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## **ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF MECHANICAL ACTIVITY**

You find that difficult to understand? You have no eye for something that took two millennia to prevail? . . . There is nothing strange about this: all long developments are difficult to see in the round.

Friedrich Nietzsche: *Genealogy of Morals*

One of the phenomena which has been long inscribed in human cultural tissue, and is therefore difficult to see, let alone reflect upon, is mechanical activity (*machinale Tätigkeit*). Nietzsche discusses this well-hidden phenomenon in his book *Genealogy of Morals*, and its three essays are, in his own words (Nietzsche 2000: 1143), “das Unheimlichste, was bisher geschrieben worden ist”. Where does this uncanniness (*das Unheimlichste*) stem from?

The basic topic of the book is *ascetic ideal* as historically expressed in the highest values of Jewish-Christian tradition. With ruthless strictness he reveals ignoble motives hidden behind the noble values of righteousness, compassion, supposed naturalness of bad conscience and guilt, and the blessedness of mystical experience of *unio mystica*. According to him, all these are manifestations *qua* symptoms of resentment. *Unheimlich*, uncanny is his insight into the background of all these ideals, primarily because it is these very ideals that have for really long been incorporated in the life of the European spirit.

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What is resentment? It is (Nietzsche 1956: 263) “the wish to alleviate pain through strong emotional excitation.” And again (Nietzsche 1956: 264): “To dull [*betäuben*] by means of some violent emotion a secret, tormenting pain that is gradually becoming intolerable – to banish it momentarily from consciousness.” Resentment is, in Nietzsche’s concise terms, “fundamental misattunement” (Nietzsche 1956: 270): *Grundverstimmung der Gründlich-Verstimmten*). What is the truth of resentment, *i.e.* what does the world revealed in it look like? Existence as incessant suffering is intolerable. The primordial pain of existence (which is, according to Zarathustra, “time and its ‘it was’”) as incessant becoming is unbearable. Something has to be done to do away with this misattunement, to tame it, mortify it. And ascetic ideals are none other than the means to do away with this fundamental resentment.

According to Nietzsche, in all noble aspects of ascetic ideals (righteousness, compassion, guilt, original sin, blessedness) there (Nietzsche 1956: 267) “rules resentment without precedence”. Ascetic ideal is a sacred form of *unbridled* affectivity. It is the most spiritual, audacious and most dangerous systemization of all means for unbridling emotions. Ascetic ideal is, and this is perhaps the most important insight, *lack of measure, resistance to measure*.

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For the sake of clarity, we could say that if existence is constant suffering (*ertragen*) of never-ending becoming, the ascetic response itself also reveals itself as incessant, constant overcoming of this incessant suffering. In short, if existence as incessant change and becoming is unbearable, ascetic response/cure as restless activity is hardly bearable. Affectivity in its unbridled nature is therefore not the self-evident nature of affectivity as such. Rather, as Nietzsche points out, it is a typical (cultural) response *qua* reaction – willed and nurtured (cultivated!) – to the primordial misattunement. Again, the final goal of ascetic ideal is to overcome boredom, pain by being (quote) “awake, eternally awake, sleepless, zealous, worn out, but not tired”. We thus see the truth of man in his entrapment between the restlessness of life as becoming on the one side and his own restless eschatological activity *qua* ascetism on the other.

This may well sound strange to the contemporary superfluously opinionated man, who believes that Christian ideals evince a longing for peace and quiet of depersonalization as absence of all desires. This is where Nietzsche reveals his genius most strikingly: Indeed, ascetic ideals are a means (characterized as noblest) of avoiding pain and bodily affectivity, they are indeed supposed to help man achieve a state of thisworldly indifference, as depersonalization, with the final goal of otherworldly existence as timelessness in sight.

Yet, there is another side to the coin of European culture, the one which lies hidden in the very same ideals: namely *restless activity*. In German: *machinale Tätigkeit*. The English translation of this phrase is mechanical activity, which is in my opinion partially misleading. The etymology of the word goes back to – where else than the Greek language: *mechané* – machine. In this respect the English translation is correct; mechanical as automatic, as if from force of habit, without reflection *always already there*; but only partially correct. For if we bear in mind Nietzsche's implications inscribed in this very notion, we get much closer to the Greek verb: *machesthai* (struggle against, react against sth, resent sth);<sup>1</sup>

Mechanical activity is therefore constant resentful activity of unleashing unbridled affectivity, which is an anesthetic against the primordial pain of existence. That ascetic ideals are indeed symptoms of resentment, *Ressentiment*, is obvious if we bear in mind that mechanical, machinal activity is *resentful* activity as antipathy against the basic character of life.

Ascetic ideals may indeed serve as a means for hypnotization as depersonalization (winter sleep), as narcotics against the fundamental misattunement, but, as Nietzsche points out, this state is reached only through mechanical, constant (*ständigkeit*), restless, resentful activity. Now the reason we are less able to detect this restless, hyperactive and resentful respect of ascetic ideals is that we are today very much immersed in the *bliss of work*.

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But, we might object, ascetic ideals, together with ascetic priests, are a matter of the past, of the so-called “dark Middle Ages”. Modern age is quite a different matter. Modern science and philosophy have rescued man from the dark corners of spiritual slavery into the broad daylight of Enlightenment. The modern man of science is the pioneer exploring the new horizons of personal freedom and truth, which can be attained by the human genius alone.

Does Nietzsche share this belief with modern optimists? The question is of course only rhetorical and anticipates a negative answer: not at all. And this is the time to step into the present spiritual situation. Nietzsche says in this respect (Nietz-

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<sup>1</sup> For example, we find the word in a poem written by the Greek poet Anacreon, where the poet, literally anacreontically enjoying his wine, says to his friends, who resent his drinking: *ti moi machesth' hetairoi*, “why, dear friends, resent it? When it is obvious that the earth drinks, and trees drink the earth, and the sea drinks rivers, and the Sun drinks the sea, and the moon drinks the Sun”. *Machesthai* therefore means: object, oppose, resent something, which implies a certain antipathy of the will, *Widerwille der Wille*, which we readily find in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* in the chapter “On Redemption”, “*Von der Erlösung*”, where he says: “This, yea, this alone is revenge itself: the Will's antipathy to time, and its ‘It was’”.

sche 1956: 288): “Modern science as true philosophy is the newest and most intimate form of ascetic ideal.” However, with one fatal distinction: if ascetic priests practiced restless activity with the final goal in sight, it being the eternal bliss as the end to all the toils and troubles of thisworldly unbearable existence, the modern man on the other hand remains possessed by the same restless activity, but – and this is of crucial importance here – he has *no final goal in sight but this very restless activity itself*. Restlessness itself in the very loss of the ideal. Scientific restlessness for its own sake. And even more clearly (Nietzsche 1956: 285): “The solidity of our best scholars, their automatic industry, their heads smoking night and day, their very skill and competence.”

94 Before we step into the arena of modern or postmodern science as true philosophy, we have to stop for a while and break our strain of thought. So far we have thought along the lines of Nietzsche’s arguments, trying to elucidate his uncanny insight into the essence of European ideals. It is at this point that we have to step aside and ask ourselves the following question: what is Nietzsche’s will to power if not the very affirmation of being as constantly restless self-overcoming? And in a way resistance to any measure of being? The eye of life, the will to power as constant self-overpowering and self-overcoming is never shut, it is eternally wakeful, *apriorily* transcending all there is. While presenting the thought of *restless mechanical activity* as Nietzsche’s own great achievement, we are at the same time obliged to pose a criticism of Nietzsche’s thought of the will to power as the very “logic” of mechanical activity.

There are numerous passages in his unpublished material, in his *Nachlass*, which corroborate this: in volume II of KSA we find the following thought (Nietzsche 1999: 538: “Der rastlose Wille zur Macht oder zur *beständigen* Schöpfung oder zur Verwandlung oder zur Selbst-Überwältigung” (“Restless will to power or the will to constant creation or transformation or self-overcoming.”). In volume 12, (Nietzsche 1999: 419), we read the following: “Der Wille zur Macht erscheint [...] als Wille zur Übermacht” (“The Will to Power appears [...] as the Will to Overpower”). In volume 13, (Nietzsche 1999: 259), we read: “Der Wille zur Macht nicht ein Sein, nicht ein Werden, sondern ein Pathos ist” (“The Will to Power is not being, it is not becoming, but rather *pathos*.”) And (Nietzsche 1999: 260): “Das innerste Wesen des Seins Wille zur Macht ist” (“the innermost essence of being is the Will to Power”).

Will to power is therefore none other but ascetic ideal, which Nietzsche describes in his *Genealogy* as “a sacred form of *unbridled* affectivity, lack of measure, resistance to measure”. But then again, didn’t Nietzsche himself admit to his own nihilism? Doesn’t he include *himself* among those who express the modern belief

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in modern science, saying in *Genealogy* that (Nietzsche 1956: 288) “Even we students of today, who are atheists and anti-metaphysicians, light our torches at the flame of a millennial faith: the Christian faith, which was also the faith of Plato, that God is truth, and truth divine...”?

## Husserl

To return to the present situation, let us again quote Nietzsche’s proclamation: “Modern science as true philosophy is the newest and most intimate form of ascetic ideal.” We are gathered here at The Fourth Central- and Eastern European Conference on Phenomenology to shed light to phenomenological perspectives on Europe, world and humanity in the 21st century. So let’s ask ourselves: are there any manifestations of the most intimate form of ascetic ideal to be found in phenomenology as true philosophy? The founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, conceived of his philosophy as universal apodictic science. Can we find in his work any indications of his philosophy as rigorous science being the most intimate form of ascetic ideal, as Nietzsche proclaimed? For the sake of brevity, we are obliged to take a shortcut. One of the shortcuts is his *Bernau Manuscripts*, as a continuation of his work on the nature of inner time consciousness. It is here that we find Husserl repeatedly allude to the basic character of time consciousness as original process (*Zeitbewusstsein als Urprozess*):

1. (Husserl 2001: 4): it shows itself as *constant* source streaming (*stetiges Quellen*)
2. (Husserl 2001: 9): it is to be thought as *constant* continuation of empty consciousness (*im Prozess setzt sich stetig dieses Leerbewusstsein*)
3. (Husserl 2001: 31): the constitution of phenomenological time in original consciousness is an “eternal”, *constant* protentional and retentional process (*Urbewusstsein als ein “ewiger”, unaufhörlicher Prozess, unendlicher protentionaler und retentionaler Prozess*).
4. (Husserl 2001: 33): it is *constantly* passing from one original point of presence to another (*stetig überführt*)
5. (Husserl 2001: 36): time as *constant* streaming (*Zeit als beständiges Strömen*)

In these manuscripts, the finite time consciousness is placed between the attentional (*attentional*) non-temporal streaming of hyletic sensuality on the one side and infinitely spontaneous all-knowing activity of infinite, divine consciousness as extra-temporal on the other. And not only this: the finite time consciousness is also caught between two infinities in its own temporality. Retentionally, it is reaching back into infinity, because each new retention is always intentionally related to previous retentions and so *in infinitum*; and protentionally it is always al-

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ready ahead of itself as an ever renewed and empty protention. (We cannot deny here the close resemblance between Husserl's temporal quality of transcendental subject and Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who finds himself caught between two infinities. But this is another story.) The point here is that Husserl's infinite, divine consciousness as an idea, ideal of finite consciousness actually does bear strong resemblance to Nietzsche's ascetic ideal, as explicated before. The ultimate implication of Husserl's posited ideal of all-knowing absolute consciousness corroborates Nietzsche's insight into the nature and purpose of ascetic ideal: it serves as the means of overcoming the constantly restless streaming of existence, which can find its ultimate unity, its peace and quiet of absolute, constant existence only through constant self-conscious activity of the pure I.

What is at work here then? You can attain the final peace and quiet, you can finally rest if you infinitely overcome the restless quality of nature and life?! Only if you are restless enough, that is constantly, can you come to rest in restless pure spontaneity?!

Can we see the magic circle that is at work here? Can Husserl see it? My answer would be: no, he can't see his own entrapment in the ascetic ideal as restless, eternally purely active self-constitution; a situation very much alike the one in *Zarathustra*, where the dwarf on Zarathustra's shoulders cannot face the truth of his own resentment through the explication of the riddle of all riddles of being.

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## Heidegger

In the paragraph 535 of Nietzsche's book *Human, All Too Human* we are given a clue as to what is actually going on in this ultimate riddle of *Zarathustra's*: In the hardest and quietest hour, when life is most unbearable, it is *anxiety* that jumps on our shoulders as the goblin (*Kobold*), the spirit of gravity, later embodied and personified in Zarathustra's dwarf, *Zwerg als Geist der Schwere*.

We are now moving ahead to the great advocator of anxiety and student of Edmund Husserl's: Martin Heidegger. In his later writings, Heidegger condemned Nietzsche of overturning metaphysics and of being the most accomplished nihilist. This is all very fine given the nature of the will to power, as we learn in Heidegger's *European Nihilism*. However, we might ask ourselves: why hasn't Heidegger included *ascetic ideal* as the sixth name among the five great names of his philosophy? For if *the will to power*, *eternal recurrence of the same*, *nihilism*, *revaluation of values* and *overman* all together actually reveal the onto-temporal character of measureless, constant, restless self-overcoming – and Heidegger is rightful

in claiming it –, the sixth name of *ascetic ideal* reveals the critical reflection of this very constant restless activity of theory and practice.

If we again bear in mind Nietzsche's proclamation that modern true philosophy is the most intimate form of ascetic ideal, can we find in Heidegger anything that might prove Nietzsche right? We are now obliged to take yet another shortcut: we shall briefly discuss Heidegger's *Being and Time*, concentrating on the phenomenon of *resoluteness* (*Entschlossenheit*).

In paragraph 62, where Heidegger discusses anticipatory resoluteness – “Anticipatory Resoluteness as the Way in which Dasein's Potentiality-for-Being-a-whole has Existentiell Authenticity”, Heidegger says (Heidegger 2005: 355):

The phenomenon of resoluteness has brought us before the primordial *truth* of existence. [...] To any truth belongs a corresponding holding-for-true (*Für-wahr-halten*). [...] Such holding-for-true in resoluteness (as the truth of existence) *by no means lets us fall back into irresoluteness (läßt jedoch keineswegs in die Unentschlossenheit zurück-fallen)*. [...] This holding-for-true, which belongs to resoluteness, *tends to hold itself free constantly (Das zur Entschlossenheit gehörende Für-wahr-halten tendiert sich ständig freizubehalten)*.

Resoluteness is the primordial truth of Dasein as authentic being-oneself. We should ask ourselves the following question: where does this urge, imperative of *constantly* not letting Dasein be irresolute stem from? Heidegger's answer to this question can be found in paragraph 58, “Understanding the Appeal, and Guilt”, where he pinpoints the ontological status of the existential of guilt (Heidegger 2005: 186): “In existing as thrown, Dasein *constantly* lags behind its possibilities” (“*als geworfenes existierend, bleibt das Dasein ständig hinter seinen Möglichkeiten zurück*”). Namely, exactly in its thrownness, Dasein constantly lags behind its imperative “become what you are” and is therefore always, constantly ontologically guilty of not being what it is. The imperative, which does not let Dasein fall back into irresoluteness, is therefore this very ontological guilt as the hearing of (Heidegger 2005: 343): “the silent discourse of the conscience”.

We see here that Dasein as a finite being-in-the-world is thrown between the constant silent imperative of (Heidegger 2005: 356) “become what you are” and the facticity of the “*constant* lostness in the irresoluteness of the ‘they’” (“*die ständige, aus dem Grunde des eigenen Seins mögliche Verlorenheit in die Unentschlossenheit des Man*”).

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“Resoluteness is the distinctive mode of Dasein’s disclosedness”, (Heidegger 2005: 343) (“Die Entschlossenheit ist ein ausgezeichneter Modus der Erschlossenheit des Daseins.”). Let’s ask ourselves again: where does this urge and imperative of constant *Entschlossenheit as Erschlossenheit* stem from? What is the nature of this resoluteness as the imperative of constant openness of Dasein? Is there not perhaps at work some sort of *willing*? Perhaps even the phenomenon of the *antipathy of the will* as understood by Nietzsche? Is not resoluteness resentfully voluntary in its nature? That this is actually so, we need only to take a closer look at Heidegger’s discussions on Nietzsche’s will from his Lecture course *Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*. In the paragraph “*Wille als Affekt, Leidenschaft und Gefühl*”, Heidegger says explicitly that (quote) “it lies in the essence of willing, in resoluteness, that it reveals itself”, (“*Im wesen des Willens, in der Entschlossenheit, liegt, das er sich selbst erschliesst*”), and that the *will itself* has the character of opening up the openness and keeping it open”, “*der Wille selbst hat den Character des eröffnendes Offenhalten*” (Heidegger 1996: 49). On page 48 he says: “Willing is willing beyond oneself, being-beyond-oneself-in-affect,” (“*Wollen ist über sich hinaus Wollen, Über-sich-hinaus-sein-im-Affekt*”) and again: “Resoluteness is willing itself.” (“*Entschlossenheit ist das Wollen selbst.*”).

### Phenomenon of Constancy

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In all three thinkers, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger, we repeatedly stumble upon one common phenomenon: the phenomenon of *constancy*. Either as Nietzsche’s *Beständigkeit*, Husserl’s *Stetigkeit* or Heidegger’s *Ständigkeit*:

1. Nietzsche: will to power as being is *constant* self-overcoming (Nietzsche 1999: XI, 538), and, as Heidegger understands it, it is *constant* keeping open of the openness. (In *Genealogy of Morals*, this constancy is the very core of the problem!)
2. Husserl: the *constant* continuation of empty consciousness (*stetige Fortsetzung dieses Leerbewusstseins*), which, as Husserl puts it (Husserl 2001: 277), cannot be understood as an entity (“*es ist nicht Seiendes*”).
3. Heidegger: Dasein as genuine holding-for-true in resoluteness, which tends to hold itself free *constantly* (*Das zur Entschlossenheit gehörende Für-wahr-halten tendiert sich ständig freizuhalten*). *Constant* resoluteness as *constant* disclosedness.

### Getting over Constant Hyperactivity

Now is there a way of getting over (*verwinden*), not overcoming (*überwinden*), this troublesome issue? Is there a third path, leading in-between of the truth of

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man as either *imago dei* or *homo faber*? Can modern, or “post-pre-post” modern man, if you like it, find a place to rest his boiling head and resentful heart?

It is in his later writings that Heidegger reflects on the manner of being of Dasein’s disclosedness as resoluteness. If in *Being and Time* concealment of truth, un-truth belongs to the falling of inauthentic Dasein, it later no longer belongs to Dasein, but rather to being as being, to *aletheia* as the clearing of being, which “first grants being and thinking and their presencing to and for each other” (Heidegger 2002: 443) And the final blow to the restless constant activity of transcendental Dasein: “But the heart of *aletheia* is *untrembling*.”<sup>2</sup>

What about Nietzsche? Can we find indications of his critical insight into his own resentment and the thoughts which are alien to the thought of the will to power? Indeed we can. In *Human, All Too Human*, paragraph 285, he says quite ingeniously (Nietzsche 2000: 620):

Modern restlessness. The farther West one goes, the greater modern agitation becomes; so that to Americans the inhabitants of Europe appear on the whole to be peace-loving, contented beings, while in fact they too fly about like bees and wasps. This agitation is becoming so great that the higher culture can no longer allow its fruits to ripen; it is as if the seasons were following too quickly on one another. From lack of rest, our civilization is ending in a new barbarism.

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And in paragraph 500 some further indication of his understanding of the nature of being, which differs largely from his understanding of the nature of the Will to Power (Nietzsche 2000: 695):

*Using high and low tides.* For the purpose of knowledge, one must know how to use that inner current that draws us to a thing, and then the one that, after a time, draws us away from it.

And perhaps the most important passage for our treatise: in *Gay Science*, in paragraph 42 we read (Nietzsche 2000: 66):

For thinkers and all sensitive spirits, boredom is that disagreeable “windless calm” of the soul that precedes a happy voyage and cheerful winds. They have to bear it and must wait for its effect on them. Precisely this is what lesser natures cannot achieve by any means. To ward off boredom at any cost is vulgar, no less than work without pleasure.

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<sup>2</sup> There are of course several other passages in Heidegger, which point in this direction. The same issue could be tackled from the perspective of the difference between *Sollen* and being, as discussed in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. For a detailed discussion on this issue see Svetlič 2003.

And last but not least, a quotation from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 2000: 455): “The soul most self-loving, in which all things have their current and counter-current, their ebb and their flow.”

What is this “windless calm of the soul, this ebb and flow” in Nietzsche, the self-revealing and self-concealing in the clearing of being in Heidegger? What does it mean that Nietzsche and Heidegger want us to be in tune with either the ebb and flow of being or the presencing and absencing of being?

We said that constancy, ever-restless self-overcoming, is a manifestation of resentment of the spirit of revenge, which reveals itself primarily as absence of measure, as resistance to measure. We could therefore say that “windless calm of the soul, this ebb and flow” indicate a certain stepping away from the constant, eternally constant activity of the transcendental ego and stepping away from the constant resoluteness as constant openness of Dasein. Stepping away in the direction of the swaying to and fro (*hin und her schwingen*) of the self-revealing and self-concealing of being; of authenticity and inauthenticity. What does this swaying to and fro reveal? None other than the newly discovered *measure* of being as *being in tune* with this primordial truth of being, with the revealing and concealing nature of being.

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It is perhaps a story of rediscovering the forgotten measure *as* attunement, as being in tune with the swaying to and fro of the self-revealing and self-concealing of the being of Nietzsche’s Will to Power, Husserl’s transcendental ego and Heidegger’s authentic *Dasein*. Is this not completely different from the *mechanical activity as the measureless* constant hyperactivity, which Nietzsche names fundamental *misattunement*?

Regardless of the being of entities, as thought in each of the discussed thinkers, what appears as crucial is the insight into the rootedness (attunement) of the being of entities (of every ground) in the groundless self-revealing self-concealment of – should we not pause here and, contrary to Heidegger, simply stick to attunement as such? If Heidegger’s being *qua* being (*Ereignis, Es gibt*) can perhaps be (mis)construed as some sort of a supreme entity, we can rest assured that there isn’t a person in this world who could convincingly defend the conclusiveness of his *ontification* of fundamental attunement. The story of *fundamental attunement*, as the story of human beings, however, has only just begun. For, as Nietzsche would put it:

You find that difficult to understand? You have no eye for something that took two millennia to prevail? . . . There is nothing strange about this: all long developments are difficult to see in the round.

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