

Nietzsche and Modernity

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Nietzsche's views on modernity seem at first sight clearly negative, as he declared in multiple places his contempt of modern values – listing among them most frequently equality, democracy, emancipation, utilitarianism, socialism, and feminism. This list, however, is not complete in reference to modernity, and defines a particular outlook upon it, which might be questioned. Nietzsche's anthropology of the modern is disputable, as much as his evaluation thereof, which comes down to the notion, extreme enough, of “nihilism”. However, upon closer look we shall find a deeper and more complex, dialectical relationship between the philosopher and the modern era, which will show how modern in fact his thinking is – making him an early precursor of modernism. In this paper I will attempt to: 1. Discuss the meaning of modernity, 2. Refer briefly to previous interpretations of Nietzsche as both modern and anti-modern thinker, 3. Discuss Nietzsche's anti-modern position, 4. Discuss how Nietzsche emerges from within modernity with reference to the notion of secularism, 5. Discuss Nietzsche's modernist position, a form of being ultra-modern. 6. Go back to Nietzsche's deepest modern/modernist motive: the notion of power and will-to-power, that was a unique invention of modernity as such, in my view, and not of Nietzsche alone. The argument relies on a dialectical turn from the simple anti-modern through radically modern to ultra-modern moment. Nietzsche, the paper will attempt to demonstrate, was anti-modern mainly in his interpretation of the actual facts, but radically modern in his assumptions leading to these interpretations and ultra-modern with his pursuits of making modern humanity really new through a radical reinvention of its moral values.

Keywords: Nietzsche, modernity, modernism, romanticism

The purpose of this paper is to present the complexity of Nietzsche's situation in the intellectual history and, more broadly history of civilization. Two major matters of interpretation will come across each other in the following considerations: first, that of “modernity”, second, that of the meaning of Nietzsche's philosophy, in the first place as regards his stance towards the first issue (and his own interpretation thereof), and, more generally, as this interpretation is rooted in his broader thinking about life as such. The complex task before us involves lots of hermeneutical labour, and is never leading to “hard” conclusions, or even to prove anything; it is more about suggesting some interpretative possibilities and encounters within the history of modern thought. I will attempt to interpret “modernity”, and later on Nietzsche's interpretation of modernity as not only denying it, but also expressing it in a profoundly meaningful, albeit self-critical way. Nietzsche's apparent anti-modern viewpoint is, in fact, inherently and also radically modern, and also “modernist”, that is precursory to “modernism”, which, as will be explained later, is in fact an epoch in late modernity, one that attempted to reinvent modernity at a

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higher level, give it a new face, new ends, in the context of the turn of the Centuries (19th/20th), and later on, until the mid-20thC, when modernism finally faded away, replaced by postmodernism, less ambitiously oriented towards other issues than reinventing modernity (this last possibly belonging to Lyotard's "great narratives").

The term "modernity" is one of the most often used in humanities and social sciences, and my departure point for its further employment assumes, I believe rather uncontroversially, that modernity is the most recent civilizational formation in the universal history starting with the Renaissance in the West. This is a view well established in both the history of ideas (as we call without much dispute "modern philosophy" everything starting from early Renaissance up until the contemporary theories, the divide separating "contemporary" being much more artificially defined), and other literature, especially with classical works by Max Weber, who named it the age of rationalization and disenchantment, Marx and Marxists, including Frankfurt School, who believed that modernity is capitalism (first "trade", then "industrial") but also the age of revolutionary bourgeois heading towards their self-undoing; Braudel, who came to name it "civilization", and after him Wallerstein speaking of the "modern world-system", with such thinkers, too, as Blumenberg or Mannheim basically agreeing on the chronology and human-centeredness of modern age, and, among more recent, Sloterdijk, a late Nietzsche's disciple. Modernity (modernization process) refers to every aspect of human life, from mindset to everyday practices, and from anthropology to technology, which also makes it so difficult to define in simple undisputable terms. It also consists of many periods of varying cultural dominants (such as Enlightenment and Romanticism) that gave rise to opposite world-views – which makes modernity dialectically ambiguous rather than having a definite shape: there is an inner anti-modernity in the heart of modernity (Luther, for example, was a very early anti-modern reformist who, although opposing Renaissance movement, nevertheless initiated important modern processes by dismantling Church authority), which yet is only possible within it (this, we shall argue, is also the case with Nietzsche, a son and grandson, by the way, of Lutheran ministers).

In other words, modernity's identity, its ultimate "what?", is hardly one definite idea, but lies more in its evolving historical continuity; such as personal identity is not based on any lasting feature but on continuous life of the person. As much as the similarity between old and young person is not a matter of any simple sameness, the continuity between the Renaissance age and our contemporary is also that of traceable paths of development that led from then until now, and not that of anything being literally "the same", to state the obvious at the outset of this discussion. And there might be a few such competitive "defining points" or core-notions of modernity, from its anthropocentrism (or ego-centrism) through to "secularization" or to Adorno/Horkheimer's "dialectics of enlightenment", or, on the other side, Arendt's idea of modern reversal of the human condition (Nietzsche-inspired, it might be argued). The fundamental disagreement concerning the "modern identity", one important also for this essay, is, I believe, the question whether "modernity" is better understood as a continuation of the long before evolution in the West (and also its possible confluent cultures) – its generally Christian inheritance – or as a radical breakthrough from the previous history and all "traditional world" - the

Age of Secularism, a leap and advancement for man towards something unprecedented and not thinkable before, self-legitimated theoretically by philosophy. This controversy has been discussed broadly by Blumenberg, who showed very well the dilemmas of “secularism” - is it just a disguised theology (a crypto-theology)? Or is it something that does away with the good old theological paradigm for the sake of renewed humanity? Is “humanism” merely a new “religion”? Or is anthropocentric turn/paradigm just a variety of the theocentric ideology, and nothing “truly new”? Is modernity legitimate in its self-understanding? (Blumenberg 1985).

I suppose there can be no conclusive answer to these questions as there can be no clear answer to whether airplane's take-off is a continuation of its previous runway or its breakthrough point? Both interpretations are true. However, it is obvious that the plane is in the air, and it makes a substantial difference compared to anything on the ground. Modernity was both a breakthrough from all the previous past, as well as it continued and emerged from the particular processes of the premodern West (the Christian Middle Ages and the Greek legacy – being the “runway”; the Ancients even having started the first take-off attempt, alas without success, either because of their material limits, or because of Christian intervention); however, as Wallerstein argued somehow in contrast to a more “Western-centric” Braudel, his teacher, this emergence occurred because of some quite accidental conjuncture (Wallerstein 1974). Now, the “breakthrough” interpretation of the modern life begins at least from the Enlightenment, which saw the earlier past as generally to be overcome, or at least revised, by humanity, as Sloterdijk argues, rather than to be continued; all Enlightenment-rooted ways of approaching modernity, such as positivism with its division of ages into “theological”, “metaphysical” and “positivist” (Comte), seem usually to follow this premise. The other approach is more conservative, usually, and it sees modernity as the final stage of the Western Christian history that started in Greece and Judea – this tradition had Hegel as its most influential supporter, with Nietzsche also adhering to this general view, only that the Christian roots were for him, unlike for Hegel, a major vice of the modern man. In the more recent thought it is an interpretation of modernity defended by Taylor (for whom modern subjectivity is deeply rooted in premodern formations (Taylor 1989)) and communitarians, Siedentop (2014) who traces modern individualism back to medieval and ancient practices, or Deleuze and Guattari who added modern capitalism to their triadic construct of the becoming of the “social machines”: barbaric, despotic, and capitalist regimes succeeding one another within the logic of molar becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1977). These former ones are also among thinkers who would question the validity and significance of identifying the modern time as anything unique or outstanding at all – Nietzsche, as we shall see, was not one, however.

Finally, modernity's value is also a matter of discussion, and both the “breakthrough” side, as well as the “continuation” one, could lead to opposing assessments. The author of this essay tends rather to view “modernity” as of positive value, and assumes a rather Enlightenment-inspired understanding of modernity as progressive, but also truly, and unprecedentedly in human history, empowering humankind. In terms of knowledge, humanity acquired a new perspective on nature and developed tools of mastering it, incomparable to any

previous times (Bacon's initiative of "Novum Organum": the connection between Bacon's philosophy of power and its anti-Christian sting and Nietzsche is very well discussed by Lampert (1993)). In the politics, humankind set on a new path towards more individual liberty and sovereignty (from Machiavelli, through social contract theories, to, say, Hegel, but, also the liberals, Bentham, Mill). In social history, it started a dynamics of structural changes emerging from an oscillation between ideology and utopia (as Mannheim or Eisenstadt show). In economy, it caused transition from a stagnating to an ever-growing regime of production of wealth, changing the face of human labour from the traditional toil of conserving and keeping up human world to its new and unprecedented form of creative and accelerating development thereof, by increasing efficiency (this was discovered by Locke, developed extendedly by Smith, and laid foundations to Marx). Finally, in philosophico-anthropological terms, modernity means transition of the entire human self-understanding from that of a being limited and of fixed nature defined by higher instances to that of a being unlimited by any given form or nature, or instance, "essentially" infinite not by virtue of immortality of the soul but rather because of an endless and formless "striving" of the human self-pursuing its "mastery" – a theme spanning in the modern intellectual history from Mirandola to Sartre, discussed also by Eisenstadt, Sloterdijk and others.

Nietzsche himself, as I will argue, was not so unambiguous about modernity as it might *prima facie* seem, the contrary should be concluded upon a deeper account: his stance towards modernity is complex and has both superficial, as well as more profound aspects. On the surface, Nietzsche seems explicitly and declaratively to disavow modernity with utmost disgust, especially when he refers to "modern values", modern humanity and their contemporary evolution, which he largely considered "decadent" and "nihilist". Anti-modern (or anti-Enlightenment) orientation of Nietzsche's philosophy is attested by many interpreters, among them Foucault, who himself developed a Nietzsche-inspired radical critique of modern institutions; Habermas (1987), for whom Nietzsche questioned the most important modern ideas of progress and rationalization; Deleuze (1983), who found in Nietzsche tools of dismantling the modern subject and counter modern institutions, too; Nehamas (1985), who saw Nietzsche's extreme individualism as a response to modern decline of values; Jameson (1991), who believed Nietzsche disavowed modernity mainly for its capitalist nature; Pippin who explored how Nietzsche questioned modern understanding of the rational subject; and Rorty (1989) who turned Nietzsche into a forerunner of postmodern thinking, with influence on its critique of the modern values. From an orthodox Marxist point of view, Nietzsche represented the most irrational and reactionary, anti-social conservatism of the slave-owners, or former slave-owners, as during Nietzsche's lifetime slavery was almost totally erased, at least legally, from the face of Earth, while at his birth time it was still in practice in America, both North and South – that would make him a basically anti-modern, and to some extent even anti-capitalist thinker, but in a toxic, unacceptably conservative, anti-progressive way. Unorthodox and post-Marxist thinkers, however, made a lot of positive use of Nietzsche's philosophy, with mixed results.

On the other hand, Nietzsche in being anti-modern was also modern in that

his ontology expressed the nature of being in way unthinkable in any premodern theory, and utmost modern, as we shall later see, thus making him an “ultra-modern” thinker. This was shown by Heidegger (1979), who interpreted Nietzsche as a culmination of Western metaphysics, will-to-power being for him a uniquely Western attitude, terminating in contemporary nihilism. It can be agreed at least that Heidegger rightly understood Nietzsche's metaphysic as essentially “Western”, even if one does not share with Heidegger his views on the contemporary developments (which implies that one does not share some of Nietzsche's views on the matter, either). If this double position of being against the current and at the same time flowing deeply within the current of things seems contradictory, it is actually “dialectical” in that the term “modern-antimodern” describes the ambiguity which is a common trait of both the modern becoming itself, and Nietzsche's philosophy, too. This shared, analogical dialectics is, I think, a meaningful coincidence showing how Nietzsche intuited into the deepest “spirit” of his time, even if his immediate opinions about this very time were to some extent mistaken.

Among other than Heidegger classical interpreters who viewed Nietzsche as essentially a modern/modernist thinker one might refer to Kaufman (1950), for whom Nietzsche's emphasis on creativity and self-overcoming represented the essence of modern ideals; Stack (1992), who believed Nietzsche to be European extension of the American philosopher Emerson – and there is nothing more purely modern than America; Gay (2007), who saw Nietzsche as essentially modernist because of his pursuit of self-liberation; Safranski (2002), who interpreted Nietzsche as being mainly concerned with the “immeasurable enormousness” and the “dividual” character of the Self. Nietzsche's affinity to Freudian psychoanalysis also attests to its modernist core. Interestingly, both Nehamas (1985) and Pippin (1991) seem to develop a dialectical interpretation of Nietzsche's critique of modernity, that assumes he struggled with modernity but also expressed its deepest pursuits – being in fact an existentialist. The existentialists, as we know, did see Nietzsche as their predecessor, and the existentialist understanding of Nietzsche is still valid. A different, but also dialectical approach can be found in Sloterdijk, who emphasizes how Nietzsche was anti-traditionalist and innovative as a prophet, or apostle, of new humanity. My approach slightly differs from most of the above listed authors, even if it also shares with them lots of assumptions and general conclusions.

Nietzsche, it could also be mentioned, was radically modern in that his nomadic, or rather early-touristic way of life especially after 1879 took much advantage of newly invented arrangements of the industrializing age; his lifestyle in material terms was avant-guard rather than traditional, as it would have been impossible without the then developing railway network connecting Europe; the telegraph, as he sometimes needed urgent help from his mother or sister; bank wires, as money was transferred to him to multiple addresses; a network of budget hotels, in which he resided for many months; and last but not least 3000 Swiss francs he got yearly as disability pensioner from his former Basel University (Safranski 2003, Britannica), and if one wanders how much it really was, one could refer to that time Swiss franc gold value established at 0.29g/1F, which gave Nietzsche the purchase power of 870g of pure gold (since gold purchase power remains rather stable, it is a good way to compare). All these arrangements were

the most state-of-the-art modern as they only could, and for his times Nietzsche lived, at least in part, an ultra-tech life defined by mobility and democratization of what had originally been luxurious goods.

To begin the proper analysis, Nietzsche, with all that he said about “sensing history”, indeed seemed to believe that his thinking expressed the universal and transcendental features of being rather than historically determined ones. He had an ontology, as Lampert rightly assumes (Lampert 1993). His essential notion of the will to power (GM:III.7, A.2, BGE:13, 23, 36; TI:10.11; WP:689, 696,1067) seems to refer to metaphysical qualities of the living being. The laws connected to the will of power are transcendently eternal, not accidental, nor transient. The more this is true about his other major idea, Eternal Recurrence (GS:341, Z:III. *The vision and the riddle, The Convalescent*; BGE:56, TI:11.5, EH: *The Birth of Tragedy*, 3). There seems to occur a vicious circle between these apparently objective metaphysical truths and the ideas of “life as interpretation” plus “there are no facts, only interpretations” (WP:481; BGE: 1,2, also GM:III.24; GS:344), which open way to extreme subjectivism. There are, of course, diverse interpretations of life depending on whether the interpreter is “healthy” or “sick” (GM:I), but this in turn assumes that life should be interpreted in a healthy, “strong” way – is this “should” however not a matter of a specific interpretation of life? In other words, we have to assume that life is best interpreted as health/sickness struggle in order to give value to various interpretations of life, this meaning that our evaluation of different interpretations of life assumes our interpretation of life to be better basing on the very same interpretation of life – it is a self-justifying evaluation that evaluates-itself according to its own, apparently “subjective”, but indeed “objective” criteria. This paradox, if not an inner “systemic” contradiction, could count as the main source of problems for any attempt to provide a consistent and wholistic interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy.

At first sight, the answer to the question if Nietzsche represented modernity in any significant way other than just being situated in its time, which he, as we know, held in deep contempt, seems easy – no. He is so opposite to anything that is modern in his eyes and in his understanding of modernity, to the extent that he equals it with nihilism, the will to nothingness, that is the most pervert and insane form of will, as it is a self-denying will. There are many quotes to cite explicitly disregarding the modern realities (e.g., GM:I.4,5,12; II.12; BGE:44,201-203, 212, 239, 242, 260, 287; A:1,4; TI:10.39-41), and also it appears that Nietzsche was in search of a formula that would rather originate in the archaic, in the most primitive and primordial, not “modern”. In the beginning, Nietzsche looked to the Greeks, and among the Greeks to those most archaic, like Heraclitus, or Aeschilos, with Euripides and Socrates being for him already too “modern”, too progressive and rational guys (BT:11-17). So this is the case for his anti-modern outlook; even among the ancients he saw a “decadent” movement that he identified also with the “modern times”. Another argument would point to Nietzsche's understanding of the modern (especially modern values) as a disguised continuation of the Christendom; with God being dead but His shadows still alive (GS:125); isn't it a critique that does away with any essential modernity? Because if modernity is just the last stage of Christianity, as Nietzsche apparently claims, then there is no, and there has

never been any modernity – and that is essentially what he says. We, the modern, believe to have overcome the prejudice and left religious authority behind, but we are still religious, in a new, disguised way that keeps adhering to the same old weak values originating in the “revolt of the slaves”, rather than reach back to embrace even older but nobler ones articulated by the polytheist religions of Antiquity (GM:II, 22-24). We are too altruistic and compassionate, too utilitarian and egalitarian, too feminist and socialist, and this is all just “Christian”, not honestly “secular” – he says. What then makes God's death a real event, on that account?

With some misunderstandings of the modern humanity's change and pursuit process, Nietzsche would have got right the latent essence of it, namely, that modernity is a major and unprecedented secular turn in all human history; that it is not motivated by religious goals/values but is a godless endeavor from its birth. It was, and still is, a prolonged, step by step process of killing God – if not literally atheistic denial (as there are less clearly atheistic than theistic theories, Spinoza's ambiguity being illustrative – but his fellow Jews did properly understand indeed what the meaning of Spinoza's “God” really was and they reacted accordingly), then more or less directly implying God's retirement, his loss of power political and moral, his being more and more pushed away to the margins of nature, that former being demonstrated with increasing empirical evidence to be self-sufficient, self-creating (like the Spinozian *natura naturans*) and self-explaining. As the famous Lavoisier saying had it: I don't need God in my theory.

We should be reminded that the premodern religiosity of any kind had always been based on the very need that Lavoisier has not felt. God was a needed/necessary being because he best explained why finite things are (so orderly and coherent, so adjusted, so harmonious, so “intelligent”). Teleology, final cause, seems to be the deepest cause, most fundamental. And before the modern age there had been no naturalistic reasoning profound and effective enough to account for these apparent features of being, the ancient atomism having been no more convincing than Platonism, and Aristotle's teleological theory of movement/becoming having seemed for centuries superior to the atomist. That only changed with the advent of modern natural sciences, Galileo, Newton et al.; with the mathematization of “natural philosophy” that turned out so powerful a tool of cognition and technology. So, obviously, it was the dynamics of modern reason and its newborn child – science (not to be in any way seen as having simply been a continuation and further development of the ancient science, as it primarily had to get rid of the Aristotle's physics limitations and wrong assumptions – the only thing that retained its ancient substance was in fact mathematics).

If Nietzsche rightly deemed modernity to be essentially secular, he also distorted this essential quality by overlooking how much reason in its mathematico-empirical mode was responsible for that. It might be discussed, of course, to what extent Nietzsche indeed identified God's death with modern secularization, but I will not engage in that discussion, assuming that it is in fact the case. Or else, he acknowledges the role that scientists and scholars played in the killing of God, but he nevertheless diminished or disavowed that event by tracing back its motivations to a “Christian” or at least crypto-religious drive for “Absolute Truth” (GMIII). That is, sciences and scientists killed God, but in a mistaken way that closed the

horizons of possible outcome of the event, making nature, man and life mere “objects” without their own souls. Nietzsche was romantic enough (to say the least about his romantic education and cultural environment in which he grew) to not embrace that outcome as the desirable one. He did not want to see nature and human nature within it as soulless mechanism devoid of any “higher” end/pursuit. He needed an “end” in the infinite becoming, not just unpurposeful and endless one. Of course, that end for him was nothing “ideal”, it was not a Hegelian absolute end, but rather an endless end of willing. On a more abstract level, if there can be more abstract level than that of Hegelian absolute, the “will” was a way to both de-rationalize and re-spiritualize the foundations of becoming in terms of an anthropomorphic, still immaterial, and “panpsychist”, it could be said, vitalism-inspired super-force of life. As all the romantics, he did believe in souls, spirits and other immaterial substances (like the national spirit) – the only difference being that while “typical” romantics had a very pious, innocent and “goodly” idea of a soul, immortal and angelic, not far from the traditional Christian concepts thereof, Nietzsche, on the contrary, and along his anti-Christian stance, wanted the soul or “free spirit” to carry the features of “essential life”, a sort of bio-soul - healthy, innocent immortality instead of individual immortality; shamelessness, violence, cruelty, self-empowering, self-overcoming, ever expanding, excelling in superiority, ordering ranks and hierarchies, dominating etc. (GM:I, 11-13). An assumption about life as a game of forces, predators and prey, inspired by an interpretation of Darwin mediated by Spencer, Haeckel, or Hartmann – who all influenced Nietzsche in that he viewed evolutionism through their eyes, and also by providing him ideas he denied in order to polemically define his own standpoint on life. (Life is not about mere survival/adaptation, but about growth and power (GM: II,12)). This understanding of life covers both individual souls and greater soul-like entities like e.g., the “we” that Nietzsche often relates to in his futurosophic mode.

Futurosophy of Nietzsche is a belief that, against the miserable condition of the present humanity, our future will or at least could be wiser, “nobler” than ourselves. It is a Hegelian view, and also Marxist one that marks early departure from the dark hole of romantic idealist exultation that always ended up in being hurt and frustrated by the “Now”, the overwhelming actual current of life that never wills to become truly “romantic”. In a gesture to overcome this typically romantic darkhole situation, Hegel, and Marx thereafter, invented, as we know, the science of the future, a futurology emerging from historiosophy that tried to demonstrate how future upcoming events will result from and do away with the “status quo”, the Actual Present, that is unbearable but transient and, most importantly, “theodiceical”. The misery of the now is for the good of the future humanity. Nietzsche's gesture is analogous, although diametrically opposite, too, because he conceives of the “good” future in terms totally different from Hegelian, not to mention Marxist – what he perceived as nihilism of the Now was exactly what would have made Hegelians hope for the future improvement. Safranski gave Nietzsche's futurosophy name “anthropodicy” (as opposed to theodicy) (Safranski 2003), but Marxism and Hegel are already anthropodicy thinkers. Anthropodicy means that all bad and absurd will turn for the good of some superior men to come, whose ultimate emergence will justify retrospectively all the evil of current

and past life. In Nietzsche's outlook these future men will restore and sport again what is now the most suppressed and hidden of the human nature's qualities – its predatory character (GM:I,11; BGE:201, 229). The man will be dreadful again, as the most evident of the present humanity is that it ceased to be “dangerous”. This is most obviously contrary to the Marxist feeling that modern capitalism is essentially predatory and that this is exactly what makes it evil.

However, the futurosophic gesture, shared with Hegelianism, but also countering it, contesting its basic meaning, is what makes Nietzsche one of the early modernists – together with Marx. Here we come across a likely confusing part of our discourse, where it seems proper to go back to the term “modernity” and explain its relationship with “modernism”.

How is modernism related to modernity? Chronologically, while the term modernity refers to an era in human history, the age after the Middle Ages that arguably lasts until today, the term “modernism” names a shorter epoch within this era: one, as already stated, that initiates in the late 19th C. and ends in the middle of the 20th C. The essential tacit premise of modernism was the recognition of modernity itself as already an old and outdated project that needs an absolute renewal, or perhaps an “acceleration”, in face of the newest context of civilizational development, anthropologic complexity, and social, political, and artistic dynamics. Indeed, the other half of the 19th C., almost exactly coinciding with Nietzsche's lifetime, was a period of substantial, all-encompassing change (Hobsbawm 1962): in order not to digress from the main tread, I encourage the reader to just figure out how the 1900 world differed from the 1850 one: only the periods later into the 20th C. could compare in terms of how fast the change was, but we – living in the 21st C. - are already used to this pace of constant innovation, while back then it was something never experienced before. Simply put, the surrounding world indeed might have seemed very new and fresh to the late-19th-Century eyes, compared to what only had been the status quo one or two generations before. Modernization process seemed to accelerate and turn human nature in unprecedented, and apparently many-faceted modes; from the mass-society mode, through the imperialist mode of the emerging large-scale institutions of state and economy (with total institutions on the horizon), to the new super-individualist mode of the arts, literature, and philosophy (existentialism) that often-exulted human condition to unknown levels of metaphysical solitude but also freedom. All these modes had been anticipated in Nietzsche's thinking.

The renewal pattern is the common denominator of the many, otherwise extremely varied, movements of the modernist times, in the arts, in the architecture, even in the natural sciences, philosophy set apart. The point is, however, that modernity from its very beginning in the Renaissance was about renewal, change, advent of the unprecedented, and it was also aware of its uniquely new nature in many ways from Dante, or Mirandola to Montaigne or Bacon. So the modernist, that is late-modern drive for the new, the project of the renewal, was nothing new, in fact; it was a renewal of the renewal, a repetition thereof, a continuation that wanted to see itself as a rupture. This is what, paradoxically, modernism was essentially about: a repetition of the renewal that was to make the difference, and a major one, the difference that would modernize the world in still new ways. Simply put: modernism

wanted to reinvent modernity, refresh its postulates in a context already deeply changed by these very postulates. Modernism, whatever its scope or field of application, was to bring a new perspective, new values, new life – as really new fields of creativity opened in that time: photography, film, systematic technical innovation, large scale organized scientific research. To further modernize what already had been brought about by modernity, to push forward, to break up with all residues and remnants. To make future even more different from the now than the now is different from the past.

However, modernisms deeper circumstance which turns out its congenital defect is that it comes in during mature age of modernity, claiming its old-fashioned nature and willing but not really succeeding in turning over the whole structure of the already-established modern world. Modernists believed too radically in the possible absolute reform of the existing structures, be it social or legal, or esthetic, however it usually turns out that these structures are strong and the change can only occur within the frames of the historic process already occurring in the long term; there is no absolutely new world, no rupture, no revolution either – this is the limit and inner hindrance of the modernist movement, which, when recognized and accepted, makes one become close to postmodernism. The prospect of the renewal of the renewal, repetition of the difference, that modernist movements tried to initiate and follow, had its close limits, and modernism thus turns out pessimistic, collapsing, implosive, or catastrophic or even apocalyptical. This scheme can be traced in early Sartre, in Freud, in the Frankfurt School, and outside history of ideas – in fascism, in soviet communism etc.

Now, this basic scheme of the modernist movement that includes a drive for the absolute renewal, a deep believe in the possible making modernity even more modern, even closer to its essential driving force, and later, in a certain dialectical way, a denial, a catastrophe, an apocalypse, a collapse – is precursored, envisioned and predefined by Nietzsche's case.

However, what makes Nietzsche a modernist thinker is not the same with what makes him a modern thinker. There are other reasons to ascribe Nietzsche to the broader and longer-term modern movement, and I will mention here just one, but major one – his embrace of the idea of power, and more precisely of the will to power. The hypothesis is: the idea of the will to power, given especially its scope ranging from psychology to metaphysics, is essentially a modern idea, one that had been the “unthinkable” of the past conceptual constellations, and that became “thinkable” only with the modern turn in the history of paradigms – the anthropocentric turn. It expresses one of the core features of the modern – the process of reshaping of the forms and their dissolution in the ever-changing being, wherein power is not preserving but formative force in the human (not divine, not semi-divine, not tradition-authorised) hands. It is also relying on a very modern move of immanentization of “infinity”, whereby “infinitude” became a possible feature of the universe itself, not exclusively God – another quality that the Greek and Medieval thinking did not accept, at least in the mainstream.

Could the idea of the will to power as the driving force of the living being, the idea that suggested a constant will to expand beyond one's limits (GM:II,11-12; A:2; BGE:36), have been an ancient idea? Or perhaps could it have some ancient

equivalents? Hasn't Plato mentioned it in some way or another? Or perhaps Aristotle? Even though Nietzsche liked to believe that his thoughts had ancient origins, it is hard to see how will to power could ever be a human good for the cosmo-centric Greeks, who were basically fatalistic and limitations/forms/golden means obsessed. Plato in his „Republic” did not wish his kings-philosophers to exert will to power; they were supposed to will reason and cognition, not power. This is perhaps why Plato was boring (TI:11.2). They were the guardians of the limits and conservators of stagnation. And he did envisage those excessively “willing power” as psycho-slaves to their own drives (*The Republic*, IX.1-4). Power was part of the cosmic order of forms for them, a force preserving and conserving the forms, not transcending them, and willing it excessively was foolish. Now for Nietzsche it was essential to be faithful to one's desires in their exceeding the limits. In this Nietzsche turns out profoundly opposing the Greeks, who, to say the least, would have never come to the idea of “superhuman” - it would have been hubris for them. The same goes for Aristotle's account of power – he knew how tyranny in fact exceeded the limits and all measures, but it marked for him the inner weakness of the tyrant, not his “good” (*Politics*, V, 1314a) - Nietzsche would rather welcome tyrant's will to power as “healthy”, just as much as Machiavelli did, illustrating it with the cases of Borgia and Agotocles (*The Prince*, 7-8). Moreover, the Greeks never identified the personal power and its pursuit with the metaphysical (or cosmic) force of becoming, as Nietzsche did, turning “will-to-power” into a psycho-metaphysical concept.

In Aristotle's metaphysics, and physics as well, there are three notions that capture the cause of any occurring change, movement, and becoming of things in general: dynamis (potentiality, matter in physical world), energeia (actuality, form in physical world), and entelechia (roughly, final cause of becoming, end), with the last one also defining the final form of the being (*Metaphysics*, 1049b-1050b). It all works within the logic of natural circularity. Entelechia governs the change from the potential to the actual. Energeia cannot exceed the limits imposed by entelechia. Energeia cannot be an object of anyone's desire/willing, either; one cannot will energeia, because willing is energeia itself; no being accumulates or needs any excess of energeia, it only needs as much and exhausts the amount necessary for its full development, according to the laws of form. This is very different from modern (meta)physics, where no difference between active and passive forces is assumed; and power is both the ability to act and act itself (like in electric power), as much as it is being accumulated by a growing number of devices, both literally, as power of engines, and metaphorically, as power of collective organization. Power is the acting but never exhausted capability. This is why it is thinkable to “will” (more and more) power, as much as it was unthinkable to will energeia, and it is practically what modern civilization, unlike the other ones, actually made its principle: the capitalist, technology-driven limitless accumulation of power. Of course, Nietzsche, to say the least, did not embrace capitalist spirit of his time, but he still might have been unwillingly expressing it. On the other hand he did attest to the above mentioned Greek “self-limitation” interpreting it as an unconscious recognition of their will to power, the explosive substance that Greeks carried within, their fear of it that expressed itself in their institutions and structures (TI:11.3).

In the middle ages, very briefly speaking, it is also highly unlikely to look for “will to power” in the Nietzschean psychometaphysical sense, as the theocentric age regarded both power and will as ultimately divine features, with humans, again, having only limited and narrow competence in both willing and having power. All power comes from God and thus is finite, and given by God. Of course humans, some humans, both in ancient and medieval times, did expand their power and transcend their given limits; there has ever, or for a long time, existed “imperialism” exerted by individual men of power (like Alexander the Great or Julius Cesar) but power itself remained a sacred taboo and these great men of power not by accident were deified, if not, otherwise, executed and defamed, as was the case with many less smart men pursuing power.

Only in the modern philosophy power became a purely and exclusively “human affair” and in a way infinite, too, that is lacking any inner logic of limitation, finitude, always tending to expand further beyond and opening up an exclusively human transcendence or infinity. And it is something that an individual may “will”. This is the dangerous and undermining meaning of humanism. God is dead – he lost his power to the humans. It was revealed by Machiavelli, whom Nietzsche so much admired, as one of the most intriguing and impactful inventions of the Renaissance age. The point of *Principe*, its implicit and most dangerous message, is that in the godless world everyone willing enough might become Powerful – a Prince. Man became interesting again, if not for the first time; he came to be a threat and a challenge to his environment. It is important to note that Machiavelli did not mean by “Prince” a hereditary entitlement (an aristocratic title), but a social position of the strongest individual. The path to becoming “the leader” is now open to all humans, regardless who they are, the only condition being their individual “virtue” (*virtù*, a virtue, of course, in Machiavellian sense of the word), i.e. their actual “will to power”. Machiavelli’s most beloved examples of that virtue and that becoming-prince had been usually men from nowhere and of no “name” who managed to get to the top of hierarchy; the first self-made men of the modern age and kind. They are not men who pursued their “entelechia”, they were men of excess and self-transformation; they imposed their order instead of just fitting some existing regime.

This was the early modern origin and a significant reinvention of the idea of power, which from that moment on was assumed to be basically universally willed by humans, or even, in a broader metaphysical scope, by all beings (this last extension due to vitalist, evolution-inspired turn, but also traceable in Spinoza). Power lost its sacred, divine, tabooed essence, and was first conceived of as immanent social endeavor of transcendence, as a challenge, and, more arguably, as something originating in the individual himself, not outside the individual as it had always been acknowledged before. The “will”, “free will” too became a universal quality of the human beings. Interestingly, and paradoxically enough, this conceptual change relates to the modern emancipation and expresses in fact an implicit egalitarian turn, a turn that does away, at least theoretically, with estates, ranks and inherited privilege as the legitimizing source of power. This is something that Nietzsche the admirer overlooked in Machiavelli, this egalitarian, anti-elitist, anti-class spirit of his critique.

The theme of power and its anthropological dynamics is one of the major

threads of the modern thinking. It was not Nietzsche who initiated the debate. The meaning, value and nature of Power was also raised by Bacon, Hobbes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Hegel. *On the Genealogy of Morals* obviously, even if vaguely, echoes the debate of the state of nature and “social contract” (GM:II, 9-11). The will to power is no “discovery” made by Nietzsche, but rather his own resumption, or a renewal and reinvention of the modern thought that had already been subject to various theorizing. “Egoism”, either, is not unknown to earlier thinking (Hobbes, Spinoza, Rousseau), only that it was “reasonable” egoism, whereas Nietzsche wanted egoism to go beyond rational limits/calculus. “Power” without any inner limits and the new human will of it is what really constitutes modern humanity – it is its driving force, as the famous Bacon saying illustrates: knowledge is power. As hypothetical and tentative as it may sound, one might suppose that “power” is what replaced in modern age the ancient “eudaimonia” as the ultimate human life purpose. Nietzsche himself somehow expressed this: “What is happiness? The feeling that power is rising...” (A:2).

But it was first declared by Hobbes who stated in *The Leviathan* that there is no peace in life, only infinite striving for more power (*Leviathan*, XI,1). And it was Spinoza who equaled human virtue with power [*Ethics*, IV, proposition XX: the more power you have, the more virtuous you are]. It is true that Nietzsche dismissed Spinozian power as survival rather than expansion oriented. However, the extent to which survival differs from expansion is not so clear; it might be a matter of circumstances, not essence of the very drive, and the specific goal of power, which sometimes is preoccupied with survival, while other times is expanding. It seems that the two orientations of life (survival vs. excess) are complimentary functions rather than opposite “interpretations”; sometimes survival needs expansion, sometimes expansion need survival; sometimes, finally, they might also counter each other, but this is not always the case. Neither is expansion a superior “end” of life than survival, also depending on environmental conditions. Clearly though, for Nietzsche power was much more excessive force than for the moderate egoists such as Spinoza or Hobbes; and excess was higher than mere rational self-preservation, a mark of “higher health”. This is why he totally mocked the concept of utilitarian wellbeing – wellbeing is not health in Nietzsche's understanding of the term, only the exhausted and sick dream of wellbeing. The really healthy want suffering as key to delight. Eudaimonia, in fact, limited the search for power, there was an excess of it that was undesirable for the purposes of eudaimonia. Yet, exceeding the given limits of power and accumulation thereof is exactly what modern humanity has always been doing. Modernity has always been more Nietzschean than Nietzsche himself believed.

What do we do then with Nietzsche's explicit and repeatedly expressed contempt of the modern age/modern ideas? If we agree to the above interpretation of modern anthropocentric turn, which, of course, is one interpretation among others, we need first to note that Nietzsche had a very pessimistic, if not biased (with this bias having deeply romantic roots and assumptions) understanding of the modern; he held too specific and one-dimensional notion of it, based on selected modern themes, but not exhaustive, and he overlooked to large extent the very essential point of the modern life, one which also made possible and was the ultimate

condition of his own thinking: unlimited, “infinitely” power-pursuing anthropocentric humanity. He believed, more particularly, that modernity, with its mental as well as technological dynamics, is about weakening of the instinctive, archaic forces in the human, that it is decadent (GM:II.24, TI:10.39, BGE:201, 229) – it is a long before existing theme of moral philosophy, explored by Rousseau, but known already to Plato, that social development and, by consequence, growing complexity of relations between humans give way to excess sophistication, loss of original simplicity (“Yes” - “No”), suppression of life instincts, self-indulgence or oversensitivity. Even everyday wisdom knows well this common place as the proverb has it “Good time make weak people, weak people make bad times, bad times make strong people, strong people make good times” - remarkably, there's the eternal return here! So inspirations or roots to Nietzsche's evaluation of his contemporary modern world can be traced back even to such common-place platitudes. This is not to say that the widely shared evaluation of modernity as more alienating than liberating human spirit/nature is altogether wrong, but it is one-sided and does not seem broad enough to account for modernity's unique reinvention of the human being. Nietzsche would have rather said that this reinvention, although essentially inscribed in the paradigm of “new man”, had not been really made, and that the future only would show how this renewal of the human nature should proceed towards its proper end.

Now, according to Nietzsche, this decadent process did not start recently, its origins, first stages date early on, with Christian turn in values (GM:I.14, GM:II.20, A:7, A:15), but perhaps even earlier, with Socrates (BT:12,13; TI:3), or maybe even earlier yet, with the emergence of the oldest profession on Earth – the priest (GM:III.14-17), or maybe a little later, when the priest invented his priestly art of turning guilt into sin (GM:II.16-22). Apparently, the right world of the authentic will to power had existed before any history – seems mythical rather than historic. This is however an extremely conservative and idealistic approach. It is conservative, or even ultraconservative because it won't embrace any change at all, faithful as it always had been to the oldest, most ancient sources, conceived of as superior to any later. Is it not, also, a secularized and disguised idea of the “Fall” of humanity at its very beginnings, transfigured yet recognizable, even if given by Nietzsche a meaning opposite to the initial? It is idealistic, because it perceived material or social development as calamity for the individual soul – hadn't Plato first observed this?

This ultraconservative idealism – so conservative in fact that it hardly could had been part of the right-wing movement of its time, even if some conservatives silently admired Nietzsche, and thus was not political (in the standard sense of the real life politics, though Nietzsche, as we know, thought of it as “higher politics” (BGE:208)) - founded its spiritual detachment from any historic movement upon the notion of Eternal Recurrence, that granted it to erase any change at all, and to finally restore the superior primitive *ab initio* in the next turnus (*aion*?). It will always remain a mystery why Nietzsche got so excited about Eternal Recurrence (EH: *Thus spoke Zarathustra*), an idea neither especially profound, nor unprecedented, the most ancient of all images of time, if we don't see it as the only hope for the return to the glorious initiatives of the most past and gone. Which promised that all things, also those great ones, will sooner or later come back. Of course, he was so taken by this promise, he did not see that in the light of Eternal Return any

futurism of the “superhuman” is meaningless, as well as any long term longing or pursuit, since what we long for was already there, it will also come again by necessity, why then strive and struggle?

This is perhaps why enthusiasm for “the most sublime idea” of Eternal Recurrence mixed in Nietzsche with many doubts and much hesitating (Loeb 2013, Lampert 1993). It was also developed in only a few places in Nietzsche's work (comparatively, “will to power” and its synonyms is mentioned much more frequently throughout), perhaps not fully, and there remains certain ambiguity as to both whether Nietzsche was entirely convinced by the idea (I am personally not convinced he was), and what was its final precise meaning for him; this last issue having been an object of studies and debates, as much as competing interpretations. Those vary from simpleminded ones (to which I lean), understanding Eternal Recurrence simply as the infinite return of the same, to very sophisticated, as Deleuze's one, claiming that the meaning of Eternal Recurrence is much less simplistic, as it assumes only a selective return of the “affirmative”, while the “negative” will not come back (Deleuze 1983), which would not make ER a force of repetition but that of differentiation. Still others even refer to the possible phenomenon of “remembering the future” as explaining the actual secret (Loeb 2013). Whatever the ultimate significance, Zarathustra as the teacher of both the Eternal Recurrence and the Superhuman seems very shaky and perhaps inconsistent on that ground; in fact his greatest secret might be that he teaches the logically incoherent thought (Z.II: *On liberation*). Or else maybe that he does not care about the logical coherence and compatibility of his ideas. Eternal Recurrence is fatalism masked (if not self-evident); and Nietzsche did seem to cope with it, and also to believe that he has somehow solved this issue (Z.III: *The Convalescent*).

Summing up what I tried to demonstrate here: Nietzsche's situation in the intellectual history is not untimely or “sub specie aeternitatis”; despite his many claims to be so. He is ultra-modern and represents, to some extent prophetically, the turn to the modernist stage of modernity. His thinking is precursory to modernism and expresses a late-modern (romantic, or perhaps a trans-romantic) turn of a dialectical nature, whereby the negation of the modern, based upon radically modern assumptions, is supposed to bring the ultra-modern, the „ever more modern”. In a way all modernists repeated after him, being his more or less notorious followers. If modernity is – rightly but only in part – defined as secular age, as the godless era, Nietzsche's critique is that the secular is not godless, anti-theist and anti-Christian enough. This, of course, is when we should turn to the analysis of his moral theory and the critique of morals under the idea of “revaluation of the values”.

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