetic practice of attributing perceptual faith affirming the reality of an imaginary object.

The emergence of the faculty of imagination entails the illusion of the coexistence of two realms: the empirical and the imagined. Thereby, it provides the ground for the credibility of the other-worldly. Yet, there remains a paradox: there are two realms but only *one way* to be real: the mode of perceptual faith, which is spatio-temporal. In the spatio-temporal mode of being, the coexistence between the perceived and the imaginary itself is impossible (a certain time and space can be occupied by only one thing). This means that the realm of imagination and the realm of perception cannot be indifferent to each other; they are in competition. Consider:

> Being and appearance [*Schein*], psychologically considered, yield no 'being-in-itself', no criteria of 'reality', [*Realität*] but only of grades of appearance [*Scheinbarkeit*] measured by the strength of the *interest* [*Antheil*] we show in an appearance [*Schein*]. (NL 1886-7 7[49], KSA 12.311)

And

> There is no struggle for existence between ideas and perceptions but a struggle for dominion. (NL 1886-7 7[53], KSA 12.312)

The relations between the realm of ideas and the realm of perception are governed by a zero-sum rule. One realm's increase in reality is the other realm's loss. It is for the individual who attributes reality to one or the other realm. As a result, the individual is placed before a *choice* and has to affirm a *preference*. Here, according to Nietzsche, we encounter the structure of valuation. The competition between values (the imaginary world) and empirical reality ('appearance') should not lead us to believe that Nietzsche places them on the same level. In fact, the superiority of the empirical world remains unchallenged. First, there is a *genealogical* priority of the empirical world; it is out of

this world that the imaginary world arises, and not the reverse. There is also a *logical* priority for the world of experience: we attribute truth to such and such idea because we experienced truth in the form of perceptual faith, a 'holding-true'.

When he traces back the '"real world"' to the apparent world, Nietzsche remarks that no moral system has ever been able to liberate values from their dependence on reality. On the contrary, the '"real world"' is valuable precisely because it presents itself as real; that is, as 'close neighbours' with the world of experience. So reality remains the ground of value: we do not value reality because it is good; instead, we value values because they are real (or so we think).

We are now in a position to examine the moment of reversal in the slave revolt of morality. My claim is that Nietzsche's mechanics of hyperbole, whose saturated language allows it to compete with phenomenal reality in the contest for valuation, explains how the slave revolt in morality achieved the disjunction between reality and immanence. Indeed, since we know that values in both the slave and the warrior systems are determined by interest, it is only this disjunction that allows individuals to attribute more reality to (i.e. to be more interested in) absent realms. In GM, Nietzsche makes every effort to describe the discourses of the slaves as hyperboles intended to project all the traumatizing images onto the imagination of the masters. For Nietzsche, the teaching of God, of heaven and of hell constitutes the key moments of the slave revolution, and by the same token, the three key hyperboles that support their rule.

IV Logic of the worst: The hyperbolic discourse of fear

I have argued that this abusive disjunction of perception (and its compelling force) and reality (with its immanence) was achieved in the slave revolt in morality by way of hyperbolic language which makes one *perceive* its object without it being *presented*. Now that it has been established that only hyperbolic discourse can overpower the master's authority, we must ask what *kind* of hyperbolic discourse. On the basis of the reliance of valuation on reality (whether this reliance is forgotten or not), and on the basis of the reversible character of reality, we can see that there exist two main domains for hyperbolic discourse. The discourse of interest and the discourse of threat. In common language, we would say the hyperbole of hope (e.g. the discourse of rewards in heaven) and the hyperbole of fear (hell is a candidate).[11] Nietzsche, I shall argue, regards hyperbolic fear-discourses to have a privilege over hyperbolic hope-discourses, and the slaves have taken advantage of this.

In his remarkable *Logique du Pire*, Clement Rosset writes:

> What the Sophists, Lucretius, Pascal and Nietzsche all have in common is that the discourse according to the worst is acknowledged from the outset as the only necessary discourse. Necessary, and therefore also the only possible discourse, for the hypothesis of the worst is always exclusive of all others. (Rosset 2008, 11)

Rosset here locates the key logical property of the 'worst' that supported the entire slave revolt in morality: the negative view is the only one capable of eliminating any

competition. An appeal to the worst cannot be counterbalanced by an appeal to the better (in everyday politics, we all lament the fact that fear-mongering is stronger than hope-discourses). References to the worst grab our attention more than references to the best do. One may remember that in his polemic with Darwinism, Nietzsche insists that the purpose of life is not in survival, but in increase (NL 1888 14[121], KSA 13.300f.; see also NL 1885 37[11] KSA 11.586f.). This doesn't mean however that he rejects the view that survival is the necessary condition for increase. It is this conditionality which subtends the excess of the negative threat (the threat for one's life) over the positive hope: with death, one loses both survival and any chance of increase and with suffering, one loses the latter. For Nietzsche, this excess of the negative over the positive is the hinge-mechanism that underlies the slaves' success. The slaves indeed needed to *transform* the given world, they needed to *remove* the rule of the warriors, and this implies: they needed to base their revolt on a monopolistic discourse. Thus the slave revolt in morality is necessarily based on what Rosset calls a 'terrorist intention', that is to say, an antagonistic push to terrify one's enemies in order to weaken them (Rosset 2008, 14).

Nietzsche, it seems, could not agree more. The hyperboles used by the slaves in their revolt, he recounts, are all spectacles of horror, which put into play our spontaneous tendency to grant reality to what we perceive, while using hyperbolic language in order to intimate precisely the illusion that what is recounted is being perceived. In short, they all have to do with *vivid* descriptions of suffering. In GM I 15, for example, Nietzsche presents two slave hyperboles, both exemplifying the 'terrorist intention'.

First of all, what Rosset would call the 'terrorist intention' of the slave revolt in morality is best exemplified, according to Nietzsche, by

> no less an authority in such matters than Thomas Aquinas, the great teacher and saint. 'Beati in regno coelesti,' he says as meekly as a lamb, 'videbunt poenas damnatorum, *ut beatitude illis magis compolaceat*'. (GM I 15, KSA 5.284, original emphases)[12]

And Nietzsche continues by referring to a long passage from Tertullian's *De Spectaculis*, which, after several gruesome and sadistic visions, concludes by displaying his own awareness that the slave revolt in morality relies on cruel hyperbole and the presentation of the absent (in this case, the day of judgement and the punishment of the former kings):

> What praetor or consul or quaestor or priest will grant you from his largesse the chance of seeing and *exulting in such things*? And yet, to some extent we have such things already *through faith*, made present in the imagining spirit. (Tertullian, cited in GM I 15, original emphases)

A close analysis of the entire passage from Tertullian could yield abundant confirmation of Nietzsche's account of the slave revolt in morality as a hyperbolic and terrorist event. This would take us too far afield however. Suffice it to say that the tortures, Nietzsche notes, are 'images and procedures' (i.e. hyperboles) designed to support memory (GM II 3).

This is therefore the only available political move for the slaves: an educational act that relies on terrorist hyperbole which appeals to the logic of the infinite: infinite pain in the eternal afterlife. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in his description of the 'terrorist intention', Rosset repeatedly connects Nietzsche's depiction of slave morality with Pascal (Rosset 2008, 10, 11, 36, 38).

The association with Pascal may help clarify the logic of the worst that Nietzsche sees in the slave revolt in morality. Nietzsche himself seems to think that Pascal's wager typifies the slave logic of the worst and its triumph through terror: if reality is interest, hyperbole must be a saturation of the danger which leads one to take it seriously and to ignore all the evidence that the hyperbole is false. As Nietzsche writes:

> Even granted that the Christian faith might not be disprovable, Pascal thought, nonetheless, that, in view of a *fearful* possibility that it is true, it is in the highest degree prudent [*klug*] to be a Christian. (NL 1885-6 2[144], KSA 12.138; original emphasis)

Pascal's wager, which stipulates that even if the probability of God's existence was infinitesimal, the penalty for not believing in God would be infinite, and therefore, that believing in God is always a safe bet, relies on the logic of the worst. A calculus of risk involves two variables: the greatness of the risk (how damaging it would be if actualized) and its probability. Pascal's strategy, of course, is to make up for the near-insignificance of the probability with an extravagant presentation of the greatness of the risk, echoing the hyperbolic strategy of the likes of Tertullian and Aquinas. Pascal's wager is a calculus of infinites. Following the logic of hyperbole, it relies on a supposedly infinite inflation of an infinitely small element of presence dwelling in the *word* (precisely what Nietzsche called 'the tiny amount of emotion to which the "word" gives rise'). The question is therefore: how do we go from 'infinitesimally likely' to 'true'? Here, we must remember that, according to Nietzsche, 'true' is only a predicative derivation of the emotion one experiences when confronted with compelling perceptions. For the warrior, 'true' denotes interest, 'true' is what *counts* as true. Pascal, Nietzsche suggests, understood this psychological trait: we do not need to believe in the truth of God to believe that God must prudentially count as true for us. All we need in order to achieve this more modest project, is to saturate the sense of possibility of God's existence suggested by the word God; that is to say, to make it frightening enough to *count* as true.

This hyperbolic character that underlies any argument for the existence of God, and which always taints them with a poetic quality – that is to say, a belief in words that crosses the gulf between the word and the thing – is essential to Pascal. Nietzsche declares that the 'men of Port-Royal', including Pascal, all have in common a certain attraction for the hyperbolic, for they suffer from 'a lack of measure within tranquil horizons' and have 'turned the infinite into a sort of drunkenness [*Betrunkenheit*]' (NL 1885 44[5], KSA 11.706; see also NL 44[6], KSA 11.706). This drunkenness is the principle that turns the 'horizon' into an existing absolute, it performs the leap from 'count as' to 'is'.

It is therefore no surprise if Nietzsche shows that the victims of the hyperbole are those who believe in danger and that those who are not contaminated by the slave revolt in morality are also those who are indifferent to the danger:

1. We are no Pascals, we are not especially interested in the 'salvation of the soul', in our own happiness, in our own virtue…—
2. We have neither time nor curiosity enough to gravitate around ourselves in that way. (NL 1888 14[28], KSA 13.231)

Therefore, the terrorist logic introduced by the slave revolt into morality and exemplified by Pascal's wager has reversed the order of priority of life (seen as increase) and survival: master morality says that life has priority over survival as it provides it with meaning (the meaning of survival is merely to be a necessary condition for life), and slave morality says that survival has priority, because losing it would imply losing life too.

Conclusion

To recapitulate the argument of this chapter: the slave revolt in morality was successful because it managed to (a) abstract value from this ('the apparent') world; (b) abstract reality from this world; (c) transfer the value-reality nexus to the other-worldly in the eyes of the masters, (d) transfer the value of the real world over to the other-worldly. This process was made possible by the peculiar rhetorical tool called hyperbole, a speech-act in which the signifier saturates the signified, one that is thereby insulated from any objection. The most powerful hyperbole is of the terrorist kind, and it is the one which the slaves used. By terrorizing their masters by way of speech, the slaves obtained their collaboration, by making the masters themselves turn against themselves and become weak (GM II 16). As can be seen, the key mechanism which Nietzsche appeals to in order to explain the victory of the weak over the strong is the small amount of excess whereby the signifier exceeds the signified, a resource that can be tapped only by way of engaging in hyperbole, in such a way that the hyperbolic discourse is engaged with as true regardless of its apodictic quality. As a combination of perception and meaning, hyperbole is both the teaching that there are backworlds, whose importance for our interest is greater than the importance owed to 'this world', *and* the very experience of such backworlds. Hyperboles constitute the linguistic irruption of imaginary entities into the perceptual field of the warrior. Indeed, Nietzsche insists at length on the fact that the warriors are naïve insofar as they are unable to disentangle truth from experience, or in other words, insofar as their nature is based upon immediate credence (GM I 10; GM II 6, 7, 8, 12).[13] In FW, Nietzsche clearly establishes the connection between language and absence: speaking is a substitute for showing made necessary by the absence of the object of speech (FW 354). This absence of course constitutes the distance that allows for lies, but only to those who are able to distinguish the word from the thing. This mental operation, Nietzsche suggests, is too complex for the master whose primitive mind stays

fascinated with the vividness of the hyperboles. The master, according to Nietzsche, was unable to grasp the interest of absent objects, just like he was unable to *attribute* reality, a mental act necessary only when referring to absent objects. In the little play in which Nietzsche dialogues with an imaginary reader, and reports what he sees cooking in the forges of the priests, he declares that the priests are busy producing values such as 'hope', 'patience' and 'faith', and 'ideals' such as 'the last judgement', the 'backworlds', and 'the kingdom of God' (GM I 14). These, as we can now see, are born out of forges, because they are war weapons.

Notes

1   NL 1887-88 11[50], KSA 13.24: 'The "real world," however one has hitherto conceived it, – it was always the apparent world *once again*.' ('Die "wahre Welt", wie immer auch man sie bisher concipirt hat, – sie war immer die scheinbare Welt *noch einmal*.')

2   Note that the mere appeal to forgetfulness, whereby we forgot that our valuing practices derived from the practice of valuing this world, is insufficient to fully address the problem, since the question is not only about valuing practices; it is about whether valuing anything but this world makes any sense, and even if the forgetting in question was a condition for this making sense, it is surely not a sufficient condition.

3   NL 1887-88 11[50], KSA 13.24. This is a question that intensely preoccupied Nietzsche in late 1887 and early 1888. See in particular Notebooks 8, 9 and 11 in KSA 12 and 13. On the 'real world' being an imitation of the world of experience, see also GD Fabel.

4   'There is no law: every power draws its ultimate consequence at every moment' (KSA 14.79).

5   The fact that Nietzsche recognizes that masters dismiss the slaves as 'bad' (schlecht) does not contradict this, since the judgement of badness is dependent on a judgement of weakness, and since reality is connected to strength, the weak are bad precisely insofar as they are lacking in reality.

6   NL 1888 14[111] 13.288. The full passage reads: 'In praxi bedeutet es, daß die moralischen Urtheile aus ihrer Bedingtheit, aus der sie gewachsen sind und in der allein sie Sinn haben, aus ihrem griechischen und griechisch-politischen Grund und Boden ausgerissen werden und, unter dem Anschein von *Sublimirung*, *entnat*ü*rlicht* werden. Die großen Begriffe "gut" "gerecht" werden losgemacht von den Voraussetzungen, zu denen sie gehören: und als frei gewordene "Ideen" Gegenstände der Dialektik.'

7   NL 1886-7 5[14], KSA 12.189: 'Wir übersetzen eine uralte Mythologie und Eitelkeit des Menschen in die harte Thatsache.'

8   NL 1883-4 24[17], KSA 10.643: [Man] 'will Formeln finden die ungeheure Masse dieser Erfahrungen zu vereinfachen.'

9   NL 1883-4 24[17], KSA 10.643.

10 On the coincidence of the development of consciousness and the development of the faculty of imagination, see GM I 10 & 15; GM II 18, 19 & 23; GM III 12; FW 107, 294 & 359.

11 Both fear and hope figure in each of the two enumerations of hyperboles in GM I 14-15 and GM III 20. In GM II 1, hope is characterized as a defining feature of the master-worldview.

12 'The blessed in the heavenly kingdom will see the torment of the damned *so that they may even more thoroughly enjoy their blessedness.*'
13 The fact that this naivety places the masters at a disadvantage in the rhetorical battle that opposes them to the slaves is pointed out in GM I 7, where Nietzsche points out that 'nobody else's intelligence stands a chance against the intelligence of priestly revenge'.

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