

ANNIHILATION OF NOTHING?

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The central thesis of Hegel's *Science of Logic* runs as follows: being is nothing. If traditional metaphysics has built upon the *exclusion* of negativity from reality, appearance from truth, and of nothing from the pureness of being, then according to Hegel, it's impossible to understand reality if it hasn't been comprehended in its equality with negation. There's no other way to behold the truth but through its *Erscheinung*: It's impossible to recognize being if it hasn't been understood as nothing.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics might have been summed up in the following words: metaphysics is unable *not* to think of being as nothing. It has always thought of being as nothing, only this fact remained hidden to it. The simplest reason for this incapacity lies in the fact that as soon as metaphysics puts being *beyond* life, it actually puts it in nothing. There is, however, another, deeper reason, which can only be fully understood through an analysis of Nietzsche's complex relation to Hegel's concept of negativity.

1. *The equinox*

Hegel introduced the phrase "being is nothing" as a necessary logical conclusion. Nevertheless, it has to be understood as an ontological thesis. In order to justify this claim, two questions have to be solved: First, how does *nothing actually intervene as being*? That means, in what manner does nothing itself prevent the world from falling into the abyss of nothing? And secondly, how is it possible to perceive *nothing as nothing else but being*? In other words, how does nothing converge into being? Both answers are to be found in the concept of the "negation of negation", logical operation, and ontological constellation in which a crush of nothing into nothing always results in

“something” and through which it becomes possible to gain the insight “that the negative is just as much positive.”¹

Pure (abstract) being is defined as “indeterminate immediateness”. As such, that is to say, as something that can’t be a result of external mediation or an object of external determination, being is “simple equality with itself”; it is something that is neither *equal* to anything else, nor *different* from anything else. It is a region of absolute ontological independency. As simple self-equality it also can’t contain any kind of content or difference: it is only a “pure indeterminateness and emptiness” in which nothing is to be thought, “or it is equally only this empty thinking”.² Pure being is therefore an empty non-reflexive thought or abstract nothing.

On the other hand, pure (abstract) nothing is also simple equality with itself, a region of absolute ontological independency. Not only being, but nothing as well can’t be equal to anything else nor different from anything else: what is identical to nothing is already nothing, and because nothing doesn’t have any positive characteristics it also can’t differ from anything. *Par definitionem* it also can’t contain any content or difference. However, the moment it becomes an object of thought, it’s no longer just nothing, but also something that exists in the given thought and as this thought: an *empty non-reflexive* thought which is, as has been shown above, exactly pure being.

This brings us to a paradoxical situation: “pure being and pure nothing are ... the same”, but nevertheless they exist as two spheres of equality-only-with-itself. What binds them together – the fact that they are both simple, empty self-equalities, also tears them apart. Their truth can therefore be neither in their sameness nor in their difference, but only in their immediate passing over into each other. The basic parameters of the relation of being and nothing are thus set.

The basic difference that separates “determinate being” from pure being lies in the fact that pure being *is* nothing, while determinate being *incorporates* it. As such, it is the determination of totality – of everything that belongs to a certain totality and of everything that this totality lacks. For the same reason, namely the inclusion of nonbeing into being, determinate being is being that is also itself a subject of determination: what a certain totality lacks co-determines this totality as a whole. Determinate being is being *determined* by nonbeing, and is therefore the *negation* of the *indeterminate* immediateness of pure being. In Hegel’s universe in general, everything that is *different* or *contains*

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Allen & Unwin, London & New York 1969, p. 54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

difference becomes subjected to negation. On the other hand, however, everything identical or equal to itself is already identical to nothing.

As existing determination, determinate being is defined as “quality”, which can be posed in two different ways. To put it very simply, in case quality appears as existing quality, it is “reality”, and if it represents a certain lack, it is “negation”. What’s crucial is that both reality and negation retain characteristics of determinate being, which is to say, first, that *negation exists*, and, second, that *reality also includes negative mediation*.

We have thus reached the first crucial point in the argument. – Determinate being has fallen into two different subspecies: existing negation and reality imbued with nothing. *These two however are again one and the same*. “Reality itself contains negation, and is determinate being, not indeterminate abstract being. Similarly, negation is determinate being, not the supposedly abstract nothing, but posited here as it is in *itself*, as affirmatively present, belonging into the sphere of determinate being.”³ The qualitative difference in determinate being is sublated in the same moment it’s been established. That doesn’t mean, however, that it has been abolished. – Through sublation of its inner difference, determinate being becomes again equal to itself, *but different from its first episode*. What we are dealing with here is determinate being that is at the same time the *other* of determinate being. Being that reinstated itself through the transgression of its inner difference and which exactly in this *transgression of difference* again *differs* from determined being as such (that means from itself). Now, if determinate being as such was the negation of indeterminate pure being, than the “second” determinate being appears through the sublation of the inner difference that constituted determinate being as such. The “second” determinate being is therefore the negation of the “first” negation of being, and because of that it is the *negation of negation*, or as Hegel puts it: “something”.

What is “something”? Hegel is rather sparing of words: “*Something* is the negation of negation in the form of being; for this second negation is the restoring of the simple relation to self; but with this, something is equally *the mediation of itself with it self*.”⁴ Negation of negation thus signifies the moment of the reinstatement of the indeterminate immediateness that defines being. The only difference is that what’s at stake this time isn’t pure being, but concrete particular existence. Once again, “something” establishes itself by transgressing the difference that created a rupture in determinate being (itself), and exactly through this transgression of difference again differs from

³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

determinate being as such (itself). It differs from itself, but in the middle of itself. It's mediated and determined only by itself and nothing else. That means, however, that we are again facing a paradoxical situation. – Both pure being and its reinstatement in something particular exist as “equalities only with itself”, that is, as something that can't be determined by anything else but itself, which actually means that at the same moment that being reestablishes itself as equality with itself, *it becomes its own independent other*. It becomes being that exists in full independence of being; being that is separated from being; being that has therefore itself for its object, and that's exactly Hegel's definition of the *subject*.

The stage is set, key elements arranged. How did the negation of negation actually occur? From this point onwards it's necessary to proceed through the hypothesis. The basic situation is the following. “Negation” is opposed to “reality” and *recognizes itself in it*: reality also is imbued with nothing. Negation negates reality only to find itself redundant, negated, which makes it disappear in its (identical) opposite. In simple academic jargon: nothing stumbles into nothing, the annihilation of nothing produces being without lack, being redeemed of its identity with nothing, which means concrete being, which is no longer an empty abstraction but “something”. There's a catch however, for this is only the first part of the story – the same that happened to being *happened also to nothing itself*. The annihilation of nothing produced something; through this process, however, *nothing was not really obliterated but was actually produced, reinstated as real nothing*: in the same way that being shook off its identity with nothing and became *something* that really exists, nothing got rid of its identity with abstract being and *became true nothing that exists, which is therefore also something*. *Something is Two in one*: first, being that has broken its identity with nothing and, second, nothing that has broken its identity with being and become “absolute negativity”.

It is thus necessary to start again. Negation negates, annihilates the whole of reality – with one sole exception: *what can't be annihilated is the nothing itself that already exists in reality*. Nothing can't be annihilated because it already is nothing. And if it is annihilated it becomes – nothing. The only remainder that survives the cataclysm of the total negation of reality is nothing itself. Or, in other words, only nothing in the midst of reality prevents the total destruction of reality and its absorption into the abstract identity of being and nothing. Schematically put, nothing was redoubled into the nothing that annihilates and the nothing that blocks annihilation. On the ontological level, however, both nothings are still posited in the relation of identity – if they weren't, negation would indeed be able to negate also the instance of nothing in the midst of reality (everything different is subject to negation). We

have still not achieved the absolute negativity; an additional micro-turn is needed. – The nothing that can't be annihilated *negates* the capacity of total annulment that defines *negation*. If the first step consisted of negation negating reality, now the annihilated remainder of reality *negates negation*: negation (the instance of nothing in reality) makes it impossible for negation to become the total negation of what it negates. It prevents it from becoming “simple self-equality”, and thus renders its return to pure being impossible. The normal flow of becoming is thwarted, first negation is left hanging outside the possibility of return into being, it falls out of the sphere of abstraction and thus becomes indeterminate “something”, *centered around its inherent impossibility (negation), which however as negation is nothing else but itself. Two, which is exactly the same.*

The given situation can be explained following Rado Riha's analysis of Malevich's painting *Black square on white background*, the painting that consists of what its title says: a black square on a white background. At the starting point there's an empty white background – abstract nothing, which, in its totality, is identical to pure being (a white screen is indeterminate immediateness, which can represent both being and nothing). On this background a black square appears, in our case the instance of nothingness in reality, which renders it impossible for the first nothing to achieve totality (a reinstatement of complete self-equality), and thereby its return into abstract being. Yet, this second nothing is also just a mere abstraction and is therefore identical to being. Where is the absolute negativity – this nothing, which is no longer just a mere abstraction, but something – to be located in this configuration? Exactly in the interval between both squares, which gives Malevitch's picture the effect of depth. In the appearance of an interval between both squares. In the interval, which in reality doesn't exist, because “*behind the surface there's nothing else but surface itself.*”⁵ *In the non-existing interval, which is literally nothing and at the same time the minimal difference of the same.* The disappearing difference, which constitutes the subject's self-reflexive structure.

What is crucial here is the following: what prevents negation from being totalized, or, in other words, what prevents the annihilation of the whole of reality, and thus its return into the sphere of abstraction (empty appearance), is not some irreducible remainder of *otherness*, but the instance of *sameness* – a *nothing* that can't be *annulled*. Negation of negation is thus the moment when *the sameness intervenes as its own other*. This is to say that particular *sameness* arises as *causa sui*: it's no longer conditioned by Other (being, life, God, *etc.*),

⁵ Rado Riha, “Scene dvojega I. Črni kvadrat na beli podlagi”, in: *Filozofski vestnik* XXII/3, Ljubljana 2001, p. 184. See also: Gérard Wajcman, *L'objet du siècle*, Verdier, Paris 1998.

but centered around its own lack, its constitutive gap, which it is itself. That is, however, only the first step.

In order for the second step, and with it the whole of negation of negation, to be fully grasped, the story has to be brought into a wider context. Hegel's idea of "absolute negativity" occurs on two levels. The difference between them might be understood as the dividing line between the Hegel that still remains bound to metaphysics, and the Hegel that in a certain manner already goes beyond it. Of course it is obvious that neither of "them" is possible without the other.

The first level can be introduced in relation to the above argument: what exactly exists as its own other? What universal is at the same time particular, and what particular is at the same time universal? In Hegel's conceptual framework, only one answer is possible: everything or nothing. Fundamentally, definitely nothing: *the immediate identity of universal and particular* can take place only in absolute negativity and nowhere else than in absolute negativity. – Nothing pervades the whole of reality, more than that – *only* nothing prevents reality from coming crumbling down into the nothingness of abstraction. Nothing and not being, or more accurately, also being, but only insofar as *nothing is being*: "to be the negation of a nothing constitutes being."⁶ Only what contains nothing exists. Everything else is already nothing. Nothing unites existing and non-existing. Nothing binds the world into a whole. *Nothing is universal*. On the other hand, however, nothing is also the *only absolute particularity*, which can't be determined by anything else, which exists as *causa sui*, and which *can't be subdued even by its own negative power*. Nothing is universal and particular in one; it's the universal of particularity and the particularity of the universal. Further on, absolute negativity is "indeterminate immediateness" – self-equality, which however doesn't represent some substantially separated world: it is situated in the world (nothing is not different from anything else) but remains untouched by it (nothing else but nothing can determine nothing); it can be found in everything, and at the same time it remains in the relation "only with it self". It exists in time, but as infinity. A spiritualised slut who sleeps with everybody and still remains a virgin.

Absolute nothing thus exists in the middle of reality and at the same time above it. *As such, it is the foundation of all the spheres of absolute ontological independency (subject, spirit, appearance, being); spheres that belong to reality (world, community, life, time) in such a way that (as absolute self-equalities) while entering reality, they already step out of it*. What is the Hegelian subject? The *negativity of desire*. As desire it has always-already been thrown out of its empty shell into the opposed

⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 400.

substance, and only the fact that the subject already *was absolute nothing* protects her from being crushed by the social substance, in its massive superiority in weight and strength. The subject's particularity is nothing. The subject reinstates herself in her unity only at the point where she has become an existing nothing and thus an empty irreducible gap in substance. Yet, nothing is also the foundation of the subject's community: an individual becomes a subject only when she becomes a link in society, an element of the "social substance". But what is this community? "*Nothing* as the absolute common spirit, – because it is one."⁷ Nothing is therefore also the basis of the particularity of the universal itself, the reason why spirit transgresses all the possible forms of its finite incarnations. Spirit surmounts finitude by being infinite nothing. Spirit is also the world, but only insofar as the world, which would have the spirit subtracted from it, wouldn't be anything else but absolute nothing, that is – the spirit. *The world is unable not to be the spirit, although the world is not the spirit*: "This common substance is not worldly; the worldly powerlessly opposes it."⁸ – What thus is being? Nothing. Being cannot be anything else but nothing.

This line of interpretation was of course already present in Derrida's analysis. – The key moment of Hegel's philosophy "consisted – it is almost tempting to say consisted *simply* – in taking the negative seriously" and changing it into a "resource".⁹ Hegelian negativity is the "reassuring *other* surface of the positive", which actually neutralizes the negative itself: a bumper that amortizes any kind of loss and turns it into something positive. In the final instance, Hegelian absolute negativity is a resource which helps to neutralize the most radical and absurd face of negativity – death, which in Hegel's philosophy takes the place of unimportant "abstract negativity". With the notorious exception of the execution of a criminal who, with his death, represents the highest level of *Sittlichkeit* and "personal freedom": "while excepting and glorifying his punishment, ... a criminal recognizes the law and is thus free."¹⁰ This also matches the general scheme: only by becoming nothing am I reinstated in my particularity; only by becoming nothing, do I truly enter the community; my death can become the source of my freedom. It is all too obvious which tradition is at work on this cross.

On the second level, everything is turned upside down. As Hegel stresses at various points, absolute negativity represents only the starting point of sub-

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Lasson & Hoffmeister, Meiner 1955, p. 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁹ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Routledge, London & New York 2001, p. 328.

¹⁰ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Galilée, Paris 1974, p. 114.

jectivity. Furthermore, he often identifies the immediate presence of absolute negativity with the deficiency that irreparably separates the Judaic state of consciousness from the Christian one. One of the best conceptualizations of this last turn was given by Žižek: “Herein lies the ‘last secret’ of dialectical speculation: not in the dialectical mediation-sublimation of all contingent, empirical reality, not in the deduction of all reality from the mediating movement of absolute negativity, but in the fact that this very negativity, in order to attain its ‘being-for-itself’, must embody itself again in some miserable, radically contingent corporal leftover.”¹¹ Žižek is referring to the infinite judgment “spirit is a bone”; however, a similar point can also be made in relation to the reinstatement of the particularized “something”. – The basic paradox is of course that “being without lack”, the absolute self-equality produced by the “annihilation of nothing”, actually is nothing. However, absolute nothing itself exists only under condition that it, so to speak, “materialize” itself in a nameless particular existence (something). If it doesn’t, it remains mere abstraction, empty, abstract nothing. Absolute negativity only has to obey one condition – it has to enter the world, one of its own creations. Hence, absolute negativity only exists under condition that it stops being the opposite of positive and enters its ranks.

From this perspective it’s possible to focus again on the process of the negation of negation that has been discussed above. In the first step *the same* intervenes as *other* – nothing itself that cannot be annihilated prevents the annulment of reality. This moment correlates to nothing stepping out of reality: only nothing survives the total collapse of reality, even if the whole of reality disappears, nothing will remain. *Nothing is by no means dependent on reality*, while reality as a whole stands on its shoulders. In the second step the whole story is repeated: the same again intervenes as its other, only this time *nothing negates its own transcendent position*. Negation negates the absolute power of negativity; it renounces its capacity to be found in heaven and earth at the same time. How? The circle is thus completed – negation opposes itself to reality and recognizes itself in it. Negation and reality are *two, which is one*. Yet how is it possible to think of this duality? How is it possible to think of a nothing, which is at the same time reality? If in the first stage nothing transgressed reality, *now reality transgresses itself in nothing*. Nothing is nothing else but a segment of a missing reality; it is a gap that separates reality from reality and thus creates the dimension of inter-space, void, *the world*.

Nevertheless, even if one has taken into consideration this last “turn of the screw”, a certain fact remains; a fact that Žižek’s apology of Hegel, to some

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London & New York 1989, p. 207.

extent at least, tries to conceal: The autonomy of the negative, its privilege not to be determined by anything else, remains even at the point where negativity ceases to be pure negativity. Nothing is and remains autonomous, androgynous power, which reproduces itself only by itself: only nothing prevents the decomposition of reality; yet at the same time, only nothing is capable of denouncing the escape of negativity out of reality as an illusion, and is thereby capable of creating nothing as a minimal difference. Hegel has argued in favor of *creatio ex nihilo* and this will turn out to be the key to Nietzsche's criticism.

2. *Death of a certain nothing*

In a certain moment, the Hegelian world finds itself in the position where only the gravity of nothing still prevents it from being swallowed by the stratosphere of infinite nothingness. Nietzsche's "answer" is clear. *It happened*. The power of nothing (God) has failed, "the horizon has been wiped out", there's hardly "any up and down left ... we are straying as through an infinite nothing."¹²

The "death of God" relates to nothing in two ways. On the one hand, it actually defines the decline of a certain nothing, since for Nietzsche, God is nothing, God is the name of a specific constellation of nothing.¹³ *God is dead* means that a certain nothing no longer lives. From the other perspective, however, the effect of the death of God is the very opposite of this: everything becomes crisscrossed with nothingness. "Is not night continually closing in on us ... Do we not smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition?"¹⁴ It seems as if the destruction of nothing (God) only opened the bottle in which the spirit of negativity has been stored. This can be explained in the language of Deleuze's interpretation: the *negative nihilist* who denies life with his belief in values that are higher than life, has been replaced by the *reactive nihilist* who openly declares the nullity of the world of higher values, without being able to reaffirm life. His principle remains the same: *negation*. However, if the religious jingoist at least believed in nothing itself (the super-sensuous world), then the "modern man" sees everywhere and in everything just nothing: everything is relative, all higher projects are from the beginning due to fail. The shadow of the obliterated nothing has only strengthened its rule.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Vintage, New York 1974, p. 181.

¹³ "One does not say 'nothingness': one says 'the beyond'; or 'God'." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Penguin, London 1990, p. 130.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.

How is this duality (the death of nothing and the proliferation of nothingness) reflected in the problematic that was introduced at the beginning of this paper, namely in the question of Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysical constitution of reality? To repeat our basic thesis: the essence of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics lies in the argument that metaphysics is unable *not* to think of being as nothing.

Nietzsche's basic question a propos of reality is: Where does the need for reality come from in the first place: "Why should the world that is relevant to us not be a fiction?"¹⁵ Nietzsche's argument of course isn't skeptical or relativistic. What he basically wants to say is that the dividing line between real and unreal originates in the belief in the existence of the eternal supersensible world that exists independently from the fugacious sensible world. The belief in supersensible reality, however, is itself the result of a metaphysical struggle against sophism. The constitutive metaphysical blind spot, its *error sine qua non*, is thus represented in suppression of the question "how *could* something arise from its opposite? Truth from error, for example?"¹⁶ Would it be possible to imagine Plato's *The State*, if the sophistical argument that "altruism" may originate in "egoism", prevailed? If metaphysics wanted to put into force its eternal common law, it had to make the conclusion that "those things of highest value must have a different origin; *their own*." In other words, because the highest values can't be derived from this "confusion of desire and delusion ... their basis must lie in the womb of existence, in the imperishable, in the hidden God, in "the thing in itself". In its effort to tame the sensible world, a world pervaded with nonbeing, metaphysics created the fiction of the supersensible world and named it true reality. *Thus it has opposed nonbeing with nothing*. However, there's yet another, deeper and more contemporaneous reason why "metaphysics" remains unable *not* to think of being as nothing.

If, in the first episode, the basic problem was that metaphysics could not allow that something originates from its opposite, now the perspective is turned upside down: "The metaphysicians fundamental belief is the belief in the opposition of values ... For may there not be doubt, first of all, whether opposites exist and, second, whether these popular value judgments and value oppositions upon which metaphysicians have placed their seal may be no more than foreground evaluations, temporary perspectives ..."¹⁷ From this new point of view, the basic problem of metaphysics no longer lies in putting

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, p. 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

all of the truth on the side of reality (being, One, Good), but rather in the very manner in which metaphysics *generates its perspective*, its sense: through thinking in opposites; through the production of contrast; through thinking in the framework of the popular tradition of Good and Evil.

The story has more than one layer. To bring the basic constellation into focus once again: metaphysics opposes *nonbeing* (the illusion of the sensible world) with *nothing* (the fiction of the true being beyond the world). Now, how is it possible to perceive this eternal being? The answer is at hand – if only what's *true* exists eternally, then it's sufficient to test the world using the method of fire – let's burn everything and only what's really imperishable will remain, while illusion and nonbeing shall become what they already are – nothing. This was Parmenid's method. That's also how the first type of dialectics Socrates' *maevtics* – was born: the truth can be grasped only by vanquishing erroneous appearance. The procedure of Cartesian doubt is, of course, no different: what is true is only what can't be subjected to doubt any longer. That's the first key: metaphysics reinstates itself through exclusion of the negative; yet this exclusion coincides with the *invention of the autonomous power of the negative*. In order to transgress the negative (nonbeing, appearance), metaphysics has to reactivate the negative as a resource in the fight against the negative. Negation is called upon to neutralize the force of the negative. However, does the autonomous power of the negative really exist? Negation by itself, for Nietzsche, is nothing but the impotence of *ressentiment*.

The act of the metaphysical constitution of reality thus proceeds as the exclusion of the negative from reality, whereby, reality in its true form and authenticity, emerges only at the end of the operation – at the moment when nonbeing and appearance have disappeared back into nothing. In other words, one is unable to behold reality in its wholeness till something has been taken away from it – something that doesn't even exist: nonbeing, appearance. The paradox of course lies in the fact that, by that means, the excluded, non-existing negativity itself becomes the condition of reality, because reality appears only through this exclusion, under the condition of the *possibility* of this exclusion. The second metaphysical myth thus lies in the conviction that there exists a *certain negative that can be isolated* from the positive reality. The myth that preaches the independent life of a shadow dragging behind one's tail.¹⁸

¹⁸ The role of the negative that can be separated from the positive is given to Zarathustra's shadow: "My shadow calls me? What does my shadow matter? Let him run after me! I shall run away from him." The shadow however didn't yield and chased Zarathustra through mountains and valleys, until Zarathustra decided that he should not "be afraid of a shadow". And as a matter of fact, when Zarathustra turned around "he almost threw his follower and shadow to the ground: so close was the shadow by then, and so weak too. And

The third moment is also closely related to the second. If the act of exclusion was constitutive of reality, then the question arises of where the negative can be excluded to. Metaphysics demands that nonbeing returns to nothing. Where to nothing? The third myth is thus *the true place of the negative beyond reality*, the zero point, *the (anti)-substance of the negative*. Metaphysical truth is the moment when nothing steps out of reality into its own field and thus leaves reality intact. Or, to put it differently, metaphysical reality exists only under condition that there is a sphere which *really* exists outside of *reality*, and which, by its very withdrawal from reality, enables this reality: nothing. That's why opposition is the metaphysical truth. And precisely in this sense nothing has always already taken the place of being. – The being of reality is the withdrawal of nothing from reality into the position of absolute contrast to reality.

One can see now where Nietzsche's story leads to. Metaphysics doesn't produce only the fiction of a supersensible world, it also and foremost produces the fiction of nothing. Nothing is not only the place where all the fiction is to be found, *nothing is this fiction itself*. It is this fiction in three different ways: as belief in the *autonomous power of the negative*, as the conviction that *the negative can be isolated from the positive* and as the creation of the *nothing beyond reality*, or the invention of nothing as the constitutive opposition to reality. That's also the reason why Nietzsche continuously stresses that the mutilation has always been double: the fiction of the supersensible world, or in other words, everything that is equal only to itself, has its foundation and sense in the three forms of the fiction of nothing. – The fiction of the autonomous power of the negative (the negation of negation) enables one to think of the fiction of eternal being as the truth beyond contradiction. Yet the fiction of the withdrawal of nothing from positive reality enables the fiction of pure positive reality. Nothing-beyond, the anti-substance of nothing, *is the same* as eternal being: the untouchable infinity, which is in everything and *truly* beyond everything.¹⁹

How can the "death of God" be placed into the given matrix? If one speaks of the death of God, it is necessary that one keep in mind the awkward

when Zarathustra examined him with his eyes he was startled as by a sudden ghost: so thin, swarthy, hollow, and outlived did this follower look." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin, New York 1978, pp. 272, 273.

¹⁹ The double mutilation is also depicted in the chapter "Shadow": "... so that soon there were three runners, one behind the other, first the voluntary beggar, then Zarathustra, and the third and last his shadow. It was not long that they ran this way before Zarathustra realized his folly ... Verily, my folly has grown tall in the mountains. Now I hear six old fools' legs clattering along in a row." The voluntary beggar, "friend of the poorest", "herdsman of the cattle of cows" might have been Jesus Christ, in any case it is sure that he represents Christian/democratic values, the shadow is of course the anti-substance of nothing. *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 273.

temporality that marks this event: although it is us by ourselves who have murdered God, the news of his death hasn't yet reached us. "This tremendous event is still on its way ... Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds though done require time to be seen and heard."²⁰ That way the consequences of God's death are always spread between the "real situation" and the future yet to come, whereby the relation between them remains blurred: what is in reality, *might* once occur. If the death of God is to signify going beyond "Good and Evil" (the rule of negative as the essence of both metaphysics and Christianity), then it has to be the death of both fictions – the death of the fiction of the supersensible world, as well as the death of the fiction of the negative anti-substance in which the first one is founded. Both "the voluntary beggar" and "the shadow" must go. At least that's what (should have) happened. But it hasn't (yet). We've transgressed the Good and remain stuck with Evil. The "new age" has (more or less) relinquished the supersensible world, but the negative anti-substance has by no means shared its fate. As both, first Heidegger and then also Deleuze pointed out, all that happened was that man himself occupied the place of God. Man himself steps in the position of nothing that extends beyond reality: "God-man, the moral man, the truthful man and the social man ... These are the new characters proposed in place of God."²¹ We remain stuck at "evil" and we've modeled the new "good" on its figure. Everything is based upon change in the way one perceives individuality: the new age thinks of the individual by stripping her of her Aristotelian *primary ousia* (the concrete unity of form and matter) and replaces it with nothing. Descartes had to annihilate almost the whole constitution of the subject in order to reach *cogito* (empty thought), Kant criticized Descartes' substantiation of the subject in *cogito*, Hegel took a step even further and put the subject in the void of desire. From Nietzsche's point of view, this development is nothing but a common fraud – we are supposedly renouncing our control over our being, pound by pound we are tearing flesh from our wretched bodies, only to reinstate ourselves as *causa sui* in the form of *nothing*. Subjects of free will, Men-Gods.

In this new situation we are thus caught in between two levels of the death of God: the death of nothing, which has already occurred, and the possible future erasure of its shadow. The belief in a supersensible world has faded away, but the fiction of nothing, now embodied in *us* ourselves, still regulates the value of life. The only difference is, as Deleuze puts it, that life is no longer

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 182.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, New York 1983, p. 151.

negated from the outside, but rather from the inside, although precisely by means of the negating element (us) representing itself as something exterior to life, as something that can position itself beyond life: the Hegelian master, man of free choice. Now, life itself is a junction of two elements: becoming and nonbeing. In contrast to the whole philosophical tradition, which has understood becoming only as a negative determination of being, and also in contrast to Hegel, who defined becoming as the vanishing moment of mediation between being and nothing, Nietzsche understands becoming as the only element that positively exists. All the *hypostases* of being, understood as self-equality, are a result of both the “physical and psychological perversion” that covers the fact that everything that really exists, does so as becoming. Becoming doesn’t become being or nothing, but continuously returns back to itself. It doesn’t have a horizon depicting its outer limit and it doesn’t have the opposite. *Nonbeing is not the opposite of becoming: becoming differs from nonbeing, which on its own behalf doesn’t have its proper place, proper time, or proper anti-substance.* It’s entirely integrated in becoming. But how? Everything is concentrated around one question: How should one think of nonbeing without negating it, and together with it also life in its entirety? In other words, how should one *affirm* nonbeing and at the same time *neutralize* negativity?

Only at this stage does “double affirmation” enter the play.²² What does affirmation actually mean to Nietzsche? Certainly affirmation of life, but what does it mean to affirm life? Deleuze argues that “to affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives.”²³ Nietzsche’s affirmation is thus not Hegelian freedom in recognition of necessity, even less so quietist acceptance of all the burdens life may bring along, but affirmation of becoming, which is the only element that positively exists and which by itself implicates the breakdown of all types of fixed figures. Namely, as was shown above, all fixed figures have their foundation in negative anti-substance. Affirmation therefore (as Deleuze demonstrated) already includes negation, because affirmation of becoming demands negation of all the static forms. This negation however already originates in affirmation; it springs out of affirmation. – What we are dealing with is not the negation of fixed figures that leads to the affirmation of becoming, but on the contrary, with the affirmation of becoming, which by itself already negates the static figures. Negative is no longer an autonomous force; it’s only

²² This paper relies on the version elaborated by Alenka Zupančič, which is closer to the moment Deleuze defines as the transsubstantiation of nothing than to his own theory of double affirmation. This fact however doesn’t change the basic point.

²³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 185.

a consequence of affirmation. Nevertheless, at this stage one still remains caught within the framework of the logic of opposition: affirmation dislocates the negative from its presupposed position, yet by doing such it only reinstalls the negative in the position of the nothing-beyond. Becoming still remains in opposition to nothing. That's why a second affirmation is needed. It is only when the object of affirmation becomes affirmation itself, when affirmation ceases to oppose negativity and instead affirms itself, that nothing ceases to exist as negativity and intervenes "*as interval or minimal difference of the same.*"²⁴ Double affirmation, "white affirmation on white background", as Zupančič puts it, paraphrasing yet another famous painting by Malevitch, *recreates nothing as an interval and at the same time neutralizes or even mobilizes the power of the negative*. Beyond becoming there's only becoming; nonbeing is no longer its opposite, but its internal interstice and its product.

Only from this point is it possible to see the (non)-relationship between Nietzsche and Hegel in all of its complexity. Nietzsche's project is transubstantiation of nothing, which means the reintegration of nothing-beyond into a minimal difference in the midst of becoming, which breaks the logic of one and thereby renders the possibility to grasp becoming in its infinity (eternal return). And at this point Nietzsche's thought actually coincides with Hegel's. Nevertheless, Deleuze's central argument isn't diminished by this fact. Nietzsche actually substitutes the positivity of the negative with "his own discovery: the negativity of the positive."²⁵ Hegelian negativity is and remains autonomous power. *Creatio ex nihilo*. Its only restriction comes from the fact that in order to exist, it has to be incarnated in the positive. Nevertheless, even when it stops being pure negativity, it still keeps all of its autonomy in the *spheres of absolute ontological independency* – free subject, spirit, appearance. There's no question of the subject and spirit going beyond the level of immediate absolute negativity. – Hegel's argument isn't that everything that the subject represents was nothing, on the contrary, subject is the only substance that exists. Subject enters its community; spirit enters its world. Nevertheless, *wherefrom* subject, *wherefrom* spirit, *wherefrom* irreducible appearance? All these figures were forged, while nothing was still on the *other* side; all of them came into being by means of finding their own being beyond being, their own negative substance. They all exist only under the premise that nothing can intervene as being. Even if the negative anti-substance at a certain point reveals its true illusory nature, the world has been cut out with its scissors.

²⁴ Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 136.

²⁵ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 180.