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# PHAINOMENA

Revija za fenomenologijo in hermenevtiko  
Journal of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

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## PHAINOMENA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS | KAZALO

Mindaugas Briedis	
<b>Kant's Transcendentalism and Tillich's Ontological Theology</b>	5
<i>Kantov transcendentalizem in Tillichova ontološka teologija</i>	
Irfan Muhammad	
<b>The Significance of the Phenomenon in Immanuel Kant's and Edmund Husserl's Transcendental Philosophy</b>	27
<i>Pomen fenomena v transcendentalni filozofiji Immanuela Kanta in Edmunda Husserla</i>	
Bence Peter Marosan	
<b>Normalität als Grundphänomen des Lebens. Versuch einer phänomenologischen Annäherung</b>	49
<i>Normalnost kot temeljni fenomen življenja. Poskus fenomenološkega približanja</i>	
Sazan Kryeziu	
<b>Ontological Aspects of the Literary Work of Art in Roman Ingarden and Nicolai Hartmann</b>	67
<i>Ontološki vidiki literarne umetnine pri Romanu Ingardnu in Nicolaiju Hartmannu</i>	
Petar Šegedin	
<b>Das Freisein. Zum Begriff des Seinkönnens in Sein und Zeit</b>	85
<i>Prostost. O pojmu môči-biti v Biti in času</i>	
Johannes Vorlaufer	
<b>Die Stille des Seyns und die Fülle des Nichts. Zur Erfahrung des Heilsamen im Denken Martin Heideggers</b>	143
<i>Tišina b i t i in polnost ničā. K izkustvu rešilnega v mišljenju Martina Heideggra</i>	
Manca Erzetič	
<b>Pričevanje in prebivanje. Biti-priča in biti-v-svetu</b>	169
<i>Dwelling and Witnessing. Being-Witness and Being-in-the-World</i>	
David-Augustin Mândruț	
<b>Being-at-Home. Winnicott, Levinas, and Bachelard</b>	185
<i>Biti-doma. Winnicott, Levinas in Bachelard</i>	

---

---

René Dentz	
<b>Philosophical Foundations of Postmodernity</b>	205
<i>Filozofski temelji postmoderne</i>	
Olena Budnyk	
<b>In Search of New Concepts. The Challenges of the Modern Humanities in the Pedagogical Focus</b>	225
<i>V iskanju novih konceptov. Izzivi moderne humanistike z vidika pedagogike</i>	
Maxim D. Miroshnichenko	
<b>Nurturing the Ecosoma. Immune System and Impersonal (Dis)Cognition</b>	253
<i>Kultiviranje ekosome. Imunski sistem in neosebna (dis)kognicija</i>	
Luka Hrovat	
<b>Vprašanje epohalnega obrata. Ob članku Ivana Urbančiča »Jugoslovanska ,nacionalistična kriza‘ in Slovenci v perspektivi konca nacije«</b>	279
<i>The Question of an Epochal Turn. On Ivan Urbančič's Article "The Yugoslav 'Nationalist Crisis' and Slovenians in the Perspective of an End of the Nation"</i>	
Tonči Valentić	
<b>The End of the Political Subject. Wars without Revolutions</b>	301
<i>Konec političnega subjekta. Vojne brez revolucij</i>	
Dean Komel	
<b>O vojni nihilizma</b>	325
<i>On the War of Nihilism</i>	
CONVERSATION   RAZGOVOR	
Dean Komel	
<b>Gespräch mit Bernhard Waldenfels</b>	349
<i>Pogovor z Bernhardom Waldenfelsom</i>	
IN MEMORIAM	
Damir Barbarić	
<b>Die Nähe zu den Dingen. Zum philosophischen Werk Günter Figals</b>	359
<i>Bližina stvarem. K filozofskemu delu Günterja Figala</i>	

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**The Thought of Leopold Blaustein in Context. Critical Essays and Materials** 375  
*Misel Leopolda Blausteina v kontekstu. Kritični prispevki in gradiva*

*Manuscript Submission Guidelines* 379

*Navodila za pripravo rokopisa* 383

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# PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POSTMODERNITY

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## *Abstract*

Postmodernity revealed itself, especially in philosophy, as a separation from the ideals that were overly exalted in the modern era with the supremacy of subjective reason. The nihilism, into which the world was plunged, became the object of philosophical investigations, making *nothingness* gain new meanings. Nietzsche and Heidegger were mainly responsible for such a change in vision and value. The article aims to understand how this process of change occurred as well as to identify,



according to Gianni Vattimo's vision, possible solutions for the imminent end that metaphysics and philosophy are heading towards.

*Keywords:* postmodernity, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Vattimo, nihilism.

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### **Filozofski temelji postmoderne**

#### *Povzetek*

Postmoderna se je, zlasti v filozofiji, razkrila kot ločitev od idealov, kakršni so bili v moderni dobi pretirano slavljene z nadvlado subjektivnega razuma. Nihilizem, v katerega je svet strmoglavil, je postal predmet filozofskih raziskav, ki so *niču* podelile nove pomene. Posebej Nietzsche in Heidegger sta bila zaslužna za takšno spremembo pogleda in vrednosti. Članek skuša razložiti, kako se je proces spremembe dogodil in kako je, v skladu z razumevanjem Giannija Vattima, mogoče najti morebitne rešitve za bližajoči se konec, h kateremu drvita metafizika in filozofija.

206 *Ključne besede:* postmoderna, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Vattimo, nihilizem.

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## Introduction

In the Western history, it is customary to divide realms of knowledge or other human expressions into historical periods, which can differ depending on the area in question. Most of the time, these periods have imprecise start and end dates, but one or another event or author is agreed upon to mark such passages of time. What groups the periods in common are human interests, i.e., that, which overlaps as a concept or as a search for an answer in each period. Ultimately, it is man's own desire that determines what we would call the topic of the moment. Of course, we are talking about that, which originates from individualities, but which, necessarily, concerns the entire collective.

Philosophy usually follows the same principle and talks about epochs of thought in human history. In each of them, a question appears as the most urgent one. What is the principle of all things? The pre-Socratics wanted to know this. What is the essence of man? This was the question of ancient philosophers. What is the origin and end of man, and what is his role in the universe? The medieval thinkers sought to respond to such a query. What can man do? This is that, which was investigated by modern people. What remains of all these questions, whether they are successfully answered or not, is always a restless and dissatisfied man.

207

Of course, this type of analysis can only be done, when the period has already passed or you have lived through it for a longer time, as this makes it easier to reach an agreement on what unites all the philosophical thought of the said time. It is much harder to get a true sense of the hurricane, when you are swirling around in the middle of it.

Times seem to get shorter and shorter, as information and knowledge gain increasingly accelerated free movement between people. We will certainly not see a thematic unity lasting as long as, for example, that of God in the medieval times. What we see now is that, over time, very dogmatic and closed responses are losing their potential and value, and that the subject, more and more, seeks meaning in different areas of experience, which human beings can have, abandoning and embracing philosophical orientations with the same speed as that of the changing hands of clocks.

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In this way, it is difficult to understand the times, in which we live. We call them “contemporary,” which really means quite little. The name represents a mix of so many fronts of study, research, investigation, and even opinions that the hurricane metaphor becomes progressively applicable. What cannot be denied is that today we live in postmodernity, and this term is the most used among philosophers and historians.

What does the prefix “post-” in front of the word “modernity” mean? The answer to this question is a point of divergence among many thinkers.<sup>1</sup> Some believe that it means that the time, in which we live, cannot be defined yet and, therefore, it only forms a provisional name for our time. Others understand it as a moment of fully experiencing the values of modernity, a kind of hypermodernity. Third parties also believe that this is really a break with modernity, which could be configured as antimodernity. Finally, there are thinkers like the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (1936–2023), whose thought is the central theme of this article, who see the term as an overcoming of recurring themes and values of the modern era. For him, postmodernity must be seen in the same way that Heidegger interpreted it with the term *Verwindung*:

208

*Verwindung* is the word that Heidegger uses, quite rarely, [...] to indicate something analogous to *Überwindung*, overcoming or surpassing, but which is distinguished from it by possessing nothing of the dialectical *Aufhebung* or of the “leaving behind” that characterizes the relationship with the past that has nothing more to tell us. Now, it is precisely the difference between *Verwindung* and *Überwindung* that can help us define the “post” of postmodernism in philosophical terms. (Vattimo 1996, 167.)

It is this last interpretation that we intend to focus on. However, before understanding how Vattimo positions himself with regard to the topic, we need, even if only superficially, to understand what had to be overcome in modernity, which required the postmodern spirit to oppose it.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, our objective is not to name philosophers or philosophical schools, but to give a panoramic view of the profusion of meanings that this prefix has given to the word “modernity” over the recent century.

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## 1. Modernity: the rise and the fall

Renaissance, humanism, and enlightenment are events that, in general, summarize and encompass the entire spirit of the modern era. The denominations themselves impose a sense of an overcoming of that, which had been until then experienced, solely through reason. Man and his rationality become protagonists of individual and social life, which become gradually interconnected. This is the time, in the words of Touraine, of the reason of men in books.

Man begins to reclaim the center of the universe, which he had lost with the Copernican discovery of heliocentrism. He looks at himself and realizes that the fact that he is no longer at the center of the cosmos is less relevant than his capacity for this same discovery. “This classic conception of modernity, at once philosophical and economic, defines it as a triumph of reason, as liberation and as revolution, and modernization as modernity in action, as an entirely endogenous process.” (Touraine 1995, 36.)

Techno-scientific reason becomes the best instrument for realizing this intention of man, taking control of his own existence. Thus, the idea of progress begins to take effect on all fronts of thought, bringing the concerns that the medieval world posited into the high metaphysical heaven to the present and the future.

209

The triumph of modernity is the suppression of eternal principles, the elimination of all essences and their artificial entities. [...] The rejection of all revelation and all moral principles created a void that is filled by the idea of society, that is, of social utility. Man is just a citizen. [...] [Thus,] the return to God, the reference to the soul, were constantly considered as the inheritance of a traditional thought that needed to be destroyed. (Touraine 1995, 37–38.)

Modernity suppressed the transcendent in the name of rationality; it killed God, without even realizing it. But the sin of modernity was the fact that it forgot that the men of the West, after Socrates and after Jesus, had based all their metaphysics on God—whatever the name and image attributed to him—; therefore, killing the transcendent meant killing the very man who supported himself in it.

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And, soon:

As modernity advances, the scientific mentality also spreads spontaneously, with its exact, functional, operative, and reductive type of rationality. The technical-scientific approach progressively shapes the vision of things, determining the relationship between human beings and reality. [...] Nature and history lose their own consciousness, becoming mere raw material to be manipulated according to man's own interests. (Mac Dowell 2002, 13.)

210 From this perspective, man stops being just a subject of knowledge and becomes also an object, as he perceives himself as the main, if not the only, builder and “creator” of his own life. But that, which was supposed to improve it, causes even more wear and tear and problems. Knowing things and yourself without a metaphysical foundation has become complicated. Thus, even the Cartesian *cogito*, the ultimate cry of the subject's rationality, needed to support the idea of God and be supported by it. The subject realized that it would not be able—i.e., exclusively by its own reason—to know all things by itself and promote the evolution in the world. The way out of the impasse offered itself: to live and think, as if God did not exist, even if he nonetheless imposed himself; to exchange the hope of heaven for the hope of tomorrow; to invite everyone to build a society of rights and not values, placing in the hands of citizens themselves the ability to make their lives better, but from the perspective of tomorrow. This process was carried out in a less delineated and more natural way. “Modernity tore us away from the narrow limits of the local culture where we lived; it threw us equally into individual freedom as into the society of mass culture.” (Touraine 1995, 99.) The entire weight of our existence rested on our shoulders; what we could build as a future depended on our own hands. In this way, “the liberating force of modernity weakens, as it triumphs” (ibid.).

## 2. Postmodernity and nihilism

Postmodernity imposed itself as a form of response to this impasse experienced in the modern period. How can we sustain life without foundation? There was something to be overcome. If modernity intends to elevate rationality

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in the sense of history and human life, postmodernity contests the possibility or knowledge of such an undertaking, which does not mean that modernity has lost the right to speak or does not have the capacity to contribute anything else. In fact, it still retains some of its legitimacy. But:

[...] the situation of the contemporary man is one of uncertainty and precariousness. It reminds me of a wanderer who has been walking in a frozen area for a long time and, suddenly, with the thaw, he finds himself surprised by the ground that begins to break into a thousand pieces. Once the stability of traditional values and concepts is broken, it becomes difficult to continue the path. (Volpi 1999, 7.)

Thus, postmodernity once again brings within philosophical discussion the idea of *nothingness* to the fore; however, this time neither in the sense of impossibility as stated by the goddess to Parmenides nor as alterity as in Plato's *Sophist*, nor in the sense of conciliation of being and becoming as defended by Hegel. Here, at the turn of modernity, nothingness shows itself as a possibility, as a value.

211

Nothingness becomes very close to the life of the postmodern man. It is upon it that man walks and bases his life, projects his future, places his hopes into it, and speaks about it. Nothingness, understood in this way, becomes the very substrate of contemporary philosophy. Below, we shall show how the two greatest representatives of the inauguration of postmodernity understand this nothingness, using the concept of nihilism.

### **3. Nothing in Nietzsche**

Nietzsche is the most prominent philosopher who announces the end of modernity as the end of a self-sustaining reason. "It can be legitimately maintained that philosophical postmodernity is born from Nietzsche's work." (Vattimo 1996, 170.) In Habermas's words, he is the turning point of the two periods (cf. Habermas 1990, 89). As if he would be a herald of the new, he foresees what only years later the world would realize: God is dead! "We killed him—you and me. We are all murderers!" (Nietzsche 2001, 147.) The modern men were not ready to hear such harsh words, they did not want to admit that

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placing all their trust in their transformative reason, swelling like a bladder, to its maximum limit, made it increasingly fragile. This is the contemporary disease, which modernity imparted upon us as its legacy.

Nietzsche proposed the overcoming of reason in the way it was established in the West. He intended to free man from the false philosophy that human reason had created, from the nihilism, wherein man found himself.<sup>2</sup>

The death of God occupies such an important place in Nietzsche's reflections on nihilism that Heidegger did not hesitate to consider it the beginning of the awareness of a radical inversion of those values that, until then, man had erected as supreme values. In this perspective, the God of metaphysics is identified, as a value, with the supersensible world. Thus, the super-sensible foundation of the super-sensible world, insofar as it is taken as the supreme and efficient reality of everything real, had no other way out, had no other destiny, other than to become unreal. This, according to Heidegger, is the metaphysical meaning of the metaphysically thought word: "God died." (Almeida 2005, 61.)

212 In this way, the best and truest philosophy becomes one that talks about life as it is and not about what it could be tomorrow. This is the nihilism that Nietzsche announces and condemns: the devaluation of life in the name of superior pseudo-values, as these, because they are too precious and equally distant, take us away from the tragedy of life and tire us too much. Thus, "[...] when we no longer want to, when we can no longer take charge of superior values, they invite us to assume 'the Real as it is'—but *this Real, as it is, is precisely what the superior values have made of reality!*" (Deleuze 1985, 20–21.) Instead of these values evaluating life, it is life itself, ultimately, that evaluates, that imposes itself.

Interpreters of the life-affirming philosopher usually list three types of nihilism<sup>3</sup> as commented on and condemned by Nietzsche:

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2 For Nietzsche, "[...] in the word nihilism, *nihil* does not mean non-being, but, initially, a value of nothingness. Life takes on a value of nothing as it is denied, depreciated. Depreciation always presupposes a fiction: it is through fiction that one falsifies and depreciates oneself, it is through fiction that one opposes something to life. [...] [it] means denial as a quality of the will to power." (Deleuze 1976, 123.)

3 In order to facilitate the exposition, we will use Gilles Deleuze's vision in his work *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1976, 123–130). We know that other commentators, such as Jean Lefranc (2008, 196), believe that such systematization can turn into a kind of pseudo-Hegelian dialectic, which can be exaggerated to such an extent that it

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(a) *Negative nihilism* is a moment of the Judeo-Christian consciousness. This doctrine imposes on man the idea of God, making him devalue life in the name of a posthumous future of eternal happiness. “The Jewish consciousness or consciousness of resentment (after the beautiful era of the kings of Israel) presents these two aspects: the universal appears there as this hatred of life, the particular, as this love for life, on condition that it is sick and reactive.” (Deleuze 1976, 127.) Christianity, inspired by the Platonic way of seeing the world, transforms this relationship and inverts the situation, where love of life becomes the universal principle, and hate the particular one.

Therefore, only those who deny the current condition, in which they live, can be happy, denying the body, its appetites, and passions. This type of conscience generates resentment, as it divides the world between the good, humble sufferers of the Judeo-Christian doctrine, and the bad, the ones who are alien to this doctrine and who enjoy goods and power, even oppressing and subjugating the so-called “chosen people.” There is, therefore, an inversion of values and of life itself. What is experienced here is not fully life, but rather what will be handed over to those who deny it.

213

(b) *Reactive nihilism* is a moment of European consciousness. It is characterized as devaluation of superior values. It denotes the death of God as given by modern and bourgeois man, when he sees himself as the protagonist of human, social, and historical progress. The same reactive man is the one who killed God. “There is no longer a correlation between divine truth and reactive life, but rather displacement, replacement of God by reactive man.” (Deleuze 1976, 129.)

(c) *Passive nihilism* represents a moment of Buddhist consciousness. Christ himself in this sense was more Buddhist than Christian. At a time when reactive life was in its genesis, he taught man passive life. He taught man how to die. “What Buddhism had come to experience as an accomplished end, as achieved perfection, Christianity experiences only as an engine.” (Ibid.)

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betrays Nietzsche’s own thinking. On the other hand, this systematization, although not originally present in the German philosopher’s work, can aid our discussions didactically.

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It can also be seen as the impossibility of bearing witness to the fact that there will be no improvement in man. He is the one who does not believe in the progress of humanity. This means the collapse of moral optimism. Man appears as incapable of loving, desiring, creating, and having hope. Man did not work out. There is nothing, no idea of the future that can correct the moment. You think nothing is worth anymore.

Nihilism is, therefore, the “lack of meaning” that emerges, when the binding power of traditional answers to the questions of life and being disappears. This is what happens throughout the historical process, in which the supreme traditional values that offered an answer to the “Why?”—such as God, Truth, the Good—, lose their value and perish, generating the condition of “meaninglessness,” in which contemporary humanity finds itself (cf. Volpi 1999, 55–56).

We could likewise add *affirmative* or *consummate nihilism* here, as Vattimo prefers to call it, but we will do this in greater detail later.

214

#### 4. Nothing in Heidegger

Another author who appears in the scenario of a rupture with modernity is Martin Heidegger. His primary contribution to this process lies in his metaphysical investigation into the possibility of knowing and discussing the truth of things. Heidegger realized that, until then, what had been done in philosophy was not a discourse about the very essence of things, but about the things themselves or how they presented themselves to the human mind.

Heidegger seeks exactly what was understood as truth, in order to assess, whether, when philosophical discourse deliberated on truth, it was *Being (Sein) itself* that spoke. Revisiting the history of philosophy, he noted that the concept of freedom was related to that of adequacy.

True then means real. However, the concept of reality is not sufficient to precisely clarify the essence of truth. [...] The concept of truth implies, in addition to reality, the authenticity of what is claimed to be true. But what does authenticity mean here? Normally, gold is said to be authentic, when it corresponds to what has always been understood when we say gold. Therefore, the concept of truth reveals itself as the

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agreement of the thing with our thoughts. [...] Also, in this case, the concept of truth reveals itself as agreement, coincidence, adequacy of thought with reality. Truth is, therefore, in the current sense of the word, the coincidence of the thing with thought and of thought with reality. (Paiva 1998, 43.)

Thus, true becomes what can be agreed between the mind of the subject and the thing or proposition itself. In this way, reason becomes the determinant of the essential meaning it seeks in beings. It determines what should be sought; and it is itself, based on what has already been determined, that proposes an answer to this search.

Heideggerian thought is not interested in what the mind can guarantee to man as truth or as the essence of things. He wants to free himself from the bonds that human reason itself has set for itself. For him, *Sein* was annihilated to the extent that it was converted into the entities themselves in the way they present themselves in the world (*Dasein*).<sup>4</sup> To speak of *Dasein* is to walk towards nothingness (in the sense of otherness), that is, to speak of anything other than being itself. Speech and thought now have the same degree of importance, since thinking is the same as organizing symbols rationally. In such a manner:

215

[...] being is never truly thinkable as presence; the thought that does not forget it is only that which remembers it, that is, that always already thinks of it as disappeared, gone, absent. Therefore, what Heidegger says about nihilism is also true, in a certain sense, for remembering thought: that in this thought, of being as such “there is nothing more.” (Vattimo 1996, 117–118.)

In this sense, Vattimo proposes the following interpretation of two nihilistic elements in Heidegger’s work:<sup>5</sup>

(a) *Being-there (that is, man) as a hermeneutic totality*: being-there is

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<sup>4</sup> *Sein* and *Dasein* are the most important concepts in the Heideggerian metaphysics. He differentiates them as the metaphysical Being itself and as the manifestation of that being in the world (being-in-the-world), respectively.

<sup>5</sup> We refer predominantly to the reflections in chapter VII of the third part of the work *The End of Modernity* (Vattimo 1996).

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essentially close to being-in-the-world, like *Dasein*, but man is this being-there as the first existential, because he fulfills the role of the hermeneutics of being-in-the-world in the triple structure of existentials, that is: *Befindlichkeit*, understanding/interpretation, discourse. Being-there only exists in the form of a project, being inserted in the context of familiarity with the world. To know, then, is to interpret this familiarity of *Dasein* with the world.

Being-there remains a being of possibilities, but the only “thing” it cannot escape is death, the experience of no longer existing in the world. This is the way it grounds itself in the hermeneutic totality, living as the possibility of death. Here, foundation and “unfoundation” coincide.

216 Nihilism appears here, as it is also understood to some extent by Nietzsche, that is, as the absence of foundation. Man loses the ability to clearly identify his foundation and being himself; in fact, Heidegger even recognizes that he must be abandoned as a foundation. On the other hand, Vattimo (1996, 115) identifies that: if, on the one hand, Heidegger seems to get close to Nietzsche, on the other, he moves away with regard to the interpretation of nihilism as a loss of one’s own being *tout court* or its being, in itself, closed and complete. Thus, the second meaning of the term nihilism for Heidegger comes into play.

(b) *An-denken as opposition to the metaphysics of forgetting Being*: the movement of thought called *An-denken* means the process of revisiting the history of metaphysical thought, including in the works of authors other than philosophers, to understand how Being was forgotten for a possible later positive ontology. But this movement does not have only this meaning. “Remembering as a journey through the decisive moments in the history of metaphysics is the *definitive form* of the thought of the being that we are given to realize.” (Vattimo 1996, 116.)

When it is realized, in history, that Being has been identified, or confused, with being-there, the latter decides to die, which is nothing more than the realization that the foundation no longer has a foundation.

*An-denken*, that is, the remembering that opposes the forgetfulness of being characteristic of metaphysics, is defined as a leap into the abyss of mortality, or, what amounts to the same thing, as entrusting oneself to the liberating bond of tradition. The thought that subtracts itself from the thought that reaches the being in person, re-presenting it, making it

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or remaking it present; on the contrary, this is precisely what constitutes the metaphysical thought of objectivity. Being is never truly thinkable as presence; the thought that does not forget it is only that, which remembers it, that is, which always thinks of it as disappeared, gone, absent. (Vattimo 1996, 117.)

This being is no longer there. It is, therefore, nothing, empty.

## 5. Nietzsche and Heidegger against history<sup>6</sup>

Within the nihilist positions of Nietzsche and Heidegger, it can be observed that both made strong criticisms against history. They considered not only the historical process of civilization itself, but also, and mainly, how philosophy influenced this process and evaluated it as a metaphysics that was constructed without ever being one. They contend the notion of evolution and *Aufklärung* that history has assumed. It is as if the latter took possession of the dominion over and of the improvement of man. As if it had been the source of his humanization, even. The notion of progress and overcoming by reason that history assumed is the central point of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's criticisms. They do not believe that the succession of facts should be taken in such a way that today's thinking needs to resume the thinking of yesterday, denying it or affirming it—but must always start from the point where it left off, in order to build a better tomorrow. In this sense, they themselves do not believe that philosophy as they practice it is the overcoming of modernity.

217

The pure and simple awareness—or pretension—of representing a novelty in history [...] would in fact place the postmodern in line with modernity, in which the category of novelty and overcoming dominates. However, things change if, as it would seem we should recognize, the postmodern is characterized not only as a novelty in relation to the modern, but also as a dissolution of the category of the new, as an experience of the “end of history” rather than as a presentation of a

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6 In *Being and Time* (2005, 183–187), Heidegger differentiates four ways of interpreting the word “history”: as past, as tradition, as historical world, and as object of historiography. Here, we refer only to the second way of understanding the word, since it is “the most philosophically relevant” (Abbagnano 2007, 503).

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different stage, more evolved or more retrograde, it does not matter, of history itself. (Vattimo 1996, IX.)

What must be overcome is the idea of overcoming itself, that is, seeking in other terms, and even in other ways, to place oneself in opposition to what had been presented in modernity. Freeing oneself from the history of thought would mean a kind of a “progressive ‘enlightenment’ that develops based on the increasingly full appropriation and reappropriation of the ‘fundamentals’” (Vattimo 1996, VI).

Postmodernity is, therefore, characterized as the “end of history,” but not in the sense of the end of life on earth, as many people, saturated with postmodern problems, try to shout from the mountains with their epistemological, scientific, or religious doctrines. The “end of history” can only be identified, in a way, as the aforementioned passive nihilism, in which people deny their own lives, hoping only—as they say—that the catastrophe that humanity blindly engineered will befall us all.

218

What [...] characterizes the end of history in postmodern experience is that, while in theory the notion of historicity becomes increasingly problematic, in historiographic practice and in its methodological self-consciousness the idea of history as a unitary process dissolves, establishing, in concrete experience, effective conditions [...] that give it a kind of truly non-historical immobility. (Vattimo 1996, X–XI.)

Philosophy has made little progress in history; in this sense, it was just repetition of repetition. What could be understood as evolution was just the continuation of the denial of life in the name of the transcendent. In the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche reserved a single essay for the notes on the usefulness and disadvantages of history for life. In his words, “the ‘historical sense,’ for which this [the 19<sup>th</sup>] century prides itself, was recognized for the first time as a disease, as a typical sign of sunset [...]” (Nietzsche 2010, 198). He differentiates between using the past as a starting point for growth (overcoming) or as an experience for building one’s own life (affirmation). For him, “there is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense, in which

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*the living being comes to suffer harm and ultimately ruins itself, be it a man or a people or a civilization”* (Nietzsche 1999, 274).

History comes to be thought of as a kind of ascension line that leads man towards progress, when this same story, thought of in this way, is the result of a metaphysical hope created in the void by the subject.

History thought of as pure science and made sovereign would be a kind of closure and balance of life for humanity. Historical culture, on the contrary, is only something healthy and promising a future as a result of a powerful and new flow of life, for example, of a civilization coming into being, therefore only when it is dominated and led by a superior force and not when it itself dominates and leads.

History, insofar as it is at the service of life, is at the service of an ahistorical power and therefore, in this subordination, it can and should never become pure, like, say, mathematics. (Nietzsche 1999, 275.)

History is (already) becoming and is not yet to come,<sup>7</sup> a becoming, into which man is inserted and inscribed in his tragicality and facticity. This means that what we understand as new and future is not separated from the return to the past, but it has meaning for life, no longer as something to be overcome for a fixed evolution, but rather as a model for the future.

219

## **6. Exit in Nietzsche: affirmation of life and creative becoming**

Although it seems that Nietzsche has a pessimistic view of life, this is not exactly what he expects from the interpretation of the readers of his texts. In fact, he is very emphatic about what makes up his life-affirming theory. It is evident that he was somewhat influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy, who was truly enchanted by the first readings of Nietzsche, but Schopenhauer's pessimism still needed to be overcome with regard to a certain disappointment

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<sup>7</sup> We wish to philosophically differentiating these two expressions. Becoming is characterized as an uninterrupted movement, influencing and creating a general law of the universe that transforms all things.

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with life, with the impossibility of touching the Will<sup>8</sup> that permeates the world. Schopenhauer's pessimism was still idealistic.

Nietzsche proposes an affirmative response to life, to what Lefranc (2008, 101) calls the "pessimism of force." The realization that life is tragic should not lead man to prostrate himself before it, denying it. This type of attitude is what Nietzsche repudiated by calling it the passive nihilism. The subject must place himself in the activity of his own life, embracing it as tragic and seeing the gaps in it, in order to introduce interference.

Embracing life as a tragedy means to return to the artistic effort that the ancient Greeks imprinted on the act of existence, combining within themselves and their attitudes the Apollonian and Dionysian principles.<sup>9</sup> There was no morality, there was no idealism, there was life, a life of becoming and not of future. They were not concerned with overcoming or development, but only with the joy of experiencing the tragic, experiencing it in all its aspects.

220 This is the solution that Nietzsche proposes for humanity lost in the passive nihilism, in the form of nihilism, within which nothing takes on another meaning: it becomes the driver of human action. Because nothing sustains me, because I hope for nothing, I assume what I have: the tragedy of being. Thus, the will reaches its maximum power when joyfully affirming the eternal return. Live as if every moment of life and time would return eternally. This is a kind of ethical affirmation of everything that was, is, and will be. Nothing has

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8 For Schopenhauer, "the will is the substance or number of the world, while the natural world is the manifestation or revelation of the will. As an appearance or phenomenon, the world is representation; like substance or number, it is will." (Abbagnano 2007, 1007.)

9 The theme is extensively covered in the work *The Birth of Tragedy*. Let us, therefore, let the philosopher himself explain what he understands by the concepts: "The word *Dionysian* expresses an impulse towards unity, an exit outside of the person, of everyday life, of society, of reality, above the abyss of that, which happens; the passionate, painful overflow into darker, stronger, and more fluctuating states; an ecstatic affirmation of life as totality as it is equal to itself in every change, equally powerful, equally happy; the great pantheistic participation in joy and pain, which approves and sanctifies even the most terrible and most enigmatic aspects of life; the eternal will to generate, produce, and reproduce; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. By the word *Apollonian* an impulse is expressed for being a complete, characterized 'individuality' for everything, which makes unique, which highlights, reinforces, distinguishes, elucidates, characterizes; freedom in the law." (Quoted by Lefranc 2008, 48.)

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value in life, other than the degree of power, that is, the intensity, with which it is lived. Life stops being oppressive, making man the bearer of tragic joy.

### **7. Exit in Heidegger: withdrawal of being and creative nothingness**

Given the impossibility of saying Being, except for that, as which it manifests itself in the world as being-there, one can deduce from Heidegger's thought that the best way to reach the truth is through freedom. It is in the freedom of Being that it best manifests itself, because the more we try to talk about it, the less we talk about it.

The speech of thought is listening. It is in silence that the meaning of Being reaches a saying without speech or reaches the speech without origin, without term, without any determination. It only allows itself to be attracted by the void, by the nothingness that imposes itself and thus can absorb whatever is necessary from it.

The essential word, being the essence of the word in the time of realizations, is just silence. Therefore, there is nothing beyond or below the word, only nothing is given. And it is neither a negative thing nor anything that disappears, but is content and denies everything without denying itself in its denial. It is a creative nothingness, a nothingness that allows everything to originate: the earth, the world, history, men, with all the negations and affirmations. It is a nothingness that constitutes the structure of being-in-the-world. (Leão 2005, 16.)

221

Nothingness becomes the cause and the very thing of thought: as they become silent, speech and thought allow themselves to be attracted by the withdrawal of the being that is thought.

### **Conclusion**

The idea that the world is based on the foundations of religion, morality, and God was largely refuted by modernity, which launched man into an unbridled search for progress and development. In order to remove such foundations, he found it difficult to seek for what to base his actions and decisions upon,

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since everything he had built was supported by what he had just destroyed. The realization that he had undermined his own foundation left him distressed and afraid. Reason, from being an ally, became man's enemy. It no longer acted under the old parameters, but was increasingly taking paths where everything was valid and permitted. In this way, one could observe episodes that were beyond human control, as in the case of wars and other barbarities, which led the subject to question how far it would go in the name of its freedom.

Postmodernity emerged as a response to the nihilistic blindness, into which the modern man plunged. It intended to bring new reflections that would bring metaphysics and philosophy—if this would still be possible—back into play for a valid discussion of man and his time. Reason with its omnipotence was overthrown, the death of God was announced, the end of metaphysics as it had been understood was revealed, and finally man was given his entire life so that he would know how to manage it alone.

222 Vattimo (1996, IX) warns of this danger, saying that postmodernity should not be characterized only as a novelty in relation to modernity, but also as a dissolution of what was understood as new, as a kind of experience of the “end of history.” It must be seen as a presentation of a new stage in history itself.

The support still defended by Vattimo is nihilism. In its defense, the author writes an entire chapter of the work *The End of Modernity*. It is necessary to take advantage of the evil that postmodernity suffers, in order to derive sustenance from it for one's own life. There is nothing wrong with knowing that nothingness is the possibility of once again having something to hold on to, even if that something, paradoxically, does not exist.

A nihilist, in the contemporary age of postmodernity, is every man, since the phenomenon of nothingness goes beyond the choice of any of us. We are immersed in the phenomenon, and that is it! In this way, it is necessary to allow the coercive force of reality to weaken so as not to attribute the character of representation to the world as well as not to reference representation as a true world. Another important step is overcoming the alienation that reifies the subject, making it attribute exchange value to everything.

The nihilism will drag us into the moment of a farewell, of abandoning meaning, in order to find meaning. Thus, according to Heidegger, we experience the abandonment of the foundation, in order to jump into its abyss.

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Thus, consummate nihilism can also be a chance in two senses. Chance means, etymologically, the favorable or unfavorable way, in which an event occurs, that is, probability. In this way, the exit through consummate nihilism is one more door that presents itself. But above it shines a strong light, as if indicating the need to go through it in these times of incendiary speeches, paths, possibilities. It is an emergency exit for this dangerous, critical, and fortuitous time.

Vattimo's thought is one among many others that roam through our contemporary society, one more in a world, in which everything is equally true and false at the same time. He may be so affected by the denial of nihilism and idealism that he himself may be, contradictorily, nihilist and even idealist. How can we not believe that the hope of getting out of the postmodern crisis cannot also be configured as a return to the same situation disguised in another, still logical and transcendental guise?

Of course, it is very pertinent to use thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger in such an effort, in order to show the directions taken today by philosophical thought, but what can be shown is an attempt and, like every attempt, it represents only a possibility. And is that not precisely what Vattimo aims for? A possibility, a chance? The nihilism he points towards is just an opportunity to get out of the fundamental crisis, in which we live. Nietzsche and Heidegger, despite their different paths, have in common, in Vattimo's view, the task of elaborating a thought whose main objective is a critique of the currently established metaphysics and a subsequent inauguration of a new experience of thought.

Every exit, therefore, will be a chance to get somewhere new, to deny what is behind, and to move onwards to another place. In this manner, even the denial of modernity uses some methods that it tries to abandon: the a-metaphysical path of man will always be metaphysical, a-logical thinking will also always be logical, because thought and language, even if they remain silent, will always make part of our constitution. Nothing is filled with meaning to a greater degree than we can imagine, and talking about it means taking it out of its emptiness. Postmodernity is condemned to be like the serpent that bites its own tail and dies of poison. And, furthermore, what sort of an exit are we looking for, if we have no exit?

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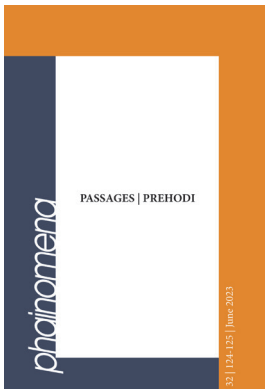
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*Phainomena 32 | 126-127 | November 2023*

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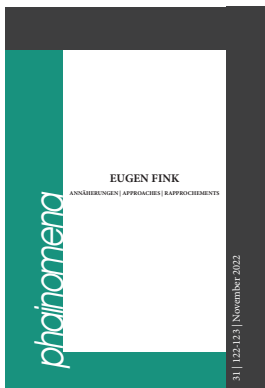
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*Phainomena 32 | 124-125 | June 2023*

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*Phainomena 31 | 122-123 | November 2022*

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