

The ethical imagination in Bachelard's reading of Nietzsche

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Introduction

What is an ethical imagination¹? Is there a place of imagination in the ethical action? The answer is not so evident. A Kantian attitude is characteristic. In distinguishing the cognitive or theoretical function from the practical usage of law, Kant denies the exercise of transcendental imagination in the law of freedom. The *raison d'être* of the imagination in the realm of pure theoretical reason is the mediation between the sensible intuition and the understanding. The problem of how the law of freedom is applied to actions in the world of senses, Kant sees only in the understanding in stead of the imagination² which engages the schema of sensibility. In considering solely the form, Kant calls into use the law of nature as “the type of the moral law (*Typus des Sittengesetzes*)”, which, as an example in actual experience, renders possible the application of the law of practical reason to the experience³. The rigid usage of the type guarantees the “rationalism of judgments” against the empiricism and the mysticism of practical reason in reserving the supersensuous character of the intelligible nature. Apart from this apparent negation of imagination in the practical reason, we have another negative presentation in the aesthetical realm.

Kant elaborates an active play of imagination in the faculty of judgment. The sense of the Beautiful (*das Schöne*) reveals only “a certain liberality in our mental mind” in which “the freedom is represented as in play rather than in that law-directed occupation”⁴. The relation of imagination with morality is closer in the judgment of the Sublime (*das Erhabene*), in which the imagination is “regarded as an instrument of Reason”. But the feeling in the Sublime is just negative, as Kant defines it – “a feeling that the imagination is depriving itself of its freedom, while it is purposively determined

¹ It is necessary to distinguish the ethical from the moral, especially in some philosophical texts. But the English translators of Bachelard, like Edith R. Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell, uses alternatively “the moral imagination” and “the ethical imagination” to render the same French term in Bachelard “l'imagination morale”. We are not here to discuss the meaning of the terminological difference between the two concepts. The option for “ethical imagination” comes from the idea that this term cover a more extensive realm than “moral imagination”. I am also conscious that in the context of Nietzsche, morality is more discussed than ethics, and that the metaphysics of subjectivity leans more on the concept of morality than on that of ethics.

² Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Hrsg. Karl Vorländer, Hamburger, Felix Meiner, 1985, p.81 [p.122 in 1788 original edition]. We refer also to *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Lewis White Beck, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1956, p.71.

³ Kant, KpV, 81-82 [122-123]; CPrR, 72.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Hrsg. Karl Vorländer, Hamburger, Felix Meiner, 1974, p.115 [p.116, in 1790 original edition]; *Kant's Critique of Judgment*, translated with introduction and notes by J. H. Bernard, London, Macmillan, 1914, p.136.

according to a different law from that of its empirical employment”⁵. And as such an instrument of Reason, the reflective judgment of the Sublime “represents the object as subjectively purposive, even by the objective want of accordance (*die objektive Unangemessenheit*) between the Imagination in its greatest extension and the Reason”⁶. As inspiring the moral feeling before the unattainable absolutely good, the Sublime grants the imagination only its inability to present the absolute which surpasses the sensibility. The imagination here serves as a sacrificed satisfaction or a satisfaction through the sacrifice⁷, that is, negative in the aesthetical side but positive in the intellectual side. The intellectual beauty (the Sublime) invokes thus an intellectual satisfaction by reserving the authority of the Reason over the Sensitivity. Conversely, the Sublime “is only represented as a might in the mind (*eine Macht des Gemüts*) to overcome certain hindrances of the Sensibility by means of moral principles”⁸ and thus it attains its interest. Even later in section 59 of the *Critique of judgment*, Kant grants the “Beauty as the symbol of morality”, the judgment uses an analogy to convey the intelligible Good to the sensible intuition, the imagination which incarnates the play of freedom does not bestow the material goodness upon the actor, but rather by “judging the beautiful as harmonious with the conformity to the law of the Understanding”⁹, it installs a formal universality. The resource of this conformity is taken as a “common sense” (*Gemeinsinn*), but the way of the connection between the theoretical faculty and the practical one remains “common yet unknown (*gemeinschaftliche und unbekannt*)”¹⁰.

Kantian point of view is typical that the imagination occupies at most a place in the moral determination in a negative way. This is often viewed as a formalism in ethics. What is formal is the rule-followed way for determine the morally good.

It is also in this respect that Gaston Bachelard tries to elaborate the connection of the will and the imagination through the poetical images. In the first place, Bachelard discards the representational view concealed in the schematizing function of the imagination. If the imagination is taken as mediation, it is no longer a substitute for the reality withdrawn from the present *hic et nunc*. But what is mediated is the human subject and the world, so that the poetical image is the direct contact in which the incarnation takes place in two sides – the human being is transformed into the cosmic being, and the *cosmos* into the humanity (*anthropos*). In the second place, the contact is materialist in the sense that the four elements – fire, water, air, earth – are seen as the

⁵ Kant, KU, 116 [117]; CJ, 136.

⁶ Kant, KU, 117 [118]; CJ, 137.

⁷ Kant, KU, 118 [120]; CJ, 139.

⁸ Kant, KU, 119 [121]; CJ, 140. I modify the translation of “fundamental propositions” into “principles”, according to the german term *Grundsätze*.

⁹ Kant, KU, 214 [259]; CJ, 252.

¹⁰ Kant, KU, 214 [259]; CJ, 251.

original material images fulfilling the immediate contact.

In commenting on the “ascensional psychology” of the Suisse psychoanalyst Robert Desoille, Bachelard deduces his own principle of “moral imagination”. Desoille offers a method which assimilates the “axis of a sublimation” to the life line realized in the verticality of aerial imagination. Bachelard adds here his assumption : “imaginary lines are the real life lines, the ones most difficult to break”, and gave a general formula: “Imagination and Will are two aspects of a single profound force. Anyone who can imagine can will. To the imagination that informs our will is coupled a will to imagine, a will to live what is imagined.”¹¹ This principle restores the transformative force of imagination, more specifically, a “transformation from oneiric energy to moral energy”. Here appears the term “moral imagination” – “this imagination that should provide us with the sequence of beautiful images for the dynamic schema that we call heroism.”¹² The following passage implies a critic of Kantian ethics : “As far as ethics is concerned, example is causality. But examples furnished by nature go deeper than those provided by man. The exemplary cause can become a substantial cause when a human being imagines that he is in tune with the world’s forces”¹³. Bachelard can not contend himself with the common moralists in assuming the moral life as the work of the mind (*l’œuvre de l’intelligence*). What Bachelard argues here is the opposition between the intelligence and the imagination, that of Reason and the Sensibility in Kantian terms. The heroic example answers to the Kantian *Type (Typus)* in a reverse way: the nature precedes the humanity, diametrically against the separation of moral law from the law of nature. In fact, with Bachelard, not only his metaphysical principle of imagination reveals the union of imagination and will, but also the human order (morality or ethics) goes along with the natural order, i.e. the anthropology with the cosmology.

Following this principle, Bachelard develops a reading of Nietzsche under the image of air and interpreted thereof the “ascensional psyche”. This interpretation is not just a complementary one that offers a classification of metaphors used by Nietzsche. Bachelard sees no symbolism in Nietzsche, but a vivid moral imagination that incorporates the transmutation of values. Bachelard seizes well the structure of forces in the metaphysics of Nietzsche, but extends the force of images convoked by the will. Here we shall consider some traits.

1. Metaphysics of imagination and ethical imagination

As we have presented earlier, the core idea of Bachelard is focused on the ethical

¹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *L’air et les songes*, Paris, José Corti, 1987(1943), p.130; see also English translation : *Air and Dreams*, tr. Edith R. Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell, Dallas, The Dalls Institute Publications, 1988, p.111-112. [abbr. AS, 130; AD, 111-112]

¹² AS, 130; AD, 112.

¹³ Ibid.

imagination or moral imagination under the image of the Air. We shall see these two points: the justification of aerial image and that of the imagination connected with value.

A first strong reason why Nietzsche is not a poet of earth consists in this: Nietzsche is not a poet “of matter”, but a poet “of action”. Either that stone and rock symbolize the hardness or that “soft earth disgusts him (Nietzsche)”¹⁴, so the earth itself is attached to the subterranean action rather than sustains in itself. Secondly, Nietzsche refused to approve the European melancholy and the maternity, often incarnated in the image of water. As for fire, Bachelard had observed that “Nietzsche’s fire is a flash of lightning (*un trait de foudre*). It is therefore a protection of Anger, of a divine and joyous anger. Anger, a pure act !”¹⁵ He insisted on the characteristics of coldness and assented that “Coldness and height are the homeland of fire”¹⁶. Even the action of fire is given by the air which elevates toward the high place, a place always higher. So the dominant element in this poetic of actions is the air.

Bachelard urges a double act of surpassing: 1) in front of the visual image realized in the imagination of forms, one should reserves the place of natural elements which involve the material imagination and dynamic imagination; 2) in the element of air, the dynamic imagination dominates the material imagination, Nietzsche as a typical exemplification. The basic traits that Bachelard sees in Nietzsche are that Nietzsche himself is “an aerial being” (*un aérien*) and the air is “the substance of our freedom, the substance of superhuman joy”¹⁷. This matter is closer to the action than to the other matters, the air is a liberating matter: “Nietzschean air, then, is strange substance: it is substance with no substantial qualities. It can thus characterize being as equal to a philosophy of absolute becoming.”¹⁸ By liberating the material side, the air becomes a negating matter, a matter that brings nothing. The first lesson of freedom suggested here is the becoming nothing of the matter, i.e. the becoming matter of nothingness. In fact, this becoming can surpass the being. For Nietzsche himself, the will to power assumes the freedom and the absolute becoming. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche makes the will to power to overpass the will to truth, and calls into the valuation power: “That is your entire will, ye wisest ones, as a Will to Power; and even when ye speak of good and evil, and of estimates of value.”¹⁹ Nietzsche continues his logic of becoming:

¹⁴ AS, 147; AD, 128.

¹⁵ AS, 153; AD, 133.

¹⁶ AS, 155; AD, 135.

¹⁷ AS, 156; AD, 136.

¹⁸ AS, 156-157; AD, 136.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, <Von den Selbst-Ueberwindung>, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, hrsg. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, Band 4, p.146 (KSA, 4, 146). In recent Cambridge series of English translation, the title is rendered as “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, but the older translation are often entitled “Thus Spake Zarathustra”. The citation refers to : Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, tr. Thomas Common, New York, Russell & Russell, 1964, p.134 (= Z, 134).

“Your will and your valuations have ye put on the river of becoming; it betrayeth unto me an old Will to Power, what is believed by the people as good and evil.”²⁰ The demand to go beyond the good and the evil is a voice of becoming, of self-passing. The problem of valuation is to create values and to master them, and it presupposes the self-master and self-passing. The life itself outbursts from this river of becoming, but as Nietzsche says, “it is not the river that is your danger and the end of your good and evil, ye wisest ones: but that Will itself, the Will to Power – the unexhausted, procreating life-will (*Lebens-Wille*)²¹” This life is “that which must ever surpass itself (*das, was sich immer selber überwinden muss*)²²”. Thus the logic of becoming can be summarized on the ontological level as the following: the essence of life consists in the act of surpassing, symbolized in the concept of *Overman* (*Übermensch, Surhomme*); a being should be an over-being.

With the idea of moral imagination or ethical imagination, the ontological sense is given to the poems. In place of reading a poem as “an abstract text, like a text on ethics (*un texte moral*) whose author feels obliged to use concrete images to make himself clear”, Bachelard offers an alternative reading of the poem as “a direct, concrete poem that was initially formed by the material and dynamic imagination and that creates new ethical values (*valeurs morales nouvelles*) by virtue of enthusiasm for a new poetry²³”. In this sense, Bachelard confirms that “the aestheticization of ethics (*l’esthétisation de la morale*) is not something superficial”, he goes on to name this “the most efficacious imagination”, “ethical imagination (*l’imagination morale*)”. The importance lies not only in the justification of moral image or ethical image available for ethical explication, but a direct creation of ethical value. But this creative function joins the logic of becoming and of self-surpassing, it is ontological: “it is the imagination in this case that raises being to a higher level” (*Ibid.*). What then is this “higher level of being”, if not the orientation made by the superhuman being? Bachelard engages a metaphysics of imagination which equalizes Being, Ethos and image. He has no hesitation in using the term “an idealism of force” (an idealistic force, *un idéalisme de la force*), quite unusual for qualifying Nietzsche. But this idealism must belong to the guiding line of the metaphysics of imagination, the force indicates the dynamic action in permanent transformation. Here is the “axiom of this idealism”, according to Bachelard’s explanation : “the being who ascends or descends is the being through whom everything ascends or descends²⁴”. Bachelard gives his own example immediately : “Weight does

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Nietzsche, KSA, 4,147; *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p.135 (Z, 135).

²² KSA, 4, 148; Z, 136.

²³ Bachelard, AS, 165-166; AD, 144. The English translators render here the noun “la morale” and adjective “moral” as “ethics” and “ethical”; on the contrary, in the precedent chapter on Desoille, they keep the term “moral” as it is.

²⁴ AS, 183; AD, 158.

not weigh on the world but on our souls, our minds, our hearts – it weighs on man.” This is the “idealistic” weight. But I understand further the ontological sense in the dynamic ascension and descent; the image of air let all other things turn into change by rendering itself being surpassed. The Nietzschean force makes possible the passage up or down. However there is nothing just physical, but metaphysical. Following the image of air, Bachelard gives another comment : “to one who triumphs over weight, to the superman, will be given a super-nature – that very nature that is imagined by an aerial psyche”. The effect of “super-” or “over” transplants the physical immediately onto the meta-physical. Superman, super-nature can’t go without super-being. In this sense, the nature and the ethics are no more two separated domains, they can be unified in this ethical image. By discovering the Nietzschean images, Bachelard affirms then “ They provide an experimental physics of the moral life. They carefully show us the mutations of images that must induce ethical mutations.”²⁵ The metaphysics of imagination reveals an immediacy of image in the totality of being, including ethical being and natural being. But the being is submitted to the becoming of being, to the super-being, to the freedom of being. Thus the ethical imagination calls into play at the same time the transformation of values. Bachelard is consistent with Nietzsche: a being should be a free being, to be is to be free.

2. Aerial images in Nietzsche

We then look at certain images corresponding to the interpretation of Bachelard.

(1) A triad: cold, silence, height

A first group is an imaginary triad of air : Cold-Silence-Height. Bachelard observes a substantiality of air in the odors, in the fresh odors. These fresh odors call for the youth and newness²⁶. Again the freshness installs the connection between the newness and the odor. For Bachelard, the metaphor of fire in Nietzsche is even a cold fire. Only the freshness is akin to Nietzsche : “this freshness is the true tonic quality of air, the one that makes breathing a joy, the one that dynamizes motionless air²⁷”. It also corresponds to “the cold of the heights and glaciers and uncontrollable winds”. (Ibid.) On holding the View from the “Mount of Olives” where silence and cold winter covers the profound depth of Zarathustra in the high hill, Bachelard catches the Nietzschean solitude which abandons the crowd and the market ethics and he cites this key sentence of hymn – “Oh, how this silence draws deep breaths of clear airs!”²⁸. We can get further the effect of

²⁵ AS, 172; AD, 149.

²⁶ AS, 158; AD, 137.

²⁷ AS, 159; AD, 138.

²⁸ Bachelard, AS, 161; AD, 139; also in Nietzsche, KSA, 4, 233; Z, 225.

freshness which brings new values, radically new with the price of solitude. And to ascend to a higher mountain, to the peak of mountain will live the Nietzschean air through this triple correspondence in Cold-Silence-Height. The final image of height suggests a sense of orientation which incorporates both the movement and the evaluation. This orientation marks the verticality in the whole dynamics.

(2) A dialectics of Weighing and Flying

For Bachelard, the sense of orientation along with vertical axis unifies various images : flight, elevation, and, conversely, weight, gravity. The dynamic imagination animates a dialectics of lightness (*légèreté*) and of heaviness (*lourdeur*). Flying as an act against the heaviness, it will “overcome weight²⁹”. Bachelard meditates the passage from ‘The Three Evil Things’ in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* : “Measurable by him who hath time, weighable by a good weigher, attainable by strong pinions, divivable by divine nut-crackers: thus did my dream find the world: -- My dream, a bold sailor, half-ship, half-hurricane, silent as the butterfly, impatient as the falcon: how had it the patience and leisure today for world-weighing!”³⁰ Bachelard concludes that “the weigher of the world suddenly and immediately has winged lightness”³¹, meanwhile the qualities as “suddenly” and “immediately” come from the imagination. To weigh the world necessitates a preparation of flying over the earth. Within the context of Nietzsche, Bachelard says : “A heavy weigher is a contradiction in terms for Nietzsche. To evaluate superhuman powers, it is necessary to be aerial, light, and capable of ascending.”³² To weigh means also to evaluate. Bachelard plays with the French words – *penser* (to think) and *peser* (to weigh)³³, one can’t think without evaluate the weight of such and such propositions or arguments; similarly the image itself calls into play the poetry and the thinking.

For Nietzsche, to think can’t exempt from the flight. If one continues to stay on earth, there is surely the danger of losing oneself in the crowd. It is the flight that brings one out of the earth, the crowd, the salve ethics. The spirit of gravity symbolizes the decline of ethics, and so Nietzsche demands a series of transcendence: standing, walking, running, climbing, dancing and finally flying. The lightness prepares the flight, before turning into the Overman, one must become a bird which abandons the heavy good and evil.

By linking the flight of bird and the peak of the highest mountain, Bachelard contrasts the vertical life with the horizontal life. In the vertical hierarchy, a sequence of

²⁹ AS, 163;AD,141.

³⁰ Nietzsche, KSA, 4, 235; Z, 228.

³¹ Bachelard, AS, 163;AD, 141.

³² AS, 163;AD, 142.

³³ Cf. Bachelard, *La philosophie du non*, Paris, PUF, 1988(1940), p.26.

elements detents as such: water, earth, fire, air³⁴. He observes a strange image of “fishing from the heights” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (<The Honey Sacrifice>): “From high mountains cast down thy glittering scorn-laughter! Allure for me with thy glittering the finest human fish³⁵”; the fish man Zarathustra fishes men to ascend to the high mountains. Along the vertical axis, the movement is ascension. The price is getting high. The home is the sky in stead of the earth; it is a home for birds. But still the central image of aerial motion is the bird, “alpha and omega” for Nietzsche to designate the spirit. Flying into the sky is not just a conquest of the earth, a leaving from the earth. It is remarkable that “Nietzschean flight is characterized by impetuosity and aggressiveness”, and “it seems that the eagle claws the sky”³⁶. In the flight, one recognizes “a pure offensive imagination” against the sky. With this aggressive imagination, we can understand the image of arrow used by Nietzsche to signify “a wild wisdom”, a revelation of the theatre of becoming such as the “play of the world”³⁷ in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this eternal becoming, no value is fixed, and the old tables of moral inscription are changed into the new ones. At least one thing is delivered by the new table: “Man is something that must be surpassed”³⁸. In the same way, the ethical truth evolves along with the logic of becoming; with the image of flying arrow, the good and the evil are surpassed, and even the man becoming bird-arrow shall surpass himself. The evolution of ethical truth means a renewal of value. In a short expression: a gushing forth of being (*un jet de l'être*)³⁹, Bachelard remarks on the emergence of the world by summing up the images of the dawn, the rising sun and the morning being (*l'être matinal*). The ontological emergence has its ethical relevance. The sensation in face of the rising sun is “the inner sensation of will, the feeling of decision”, it delivers “the eternal return of power” which carries the irrevocable decision with the renewing act. The act of decision renews the world. Bachelard gives a lesson of Nietzschean “sympathy with the cosmic powers of return (*accord avec les forces de retour cosmiques*)⁴⁰”. He refuses the interpretation of the eternal return as a circle made by a mill that endlessly turns and grinds the same grain, and accepts on the contrary the rediscovery of the new world. and of the being. Flying like an arrow or a bird is an expression which involves a set of images rich in the ethical affirmations. This arrow means that “Our being is what projects the world anew”. The pro-ject is of the will to

³⁴ Bachelard, AS, 173;AD, 150.

³⁵ Nietzsche, KSA, 4, 298; Z, 291.

³⁶ Bachelard, AS, 177;AD, 153.

³⁷ <Old and New Tables> in Nietzsche, KSA, 4, 247-248; Z, 241: Where all becoming seemed to me dancing of Gods, and wantoning of Gods, and the world unloosed und unbridled and fleeing back into itself: – As an eternal self-fleeing and re-seeking of one another of many Gods, as the blessed self-contradicting, recommuning, and refraternising with one another of many Gods: –

³⁸ Nietzsche, KSA, 4, 249; Z, 243.

³⁹ Bachelard, AS, 179;AD, 155.

⁴⁰ Bachelard, AS, 180;AD, 156.

power. We can see here in Bachelard and Nietzsche that the surpassing of metaphysics presupposes a metaphysics of surpassing, at least of surpassing imagination. In the equivalence of cosmic becoming and transmutation of ethical values, Bachelard discovers a direct link of aerial image.

(3) Tree

In the image of tree, there are two basic characters to notice: the conquest of abyss and the verticality. The abyss, the bottom and the depth are the types for Nietzsche. On the contrary, what he consents are the summit, the peak and the height. Bachelard defines that “Nietzscheanism is conquered vertigo. Nietzsche comes near the abyss to find dynamic images of ascent”.⁴¹ The pine introduces two things: 1) it is vertical, “upright, braced, standing straight (*droit, dressé, debout*)”, 2) it symbolizes the force, of projection and of conquest. Bachelard uses a contrast of direct images: “Near the abyss, the plight of human beings is to fall. Near the abyss, the superman’s destiny is to spring up, as a fir tree does, toward the blue sky.”⁴² The opposition of man and superman, or even that of evil and good, is expressed in a dynamism: to fall or to spring up. But the pine has showed itself to be a straight image that conquers the abyss. Bachelard cites also a passage from <The Welcome> in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* : “Whoever grows up high like you, O Zarathustra, I compare to the pine: long, silent, hard, alone, of the best and most resilient wood, magnificent (...)”⁴³. For Nietzsche, it belongs to a drama of higher man who serves as a bridge to reach at a height of superman. The irony of Nietzsche is that a sole tree can refresh an entire landscape, a metaphor for the highest and strongest will that surpasses that of the higher man. The refreshing force of the pine can be assimilated to the cosmic force; in refreshing the entire landscape, the tree put the world anew. We read in the page of Bachelard that “Nietzsche’s fir tree, on the edge of the abyss, is a cosmic vector”⁴⁴. The will of the tree is thus a will of the world; by conquering the abyss, the pine, in its straightness and uprightness, in short rightness, animates dynamically the will to change, the will to renew the world.

In this vertical life of tree, Bachelard operates a double dynamism: since the Nietzschean pine is more dynamic than material, the pine tree leads a dynamic life along with the vertical ascension; then this dynamic ascending life animates the ethical will. The latter one sees in the pine a natural link of sky and earth, but also an ethical link of good and evil. But if one considers the image of the straight tree, is he using an imagination of form or a dynamic imagination? In the imagination of word from the uprightness to the rightness, there is a formal procedure. In the analogy from the straight

⁴¹ Bachelard, AS, 170;AD, 147.

⁴² Bachelard, AS, 171;AD, 148: « Près de l’abîme, le destin humain est de tomber. Près de l’abîme, le destin du surhomme est de jaillir, (...) ».

⁴³ Bachelard, AS, 171;AD, 148 ; Nietzsche, KSA, 4, 348; Z, 343

⁴⁴ Bachelard, AS, 170;AD, 148.

form of tree with the righteous life of human beings, there is a metonymy function. But all these observations are only static according to Bachelard, it is not sufficient to see in the form of tree the righteous way of life. A direct imagination is that the will of cosmic ascending will through the tree animates the human action. The ethical values are not for meditation. So when Bachelard says “Nietzschean images (...) carefully show us the mutations of images that must induce ethical mutations⁴⁵”, he praises in fact the heroism of moral action. “To live the Nietzschean philosophy is to experience a transformation of energy⁴⁶”, this formula alludes to an ethical universe – “a cosmos that coincides with heroic life”. In a chapter entitled “The Aerial Tree” of *L’air et les songes*, out of the context of Nietzsche, Bachelard mentions an image of cosmological or cosmogonic tree. He gives a similar sentence: “we dream of a tree that constantly renews its cosmogonic power”⁴⁷. The vital impulsion is a vegetable will to power, it commands the whole universe. The terminological influence of Nietzsche on Bachelard is so evident that, in contemplating on the vegetable world, in the coefficient of cosmogony, Bachelard introduces a (poetic) animism. The dynamic imagination in the chapter on the aerial tree works on the poet who urges “an enthusiastic participation in the vegetable world”. The heroic enthusiasm penetrates in the entire universe under the score of the Nietzschean Becoming.

Conclusion

The commentary style of Bachelard furnishes a set of images dispersed in the half poetic half philosophical text of Nietzsche. As a philosopher, I always take the prose of Nietzsche as inaccessible. In the beginning, I am confused if Nietzsche is a philosopher or a poet. Other approach will take another text as the key, like Gilles Deleuze using the *Genealogy of Moral* in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Through Bachelard, I can understand many metaphors that some later philosophers such as Sarah Kofman⁴⁸ or Jean Grenier⁴⁹ does for explication of the metaphorical labyrinth in Nietzsche’s work, especially in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. The metaphors are viewed or rather defined as the images. In Bachelard’s reading, the emergence of images is not arbitrary in the mind of a subject such as a poet or a philosopher. It is related to a valorization of the images, and conversely to the images with values. A natural image has its value, and further on an elementary image has a fundamental value.

One can seize an image in the everyday life, but an elementary image implied in the poem is rooted in the depth of human mind. One important factor to be noticed is

⁴⁵ AS, 172; AD,149.

⁴⁶ AS, 173; AD,149.

⁴⁷ AS, 254; AD,223.

⁴⁸ Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche et le metaphore*, Paris, Payot, 1972.

⁴⁹ Jean Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, Paris, Seuil, 1966.

that the imagination in the mind is not a psychic faculty which stays in the confine of the human representation. What Bachelard asserts more is that this imaginary function is cosmic. The valorization of image assimilates at the same time the universe, the ethical action and the imagination. Bachelard agrees with Nietzsche in interpreting the transmutations of values through the transformation of images. In the vertical imagination, Bachelard explores the dynamic elevation of flying and the weighing action in the general value life – “everything is value, life is valorization”.⁵⁰ But in fact, this poetic axiom is not just applicable to Nietzsche, but also to a Shelley and a Balzac. The Nietzschean idea of eternal return and the moral transvaluation (Umwertung) have their common presentation in the dynamic imagination. It does not matter with a mediation through visual image or mental projection. The projection belongs to the immediate fusion of psychic subjectivity and the cosmic subjectivity. With this fusion, we can see that the poetic value consists in the image itself and that the ethical value can also be sought in the dynamic imagination.

⁵⁰ AS, 182; AD, 158.

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Summary

With the images of four elements, Bachelard invoked two kinds of imaginations: material imagination and dynamic imagination. The first indicates the intimacy of human beings with the universe by the immediate contact of material image. The second is remarked by the transformative function in the faculty of imagination in relation to the human actions. Under the image of air, Bachelard qualified Nietzsche of “the ascensional psyche”, which animates the transmutation of ethical values by the psychical energies. The classification of Nietzsche as the “vertical poet” or “poet of air” introduces, according to Bachelard, a reading strategy of the Nietzschean metaphors and a specific organization principle. Holding on the surpassing action in the new value systems, Bachelard found in Nietzsche an example of moral imagination. In this way, he argued that not only the intelligence establishes the moral codes, but also the imagination gives life to the moral action.

It is of interest for us to consider two principles challenged by Bachelard. The imagination is no longer a faculty of mediation determined by a Kant or a Fichte. The realm of poetics, expressed as “aestheticization of ethics”, is as less as a symbolism of morality. The realm of imagination, especially of poetic images, could be in itself an ethical realm which incites the human beings to action directly. The implication of this last perspective is consequential in the sense that a critic of mediation in the representational thinking is on the way with Bachelard. A poetic image rich in the immediate active consequences may lead us to reflect on the existential status of the human desire for a contact with the world. With the theme of ethical imagination viewed by Bachelard, the transformation of values in Nietzsche is expanded to a cosmic level.

Here are the outline of the article

- 1) the principle of this ethical imagination, within the context of metaphysics of imagination.
- 2) The images discussed by Bachelard
 - the triad of Cold-Silent-Height
 - the dialectics of Weighing and Flying
 - the tree