

# Worshipping Equality as Organizational Idolatry? A Nietzschean View of the Normative Foundations of the Diversity Management Paradigm

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**Abstract:** This article critically discusses the morally legitimizing status of ‘equality’ for diversity management (and equal opportunities) from a Nietzschean perspective, for whom the equality of all humans is the “biggest lie of all” (NF-1885, 37[14]). By applying Nietzsche’s understanding of human relations in terms of the global concept of the will to power, equality can be framed as a form of moral absolutism, in both the critical and the mainstream discourses on diversity. Performatively (re)producing equality as being socially just and an unquestionable value in and of itself can therefore be understood as a mechanism of strategically influencing power relations in an instrumental way. By adding a Nietzschean perspective this article offers new insights into how we consider diversity management, and, more broadly, into the dynamics of (in)equality in organizations.

**Keywords:** Equality, Equal opportunity, Diversity management, Organizational justice, Critical diversity studies, Friedrich Nietzsche

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## Introduction

“The doctrine of equality! . . . But no poison is more poisonous than this: because it seems as if justice itself is preaching here, while in fact it is the end of justice . . . 'Equality for the equal, inequality for the unequal' - that is what justice would really say: along with its corollary, 'never make the unequal equal'” (Nietzsche, 1889, *Twilight of the Idols*, 48).

In Europe, the Americas, and increasingly also globally, the number of organizations following a diversity management approach of some kind continues to grow (Klarsfeld, Ng, Booyen, Castro Christiansen, & Kuvaas, 2016). Aside from being established as an important area of organizational HR practices, workforce diversity and its management is also a well-established area of academic research (Köllén, 2019; Magazzini, 2017; Nishii, Khattab, Shemla, & Paluch, 2018; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). However, the academic discourse on diversity and diversity management seems to be split into two differing approaches: a critical approach, and a mainstream one (Tatli, 2011).

Mainstream approaches focus predominantly on the positive and negative performance-related outcomes of workforce diversity and its management (Mease & Collins, 2018). These outcomes are, in most cases, closely related to the monetary business success of organizations, either short-term or long-term (Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel, 2018; Page, 2017). This ‘business case’ for diversity can be seen today as the predominant, but not exclusive, impetus for organizations to follow a diversity management approach of some kind (Litvin, 2006; Noon, 2007). Critical approaches, on the other hand, are very much related to the fact that the concept of ‘diversity management’ did not spontaneously materialize, but rather derived from – and then took the place of – ‘equal opportunities’ (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Equal opportunities, originally an anti-discriminatory political project, derives its legitimacy primarily from (social) equality being framed as ‘socially just’, and therefore ‘morally good’ (Thompson, 2016). Although the discourse on equal opportunities is likewise not free of business case considerations (Liff, 1999), it is its primary focus on equality as a state of social justice (rather than a focus on those business arguments) that meant that “the concerns over a shift from equal opportunities to diversity management have now become commonplace in critical diversity research circles” (Tatli, 2011, p. 239). A key question is the notion of, and engagement with, issues of sameness and difference, since a major point of criticism for critical diversity studies is the instrumental, naturalizing, and normalizing view of differences within the diversity paradigm (Noon, 2007; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). However, although critical diversity studies are multifaceted in terms of research object, theoretical framing, and the type of equality in question, they share the conviction that equality as such is a (moral) value in and of itself (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Noon, 2007; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010).

This article critically discusses this morally legitimizing status of ‘equality’ for diversity management (and equal opportunities) from a Nietzschean perspective, since, for Nietzsche, equality of all humans is the “biggest lie of all” (NF-1885, 37[14]) [Footnote 1]. Adopting a Nietzschean perspective opens up the possibility of thinking of equality as a form of moral absolutism in both the critical and mainstream discourses on diversity. “Nietzsche had sought to understand human relations in terms of the global concept of the will to power” (Sluga, 2005, p. 231). Against this background, performatively constructing and reproducing equality as an unquestionable value in itself can therefore be understood as a mechanism of influencing power relations. By adding a Nietzschean perspective to an issue that, in recent decades, has mainly been discussed through the Foucauldian notion of power (e.g. Barratt, 2008; Leyerzapf, Verdonk, Ghorashi, & Abma, 2018), this article offers new insights into how we consider diversity management and, more broadly, into the dynamics of (in)equality in organizations.

This article is a response to the call of many diversity scholars for new research approaches, in order to revitalize the whole field of research on diversity and diversity management (Ahonon, Tienari, Meriläinen, & Pullen, 2014; Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2008; Miller, Mills, & Mills, 2009; Zanoni, et al., 2010); this response is given by taking up Tajalli and Segal’s call to “business and the scholars in the field to heed Nietzsche’s call for re-evaluation of all values” (Tajalli & Segal, 2019, p. 240). In a way that may be deliberately provocative, it aims at opening up a new perspective on the discourse on equality and diversity; one which may strike many as politically and ethically incorrect, if not even outrageously unthinkable. However, by opening up the perspective of thinking about attaching moral value to ‘equality’ as a strategic and instrumental way of turning power relations upside-down, this article offers a new critical view of both mainstream and critical diversity research. Since, in the mainstream discourse, the moral value of diversity management is an appreciated side effect of diversity management, rather than its primary concern, this critical perspective might not prove that pivotal. However, in terms of the critical diversity discourse, questioning the moral value of ‘equality’ means questioning one of the pillars of legitimacy of its criticism, and with it the criticism itself. Since

“Nietzsche’s endeavor was the destruction of myths, ideologies, or eternal truths of any shape” (Zittel, 2011, p. 289) – an ideal that is shared by many critical management scholars – it is important to discuss to what extent critical diversity research is based on certain ideologies as well. It is safe to assume that this perspective has the potential to trigger new discussions, and new streams of diversity research. The philosophy of Nietzsche is increasingly entering the critical sociology discourse (e.g. Berard & Meeker, 2018; Schotten, 2018; Yeritsian, 2018), and this article might contribute to stimulating an interest in his perspective within critical management and diversity studies also.

The article is structured as follows. First, a brief overview will be given of how previous organizational and management research has already built upon elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Then, the concept of diversity management, its relationship with equal opportunities, and the morally legitimizing role of ‘equality’ for both endeavors are discussed. Subsequently the essentials of Nietzsche’s critique of morality, and the morality of equality, are outlined, and brought together with the differing notions of equality within the diversity (management) discourse. The concluding section of this article outlines and discusses the various contributions of a Nietzschean perspective to the field of diversity (management), including a critical view on critical diversity studies, and the potential for a Nietzschean approach towards *inequality*, diversity, and inclusion. The latter allows framing the call for equality as a fetishism and contingent idolatry, and making a different, more elitist approach to diversity thinkable. It is shown that a Nietzschean perspective can open up a new field of diversity (management) research, shorn of moral finger-wagging.

## **Nietzsche in organization studies and management research**

Until now, very few contributions in organizational and management studies have adopted a Nietzschean perspective. While Nietzsche’s fundamental criticism of equality has not yet entered the organization and management discourse, several other facets of his philosophy have indeed previously been applied. Ortmann and Sydow (2018) build on Nietzsche’s aphorism of “dancing in chains” (HH II, II-140), whilst discussing the creativity-enhancing potential inherent in self-imposed constraints within organizational settings. Gray (2013) applies Nietzsche’s considerations on the “spirit of gravity” (ZA III, 11), and the related human fear of depth and height, to the area of human resource development. Hjorth and Dawson (2016) draw on Nietzsche’s chapter ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ (UM, II) from his book “Untimely Mediations”, showing that (family) history may be a burden in family business succession, keeping the successor away from writing his/her own history, guided by his/her own will and values. In his essay on how public spaces are organized in reaction to the presence of homeless people, Stevens (2017) applies the Nietzschean method of genealogy, in order to avoid being moralizing and normative, prior to his empirical observations. Waistell (2007) makes use of Nietzsche’s perspectivism in order to understand the role of metaphors in shaping organizational values. Ten Bos (2004) refers to Nietzsche’s concept of “eternal recurrence” (GS IV, 341) as fertile ground for developing new perspectives on organizational phenomena in general.

A relatively small amount of organizational or management research, therefore, has applied Nietzschean perspectives. Steyaert and Janssens (1999, p. 191) were therefore justified in calling on organizational researchers for “a lot of Nietzsche, who is able to wind up through a rich literary style that everyday life is already and always dressed in a philosophical fashion”; until now this call has not been sufficiently heeded. However, this article takes up their plea by focusing on a Nietzschean view of equality within the diversity (management) discourse.

## Equality and diversity management

In both the critical and the mainstream discourse on diversity management ‘equality’ holds a crucial position, either as a goal and benchmark for diversity initiatives, or as a mediate target dimension towards benefitting from these initiatives in economic terms, or as a combination of both. Against this background, the degree of equality in question indicates the “way in which an individual (or group) displaying specific manifestations (of any dimension of diversity) is related to that individual’s (or group’s) (un)equal achievements, status, or access to resources” (Köllen, Kakkuri-Knuuttila, & Bendl, 2018, p. 439). This definition already points to the different notions or layers of equality. Equality can occur in the shape of equality of opportunity (Levin, 1981), equality of treatment, equality of outcome, or as a combination of those (Dahlerup, 2007; Klarsfeld, et al., 2016). Implicitly - though sometimes quite explicitly (Fujimoto, Härtel, & Azmat, 2013) - equality is associated with (social) justice, for example in the shape of distributive justice (Deutsch, 1985), interactional justice (Bies, 2015), or procedural justice (Choi & Rainey, 2014). By equalizing equality with justice, equality becomes morally loaded as being ‘morally good’ or ‘morally praiseworthy’ (Köllen, et al., 2018).

One can argue that equality and diversity are incompatible concepts, and “attempts to promote one can only be made at the expense of the other” (Kukathas, 2002, p. 186). However, one explanation for the close relationship of equality and diversity, and also for their common co-occurrence as ‘equality and diversity’ in management research and practice (e.g. Colgan, Wright, Creegan, & McKearney, 2009) derives from the history of diversity management. Diversity management can be framed as both building on *and* opposing equality of opportunity approaches (Liff, 1999; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). For equal opportunities, Dickens (1999) observed a shift in the late 80s from legitimizing practices striving for equality with “arguments based primarily on appeals to social justice or morality, backed by the need for compliance with anti-discrimination legislation to arguments based on pragmatic business self-interest as a rationale for equality action” (Dickens, 1999, p. 9). The emergence of diversity management approaches in the 90s, then, can be interpreted as a progression of this shift. Although accentuating business case arguments does not perforce mean denying social justice arguments (Liff & Dickens, 1999), replacing equal opportunity approaches with diversity management promoted the justification of equality initiatives through business arguments.

Regardless of the economic value that might be inherent within it, in both research and practice, it is precisely because of its contribution towards promoting equality that diversity management is commonly assumed to be “socially just and morally desirable” (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000, p. 21). For organizations, managing their workforce diversity has achieved the status of a “moral imperative” (O’Leary & Weathington, 2006; Vertovec, 2013). For Cox (1994) “a major motive for investing in managing-diversity initiatives is that it is morally and ethically the right thing to do” (Cox, 1994, p. 10). Due to its intended contribution towards achieving some state of equality, the assumed moral value of diversity management derives predominantly from those aspects that diversity management has in common with ‘equal opportunity’. Kaler (2001) puts it this way: “Though arguments based on organizational self-interest might well be the norm amongst advocates of diversity, in principle nothing prevents diversity being argued for as a way of serving the very same moral ends as equal opportunity” (Kaler, 2001, p. 59).

Since this article focuses on discussing the moral value of equality and diversity management from a Nietzschean perspective, the debate on their economic value may be put aside. However, in order to apply a Nietzschean perspective, it is important to understand the different notions of equality within the equality and diversity discourse. Therefore, the basics of his criticism on the morality of equality are outlined in the next section, followed by a brief overview of the most common distinction in the differing approaches to equality or equal opportunities, the one between ‘radical’ and ‘liberal’ approaches. Subsequently, and in conclusion, the various

contributions of a Nietzschean perspective to the whole field of diversity (management) are then discussed in more detail.

## **Nietzsche, morality, and diversity**

Nietzsche categorized himself as an ‘immoralist’ (Huddleston, 2015), which he considered to be the “highest form of intellectual integrity”<sup>1</sup> (BVN-1888, 1075). Moral judgements, for Nietzsche, are neither rigid nor permanent. Good and Evil are man-made concepts (ZA II, 12), ones which are just as transitory as “intervening shadows and damp depressions and drifting clouds” (ZA III, 4). Nietzsche describes the purpose of his criticism as follows:

“My purpose: to demonstrate the absolute homogeneity of all events and the application of moral distinctions as conditioned by perspective; to demonstrate how everything praised as moral is identical in essence with everything immoral and was made possible, as in every development of morality, with immoral means and for immoral ends [...]” (NF-1887, 10[154]).

Nietzsche's critique of morality primarily addresses the claim of most moralities for universality. Such a claim forces those espousing these moralities to give up their individuality, which makes them eschew their individual responsibility. Individuals with stable moral value systems then often engage in self-righteousness and dishonest conduct and thinking (Stegmaier, 2008). Although several philosophies and philosophers had an important influence on Nietzsche's thinking (see e.g. Bishop & Stephenson, 2005; Rutherford, 2011), Nietzsche's skepticism towards prescriptive moralities, especially towards religious moralities, reveals the substantial impact Arthur Schopenhauer had on both the style and the direction of his writing (Dolson, 1901; Köllen, 2016).

Nietzsche applies the method of genealogy for understanding and criticizing the genesis of morals and moral values, whereby he explains their creation by power, power relations, and by will. In the introduction to his book “Nietzsche and Philosophy” Deleuze (1983) describes the necessity of Nietzsche's endeavor:

“In fact, the notion of value implies a critical reversal. On the one hand, values appear or are given as principles: and evaluation presupposes values on the basis of which phenomena are appraised. But, on the other hand and more profoundly, it is values which presuppose evaluations, "perspectives of appraisal", from which their own value is derived. The problem of critique is that of the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their creation” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 1).

For critically discussing the moral value of diversity management from a Nietzschean perspective, Deleuze's evaluation points to the necessity of critically reflecting upon the status of ‘equality’ as being a value in and of itself. It has to be set into the context of the (moral) claim inherent in the diversity discourse, and the question has to be asked as to why ‘equality’ has achieved the status of ‘moral goodness’ in this discourse, for what reasons, and for whom this is beneficial. As Deleuze describes it, without accepting ‘equality’ as a value, particularly in terms of the critical diversity discourse, the criticism as a whole would lose its moral legitimacy, and, with it, its criticality. It would, then, ‘only’ be a mere description of power relations.

For Nietzsche, morality arises from a perceived necessity, and helps to address the sensation of powerlessness in life, and to face overwhelming powers. Thus, the weaker will be defended against the stronger: a power reversal, which stands in stark contrast to Nietzsche's ethical naturalism (Stegmaier, 2008). Nietzsche saw life as a struggle between disparate centers of power, command, and obedience. Everything that enhances the individual's strength, energy and power is of normative significance in this struggle (Wolf, 2004). In terms of the various man-made moral value systems that try to morally evaluate the different facets of this struggle,

Nietzsche distinguishes between two types of morality: *master morality* and *slave morality* (NF-1883, 7[22]).

Although both moralities stand in contrast to each other, it is not possible to draw a sharp line of demarcation between them. Both moralities can coexist, even within the “same soul” (BGE, IX-260). The crucial difference between both moralities is their origin, i.e. their authorship: while master morality, as already indicated by the name, originated “among a ruling order which was pleasurably conscious of its distinction from the ruled” (BGE, IX-260), slave morality originated among the ruled, “the slaves and dependents of any degree” (BGE, IX-260). What might be seen as being morally *good* from the perspective of the first might be morally *bad/evil* for the latter. Master morality favors actions that create values, and it exclusively relies on one’s own judgment. Power is honored, be it power over oneself or others. Action deriving from compassion lacks any moral value, as master moralities tend to despise the “warm heart”. Nietzsche, therefore, defines master morality as “self-glorification” (BGE, IX-260). Slave morality, in contrast, is born from “the abused, oppressed, suffering, unfree, those uncertain of themselves and weary” (BGE, IX-260). Nietzsche considers it very likely that this kind of morality is an expression of the slave’s “pessimistic suspicion of his whole situation” (GM, II-10). Slave morality highly values that which makes life easier, and suffering more bearable, including compassion, patience, humility, diligence, helpfulness, and a warm heart.

Here, again, Nietzsche’s interconnectedness with Schopenhauer becomes visible. “In fact, one of the main incentives to Nietzsche’s work in ethics seems to have been his opposition to Schopenhauer’s view of sympathy [i.e. compassion, *German: Mitleid*]. Instead of making sympathy a chief virtue, he put it among the vices” (Dolson, 1901, p. 248).

Slave morality is, according to Nietzsche, not self-glorification, but mere “utility” (BGE, IX-260). These definitions already indicate that attaching a moral value to the state of ‘equality’, and with it, trying to stigmatize any action and actor that promotes inequality as ‘morally evil’, belongs to the category of slave morality. Before pursuing this line any further, the central position of ‘equality’ in Nietzsche’s criticism on morality will be outlined in more detail.

### ***Nietzsche on equality***

Nietzsche sees the equality of all humans as the “biggest lie of all” (NF-1885, 37[14]). However - and this applies equally to Nietzsche’s own time as it does nowadays - equality is deemed to be a desirable state; unity and peace are regarded as those conditions most worth striving for (NF-1881, 11[303]). The *herd* feels that the *higher men and women* are dangerous, from the standpoint of slave morality; they have the ability to overthrow everything generations of *mediocrity* have established. Everything that elevates individuals above the “average and the lowlands of the herd” (BGE, V-201) undermines the self-confidence of the community and breaks its back. Consequently, these tendencies are considered to be *bad* and *evil* (BGE, V-201). Nietzsche, therefore, sees equality as a subtle device of the *weak* to weaken the *strong* and to finally come into power themselves (Kazantzakis, 2006). Envy and revenge propel the “preachers of equality”. Their “tyrannomania of impotence” is obscured by their “words of justice”; against “all that has power” (ZA II, 7), and a clamor is raised, since “the envious man is conscious of every respect in which the man he envies exceeds the common measure and desires to push him down to it or to raise himself up to the height of the other” (HH II, II-29). This describes the “two kinds of equality”, [whereby one either draws everyone down to one’s own level,] “through diminishing them, spying on them, tripping them up”, [or one raises oneself up,] “through recognizing their virtues, helping them, rejoicing in their success” (HH I, VI-300). Above all, where equality has “prevailed and [is] permanently established” there arises “a sense of indignation that one man should fare badly beneath his dignity and equal rights,

while another fares well above his equal rights [...] it angers them that the equal are not accorded an equal fate” (HH II, II-29). Morality can hence only work on the outside and never on the inside; regardless of the effort, it is merely the pretense of equality that can be reached (GS IV, 335).

Nietzsche has Zarathustra say that it is wise to distrust all those who “talk much of their justice” (ZA II, 7). They are nothing but “hypocrites” when they claim to be the “good and just” (ZA II, 7), for in all living things the will to power can be found, even in those who serve: “the weaker should serve the stronger, to that it is persuaded by its own will, which would be master over what is weaker still” (ZA II, 12). “The notion of the primal nature of the will is the connecting link between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer” (Dolson, 1901, p. 244). Even though Schopenhauer’s *will to life* has, in Nietzsche, turned into the *will to power*, “it is still the will” (Dolson, 1901, p. 244).

In “On the Genealogy of Morals”, Nietzsche states: “if they [the slaves] succeeded in poisoning the consciences of the fortunate with their own misery, with all misery, so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune and perhaps said one to another: ‘it is disgraceful to be fortunate: there is too much misery!’” (GM, III-14), then they would “achieve the ultimate, subtlest, most sublime triumph of revenge” (GM, III-14). Consequently, Nietzsche concludes:

“The doctrine of equality! . . . But no poison is more poisonous than this: because it seems as if justice itself is preaching here, while in fact it is the end of justice . . . ‘Equality for the equal, inequality for the unequal’ - that is what justice would really say: along with its corollary, ‘never make the unequal equal’” (TI, 48).

Nietzsche does not look upon equality favorably, and, from his perspective, the claim for equality carries the inherent danger of merely being an instrument of the underprivileged to feed their will to power. Attaching moral value to equality is rather a strategy of the *weak*, than an *a priori* quality of equality itself. The following sub-sections will discuss what the implications of this might be for a Nietzschean view on the different notions of equality ‘preached’ in the critical and mainstream discourse in diversity management.

***Equality and equal opportunity.*** Concerning general equality, one can argue with Nietzsche, that, on the one hand, diversity management attempts to directly empower members of groups who have been historically discriminated against (i.e. black people, women, gay men and lesbians, etc.). On the other hand, it could accomplish this empowerment indirectly, by weakening the dominant group (middle-aged, white, heterosexual males, for example) (HH I, 300). From a Nietzschean perspective, one could potentially ask whether these attempts could be linked to feelings of vengeance and the *tyrannomania of impotence*, which have accumulated during the long period of oppression (ZA II, 7). Analytically this could be done by tracing back the moral valuation of diversity management to the claims for equality of the various social movements. The political rhetoric of these “movements of the underprivileged” very much employed the concept of equality and succeeded (at least politically) in linking this concept with the idea of justice (Mead, 1998; Skrentny, 1996). In doing so, such movements established the moral weapon of stigmatizing oppositions to affirmative action (and also EO and DM) as being *evil* and morally blameworthy (Burns & Schapper, 2008; Pojman, 1992; Premdas, 2016; Singer, 2016). Thus, the underprivileged succeeded in attaching moral legitimacy to their striving for more power, and gained moral interpretational sovereignty in the public discourse on this issue.

Greene (2015) points out that the “rationale for policy action within the EO paradigm is primarily based around a moral or social justice case”, which means that ‘equality’ here is,

indeed, estimated to be a socially just and morally good state. It is therefore already obvious, by this point, that, from a Nietzschean perspective, the whole idea of equal opportunities is questionable, albeit to different degrees. Equal opportunity is about giving employees the opportunity to compete “on an equal basis for unequal rewards [...], whereby the] equal basis for competition provided by equal opportunity is selection of merit” (Kaler, 2001, p. 53), i.e. their contribution to the organizational goals. How exactly these contributions or merits should be valued remains highly controversial (Liff & Wajcman, 1996), but it is clear that mere demographic characteristics, such as gender, skin color, or sexual orientation *per se* have to be considered as being non-meritorious. In the literature, the discourse of equality and equal opportunities - and with it, the equality facet of diversity management - is predominantly shaped by two differing standpoints and approaches: the radical and the liberal approach.

**Radical and liberal approaches.** Drawing on Rae (1981), Jewson and Mason (1986) coined this distinction, often also labelled as the ‘sameness/difference debate’. The liberal approach “is predicated on a philosophy of *sameness* – the idea that people should have access to opportunities and be assessed as individuals, regardless of identity characteristics” (Greene, 2015, p. 1), demographics or social group-memberships. This approach accepts unequal outcomes when they are exclusively due to unequal merits, and it legitimizes diversity measures aimed at reducing demographic- or social group-based decisions and selections as unfair or unjust discrimination. In case there is an unequal distribution of merits between social groups, this approach accepts an averaged unequal distribution of outcome between these groups.

Focusing more on the group level instead of the individual level, the radical approach “is predicated on a philosophy of *difference*” (Greene, 2015, p. 1), looking more closely at the impact identity characteristics, social group-memberships, or demographics have on the individual’s chances. As the radical perspective mostly strives for an equality of outcome and can include the claim for achieving representativeness, “its ideal outcome is a situation in which every workforce is more or less representative of all the social groupings available to it” (Kaler, 2001, p. 53). The underlying basic assumption is that work - and with it the definition of merits - is far from being race-, gender-, sexual orientation-, etc.- neutral. Rather, it privileges certain manifestations of given demographics or social groups, such as white, heterosexual, male, cis-gender, able-bodied, etc. employees (Acker, 2006; van Dijk, Meyer, van Engen, & Loyd, 2017). The prevalence of group-specific barriers (Blaine & McClure Brenchley, 2018; McMillan-Capehart, 2005) allows the implementation of remedial diversity measures exclusively addressing underprivileged groups. This perspective therefore legitimizes unequal treatment in the shape of “positive actions” (or “affirmative actions”) for exclusively supporting, for example, transgender, female, or foreign employees. With it, it allows “reverse discrimination”, as it provides these groups with resources that are not accessible for others (Newton, 1973; Taylor, 1973); this can include the definition of quotas (Bagilhole, 2012). Thus, the radical approach legitimizes direct intervention towards redistributing resources and power between social groups.

While within the critical discourse on diversity a predominance of the radical approach is observable, the mainstream discourse predominantly follows the liberal approach (Kirton & Greene, 2016; Tatli, 2011). Both approaches are not totally mutually exclusive, and “equality specialists continue to use both liberal and radical discourses in instrumental ways to promote equality” (Conley & Page, 2017, p. 7). However, the emphasis on the ‘moral goodness’ of equality is more crucial for the legitimacy of the concerns of the voices within the critical diversity discourse. Therefore, a Nietzschean criticism of equality, too, is more crucial for this discourse, and with it, for more radical approaches to equality and diversity. However, there are manifold ways in which a Nietzschean view broadens the discourse on diversity and



diversity management, and in which it contributes to the further development of the field of diversity management research.

## **The contribution of a Nietzschean perspective to the field of diversity (management)**

### *A Nietzschean view on critical diversity studies*

Zanoni et al (2010) summarize what critical diversity studies have in common:

“They share, at the core, a non-positivistic, non-essentialist understanding of diversity — as well as the socio-demographic identities subsumed under this term — as socially (re)produced in ongoing, context-specific processes. Crucially, they underline how such processes and the resulting understandings both reflect existing unequal power relations within a given context and contribute to maintaining, resisting and/or transforming them” (Zanoni, et al., 2010).

Important for evaluating this approach to diversity is the focus on power relations and the concern over these relations being unequal.

A crucial anchor-point for theoretically framing these ‘power relations’ in many contributions within the fields of critical management studies in general (e.g. Barratt, 2003; Burrell, 1988), and in critical diversity studies in particular (e.g. Ahonen, et al., 2014; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Krysa, Paludi, & Mills, 2019; van Laer, 2018), is Michel Foucault’s conceptualization of power. Foucault adopted the historical method of genealogy from Nietzsche (Foucault, 1977), which “seeks to expose mechanisms of power and relations of force but also to highlight the contingency and fragility of the circumstances that have shaped present practices” (Barratt, 2003, p. 1080). In his last interview in 1984 Foucault said: “I am simply a Nietzschean, and try as far as possible, on a certain number of issues, to see with the help of Nietzsche’s texts (FL, 327)” (Foucault, 1984 in Sluga, 2005, p. 210). Foucault describes the relationship of his genealogical approach to that of Nietzsche as follows:

“If I wanted to be pretentious, I would use ‘the genealogy of morals’ as the general title of what I am doing. It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as the general focus, shall we say, of philosophical discourse- whereas for Marx it was the production relation. Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so” (Foucault, 1980, p. 54).

Besides explaining the influence Nietzsche’s approach to power and his criticism of moral values has on Foucault’s work, this statement also highlights another important point. Although Foucault seems to have agreed with some key ideas of neoliberalism (Zamora & Behrent, 2016), both Foucault as a political person, and his work, became very popular with, and highly significant for large parts of the political left (Reader, 1987). Nietzsche, however, kept a critical distance from socialist ideals, especially from their references to equality and the concept of ‘human rights’ (NF-1877, 25[1]). Nietzsche’s critical distance is in marked contrast to many contributions to critical diversity studies, which find themselves considerably more proximate to these socialist ideals (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). This might partially explain why “in the realm of academic critical theory [... Foucault] has acquired a saint-like stature” (Zamora, 2016, p. 2), while Nietzsche and his work are largely ignored.

Closely following Nietzsche’s line of argument in “On the Genealogy of Morality”, Foucault sees power as essentially productive, also productive of the human subject itself. Exercising power has to be understood as a technique of normalization by control and punishment (Ansell-Pearson, 1991). However Foucault replaces Nietzsche’s global concept of the ‘will to power’

through a strictly nominalist view on power that “is constructed and functions on the basis of particular powers, myriad issues, myriad effects of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 188). Foucault rejects the Nietzschean idea of developing a general theory of power, and his assumption about power relations being inevitably linear relations of domination. However, “Foucault’s belief that power circulates continuously and that wherever there is power there is resistance certainly seem to be global claims about the nature of power, and these are no more justified than Nietzsche’s assertion that the will to power is inevitably an overpowering” (Sluga, 2005, p. 234). Thus, both believe in the productive nature of power and embrace “an ontology of becoming, involving a historical, processual and multiple vision of the world” (Bardon & Josserand, 2011, p. 502).

A Nietzschean perspective on the claim for ‘equality’ within the critical diversity discourse does not necessarily need, therefore, to contradict a Foucauldian one. Both perspectives would allow the framing of this claim and its moral loading as an attempt of the underprivileged to come into power themselves (or, at least, to take away power from those who have it). This framing becomes especially plausible when taking into account that many critical diversity scholars tend to prefer the equal opportunity paradigm over the diversity paradigm, and that ‘equal opportunities’ is rooted in the political claims of diverse social movements (Cockburn, 1989). These movements consisted predominantly of certain marginalized groups that mostly used the term ‘equality’ as an apparently unquestionably morally good state (Jasper, 2008). However, this claim can also be framed as their method of resistance against given power-relations and hierarchies. Arguing with Foucault that “its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault, 1978, p. 86), it is even more interesting, from a Nietzschean perspective, to unmask potential mechanisms of (re)producing the moral status of equality as being morally good, and reflecting upon the genealogy of its moral value and its contingency. Taking this standpoint, rather than accepting equality as a (moral) value in and of itself within the critical discourse, (and especially through conferences, or in publication outlets), could potentially trigger polarized reactions, including overt moral indignation. These reactions, however, could then in turn be the object of further investigation from a Nietzschean perspective, e.g. on the way that such approaches are stigmatized, or excluded from the discourse altogether.

The strength of a Nietzschean view in this issue is not in attempting to prove equality immoral, but rather to render it conceivable that marginalized groups might feasibly load ‘equality’ with moral value, and use this as the basis for criticism, in order to pursue a strategy of coming into power themselves, and to feed their will to power. Through Nietzsche, one can cast critical light on this criticism, that, like the criticism itself, is based on the self-same ideals of questioning given values. Against this background, it does not matter whether this criticism is expressed through research or through political activism.

### ***A Nietzschean approach towards inequality, diversity, and inclusion?***

Nietzsche’s philosophy represents an individualistic and anti-egalitarian perspective on morality. His perspective fundamentally opposes the widespread basic assumption in the discourse on equality and diversity that every human being possesses the same personal rights, often articulated as some kind of ‘human rights’. Arguing along the lines that “human rights do not exist” (NF-1877 autumn, 25[1]), he fundamentally rejects the democratic, socialist, or Christian notions of equality (see Knoll, 2009), which serve as a common value base for morally evaluating different approaches towards diversity. From Nietzsche’s viewpoint, not only are all human individuals fundamentally different from one another (a standpoint that is less controversial in the discourse on equality and diversity), but they are all of unequal worth and of unequal rank. Therefore it follows that unequal treatment and the unequal allocation of

resources cannot be morally blameworthy. Equality can be understood as a construct that is discursively loaded with moral value through certain power relations and ‘wills’.

Morality is the method of choice in democratic societies, where the mass morality of the *herd* is valued higher than the exceptional morality of the *masters* (Wolf, 2004). As already outlined, the “ultimate, subtlest, most sublime triumph of revenge” of the unfortunate herd is, for Nietzsche, “if they succeeded in poisoning the consciences of the fortunate [...] so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune” (GM, III-14). One need not equate each and every representative of today’s privileged, or fortunate, manifestations of dimensions of diversity with the ‘masters’ Nietzsche has in mind. Neither need every representative of the underprivileged, or unfortunate, manifestations be a ‘slave’. However, the diffusion and legitimization of diversity management reveals several parallels and connecting points to the way slave moralities attempt to gain moral interpretational sovereignty.

Speaking in favor of establishing a ‘feminist ethics’ Ferguson (1996) exemplifies and illustrates this process. She asks “what principles of justice to use to redress unequal distribution of power, property and resources” (Ferguson, 1996, p. 577), and presents ‘ethics’ as an exchangeable phenomenon that only serves to legitimize a given purpose morally.

### ***The call for equality as fetishism and contingent idolatry***

“In contrast with the aspiration of ‘equal opportunities’, which valorizes social justice, mainstream accounts of diversity draw on the fetishizing of economy, efficiency and rationality” (Schwabensland & Tomlinson, 2015, p. 1934). However, contrasting mainstream accounts with critical accounts of diversity, which mostly argue within the equal opportunity paradigm, it might be suggested that the latter tend toward fetishizing ‘equality’. Of course, the discourse on ‘equal opportunities’, like that on ‘diversity management’, is a contested field, and equality can take on many more forms than ‘equal opportunities’ alone. However, by applying a Nietzschean perspective, ‘equality’ can be framed as the ‘golden calf’ around which the critical diversity discourse dances, and which bestows upon its striving the label of ‘moral goodness’. Although this may not be the primary goal within the mainstream discourse on diversity (management), the assumed ‘moral goodness’ is likewise here accepted as a concomitant ‘morally good’ side effect, as a state of ‘social justice’. In this way, this debate too, dances to the tune of the golden calf, albeit somewhat less exuberantly. Making it permissible to consider these elements as fetishism and contingent idolatry, though provocative, might, in fact, open up new and alternative ways of doing diversity (management), for example more elitist ways.

### ***A closer look at preachers of equality of nowadays***

In order to further develop Nietzsche’s approach of morally (de)legitimizing diversity management, future research could try to gain deeper insights into the background of the ‘preachers for equality’, i.e. the advocates of equality and diversity management.

In his book ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’ Nietzsche compares the ‘preachers of equality’ with secretly vengeful tarantulas, who mask their revenge with the term ‘justice’. These tarantulas preach that the “‘will to equality’ – that itself from now on shall be the name for virtue; and against everything that has power we shall raise our clamor!” (ZA II, 7). As it is their own will to power that is guiding these preachers, Zarathustra concludes: “Mistrust all those who speak much of their justice! Indeed, their souls are lacking not only honey. And when they call themselves ‘the good and the just’, then do not forget that all they lack to be pharisees is – power!” (ZA II, 7). Although one must certainly not impute these base motives to every

advocate of equality, this coruscating comparison opens up an interesting stream of research. There are numerous (lobbying) associations representing underprivileged groups amongst the loudest and most eager preachers (e.g. Catalyst, 2004). It would, however, be interesting to additionally know more about the background and motivations for action of smaller consultant agencies and researchers, who advance the diffusion of diversity management and the promotion of equality through their counseling services and their research. Against this background, it would also be worth examining more closely how the opponents of the ‘ideal of equality’ and of diversity management are morally stigmatized and demonized by these advocates; an issue that would be interesting on both the processual and the linguistic level.

### ***Questioning the established regime of political correctness***

A study from Tomlinson and Schwabenland (2010) might usefully point to another practice-based direction of Nietzsche-inspired research on diversity management. This study, through the exemplar of British diversity practitioners, shows the high level of intangibility and vagueness that in practice is attached to the concept of diversity management. Drawing on the metaphor of ‘phantasmagoria’ the authors, then, in a second study, identified several ‘specters’ as being responsible for the fears, anxieties, and confusion of practitioners, when dealing with diversity issues. One of these specters is the “spectre of political correctness, the fear of saying the ‘wrong’ thing” (Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015, p. 1931). Transferring this idea of political correctness to a Nietzschean point of view, it can be argued that for both diversity research and diversity practice, questioning ‘equality’ as a value in itself seems to be a violation of seemingly established political correctness. With reference to the quotation from Zarathustra at the beginning of this article it might, therefore, be argued that the ‘preachers of equality’ have, indeed, succeeded. Through Nietzsche, future research can elaborate further on the mechanisms that have naturalized this ‘correctness’ and, by focusing on their contingency, the diversity managers’ scope might be broadened in order to allow new, different ways of managing diversity. In general, future diversity research can benefit from *unlearning*, and casting of its ‘moral straitjacket’.

### ***Towards a more Nietzschean diversity management***

Future research on alternative diversity management practices can build in the fact that there are ‘many Nietzsches’, rather than just one (Müller-Lauter, Parent, & Schacht, 1999). These multiple Nietzsches arise from the great diversity of the topics his work treats, as well as from possible ambiguities within his work. One of these ambiguities is that, on the one hand, he fundamentally criticizes the universality and the instrumentality of *any* morality. On the other hand, he defines cultural advancement as a goal for the development of humankind, which then seems to turn into a value in and of itself. However, no matter whether Nietzsche is labelled as a moralist, an anti-moralist, a post-moralist, or as all three rolled into one (Schacht, 2001; Stegmaier, 2016), it can be asked how diversity management can be related to what he suggests is this only valuable goal for the development of humanity: cultural advancement.

After having involuntarily accepted the death of God as part of the development of mankind, for Nietzsche there is only one possible sense of human existence: the purely aesthetic creation of culture. To that end, only a few *higher men and women*, namely the *creators*, are needed, and many *slaves*, who enable the *higher persons* to perform the process of creation. Without the “abysmal disparity in order of rank and abyss of rank between men and man” (BGE, III-62), mankind cannot flourish (BGE, II-44).

Therefore, the only valuable societal goal that it is worth striving for is “the greatest of all tasks, the breeding of a higher humanity” (EH III, BT 4). As to how, exactly, this higher humanity might look like must perforce remain vague as the values this humanity ideally would be based on are very different from today’s values, as one would expect (Kang, 2003; Kirkland, 2009). For Nietzsche, this ‘moving forward’ needs a few individual great humans, who within the population as “successful cases are always the exception” (BGE, 62). Therefore,

“mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men [i.e. humans, *German: Menschen*] - that and nothing else is its task [...] ..its only concern is the individual higher exemplar, the more uncommon, more powerful, more complex, more fruitful.” (UM, Schopenhauer as Educator, 6).

The Nietzschean ideal of ‘cultural flourishing’ and the necessity of ‘few great men and women’ for its achievement can serve as a new prism to evaluate and reconceptualize the different approaches to equality and diversity in terms of impeding or supporting the emergence of these ‘great persons’. These higher persons embody Nietzsche’s ideal of the ‘free spirit’, which he particularly sought to address in his book “Human, All Too Human”, which bore the subtitle “A book for free spirits”. Against this background, a Nietzschean diversity management would, of course, be more elitist (Rowthorn, 2017).

Taken that this empowerment of the free spirits might be a crucial element, in order to pave the way for them to lead the organization into a flourishing future, the necessity of free-spiritedness and individual free spirits for disruptive innovations could be another promising research topic in this context.

### ***Against the preservation of the established diversity-related hierarchies***

Nietzsche’s strong language and his radical criticism of equality might seem to provide those persons in power, who belong to historically privileged groups, with ammunition against criticism. However, the individuals, that, from a Nietzschean perspective, should fill these powerful positions, are essentially free spirits, that do not adhere to any given value systems, but are capable of creating new ones. It is their freedom and independence from given value systems that gives these individuals their strengths, not their social or demographic background that qualifies them for these roles. In the same way, ‘weak’ persons cannot simply be equated with persons who are historically underprivileged due to their social and demographic background, as this (with the exception of religiosity) is in no way related to their potential for free-spiritedness.

A Nietzschean view on diversity issues, therefore, cannot be utilized to justify privileging certain groups of people simply because of their demographics. Thus, it cannot be used for far-reaching strategies of ‘immobilizing’ the opponents of diversity-related privileges in business life, public administration, and politics in general. For Nietzsche, the will to power is inherent in every human being and, therefore, societal (and business) development is based on the permanent struggle of conflicting wills. The individual’s will can explain every human’s striving for more power over others. Against this background, applying biologicistic or other essentializing explanatory models for justifying power-related hierarchies alongside the differing manifestations of the various dimensions of workforce diversity can be interpreted as a means to feed the will to power of the privileged groups. Stressing essentialist arguments can, therefore, be thought of as being as instrumental as loading equality with a moral value; both strategies simply serve the different purposes of differing groups.

However, by focusing on enabling free-spirited employees to achieve more autonomy and responsibility, a Nietzschean view opens up a new perspective on dealing with workforce diversity, detached from the ideals of representativeness or equality. Given that many of today's

society or business leaders are highly dependent on the expectation of diverse shareholders and stakeholders, public opinion, votes, or religious and denominational lines, it can be assumed that, for most of them at least, it was not their free spiritedness that brought them to the top rung of the ladder, as it were. Therefore, esteeming free-spiritedness a little more, and focusing more on those employees that are capable of setting new values adds a novel perspective to management in general, and to diversity management in particular.

The strong and the powerful in the corporate and societal life of today are not necessarily the 'masters' Nietzsche has in mind. Those, especially, who are driven only by the desire to accumulate wealth, reputation, and, of course, power as an end in itself, cannot fall in the Nietzsche's category of a 'great person'. For noble 'masters', as great persons their power is only a vehicle, a means to an end that derives from their own values. Therefore, a Nietzschean view of workforce diversity and its management should not be misinterpreted as a pro-managerialist call-to-arms, to protect the status quo. It is, rather, an exhortation to both those who are in power, and to those currently excluded from it, to reconsider the legitimizing basis of their will for the preservation of, or change of, the status quo. However, as the focus of this article is on equality, and the potential moral value attached to it, this article is more a contribution to, and a broadening of, those debates on workforce diversity that, until now, seem to take the moral value of equality as an unquestionable given.

### ***Diversity (management) research without moral finger-pointing***

“Here we must think things through thoroughly, and ward off any sentimental weakness: life itself is *essentially* a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting. [...] It will have to be the embodiment of will to power, it will want to grow, spread, grab, win dominance, – not out of any morality or immorality, but because it is *alive*, and because life *is* precisely will to power. [...] ‘Exploitation’ does not belong to a corrupted or imperfect, primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of being alive as a fundamental organic function; it is a result of genuine will to power, which is just the will of life. – Although this is an innovation at the level of theory, – at the level of reality, it is the *primal fact* of all history. Let us be honest with ourselves to this extent at least! –” (BGE, IX-259).

From a diversity perspective, this is what describes the everyday experiences of many individuals, in terms of their various facets of diversity. However, Nietzsche frames this in a morally non-judgmental way and excepts no-one, neither from being exploited nor from exploiting. This allows us to step back from the widespread victim-offender polarity in diversity research and its generalizing battle cries, alongside the various manifestations of the differing dimensions of diversity. This perspective enables us to think of the rhetoric and arguments applied in this field, no matter whether within academia, social movements, or in management practice, as attempts to achieve interpretational sovereignty of the moral evaluation of the shape or the outcome of this struggle.

Diversity issues are often identity issues, not only for the subject of study but also for the researcher him- or herself. Thus, diversity research carries within it a certain danger of embodying reactive attitudes, which are mostly brushed aside. However, for Nietzsche, these attitudes are of crucial importance for understanding human will and related human behavior, especially the attitude of revenge (Leiter, 2019). In case these attitudes stem from diversity-related experiences in the aforementioned struggle, they may also relate to whole groups, whose members share a certain manifestation of a certain dimension of diversity, e.g. a specific nationality, religion, or gender. Allowing these attitudes in diversity research enables us not only to broaden our perspective on the subjects of investigation, but also on the researchers themselves, without having to judge them morally, neither implicitly nor explicitly.

Tajalli and Segal (2019, p. 240) state that within the field of business and management studies “we need to become active nihilists and find the courage to go beyond the safety of clear and straightaway guidance on moral issues, and to resist the temptation to cling to any form of absolutism in moral judgements”. This is a necessary pre-condition for understanding diversity-related processes in the everyday struggles of life, and also for developing new moral evaluation criteria, without the necessity of claiming universality for these criteria.

The Nietzschean perspective on issues related to diversity and its management, which has been developed here, might seem radical, very provocative, and different to the way these issues are traditionally treated in organizational research and practice. However, in order to make this perspective somewhat more digestible, it might be helpful to recall how Nietzsche himself put his own writing in perspective:

“It is not necessary at all, not even desirable, [...] to take sides with me: quite the contrary, a dose of curiosity, just as for a strange plant, together with some ironic resistance, seems peerlessly to be the more intelligent attitude towards me” (BVN-1888, 1075).

## Footnote

[1] All references to Nietzsche’s work use the standard abbreviations: BGE – Beyond Good and Evil; EH – Ecce Homo; GM – On the Genealogy of Morals; GS – Gay Science; HH – Human, All Too Human; TI – Twilight of the Idols; UM – Untimely Mediations; ZA – Thus spoke Zarathustra; Sources are the digital critical edition (eKGWB) by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari available at <http://www.nietzschesource.org> and the translations by Hollingdale and Kaufmann, if available. They are cited in the following way: (abbreviation book-number, part-aphorism). The posthumous fragments are referred to as follows: [NF-year, number as stated in the eKGWB], as well as his letters [BVN-year, number as stated in the eKGWB].

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