

Tracing Nihilism: Heidegger to Nietzsche to Derrida

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I. Rhetoric and Nihilism

This collection of essays is not intended as an introduction to Nietzsche. Rather, it is, as its title suggests, an exploration of two themes and a reflection on the possible connections between them.

Nietzsche had much to say about nihilism. It might even be argued that it is the single most important theme running through his works. He says comparatively little about rhetoric. But one could assert that rhetoric is strongly implicated as one of Nietzsche's permanent concerns. Indeed, it could be argued that such Nietzschean themes as perspectivism, nihilism, will to power, eternal recurrence, or the overman lose altogether their force and novelty if they are not seen as just so many elements in Nietzsche's rhetorical arsenal. And it could be argued further that Nietzsche has created a new place for rhetoric in the history of Western thinking, that he has restored to it a legitimacy it once enjoyed.

Not all the essays here are written from the same point of view. Nietzsche, because of the way he wrote and because of his attitude toward reading and writing, never had a devout circle of followers. Hence, those who follow him do so as individuals not so much in search of some one truth, but more in search of words and ideas around which they can weave their own words and ideas, giving the latter a unique texture. Among these varied and personalized perspectives on Nietzsche's words some have left marks on his corpus which none of us today can ignore. And, without doubt, the reader who had the widest impact on our generation was Heidegger. One could almost say, with only slight exaggeration, that everything that is said or thought about Nietzsche today is said or thought, directly or indirectly, for or against Heidegger. Indeed, this holds true for the essays that compose this book. I would say further that the majority of the authors of these essays take their specific position with respect to Nietzsche not only with Heidegger in the background but also with what has come to be known as the "French" interpretation of Nietzsche. This French interpretation has evolved as a result of a confrontation with Heidegger's thoughts on such fundamental topics as "metaphysics," "nihilism," and "difference."

The names of Heidegger, Deleuze and Derrida come up time and time again in this book and even where there is no explicit mention of them their influence is easily discerned. In order to enable our readers to see this more clearly, I shall set out as briefly as possible, first, Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche, then Deleuze's implicit critique of Heidegger's critique, and finally I shall try to indicate how Derrida's deconstruction is a development of Nietzsche's conception of philosophy and rhetoric and that it is in an important sense a critique of both Heidegger and Deleuze.

In spite of my great respect and admiration for Heidegger's philosophy, I cannot accept his critique of Nietzsche. In fact, I believe that Nietzsche's position is much closer to his own than he realizes. It seems to me that Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche, understood properly as a critique of subjectivism, is not only a more faithful understanding of Nietzsche but even of Heidegger himself who, it must not be forgotten, was the first thinker of difference and the first critic of subjectivism after Nietzsche. By introducing Derrida's position I want to focus attention on the affinities between the deconstructionist and the Nietzschean conceptions of language, and to show the importance of the notion of nihilism for both.

The concept of nihilism is the obvious link between Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, and this book. But we must not forget rhetoric. Most of the papers in this book speak explicitly about rhetoric, offering one position or other with respect to rhetoric. However, I want to argue against some of them, and with some of them, that only by listening to deconstructionists like Derrida can we hear the great intensity of "the rhetoric of nihilism," and hear it not simply as the discourse of the rival, or of the frivolous, or of the dilettante, but hear it as it marks all discourse. But this is something that needs to be argued and something which I shall do with the hope that even if I don't succeed in convincing my readers, I will succeed in giving them a better sense of the overall argument of this book.

II. Heidegger on Nietzsche on Nihilism

Between 1935 and 1945, a period spanning the most troubled years of our century, in a series of lectures and articles on Nietzsche, Heidegger presented some of his most profound reflections on nihilism and on modernity. He took his point of departure from Nietzsche's distinction between incomplete and completed nihilism.

He notes that there are a number of different senses of "nihilism" in Nietzsche, some of which are relatively easy to see. For example, it is relatively easy to see what Nietzsche means when he says that the history of Western thought up to his own time is a history of nihilism: he means the negation of life in the interest of peace and security. In other words, in one sense "nihilism" refers to a historical period in which the instinct to survive leads individuals and peoples to form communities, to institute rules of exchange which would enable them, if not to master, at least to create the illusion of mastering, all that is wild, unpredictable, and ambivalent: all that is alive.

Another sense that Nietzsche gives to nihilism is that in the end the negation of life negates itself, that those values by which men have devalued life cause themselves to be devalued. This kind of nihilism is typified for Nietzsche by the world-weariness of a Schopenhauer. The point here is that since values are seen for what they are, simple instruments in the service of life, they can no longer be valued for themselves, but only tragically. It is not so easy to see that what Nietzsche thinks follows from the devaluation of all values hitherto recognized, or in other words, what he understands by "completed nihilism." It is

Heidegger's great merit that, against a mass of misinterpretations reigning at the time, he undertook the task of rethinking this question as it relates to the future destiny of man.

He observes that Nietzsche's discussion of nihilism is an essential part of his "countermovement to metaphysics" (Heidegger 1977, 61), which is announced as early as in *The Gay Science* by the words "God is dead." But Heidegger also notes a radical ambiguity in this discussion: Nietzsche talks about an incomplete nihilism, a simple "no-saying," as well as a "completed" or "classical" nihilism. As a form of "yes-saying," completed nihilism is not simply a devaluing of the highest values hitherto recognized but is, at the same time, a revaluation, a counter-movement to devaluing (Heidegger 1977, 67-68). This revaluing is not merely a replacement of old values by new ones, it is also a complete restructuring of the nature and manner of valuation itself (Heidegger 1977, 70). Heidegger construes the revaluation carried out by complete nihilism as the replacement of a (lifeless) supersensory world with a (life-full) sensory world. In the end Heidegger does not think that Nietzsche has succeeded in overcoming nihilism, or even metaphysics: he has completed it but he has not overcome it.

Despite all his overturnings and revaluing of metaphysics, Nietzsche remains in the unbroken line of the metaphysical tradition when he calls that which established and made fast in the will to power for its preservation purely and simply being, or what is in being, or truth. (Heidegger 1977, 84).

Before looking at Heidegger's argument for this central point of criticism, let me say a few words about Heidegger's conception of metaphysics which motivates and guides his interpretation of Nietzsche.

III. Heidegger on Metaphysics

According to Heidegger, the history of Western metaphysics is a history of the forgetting of Being, or more precisely, the forgetting of the difference between Being and beings. This forgetting is accompanied, in Heidegger's view, by an ever growing obsession of the subject with itself. This subjectivity, in its increasing effort to master and dominate all that is not itself, making it into beings for its own use, erects an increasingly impenetrable veil between itself and Being. Language, science, metaphysics, technology, all have for Heidegger the same essence, they all play their role in this veiling. This conception of metaphysics leads Heidegger to say that Nietzsche completes, but does not overcome, metaphysics because, with his doctrines of will to power, eternal recurrence, and the overman, metaphysics reaches its highest possible point, a point so high, in fact, that humanity will no longer be able to hide from itself its own truth: its essential subjectivity. But, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche who is the first to give expression to this profound insight is able only to affirm it, and for this reason he escapes neither from metaphysics nor from nihilism.

It remains to be seen whether Heidegger himself is able to do what he thinks Nietzsche could not do, but his interpretation of Nietzsche has some plausibility. If we were to think, as Heidegger seems to, that Nietzsche conceives of life, and

of the affirmation of life, uncritically, and if we construe will to power as a form of valuation, as a life enhancing/preserving point of view, and, furthermore, if we acknowledge Nietzsche's tendency to "ontologize" the will to power, Heidegger's conclusions are hard to avoid.

Nietzsche arrives at this transformation of metaphysics into psychology, according to Heidegger, by connecting will to power to both valuation and to being. (This, he tells us, is the meaning of Aphorism 617 of *Will to Power*. "To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power.") Heidegger, who places much emphasis on this passage, sees it this way. For Nietzsche, values are points of view whereby the conditions and preservation/enhancement of life are posited, but it is the will to power which posits values and it is the will to power which determines the essence of Being. In this way Being comes to be subjugated to the will to power.

There are, however, a number of difficulties with the way in which Heidegger sees the connection between valuation, will to power, and being. First of all, Nietzsche never says that will to power is, or determines, the essence of being. He always means "beings" when he speaks of being, not "Being," if we are to use the Heideggerian terminology. What Heidegger means by "Being" is meant by "becoming" in Nietzsche. Secondly, and here we are getting at a more serious difficulty, Heidegger makes too much of the notion of preservation/enhancement for Nietzsche's philosophy. He argues on the basis of a plausible, but not Nietzschean, view that enhancement is possible only if a stable reserve, preserved and secured, is already at hand (Heidegger 1977, 73).

This seems to me to miss completely Nietzsche's ambivalence about the preservation of life. Nietzsche gives expression to this ambivalence when he says that the strong should be protected from the weak. Why should the strong be protected? The best answer to this question based on our understanding of Nietzsche is that the strong need to be protected from the weak because their interest in survival or self-preservation is lower. Metaphysics in all its forms is, according to Nietzsche, on the side of the weak: it is their strength. It is their defense against the incertitude and violence of living. As we have already seen, metaphysics as the protracted struggle to preserve life against life is one meaning Nietzsche attaches to "nihilism." Thus, we can see how the preservation of life can be for him in direct opposition to its enhancement. For this reason we cannot allow Heidegger to construe Nietzsche's conception of will to power as the necessary condition and positing of "the constant stability of a constant reserve" (Heidegger 1977, 103). But without this, Heidegger could not convincingly argue that Nietzsche's will to power amounts to an "obliteration of Being" by and in the name of a self-asserting subject. In fact, it can be argued, and it has been argued by a number of more recent interpreters of Nietzsche, that his notion of will to power is precisely his way of "decoding" or "deconstructing" subjectivity.

As I have suggested, Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche can be criticized on a number of specific points and I could add to the ones already mentioned the following: first, it is extremely doubtful that Nietzsche would explain the

difference between incomplete and completed nihilism in terms of self-consciousness; secondly, in view of Heidegger's statement that "Nietzsche never recognized the essence of nihilism," it is not clear whether he would grant him even that; thirdly, Heidegger says nothing about why and how Nietzsche thinks that completed nihilism involves a joyful affirmation, and he thereby leaves a number of important questions unexplored.

At the same time, self-overcoming and self-affirmation are central themes in Nietzsche's philosophy. So the onus is on us to show that an interpretation of the will to power which is different from Heidegger's is possible. It is for this reason that Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie* is such a valuable contribution to Nietzsche studies. It was the first, and is to this day the most fully developed alternative to Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche.

IV. Deleuze on Heidegger

Deleuze's and Heidegger's interpretations of Nietzsche differ on almost every point. Yet, their agreement on the fundamental unity of the doctrine of will to power, eternal recurrence, and the overman makes it easier to compare their points of view. In fact, their differences can be brought into sharp focus by an examination of their respective treatment of "becoming." I have already expressed some reservation about the way Heidegger explains Nietzsche's concept of "being" and "becoming." The following passage, despite its seeming innocence, reveals in my opinion another main source of Heidegger's misconstruing of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power:

Here and in the conceptual language of Nietzsche's metaphysics generally, the stark and indefinite word "becoming" does not mean some flowing together of all things or a mere change of circumstances; nor does it mean just any development or unspecified unfolding. "Becoming" means the passing over from something to something, that moving and being moved which Leibniz calls in the *Monadology* (Chap. 11) the *changements naturels*, which rule completely the *ens qua ens*. . . . Nietzsche considers that which thus rules (i.e., will to power) to be the fundamental characteristic (the *essential*) of everything real, i.e., of everything that is, in the widest sense. (Heidegger 1977, 73-74).

Apart from the gratuitous assimilation of Nietzsche's view to that of Leibniz, Heidegger's claim that *for Nietzsche* "becoming" means the passing over from one thing *to* another is absolutely without foundation. Even though Deleuze does not mention Heidegger by name, this is precisely the view that he attacks. In direct opposition to Heidegger, he maintains that "becoming" makes no sense *unless* it is conceived as "pure becoming" (Deleuze 1962, 53-54). For, if becoming is a becoming of something which already *is*, then it is a complete mystery why and how could it ever have begun to become. Furthermore, if becoming is a coming to something, it is a complete mystery how this could "take place." If it could, why then has it not already taken place? I will argue that we will go far in understanding Nietzsche if we accept that for him, as for Heraclitus, there must be a choice between pure (unchanging) being and pure

(changing) becoming as fundamental concepts, and that what he asks of a fundamental concept is that it *be able to explain* and not that it be explainable itself. According to Nietzsche, we can give a much better explanation of being in terms of becoming than the other way around. This is the true meaning of Aphorism 617 of the *Will to Power*: "That everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being." For these reasons we have to agree with Deleuze when he says that it is nonsense to construe eternal recurrence as a return of the same. As he puts it: "It is not being that returns, but the return itself constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming . . ." (Deleuze 1962, 55).

Thus, while he agrees with Heidegger that eternal recurrence is an expression of a more fundamental principle, the will to power, he does not understand this principle in the same way at all as Heidegger does. While it is ironic, it should be said: Deleuze is more open to Nietzsche's ontology, his discussion on being and becoming, than is Heidegger. Deleuze is more open because he is less obsessed with a certain manner of posing the "question of Being." He follows Nietzsche boldly in seeing what it is like to take Heraclitus' side in the debate with Parmenides. He takes seriously not only Nietzsche's attack on Parmenidianism, or on Platonism, but he takes just as seriously the latter's attacks on atomism, mechanism, and certain popular conceptions of time. This is what allows him to have a more "ontological" and a less voluntarist—that is, a less subjectivist—approach to the will to power. Once again, he is less concerned with the concept than with showing what role it might play in an overall explanatory schema. What is important for Deleuze is not the phenomenon of willing, of overreaching oneself, and of securing for oneself a stable reserve, but Nietzsche's attack on mechanism.

Deleuze begins his account of the will to power by noting that *force* is essentially a relative concept: there is no force outside the relation of forces. On this point everyone agrees. But, Nietzsche invented the concept of "will to power" in an attempt to give a non-mechanistic explanation of force. Will to power, in other words, is nothing other than the genealogical aspect of force: that which differentiates quantitatively one force from another and that by virtue of which each force has its intrinsic quality. It is not to be mistaken for some secret inner will pre-existing in each force. For the same reason that there can be no force as such there can be no will to power as such. So why talk about will to power at all? Once again Deleuze considers Nietzsche's reasons to be ontological: forces in pure becoming cannot be in complete equilibrium (such a complete equilibrium would be pure being under another name). Therefore, at best, we can only speak of a synthesis, of a "vector" of forces. There is an affinity with Kant's conception of "synthesis," and this is intended. Here we have a constituting/constituted difference of forces which cannot, *ex hypothesi*, be imposed from "outside," i.e., "outside" is itself constituted by the differences of forces, therefore, there can never be an "outside" to their differences. And Nietzsche calls the originary self-constituting difference of forces "will to power."

At this point one might ask how "will to power", understood this way, could have anything to do with willing and subjectivity as we ordinarily understand them. Deleuze answers this question with an elaborate theory of active and reactive forces and affirmative and negative wills to power. It is an ontologically based theory of ethics in the grand style, suggesting that we might, after all, extract from Nietzsche's writings a non-Hegelian political philosophy, a different kind of answer to the question: "how ought one to live?" Fascinating as it is for the way it pulls together the different strands of Nietzsche's philosophy, it is not without its critics, especially among political theorists.

Where Deleuze wants to end up is clear: he wants to arrive at a coherent vision of the overman, not as the essence of humanity, but as a figure of pure affirmation. He takes his distance from the Heideggerian conception by stating at the outset that man is essentially reactive and therefore cannot overcome nihilism without first overcoming himself. The overman is not, for Deleuze, the being who will succeed where man, even the highest, has failed (Deleuze 1962, 194).

His problem at this point is to explain what he means by "man overcoming himself." The problem is especially urgent since this is one of those rare occasions on which Deleuze addresses his criticisms specifically to Heidegger, and, as we have seen, for Heidegger the overman is man *overreaching* himself. To put the problem slightly differently: if nihilism as negation is a quality of will to power and if conversely will to power appears in man as a will to nothing, how can man ever overcome himself and nihilism? Deleuze's solution to the problem is as simple as it is brutal: man must turn against himself, must destroy himself in order to make room for the overman. This solution clearly echoes many of Nietzsche's own sayings and it calls to mind the figure of Dionysus, so prominent in Nietzsche's writings. Let me offer a few suggestions which might illuminate this point.

First, it should be recalled that for Nietzsche, and for Deleuze, the eternal recurrence is a principle of selection in addition to being the thought of an ontological synthesis. As a principle of selection it separates those who can bear life without "truth" and "eternal values" from those who cannot. But to affirm life conceived in such a way is completed nihilism. It is a wager, and a wager that all those who love both life and wisdom must make. And like all wagers, this one involves risks. In other words, only those who can live life fully, living it without the sour taste of resentment, loving it together with its ugliness and cruelty, will be able to affirm all its negations as well as all its affirmations.

My second suggestion is based on an example Deleuze uses to illustrate what he means by the concept of "becoming-reactive" (Deleuze 1962,75). Sickness, he points out, is a reactive force insofar as it renders one inactive, restricts one's possibilities. But, at the same time it reveals new powers that one never thought one possessed. So there is no absolute distinction between forces which render me reactive, separate me from my potential, and those which bring out in me a new power. This indicates that even though man is essentially reactive and that his will to power is essentially a will to nothing, depending on the configuration

of forces which constitute him, they might tend to a further becoming-reactive or they might tend in the opposite direction. In the case of sickness one might unleash further reactive forces, fighting sickness as it were, or one might "affirm" it, gathering new strength. Of course, it is possible that one might die in the process, but one can die just as easily fighting sickness as affirming it, and by affirming it, and "oneself" "once again" in it, one can at least live more fully until one dies.

And finally, we come back to Heidegger. He himself outlines how such an overcoming might some day be possible. And this outline, barely intelligible as it is, is not without relevance to the question of "pure affirmation." Having stated that "Nietzsche never recognized the essence of nihilism" he goes onto note first, that the essence of nihilism lies in history itself (Heidegger 1977,109). But, since Being is whatever is in its entirety it cannot *not* be. Consequently, nihilism to us can only mean that Being does not show itself, that Being has withdrawn itself. And, according to Heidegger, we are accustomed to hearing a false note in "nihilism," hearing it because, in our self-centredness we can think, only of how Being appears to us and not how it is in itself. And he suggests that perhaps with another "note" in our ears, we might one day be able to ponder differently what really is "befalling Being" in this "age of that consummation of nihilism which is now taking place" (Heidegger 1977, 111). This different thinking would not be about some deeply hidden meaning behind our discourses on, for example, politics, technology or religion. It would be "de-ranged," "dislodged" (can we say also, "joyful"), a thinking of what "lies nearest." This, for Heidegger, would be a new way of thinking nihilism.

I do not know to what extent these suggestions help to clarify the overman, or the completion of nihilism, but by listening to Nietzsche and his "interpreters," and by trying to talk about them ourselves, we get an uncanny feeling that we are coming up against the very limits of language. Could it be that nihilism is our language, or better yet, that it is that which is unsayable in our language revealing itself at the limit only as a limit?

Ever since Spinoza one of philosophy's most important *dicta* has been: "determination is negation." It played a crucial role in Hegel's philosophy and it has once again come to the forefront with Heidegger's discussion of nihilism: by thinking Being under certain forms of determination as beings we think Being nihilistically. And, although he suggests that we could think Being in a different way, it is clear that we could not *speak* it differently. The question here asked of Heidegger is the following: what kind of thinking is it which cannot be spoken? Heidegger seems to reject the possibility that it is some kind of deep pre-linguistic or extra-linguistic thinking. He says simply that it is a thinking of "that which lies nearest." What can this mean? One way of making this meaning clear is Derrida's. If we interpret "lying nearest" in the light of the original hermeneutic project of *Being and Time*, as that which is "present," Derrida's criticisms of it would apply. But if, on the other hand, we focus not on *Being and Time* but on Heidegger's later "philosophy of difference" Derrida's criticisms may not apply as easily. In a way, Derrida's "debate" with Heidegger is not

unlike the one between Nietzsche and Heidegger. What Derrida says in opposition to Heidegger is discovered later as having been said by Heidegger himself. In order to complete our discussion of the Heideggerian critique of Nietzsche we must confront Heidegger with Derrida on the question of difference.

V. Difference: Between Heidegger and Derrida

Nothing would be gained by arguing at length whether Derrida's criticisms are appropriate for Heidegger or not. Instead, what I propose to do is to defend Derrida's views, leaving aside the question whether Heidegger would agree. A case can be made, however, that there is *prima facie* ground for suspicion about Heidegger's preoccupation with the question of Being. It seems to me that we have to choose between *Being*, on the one hand, and the *difference between Being and beings* on the other. Derrida clearly chooses the second. Heidegger seems at times to choose the first, but at other times says that there is no choice because Being *is* the difference between Being and beings.

With Derrida, in contrast to Deleuze, we find specific attacks on Heidegger and on his reading of Nietzsche. But in Derrida we do not find the comprehensive reconstruction of Nietzsche's works that we find in Deleuze. There is a passage in *Grammatology* that puts his position on the Heideggerian interpretation very pointedly:

To save Nietzsche from a reading of the Heideggerian type, it seems that we must above all not attempt to restore or make explicit a less naive "ontology," composed of profound ontological intuitions acceding to some originary truth, an entire fundamentality hidden under the appearance of an empiricist or metaphysical text. The virulence of Nietzschean thought could not be more completely misunderstood. On the contrary, one must *accentuate* the "naivete" of a breakthrough which cannot attempt a step outside of metaphysics, which cannot *criticize* metaphysics radically without still utilizing in a certain way, in a certain type or a certain style of *text*, propositions that, read within the philosophic corpus, that is to say according to Nietzsche ill-read or unread, have always been and will always be "naivetes," incoherent signs of an absolute appurtenance. Therefore, rather than protect Nietzsche from the Heideggerian reading, we should perhaps offer him up to it completely, underwriting that interpretation without reserve; in a *certain way* and up to the point where, the content of the Nietzschean discourse being almost lost for the question of being, its form regains its absolute strangeness, where his text finally invokes a different type of reading, more faithful to his type of writing: Nietzsche has *written what* he has written. He has written that writing—and first of all his own—is not originally subordinate to the logos and to truth. (Derrida 1974, 19)

Derrida is here warning us against attempting to restore to Nietzsche, or to make explicit in Nietzsche, a more sophisticated ontology than that of Heidegger. This constitutes indirectly a reproach to Deleuze who, as we have seen, attempts to do just that. Also, it is a reproach to all those writers who take seriously the project of overcoming the nihilism of metaphysics. All readings which claim that Nietzsche was or was not a "naive" metaphysician mis-read him, and do so because they read him metaphysically. It is Derrida who says that

Nietzsche is read well only if he is read "superficially,"—read on the surface—because writing, as Nietzsche himself says, is only surface. Writing has no depth. We are reminded here of Heidegger's invocation: "think what lies nearest." And we can hear in this reminder an explosion of the difference between Derrida's and Heidegger's points of view. This is precisely Derrida's point: there is neither depth to his own writing nor to Heidegger's, and those differences between texts or interpretations are really like the folds between two surfaces.

This is also why Derrida asks us to read Nietzsche in a completely Heideggerian way in order that Nietzsche may regain his absolute strangeness. Absolute strangeness comes with absolute closeness. Something is strangely close to us (*unheimlich*) because it talks to us in our own language, but talks strangely about familiar, all too familiar, things.

Heidegger's and Deleuze's readings of Nietzsche function insofar as they push certain elements of his text to a breaking point. They fail the moment they invite us to a secure position where, in our complacency, we could say "yes, this is it, now I've got it." Derrida captures the meaning of "rhetoric of nihilism" more firmly than does either Heidegger or Deleuze by his insistence that we can never take our distance from nihilism because all such distancing is already caught up in nihilism.

But, is there negation without affirmation, surface without depth, rhetoric without logic, or difference without identity? Surely, it would be too naive to think we can affirm difference and at the same time negate one of the terms in difference. I have hinted earlier that Heidegger in thinking Being and difference might be guilty of such a naivete. But surely Heidegger is not naive, or at least not a naive philosopher. And here is where something uncanny appears: Heidegger, or Nietzsche, or anybody else, could not have been a profound philosopher if he had not already been naive. What about Derrida and Deleuze? Is Deleuze not naive when he talks of "pure becoming" or when he talks of "pure affirmation"? And is Derrida not naive when he talks of the "arch-trace," or of "differance"? To those who read him as proposing a new "structuralist" ontology he will appear naive. But, there is no Derrida in himself, so whether he is naive, and to what extent he is, will depend on the nature and strength of the interpretive forces which resist him. Thus the naivete, the profundity, the frivolity, or the seriousness of any discourse, can only reveal itself as a resistance, as a difference which is deferred, if not altogether negated, by and in the nihilism of rhetoric which is at the same time a rhetoric of nihilism.

VI. The Rhetoric of Nihilism

If what I say in the last section is anywhere near the truth, if, that is to say, it can put up a resistance for at least a short time, then the essays in this volume are not simply *about* the rhetoric of nihilism but are instances of such a rhetoric.

The question of the relation between rhetoric and nihilism is first taken up by Gianni Vattimo. In his most recent publications, writing under the joint influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger, he invited us to consider the possibility that there is only a "weak" truth, a "weak" ontology, or a "weak" thought.

Vattimo here brings the notion of "weak thought" to bear on the issue of overcoming nihilism. Arguing, first, that attempts by hermeneutics, pragmatism and vitalism to give sufficiently precise sense to Nietzsche's distinction between "active" and "reactive" nihilism have failed, he goes on to suggest that we should not look for a "strong" alternative between the two. He recommends, instead, that we look upon active nihilism not simply as the overcoming of metaphysics but also as the overcoming of the hope that there is a strong alternative to metaphysics. This suggestion invites us, at the same time, to read not only the distinction between "active" and "reactive" but all of Nietzsche's binary oppositions in a new way.

Jean-Michel Rey's essay, like Vattimo's, is informed by years of study into Nietzsche's works. Here he shows how all discourse, and especially that of autobiography, is filled with paradoxes and ambivalences. If his essay can be said to have one single thesis, it is this: "Nihilism is perhaps discourse which, after multiple detours, after times of wandering, is on the way to finding its object, that is to say, the very absence of an Object." Some might wish to see in it also a masterly deconstruction of Nietzsche's announcement: "Nihilism is at the door: whence comes this most uncanny of all guests?"

Thomas Altizer is widely known in the English speaking world of letters not as a philosopher but as a voice of radical theology. Still, readers of his essay in this volume will note affinities with what I am calling the philosophy of difference. Altizer considers Nietzsche "the apocalyptic thinker *par excellence* . . . simultaneously apprehending God as absolute Yes and absolute No, as absolute perfection and nihilistic abyss." And he concurs with Nietzsche that "the Christian God is a pure embodiment of guilt and revenge," linking guilt and revenge to "an apprehension of the Kingdom of God as being other than all and everything, as being a realm wholly beyond or wholly to come." Thus for Altizer Yes-saying is, as it was for Nietzsche, inseparable from No-saying. Consequently, all discourse about the coming of God is inevitably discourse announcing the death of God. And this comes close, I think, to saying that all discourse, insofar as it announces a coming or a passing, is a discourse of nihilism.

Claude Levesque's essay in this volume, "Language to the Limit," warns us against a simplistic way of construing Nietzsche's distinction between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. He argues that Nietzsche considered musicality and language to be inseparable, music being not something above or below language but its very limit. He describes how at this limit, in the scream (*le cri*), language shows itself for what it is. A corollary of Levesque's thesis is that what marks language as language is not its seriousness, its conceptuality, but precisely that which, by mobilizing the dissonance of desires and impulses, allows it to escape all representation. He also makes it clear that for Nietzsche the Dionysian and the Apollonian, drunken ecstasy and melodic revelry, are not absolute opposites. He merely insists that the Apollonian risks denying itself in denying the Dionysian. Levesque's sober analysis of Dionysian frenzy points in a direction away from what are, at best, romantic, and at worst reactionary, conceptions of politics too often ascribed to Nietzsche.

Tracy Strong's pioneering work, in English, on the French Nietzsche— a Nietzsche which emerged from the writings of Blanchot, Derrida, Deleuze, and Klossowski—came out more than ten years ago. He was among the first to bring "deconstruction" to North American Nietzsche studies. In the present volume he asks: What did the Greeks mean for Nietzsche? What is the sense in which Nietzsche made the Greeks his own? And what can we learn from Nietzsche's "imitation" (mimesis) of the Greeks? Strong's main interest is in understanding the structure of authority, in understanding the process whereby what has authority is recognized and accepted as authoritative. Strong is not asking a simple question about history and tradition. His question goes to the very heart of political life in that it poses the radical question of all political subjects: what authorizes adhesion to a community?

Freud and Nietzsche are the two central figures for all that has been vibrant and inspiring in the last few decades of French intellectual life. And, as Lise Monette reminds us, in spite of Freud deliberately taking his distance from Nietzsche's writing, and doing so mostly to safeguard his own "originality," and in spite of Lacan's contemptuous attitude towards his own Nietzschean contemporaries, the affinities between Nietzsche and psychoanalysis are unavoidable. This contention is already implied by Rey's, Levesque's and Strong's papers. But Monette arranges for us a "blind date" between Freud and Nietzsche on the question of interpretation. She shows us first of all how a Nietzschean "interpretation" of Freud could have fertile consequences both for the theoretical and clinical development of psychoanalysis. She also points to very important similarities between the Nietzschean and the psychoanalytic notion of "interpretation." In the end she offers philosophers new insight into Nietzsche's conception of "time," "truth," "will to power," and also into Nietzsche's use of aphorism: his way of keeping his writing open to interpretive forces without letting it run wild.

The title of Constantin Boundas' paper, "Minoritarian Deconstruction," should be read in two ways. First, it should be read as a form of deconstruction which Deleuze and Guatari find in Kafka's writing. Kafka, according to them, is able to subvert a "major language" by setting up a "minor" practice within it. Secondly, "minoritarian" should be read as a form of deconstruction which differs from the "majoritarian" (Derridian) practice of it. In fact, Boundas' paper is minoritarian in both senses. He details the distinctive contributions made by such readers of Nietzsche as Deleuze, Laruelle, and Klossowski who read him "ontologically." At the same time he attempts to deconstruct the majority deconstructionist position from within. I leave it up to the reader to decide to what extent the minoritarian's key concept, "intensity" (which Boundas also calls "originary difference"), is in fact sufficiently distinct from Derrida's concepts of "arch-trace" and "différance" to enable their subversion. Whether or not it succeeds in confounding the codes of majoritarian deconstruction, Boundas' essay makes an important contribution to our understanding of the French Nietzsche.

At the beginning of *Zarathustra* we are told about the three metamorphoses of the spirit, first into camel, then into lion, and finally into child. Nietzsche's figure of the child allows Francois Peraldi to convoke for us, this time, Nietzsche,

Heidegger and Freud. The description of a "primal scene" at Heidegger's house leads Peraldi to reflect upon the conditions of thinking which, according to him, are also the pre-conditions of psychoanalysis: the ability of the thinker as well as of the analyst to become-child. This becoming-child is not for psychoanalysis, any more than it was for Nietzsche, a becoming of a something from a something else. It is rather a constant repetition of a passing away, a form of dying. This passing away, which corresponds in the primal scene to the absence of the mother in her "little death," is also a rite of passage. Peraldi locates the birth of thinking at this "point of radical cleavage." Consequently, he suggests, that the thinker, if he is to make himself available to "that which lies nearest," must go back to this point of cleavage and go over it again as did the child.

Peter Sloterdijk's poetic essay is also a result of years of reflection upon Nietzsche, Heidegger and psychoanalysis. Against common opinion he suggests that our death poses less of a problem for us than does our birth. He sees all efforts to achieve full subjectivity as pathetically inadequate attempts to heal an originary wound. Sloterdijk's ultimate intention is to trace the way from the ancient Cynics through Nietzsche to what might be called Eurotaoism. I do not think that he is alone in this project. While his term "Eurotaoism" will seem puzzling to some we should be reminded that the Tao, the Way, is not what can be named, it is not what it is forever, it is rather what makes all naming possible, makes all difference possible, it is, we might say, "originary difference" or "arch-trace."

Horst Hutter's thoughts on the Cynic tradition are, as he tells us, a continuation of Sloterdijk's major work, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*. Cynics like Diogenes Laertius practiced a form of rhetoric of the body which was meant to resist attempts at recodification. For this reason they could be considered as the first joyful practitioners of the rhetoric of nihilism. Their vulgar parodies and pantomimes can teach us much about strategies of subverting dominant discourses. Hutter argues that Nietzsche's rhetoric owes an important debt to the ancient Cynics. But he notes that for historical reasons Nietzsche's appropriation of the cynic wisdom of the body was not complete. He points out that Nietzsche gave in at times to morbid, and "cynical" (in its modern colloquial sense) ideas about pain and suffering.

It is interesting to speculate as to how much Nietzsche knew about the characters and the events associated with the historical phenomenon that has come to be called "Russian nihilism." No doubt the subject came up in his conversations with Lou Salome. He was, no doubt, also familiar with the attempt of these "nihilists" to reduce questions of morality to questions of physiology. Richard Brown's essay documents the many references to physiology that appear throughout Nietzsche's writings. We can assume that Nietzsche was aware of the conceptual traps opened up by a narrowly reductivist use of the term. Brown shows us how Nietzsche, by making physiology a fundamental concept of moral valuation, completely restructures the nature and manner of valuation itself. Brown stops short, however, of spelling out how this valuation from "below," this rhetoric of the body, could lead to an active, or completed nihilism.

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Stanley Rosen sets himself the task, first, of arguing that Heidegger's view about Nietzsche's "Platonism" misses the rhetoric in both Nietzsche's and Plato's philosophy. Neither, according to Rosen, were "Platonists" in Heidegger's sense. Secondly, he argues that Nietzsche's commitment to chaos, a world of pure becoming, cannot fairly be described as commitment to ontology. Finally, Rosen undertakes to spell out the difference between Nietzsche's and Plato's rhetoric. In Rosen's view both invoke a "noble lie." But, whereas Plato's sober political rhetoric is meant to constitute a political solution, Nietzsche's "mad or Dionysiac" rhetoric provides none. Still, Rosen finds a sense in which we might speak of "Nietzsche's Platonism." Nietzsche's teaching, he claims, "stands or falls upon the possibility of distinguishing the high from the low, the noble from the base. . . ." Surely, high and low, noble and base cannot simply be the rigid, absolute binary distinctions of traditional metaphysics. The question then is whether, in the end, Nietzsche was a dupe of metaphysics (and the political hierarchies that it has nourished) or was using categories of metaphysics and politics in an effort to deconstruct them.

The possibility of discovering a natural order, which could serve as basis for sober political thinking, is important for both Barry Cooper and Stanley Rosen. However different their answers to this question might be, they agree on the importance of it. Cooper shows in a humorous way how Nietzsche's description of ass-worship at the end of *Zarathustra* is also an apt description of the current worship of technology. Like Rosen, he also seems to fault Nietzsche. Nietzsche, Cooper says, side-steps the Socratic question, "how ought one to live?", by giving it a merely Dionysian answer. Here, one might juxtapose some of the earlier essays, especially Levesque's and Strong's and the questions they raise about the validity of attributing to Nietzsche an absolute distinction between "sober" and "Dionysian" rhetoric.

David Goicoechea approaches the rhetoric of nihilism from yet another point of view. Through an analysis of the rhetoric of life and wisdom in *Zarathustra* he leads us step by step to the conclusion that Zarathustra's affirmation of life is "beyond Platonic negation and the tragic protest." Thus, for Goicoechea, too, the question "How ought one to live?" is an all important one. But he finds the answer to it to be beyond rhetoric. In short, he understands the overcoming of nihilism as an overcoming of rhetoric. And, as he says, this overcoming cannot be derived from Platonic negation or tragic protest; it must come from an affirmation of all that is. But, what does it mean to affirm *all* that is? Does it mean to re-affirm all that has been affirmed or negated up to now? Or, does it mean to affirm and to negate differently—in a way which would result neither in a simple "what is" or "what is not"?

These questions bring us back to the one posed by Vattimo in the first essay of this book: should we not think of Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism as advocating a form of "weak" thought? I invite the reader to judge.