

## NIETZSCHE: VALUE AND THE ECONOMY OF THE WILL TO POWER

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Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power implies the ontological concept of value whence is derived the operative concept of value that informs the globalized world. In this essay, I shall first elucidate that ontological concept, in other words I shall ask and answer the question "What is value?" in the perspective of Nietzsche's thinking. Subsequently, I shall outline Nietzsche's diagnosis of the present world-instant in its nihilistic becoming under the more and more open and avowed sway of the will to power. The insight into the nihilistic character of this becoming will finally allow to indicate in what sense the operative values of the globalized world are derived from the value concept that emerges in Nietzsche's metaphysical position and what this implies for the being of contemporary man.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The intention of the following elucidation is to present Nietzsche's thinking not from an outside, neutral standpoint, but, so to speak, from the inside. The reader unfamiliar with this style of interpretation should therefore not be surprised if, along the way, he will not find the rhetoric signals by which scholars usually mark the "autonomy" of their standpoint with respect to the position they discuss. However, the "inside perspective" that this essay attempts does not imply an uncritical adherence to the interpreted position. In fact, the interiority in the *metaphysical issue* that concerns Nietzsche's thinking demands a critical overcoming of his position that only a thinking that is itself *not metaphysical* is capable of. Both the determination of a metaphysical position *as such* and the first attempt to formulate a grounding position that is not metaphysical, we owe to the thinking of Martin Heidegger, or what is known as his *Denkweg*. The present essay draws its guidance from this *Denkweg* and its confrontation with Nietzsche's thinking, without for that in any way matching the scope and depth of this confrontation. The term "metaphysics" is here used in Heidegger's sense, and therefore does not coincide with Nietzsche's grasping of what is "metaphysical". For Nietzsche, "metaphysics" is essentially the same as what he defines as "Platonism" or "idealism". As a consequence, he would himself never refer to his own thinking as being "metaphysical". – Heidegger's lecture courses, as well as other texts on Nietzsche (but not the latest ones), are in the two volumes of his *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske 1961). The main reference for this essay is the text "Nietzsches Metaphysik" (Vol. 2, pp. 257-333).

## 1. VALUES AS CONDITIONS POSED BY THE WILL TO POWER

In asking the question “What is value?” in the perspective of Nietzsche’s thinking, we are not simply illustrating the position of a particular thinker on a given concept named “value”. Though this word and concept is undoubtedly common, and a number of philosophers treat of values, only Nietzsche’s metaphysics is rightfully and necessarily a *thinking through values*. The reason for this is that only this thinking gives rise to an *ontological* concept of value that characterizes a *grounding* position of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In other words, in this thinking, insofar as it is claimed by, and in turn preserves and articulates, the principle itself of all value-posing or valuing, value is the answer to the fundamental question of metaphysics, i.e. “What is a being insofar as it is?”. When value has the status of a determination of the being of beings, something *is*, and can be said to *be*, only insofar as it is constituted and functions as a value, while that which does not show this constitution and capacity *is not*.

The scope of Nietzsche’s metaphysics of values marks its central role for the attempt to diagnose the fundamental trait that governs and shapes our “globalized reality”. In fact, this reality not only *contains* something like values; rather, it is, for the first time, a reality that is, as such, *constituted* as a totality of values. In this reality, that which we call “sense” is entirely absorbed and surrogated by value. Accordingly, in this reality thinking through values, or valuing (i.e. computing values), is the only true form of thinking, which entirely supplants the form of thinking known as “judgement”. Valuing itself now appears as the only true manner of judgement. Value as a form of being, and valuing as a form of thinking, are today *universal, self-evident* and *unquestionable*, and as such already “naturally” and implicitly in place whenever each single one of us experiences, feels, senses, reflects, ponders, studies, plans, organizes, builds, creates, foresees, recalls, etc. – so much so that it appears as if everything had always been, and could always only be, a matter of value, and as if all thinking had always been, and could only be, a matter of valuing.

At a closer look, the unquestionable and unquestioned character of values and valuing, together with their self-evidence and universal scope, is revealing of their non-original, derived constitution. The values that inform the globalized world *appear* as the essential trait of things, when in fact they cannot exhibit any essential content. Moreover, they act *as if*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, p. 272.

they held a sufficient knowledge of things, when in fact they are not at all sufficient. Finally, they *pretend* to be solidly justified, when in fact they lack a justifying ground, so that any interrogation of this ground quickly finds itself in the groundless.<sup>3</sup> In short, these values present themselves as having the scope of *ontological* concepts, when actually they are but surrogates of such concepts, from which they are in some way derived.<sup>4</sup> This is why the current, world-shaping concept of value can only be elucidated, and made transparent in its implications, thanks to the ontological concept that is to be found in Nietzsche's philosophy. On the other hand, any attempt of "explaining" these derived values, i.e. of accounting for them in a scientific manner or through common sense, would itself be constituted in terms of these values and the thinking that belongs to them.

In a posthumous fragment dated 1888, Nietzsche writes: "The innermost essence of being [is] the will to power" (KSA 13/260; 14[80]).<sup>5</sup> Since for Nietzsche "being" is the same as "functioning as a value", the will to power is the "essence" that poses values. In other words: *Because* the will to power sways, anything that *is* has the ontological status of a value. Hence, in order to grasp the ontological concept of value we must first obtain a sufficient determination of the will to power as "the innermost essence", i.e. as the principle of being.

### 1.1 *The Will to Power*

Despite the scarce references to the will to power in Nietzsche's published work, this concept is arguably the fundamental thought of his philosophy, and this means: it is the manner in which he thinks the being of beings from out of its principle.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, for Nietzsche all

<sup>3</sup> While philosophical thinking is intrinsically self-grounding, thinking through values cannot evaluate itself *as such*, but only *impose* its invaluable validity by way of blows of effective performance.

<sup>4</sup> The sense of this derivation is elucidated below in section 3 of this essay.

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche's works are quoted from the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari in fifteen volumes (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 21988). References have the following form: "KSA [volume number]/[page number]". Posthumous fragments have an additional reference number of the following form: "x[y]".

<sup>6</sup> The picture changes if we consider the posthumous writings that constitute the main corpus of Nietzsche's work after *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885). These fragments show that Nietzsche was sparing the explicit treatment of the will to power for a planned major treatise, towards which he kept working until his breakdown in early 1889.

being – “natural” and “artificial” – is life.<sup>7</sup> This identification of being with life, however, is already a consequence of the fact that life itself is experienced as will to power.<sup>8</sup> What, then, is the will to power as such?

The following formula can put us on track:

the will to power is the will to (will) more power

This formula implies that pivotal to the will to power is not the attainment of a certain degree of power, however high, or the generic insatiable craving for power. Rather, what is central is the constant will of surpassing or outperforming any attained level of power, *so as to keep willing*. Thus, in willing more power, the will in fact wills *itself*, so that the above formula already shows that the ultimate sense of the will to power is the *will to will*.

The will to power as the ceaseless (self-)empowering to (self-)outpowering,<sup>9</sup> and therefore as the empowering *of* overpowering, informs life as such. In *Thus spoke Zarathustra* we read:

Where I found something living there I found will to power, and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master [...] And this secret life itself spoke to me. “Look, it said, *I am that which must always outdo itself* [by overcoming any resistance to such outdoing]. (KSA 4/147 et seq.)<sup>10</sup>

The will as such, this passage tells us, is the will to be master.<sup>11</sup> Who is a master? Not just he who exerts the command over others. First and foremost a master must master himself, i.e. have the command over himself,

<sup>7</sup> “Being – we don’t have any other idea of it than ‘living’. – How then can something dead ‘be’?” (KSA 12/153; 2[172]).

<sup>8</sup> “There is nothing of life that has value except the degree of power – given that life itself is the will to power.” (KSA 12/215; 5[71]).

<sup>9</sup> Outpowering, which translates the German *übermächtigen*, refers to power itself in its constitutive trait of outdoing, surpassing itself (see the following explication in the text). We say overpowering rather than overpowering, in that overpowering places the accent on the trait of outdoing in power, while overpowering means overcoming and subduing with superior power. Outpowering includes overpowering, where the latter is however only a means for the former and not an end in itself (see also footnote 3, p. 452).

<sup>10</sup> Square brackets “[...]” indicate explanatory additions, while brackets of the form “<...>” contain additions that are to be read as integrant parts of the quoted text.

<sup>11</sup> Insofar as this will is the will of the will to power, it characterizes any being *insofar as it is*, and not as a “faculty” a given being “has”. For Nietzsche, the “will” (be it “free” or “unfree”), conceived as a human faculty and as a ground or cause for action, does not exist. In the *Twilight of the Idols* he writes: “At the beginning stands the great fatality consisting in the error <of thinking> that the will is Something that *acts* [i.e. that *is effective*], – that the will is a *faculty* ... Today we know that it is nothing but a word.” (KSA 6/77) Thus, what we call conscious acts of will are nothing but late emanations and, so to speak, symptoms of the fundamental will that informs man and all beings.

more precisely: he must be capable of commanding himself to grow over and beyond himself, so that, in such outgrowing himself, he always has himself under himself. In short, a master is he who can master himself and, *in pursuing such mastering*, obtains control over others.<sup>12</sup> The servant, grasped in his essential trait, is not one who wants to stop being a servant and rather switch into the place or status of a master. What drives him is the constant tension toward becoming a master *as* the servant he is. In other words, in his being-servant he wants to master and outperform his own being-servant so as to constantly sway over himself *in* his being more and more ascendant over the master he serves (namely by rendering his services indispensable to the master). While performing this self-commanding outgrowing-himself he brings under himself the master and controls – i.e. again, brings under himself and commands – whatever is needed as a *means* for such mastering. The master himself is actually a means for the servant's mastering, *as is the servant's own being-servant*. Willing essentially consists in such *commanding*,<sup>13</sup> and commanding is obeying, namely to the injunction of self-outpowering while assuring, for this very purpose, the command over the means and possibilities of effective action for exerting power over others, and thus *willing* these means and possibilities. Will is therefore a manner of obeying that consists in commanding the self-outpowering. Hence, will *as* will is already entwined with the trait of power, in short, will *as such* is will *to power*.

What about power itself? Power does not consist in the mere detention or exertion of a certain quantum of force, i.e. of certain possibilities and means of effectuation. For power to be such, it must hold the mastery of, or ascendancy over, any attained level of power. Such mastery, in turn, consists in power's capacity for enjoining on itself an increase of power, i.e. for willing such an increase. Any level of power that is incapable of commanding this self-outpowering falls short of what it is to be powerful, i.e. it is already on the verge of being powerless. Thus, power *in and of itself* consists in enjoining on itself an increase (a plus, a gain) of power.

<sup>12</sup> In speaking of "control", "mastery", etc., we need to hold off any authoritative or even aggressive tones. In other words, we need to distinguish ontological determinations from ontic relations. "Control", here, describes, for instance, the most caring relation of a gardener to his plants.

<sup>13</sup> "to will' is not 'to desire', to strive, to crave: from these it distinguishes itself by the affect of *commanding* / there is no 'willing', but only *willing-something* [...] that something is commanded belongs to willing [...] That general *state of tension*, by virtue of which a force strives to being unleashed – is not a 'willing'" (KSA 13/54; 11[114]).

Power as power is the *command* to such overpowering. But this is the same as saying that power *as such* is to will (more) power, or, which is the same, power as power is always *will to power*.

As we can see, the will to power is the constitutive trait both of will as such and of power as such – and not the product of a “will” that exists for itself, applied to a “power” that also exists for itself. However, if the will to power is the will to will a plus of power, i.e. the will to become more; if the will to power is, in this sense, the *empowering of overpowering*, then the will to power is all about the empowering of power, i.e. about the saturation of any sense with power and *therefore* with the will to will. The empowering of power is the only end the will to power pursues, and it pursues this end in order for the will to will its willing. Summing up, it must be seen

that all “purposes”, “aims”, “senses” are merely manners of expression and metamorphoses of the One Will, which is inherent in all occurring, <namely> the will to power; that having purposes, aims, intentions, that willing in general is as much as willing to become stronger, willing to grow, and *for that end* also willing the *means* (KSA 13/44; 11[96])

In fact, the will, which is itself constituted as will to will, cannot ever *not* will, i.e. it cannot cease to empower the overpowering. Hence, rather than not willing at all, it wills to will the nothing. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* we read:

[The will] *needs an aim*, and rather than *not* willing, it wills to will *the nothing*. (KSA 5/339)

The empowering of overpowering is the manner in which the will to power implements itself. This self-implementation, which has no other aim than the empowering of power in order for the will to will its willing, takes place in the form of a *circuit of conservation and increase*. Any attained level of power must be conserved, maintained, secured *in preview* of the attainment of a higher level (for, according to the essence of power, conservation itself lies in increase), while any increase and enhancement must, in turn, secure its path of enhancement *in preview* of the necessary conservation of what is attained. In this manner, conservation has in itself the trait of increase, while the latter bears, as such, the character of conservation and assurance. Thus, the will to power is a circuit in which conservation *is* increase and vice versa. In implementing this circuit, the will to power itself poses the conditions for this implementation, i.e. it poses its own conditions.

1.2 *Value*

The conditions that the will to power poses for its own implementation have the structure of viewpoints that the will to power points, or, as Nietzsche says, punctuates. These points are poles of force. Their force is seen in their capacity for overpowering. This force is at the same time the resistance they oppose to other forces. The will to power avails itself of these forces as it implements the circuit of conservation and increase. In resisting to being overcome, any punctuated viewpoint (e.g. the viewpoint “master”) is a condition the will to power poses in such a way that it can count on it, and take it into account, for its own conservation and increase (e.g. in empowering the overpowering of the ascendant “being-servant”). As a countable, computable condition the viewpoint is – a value:

Der Gesichtspunkt des ‚Werts‘ ist der Gesichtspunkt von *Erhaltungs-, Steigerungs-Bedingungen* in Hinsicht auf komplexe Gebilde von relativer Dauer des Lebens innerhalb des Werdens. (KSA 13/36; 11[73])

The viewpoint of “value” is the viewpoint of *conditions of conservation, increase*, in regard of complex configurations of relative duration of life within the becoming.

This passage provides the ontological determination of value that we must now further elucidate. The “conditions of conservation, increase” are the conditions for the circuit of power to implement itself.<sup>14</sup> Being such a condition, i.e. being a value, is that thanks to which anything *is*, rather not being at all. To be viewed and, so to speak, pointed out as a value with which the empowering of overpowering calculates for implementing its own becoming, is what it means to *be*. Being a value, and functioning as a value, is the *form of being* of any being where the principle of being is the will to power.

On what is value objectively measured? Only on the quantum of *increased* and *organized power*... (KSA 13/40; 11[83])

This implies that *only* the will to power, as the central perspective that is constitutive of all being, poses, sets, establishes, i.e. computes values:

<sup>14</sup> We understand why Nietzsche says “conservation, increase” and not “conservation and increase”: in the domain of power, conservation *is* increase and increase *is* conservation.

All valuations are only consequences and narrower perspectives *at the service of this One Will*: valuing itself is only this will to power... (KSA 13/45; 11[96])

The perspective of the will to power is an anticipatory regard that cuts across, and in this manner constitutes, the entire dimension in which a being can be, or, as we say, can *abide* as such. It builds this dimension *relatively to itself*, i.e. as a relative dimension, by computing in advance the conditions for its own implementation, and by construing everything else accordingly, i.e. again relatively to itself. As a consequence, everything comes to be as a pre-computed (relative) condition for the overpowering, and has its consistence and duration in dependence of this computation that precedes and surpasses it.

Each being is, as such, a pole of valuation that, as a point and position of the central perspective of the will to power, interprets the entire world in the perspective of how anything else functions as a condition for its own empowerment. “Interpreting”, here, does not mean “producing a particular view on something given”. It means: *being perspectively*, i.e. becoming as a valuing perspective in the elucidated sense. Interpreting is therefore not done *by* something given *on* something given; rather, it has a *constitutive* character, since nothing *is* otherwise than in the manner of valuing and being valued in the perspective of the overpowering of power. The entirety of the thus established relations of valuation, governed by the central perspective of the will to power, forms what Nietzsche calls “perspectivism”. This is a name for thinking through values, insofar as it constitutes the whole of life as the will to power:

[Perspectivism is that] by virtue of which each centre of force – and not only man – construes from out of itself the entire remaining world, i.e. measures feels and frames it according to its own force. (KSA 13/373; 14[186])

Each centre of force is a “configuration of relative duration of life”. The duration is relative to this centre’s functioning as an effective means, i.e. as a value within the circuit of power. Eminent “complex configurations”, whose value is that of forming perspectives of valuation of a vast and constitutive scope, are science, religion, the State and art, each of which has a different value in the ranking of values resulting from the principle that is the will to power. What Nietzsche calls “the becoming” (*das Werden*) is the will to power in its self-implementation. The becoming is the whole of life as perspectivism, i.e. as the circuit of the empowering of overpowering by virtue of the universal reciprocal valuation of all centres of force.

Within the becoming, nothing “is”, if “being” implies a form of substantial stability and absolute steadiness, i.e. a principle of identity located in some supersensitive or supernatural place. In other words, *there is no* true, absolute and eternal, constant and unchanging “being in itself” that precedes and underlies the changing states of concrete things in their becoming and passing away. In fact, any such “being” or “thing in itself” would itself *not* become, and therefore be independent of the will to power, thus negating it as the only value-posing principle. If being as absolute supersensitive stability were established as the true sense of being, i.e. as the only true value, anything that becomes would lose its truth, and all becoming – i.e. the *only* existing life – would be worthless. Hence, within the becoming nothing *is*, but everything *becomes*, in that only such becoming, *i.e. functioning relatively to the will to power*, satisfies the principle of being that is the will to power itself. In a late fragment Nietzsche writes:

one *cannot in any way admit anything that is*, – for then [i.e. if, on the contrary, something that persists outside of the becoming is admitted] the becoming loses its value and appears as positively senseless and superfluous. (KSA 13/35; 11[72])

Only becoming is compatible with the form of being, i.e. abiding, that consists in being posed and functioning as a value. Thus a value itself *is* not, there is no “value in itself”, if “in itself” means: independently of the circuit of power. The being of value is its perspective becoming within the world-movement that is the will to power.

### 1.3 *Will to Power and Eternal Recurrence*

The will to power as the principle that rules universal becoming, i.e. as the metaphysical “cause of the fact *that* there is a development at all”, can neither be thought as “becoming” nor as “having become” (KSA 13/17; 11[29]). That the will to power cannot be thought as “becoming” is to say that the becoming as a whole is not a value and has no value: it is, strictly speaking, valueless. Indeed, if the will to power became, i.e. if it were a value, it would be contingent on something external to it that would pose the becoming as a viewpoint and condition. But the will to power, which poses values as conditions for itself, is unconditional and cannot itself be a condition of a higher conditioning principle. Thus the becoming as such is

of equal value in each instant: the sum of its value remains equal: *differently put: it does not have any value at all*, for there is nothing relatively to which it could be measured and in relation to which the word “value” could make sense. (KSA 13/35 et seq.; 11[72])

If the becoming itself cannot be thought as becoming, i.e. as *relative* to something outside the will to power, it can even less have become at some given point. As a consequence, the becoming has always been and will always be, i.e. it is *eternal*. How are we to think this eternity?

From the previous observations on being we know that the becoming cannot *be* eternally, if being has the sense of an absolute, stable presence, in which becoming itself comes to a rest. One form of this kind of being would be a “perfect final state” or “ultimate end”, towards which all becoming is tending. However, such a final state is impossible, for, given the infinity of time, if it existed it necessarily would have had to have been already attained:

If the world-movement had a final state, it would have had to have been reached. The only fundamental fact, however, is that it has *no* final state ... I am seeking a concept of the world that meets *this* fact: the becoming is to be explained without resorting to such final purposes: the becoming must appear justified in each instant (or, which in the end is the same, <it must appear> *undevaluable*). (KSA 13/34; 11[72])

Hence, the becoming becomes endlessly, without having become, without being in the act of becoming and without ending in final state. The situation characterized by the “fundamental fact” that the world-movement “has *no* final state” implies the complete absence of given, preset, self-standing purposes, so that in the universal flow of becoming everything is forever “in vain” and “to no avail”, in other words: it is eternally “for nothing”. Thus the becoming is, in a strictly ontological sense, *nihilistic*. The truest, “most frightful” (KSA 12/213, 5[71]) and most unbearable form of this eternal nothing, which, while it negates any aim and purpose, *never ends in nothing*,<sup>15</sup> is the *eternally recurring* nothing. In fact, the eternal recurrence is not only the truest (Nietzsche says: “the most *scientific*”), but the *only* true form of the eternal nothing. Why? Because an eternally changing flow of becoming with no beginning and no end *is not thinkable*, more precisely, it is not a thought of metaphysical dignity, but a purely ontic representation (which, as such, we can certainly always

<sup>15</sup> Such ending in nothing would put an end to the flow of nothing, and thus make the thought of this flowing somehow bearable.

“think” or “hypothesize”). Thus, only the truth of the eternal recurrence entails the truly frightening and laming, *ineludible* character of the eternal “for nothing”.

The necessity of the eternal recurrence results from a seemingly purely logical argument:<sup>16</sup> given the eternity of time as an effective dimension of effectuation of things, any finite effective world-state or thing (i.e. any constellation of forces) must in any instant necessarily have already recurred infinite times as this identical state or thing, and at the same time face its infinite recurring as the identical, or, as we can also say, as the *like*.<sup>17</sup> However, logical correctness is not sufficient for the thought of the eternal recurrence to be *true*. Sufficiency is attained only at the level of a more original necessity, which is metaphysical or ontological. In fact, the insight into the eternal recurrence of the like is not the result of a logical computation, but an experience of *thinking*.

In order to see this more fundamental necessity, let us consider more closely what is *experienced* in the eternal recurrence. This recurrence implies that, in any instant, anything that exists abides as something that is *like itself*. In what sense? Answer: *Not* in the sense of an underlying unchanging identity (which, for Nietzsche, is only a “moral” construction and a fictitious idea, of which life avails itself for pragmatic reasons), but insofar as, *in* the very instant, it exists as that which *has* already existed infinite times in the past *as the like*, and *will* exist infinite times in the future *as the like*. That which exists, insofar as it exists, exists forever, in that, in any instant alike, it *is* as having forever already been its future. The instant of becoming is experienced as eternal in the sense of this *fixedness in the eternal ring of recurrence*. The thus established likeness warrants – *in a manner that does not resort to any “substantial” or “essential” element* – that, in any instant of the becoming, everything is itself “the same”, and, in its eternity, *unique*.

What have we just experienced? Nothing other than this: the eternal recurrence of the like as *the form of the fundamental law of identity in the domain of the will to power*. We can clarify the sense of this statement by answering the following two questions: a) What is the law of identity? and b) What characterizes the domain of the will to power so that this law must, in this domain, take a unique form, and precisely the form of the eternal recurrence of the like? Ad a) In metaphysical thinking, the

<sup>16</sup> We can recognize this argument in the presentation of the eternal recurrence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (cf. Part III, “Vom Gesicht und Räthsel”, KSA 4/197).

<sup>17</sup> See Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 296.

identity of something with itself (in other words, the fact that something is, *with itself*, the same) is constitutive for being: were this identity not granted, no single being could be said to exist. Thus, identity is not only a logical, but an *ontological* condition for beings. Ad b) The domain of the will to power is characterized by the fact that there is no substantial being, no constant being-basis as a ground for beings, i.e. no *one* being constitutive of the identity of any being with itself. In short, in this domain there is no underlying being-identical-with-itself as a constitutive trait of the being of beings, but only the flow of becoming centres of force. However, as long as the law of identity is not established, this flow is totally senseless, i.e. purely nihilistic.<sup>18</sup> In the domain of the will to power, the necessary identity of any “configuration of life”, and for *life as a whole*, is granted – and *can only* be granted – by the eternal recurrence. In other words: where the essence of beings (i.e. *what* they are as such) has the form of the will to power, the existence of beings (i.e. *that and how* they are in the whole) *necessarily* has the constitution and temper of the eternal recurrence of the like.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one cannot think the will to power as the principle of the world-movement without having already experienced the eternal recurrence as its temper of existence, and vice versa. Therefore, Nietzsche’s thinking of the will to power would not be a *philosophical* position were it not tuned by what we must consider as his originally *tuning* thought, namely the eternal recurrence of the like.<sup>20</sup>

The will to power rises to the status of a principle of *being* only as the moving principle of that which eternally recurs as the like. For now “becoming” itself – which, as we know, is the same as the will to power – is the very manner in which each “configuration of relative duration of life” is *stabilized* in what we call its “instantaneous recurrence-eternity” – the undevaluable splendour of its uniqueness in the instant *of* the ring of time.<sup>21</sup> Thus, becoming is now *itself* stability, in that it is precisely and only by becoming that anything is stabilized in its eternity in the instant.

<sup>18</sup> As we shall see, the “accomplished nihilist” must, in the first place, acknowledge this senselessness.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche says “ewige Wiederkehr des *Gleichen*” (“eternal recurrence of the like”) and not “ewige Wiederkehr des *Selben*” (“eternal recurrence of the same”), as the latter bears the trait of metaphysical identity, and thus of persistence and substantial being.

<sup>20</sup> The *tuning* thought (i.e. the eternal recurrence) and the *fundamental* thought (i.e. the will to power) belong together. The unity of these two thoughts, and even more so the provenance of this unity, remains however unthought in Nietzsche’s metaphysical attempt.

<sup>21</sup> The uniqueness of the instant, as an instant *of* the ring of time, is in no way negated by the fact of the infinite recurrence: the *eternal* instant *is* unique.

However, this is the same as saying: becoming *is* now being. This does not imply that becoming loses its character of movement and change and is substituted by its opposite, namely the constancy of substantial and ideal being. Rather, in the sphere of eternal recurrence, becoming *as* becoming obtains the character of being (i.e. stability), and change *as* change, i.e. biding in the instant of becoming recurrence, is the only sense of constancy and steadiness. When becoming *as* such obtains the character of being, the will to power attains its supreme affirmation:

To *impress* on the becoming the character of being – this is the highest *will to power* [...] That *Everything recurs* is the most extreme *approximation of a world of becoming to that of being: topmost summit of the consideration.*<sup>22</sup> (KSA 12/312; 7[54])

Only when becoming itself has the character of being, at any instant *something* – as opposed to nothing – is achieved by virtue of the self-implementation of perspectivism. In fact, the worthless and undevaluable becoming, now “thought” and “brought together” into the “one” of the eternal recurrence (cf. *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4/248; see also 4/181), is “in each instant satisfied, achieved, accomplished” (KSA 13/39; 11[82]). It is achieved, though, not thanks to the attainment of an “ultimate absolute end”, but *as life itself*, i.e. as the – in each instant perfect – overall “will to become stronger” in which life consists. Within this instantaneous becoming, each single becoming “configuration of life” – *including the configurations of the past* – is always equally undevaluable, accomplished and eternal, and therefore such as to be *eternally desirable in its eternity*, regardlessly of whether it is gaining or losing value. In other words, the world as a whole and its single beings are such that *now* the will has *free reign*, and is not anymore lamed by the eternal nothingness, *in the first place by the impregnable nothingness of what is past*. On the contrary, although there is forever no final end or ultimate purpose, in this *entirely willable and willed* becoming the will can unconditionally assent to each single configuration of life (i.e. precisely, will it) and be heightened in such assenting, in which it wills itself. The man who is capable of interpreting, in his own being, the eternal recurrence of the accomplished will to power, has finally overcome nihilism in the pantheistic “yes” to the *only* world, or the world “as it is”:

<sup>22</sup> “Consideration”, which translates *Betrachtung*, here means “theory” in the literal sense of the beholding of the essential. With the thought of the eternal recurrence Nietzsche touches the extreme point of what is “visible” within the scope of his metaphysical experience.

My new grasping of *pessimism* as a voluntary seeking out of the frightful and questionable sides of existence [...] Such pessimism *could open out* into that form of a Dionysian saying-“yes” to the world as it is: up to the wish for its absolute recurrence and eternity: as a result of which would be given a new ideal of philosophy and sensibility. (KSA 12/455; 10[3], in a section entitled “My new way towards the ‘yes’”.)

## 2. NIHILISM AND THE OVERALL ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT OF THE EARTH

In a sketch for the foreword to his planned major work with the provisional title *Der Wille zur Macht*, Nietzsche writes:

What I tell [scil. in this book] is the story of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what cannot anymore come otherwise than thus: *the upcoming of nihilism*. This story can already be told now, for what is at work here is necessity itself. This future already speaks in hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are already pricked up. Our entire European culture has for a long time been moving as towards a catastrophe, with a torture of tension that grows from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, precipitately: like a stream wanting to get *to the end*, and that does not bethink itself any more, that is frightened of bethinking itself. / – He who here rises to speak has, on the other hand, until now done nothing but *bethinking himself* [...] as the first accomplished nihilist of Europe, who however has within himself already outlived nihilism – who has nihilism behind himself, below himself, outside himself... / For one should not mistake the sense of the title with which this gospel of the future wants to be named. “*Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte*” – this formula expresses a *countermovement*, in regard to its principle and to its task: a movement that in some future time will supersede that accomplished nihilism; that, however, *presupposes* this nihilism logically and psychologically, and that can by all means only come *after it* and *from out of it*. For why is the upcoming of nihilism now *necessary*? Because it is our very hitherto valid values that draw their last consequence in this nihilism; because nihilism is the logic, thought to its end, of our great values and ideals – because we must first live through nihilism in order to find out what actually was the *value* of these “values”... At some point we need *new values*... (KSA 13/189 et seq.; 11[411])

The “necessity” that is at work in the upcoming of nihilism is what Nietzsche elsewhere calls the “devaluation” of the hitherto valid values. The “last consequence” these values draw is their self-devaluation, i.e. self-annihilation. The necessity of this self-annihilation indicates the nihilistic character of the entire tradition of “European culture”, even

though the flagrant outbreak of nihilism is mostly a matter of “the next two centuries”. At this point we need to characterize nihilism as the fundamental trait or “logic” of this tradition. This will help us to gain a proper understanding of the nihilistic character of the world-state Nietzsche calls the “overall economic management of the earth”, in which we recognize, to some extent, the world we live in.

### 2.1 *First Nihilism and Upcoming Nihilism*

Nietzsche's classical definition of nihilism reads: “*Nihilism*: the aim is wanting; the answer to the ‘Why?’ is wanting. What does ‘nihilism’ mean? – <Answer:> *that the supreme values devalue themselves.*” (KSA 12/350; 9[34]) Nihilism refers to man's finding himself in the midst of the chaotic flow of things (i.e. of things that are “for nothing”) and failing to find a stance, to establish himself in this flow. What is man's specific manner of finding a stance and thus to become himself? That of posing an answer to the question “why?” (i.e. “what for?”), and letting the posing and bearing of this answer attune his building and dwelling. The posing of the answer, i.e. of the aim, is not a supplementary activity man is involved in, but the fundamental action of his being: It is the action by virtue of which he *is* (or not) *as* a man, or, differently put, the action by which he *becomes* who he already is. Posing the aim that constitutes the “innermost essence of being” is what it means for man to be, i.e. it is an ontological necessity of his existence. “Being” is existing *in* the sphere of this necessary task. Hence, nihilism is not just a contingent state in which man may occasionally find himself, but a condition that, though temporary, belongs to the native constitution and the realm of likely conditions of his being.<sup>23</sup>

Nietzsche's diagnosis is that man, having so far failed to establish himself in the midst of the chaotic flow of things by means of an adequate posing of aims, has not yet become the peculiar animal he is. In this sense, he is *das noch nicht festgestellte Tier*, the not yet established animal, i.e. the animal that is not yet firmly installed in its own being. This means: so far man has not yet risen to his essence as the aim-, i.e. value-posing animal, insofar as this essence implies, in the first place, the posing of the one *principle* of valuation. This is what Nietzsche refers to when he says: man is not yet an accomplished *type*. As a consequence, so far man's

<sup>23</sup> In a sense, nihilism may be likened to the state in which, for a prisoner of Plato's cave, the absoluteness of shadows is broken, although he is not yet capable of recognizing, in the direction of the blinding light, what is truer than the shadows, and even less of remaining habitually turned towards that light and what appears in it.

becoming has been more or less openly haunted by nihilism or general purposelessness. Only the type that forges itself by posing the very principle of all value-posing, namely the will to power, is *over* nihilism.

The first outbreak of nihilism prompted man's first attempt to establish himself as the value-posing animal against the nothingness of life. This "first nihilism" resulted in the "moral" tradition, whose main pillars are the institution of Christianity and philosophical thinking.<sup>24</sup> Man's "best thinking" produced the "moral hypothesis" – whose supreme vertex is the hypothesis "God" – as a "means of sustainment" against man's self-contempt and against his taking a stance of hostility with regard to life,<sup>25</sup> in other words as a "counteragent" against "practical and theoretical nihilism". This means consisted in the position of a *certain kind* of values. This position of values, i.e. morals as a whole, has a value that is relative to its functioning as a life-sustaining means. The value of moral values depends on the conditions of existence in which this means is supposed to function. Thus, the establishing of moral values *did* have its own value, i.e. its justification and necessity: given certain conditions of existence, the moral values were, for a certain type of men, effective means for the sustainment of life.

However, an essential feature of the moral values is that they are hostile to life, to becoming and change, i.e. to the will to power. These values *negate life*. This is due to the fact that the peculiar form of life they sustain (namely, that of a man too weak to assent to the principle of all becoming) must in some sense be defended against life itself. The hostility to life of these values, or, which is the same, their counternatural character, shows in their adversity to (and devaluation of) the natural instincts, which are instincts of the will to power. Morals, i.e. the will to the good (construed in various forms), is thus a modality of the will to power<sup>26</sup> that, however, turns *against* the will to power itself. The hostility to life, i.e. the moral character of the values posed by this counteragent to nihil-

<sup>24</sup> What follows draws in many points on a text entitled "Der europäische Nihilismus" that Nietzsche wrote in Lenzer Heide (Switzerland) on June 10, 1887 (cf. KSA 12/211 et seq.; 5[71]). This text gives an extremely dense elucidation of the genesis of present nihilism in light of the will to power and the eternal recurrence.

<sup>25</sup> ... insofar as it persists as an eternal aimless flow in which everything is "for nothing".

<sup>26</sup> In the perspective of the metaphysics of the will to power, all thinking, including the philosophical positions of the tradition, is necessarily a manner of taking a stance in the will to power, and therefore an instance of value-posing. In short: since the will to power is the only principle of being, all thinking is thinking through values and in view of values.

ism, consists in the fact that these values are placed not within life and within the becoming, namely as conditions of the circuit of power; instead, they are placed as "values" and "ends" "in themselves" in a sphere beyond the only known world, and thus in a lifeless sphere beyond life. The form of these values is that of an exclusive and absolute truth and being, where "absolute" means: *not* (explicitly) relative to the will to power as the empowering of overpowering, i.e. not relative to life, and therefore not life-enhancing. That these values are exclusive, means that their truth and being implies, by contrast, a devaluation of earthly life, i.e. of the becoming and its constitutive traits. Thus, the counteragent against the first nihilism prevents man from turning against himself and against life, but it does so *at the price of devaluating life itself*, i.e. at the price of a "no" to life. The general name Nietzsche gives to the moral form of posing values, insofar as they are placed in an outer "sphere of truth" at the expense of the element of life and becoming, is "Platonism".

Nietzsche's critique of Platonism and its values is necessarily strictly a-moral. In other words, it is rigorously an evaluation of the value of these values in light of specific conditions of existence. The fact that these values negate life does certainly say something essential about their capacity for functioning as means of life-enhancement. However, in the perspective of Nietzsche's thinking this is not – and cannot be – a reason for an *absolute*, i.e. for a *moral* devaluation of these values. On the contrary, these values are justified and necessary within the economy of power that poses them. As a consequence, the a-moral thinking of the will to power, the "pantheistic 'yes'" to life as a whole, assents to them in a non-moral manner. However, at the same time at which it says "yes" to the moral values, the thinking of the will to power must say "no" to them *insofar* as they pretend for themselves an absolute, universal, i.e. a *moral* validity, i.e. a validity for *all* men and *irrespectively* of the conditions of life, when instead, relatively to the present conditions of life, they have lost their value. Hence, this "no" draws its justification from the underlying all-embracing "yes", which contains "the principle and the task" of the conception of "new values".

The devaluation of the supreme values, the vanishing of their relative value, is a consequence of their own "logic". In fact, these values themselves, as supposedly universal values, raise a humanity that, being educated to truthfulness, eventually recognizes their "teleology", namely their in no way absolute and unconditional, but actually *instrumental* character as "counteragents" and "means of sustainment", i.e. their

essence as *relative* values. However, *for the very same reason*, i.e. because of its being bound to regarding only absolute values as true values, this humanity cannot anymore adhere to the values it now recognizes as relative. The result of this development, Nietzsche says, is an “antagonism” (KSA 12/212; 5[71]), in which men *do not* value what they recognize (namely the supreme values in their instrumental, life-sustaining function) and *cannot* value what they would like to convince themselves of by lying (namely the absolute truth of these supreme values).

This situation leads to a process of “dissolution” (*ibid.*), in which the hitherto valid values are devalued. Hence, the “why”-question remains once again without an answer and a new nihilism arises from out of the very means against nihilism. In a fragment from the mid-eighties Nietzsche writes: “Nihilism is at the door. Whence does this most uncanny of all guests come to us?” (KSA 12/125; 2[127]). Nihilism, the devaluation of all moral values, is firstly a matter of the devaluation of the architectonical ground-values or highest values, and, among these, of the supreme value, namely God. This is why the shortest formula for characterizing this new nihilism is: (“The highest value has devalued itself”, i.e.) “God is dead”.

### 2.2 *The Necessity of a Polar Inversion of All Values*

The new nihilism cannot be overcome by re-establishing the old values or by substituting them with new values that share with them the moral character. Man is therefore, at first and for a long time, exposed to the purposeless, aimless flow of becoming, without disposing of any means for sustaining life and assenting to it. He is still the “not yet established animal”, but now without the protection of the moral counteragents. The moral attempt to provide man with a value and with an adequate knowledge of things situated this value and the only truth of things in an unconditional realm beyond the earthly sphere, thus failing to let man become the animal that stands, *knowingly* and *assentingly*, in the midst of the becoming constituted as will to power and eternal recurrence.

In this critical instant, thinking must consist in the prefiguration of the man who *can* assent to these changed conditions of existence, i.e. the *type* who is *necessarily* called for in these conditions. This prefiguration consists in bearing the coming of the “strike” by which man is finally shifted and, so to speak, cast unto his being, and thus established in his animality. Bearing the coming of this strike requires the thinker to experience and acknowledge *himself* the truth of nihilism in its most extreme and

“frightful” form, so as to become an *accomplished* nihilist – one who says “yes” to the absence of any end in itself and “yes” to the world as it is, but in order to eventually outlive nihilism and rise above it. *Thinking now consists in preparing and bearing the transition towards the new type.*

However, such outliving cannot be accomplished from the standpoint of the man who, being stuck in the habit and attitude of the old, devalued values, can only passively suffer this devaluation and the ensuing nihilism. The outliving requires that man have in advance his standpoint elsewhere, namely *beyond* the sphere of moral values and moral oppositions, in one word: “beyond good and bad”. Only from here, where nihilism is already overcome, and not just a new answer, but a new *form* of answer to the “why?” is found, can man accomplish the outliving-overcoming in both its parts: the *pars destruens*, i.e. the active destruction of the old values, and the *pars construens*, i.e. the active reconstruction of values on the basis of the new principle, or, which is the same, the establishment of a *ranking* of values on this new basis. Having nihilism behind, below and outside himself, man can carry out what Nietzsche calls *die Umwertung aller Werte*, which we translate as “the inversion of the polarity of all values”.

What does this inversion consist in? Answer: in the posing of a new principle of valuation, or more precisely: in the fact that what is already the only principle of valuation and the only origin of values, namely the will to power, is for the first time *explicitly* posed as such. This posing is not just an intellectual act, but one that requires that man, having detached himself from acting in view of “ends”, take an assenting stance towards the “most frightful and questionable sides of existence”, which he has hitherto always negated and turned away from, thus negating life itself. In other words, it requires a *complete transformation of man towards himself and his true being and nature* – not less so than the act that Plato calls “turning-around of the entire soul” (*Politeia*, Book VII), but in a manner that is, in some sense, opposite to the Platonic one and in itself *eine Umkehrung des Platonismus*, an inversion of Platonism.

The polar inversion<sup>27</sup> implies, in the first place, that the supposedly “true” world, the “beyond-world” of absolute ideas and truths, in short, the now devalued world of “being”, be “abolished” (KSA 13/281; 14[103]). This abolition, though, does not simply leave us with a rest constituted by its opposite, namely the “apparent” world of “becoming”. The reason for

<sup>27</sup> We use this formula in place of the longer expression “inversion of the polarity”.

this is that the sense in which the “apparent” world was “apparent” in the first place, was itself determined *by contrast* to the value of the “true” world, whose “truth”, however, denies the true principle of valuation. “Becoming”, in turn, appeared as such (namely as that which has no value) in light of the life-negating value of “being”. Therefore, the devaluation and abolition of the “true” world of “being”, insofar as it already has its ground in the posing of a new principle of valuation, necessarily implies that the “apparent” world of “becoming” be abolished *as well*. Thus the inversion of the polarity of all values requires that *everything be lost* – before it can reappear in the light of the new principle.

By virtue of the inversion of the polarity of values, that which was hitherto positively valued (“being”, “stability”, “harmony”, “truth”, “the soul”, “resignation”, etc.) loses its value, while that which the moral tradition valued negatively (“becoming”, “change”, “conflict”, “appearance”, “the body”, “the will to power”, etc.) is now provided with a positive sign and thus revaluated. However, this inversion is not just a matter of “plus” and “minus” switching poles. Rather, what takes place in this inversion is the posing of a new central polarity that is not identical with any of the previously established poles. Consequently, the *sense* of being a value switches to “acknowledged condition of the will to power”. The token of the fact that the inversion is primarily the posing of a new central polarity is that the opposite poles and mutually exclusive categories disappear in favour of a new univocity, namely the *univocal sense of the will to power* as the principle that generates a new ranking of values. In other words, the old values cease to exist as *absolute* (dis)values, *however* they are “reborn” in the new light of the will to power as *relative* values. In this light, all values return, in an ‘inverted polarity-form’, in the new ranking, which does not know any moral (i.e. absolute yes-no) oppositions anymore, but only what is “more valuable” and “less valuable” within the eternal “yes” to life in its totality.

As a consequence, the abolition of “being” does not simply leave us with “becoming”, in the sense that the known exclusive opposition of the two is resolved in favour of the latter; rather, becoming *as* becoming is now *itself* being, where both becoming and being obtain a new, inverted polarity-value. Similarly, appearance *as* appearance is now *itself* the highest inverted form of truth, and both appearance (art) and truth (science) are two differently ranked tonalities of valuation according to the will to power. Or again, the body *as* the body is now itself the soul, insofar as the soul, but also spirit and reason, are seen as mere emanations of the *living*

body, which is more fundamental and ranks higher than its emanations. Thus, the "true world", "being" and "the soul" are abolished in their old value, only to be recast in a new light, in which they obtain a relative value, justification and necessity – in one word: their full and undevaluable "yes" – in the new perspective of power. In this manner the inversion abolishes all moral yes-no-oppositions in favour of the only "yes".

In contrast to the inversion of the polarity of values achieved by "accomplished nihilism", "incomplete nihilism" is stuck in the passive experience of the devaluation of the hitherto valid values. It is a stage of nihilism in which nihilism itself is not yet overcome *in principle* thanks to the polar inversion. Within incomplete nihilism, different reactions to the devaluation of values are possible: the blind attempt to reevaluate the devalued values; the posing of new moral values as surrogates of the devalued ones; the resigned or despairing negation of all values, etc. However, in incomplete nihilism the only action that is called for, namely the inversion of the polarity in light of the *one* central pole that is the will to power, cannot be accomplished. Therefore, when Nietzsche declares that thinking must henceforth take "the body" as a guide and reference, this has nothing to do with a mere "revaluation of the body", as an incomplete form of nihilism might have it. In fact, only the thinking that has itself the character of the inversion of the polarity of all values can and must take the *inverted polarity*-body (i.e. man's animality established as the sheer will to power and thus as the "sense of the earth") as a guide. Merely "revaluing" and "valorising" "the body" according to the old sense of valuation, without inverting it into a value and a value-posing configuration of the will to power, not only does not overcome nihilism, but in fact aggravates it. The same is true for *all* attempts to escape nihilism without outliving it and bringing it behind and below oneself: "– the *attempts to escape nihilism*"<sup>28</sup> without inverting the polarity of those values: <they> produce the opposite, aggravate the problem." (KSA 12/476; 10[42]) Indeed, all forms of thinking, including scientific thinking, that merely substitute the devalued moral values with other values that, just as the devalued ones, "do not exist", have "nihilistic consequences".<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Brackets in KSA.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. KSA 12/126 et seq. (2[127]) on natural science, history, as well as on political and economic thinking, "where all 'principles' well-nigh belong to play-acting".

Examples of such “non-existing” values are “equality” (as a value of socialism) and “the happiness of the most” (as a value of utilitarianism).<sup>30</sup>

### 2.3 *The Value-Economy of the*

#### *Overall Economic Management of the Earth*

In his unpublished writings, Nietzsche analyses at length the different “logical” forms and stages of the nihilistic process of “dissolution”. These forms and stages vary according to the strength of the kind of man who is involved in them as a value-posing being, and his relative capacity for bearing the new conditions of life and performing the new manner of valuing. The different forms of nihilism are not ordered in a rigid sequence or progression. They can coexist, and may oppose, overlap and alternatively supersede each other.<sup>31</sup> Man will live through the new, nihilistic conditions of existence in a manner that depends on his capacity for resisting in the absence of ends and for inverting his own being, which is suddenly deprived of the absolute value it had under the moral hypothesis. Hence, he might adopt an active or merely reactive manner of being, express a solely destructive (in the first place self-destructive) “will unto nothing” (KSA 12/215; 5[71]) or, on the contrary, an accomplished, constructive and life-enhancing will to power, etc.

Given the long habit of posing life-negating values, man mostly lacks the capacity and strength for facing and organizing the chaotic (i.e. not anymore morally ordered) impressions he is exposed to in such a way as to openly posit them as means of life-enhancement. He is hardly capable of being in full accordance with the will to power, and therefore of valuing in the inverted sense. As a consequence, he loses his capacity for acting and withdraws into a merely reactive form of existence that, supported by appropriate forms of knowledge, keeps him, so to speak, clear from life. In one of his diagnostic sketches of modern man Nietzsche writes:

[...] man unlearns to *act*; he merely reacts to stimulations that come from the outside [...] *Profound weakening of spontaneity*: – the historian, the critic, the analyst, the interpreter, the observer, the collector, the reader – all <these are> *reactive* talents: *all* of science [*scil.* is a reactive form of knowledge in this sense]! / Artificial *adjustment* of his [*scil.* man’s] nature into a “mirror”; interested, but so to speak only epidermally interested; a fundamental coolness, an equilibrium, a maintained *low* temperature,

<sup>30</sup> The latter is seen as an “incomplete” attempt to justify the hitherto “denigrated instincts” (cf. KSA 12/489; 10[57]).

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche diagnoses relations of sense from out of a governing principle. The “story” he tells is not the computation of operative scenarios.

close under the thin surface on which there is warmth, movement, "tempest", wave-play / opposition of the *exterior* mobility to a certain *deep gravity and weariness*. (KSA 12/464; 10[18])

The rise of nihilism implies a "crisis", whose "value" is that it "clarifies" and thus establishes a "ranking of forces", recognizing as such "those who command" and "those who obey", and this, of course, "aside of all existing social orders" (ibid., 217).<sup>32</sup> It would be superficial and a mistake to spot in the diagnosis of this crisis a proximity to the idea of the "survival of the fittest" or similar representations. What is at stake in this diagnosis is the *form* of man's being once this being has lost its "infinite", "metaphysical" value (ibid., 215) and must prove itself in the new conditions dictated by the circuit of power. In fact, those who, in this crisis, will show as the "strongest", are not those who can seize and retain the highest quantum of brute force, but rather the "most moderate", those "who do not *need* extreme doctrines, those who not only concede, but love a good portion of accident and nonsense, those who can conceive of man with a significant reduction of his value, without for that reason becoming small and weak" (ibid.).

"Moderation" and "temperance" are indeed keywords for qualifying the transformation of man that for Nietzsche becomes necessary as the naked will to power breaks through the devaluation of the old values and calls upon man to *be* the one who poses the earth as a whole as a value, in other words: *to become the master of the earth*. "Moderation" does not just mean "self-restraint" in a generic sense; it rather indicates the temper and steadfastness thanks to which man is capable of the right *measure* that only the inversion of the polarity of all values, *borne in man's being*, can bring about. The crisis in which nihilism consists calls for the man who implements the mastery of the earth and therefore the highest will to power. Nietzsche asks: Man is claimed as the master of the earth, but is he *ready* for this mastery?<sup>33</sup> What is of man if he fails to become the being who, thanks to his inverted temperance, can *assent* to life as the will to power in the eternal recurrence of the like? Who are the leaders of this

<sup>32</sup> "Those who command" and "those who obey" are to be seen in analogy to the "free" and the "slaves" in Heraclitus' *polemos*-fragment (number 53 Diels-Kranz), with nihilism itself (i.e. the will to power) as the analogon of *polemos*. (NB This observation, just as those concerning certain analogies to Plato, are not meant to reduce Nietzsche to other, supposedly "known" positions; rather, they intend to indicate how his thinking is located in the core of the philosophical tradition, which, in a sense, it completes.)

<sup>33</sup> This aspect is highlighted in the reading of Nietzsche that Heidegger presents in his last lecture course. Cf. *Was heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer 41984), here p. 24 et seqq.

necessary transformation – i.e. the men who can *invert their own being* –, and what are the conditions under which they come about?

In a note dated autumn 1887, which from now on we will be referring to as “economics-fragment”, Nietzsche writes:

The *necessity* must be shown that to an ever more economical usage of man and humanity, to an ever more tightly interlaced “machinery” of interests and performances there *belongs a countermovement*. I designate this countermovement as the *secretion of a luxury-surplus of humanity*: within the latter a *stronger* kind, a higher type is to come to light, a type that has other conditions of generation and sustainment than the average man. As is well known, my concept, my *likeness* for this type is the word “overman.”

On that first path, which can now be entirely overlooked, there comes to be the adaptation, the flattening, the higher Chineseness, the modesty of instinct, the satisfaction in the shrinking of man – a kind of *standstill* in the *level of man*. Once we have that overall economic management of the earth, which is inevitably in store, humanity *can* find its best sense as a machinery at the service of this management: as an enormous wheelwork of ever smaller, ever more finely “adapted” wheels; as an ever growing becoming-superfluous of all dominating and commanding elements; as a whole of enormous strength, whose single factors represent *minimal forces, minimal values*. In contrast to this shrinking and adaptation of man to a specialized usefulness, there is the need for the inverse movement – the production of the *synthetic, summing, justifying man*, for whose existence that machinalization of humanity is a precondition, as a base frame on which he can invent for himself his own *higher form of being* ...

Die *Nothwendigkeit* zu erweisen, daß zu einem immer ökonomischeren Verbrauch von Mensch und Menschheit, zu einer immer fester in einander verschlungenen „Maschinerie“ der Interessen und Leistungen *eine Gegenbewegung gehört*. Ich bezeichne dieselbe als *Ausscheidung eines Luxus-Überschusses der Menschheit*: in ihr soll eine stärkere Art, ein höherer Typus ans Licht treten, der andre Entstehungs- und andre Erhaltungsbedingungen hat als der Durchschnitts-Mensch. Mein Begriff, mein *Gleichniß* für diesen Typus ist, wie man weiß, das Wort „Übermensch“.

Auf jenem ersten Wege, der vollkommen jetzt überschaubar ist, entsteht die Anpassung, die Abflachung, das höhere Chinesenthum, die Instinkt-Bescheidenheit, die Zufriedenheit in der Verkleinerung des Menschen – eine Art *Stillstand* im *Niveau des Menschen*. Haben wir erst jene unvermeidlich bevorstehende Wirtschafts-Gesamttverwaltung der Erde, dann *kann* die Menschheit als Maschinerie in deren Diensten ihren besten Sinn finden: als ein ungeheures Räderwerk von immer kleineren, immer feiner „angepaßten“ Rädern; als ein immer wachsendes Überflüssigwerden aller dominirenden und commandirenden Elemente; als ein Ganzes von ungeheurer Kraft, dessen einzelne Faktoren *Minimal-Kräfte, Minimal-Werthe* darstellen. Im Gegensatz zu dieser Verkleinerung und Anpassung der Menschen an eine spezialisierte Nützlichkeit bedarf es der umgekehrten Bewegung – der Erzeugung des *synthetischen, des summirenden, des rechtfertigenden* Menschen, für den jene Machinalisierung der Menschheit eine Daseins-Vorausbedingung ist, als ein Untergestell, auf dem er seine *höhere Form zu sein* sich erfinden kann ...

He needs just as much the *opposition* of the multitude, of those who are "leveled", the feeling of distance in comparison to them; he stands on them, he lives off them. This higher form of *aristocratism* is the one of the future. – In moral terms, that overall machinery, the solidarity of all wheels, constitutes a maximum in the *exploitation of man*: but it presupposes those in favor of whom this exploitation has a *sense*. Otherwise it would in fact be merely the overall reduction, the *value-reduction* of man as a *type*, – a *phenomenon of regression* in the greatest style.

– As one can see, what I fight is *economic* optimism; as if the fact that *everybody's* expenses rise necessarily implied that everybody's benefits rise as well. It seems to me that the opposite is true: *the expenses of all sum up to an overall loss*: man becomes *less*: – so that one does not know any more *what* this enormous process was good for. A what for? A *new* "What for?" – this is what humanity needs ...

Er braucht ebensosehr die *Gegnerschaft* der Menge, der „Nivellirten“, das Distanz-Gefühl im Vergleich zu ihnen; er steht auf ihnen, er lebt von ihnen. Diese höhere Form des *Aristokratism* ist die der Zukunft.

– Moralisch geredet, stellt jene Gesamt-Maschinerie, die Solidarität aller Räder, ein maximum in der *Ausbeutung des Menschen* dar: aber sie setzt solche voraus, derentwegen diese Ausbeutung *Sinn* hat. Im anderen Falle wäre sie thatsächlich bloß die Gesamt-Verringerung, *Werth-Verringerung des Typus* Mensch, – ein *Rückgangs-Phänomen* im größten Stile.

– Man sieht, was ich bekämpfe ist der *ökonomische* Optimismus: wie als ob mit den wachsenden Unkosten *Aller* auch der Nutzen *Aller* nothwendig wachsen müßte. Das Gegentheil scheint mir der Fall: *die Unkosten Aller summiren sich zu einem Gesamt-Verlust*: der Mensch wird *geringer*: – so daß man nicht mehr weiß, *wozu* überhaupt dieser ungeheure Prozeß gedient hat. Ein wozu? Ein *neues* „Wozu?“ – das ist es, was die Menschheit nöthig hat ... (KSA 12/462 et seq., 10[17]).

The scope of what is said in this sketch goes far beyond what this essay can attempt to elucidate. The following interpretive hints are based on the insight that what is "inevitably coming", far from depriving man of his liberty of action, implies a *decision* – in fact, the highest decision. In terms of the traditional modalities of being this can be stated as follows: The inevitably coming *actuality* implies a *possibility* that, in turn, constitutes a *necessity* for thinking. As the conclusion of the fragment shows ("A *new* 'What for?' – this is what humanity needs"), Nietzsche's prognostic insight into the transformation of the earth, and the manner in which man is involved in it, has its place in his diagnosis of nihilism (the lacking "what for" taking the place of the missing "why"). This diagnosis concerns man as the "not yet established animal" and contains a therapeutic indication – the last indication of a likely "way out from the cave" in the tradition of philosophy.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> In this case, however, the "cave" is the Platonic (i.e. moral) dyad of cave and outside world, the "way out" consisting in the "abolition" precisely of this dyad as a whole.

Let us start by clarifying the sense of what is “inevitably” coming. Nihilism, the devaluation of the supreme values, means that the hitherto covered sway of the will to power, with its absence of ends, becomes overt and avowed. The earth now appears as a becoming totality of aimless forces, as a chaos that lacks the assurance of an overarching unity, a structured wholeness or an ultimate end. However, these forces are already likely conditions of the will to power, i.e. values. The will to power now explicitly wills these conditions for its own implementation, i.e. it wills the “overall economic management of the earth” and *therefore* also the managers of this management. In other words, it wills man as a means for the implementation of the overpowering of power. “*Economic management*” means: management of the becoming, in abidance by the injunction of the law of the empowering of overpowering.

This process, which, due to the “logic” of the devaluation of the highest values, is “inevitably in store”, is at the basis of the visible phenomenon we commonly refer to as “globalization”. It is at the basis of this phenomenon in the sense that it is its metaphysical provenance and sense. The “overall economic management of the earth” is therefore not a concept of economic science but of the thinking of the will to power. It refers to the earth – the totality of becoming things – as the domain of the overt sway of the universal circuit of power. The earth, unified in the will that wills it as *one* condition of power, appears as a uniform sphere of perspective value-relations forming a stock of computable conditions for the enhancement of life. It is a reserve of resources calling for optimal management.

The logic of the circuit of power demands that any increase of power bear in itself its own means of assurance, and that, in turn, any assurance have as such already computed in itself the conditions of a new increase. In other words, the *development* that consists in empowering the overall economic management of the earth must be *sustainable*. “Sustainable development” is the name of the aimless process by which the globe of univocal relations of force is progressively framed as a resource or means of the circuit of power. The general form of the domain in which everything is in advance posed as a sheer value and computable stock in view of the sustainable implementation of the commanded enhancement of power is the *market*.

The overall economic management of the earth, i.e. the global sustainable market, wills that things be, in principle, commandable means that are in any moment available or retrievable as perfectly computable and thus assured factors of the circuit of power. It wills the progressive machi-

nalization and automation of life. The latter demands that everything be, in advance, grasped as information. Information is the perfect form of a marketable value of relative duration of life in the circuit of power. The manner of existence of automated, *made* life, i.e. of life made available in the very conditions of its making, is such that any instant occurs as one than can without fail be retrieved (i.e. launched, run, reset, etc.) infinite times in the same, identical form. Machinalized, automated life takes place in instants of virtually endlessly retrievable, in themselves rotating occurrences. These occurrences are values, namely computed-computing conditions of a machinal economy of power. They are, in their own manner, "undevaluable life".

What is the peculiar character of these undevaluable instants? Answer: the fact that their being undevaluable occurs *at the lowest level of life, of force, of value*. These instants, unlike the instants of eternal recurrence in the pantheistic "yes", are *not* each time unique. In fact, in their machinal retrievability they are *never* unique, i.e. they are *by themselves* not alive and therefore *are not*. In other words, they are "in the greatest style" value-reduced instants, or, more precisely, *they are not instants* at all. The "time" of automatic retrieval is *not yet* a will-mastered time, not yet the time of a true, living occurrence, but a "machinery" that, so to speak, awaits the "yes" that releases it as an "enormous force" *for* life and thus *brings it to life*. It has in itself the necessity of an assenting being that *donates* it its value for life, i.e. for the eternal recurrence of truly valid undevaluable instants.

What is the human being, what is the "average man" in this overall economic management? Man is necessarily also a value and a resource of this management. He is both one of its objects and the subject that is recruited for its implementation. Men as human resources are "adapted wheels", i.e. machinalized, and therefore sustainable, "*minimal forces, minimal values*" that (thanks to the upgrades and updates provided by way of "life-long learning") keep their functional efficiency in the overall machinery of endlessly retrievable, *unoccurring* actions. They are the sustainable humanity of functionaries of the overall economic management of the earth.

The progressive, sustainable implementation of the earth as a stock of values, and the adaptation of man as the machinal functionary who implements the management of these values – i.e. the process of globalization and the according training and usage of man –, has no purpose or aim. Not only is it "for nothing", but it implies a "value-reduction of man

as a type". And yet, humanity "can find its best sense" (this being the *possibility* that comes with the diagnosed actuality) as a machinery at the service of this management. How so? Thanks to the appearing of the man who – differently from the merely adapted, leveled humanity – has the temper and temperance for willing, i.e. *mastering* the machinally managed earth in a "yes"-saying, *assenting, life-enhancing* manner. It is the man whose life is itself that necessary *bringing to life* of what is hardly alive, and who therefore *justifies with his sheer being* what otherwise must only remain a huge regression. The man who is to come to light is the one who finally poses *himself* as the answer to the "why?". Thus, not the inevitably coming *fact* of the "overall economic management" is decisive,<sup>35</sup> but the justifying *manner* of its *mastery*.

This justification is not a moral justification of a contingent state of affairs. It consists, and can only consist, in the explicit polar inversion of values. Only the a-moral act of justification, i.e. the adjustment to the one principle of becoming, makes of the overall *management* an overall *mastery*, and thus an occasion for the enhancement of life.<sup>36</sup> However, the polar inversion takes place in the very being of the man who inverts *himself* and is thus beyond the moral man. This man *wills* the economic management of the earth for his own, higher form of being, and is therefore its master. As such he is himself, Nietzsche says, "the sense of the earth". Thus, within the actuality of what is inevitably coming, there lies a possibility, whose form is the metaphysical necessity of the *overman*. In a short formula: Where there are reduced-value *obeying* men, there *can* and *must* become – "typifying" the thus freed value-surplus – value-enhancing *commanding* men. Thanks to the appearing of the justifying man, the machinal economy of power is brought to life. It *lives* by becoming what it *already is*, namely that which, in its machinal value-reducedness, is the condition and sustainment of the man who can say "yes" to life as a whole and thus pose "*new values*".

We must keep in mind that Nietzsche is not theorizing, and at the same time legitimating, a certain world-order, as our moral thinking habit

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<sup>35</sup> The scope of the mastery of the earth that man is called to perform shows in the "victory of scientific *method* over science" diagnosed by Nietzsche as the distinctive character of the 19th century. This victory implies that the world is in advance made available as a totality of computable forces, whose computability the sciences conform to and, in turn, shape.

<sup>36</sup> Any not polarity-inverting form of mastery, such as speaks, e.g., in the rhetoric of "mastering technology for the purposes of man", is an instance of incomplete nihilism and as such "aggravates the problem".

all too easily induces us to presume. Rather, he indicates a necessity (an urge that concerns man's being as such) kept by a reality that is seen in its possibility, i.e. in light of the will to power. The necessity is that of a transformation of man's being in the instant in which the world-movement itself calls upon man to be the master of the earth. Man *will* inevitably be the manager of the overall management of the earth, but is he ready for being its *master*? Plato's *Republic* asks: Who should be the leaders of the *polis*?, and answers: Those who, having acquired the habitual capacity for seeing the ideas, can talk *otherwise* about the shadows in the cave (i.e. those who can, in a sense, "justify" them) and so be the deliverers of the prisoners. On the other hand, Nietzsche asks: What type of man is demanded by the nihilistic cave called "overall economic management of the earth", whose indwellers are management-prisoners adapted to automated functioning at the lowest level of force? And he answers: The *inverted* man, the man who has already outlived nihilism and is *over* it: the overman. Again, Nietzsche does not merely say: A world-order in which humanity is divided into a new class of aristocrats and a machinalized mass of functionaries is justified in light of the will to power. Rather he asks: What is the path towards *sense* (towards the "yes") in the world-instant of senselessness that wills, and effectively brings about, the machinalization of humanity? What is the way out from nihilism, i.e. from the state in which both the ideal world and the sensible world are abolished, and replaced by a machinal chaos that man cannot master? And he answers: In the present world-instant, this path is given by the necessity of a transformation of man beyond his moral nature, i.e. by the fact that man *become himself* the sense that this very senselessness bears in itself as the greatest gift and promise.

### 3. VALUE-FORMS – VALUE-FORMATS

Nihilism, the condition in which the old values are devalued, while man is not yet capable of establishing new ones, is a "pathological *intermediate state*". Its pathological character lies in the "uncanny generalization that there is *no sense at all*" (KSA 12/351; 9[35]).<sup>37</sup> The intermediate character implies that this state is not steady: it is critical in the sense of the above-

<sup>37</sup> This determination does not contradict what has been said above concerning nihilism as a condition belonging to man's existence. In fact, Nietzsche himself speaks of nihilism as a "normal state" (KSA 12/350; 9[35]). The "intermediate" character is a consequence of the "pathological" modification of the "normal state".

mentioned “crisis”. Through this crisis, humanity must *in one way or another* adjust to the changed conditions of existence. What the economics-fragment calls “economic optimism” is an insufficient stance in the mounting pathology of nihilism, namely a stance of *incomplete* nihilism. Nihilism is incomplete as long as the absence of ends is not acknowledged, and at the same time overcome, thanks to the polar inversion of values. “Incomplete nihilism” is the formula that characterizes Nietzsche’s time and that would presumably also be his diagnosis of ours. The fuller version of the above-quoted fragment on the insufficient attempts to escape nihilism sounds: “*Main proposition. To what extent accomplished nihilism is the necessary consequence of the hitherto existing values. / – incomplete nihilism, its forms: we live in the midst of it. / – the attempts to escape nihilism*”, without inverting the polarity of those values: <they> produce the opposite, aggravate the problem.”

Economic optimism poses a fictitious, “invented” ideal of benefit and well-being, which is, in turn, mechanically associated with a rise in expenses. If, on the other hand, we define benefit in terms of the will to power, i.e. as a “becoming more” or “becoming stronger” of life, we must conclude that, while expenses rise as a consequence of the ever more efficient management of the earth, not only do benefits not rise accordingly, but instead “man becomes *less*”. However, the optimistic manner of valuation that presides over the increase in spending is not an inverted, but only an incompletely nihilistic one, i.e. it cannot compute expenses as a means for the enhancement of life. Instead, a sustainable increase is pursued, but within the old scheme of valuation and its fake ends, so that the increase *de facto* only mediates the adaptation to a minimal level of life. The result is a kind of merely formal implementation of the circuit of power, in which, however, life is reduced. “Formal” means: compliant *on an operative level* with the value-structure as willed by the will to power, but *without* having undergone the inversion of polarity, and therefore *not* life-enhancing.

We call a “configuration of life” that is structured as a value in this formal sense a *format*. A format is a scheme or frame that defines whatever it contains in exclusively operative terms, i.e. as a computable value, but without performing the polar inversion. A format is therefore essentially a *surrogate* of a true, i.e. ontological form. It is itself not original, but always derived from what it surrogates, though it belongs to it to deny this provenance. For instance, “economic optimism” operates with a format of benefit that combines elements of old, devalued values (“imagined

ends in themselves") with merely formal features of the circuit of power ("values" as formatted conditions for the operating of modular processes of "optimization" and "maximization").<sup>38</sup> In incomplete nihilism, such formats appear as self-evident, sufficient and unquestionably justified.

Incomplete nihilism is characterized by the fact that, while everything *is* already a value of the will to power, values themselves are not lived (i.e. interpreted) as the form of things willed by this will, but merely as formats. While the explicitly sustained will to power knows "complex configurations of life" that are themselves forms of value-posing and, in this sense, *forms of forms*, the still denied will to power of incomplete nihilism knows values which are models of evaluation, or *formats of formats*. The format of formats – let us call it: the *matrix of formats* – is the format called "market". The matrix generates a regime of value-formats and fake ends. These ends are fake, because in actual fact they only serve as formatted means of the machinal economy of power. The earth is in advance computed as a totality of operative values serving the circuit of enhancement, i.e. as a stock of material and human resources readily available for sustainable exploitation. Nature, once it has become a marketable format, is entirely in the grasp of the reactive, distancing knowledge of the value-computing and format-living subject.<sup>39</sup> Man, on the other hand, is entirely "naturalized", in that his valid format is that of the socially active animal defined by an encoded set of cellular information and capable of performing parameterized life-functions.

In the dominion of the matrix of formats, the only valid manner of thinking is thinking through values in the form of an evaluating that supplants judgement through the computation of value-formats. Evaluating is now necessarily thinking through formats.<sup>40</sup> In the absence of a genuine, "natural" capacity for value-posing, only what is previously captured thanks to and *as* a format can be evaluated; conversely, only what is already set as a computable value can be formatted. Thinking through values and thinking through formats imply each other. They are both functions of life now grasped in the distancing, historical terms of bio-chemical processes and neuronal activity.

<sup>38</sup> The ontological form whence economic optimism is derived can be traced back to Leibniz.

<sup>39</sup> We say that nature is, in this sense, "hominized" (*vermensch*), which is not to be confused with "humanized" (*vermenschlicht*). For Nietzsche, *vermensch* is the condition of nature as long as it is permeated by moral values.

<sup>40</sup> On the topic of thinking through values and thinking through formats see the article "The Dictatorship of Value" in this volume.

Valuing and formating proceed by means of peculiar ordering formats (rankings, ratings, quotations, etc.), which, rather than serving as guides for selfstanding, autonomous action, are means of sustainable overpowering that have already informed and recruited for themselves human acting. The ordering performed by these formats consists in providing benchmarks, which, in turn, trigger automatic management procedures. As opposed to ontological ranking (i.e. the order of relative values established on the basis of the will to power as a sufficient principle), these surrogates lack any reference to life enhancement, but rather cover up the reduction of life under the mask of incessant “progress”. The guiding forms of knowledge (i.e. the leading sciences) implement the interpretive function of life as the sustainable production of manageable information, and thus the adaptation and training of man to the extreme form of “reactive historical animal” willed by the circuit of overpowering.

The overall economic management of the earth results in a machinalized economy of power that pursues the highest possible level of automation. An automated process is the *format* of the eternal recurrence of the like. Perfect automation, in turn, presupposes informational availability obtained in the format of virtuality. “Virtual reality” is the ultimate format of effective force that surrogates the eternally recurring concrete reality of the will to power. While this concreteness is experienced and outborne in the perspective of life enhancement by the inverted polarity-man, virtual reality is lived only “epidermally”, i.e. from the distance of the uninvolved observer, by formatted men reduced to the “low temperature” of “minimal values”.

#### 4. OUTLOOK

What are we looking at as we describe the overall economic management of the earth as a formatted, virtual reality? In Nietzsche’s terms we would have to say: at an advanced stage of incomplete nihilism, in which, behind the mask of old and new *uninverted* values, the adaptation of man and the machinalization of humanity is inexorably progressing in a way that is “for nothing” as long as the necessary countermovement is not accomplished, and that thus “aggravates the problem”. In fact, *if* that which Nietzsche experiences as the coming machinal economy of power is an earth that – to the ear and sensibility of him who bethinks himself – literally screams for the overman, i.e. for the man who can say “yes” to it, *then* this scream, namely the *necessity* of the overman, would have to resound

in an even more acute tone from the earth now globalized through the automated formats of virtuality, i.e. the earth of virtual perspectivism.

What if, however, that which Nietzsche experiences was already the coming concreteness of a *different* principle – let us call it: the *will to will*, or the *will to format* –, which is not graspable in terms of the will to power as the “essence of being”, and of nihilism as the “devaluation of the supreme values”? What if the concrete earth of virtual perspectivism kept in itself a likely “way out” that, instead, demands the abrupt surrender of thinking through values, and therefore calls for a man capable of bearing the “there” of this surrender?

Even if this *was* so, it would not curtail the truth of Nietzsche's diagnosis. The metaphysics of the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the like remains an *invaluable* indication for the attempt of minding the provenance and scope of thinking through values in the tone in which this thinking dominates our planet, namely, as Nietzsche lets his Zarathustra speak, as the “spirit of vengeance”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. KSA 4/180 et seq., “Von der Erlösung”, and KSA 4/128, “Von den Taranteln”.