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Yunus Tuncel, Nietzsche on Human Emotions, Basel: Schwabe, 2021, 248 pp. ISBN-10: 3796543456

Review by Johannes Lagerweij¹

No lesser an expert on matters of the soul than Freud said that Nietzsche had a more penetrating self-knowledge than any other man who ever lived or was ever likely to live. Since the soul is the ‘seat of the emotions’, it seems that we may learn a thing or two from Nietzsche about feelings and emotions. The depth of this understatement becomes clear in Yunus Tuncel’s book, *Nietzsche on Human Emotions*.

We learn from Tuncel that, for Nietzsche, emotions play a role in life’s experiment of cultivating a higher type of man, one who lives a life of independence, solitude, abundance in creativity, ambition, cheerfulness, courage, and that of a free spirit. What makes a spirit free is his persistence in his (and it is probably always a ‘he’ in Nietzsche) effort to break free of the bonds of the traditions and dominant emotions of his society. (p. 95), to become an ‘Ueberschensch’, that is one who overcomes, again and again, life-negating emotions such as pity and passive (mediate) revenge. (p. 190) and who affirms, again and again, the struggle and suffering that is part of life and makes one stronger.

Tuncel calls these life affirming emotions also strong emotions, and the life-negating ones weak (91-101). This seems to me an unhappy choice of words and needlessly confusing. For example, an emotion like resentment can be very dominant and strong in a culture, yet Tuncel considers resentment a weak emotion. It seems to me that he means to distinguish emotions that strengthen morale from those that demoralize.

To get a better feel for the ways Nietzsche makes sense of emotions is urgent for those who want to contribute to the task of what Nietzsche calls the **transvaluation of all values**. To support life’s experiment of cultivating a higher type of man, it is necessary to bring about a general transvaluation. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche gives an account and critique of what he considers a decadent type of transvaluation, the so-called slave revolt, instigated and led by the priests. This revolt resulted in a replacement of the dominant values of the warrior culture of the Roman empire with the apparently life-negating values of Christianity, that have since dominated Western culture for the last 2000 years.

From Tuncel’s book, *Agon in Nietzsche*, we have learned that the transvaluation Nietzsche promotes is different from the “slave revolt”, not only in its ambition to overcome slave values, but also in the affirmation of the permanence of the struggle (agon) that every transvaluation involves. There’s no goal of ending the struggle by annihilating the

¹ Johannes Lagerweij, New York University, USA. E-mail: jl7@nyu.edu



antagonist's values. What is strived for is a dominance of life-affirming values, though with the understanding that the strength and survival of the opponent --, of the life-negating forces -- must be affirmed as well. (Though Tuncel, is very much aware of the vital need to keep one's antagonists alive and strong, he does not always sufficiently remind his readers of this need. (See Yunus Tuncel, *Agon in Nietzsche*, Marquette University Press, 2013. ISBN978-0-87462-823-4)

A transvaluation of all values is not something to be achieved by a rhetoric of argument since, according to Nietzsche, no one is convinced by an argument for very long. What needs to be changed are not people's minds, but their hearts, that is, their feelings. Tuncel shows us how, for Nietzsche, particular values correspond to particular emotions. For example, members of a warrior culture value honor and cheerfully welcome hostile conditions, while the same conditions provoke in members of a slave culture fear and resentment. To bring it about that a people whose lives, for centuries, have been dominated by fear, have learned to laugh in the face of danger is perhaps not an impossible task, but it will take at least a struggle of many generations.

To bring about a transvaluation of all values requires a deep awareness of the nature of emotions and their complexity – for instance that they have roots both in the body and the psyche, and that the greater part of an emotion remains unconscious. To become more familiar with what Nietzsche teaches about emotions, Tuncel asks the following question: Where do emotions stem from? This is a question of inheritance, involving a genealogy of emotions: According to Nietzsche, acting upon one's feelings means to obey one's ancestors. Tuncel stresses that this obedience is not felt as such: "We experience our feelings as individual while they are for a large part inherited and collective". (31, 56, 74) And it's healthy that way: One can say, in analogy to what Nietzsche says about the illusion of free will, that a person who **feels** that his emotions stem from sources outside of him is mentally ill, but a person who denies this to be the case, is stupid.

To clarify Nietzsche's and Tuncel's comments on the inheritance of emotions, it may be useful to have a look at a development of this idea by the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan to whom Tuncel refers occasionally in his book. (109) According to Lacan, a child is intuitively aware that its existence depends on the care and love of its parents. To secure that care, it searches and gropes for what it is the parents want from it. To win their approval and affection it imitates and appropriates the 'proper' emotional responses it observes in its parents. For example, when its parents express disgust when they see a gay couple kissing, the child will imitate this expression and, with it, develops the corresponding emotion. If such a development is not corrected by teachers or peers, emotions like that of homophobia, racism, sexism, and the like, become ingrained so deeply that they become almost ineradicable. The child will rarely learn to feel differently, even if it recognizes at a more mature age that its emotions are prejudicial, and damaging in the sense that they block its views and arrests its growth. Emotions are too compelling. Opposing arguments grounded in mere reason alone are no match for them.

Few are the moments in Nietzsche's work where hope is given for the possibility of a transformation of emotions. Tuncel quotes a passage from *Untimely Meditations* that is pertinent to emotional transformation (105):



“The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away.”

Although Tuncel repeatedly stresses the idea that our emotions are shaped by all kinds of cultural formations, he also assures us that Nietzsche does not diminish the role the individual plays in the shaping of his emotions (103). However, this assurance remains quite undeveloped.

A note on page 103 gives some support; in it Tuncel explains that, according to Nietzsche, human beings stand in a relation of appropriation to the values (and feelings?) they are born into: “some follow them blindly, some run away from them, and some recreate them in their own way”. However, as Tuncel himself admits, “these recreators do not create out of nothing”, so that it is unclear how much credit the individual recreator can claim for his recreations.

Apart from that relevant note, I have not found in Tuncel’s book further clarification of the role of the individual in the formation of its emotions. Overall, reading Tuncel’s book is a source of delight. The book offers a wealth of insights and rarely fails to astonish.