

Mădălina Guzun

Eternal Return and the Metaphysics of Presence

Edited by
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Introduction

The main question that guides the following work is how we can understand the Nietzschean notion of ‘eternal return’ today in what Martin Heidegger calls *the epoch of technology*. The thought that guides my analysis is that if the world we live in opens certain possibilities of understanding Nietzsche, by following these possibilities we will also discover what Nietzsche himself can reveal us about the times we live in. On this way, I have chosen to walk alongside Martin Heidegger’s reading not only because he takes extremely seriously the *situatedness* of thinking, but also because his reading of Nietzsche is grounded in what touches upon us most intimately as human beings, namely the question of being.

I do not, therefore, wish to judge Heidegger’s interpretation as right or wrong, but to follow it to the point where it appropriates Nietzsche’s thought and to see where it opens up the possibility of a leap toward a further reading still, which allows us to put into question Heidegger’s interpretation itself. If Heidegger’s interpretation is widely known for its claim that Nietzsche is the highest point of an ontology of presence in which metaphysics is brought to its end, I will also try to show that this claim stands as true only to a certain extent.

Nonetheless, in order to grasp why it is so, one has first of all to understand what is meant under words like ‘metaphysics’ or ‘presence’, words by means of which Heidegger’s texts bring to light more than just a series of ideas or arguments. If our way to the things encountered in the world passes through λόγος, it is all the more important to become aware of how the words that we use bear the trace of a certain *attitude* toward that which is named, influencing in their turn the relation we have to it.

For this reason, when treating the problem of technology, I offer a description not of Heidegger’s ‘ideas’, and not even of his ‘concepts’, but rather of the way in which technology reveals itself through language, from the words which name it expressly to those which are hidden in its history. The same motivation has led me not to follow some of the already consecrated English translations for Heideggerian terms like *Wesen*,

Anwesen, *Lichtung* or *Machenschaft*, when they proved to run counter to the *relation* with the world that these words express in German. I have put forward, instead, other means of translating, which may not be the best, but have at least the merit to make us depart from the vocabulary of ‘essence’ and ‘presence’.

What should be underscored, though, is that such a vocabulary is not ‘faulty’ and even less ‘inaccurate *in itself*’. Rather it hides the ground from out of which it speaks. When we utter one of these words, we concentrate on its *meaning*, not on its *history*, and yet the latter impregnates the manner in which we relate precisely to what is *meant*. This is why the fact of unveiling origins is not just ‘mere recourse to etymology’, but a way of uncovering what might later have become a distorted and one-sided approach to the world – one which opens up the latter not according to its *own* way of dwelling, but to our imposing will.

The latter approach is to be found, for Heidegger, in Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power and of the eternal return of the same, which constitute the utmost affirmation of an ontology of presence as a ‘now’ which, repeating itself eternally, never goes past. Nonetheless, Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche is not limited to the perspective of time seen as a chain of equal ‘nows’, but it also opens another path for understanding the eternal return. If there is an instant – the *Augenblick* – in which the *thought of the eternal return* could be itself regarded as an event *within* the circle then the discontinuity thus introduced prevents us from falling into a mere repetition of an undifferentiated ‘sameness’. But the questions that arise here are: whose repetition are we confronted with and what is it that perpetually returns?

An answer to these questions must run up against the problems of world and finitude, problems which have called my attention to Heidegger’s dialogue with Eugen Fink. If *being in the world* opens an awareness of *the fact that* one is in the world, this implies, for Fink, that the world is a *borderline*; and even if he does not take it as proof for an explicit ‘beyond’, it stands nonetheless for the fact that the world *is not everything*.

My point of view, which corresponds to the Heideggerian understanding of ‘world’, is that awareness of the borderline does not imply anything *other* than the world. Accordingly, I believe that the eternal return can be read precisely as an affirmation of the impossibility of transgressing the frontier. Better said, *if* someone tried to overcome the horizon he would find himself before nothing but a new horizon and aware of a new frontier.

The repetition does not therefore presuppose a certain 'content' to be repeated, but an act, i.e. a 'performativity'.

Such a reading entails another perspective upon both technology and Nietzsche's metaphysics, which will be shown to be something other than a mere 'metaphysics of presence'. Involving *our* manner of being situated in relation to the world, they both confront us with the danger of losing ourselves into the uniformity of inworldly entities *and*, at the same time, to the chance of seeing them 'as such'. The second possibility thus reveals not just the difference between beings and *their being*, but between the latter and the dwelling of the 'is' itself, which calls for our thinking. Whether we are to co-respond to it or not can only be decided, I believe, on the ground of our already *ethical* stance.