

“We Hyperboreans”: Platonism and Politics in Heidegger and Nietzsche

Robert Sinnerbrink

In the opening section of *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche compares himself and his philosophical reader with the mythical Hyperboreans.

—Let us look one another in the face. We are Hyperboreans—we know well enough how much out of the way we live. ‘Neither by land nor by water wilt thou find the way to the Hyperboreans’: Pindar already knew that of us. Beyond the North, beyond the ice, beyond death—*our* life, *our* happiness... We have discovered happiness, we know the way, we have found the exit out of whole millennia of labyrinth.¹

Nietzsche’s allusion is to that blissful race of people, described by Pindar, who dwell beyond the north wind (the Boreas) in a land of warmth and plenty. The Hyperboreans are free from sickness and death. They worship Apollo, who delights “in their perpetual feasts and hymns.”² The Muse is always with them, and they are free from the tyranny of Nemesis.³ We too are Hyperboreans, Nietzsche suggests, in that we seek a way out of the labyrinth of metaphysics, a philosophical happiness beyond what Nietzsche famously called “European nihilism.”

Martin Heidegger took very seriously Nietzsche’s exhortation to overcome nihilism through Hyperborean solitude. Heidegger too sought an exit from the labyrinth of Platonic metaphysics. Heidegger too alludes to a luminous yet obscure beginning, covered over by metaphysics, but which culminates in the nihilism of technological modernity. In comprehending Nietzsche’s completion of metaphysics, however, the Hyperborean thinker of Being is able to discern the traces of “another beginning” beyond the will to order of modern technics.⁴

In what follows, I want to critically explore Heidegger’s thesis that metaphysics is Platonism, hence that Nietzsche’s metaphysics, as “reversed Platonism,” is the completion of metaphysics. Against Heidegger, I want to argue that Nietzsche is more a political, rather than metaphysical, Platonist. Nietzsche, along with Plato, demands that the philosopher be a law-giver and legislator, that is, a creator of “noble lies” that will produce a new type of human being and thereby prepare for an overcoming of nihilism. This account, I argue, depends upon the distinction between exoteric and

esoteric perspectives in Nietzsche—or between political and philosophical doctrines—a distinction also to be found in Plato. Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche obliterates this distinction, confusing exoteric with esoteric or political with philosophical doctrines, a confusion facilitating the ontological interpretation of Nietzsche as “the last metaphysician of the West.” Nietzsche’s political or exoteric rhetoric, however, is at odds with his deeper philosophical or esoteric teaching, and this difficulty is repeated in Heidegger’s own thought. For all the “Platonic” elements in Nietzsche, Heidegger’s Nietzsche fails to appreciate the originality of Nietzsche’s philosophical modernism.

Heidegger’s Nietzsche

The thesis of Heidegger’s monumental *Nietzsche* text, as Derrida once remarked, is much more complex than readers generally admit. It would be difficult to disagree, but one could still venture a hypothesis. Expressed in the form of an ‘argument’ one could summarize it thus: metaphysics as a whole is Platonism; Nietzsche’s metaphysics, however, is “reversed Platonism”; but reversed Platonism is the completion of Platonism; hence Nietzsche’s metaphysics of the will to power is the completion of metaphysics as a whole. Let me elaborate this highly schematic account a little further.

Heidegger’s interpretation is oriented throughout by the thesis that Nietzsche thinks within the horizon of Western metaphysics. Metaphysics as a whole, for Heidegger, is defined as the inquiry into the guiding question of philosophy, the question: “What is a being (*Seiendes*)?” Nietzsche’s response to this question is formulated in the thought of the will to power; the Being of beings is grounded in the will to power, which Heidegger interprets as unconditional subjectivity. This interpretation of the Being of beings, however, is a reversal of the metaphysics of Plato, for whom the Being of beings is grasped as Idea. Indeed, Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche is guided throughout by a statement found in Nietzsche’s notebooks for 1870/71: “My philosophy is a *reversed Platonism*. The farther removed from true beings, all the purer more beautiful and better it is. Life in illusion (*Schein*) as goal.”⁵ Nietzsche fundamentally reverses the Platonic hierarchy of Being as Idea over sensuous Becoming, the supersensible over the sensible, intelligibility over affectivity, philosophy over art, truth over illusion. The primacy of thought over Being expressed in the doctrine of Ideas becomes the primacy of self-willing absolute subjectivity, as an expression of the will to power, over beings as a whole. Reversed Platonism is its most extreme form; it is the “truth” of Platonism, as Hegel would say, which emerges only through its extreme inversion. Because Nietzsche’s metaphysics is completed Platonism, hence completed metaphysics, Heidegger’s confrontation with Nietzsche is a confrontation “with all Western thought hitherto.”⁶

Heidegger’s decisive move lies in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s will to power as articulating a “subjectivization” of the Platonic Idea. Metaphysics as a whole develops

the Platonic interpretation of Being of Idea, right up to the Hegelian supersession and Nietzschean reversal of Platonism. Indeed, it is Plato, according to Heidegger, who inaugurates the fateful shift from the original Greek understanding of Being as *phusis* to a conception of Being as enduring presence or idea. In so doing, metaphysical thinking shifts its focus from the emergence-process of uncovering beings to the enduring and unchanging presence of the beings thus uncovered for noetic vision. This process inaugurates Western metaphysics, which in the course of its history effectively covers over the silent emergence-process of Being itself. Heidegger's thought of the "ontological difference" between Being and beings—the originary event of presencing as distinguished from the enduring presence of beings or events—is essential to this interpretation.

To return to Nietzsche, the complete obliteration of Being, however, occurs once Being itself is grounded in self-willing subjectivity. This final step, according to Heidegger, occurs in Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power, which obliterates the question of Being altogether: Being becomes merely the "last wisp of evaporating reality" that is swept away by the metaphysical interpretation of beings as grounded in the will to power of unconditional self-willing subjectivity. Here we arrive at the most extreme reversal, but also the culmination, of the Platonic hierarchy of thought as Idea over beings as a whole. With Nietzsche, the "what" of beings as a whole is interpreted as will to power, the "how" of beings is understood through the eternal return of the same, but the "that" of beings is reduced to the perspectival schematization of Chaos in accordance with the exigencies of subjectivity. Heidegger's history of metaphysics is thus a narrative of decline, a *Verfallsgeschichte*: Being as Idea declines into subjectivity as will, as will to power, and finally, as the emptiness of the "will to will" that provides the metaphysical basis of modern technology—the final stage of the calculative, ordering, securing, and objectification of beings as a whole and hence the complete obliteration of Being as such.

Heidegger's Ends of Metaphysics

In sum, Heidegger interprets Nietzsche, like all Western thinkers, as affirming "the predominance of beings over against Being." At the same time, Nietzsche has the distinction of anticipating "the consummation of the modern age with his unique thought of the will to power"⁷—and thus completing the metaphysical trajectory of the forgetting of Being. Indeed, for Heidegger, Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power becomes a prophecy about the historical destiny of modernity itself.

Nietzsche is the transition from the preparatory phase of the modern age—historically, the time between 1600 and 1900—to the beginning of its

consummation. We do not know the time span of this consummation. Presumably, it will either be very brief and catastrophic or else very long, in the sense of a self-perpetuating arrangement of what has been attained.⁸

What we do know is that Nietzsche heralds the consummation of metaphysics and of modernity. The last metaphysician of the West is the metaphysician of the epoch of planetary technology.⁹

Heidegger's thesis is clearly articulated in section 22 of the lectures on European nihilism. According to Heidegger, "We must grasp Nietzsche's philosophy as the metaphysics of subjectivity."¹⁰ Like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the genitive here is both objective and subjective: on the one hand, Nietzsche's metaphysics takes subjectivity as its basic principle, on the other, this metaphysics is a manifestation of the unfolding of subjectivity itself. Nietzsche's relation to this Cartesian turn to subjectivity is fundamental: what begins with Descartes finds its completion in Hegel and in Nietzsche. To this end, Heidegger discusses what is meant by "subjectivity" in an earlier discussion of the dominance of the subject in the modern age. The Cartesian turn to the self-certainty of the thinking subject signals the beginning of the foundation of modern metaphysics. Cartesian metaphysics marks the shift from a conception of beings as grounded in an underlying *sub-iectum*—the Latin interpretation of the Greek *hypokeimenon*—to a conception where the human cognitive subject becomes the grounding principle of beings in their intelligibility. The principle of the *ego cogito* means that the intelligibility of all beings is determined by that which can be presented for a representing ego or 'I'. The metaphysical question of Being becomes the epistemological quest for the certain representation of beings. Nietzsche's rejection of the unified Cartesian *cogito*, for Heidegger, thus shares the same fundamental metaphysical position of self-willing subjectivity. In Nietzsche's case, however, what underlies the representation of beings is not the Cartesian cognitive subject but rather the body with its drives and affects. Nietzsche's metaphysics, Heidegger continues, should thus be understood as a metaphysics of the absolute or unconditioned subjectivity of the will to power.

In Heidegger's account, however, the consummation of metaphysics occurs in a transitional process stretching from Hegel to Nietzsche. Hegel's metaphysics is a metaphysics of the absolute subjectivity of self-knowing will or Spirit. Nietzsche's metaphysics is that of the absolute or unconditioned subjectivity of the drives and affects of the body interpreted as will to power.¹¹ The inner connection between Hegel and Nietzsche, Heidegger argues, derives from the metaphysical determination of the human as *animale rationale*.¹² Once subjectivity becomes the determining ground for the interpretation of beings, the question of the meaning of the human also comes to the fore. Kant's question "What is man?" is answered by Hegel and Nietzsche respectively in the following manner: Hegel's metaphysics determines the meaning of subjectivity according to a speculatively-dialectically understood *rationalitas*, while Nietzsche's metaphysics, inverting Hegel, determines subjectivity by taking the *animalitas*—the drives and affects of the body—as its guide.¹³ Thus Hegel and Nietzsche together not only

complete the metaphysics of modernity, in so doing they also complete the determination of the metaphysical meaning of the human as *animale rationale*.

This completion of the metaphysical “humanism”—which for Heidegger has its roots, once again, in Platonic metaphysics—marks also the beginning of a transitional process that gestures towards the possibility of another beginning, another way of experiencing the being of human being beyond the possibilities circumscribed by the metaphysical tradition. In this regard, Heidegger’s Greco-German “grand narrative” of the end of metaphysics provides the paradigm for a multitude of contemporary deconstructions of subjectivity, of identity and difference, and of the philosophical-historical roots of modernity itself. However, this “grand narrative” of the history of Being, which eclipses Plato’s sun in the *chiaroscuro* of modern technics, must itself be subjected to critique. In what follows, then, I want to question Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche as an (inverted) metaphysical Platonist. Nietzsche’s reversal of Platonism is more concerned with its political significance for the production of a new human type rather than its metaphysical coherence as a doctrine concerning the Being of beings.

Nietzsche as Hyperborean

Let us turn now to an interpretation of Nietzsche’s Hyperborean view of nihilism. I shall explore the thesis that the figure of the Hyperborean philosopher is a metaphor for Nietzsche’s “Platonism”: not metaphysical Platonism, in Heidegger’s sense, but political Platonism. “Politics” should be understood here, as Rosen observes, in the broadest philosophical sense of “forming the soul of the citizen,” to speak with Plato, or “creating a new human type,” to speak with Nietzsche.¹⁴ Nietzsche’s reversal of Plato can be understood, Rosen continues, as the inversion of the rank-order of theoretical and practical-productive elements in the Platonic conception of philosophy. We might gloss this by saying that while Plato’s philosopher-ruler is guided by knowledge of the True and the Good, Nietzsche’s philosopher-creator translates Dionysian wisdom into life-affirming interpretations or illusions.

In the passage from *The Antichrist* I quoted at the outset, Nietzsche contrasts the Hyperborean philosopher with the decadence of modern individuals. This somewhat ironic discussion develops one of Nietzsche’s favourite themes, his critique of modernity; I say ironic because, as Nietzsche admits, he too is a modern decadent, one who adopts the mask of Hyperborean hermeneut in order to diagnose and overcome the maladies of modernity. We moderns, Nietzsche tells us, should reject this “tolerance and the largeness of heart which ‘forgives’ everything because it ‘understands’ everything.”¹⁵ Enlightened tolerance is an enervating sirocco to the untimely Hyperborean. “Better to live among ice,” Nietzsche declaims, “than among modern virtues and other south winds!” Nietzsche again refers to himself as a Hyperborean in the seventh paragraph

of *The Antichrist*,¹⁶ a passage in which Nietzsche comments on the need for a radical therapeutic approach to our unhealthy modernity. “To be physician here, to be inexorable here, to wield the knife here—that pertains to us, that is our kind of philanthropy, with that are we philosophers, we Hyperboreans!”¹⁷ The philosopher takes a critical knife to the diseased body of culture, not only to diagnose our malady but to prescribe a possible cure. The philosopher is a physician who diagnoses, an artist who transfigures, and a legislator who prescribes “remedies”—interpretations or values—for our decadent modernity. For the malady from which modernity suffers, according to Nietzsche, is the advent of nihilism: the self-devaluation of the highest values. This “uncanniest of guests,” Nietzsche writes in an oft quoted note, is already among us: “The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer.”¹⁸

We should note here that Nietzsche’s diagnosis of European nihilism has multiple aspects and senses: there are active, reactive, and passive forms of nihilism, differing and interconnected stages whose characteristics are manifested in a multiplicity of social, cultural, aesthetic, and political phenomena (liberal democracy, socialism, bourgeois morality, scientific positivism, Wagnerian romanticism, to name a few). In its broadest sense, according to Nietzsche, “nihilism” names a cultural-historical condition that is the culmination of two millennia of Platonic metaphysics and Christian morality (or “Platonism for the people”). This historical process, in which the will to truth underlying European modernity becomes self-conscious, and thus self-undermining, is “the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe.”¹⁹ This is Nietzsche’s reprise of Hegel’s speculative thesis concerning the dialectical conversion of nihilism into philosophical wisdom. From within the finite historical perspectives of Christian morality, however, the meaning of the various symptoms of European nihilism is not yet apparent.²⁰ Only the philosopher as cultural physician can interpret the meaning of these symptoms, tracing these to their origin, and proposing some kind of remedy.

Overcoming nihilism, however, would therefore seem to require the assumption of a supra-historical, supra-moral perspective—“beyond good and evil.” This is the synoptic vision of the Hyperborean philosopher, who has already traversed the historical experience of nihilism so as to be able to retrospectively decipher its significance. In doing so, Nietzsche acknowledges, the Hyperborean philosopher remains a modern decadent; at the same time, however, the Hyperborean encompasses the totality of historical perspectives, or finite human types, and has thereby found a way out of the labyrinth of Christian-Platonic metaphysics. Nietzsche’s Hyperborean perspective is indicated in the following passage, written in late 1887 or early 1888. “He that speaks here,” Nietzsche writes,

has done nothing so far but reflect: a philosopher and solitary by instinct, who has found his advantage in standing aside and outside, in patience, in procrastination, in staying behind; as a spirit of daring and experiment that has already lost its way once in every labyrinth of the future; as a soothsaying-bird spirit who looks

back when relating what will come; as the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself.²¹

The Hyperborean philosopher is the perfect nihilist: the one who has surpassed finite perspectivism in order to relate “the history of the next two centuries.”²² The Hyperborean nihilist must have traversed the totality of human historical types, to have become “all the names in history” in order to philosophically legislate for, and thereby create, the future as a horizon of possibility. This supra-historical or synoptic vision enables Nietzsche to engage in a critical diagnosis of modern nihilism, an historical reconstruction of its genealogical roots, as well as a therapeutic promotion of life-affirming interpretations as a counter-movement to nihilism. Nietzsche’s Hyperborean or perfect nihilist, I would suggest, is thus a radical descendant of Hegel’s speculative phenomenologist. Hegel’s phenomenology, as a self-consummating skepticism, becomes Nietzsche’s Hyperborean nihilism as the self-overcoming of finite historical perspectivism.²³

Esoteric and Exoteric perspectives

To summarize this interpretation, Nietzsche’s figure of the Hyperborean philosopher is a cultural physician who is at the same time the perfect nihilist. The Hyperborean is both “a child of his time” and able to transcend finite historical perspectivism in order to “survey the millennia” in a critical-therapeutic diagnosis of modernity. Nietzsche explicitly articulates this dual historical-supra-historical perspective of the Hyperborean in the foreword to *The Case of Wagner*, published in 1888:

What does a philosopher require of himself as the first and last thing? To overcome his time within himself, to become ‘timeless’. With what must he undergo therefore his hardest struggle? With that precisely whereby he is the child of his time. Well! I am as well as Wagner the child of this time, that is to say a decadent: except that I understood this, I defended myself against it. The philosopher in me defended himself against it.²⁴

Nietzsche the Hyperborean philosopher struggles with Nietzsche the modern decadent in order to overcome the historical experience of nihilism. The “happiness” of the Hyperborean is to have found a way out of the labyrinth of Platonic-Christian metaphysics, a “happiness” or success which, Nietzsche intimates, was denied both to ancient and modern Hyperboreans, but is achieved by Nietzsche alone. I take this to mean Nietzsche takes himself to have identified and realized the philosophical task of

producing new forms of life through the teaching of the doctrines of will to power and eternal return. In other words, Nietzsche's task is not only to diagnose nihilism, in the manner of a cultural physician, but to foster the creation of a new type of human being, in the manner of a Platonic philosopher-creator.²⁵ In this sense, it is not too much of an exaggeration to speak of Nietzsche's "revolutionary politics": paraphrasing Marx, Nietzsche's thesis is that philosophers hitherto have only ever interpreted nihilism; the point, however, is to overcome it. This means, for Nietzsche, to create or "will" the Overhuman, a type able to transcend the debilitating effects of an extreme historical perspectivism resulting from the decay—or, as we might say, self-deconstruction—of Christian-Platonic metaphysics.²⁶

Like Plato before him, Nietzsche recognizes the need for a "noble lie" to found the ideal *polis*; an exoteric myth to foster the creation of a life-affirming "higher culture." Indeed, Nietzsche shares with Plato the conception of the philosopher as legislator, but differs in the role accorded to poetic construction in the task of producing a new type of human being. As Nietzsche states in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the Kantian-Hegelian philosophical labourer must be superseded by the Nietzschean philosopher-legislator.

Genuine philosophers are commanders and legislators: they say, "thus it shall be!" They first determine the Whither and For What of man, and in doing so have at their disposal the preliminary labor of all philosophical labourers, all who have overcome the past.²⁷

The philosopher as legislator has overcome the finite historical series of human perspectives or types, and from this Hyperborean vantage point can engage in the world-building task of creating new values. The Nietzschean Hyperborean assumes the multifarious masks of historical Spirit, forges new values with the hammer of philosophy, and thereby takes retrospective responsibility for the "total development of humankind." What I am calling Nietzsche's political Platonism thus provides a way of understanding what he calls "Grand Politics."

In short, if the task of the philosopher is to legislate for the future, this political task necessarily requires a dual or doubled philosophical rhetoric. Nietzsche's advocacy of the distinction between exoteric and esoteric perspectives becomes crucial here. This distinction, Nietzsche tells us, was formerly known to philosophers—"among the Indians as among the Greeks, Persians, and Muslims, in short, whenever one believed in an order of rank and not in equality of rights."²⁸ But this order of rank has been obliterated by the levelling effects of Socratic dialectics and modern egalitarianism. Nietzsche thus advocates a return to exoteric and esoteric perspectives, which I interpret to mean that the philosophical wisdom of the Hyperborean, the supra-historical comprehension of nihilism, must be distinguished from its translation into the political rhetoric of life-affirming illusion.

In order to do so, however, the philosopher must wear various masks: esoteric

philosophical wisdom must be concealed behind the mask of exoteric doctrine or political rhetoric. The philosopher-creator must translate the esoteric wisdom of the Hyperborean into an exoteric rhetoric suitable for the philosophical education or *paidieia* of the non-philosophical *publicum*. In short, Nietzsche must write in such a way that the esoteric truth will be recognized by the supra-historical Hyperborean, while the therapeutic exoteric doctrine will be affirmed by the non-philosopher still caught within the finite historical perspectives of modern nihilism. This ultimately Platonic theme is repeated constantly throughout Nietzsche's published texts. One striking example, from *Human-All-too-Human*, has Nietzsche's esoteric Hyperborean (B) in dialogue with his non-Hyperborean—or Human-all-too-Human—alter-ego (A):

Stylistic caution: A: But if everyone knew this most would be harmed by it. You yourself call these opinions dangerous for those exposed to danger, and yet you express them in public? B: I write in such a way that neither the mob, nor the *populi*, nor the parties of any kind want to read me. Consequently these opinions of mine will never become public. A: But how do you write, then? B: Neither usefully nor pleasantly—to the trio I have named.²⁹

Nietzsche's assumed reader is the would-be philosopher—We Hyperboreans! as Nietzsche says. The dual philosophical rhetoric of the Hyperborean conceals the esoteric comprehension of nihilism through its exoteric mask. For Nietzsche's text seeks to convert this esoteric insight into political experience. In other words, Nietzsche's "doubled writing" has the extraordinary aim of producing the very readers who would embody its teachings. This task, however revolutionary, remains thoroughly utopian. The tragic failure of Zarathustra, whose doctrines remain either misunderstood or ignored, testify to Nietzsche's awareness that his writings, like Plato's, remain merely a "paradigm" of the just *polis*, a "model" of the (political) philosophy of the future—hence inextricably bound to the nihilism they seek to explode.

Nietzsche's political Platonism thus remains ambiguous. Connected with this ambiguity is a crucial difficulty in Nietzsche's account of the relationship between esoteric and exoteric—or philosophical and political—doctrines. To give a sense of what Nietzsche's "esoteric" wisdom intimates, I cite an enigmatic fragment from *The Will to Power*, in which Nietzsche describes this Dionysian world of Chaos, present to the Apollonian vision of the Hyperborean, as follows:

And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by "nothingness" as by a boundary;... a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a

sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and flood of its forms,... blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying...³⁰

Nietzsche calls this image of Dionysian cosmos, this eternally returning becoming or Chaos, “the will to power—and nothing besides!”³¹ “The world is altogether not an organism but Chaos,” Nietzsche writes.³² And we too, as interpreters and schematizers of Chaos, are expressions of the will to power—and nothing besides. Indeed, according to Nietzsche’s doctrine of perspectivism, the will to power as knowledge is “not ‘knowing’ but schematising, imposing onto Chaos so much regularity and forms as suffice for our practical requirements.”³³ A difficulty, however, arises here. According to the exoteric or “political” doctrine, human beings schematize Being as Chaos through the imposition of perspectival interpretations (“knowledge”). World-making is a construction of perspectival subjectivity. Nietzsche’s deeper, esoteric view, however, is rather the opposite: Chaos schematizes itself through the medium of human action and interpretation. Perspectival world-construction is a salutary myth that hides the esoteric truth: the world of human being, of action and interpretation, is nothing but self-schematization of Being as Chaos.

How this happens, however, is utterly mysterious, as Nietzsche himself admits.³⁴ The tension or contradiction here is between Nietzsche’s cosmological doctrine of Being as Chaos and his political doctrine of self-willing subjectivity: How does Nietzsche reconcile the esoteric hypothesis that Being is Chaos, hence perspectival subjectivity an illusion, with the political teaching that the creation of new world-interpretations is the product of perspectival subjectivity? We could express the difficulty as follows: if the will to power is identical with Chaos, then human interpretations are reduced to mere fluctuations of Chaos, and any sense of active value-creation must be an illusion. On the other hand, if the will to power is rather a schematization of Chaos for human practical needs, then there seems to be no essential difference between the will to power and any other metaphysical principle of interpretation. The will to power becomes just another “subjectivizing” interpretation necessary for the preservation of life, with the sole difference that the Nietzschean presumably recognizes our need for such human-all-too-human illusions, whereas the Christian-Platonic nihilist does not.³⁵ The result in either case, however, is nihilism: human valuation and interpretation reduce either to Chaos or to subjectivistic illusion.³⁶

This *aporia* returns us, in conclusion, to Heidegger. My contention is that Heidegger overlooks this crucial distinction between Nietzsche’s esoteric wisdom (that Being is Chaos hence subjectivity a necessary illusion), and his exoteric political doctrine (that nihilism can be overcome by the creation of life-affirming world-interpretations). By conflating these two doctrines, which are in any case incompatible, if not contradictory,

Heidegger arrives at his ontological interpretation of Nietzsche as a metaphysical Platonist (will to power, as the Being of beings, is the subjectivization of the Platonic Ideas). Indeed, this confusion of philosophical and political doctrines, along with Heidegger's readings of Hölderlin, sheds light on Heidegger's disastrous attempt to become a latter-day Platonic philosopher-king.³⁷

At this point, however, Heidegger confronts the same problem that also afflicted Nietzsche. Heidegger criticizes Nietzsche's proposal for overcoming nihilism for the reason that any attempt to actively overcome nihilism is in fact the uttermost entanglement within it.³⁸ To attempt to actively overcome nihilism means to remain caught within the self-willing subjectivity that, for Heidegger, is the very essence of modern nihilism. Nihilism cannot be overcome by any act of human willing or project, for it is rather a destinal sending or "gift" of Being itself.³⁹ The only appropriate response is therefore to experience nihilism in a meditative and recollective manner as the way Being itself happens to reveal itself in the epoch of planetary technology.⁴⁰ In this way we might recover from the maladies of self-willing subjectivity through a will-less *Gelassenheit* or "releasement" towards what Being itself sends us, thereby opening up the possibility of another, no longer metaphysical, experience of the mutual appropriation between human beings and Being.

Heidegger's "recollective thinking" of Being thus repeats the tension between exoteric and esoteric perspectives that we found in Nietzsche. We can attempt to overcome nihilism, which obliterates the "destinal" character of technology, but thereby affirm the very self-willing subjectivity that defines nihilism in modernity. On the other hand, we can let technological nihilism eventuate, since this is the destiny of completed metaphysics in modernity, and thereby prepare for the possibility of another "sending" of Being beyond the technological en-framing or *Ge-stell*. In both cases, however, the result is nihilism: active nihilism that remains entangled within the metaphysics to be overcome, and passive nihilism that piously submits to our historical fate. "European nihilism" becomes what Nietzsche called "European Buddhism" in Heidegger's Hyperborean thinking of Being. Given this *aporia*, Heidegger should perhaps have heeded Nietzsche's advice—whispered into "the ear of the Conservatives"—concerning the return to forgotten origins, archaic mythologies, or conservative revolutions: "a reversion, a turning back in any sense and in any degree, is quite impossible ... no one is free to be a crab. There is nothing for it: one has to go forward, which is to say step by step further into decadence (this is my definition of modern 'progress'...)." ⁴¹

Robert Sinnerbrink
University of Sydney

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Notes

1. Friedrich. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1968) 125.
2. In the Pythian odes, Pindar writes, "Neither by ship nor by journeying on foot will you discover the marvelous way to the Hyperboreans." (11. 29-30).
3. Cf. Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1993) 139-140. I am indebted to Rosen's study of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's "reversed Platonism" and his essays in *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1989) 189 ff.
4. Cf. Pippin's criticism of Rosen's account of Nietzsche's philosophical modernism. Robert B. Pippin, "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Metaphysics of Modernity," *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 282-310. See also Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 80-147.
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vii, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Moninari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) 199.
6. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1979) vol. i 4.
7. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper, 1987) vol. iii 6.
8. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. iii 6.
9. Cf. "In the thought of the will to power, Nietzsche anticipates the metaphysical ground of the consummation of the modern age. In the thought of the will to power, metaphysical thinking completes itself in advance. Nietzsche, the thinker of the will to power, is the last metaphysician of the West." Heidegger *Nietzsche*, vol. iii 8.
10. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Nihilism*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper, 1982) vol. iv 147.
11. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. iv 147.
12. Cf. "The essence of man is universally and consistently established throughout the history of metaphysics as *animale rationale*." Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. vi 147.
13. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. vi 147.
14. Rosen, *The Question of Being* 141.
15. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* 125.
16. This opening section, Colli and Montinari tell us, was to have been "the preface to the *Will to Power* under the title 'We Hyperboreans' according to the plan of 26 August, 1888." *Kritische Studienausgabe*, xiv 437.
17. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* 129.
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) §2 9.
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989) 161.

20. Zarathustra's admonitions about the threat of nihilism are ignored: "They do not understand me: I am not the mouth for these ears." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London and New York: Harmondsworth, 1978) Prologue §5 18.
21. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 3.
22. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 2.
23. But unlike the Hegelian phenomenologist, who attains absolute knowing in the self-comprehension of Spirit, Nietzsche's Hyperborean seems to reject any rational or historical necessity to the advent of nihilism. On the contrary, Hegel's circularity of Being in the development of the Concept gives way to Nietzsche's radically open and poetic vision of Being as eternal return.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967) 155.
25. That Nietzsche realizes that this is by no means a probable or even achievable task is shown in the drama of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra's struggle to teach his esoteric wisdom in an exoteric doctrine repeatedly fails; the ultimate insight (which remains veiled) is translated into the doctrines of will to power and eternal return but these teachings quickly degenerate into the vulgar "hurdy-gurdy song" sung by Zarathustra's animals.
26. Both Marx and Nietzsche maintain that radical negation is the precondition for revolutionary transformation; Nietzsche replaces Marx's proletariat, however, with the agents of the creative-destruction of bourgeois morality and culture. This point accords incidentally with Heidegger's claim that Marx, like Nietzsche, represents the most extreme inversion of Platonic metaphysics.
27. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage) 136.
28. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* §30, 42.
29. Nietzsche, *Human, All-too-Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), vol. ii, part ii, §71 327-328.
30. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* §1067 550.
31. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* §1067 550.
32. Nietzsche *Kritische Studienausgabe* xiii 37.
33. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* §515 278.
34. Cf. "This is the mystery: how did the organism arrive at a judgment of Same and Other and Enduring?" Nietzsche *Kritische Studienausgabe* ix 544.
35. One could say that Chaos schematizes itself but all we can know of it is the will to power. This Kantian-Deleuzian alternative faces two difficulties: to explain how Chaos can do so without becoming a version of Hegelian absolute Spirit, and to explain the distinction between unknowable Chaos and the will to power without repeating the metaphysical dualism between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. See my "Active Slaves and Reactive Masters? Deleuze's Anti-Dialectical Nietzsche" in *Social Semiotics*, 7. 2 (1997): 147-160.
36. In this sense, Heidegger's Nietzsche is a late romantic descendant of German Idealism: Being as Chaos develops itself into perspectival subjectivity in accordance with the will to power, which thereby becomes a "naturalized," anti-teleological, or inverted version of Hegelian absolute spirit. The end of metaphysics no longer means the speculative self-comprehension of freedom in modernity, it means rather the fulfilment of Platonism and the metaphysics of subjectivity in the nihilism of planetary technology.
37. Cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, Politics*, trans. Chris Turner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), esp. 27-28; Otto Pöggeler, "Heidegger, Nietzsche, Politics," *The Heidegger Case. On Philosophy and Politics*, ed. Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992) 114-140; Rainer Marten, "Heidegger and the Greeks," Rockmore and Margolis, ed. 167-187; Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 68-84; Michel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1998) 63-86.
38. Cf. "To want to overcome nihilism—which is now thought in its essence—and to overcome

it would mean that man of himself advances against Being itself in its default. But who or what would be powerful enough to attack Being itself, no matter from what perspective or with what intent, and to bring it under the sway of man?" Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. iv, part II, "Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being" 223 ff.

39. Cf. "The essence of nihilism, however, applies to Being itself, or, more appropriately expressed, Being applies to the essence of nihilism, since Being itself has brought it to pass in history that there is nothing to Being itself." Heidegger, *Nietzsche* vol. iv 222.

40. See Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventures of Difference. Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger*, trans. Cyprian Blamires (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993) for a discussion of the significance of Heidegger's shift from the active *Überwindung* to the more passive *Verwindung* in relation to metaphysics and technology.

41. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1990), §43 106.

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