

To what extent was Heidegger right in declaring Nietzsche the last metaphysical thinker?

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Abstract

Nietzsche was one of the most prominent figures of the 20th century. First considered as an artist, he was then first treated as a philosopher by Heidegger. Nietzsche is often said to represent a turning point in modern philosophy, the culmination but also the end of western philosophy. Can then Nietzsche be seen as the first post-modern philosopher? To what extent does he represent the post-modern values? Is he the first post-modern or the last modern man? The pessimistic view of Nietzsche does not allow much opening for a new era, compared to Heidegger who tried to find a new beginning of metaphysics in presocratic views. But the new philosophers tend to focus on the deconstruction of human reason and reshape ontology in the light of human sciences.

Introduction

Metaphysics in its initial sense – as the title of Aristotle's book – means “what comes after the issue of physics”, that is the issue which comes after the issues treated in Physics. This meaning of metaphysics has changed in the Middle Ages: it was made to convey “what is beyond the physical”. Metaphysical tradition goes back to Plato and has been understood as an attempt to search the Good and Truth beyond the physical world. The Platonic good is superior to being. We can define metaphysics as an attempt to provide an explanation of the fundamental nature of reality. Ontology works on the nature of being, and the meaning of being. Cosmology provides an explanation on the structure of reality. Some authors found metaphysics in Descartes' “*Sum ergo cogito: cogito ergo sum*” who finds the foundation of metaphysics in ego. For him, metaphysics is based on the subject, the thinking subject.

In history, the foundation changed with the death of God which meant at the same time the death of the foundation of metaphysics. In that sense, Nietzsche can be considered the last metaphysical thinker because his ideas about “the death of God”, “beyond good and evil”, nihilism and “the eternal return” represent the closure of metaphysics. This new understanding of metaphysics was mainly influenced by the discovery of Buddhism and Asian philosophers by Western thinkers, and is seen by many modern philosophers as the completion of metaphysics. But the “death of God” was rather the death of the Christian God, as Nietzsche described Christianity and alcohol as the two great means of corruption.

Heidegger who was the first to treat Nietzsche as a philosopher tried to rethink metaphysics by asking “is there something that has been forgotten or repressed?”

According to him, we have to step back and think what philosophy has left unthought. Heidegger found this change in the interpretation of metaphysics, in which meta is understood in the sense of “trans” and metaphysics in the sense of “what is beyond entities ('uber' das seiende)” very crucial for the history of metaphysics.

Modern metaphysics says that the foundation of traditional metaphysics is an illusion, a projection of the self representing his own thoughts back to himself, like a mirror reflects one image. For Levinas, metaphysics represents the self to itself and results in constructing the world in its own image, and Derrida says that the meaning is never given pure and simple, but is always an effect of the play with differences within the language. Most of the new philosophers are associated with the work of deconstruction, often based on language. In a way, it is clear that metaphysics is now split into one part that has been trapped by Asian philosophy on the one hand, and the human sciences which deal with the human reason on the other hand.

In the following pages, we shall present the philosophy of Nietzsche and its main characteristics, then analyze Heidegger's view on Nietzsche, and philosophy according to modern thinkers, including the *theory of mediation* by Jean Gagnepain who tries to build a coherent structure of human reason, taking into account the progress of linguistics, sociology and psychology. We then try to analyze the effect of the end of philosophy on Western history, but also on Asian societies, especially with the creation of a new man in communist China, and its challenge to return to tradition.

Nietzsche's philosophy

Nietzsche's view that non-rational forces reside at the foundation of all creativity and of reality itself, identified a strongly instinctual, wild, amoral, “Dionysian” energy within pre-Socratic Greek culture as an essentially creative and healthy force. Surveying the history of Western culture since the time of the Greeks, Nietzsche lamented over this “Dionysian”, creative energy that had been submerged and weakened as it became overshadowed by the “Apollonian” forces of logical order and stiff sobriety. He concluded that European culture since the time of Socrates had remained one-sidedly Apollonian and relatively unhealthy. As a means toward cultural rebirth, Nietzsche advocated the resurrection and fuller release of Dionysian artistic energies – those which he associated with primordial creativity, joy in existence and in the ultimate truth. In his 1873 unpublished essay, “*on Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*”, Nietzsche rejects the idea of universal constants, and claims that what we call “truth” is only “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms”. His view at this time is that arbitrariness completely prevails within human experience: concepts originate via the very artistic transference of nerve stimuli into images; “truth” is nothing more than the invention of fixed conventions for merely practical purposes, especially those of repose, security and consistency.

The word “philosophy” does not really apply to Nietzsche's thinking because, although his brilliant, illuminating ideas hang and belong together, he did not aim at elaborating a logically consistent interpretation of the whole of existence, of the whole of experience [Nietzsche2005]. He did not aim at building up a system of philosophy like Kant, Hegel or Schopenhauer. He was not a systematic philosopher, a system builder, he did not aspire to erect one edifice of thought within which everything would be accommodated. Indeed, he was opposed to this sort of approach, to this sort of method, as he went so far as to declare that “the will to system is a will to lack of integrity”. And this indifference to system building is reflected in his works,

in his writing, especially in the later ones. With the exception of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, all of his later writings are simply strings of aphorism, short sharp sayings. Nietzsche is the master of aphorism. This lack of system is not accidental, one might even say that the aphoristic approach is the essence of Nietzsche's method.

Nietzsche is very well-known for his idea of The death of God that he expressed first in *gay science* [Nietzsche1974]: Perhaps man will rise ever higher as soon as he ceases to flow out into a god. The greatest recent event – that “God is dead”, that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadow over Europe. You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian God: the Christian morality itself. In *twilight of idol*, he compares Christianity and Buddhism in these terms: “The virtue of Christianity is profoundly grateful to Indian scholars that one is now able to compare these two religions. Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity – it has the heritage of a cool and objective posing of problems in its composition, it arrives after a philosophical movement lasting hundreds of years; the concept of “God” is already abolished by the time it arrives. It no longer speaks of the struggle against sin but quite in accordance with actuality, the struggle against suffering. It stands, in my language, beyond good and evil.” He then argues that Christianity robbed us of the harvest of the culture of ancient world, it later went on to rob us of the harvest of the culture of Islam. For Nietzsche, Christianity and alcohol are the two great means of corruption.

Zarathustra's prologue represents him coming down from the mountain; and this is meant to be symbolical. And on the way down, he meets a saintly hermit, someone who had been living in the forest at the foot of the mountain for years. The hermit tries to persuade Zarathustra not to go down amongst men. He says: “it will be a waste of time, don't trouble yourself. Men are ungrateful. Men are distracted. Don't waste your time going down amongst them”. But Zarathustra is not to be dissuaded from his mission, so he leaves the hermit and he goes down the mountain. And as he goes, he says to himself: “ could it be possible that this old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that God is dead?”.

Nietzsche saw clearly that orthodox Christian theology with its doctrine of a personal God, of a supreme Being, a Creator, the doctrines of sin and faith and resurrection, that this whole system is in fact dead, is in fact finished, irrelevant; and that we are now living not just in the Age of Science and Technology, not just in the Age of Globalisation even, we are now living in the Post-Christian age. The Christian Ages, whether of faith or un-faith, are behind us. So God is dead. If God is dead, if Christianity is dead, if the Christian dogma is dead, then the Christian view, the Christian conception of Man is dead as well. The conception of Man as a fallen being, a being who sinned, who has to believe, who will be judged, this sort of concept about Man is exploded, is finished, is dead.

Nietzsche arrived at the concept of the overman by consideration of the general nature of the evolutionary process. The overman (*uebermensch*) is the man who stands over and above Man as he exists at present. The overman is that, or who, transcends Man. He represents a completely different type of man. Zarathustra, in his prologue points out that so far in history all beings have created something beyond themselves, something higher than themselves in the evolutionary scale. And Nietzsche, through the mouth of Zarathustra, says that there is no reason to suppose

that this process will stop with man. He says, clearly: the ape created man. And in the same way, in an even higher way, man himself must now create the overman by overcoming himself. But the overman will not be produced automatically, as a result of the general blind function of the evolutionary process. Nietzsche distinguishes between what he calls “the last man” on the one hand, and the overman on the other. The “last man” is simply the latest product of the general collective evolutionary process of humanity.

Nietzsche says that he sees man as a rope; a rope stretched out between the beast on the one hand and the overman on the other. And the rope, he says, is stretched over an abyss. It's dangerous to be a man, or at least it should be dangerous. Man is something transitional, he is not only just a rope, he is also a bridge and must live for something other than himself. And this something other is the overman. Nietzsche in fact does not only distinguish between beast and overman, he also distinguishes between man and overman. He distinguishes between man as animal and man as human being. He says that the majority of men are not men, the majority of men are animals. Most people have not yet achieved humanity. According to Nietzsche, the turning point of the evolutionary process, is not between animal and man, it is between man who is still an animal and man who is no longer an animal, man who is truly human. The true men, those who are no longer animals, are simply the philosophers, the artists and the saints. And the overman apparently, is something even higher, even superior to the philosophers, the artists and the saints. Man becomes overman by self-overcoming, and as the philosophers, the artists and the saints are overcoming themselves, they are to some extent overmen.

Nietzsche speaks of self-overcoming in terms of what he calls “giving style to one's character”, which means not accepting oneself ready-made, just as you come from a factory. As you are now, as you have been handed to yourself by your parents, your education, your social conditioning, educational conditioning, this is not the finished product, this is just raw material. This is where you begin, where you start. So Nietzsche says that one should work upon oneself, create oneself like a work of art. Produce yourself like producing a work of art. Don't be satisfied with yourselves as you are. Nietzsche makes it clear that the higher degree of being, the higher mode of being, is attainable only to the extent that the lower degree, the lower mode of being is left behind. So the lower degree of being, the lower mode of being has to be negated, even destroyed before the higher can be reached. So Nietzsche's ultimate aim is not negative at all, it is positive. His ultimate aim is the creation of the overman, and man as we know him at present, gets in the way of the overman. So man, if the overman is to come, must go. It's yourself that you must overcome.

Heidegger's view on Nietzsche

Heidegger has tried to find a way back into the primordial beginning, so that the “dead end”, the completion of philosophy by its dissolution into particular sciences and nihilism, into which the west has run, can be replaced by a new beginning. In the first beginning, the task of the Greeks was to ask the question “What are beings?”. In the end, the task is to make questionable what at the end of a long tradition of philosophy-metaphysics has been forgotten. The conception of the history of being is of central importance in Heidegger's thought.

In his fundamental, but also unfinished treatise, *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the word *Dasein*, which means life or existence in everyday German language but which is also used by other German philosophers to denote the existence of any

entity. However, Heidegger breaks the word down to its components “Da” and “sein”, and gives to it a special meaning which is related to his answer to the question of who the human being is. *Dasein*, that being which we ourselves are, is distinguished from all other beings by the fact that it makes an issue of its own being. It stands out to being, as Da-sein, it is the site “Da” for the disclosure of being “Sein”. Heidegger's fundamental analysis of *Dasein* points to temporality as the primordial meaning of *Dasein's* being. *Dasein* is essentially temporal and is derived from the tripartite ontological structure: existence, thrownness and fallenness by which *Dasein's* being is described.

The truth of being, its openness, is for Heidegger not something which we can merely consider or think of. It is our own production.

The Heidegger's program expressed in “The End of Philosophy and the task of Thinking” consists solely in the character of thinking which does not attempt to dominate, but engages in disclosing and opening up what shows itself, emerges, and is manifest.

One reason Heidegger considers Nietzsche a metaphysician is that he considers “metaphysical thinking” to be a thinking that goes beyond entities. Another reason is that he assumes that there is an inner connection between the history of European thought and Nietzsche's philosophy. Thus Heidegger sees Nietzsche as a metaphysician, and as a philosopher who must be overcome, although he acknowledges his special place in the history of philosophy. What makes Nietzsche a metaphysician for Heidegger, are the key concepts of his philosophy, such as the *will to power*, *nihilism*, the *eternal recurrence of the same*, the *overman*. According to Heidegger, “the eternal recurrence of the same”, which constitutes “the concealed essence of Time”, is “the last metaphysical name of Being”. Another example is that although Heidegger considers Nietzsche's concept of overman to be the culmination of metaphysics, he objects that this concept does not help to transcend metaphysical thinking and consequently cannot become a different new beginning, while his own concept of Da-sein that never refers to something real, but asks about the truth of Being, can become such a new different beginning. But this role of Da-sein as the enlightenment of Being itself is something to be realized in the future.

In his paper “*who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?*”, about nihilism and Eternal Recurrence, Heidegger concludes: That Nietzsche experienced and expounded his most abysmal thought from the Dionysian standpoint only suggests that he was still compelled to think it metaphysically, and only metaphysically. But it does not preclude that this most abysmal thought conceals something unthought, which also is impenetrable to metaphysical thinking [Heidegger1985].

Other thinkers on Nietzsche

We shall now analyze the opinions of the generation of new philosophers, mainly French and Italian about Nietzsche's philosophy and its interpretation by Heidegger.

For Michel Haar [Haar1985], platonic structure of metaphysics, based on the separation of true being and lesser being, is abolished and no just turned around. The Heideggerian definition of metaphysical approach consists in identifying beings in their totality - i.e. in designating with one name the character of beings as such and in their entirety. Is not Nietzsche then still a metaphysician?

Alphonso Lingis [Lingis1977] quotes Nietzsche: “The essences found through philosophical interrogation do not reveal the things themselves productive of their

appearances, issuing signs of themselves, but reveal acts and laws of the subject that interprets”, and says that in this sense, Heidegger has called Nietzsche the most coherent subjectivist and the last Cartesian. If Being, then is not a ground, but an abyss, chaos, there is consequently in Nietzsche a quite new, non-metaphysical or trans-metaphysical understanding of being of things. Nietzsche wrote “there are no facts, there are only interpretations and interpretations of interpretations. There are no persons, selves and egos; there are only masks, and masks of masks”, so what is sovereign is always masked. For Lingis, a being has not one form, but different forms; it has not one *telos*, but as many as there are powers orienting it; it has not one essence, but multiple essences, not one meaning behind it, but multiple meanings in its appearance, multiple apparent meanings. There is no essence to be sought behind the appearances, no *telos* behind the differentiation of the appearances.

Jacques Derrida who is associated with deconstruction asks “what other possibilities for thinking after the end of metaphysics?” For Heidegger, the dual notion of veiling and un-veiling happen simultaneously through the opening. The opening corresponds to presencing. Derrida speaks of the illusion of metaphysics. A meaning is never given pure and simple, it is always an effect of the play with differences within language, so an absolute present truth is never there, it is always deferred (postponed). He adds that everything can be deconstructed, which explains the instability of knowledge. For Derrida, language or texts are not a natural reflection of the world. Text structures our interpretation of the world. Following Heidegger, Derrida thinks that language shapes us: texts create a clearing that we understand as reality. Derrida sees the history of western thought as based on opposition: good vs. evil, mind vs. matter, man vs; woman, speech vs; writing. These oppositions are defined hierarchically: the second term is seen as a corruption of the first, the terms are not equal opposites.

Ludwig Wittgenstein [Wittgenstein1958] like Derrida speaks of the multiplicity of language games, the whole life consists in playing with language games. In his *Philosophical investigations*, he stresses that philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is.

Emmanuel Levinas argues that the call for the other is prior to the subject [Levinas1963] . He defines the trace as what bears witness to something that has not been there, that is older than time. He finds the basis of the subject on ethics. Ethics is prior to the subject, it does not tell you what to do, but rather tells you what you do do.

Taylor describes the technological world as the ultimate projection of the self to the world. For him, Heidegger and Levinas question the subject as an ethical question. He stresses on the end of the self with the death of God. The self becomes an effect (post-modern) rather than a cause, a producing source (modern self). Stable self becomes an unstable product, it becomes a trace. But the deconstruction of the self is not the destruction of the self. The self does not construct the truth but opens to the truth. So what is it that gives rise to our language, thinking, understanding? Taylor calls it the divine milieu which correspond to Heidegger's opening.

Gilles Deleuze [Deleuze1985] asks “What is consciousness?” and argues that like Freud, Nietzsche thinks that consciousness is the region of the ego affected by the external world.

In *Theology and social theory* [Milbank1990], John Milbank introduces his book by saying: “I treat the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Foucault and Derrida as elaborations of a single nihilistic philosophy, paying relatively less attention to their differences of opinion”. We can agree with a definition of a nihilistic philosophy since Nietzsche, but what happened then to metaphysics, after being trapped in Asian philosophy? The main element in our view, is the fact that it is no more possible to see the world as dual oppositions like Derrida describes the western thought, but to insert another level of rationality between nature and super-nature, which is human reason.

Nietzsche's philosophy is nihilistic and considered as a wrong view by Buddhism although it has been build on the influence of translations of Buddhist texts. Heidegger tried to find a new way to consider metaphysics, but in our view, he seems to have moved toward a kind of Taoist view, with his disclosing and opening which is close to the Tao. “The Tao that can be described is not the Tao” say the Taoist philosophers, and that matches very much the idea of the opening, prior, beyond our understanding.

The works of later philosophers have focused on deconstruction. Jacques Derrida and Ludwig Wittgenstein have focused on language, Heidegger and Levinas have put ethics prior to the subject, and Gilles Deleuze has stressed the importance of the external world on consciousness. Heidegger and Mark C. Taylor have seen the importance of technology on the subject. All these different views are very close in their different ways to the human sciences of Ferdinand de Saussure for linguistics, Freud for psychology and Karl Marx and Auguste Comte for sociology.

So we can argue that metaphysics since Nietzsche has been split between Asian philosophy and the western human sciences, the latter being the new way to think for western philosophers. The result is a three level vision of the universe: physics, human reason and supra-natural. The theory of mediation of Jean Gagnepain deals with human reason and diffracts it into four rationalities: logical, technical, ethnical and ethical. There is no hierarchy among these different plans or levels of rationality that constitute psychic life. The logical level is connected with the *logos* or knowledge, the technical level with the *tropos* or art and technology, the ethnical level with the *nomos* or history and society, and the ethical level with the *dikè* or the will. This theory which appeared in the 60s is based on the observation of pathologies like aphasia, atechnia, perversion and psychosis, and neurosis and psychopathy. This connection of human reason with scientific observation has made some authors say that Jean Gagnepain has founded the human sciences.

Beyond metaphysics

As we have seen previously, Nietzsche is considered to be the last metaphysical thinker under the influence of the Buddhist scripture that were first studied by Schopenhauer. His philosophy is characterized by the idea of the Death of God, but rather the Christian God. As he claims in the *twilight of idols*: “Schopenhauer was hostile to life: therefore pity became for him a virtue. Nothing in our unhealthy modernity is more unhealthy than Christianity”, and in *gay science*, he argues that “the Christian resolve to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad”. His nihilism however is considered as a wrong view by Buddhism

[Rinpoche1997] because it does not take into account that actions cause karmic effect in a relation of cause and effect. But why did not Nietzsche take this law into account, in his metaphysics? Maybe because of a problem of interpretation of Buddhist texts. It is interesting to stress the inversion of the meaning of enlightenment between the Buddhist view which is related to detachment, and the meaning of the Western enlightenment project which is a kind of positive study of the world. The same inversion occurred in the representation of the symbol of the wheel of time (*swastika*), and the *Haken Kreuz* of the Nazi. As Derrida said: “Of course, there was an abusive interpretation of Nietzsche by the Nazis. No doubt, Nietzsche did not want that, it is sure. But nevertheless, how can we account for the fact that the only philosopher or thinker that was referred to as a predecessor by the Nazis was Nietzsche? So there must be in Nietzsche's discourse, something which was in affinity with the Nazis, and you can say this and try to analyze this possibility without of course, concluding that Nietzsche himself was a Nazi, or that everything in Nietzsche was in affinity with the Nazis. But we have to account for the fact that there was a lineage, there was some genealogy” [Derrida].

We have seen the result of the use of Nietzsche's view by the Nazis and the reality of karmic effects with the destruction of Germany in the end of WW2. Ironically, nihilism has also influenced the East world by communism and the creation of a new man, first in the soviet union, and then in the People's Republic of China from 1949 on. The arrival of communism in China meant the denial of religion and Chinese tradition, and later the invasion of Tibet. One can see the effectiveness of karmic effect with the growing movement of Falun Gong which is also considered a wrong view by Buddhism and challenges the Chinese communist party. The same relation of cause and effect happens all the time and denies the very principle of nihilism and eternal return to affirm the law of Karma. Chinese people who strive to return to their tradition should know that the only way to escape the chaotic results of one in the 'thirty percent' of mistakes that Mao Zedong has made during his reign according to the Communist Party, is to let the Dalai Lama go back to his country with all the honors due to his rank.

Conclusion

We can argue that Nietzsche is the last metaphysical thinker because his philosophy meant the completion of metaphysics and its dissolution in Asian philosophy and the human sciences. Heidegger's late work “The End of Philosophy and the task of Thinking” consists solely in the character of thinking which does not attempt to dominate, but engages in disclosing and opening up what shows itself, emerges, and is manifest. New philosophers engage mainly in the field of human sciences and try to analyze language, ethics or the influence of technology on human reason. The end of metaphysics as an autonomous discipline can be understood as the end of the enlightenment project and modernity. Nietzsche's philosophy initiated the relativism that one can find in post-modern societies, with the cohabitation of different ethos and vision of the universe and of man in the world. If we see man as a rope stretched between nature and super-nature, the man-to-nature relation corresponds to western sciences and the enlightenment project, and the man-to-super-nature relation is close to the Buddhist enlightenment based on detachment. Ontology and human reason are at the intersection of Eastern vision from above that explains relation of human with super-nature and Western scientific study from below that situates human in nature. If philosophers succeed in unifying the definition of man in the universe, the following question could be “To what extent can the vision of God in

the religions of the Book match the description of the Sacred world in Hinduism and Buddhism? ”.

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