

ABOUT "THE ETERNAL RECURRENCE AND THE BECOMING"*

George FOCA-RODI

Pianist composer and essayist, USA.

Corresponding author: georgefocarodi@yahoo.com

He corrupted me! (Er hat mich kaputt gemacht !)

These are Heidegger's words when referring to Nietzsche. In his early life, when he was a teacher and speaker at various universities of Germany, Heidegger was obsessed with Nietzsche. He included Nietzsche's opinions in his speeches, sometimes in a dialectical mode, and harshly argumentative, because, as he stated, this was the best way to clarify his own thinking. Heidegger's book, "*Nietzsche*", is of paramount importance in understanding the concepts of "*Becoming*", "*Eternal Recurrence*" and "*Will to Power*". The "*will to power*" and Nietzsche's dream of an *Übermensch* whose destiny was to lead the many of lesser value, triggered the resentment of European thinkers, the majority of them English. Nietzsche's influence on the existentialist movement of the later Sartre and Camus is better understood after reading Heidegger's commentaries on "*The Birth of Tragedy*", "*The Gay Science*", "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*", "*The Antichrist*" and "*The Will to Power*". Beckett and Ionesco, the "absurdists", were also inspired by Nietzsche's style of writing (caustic-with incisive irony), especially when referring to *The Old and New Testaments*. These Holy Books dominate the realm of the absurd, unchallenged by any other absurdities ever created by mankind. Eve's fable is a masterpiece that exemplifies the absolute need for ignorance and deep fear of knowledge, professed firmly by the "*Creators of God*", the writers and prophets of *The Old Testament*, and the Four Apostles—*The Holy Gospels'* "*story tellers*" of the *New One*. Heidegger's opinion was that, when Nietzsche stated "*God is Dead*", he became a nihilist, proclaiming victory over the devaluation

of all values of life. Interestingly enough, Nietzsche's philosophy is ontological in nature. Heidegger regarded Nietzsche as being a metaphysical thinker who perfected nihilism! The term nihilism, applied to some of Nietzsche's thoughts, evolved over time and lost its significance. Listen to Nietzsche himself talking about nihilism: *I praise, I do not reproach, (nihilism's) arrival. I believe it is one of the greatest crises, a moment of the deepest self-reflection of humanity. Whether man recovers from it, whether he becomes master of this crisis, is a question of his strength!*¹ In this context, we should remember Samuel Beckett's words: *Nothing is more real than nothing! (Malone Dies 1951)*

Heidegger's criticism of metaphysical concepts is that, most of the time, European philosophers did not discriminate between *Seiende-Being*, and *Sein-To Be*. The majority of these philosophers renounced asking what it means to exist, and, especially, what a "*Being*" really is, and they exonerated, perhaps unwillingly, the disparaging of this subject. In his famous book "*Sein und Zeit*", Heidegger considers this a failure of philosophy in general, calling it *Seinsvergessenheit (The oblivion of being)*.

"*The Eternal Recurrence*" and "*The Becoming*" are the most significant concepts of Nietzsche's philosophy. The following example about the eternal return is as profound as it is beautiful: *"What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you, into your loneliest loneliness, and say to you: This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be*

* this is the second part of a series of three studies published in consecutive issues of IJCR

*nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and every unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust! Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine."*²

We must remember also Eugene Ionesco's *King Beringer*, who rages in despair: *Why was I born if it wasn't forever? ("Exit the King")*. This question proves again and again, that, beyond painful doubts, there is always left in our hearts a last hope for an "eternal recurrence".

Now let us talk about "*Being and Becoming*". When reading "*Sein und Zeit*", we understand the difference between Heidegger's language of thought and that used by Nietzsche. The latter's one is crisp and provocative, with an unparalleled creative imagination, while Heidegger's is dense, sometimes shocking, and definitely more difficult to follow. In his book, he invites us to a discussion about beings and things, that all, must, and will disappear! Humanity needs time to measure the duration of life and of events, from the cosmic to the almost imperceptible. This is redundant information, representing common knowledge, but, only up to a point, when Heidegger introduces new and original nuances while talking about "*Dasein*". An imperfect translation of this word is "*Being*". There is also another way of thinking about it as "*Existence*".

I have also to emphasize that a misrepresentation of it is "*being there*". Heidegger was adamantly against this translation, which falsified his intention. Only when written *Da Sein* does it mean being there. Heidegger, when talking about (*The*) *Being* within its limited time to be, means that the only way to grasp the significance of it occurs when one goes through, or, better said, lives within a "*Conscious Existence of Being*"! Referring to Nietzsche's opinion on the subject he states: "*To stamp 'Becoming' with the character of 'Being' – that is the supreme will to power*".

The difference between a *being* and "*Being*" (*Existence*) is apparent and easy to understand. The meaning of *beingness* is what Heidegger discussed in his book and, of course, what a being's importance is in relationship with other beings. Beings are alive and they define what life means. But "*The Existence*" represents the complex sum of all things that are found in the universe, alive or not, actually *The Universe itself*. In spite of this, only humans should be considered "*beings*" because they are the only ones who can understand their *beingness*! Among all forms of life, the consciousness kind, rendered to mankind, is the only one capable to determine what to be means. The rest, made of all other forms of life, represents an inferior manifestation of it in the realm of biology. Heidegger believes that *Dasein* exists in two forms (modalities). The first one has authenticity or, inauthenticity (not relevant), and the second one, that cannot be defined because it is without contour – shapeless and undefinable. Nietzsche imagined this concept 30 years prior to Heidegger, but his creed was that "*Becoming*" has greater significance. *The Becoming* is born out of "*the will to power*" that eventually goes through a metamorphosis, affirming at the end "*the will to live*". Therefore, Nietzsche's conclusion "*That everything recurs, is the closest approximation of the world of 'Becoming' into one of 'Being': a climax of meditation*". As a result, "*Becoming*" is life's crescendo – necessary for the existence of beings. Nietzsche justifies his lack of interest in becoming redundant and analytical, like so many others before him, about the substance of "*Being*". We know that Nietzsche was adamantly opposed to the concept of "*transcendental beingness*", because it motivates and explains the need for God.

After reading his "*Schriften für und gegen Wagner*", one listens better to Wagner's music. The philosopher's objections to the poorly written libretti (by the composer himself), as well as his criticism about the shape and structure of some musical ideas, Wagner's famous Leitmotifs, are only informative. When it comes to the evaluation of music itself, Nietzsche was wrong and unfair. Besides the weaknesses of his libretti, there is something more significant and profound to be discovered when searching Wagner's ideas. What is it?

Well, first of all, it is Wagner's inner conflict, his enormous ego, his musical genius, and his arrogance. Secondly, it is his ill-conceived "*will to power*", and, tragically, the promotion of a narrow-minded Germanic nationalistic dream! Our perplexity becomes extraordinary when we realize the contrast that exists between a pitiful man and the magnificence of his music. After a while, we pause and understand. For the educated, the joy is much greater!

Continuing the thought about Nietzsche's influence in so many domains, I have to mention Richard Strauss' symphonic poem "*Also Sprach Zarathustra*", inspired by the philosopher's book from which I selected a paragraph.³ God, this time, is an Ass. We'll hear him bray: YE-A!) Let's listen: *All on a sudden however, Zarathustra's ear was frightened: for the cave which had hitherto been full of noise and laughter, became all at once still as death; - his nose, however, smelt a sweet-scented vapour and incense-odour, as if from burning pine-cones.*

"What happeneth? What are they about?" he asked himself, and stole up to the entrance, that he might be able unobserved to see his guests. But wonder upon wonder! What was he then obliged to behold with his own eyes! "They have all of them become PIOUS again, they PRAY, they are mad!" - said he, and was astonished beyond measure. And forsooth! all these higher men, the two kings, the pope out of service, the evil magician, the voluntary beggar, the wanderer and shadow, the old soothsayer, the spiritually conscientious one, and the ugliest man - they all lay on their knees like children and credulous old women, and worshipped the ass. And just then began the ugliest man to gurgle and snort, as if something unutterable in him tried to find expression; when, however, he had actually found words, behold! it was a pious, strange litany in praise of the adored and censed ass. And the litany sounded thus: Amen! And glory and honour and wisdom and thanks and praise and strength be to our God, from everlasting to everlasting! The ass, however, here brayed YE-A!

Did you like it? I hope so! Now let's go back to... "more serious" subjects.

The Christian Doctrine is discussed in great detail in "*The Antichrist*". Read with attention: *Paul invented the doctrines of 'eternal life' and*

*'the Judgement' as a means to his ends. Science is the "first" sin, the "original" sin. "This alone is morality" "Thou shalt not know" - the rest follows." The priest invents and encourages every kind of suffering and distress, so that man may not have the opportunity to become scientific, which requires a considerable degree of free time, health, and an outlook of confident positivism. Thus, the religious authorities work hard to make and keep people feeling sinful, unworthy, and unhappy."*⁴

Some critics of Nietzsche's philosophy seem to hang on to a simplistic and false assumption that he was delusional. In the opinion of his detractors, he was an elitist who dreamt about the governance of the powerful over the masses of common men. Nietzsche argued that there are existing two moralities living side by side: the morality of the Master, born in the soul of a generous, noble man, and the morality of slaves, of the meek and unworthy, that is born in the hearts of the weak.

Zarathustra teaches the *Übermensch* to separate from the herd and guide lesser humans to a brighter life. His example of courage, dignity, desire for all that makes life worthy to be lived, love for women, sexuality, the arts and music, will excite the masses to follow him on a path that will, finally, bring happiness to all. The *Übermensch*, according to Nietzsche's critics, is entitled to make the final decision concerning the faith of many, regardless of whether pain and suffering are the result of such an act. Therefore, the concept in itself seems to be unethical because it leads to dictatorship.

Before trying, once more, to explain the meaning of the *Übermensch*, I want to remind the readers that Alvin Toffler's predictions come into being right now. Already, the many and less educated follow the thinkers, the elite inventors and innovators, without questioning the need for all the gadgets that come their way daily, which, finally, succeed in making them more dependent, and therefore, more insignificant.

The new leaders of the world are the "one percent", the money oligarchs, the cynical few, who decide about war and peace. In short, they are "the deciders" (G.W. Bush comes to mind), they are in control of peoples' lives. What these kinds of leaders are lacking is the beauty of that

superior being, whose high morals and noble aspirations will give hope for a better life to all the meek and needy.

The *Übermensch* does not want to exploit the common man for his own benefit. The less gifted will be guided toward a future in which their lives will become meaningful, based on their abilities and capacities to produce. The superiority of the *Übermensch* is not due to a specific race. He does not have a lust for power. It is his natural gift that will allow and oblige him to lead common men.

Let me exemplify, once more, why Bertrand Russell disliked Nietzsche. Listen:

"They are no philosophical race, these Englishmen: Bacon signifies an attack on the philosophical spirit; Hobbes, Hume, and Locke, a debasement and lowering of the value of the concept of "philosophy, for more than a century. It was against Hume that Kant arose, and rose; it was Locke of whom Schelling said, understandably, "je m'éprise Locke" (I despise Locke); in their fight against the English-mechanistic dollification of the world, Hegel and Schopenhauer were of one mind (with Goethe)" ...

"It is characteristic of such unphilosophical race that it clings firmly to Christianity; they need its discipline to become "moralized" and somewhat humanized". "For more sensitive nostrils, even this English Christianity still has a typically English odor of spleen and alcoholic dissipation against which it is needed for good reasons as a remedy - the subtler poisoning against the coarser: a subtler poisoning is indeed for clumsy peoples some progress, a step toward spiritualization".⁵ It is obvious that his irony, when writing about "Englishmen's religiosity", the puritans and their obsessive need to be righteous, was profoundly offensive and, as a result, one should understand why the expression of hatred against him is so vitriolic, even now, among the majority of British "thinkers" (are they, are there any?) (I know, I am vicious now!). To me, Nietzsche's harshest critic, Bertrand Russell, the troubadour who serenaded with sweet songs for peace, the two superpowers of the last century, was a humanitarian activist, with great appeal to the less informed. However, I cannot find any depth in his thinking. Preaching about the goodness of man, the importance of

friendship between nations, or the misery of war etc., does not make one a philosopher. I suggest that Heidegger, Sartre or Camus are of much greater significance than Russell.

Nietzsche is regarded by most of the English philosophers as belonging to an alien culture. The truth is that if someone wants to understand what the tradition of Western European Philosophy is and what the accomplishments of the great thinkers from the time of ancient Greece until the end of the 19th century were, the reading of his books becomes a must. And, after that, I'm sure, his profoundly disturbing ideas will trouble even the most olympian thinker, who will be forced to come out of complacency and take a stand for, or against Nietzsche's philosophy.

One must observe the difference of style that exists between the Anglo Saxon philosophers and the Germans. The first seem to enjoy a more simplistic and direct mode of expressing their ideas. They avoid terms that are unfamiliar to the common reader. English philosophers seem to be less refined than the Germans, who, most of the time use a scientific or, in Nietzsche's case, poetic vocabulary that requires an educated reader.

The reason I write about Nietzsche with such enthusiasm goes far beyond his philosophy. His style is poetic, sometimes sarcastic, vitriolic, funny, dramatic, and romantic, using a kind of metaphor that surprises the reader all the time. You don't need to drink lots of coffee when reading Nietzsche's books. They keep you alert and you are entertained by his vivacious and exciting style. But, at the same time, we are obliged to reflect and absorb all the information that flows out of his pages, and, as a consequence, feel compelled to "travel" wherever Nietzsche sends us, in all corners of the world, searching all times of history, to learn about what the great minds of the past have written.

We find out what poets, historians, philosophers, artists, politicians and military leaders have thought and written about, from the beginning of time. As a result, we learn about the universe, mankind and "*Eternal Recurrence*", because... *we don't have any other choice!* A great number of contemporary writers admire him and continue to develop new theories born out of his ideas. Among the most inflammatory and

contradictory of Nietzsche's concepts, is his dream and hope for the arrival of a real *Übermensch*. Also, the false impression caused by "*The Antichrist*" is another reason for the unrepentant hatred against him.

Once more I should remind the reader that Nietzsche was not critical of Christ, but of the Christian Doctrine, which distorted His Message. Nietzsche claims that unlike the *Übermensch's* hunger for life and its beauty, Jesus renounced it in favor of... A (His) "*Kingdom of God*".

Vacuous righteous men, sinless people, priests, puritans, all of them, were a repulsive obnoxious irritant for Nietzsche, who stated in one of his famous quotes: "*After coming into contact with a religious man I always feel I have to wash my hands!*"

References

1. Nietzsche, Friedrich (1974), *The Gay Science*, translation by W. Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York.
2. Nietzsche, Friedrich (1918), *The Antichrist*, translation by H.L. Mencken, Download from Free Encyclopedia.
3. Nietzsche, Friedrich (1886), *Beyond Good and Evil*, translation by W. Kaufmann, Vintage books, Random House.

Endnotes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (585), translated by Walter Kaufmann.
2. *Idem*, *The Gay Science* (341).
3. *Idem*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (The Awakening LXXVII).
4. *Idem*, *The Antichrist* (47-49), translation by H.L. Mencken, 1918, Download from Free Encyclopedia.
5. *Idem*, *Beyond Good and Evil* (252), translation by W. Kaufmann, Vintage books, Random House, 1886, p. 192.