

Article

Quid Sit Deus? Heidegger on Nietzsche and the Question of God

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Abstract: This article develops a hermeneutic study of Heidegger's text *The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"*. We attempt to read Heidegger's remarks in the context of the "period of transition" that, according to Nietzsche, is occurring in the history of western thought and culture. This essay unfolds in the following manner: beginning with Heidegger's contention that Nietzsche's philosophy is the "fulfilment" of Platonism, we go over the problem of nihilism in relation to the metaphysics of the will to power, which for Heidegger requires revising Cartesian subjectivity in search of a new ontology. Heidegger's critique of modernity encompasses a narrative that goes from "Plato" to "Nietzsche", leading to a reconsideration of the notions of art and truth. Finally, we attempt to interpret the meaning of the "madman's lament" voicing the passing of God.

Keywords: Heidegger; Nietzsche; Platonism; Descartes; will to power; truth; art; period of transition; spiritual transformation

1. Introduction

This article proposes a hermeneutic study of Heidegger's seminal essay *The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"* (WN) [1–22]¹. Although I attempt to do a detailed reading, I also take some interpretative latitude and seek to orient my remarks in a spiral-shaped "learning curve" [23] that lets me review, unpack, and experiment with themes that, I believe, may be hinted at, or could be ventured from Heidegger's commentary. The text is an exegetic exercise that tries to foresee new lines of development from Heidegger's thought-provoking interpretation of Nietzsche. The essay probes Heidegger's intricate *logos* on Nietzsche to signal possible pathways beyond the *aporias* of existentialist thought. Heidegger takes the passing of God or nihilism—the "uncanniest of guests"—to be the end of Platonism, leading to the primacy of the will to power and its consequences. Overall, this is the story of an interlude in the history of metaphysical philosophy: an episode that winds up paying heed to a madman's lament (GS, §125) longing for a new ontological dispensation.

2. Nietzsche's Word: The End of Platonism

Heidegger claims to be offering a series of preparatory remarks toward a future consideration on the "essence on nihilism". The exposition, Heidegger tells us, marks an initial approach to clarify Nietzsche's philosophy as the culmination or fulfilment of western metaphysics. It seems as if, after Nietzsche's "overturning" (*Umkehrung*) of Platonism, metaphysics has reached its final stage (WN, 53). In Heidegger's estimation, Nietzsche is the "last metaphysician" in the history of western thought. By Nietzsche's overturning of metaphysics, Heidegger means that what has hitherto appeared suprasensory has been "transformed into an unstable product of the sensory" (WN, 54). But mere sensation without a transcendental source seems to lose its own essence. The fundamental distinction between *nous* (the suprasensory) and *aisthesis* (sensibility) seems to be eclipsed in the final stage of metaphysics in European modernity.

The concept of "Platonism" does not mean "Plato" *tout court*. Platonism in this text means the dualistic interpretation of Platonic philosophy and its historical legacy: the comprehensive framework that has provided metaphysical meaning and purpose to western



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history and culture for over two millennia. Heidegger thinks that Nietzsche, in his radical critique of Platonism, is the spokesperson of a phenomenon that is an authentic manifestation in the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*). Nietzsche is considering and announcing a structural transformation that concerns contemporary human beings, but because we are in its midst, it still seems not to be fully self-evident. We are undergoing a period of transition between the end of an era and the dawn of a new world.

It is in this epic context of structural change and regeneration that Heidegger proposes to study Nietzsche at the level of ontology. That is, he proposes thinking about Nietzsche's metaphysics in relation to the history of Being. This meditation (*Besinnung*), Heidegger tells us, is a small and preparatory step in the way of thought—aiming to light up the space from which Being itself may again be heeded by human beings (WN, 55). Heidegger is sowing the seeds of a new way of thinking that may be receptive to the question of what it means “to be” in a world obsessed with the restless motions of becoming. But, before sowing, the ground must be prepared, and Heidegger mentions in passing that perhaps *Being and Time* offers such groundwork. Heidegger in this text on Nietzsche proposes to continue thinking in line with the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*: to think “unceasingly with one single happening” that from the beginning of the history of western thinking thought is concerned with Being, “yet the truth of Being remains unthought . . . and western metaphysics veils the happening of the denial” (WN, 56).

In this text on Nietzsche, Heidegger also concretely situates the crisis of metaphysics in relation to modern science and technology. Modern science and, therefore, modern technology are products of metaphysics. The question concerning the limits and purposes of technology refers not only to the understanding of modern science, but also to the origin and purpose of metaphysics itself. Heidegger's tentative steps in thought aim at grasping the relation between science, technology, and metaphysics ontologically understood. Yet, we modern human beings do not seem prone to consider the possibilities that may be cleared by such preparatory thinking. We are apprentices, beginners in new ways of thinking and taking to heart, learning to “remain on the way” so that we may “be there at the right moment” (WN, 56) when insights may come.

Heidegger's preparatory thinking is fundamentally a “historical meditation” (*geschichtlichen Besinnung*). It is a meditation that is not only an inner exercise in self-knowledge and self-reflection, but also has a contextual and relational component to it. For Heidegger, this also means that history is not the linear structuring of successive time, but the openness toward “the Same” [24]², which in a non-calculative way destines and concerns authentic thinking. In this historical meditation, Heidegger locates Nietzsche's metaphysics under the rubric of “nihilism” or the historical movement encompassing European and now global civilization for two centuries, presumably from Nietzsche's time until our own 21st century [6]³. For Heidegger, this is a transitional phase between two worlds which Nietzsche depicts with the shocking expression “God is dead” (WN, 57).

Nietzsche's word is not an idiosyncratic expression. Heidegger wonders whether the word of Nietzsche is a metaphysical insight about the overall composition or plot of the history of Being. Heidegger is concerned with the overarching implications of this “dreadful word”. He feels the need to emphasize that “the word of Nietzsche speaks of a destining of two millennia of western history” (WN, 58). It seems to be the final act or denouement of a spiritual epoch: it is, then, amid a collective “spiritual crisis” that Heidegger is trying to let his meditation resound.

How does he intend to proceed? Heidegger proposes in passing to work with a guideline of Kantian interpretation [25]: apparently, without forcing Nietzsche's thinking, by the movement of hermeneutic historicity, it may be possible to understand an author better or at any rate differently than he understood himself. Yet, this interpretation, to be authentic, must be of “such a kind as to touch upon the Same toward which the elucidated text is thinking” (WN, 58). Hermeneutic interpretation is not, therefore, forced arbitrary imposition, but the possible elucidation of meaning latent in a text.

Nietzsche's word "God is dead" was first published in book III, §125 of *The Gay Science* (GS). Nietzsche did not complete his expected final work, of which we have fragments assembled and posthumously published as *The Will to Power* (WP). Heidegger reports that the notion of the passing of God or gods was already present in the thinking of the young Nietzsche. In the *Birth of Tragedy* (BT), an early text, Nietzsche writes: "I believe in the ancient German saying: All gods must die". Also, even the young Hegel played with the same notion regarding the state of religion in modernity, mentioning "the feeling that God himself is dead" [26,27] ⁴.

Heidegger finds essential resonances between Hegel, Nietzsche, and Pascal's evocation of Plutarch's "*Le grand Pan est mort*" (*Pensées*, 694). These resonances occur "even if for contrary reasons" (WN, 59). It is significant that in Nietzsche's text it is a "madman" [28] ⁵ who voices the terrible event of the death of God at the hands of modern man. Modern man at the end of western metaphysics loses God and becomes neurotically confused with his own shadow.

Nietzsche's word voices a historical earthquake in which apparently "the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable" (WN, 60; GS, § 343). In Nietzsche's passionate testimony it is the Christian God that has died. Heidegger, however, contends that when Nietzsche uses the expressions "God" and "Christian God" he is referring to the "suprasensory realm . . . of ideas or ideals" (WN, 61). For Heidegger, the death of God is really the end of Platonism. It is Platonism and its legacy that seems to be seeking closure in Nietzsche's thinking. The suprasensory (*Übersinnlichen*) or metaphysical realm, in contrast to the sensory or physical world as structured and narrated in the Christian drama, has become deeply questionable for modern skeptical sensibilities shaped by modern science and technology. Heidegger adds that the word "God is dead" also means that "the suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life" (WN, 61). Suprasensory or metaphysical vistas become unbelievable for modern man. Platonism, which for Heidegger also means western metaphysics proper, has apparently come to an end. And yet, although Nietzsche is proposing to turn Platonism upside-down, Heidegger claims Nietzsche remains a metaphysical thinker.

But how? Because, in a Hegelian manner, the negation of an assertion remains wedded to that which it is negating. Such dialectical liaison also seems to confuse the issue. Despite Nietzsche's critical rhetoric, his metaphysics "remains hidden" and lacking proper clarification. For Heidegger, what Nietzsche means by "God" is the "suprasensory ground and goal of all reality" and the suprasensory realm of "ideas and ideals". The loss of this ontological source and goal means a profound problem for human orientation. Hence, Nietzsche's madman decries: "are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?" (GS, §125). Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's word as implying that with the death of God the "nothing (*Nichts*), is spreading out". The *Nichts* represents the perplexing absence of ontological orientation toward even the *possibility* of a suprasensory ground and goal.

3. Hosting the "Uncanniest of Guests"

The initial implication of the embodied experience of the *Nichts* is that nihilism, "the uncanniest of guests" (*der unheimlichste aller Gäste*), is at the door. But to think deeply about the *Nichts* does not necessarily mean that one is a nihilist. Yet, the accusatory and negative tone behind the expression "nihilism" suggests a closed-minded sort of "dictatorship of the *Nichts*" (WN, 62). The word nihilism is already vague enough. Heidegger situates the expression on the historical plane: it is a fundamental historical movement that concerns the destiny of western metaphysics, and is (somehow) larger than Christendom, humanism, and the Enlightenment.

Heidegger adds that nihilism is a world-historical movement "of the peoples of the earth who have been drawn into the power realm of the modern age" (WN, 63). There seems to be an equation between the "death of God," nihilism, and the end of modernity. Still, this "uncanniest of guests" seems to evade a clear-cut historical origin. Heidegger, unlike Nietzsche, apparently attempts to disassociate the direct relation between the critique of

Christianity (including atheism) and nihilism. The tacit suggestion of the text is that nihilism as historical destiny is fundamentally “other” than the religious tradition(s) known to modern man [29] ⁶. The effect nihilism produces is a disjuncture between the suprasensory realm and the essence of man. Modern man seems to lose his connection with what is sacred or divine, thus living in a time of “lost spirit”.

Heidegger takes Nietzsche to be saying that the expression “God is dead” refers to the loss of the goal of human existence as being suprasensory and somehow beyond earthly life. If this source of aspiration is lost, then also the normative implications and sensory consequences in earthly life would have to be profoundly reconsidered as well. Instead of the unquestioned authority of God and the Christian church, now in our liberal secular age the phenomena of conscience (*Gewissens*) and of human reason (*Vernunft*) tend to become central. The problem is that conscience and reason are reduced to immanent sociological perspectives. This has produced a shift from suprasensory orientation toward the objective of historical progress. Otherworldly blissfulness is replaced by utilitarian tangible and measurable earthly happiness as the new goal. The divine attribute to create *ex nihilo* is taken to be a merely human *autopoietic* business. In our “post-metaphysical” or post-modern epoch, the suprasensory understood in terms of the historical legacy of Platonism seems to dissolve into a myriad of fragments driven by autonomous human self-making.

Platonically speaking, what has become evanescent is the “fundamental structuring of that which is” in terms of the distinction between *nous* and *doxa*. The *noetic* anchoring of the *psyche* which was an essentially “constructive force” now seems to become “void” (WN, 65). Our experience of the suprasensory has fallen into an apparent process of “decomposition” (*Verwesung*). Unbelief in Christian faith is not the cause but a consequence or symptom of nihilism. The increasingly overwhelming appearance of technology (today’s “artificial intelligence”) and the populist revolt of mass society in contemporary political cultures seem to be signs of the same metaphysical “decomposition” within the historical storyline of the “truth of Being” (*der Wahrheit des Seins*) (WN, 66).

Heidegger takes the rather striking position that the death of the Christian God is a consequence of a more comprehensive historical phenomenon. To his ear, this is not mainly a religious or a moral issue but a metaphysical problem. In this essay, he provocatively claims to be meditating on the problem of the evanescence of Platonism *sine ira et studio*. This was certainly not Nietzsche’s way (cf. BGE, Preface). Whatever the differences in philosophical temper between these two thinkers, in this portion of the text Heidegger proposes again to look closely at Nietzsche’s diagnosis. He refers to Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* § 2: “What does nihilism mean: *that the highest values devalue themselves*. The goal is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer”.

The malaise of nihilism is an “ongoing historical event” in which the structure of Platonic metaphysics regarding the ideas of the “true” (“that which really is”), the “good” (“that upon which everything everywhere depends”), and the “beautiful” (“the order and unity of that which is in its entirety”) become mistakenly identified with human-made values that are a product of the will to power (WN, 66).

Heidegger notes that for Nietzsche this process is not simply of decay but is rather the “intrinsic law” or “inner logic” of western history. As we noted above, Nietzsche in Heidegger’s view conceived nihilism in the manner of Hegelian dialectic: an intricate process of recognition and sublation in which old values dwindle and new values “inevitably” come to the fore. The saturation and uncompromising negation of values generates the impulse toward the “yes-saying” of new valuative affirmation. Nietzsche’s new affirmation, the “revaluation of all values,” is paradoxically the completion of nihilism. Nihilism is ambiguous in the sense that it is both the critical “devaluing of the highest values” and the affirmative “unconditional countermovement to devaluing” (WN, 68).

According to Heidegger’s interpretation, the apparent end of metaphysics translates into the predominance of proud assertive human self-making. Here, perhaps for rhetorical effect, Heidegger’s Nietzsche articulates the human situation in terms of an absolute

either/or: the “death of God” produces an *interregnum*, where the old values have been negated, and the new values have not yet been affirmed. This leads to our collective “dark night of the soul,” as it were: the painful and perplexing historical moment we are still undergoing as a culture. The problem lies in that, instead of an ontological quest, modern humanity has opted to overshadow the “suprasensory” and replace it with immanent standards intersubjectively constructed (a new Babel). This makes the situation worse, because it mistakes a “spiritual crisis” that would require a profound inner transformation of consciousness and a “turning around” (what the ancients called *metanoia*) with a problem to be solved generically by the hands of modern subjectivities.

Nietzsche apparently conceives the “highest purposes, grounds or principles” in terms of the metaphysics of subjectivity. Heidegger claims that understanding the notion of value is key to grasping what he takes to be Nietzsche’s metaphysics. Values become the positivistic, potentially tangible, yet “vague” replacement of metaphysics. Nietzsche takes values to be “point[s] of view constituting the *preservation-enhancement conditions* with respect to complex forms of relative life duration within becoming” (WP, §715). The ontological stability of the suprasensory is replaced by different sorts of strategic and tactical power structures. Values are intersubjective and nominal “points-of-view” (*Gesichtspunkt*) that measure “quantity and number” (WP, §710). As points-of-view, values are practically guided by the sense of “sight” (WN, 72). Values attempt to measure and grasp what counts and matters. Here, Heidegger marks a key distinction between the suprasensory *noetic* “vision” of Plato, and the perspectivist valuative sight of Nietzsche. Sight bodies forth in corporeal desire. Perceptive sight scouts out for self-preservation and the satisfaction of human appetite.

Heidegger claims to be following Nietzsche’s thinking: once the process of nihilism becomes “complete” or reaches its “classical” shape, a new principle would then become needful. Since in the modern condition the “suprasensory [has] become lifeless”, Nietzsche now seeks to affirm “the ideal of superabundant life” (WP, §14). What does Nietzsche mean by “life”? (WN, 70). “Life” means, for Heidegger’s Nietzsche, the following: a synchronous process of “preservation and enhancement” of conditions rooted on self-preservation and the satisfaction of desire. But self-preservation is put in the service of “growth”, because “every life that restricts itself to mere preservation is already in decline” (WN, 73). Heidegger adds that enhancement is not possible without securing a stable basis upon which to grow. All “complex forms of life” are bound by this dual basis of stable preservation and unpredictable growth (WP, §556). “Preservation and enhancement” are the “progressive conservative” motives for value-positing within the realm of becoming. “Becoming”, as used here, serves as another word for Nietzsche’s “will to power”.

4. Will to Power and Time

Nietzsche calls the will to power the positing of values for the sake of preservation and enhancement. The will to power is the fundamental characteristic of “life”. Heidegger now claims that the words “becoming,” “life,” “will to power,” and “Being” mean the same for Nietzsche [30] (WP, §582; §689). The will to power shapes particular ruling structures (*Herrschaftsgebilde*) of preservation and enhancement within time. These power configurations are applicable in the realms of “art, the state, religion, science, society” (WN, 74). Values are measured by their capacity for securing and enhancing the will to power. The will to power, in Heidegger’s view, becomes out of “Being itself as the ground of whatever is” (WN, 75). The key point in this passage is that for the first time the process of value-positing by the will to power has become self-conscious and explicit. The will to power is also the principle that affirms the “revaluation of all values” overturning metaphysical Platonism. The “overturning of metaphysics” is produced by the questioning of the governance of the suprasensory over the sensory. Heidegger reiterates that, for Nietzsche, this overturning is also the overcoming of metaphysics. But again, since overcoming is a negation, it remains linked to that which it is negating. Hence, Nietzsche’s overcoming of Platonism is also metaphysical. The conclusion here is that, in Heidegger’s polemical

interpretation, although Nietzsche and Plato remain different, they are also “the same”. Heidegger does not seem to consider that, while for Nietzsche the distinction between Being and becoming is one of degree, for Plato it is one of kind.

Nietzsche’s will to power is the ground of values: of their positing, their securing, and their overcoming. The concept of nihilism and the allegory of the death of God are all effects of the will to power. They are therefore effects of “willing” (WN, 76). To will means to strive. Power is “the exercise of rule or authority”. Heidegger infers that the will to power is the “striving to come into power” due to some sort of desire or lack. To explore further the nature of human desire, perhaps it would make sense to turn toward the study of psychology [31]⁷. Yet, Heidegger finds this psychological or particularly “psychologistic” turn (i.e., interpreting philosophy as subset of confessional biography) wanting. Heidegger takes the will to power to be not a mere desire or the expression of the inner economy of drives and affects, but an essentially metaphysical notion [32,33]⁸.

The will to power is the will of life. In Heidegger’s view, for Nietzsche, the will of life is the will for mastery and for “making use”. Heidegger now refers the reader to parts I and II of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Will to Power* §668 to propose a distinction between desire for self-preservation and willing self-overcoming. The will to power aims at being effective in commanding with the resources it has at hand. The will to power implies a ruling structure, with the primary aim of “self-conquest” for the pursuit of a given task (WN, 77). It is an exercise of self-government, to avoid being commanded unnecessarily by others.

Perplexingly, “the will wills itself”, it is self-moving motion, with the non-final aim of achieving “growth” (WP, §675). Heidegger takes the essence of power to mean not losing ground or “being master over the level of power attained at any time” to be able to grow (WN, 78). Apparently, this power dynamic must always be in motion: a pause in self-overpowering is already a sign of the decline of power [34]⁹. So far, it remains unclear what is the *telos* of the will to power: what is this self-moving motion *for*? We now learn that the aim of the self-commanding and self-overcoming of power whereby the will wills itself is attaining a level of *essential unconditionality*.

The *will to will* would be the circular overpowering of power. The will to power, however, is also for Nietzsche “the inner most essence of Being” (WP, §693). For Heidegger, “Being” (*das Sein*) here means metaphysically “that which is as a whole” (WN, 79). Heidegger emphasizes that Nietzsche’s will to power is not the will of necessity, scarcity, or lack. Rather, it is the joyous and overreaching “ground of superabundant life” which ascribes “worth” (WN, 81). The will to power mixes essence and existence: Being-and-becoming joined in the “perpetual movement of the same” and the eternal return.

Thus, the two fundamental terms of Nietzsche’s metaphysics “will to power” and “eternal return of the same” (*die ewige Widerkunft des Gleichen*¹⁰) define the Being and becoming of “whatever is” (WN, 82). This phenomenon for Heidegger finds continuity and has been a metaphysical guideline from ancient times all the way to his interpretation of Nietzsche. Heidegger signals a parallel analogy between “will to power” and “eternal return of the same” and the notions of *essentia* and *existentia*. At the end of the history of metaphysics, this seems to imply a dualism in need of integration and concord.

5. The Cartesian Moment

Heidegger takes a step back, and states again the liaison between metaphysics, the will to power, and value-positing. This conceptual structure has found in the philosophy of Descartes an articulation in terms of “certainty” (*Gewissheit*). Descartes, in Heidegger’s account, constructs a structure of representation that aims at producing objectivity, security, and fixity, which is a distinct feature of the modern world.

Although Heidegger’s Descartes also inquiries into the Aristotelian “ground” or *hypokeimenon*, he does not conceive of it as the wholesomeness of an orderly cosmos but locates it in human subjectivity. This implies an anthropocentric contraction of metaphysics whereby the Cartesian subject represents the “measure of things”. Human subjectivity

produces through methodological self-consciousness a structure of “certainty,” “preservation,” and “securing” around itself. In modern metaphysics, self-preservation or security becomes the standard for human certainty. Heidegger finds in Cartesian radical doubt the basis for the progressive development of intersubjective self-interpretation that is the modern project (WN, 83). He claims that this metaphysical structure of the will to power finds its critical completion in Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, however, emphasizes more the relative matter of value than the question of certainty (WP, §588). What is the highest value based on the will to power? So far, the “essence of value” seems to be the “preservation-enhancement” of conditions posited by the will to power. This phenomenon is for Heidegger an “encircling sphere” conceived for securing and laying out the foundations for further growth at will: a “constant reserve” of that which the will to power needs for its preservation and growth. For Heidegger, this is what Nietzsche, in line with the tradition of the “metaphysics of presence,” apparently means by the “true” (*wahr*). The “true” becomes that which allows the preservation and enhancement of the conditions of possibility for the will to power (WN, 84). And its structural shape is what Nietzsche means by values. “Truth” (*Wahrheit*) would, then, be a projected value posited by the will to power. Truth as such apparently ceases to be “unconcealment,” or the “realist” correspondence of a judgment with regards to its object, or the intuitive vision of a universal that is instantiated in particulars. The “truth” of the will to power is preservation and enhancement of conditions directed by an apparently restless “will to will” [35]. This voluntaristic mechanism tends to give predominance to self-referential autonomous willing over universal and necessary thought [36].

In a world of becoming, where everything appears to be in motion, conservative preservation or security is not enough. Mere preservation is already decline; thus, enhancement becomes needful. Improvement of conditions is not inertial or automatic: some sort of governance is required to open new possibilities. But, for the metaphysics of voluntarism, “truth” is not the standard (WP, §853). Apparently, “truth” has become a means, and not an end in itself. What does that mean in terms of Nietzsche’s philosophy? For Nietzsche, “knowing is creating” (BGE, §211), and the “creation of possibilities” made by the will to power becomes the “essence of art”. Art, however, does not mean a merely aesthetic phenomenon: it means autopoietic world creation through structures of power where “the world as work of art gives birth to itself” (WP, §796) [37].

Art is a manifestation of the will to power. Art also “excites the will to power” to will beyond itself. Since for Nietzsche the will to power is “life,” art then becomes the “great stimulant of life” (WP, §851). Art stimulates the growth of life which is also an enhancement of power based on previously secured conditions. Art also becomes a value. But it is not any mere value: as that which clears the way for the ascent of the will to power, art becomes the highest value. Not perennial truth, but rather “art” becomes the standard. Although “art” and “truth” are not unrelated, they are also not equivalent: art appears to be the higher value. Nietzsche claims that “art is *worth more* than truth” (WP, §853). Both “art” and “truth” are united by their source, which is the will to power. Will to power for Heidegger’s Nietzsche becomes the ontological “reality of the real,” the essential “ground” or “Being of that which is” (WN, 86). That which gives essential unity to the will to power is “the will itself”. The will essentially reveals itself in “unconcealment” (*Unverborgenheit*) (WN, 87). Heidegger now marks the notion of revelation or unconcealment as the essential “truth” of willing. There are then at least two kinds of Heideggerian “truth” proposed in this essay: the relative truth of pragmatic intersubjective representation, and the ontological truth of essential willing and self-remembering (*aletheia*).

Differently put: Heidegger signals a hermeneutic distinction between the factual truth of modern metaphysics and the artful or poetic truth of unconcealment. Both are manifestations of self-willing, and therefore, eventually, of self-knowledge. The Cartesian metaphysics of representation is structured around subject–object distinctions marked by “clear and distinct,” that is, “certain” or “secure” knowing for safekeeping. Factual certainty marks the correctness of a given representation. In modern metaphysics, the Cartesian

ego cogitans intersubjectively establishes the representation of truth while taking itself as “ground” or standard. The pragmatic truth of subjective representation is methodologically articulated in the unambiguous language of mathematical calculation and factual traceability. As such, it appears uncontested. The truth of securing and certainty eventually becomes the truth of “making-right,” or of human justification (WN, 89). In the modern condition, it becomes the truth of contemporary rights discourses seeking to declare a sense of “justice”¹¹.

Heidegger, however, wishes to take the discussion in another direction. He raises the issue of justice (*iustitia*) in terms of “salvation” (*Heils*). Although this was still a relevant association in early modernity, the justification of salvation has apparently fallen into disuse in the modern logic of “truth as certainty”. Now, the worldly logic of “justification” for the most part seeks to arrange and establish the successful conditions for human security and growth under the calculation of risk avoidance.

The truth of (inter)subjective “clear and distinct” certainty is derived from an expectation of justice: the still relevant notion of giving to each their due. But how is this expectation to be reckoned with the phenomenon of the will to power? The becoming of the will to power is not brutal dominion but unfolds as the expression of justice. For Heidegger, in the age of the “fulfillment” of metaphysics, Nietzsche seeks to encompass the manifestation of the will to power from the self-certainty of subjectivity toward the aspiration of a new ontology of justice. The question pertains to the meaning of the art of justice—What is art? What is justice? And how is justice an “art”?—in the interregnum between the completion of the metaphysics of subjectivity and the dawn of a new dispensation.

6. Will to Power as Art

Heidegger is reading Nietzsche in conversation with the history of metaphysics. For him Nietzsche brings the history of Platonism to its modern completion or “fulfillment”. The metaphysics of the will to power becomes articulated at the end of the history of Platonism under the rubric of “art”. Heidegger adds that, for Nietzsche, creative “art” is distinct from the statistical measurements of modern science: “we possess *art* lest we *perish* of the truth” (WP, §822). The concern consists in revising the disjuncture between “art” and “truth”. Heidegger at this point of the text seems to be saying that *both* are extensions of the will to power “in relation to man”. Although the poetic or poietic function of art seems clear under the metaphysics of willing, the metaphysical role of truth still seems to be an open and “veiled” question.

Heidegger provocatively claims that the question of truth is “scarcely asked” if it is put in the language of human nature or in terms of “philosophical anthropology” (WN, 94). For Heidegger, the question of truth is a metaphysical question. In relation to the metaphysical question of truth he ponders metaphorically that perhaps “we are not yet mature enough” to think through what Nietzsche may have meant when he saw that “around the hero everything turns into tragedy; around the demi-god, into a satyr play; and around a God—what?—perhaps into ‘world’?” (BGE, §150). But perhaps the time has come to “learn to perceive” Nietzsche’s thinking. Although Nietzsche’s writing seems fragmentary, for Heidegger, it is no less consistent than Aristotle’s. Heidegger now proposes that Nietzsche’s metaphysics might be closer to Aristotle than to Kierkegaard. The relevant distinction lies in that Aristotle was a philosopher and Kierkegaard a religious writer. The grounding principle of Nietzsche’s metaphysics is that which essentially unites art and truth: the will to power as “the Being of everything that is” (WN, 94).

Heidegger now takes Nietzsche to be saying that the will to power can become the *thread* in the creative overcoming of nihilism, whereby “being human is lifted into another dimension of happening” (WN, 95). There appears to be an epochal shift in our dimensional experience in which the death of God announced by the madman, that is, the profound questioning and deconstruction of the suprasensory, becomes a historical *rite of passage* in the journey of human self-knowledge.

This potentially transformative experience seems to imply the genesis of a new man: the coming of the *overhuman*, *transhuman*, or *hyperanthropos* to heal the neuroses and fragmentation driving modern subjectivities [38,39]. But the new man does not originate merely out of the practical application of Nietzsche's philosophy of life. For Heidegger, "the essence of humanity" itself at the end of the history of metaphysics needs to undergo a spirited self-overcoming or metamorphosis in which the will to power *ontologically understood* offers a creative opening to heal the "spirit of revenge". In my reading, that is what Heidegger takes Nietzsche's "overhuman" to mean: a *spiritual transformation* rather than the mere materialistic application of artificial intelligence that seems to frantically and foolishly be driving contemporary science and technology in the early 21st century. We should be careful not to mistakenly read into Nietzsche's "transhumanism" a fateful repetition of the fall of Atlantis.

Heidegger reiterates that the dualistic relation between *essentia* and *existentia* mirrors the will to power and the eternal return of the same. The triangular point of concord that may integrate the polarity between the will to power and the eternal return of the same would be the "overhuman" [40]¹². For Heidegger, the inner connection between these three notions remains "concealed" in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [41–43]¹³.

Heidegger does not take Nietzsche to be putting man in the place of God or the gods. Heidegger here marks an essential distinction between the divine and the human, the sacred and the profane, that leads him to the question of creation. Only the God of Abraham has the attribute of creating *ex nihilo*. The problem now appears to be the relation between the human essence and "creativity" in the apparent absence of God or the gods [44,45]¹⁴. The Cartesian ego cogito appears to creatively construct reality by means of (inter)subjective representation. But this implies an "insurrection" of sorts in which the world itself ceases to be an orderly cosmos, becoming an object and therefore a malleable construct of human subjectivity. That is how nature, including human nature, increasingly becomes an object of subjectivity to be shaped by human technology.

Politically speaking, in our historical interregnum, thinking is increasingly becoming a pragmatic means for praxis, and genuine philosophy seems to be replaced by different sorts of voluntaristic ideologies. The upsurge of human "self-willing" because of the metaphysics of subjectivity tragically distorts thinking into "power/knowledge," i.e., ideologically structured control, activist social planning, and positivistic standardization.

This also appears to be a time of "high noon" in which every phenomenon is interpreted as a manifestation of the will to power. The will to power itself is now technologically driven to geometrically structure the world based on the values of security, certainty, stability, and the "greatest possible uniformity and equality" (WN, 102). Heidegger, however, poses the ontological "what is" question amid the apparent sovereignty of technological craftsmanship. What is the relation between the question of Being and the voluntaristic epoch of the potential artificial dominion over the earth? What is happening to Being itself in the age of boundless will to power?

The will to power turns Being into a value. But because Being and becoming are not identical, Being *as Being* cannot be thought of in terms of mere strategic or pragmatic valuation. That would be a degradation of Being. And yet, the will to power posits the ontological realm in the transactional language of values whereby "to be" is to have value fixed as a stable constant reserve ready for use. This degradation for Heidegger produces an awkward confusion and eventually the oblivion of the experience of Being as Being in western thinking. Human self-knowledge suffers from this degradation: we are considering less ontological possibilities than we may otherwise have.

What is, then, happening to Being? *Nothing*. But this *Nichts* is an essential *no-thing* that hints toward the fundamental question: thinking of Being in terms of values only occludes the ontological question (WN, 104). Nietzsche insists that the overcoming of nihilism proceeds from the will to power as the principle of value-thinking (*Wertdenken*). The overcoming of nihilism posits value-thinking as a principle. Heidegger adds, however, that since value-thinking does not let Being *be* Being, then it does not really overcome

nihilism. It consummates or fulfills it. Value-thinking is a non-thinking of Being under the illusion of an *all too human* know-it-all matter-of-factness that forgets the needful question.

7. Hearing the Madman's Lament

In our time of transition, all authentic questions concerning Being seem to become needless and superfluous. Nihilism is the critical thinking that interprets and deconstructs "God" or the "suprasensory" as the hitherto highest value: God or the suprasensory as such is taken to be a product of human manipulative reckoning. But this, for Heidegger, is "sheer blasphemy" (WN, 105). He refers once again to Nietzsche's GS §125 where the madman proclaims the collective killing of God. Heidegger reads as follows: "they have performed the deed of killing God, even though today they have still heard nothing about it". So, the inference of the madman's proclamation is not that there is no God. It means something much worse: "God has been killed".

The collective murder of God is not a triumphant assertion but an awful and shocking realization for Nietzsche. "*We have killed him—you and I*", Nietzsche's madman adds, before asking: "but how have we done this?" (GS, §125). For Heidegger, the madman's expression is analogous to the history of European modernity (WN, 106). The madman metaphorically laments that what has occurred is the "wiping away of our entire horizon," the loss of sublimity or "drinking up the sea," the unchaining of the earth from its "sun". Heidegger interprets these expressions in a Platonic key [46,47]. It is the loss of the suprasensory taken to mean "the world that truly is" (WN, 107). It is therefore a loss of *thoughtful* orientation: "the whole field of vision has been wiped away" by the contraction toward human self-referential disorderly hyper-subjectivity.

The killing of God is poetically expressed by the madman as the loss of "sun, horizon, and sea". These are metaphors of the suprasensory which has been deconstructed and disenchanted ad absurdum by human analytical and instrumental rationality. Man himself also changes and becomes objectified as a result of this *noetic* oblivion. Heidegger notes the metaphysical impasse: Nietzsche does not seem to acknowledge the subjectivistic blow "through which Being is struck down to a mere value" (WN, 108). This is the killing of God, and "all of us are his murderers!—you and I". For Heidegger, it is the metaphysics of the will to power expressing itself in the language of values that results in nihilism: the eclipse of the suprasensory, or the dramatic "Death of God". This time in the history of European and now increasingly global civilization also seems to bring the legacy of Platonism to completion.

Thinking only in terms of values blocks access to the question of Being. It "murders" the ontological *Seinsfrage*, i.e., does not let it flow and "come into the vitality of its essence". Value-thinking for Heidegger does not let Being unconceal itself and reveal its truth. Here, Heidegger makes the thought-provoking and sweeping claim that the forgetfulness of Being is not only a result of the modern project from Descartes to Nietzsche [48]. It goes much further back, all the way to the beginning of western thinking. Heidegger polemically contends that, in the metaphysical legacy of Plato and Aristotle, "the history of Being begins, and indeed necessarily, *with the forgetting of Being*" (WN, 109). For Heidegger, it is the *historical legacy* of Platonic metaphysics as such all the way to Nietzsche's radical critique that is at the origin of the oblivion of the question. For Heidegger, "Plato" is already modern. Heidegger insists in assimilating Platonic ideas and Nietzschean values: in his hands, the guiding contemplative stability of *noetic* thought becomes a concept of intersubjective historical willing¹⁵.

For Heidegger, the "death of God" is an interregnum in which "Being remains unthought because it withdraws ... into its truth" in the mystery (*Geheimnis*) of its self-concealment. The "metaphysics of presence" is a "self-withholding" of Being, a collective "suspension of judgment" (*epoché*) occurring within the overall composition of the *Seinsgeschichte*. In the epoch of metaphysics, the *Nichts*, the *no-thing*, calls us toward the forgotten essence of Being. Heidegger adds that "perhaps" we can begin to feel the essence of that uncanny mystery in which the truth of Being may be pulsating in our time of transition.

Nihilism means that “*nothing* is befalling Being” (WN, 110). Thinking of Being falls from human memory and remains forgotten. The truth of Being is not given to thinking. As such, the authentically *ontological* call of conscience [49]—“self-remembering” and “becoming the one you are” (GS, §270)—remains unheeded.

For Heidegger, nihilism is the epoch of the fulfillment of the legacy of Platonic metaphysics: a historical era in need of integration, that we moderns have still not thought in the proper tone. In order “to learn to pay heed” to the question, Heidegger refers us back to the madman, who “cried incessantly: I seek God! I seek God!” Before closing his remarks, he wonders why Nietzsche depicted him as a *madman*. The madman seems “unhinged” or “de-ranged” (*ver-rückt*), lacking an ontological source and orientation in the suprasensory, and is therefore temporarily groping in the dark. Heidegger seems to be saying that the madman may be a bridge, sublating and going beyond the Aristotelian rational animal. He is distinct from the men of the marketplace who do not believe and have ceased to search for God. What the restless men of the marketplace might be missing is thinking (*denken*) [50] attuned to the inner mood that “stays in front of the lack” and carefully sustains a pathos of “divine hunger”. The madman for those who have ears to hear is a seeker of God who cries out *de profundis* [51,52]¹⁶. To recover, he might initially need to cry out cathartically until he finds inner peace and balance indispensable for true thinking [53]. Then, from deep healing silence, the sayer can come to create the poetry that may uplift us and take us home.

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¹ See [1]. Unless otherwise noted, references by abbreviated title and page number within the text are from Martin Heidegger [2]. I have also used the following translations of Nietzsche, referenced by aphorism/section number: [3–7]. Some of the studies in the secondary and critical literature I consulted include: [9–18] For useful commentaries and explanations of Heidegger’s terminology, see [19–21] This essay revisits themes explored in my book [22].

² David White explains the Heideggerian distinction between general identity and nominal “sameness”, see [24]. In contrast to the logical principle of identity ($A = A$), the notion of sameness means the “belonging together of what is distinct as derived from the gathering by means of difference” (100). The implication appears to be that, unlike abstract identity, the “historically conditioned,” thus temporal, concrete, and finite notion of sameness would be compatible with plurality, difference, singularity, and diversity.

³ See [6] Preface, § 2 (p. 3).

⁴ The expression appears as well, in [26] section 752. Cf. p. 585. Eric Von Der Luft [27] notes that “far from being only an anti-Christian slogan for Nietzsche, “God is dead!” involves an intricate and dynamic metaphor which has its roots deep in German religious thought” (p. 263). He adds, in the spirit of Christian theology, that “the idea, prominent in medieval mysticism, that God must die in the world, on the cross, so that He can be born, or reborn, in the human spirit, is taken over not only by Luther, Rist, and Hegel, but also Kierkegaard, Tillich, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, indeed, by all who emphasize the angst of mankind’s worldly or existential situation. In a nutshell, the idea is that if someone feels alone, dejected, guilt-ridden, etc., then God has died, in effect, for him, i.e., he perceives no God. In this view, a person’s life is seen as occurring entirely during that sad time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday; he is confused, depressed, disoriented, uncertain. Since reason, the Logos, Christ, is lost, one must rely instead on faith; once he again believes in salvation, then and only then will the Resurrection occur for him, then and only then will God no longer be dead” (p. 264).

⁵ Contrast with [28], (244a8–10).

⁶ From a narrative perspective, René Girard finds himself much closer to Nietzsche than to Heidegger in terms of the passionate regard for the Christian religion. Heideggerian ontology seems to view Christianity from a pre-Socratic and post-Christian interpretative distance, while in their own ways Nietzsche and Girard remain ardent interpreters of Christianity. Cf. [29].

- 7 That was Nietzsche's preference: he proposes that psychology should be recognized again as "queen of the sciences, for whose service and preparation the other sciences exist". Depth psychology is "now again the path to the fundamental problems" (BGE, §23). See [31].
- 8 Heidegger marks an *either/or* between metaphysics and "psychologism". Heidegger's thought is quite critical of the reductionism of, say, Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis. But perhaps we could consider Heidegger's and Nietzsche's philosophies as opening the way for later developments in transpersonal and ontological therapeutics. The experimental studies and writing, therapeutic practice, and research of people such as Fritz Perls, Claudio Naranjo, Pablo d'Ors, or Michael Newton might be stimulating for those interested in exploring this line of investigation. For approaches toward Nietzschean and Heideggerian therapeutics, See [32,33].
- 9 Byung Chul Han has written about the dire consequences of this restless and time-consuming sort of logic in contemporary modern society. See for instance [34].
- 10 Consider also the possible hermeneutic distinction between the pagan notion of fateful "eternal recurrence" (*die ewige Wiederkehr*) and the releasing notion of "eternal return" (*die ewige Wiederkunft*) sketched in Parra [22], p. 62.
- 11 *Gerechtigkeit*, justice or righteousness, an attribute of the God of Abraham that Nietzsche takes to be at the origin of modern scientific "intellectual probity" (BGE, §213; GM II: 21).
- 12 For a persuasive and intriguing parallel between Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and the figure of the Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism, consider Graham Parkes ed. [8], p. 18, n. 23, with [40].
- 13 In a somewhat cryptic passage that follows (WN, 97–98), Heidegger hints that unpacking Nietzsche's teaching in *Zarathustra* would require studying as well [26,41,42]. Cf. [43].
- 14 See [44]. Among other things, Strauss critically remarks that with the modern project poetry ceases to be archetypically receptive and mimetic ("inspired imitation") and becomes an affirmation of experimental novelty and creativity. Modern science becomes a kind of "art" under the principle of "knowing as making". Strauss finds especially questionable the apparent rejection of "final causes" and "chance" in modernity (87–88). We may wonder: is there a way to respond to Strauss' conservatism in the realm of art with the wholesome composition or creation of unprecedented possibilities? Contrast with [45], p. 69 ff. Nietzsche discusses "the will to power as art" in [6], §794–853.
- 15 Contrast with [22], pp. 11–13.
- 16 Nietzsche BGE, Preface, and §37; 150; 152; 295. GS, §343. Cf. also, [51,52].

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