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INTERPRETING SIGNATURES (NIETZSCHE/HEIDEGGER): TWO QUESTIONS

THE FIRST QUESTION concerns the *name* Nietzsche, the second has to do with the concept of totality.

I

Let us begin with chapters 2 and 3 of Heidegger's *Nietzsche* — dealing with “The Eternal Recurrence of the Same” and “The Will to Power as Knowledge,” respectively. We will be turning especially to the subsection on chaos [“The Concept of Chaos,” I, pp. 562–70] and to “The Alleged Biologism of Nietzsche” [“Nietzsches angeblicher Biologismus”]. In view of the fact that the same interpretation is regularly at work throughout, the risks involved in choosing this strategy are, I hope, quite limited. In each instance, a single system of reading is powerfully concentrated and gathered together. It is directed at gathering together the unity and the uniqueness of Nietzsche's thinking, which, as a fulfilled unity, is itself in a fair way to being the culmination of occidental metaphysics. Nietzsche would be precisely at the crest, or ridge, atop the peak of this fulfillment. And thus he would be looking at both sides, down both slopes.

What about this unity — this doubled unity? What is its connection to the name — or rather, the signature — of Nietzsche? Does Heidegger take any account of this question — which others might call biographical, autobiographical, or autographical — of the singularity of a signature ostensibly the proper name of Nietzsche? To put the matter another way, if one can glimpse behind Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche the foundations of a general reading of Western metaphysics, then the question

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arises: To what extent does this interpretation of metaphysics in its totality and as a whole contain an interpretive decision about the unity or singularity of thinking? And to what extent does this interpretive decision also presuppose a decision about the “biographical,” about the proper name, the autobiographical, and about signature—about the politics of signature? ¹

Heidegger’s position on this subject I will indicate first of all with a summarizing and simplifying statement, which one could, I hope, demonstrate is not wrong: there is a unity in Nietzschean thought even if it is not that of a system in the classical sense. This unity is also its uniqueness, its singularity. A thesis explicitly advanced by Heidegger is that every great thinker has only one thought. This uniqueness was neither constituted nor threatened, neither gathered together nor brought about, through a name or proper name—nor by the life of Nietzsche, either normal or insane. This unique unity is something it draws from the unity of Western metaphysics which is gathered together there at its crest, which one could also compare to the simple unity of a line created by a fold. The result of all this is that biography, autobiography, the scene or the powers of the proper name, of proper names, signatures, and so on, are again accorded minority status, are again given the inessential place they have always occupied in the history of metaphysics. This points to the necessity and place of a questioning which I can only sketch here.

Such would be a simplified version of the question. Now let us read Heidegger a little more closely and seek to confirm the strongest coherence of his interpretation or, beyond its coherence, his deepest thought. As a provisional concession to the classical norms of reading, let us take this book at its beginning, or even before its beginning at the beginning of the preface. Naturally, this preface was, like so many others, written later. As we know, the book goes back to a series of lectures given between 1936 and 1940, and to some treatises written between 1940 and 1946. One should take most careful note of these dates if one is to bring this interpretation, as a whole and in detail, into connection with the historico-political and institutional field of its presentation. The preface, however, dates from 1961. The intention of the two pages in this case, as almost always, is to justify the publication of this collection by reference to the essential unity of its totality: “This publication, rethought (*nachgedacht*) as a whole (*als Ganzes*) should provide a glimpse of the path of thought which I followed between 1930 and the *Letter on Humanism* (1947).” The unity of this publication and of this teaching is, then, also the unity of the path of thought of Heidegger at a decisive moment and traced through a period of

over fifteen years. But at the same time this also means that the unity of his interpretation of Nietzsche, the unity of Western metaphysics to which this interpretation is referred, and the unity of the Heideggerian path of thought are here inseparable. One cannot think the one without the other.

Now what are the first words of this preface? What does one find in that first phrase? To be elliptical, let us say one finds *two things*, and both of them have a literal connection with the *name* of Nietzsche.

First, the name is placed in quotation marks.

Now what happens when a proper name is put between quotation marks? Heidegger never asks himself. Still, his whole undertaking, although entitled "Nietzsche," has perhaps put all its powers together in such a way as to nullify the urgency and necessity of this question.

Second, let me read you the first sentence of the preface in the French translation by Klossowski: "'Nietzsche' — the name of the thinker here names the *cause* of his thinking [*intitulé ici la cause de sa pensée*]." ² Heidegger's next paragraph explains and, up to a point, justifies Klossowski's translation of a certain German word [*Sache*] by "cause." For in Heidegger's next paragraph we read: "A case, the legal case, is, in itself, *ex-pli-cation* — or in German, *Aus-einander-setzung* — one party taking a position in relation to another. To let our thought be penetrated by this 'cause' — to prepare it for this — that is the content of the present publication."³

Now to someone who simply opens up this book without knowing the German text, such an approach could seem both odd and at the same time consonant with the latest modernity, not to say the latest style: the *name* of the thinker would thus be the *cause* of his thought! The thinking, then, would be the *effect* caused by his proper name! And here is a book on the name Nietzsche and on the connections between his name and his thought. Taking into account the fact that in this French edition, through a strange typographical error, the name Nietzsche is cut in two (Niet - zsche), who knows what heights this new reader, in the freshness of his too great or too limited perspective, could attain in his analysis of the schism of the proper name, an analysis which, through a parcelling out of the signifier or the semantic elements, could make a connection between the Slavic (Polish) origin of the name, on the one hand, and what Nietzsche himself said about the negativity of his own name and the destructive power of his thought, on the other. And if this analysis were carried to delirious extremes, it would then connect this negative element, *Niet-* (and why not? why stop half-way?) with the only two cities in which he said in 1887 he could think or wanted to think: Venice and Nice (specifically, in a letter to Peter Gast-dated September 15, which Heidegger cites near the

beginning of the book and chapter on *The Will to Power as Art*).⁴ These two cities remain the only cure for Nietzsche, the only possible escape. Ah, says our ingenuous and zealous reader, “I see, I see! *il veut Nice, il veut Venise, il veut Nietzsche, il veut et il ne veut pas*,⁵ there you have the two places, the two said places, the toponyms of his *Will to Power!*” But unfortunately this sequence can only work in French and the delirium must come to a halt the moment one notices that Venice in German is *Venedig* and Nice in German is *Nizza*. As Nietzsche says, cited by Heidegger: “*Somit läuft es auf Venedig und Nizza hinaus. . .*” — “Therefore it has turned out to be a matter of Venice and Nice. . .” (*N*, I, p. 22; Eng. I, p. 14).

But then, pursuing his reading, our French reader still asks: What does it mean, “Nietzsche, the name of the thinker stands as title for his thinking”? Even within the confines of the French translation the content of the next paragraph is enlightening for it clearly says, Do not take the word *cause* in its opposition to *effect* as material, efficient, formal, or final cause of his thought but understand it as the Latin *causa*: legal debate, litigation, opposition of two parties. Still, this perspective too can exercise a kind of modish temptation for the French reader of today: the name Nietzsche as contentiousness of thinking, as stake in a game, war, or legal battle — that scarcely sounds classical any more. Such, taking this new, fresh start, would be an initial reading. But if he consults the original text, the reader discovers something else, quite different from *cause* either in the derivative sense or the usual sense of the word: “‘Nietzsche,’ the name of the thinker stands as title for *die Sache seines Denkens*,” the *subject-matter* [*Sache*] of his thought, for *what* he thinks.

The German word that one usually translates into French as *cause* [English: “cause”] is *Ursache* [the cause or reason for something]. Because the two words are alike, Klossowski felt justified in translating *Sache* as “cause.” But normally *Sache* designates the “thing” — not the sense object or even the thing at hand but the thing in question, the affair, which eventually can lead to litigation. In this sense, the Latin *causa*, cause in the sense of litigation or a trial, is a good translation. It poses not only the thing in question but the question of the thing (*Die Frage nach dem Ding*), which is dealt with elsewhere, namely in Heidegger’s great meditation by that title and above all in reference to the relation to all semantic determinations of cause. Indeed, the translation of *Sache* by the French word *cause* [instead of *chose*, thing] can find, as we have said, support in the course of the text itself. For Heidegger continues, “Die Sache der Streitfall, ist in sich selbst Auseinandersetzung” — “the matter, the point of dispute, is in itself a placing in opposition, a confrontation.”

But when he says that the name of the thinker stands as title “for the *Sache* of his thinking,” he certainly does not intend to make the name the cause of an effect that would be the thinking. The genitive “of” here designates the *Sache* [matter] *as* his thinking. Everything will confirm this once one considers the proper name not as that of an individual or of a signatory; it is the name of a thought, of a thought whose unity gives in return sense and reference to the proper name. “Nietzsche” is nothing other than the name of this thinking. The syntax of the genitive misleads us in the other direction, if one may put it that way, for the name is not before the thought, it is the thing that is thought; it is produced and determined by it. Only in thinking this thought will one think the possessive, the genitive, and the proper name. One will learn *who Nietzsche is* and what his name says only from his thinking – not from card files packed with more or less refined biographical facts.

At this point two paths present themselves. One would consist in taking a new approach to the problematic of the name, at the risk of seeing the name dismembered and multiplied in masks and similitudes. We know what Nietzsche risked in this respect. The name would be constituted on the far side of the “life” of the thinker, from the vantage point of the future of the world, from an affirmation of the “eternal recurrence.”⁶

The other path would be to determine the essentiality of the name from the “subject matter of thought,” of thought itself defined as the content of theses, and to let fall into inessentiality the particular proper name, which has become the index of the “biography” or a “psychology” of an individual. In legitimately scorning biographism, psychologism, or psychoanalysis, one instead embraces reductionist empiricisms which in turn only cover up what is given as thinking. This is what Heidegger does, for the best reasons in the world. But in doing this does he not thereby fall back on a gesture of classical metaphysics, indeed at the very moment in which he is appealing for something other than metaphysics – i.e., at the moment when he situates Nietzsche on the crest of that metaphysics? This classical gesture also reappears in his dissociating the matter of life or of proper name from the matter of thought. Hence the beginning of Heidegger’s lecture course: In a very conventional fashion he dissociates his summary and “official” biography of Nietzsche, on the one hand, from the grand questions which stretch the great philosopher to the limit of his powers, on the other. Such is the form of this first lecture, which conforms to the old pedagogical model: very quickly one runs through the “life of the author” in its most conventional features, then turns to the thought, that which Heidegger calls “the authentic philosophy of Nietzsche.” This

philosophy, Heidegger notes, “does not arrive at a definitive elaboration nor is it ever published as a work.”

Then, criticizing the edition of the complete works, Heidegger notes some of its limitations. They adhered to the principle of integrality (*Vollständigkeit*, completeness), that pushed everything and which resurrected nineteenth-century models, to the point of that biologism and psychologism which are like a monstrous perversion of our age. Heidegger criticizes that editorial enthusiasm that “proceeds in the manner of biological and psychological elucidation,” which “traces minutely all the data” of the life of the author, including the opinions of contemporaries. It is an “excrescence” (*Ausgeburt*, monstrosity, product), a “monstrous product of the addiction of our time to the psycho-biological (*der psychologisch-biologischen Sucht unserer Zeit*).” Says Heidegger, “Only the proper preparation of an authentic edition of the *Works* (1881–1889), if that task is ever accomplished in the future, will bring access to the ‘works of Nietzsche,’ properly speaking.” Furthermore, Heidegger adds, “This will never be genuinely accomplished if in the questioning we do not grasp Nietzsche as the end of Western metaphysics and press over to the quite different question of the truth of Being” (*N*, I, pp. 18–19; Eng. I, p. 10). To pose the question of the truth of Being, beyond ontology, and to determine the place of Nietzsche as the end of Western metaphysics — these are the prerequisite conditions if one wishes eventually to gain access to the “biography” of Nietzsche, to the name, and above all to the textual corpus of Nietzsche — if one wishes, in other words, to know “who Nietzsche was.”

Prior to all other questions, we need to be attentive to the fundamental necessity for such a schema as Heidegger puts forward, and also attentive to everything in a certain historical and political situation which could justify it. The psychological and biological eagerness in the *style* he so often practices circles around and thereby misses the *content* of a thought — its necessity and its internal specificity. A well-known schema. Besides, at the time he was teaching his “Nietzsche,” Heidegger had begun to put some distance between himself and Nazism. Without saying anything in his lecture itself that was directed against the government and the use it was making of Nietzsche (on so much prudence and silence one can certainly put an interpretation — but elsewhere), Heidegger is in the process of overtly criticizing the edition that the government is in the process of supporting. Heidegger appears at first to have been associated with it, then he backed out; the issue had to do with instituting, in cooperation with Nietzsche’s sister, falsifications in that edition: “For knowledge of Nietzsche’s biography,” Heidegger continues, “the presentation by his sister, Elisabeth

Förster-Nietzsche, *The Life of Friedrich Nietzsche* (published between 1895 and 1904), remains always important. As with all biographical works, however, use of this publication requires great caution. We will refrain from further suggestions and from discussion of the enormous and varied secondary literature surrounding Nietzsche, since none of it can aid the endeavor of this lecture course. Whoever does not have the courage and perseverance of thought required to get involved in reading Nietzsche's own writings has no need to read anything *about* him either" (*N*, I, p. 19; Eng. I, pp. 10-11).

Here and elsewhere one of the targets of Heidegger is what he calls "philosophy of life." The object of Heidegger's attack here was Nazism, but also a classical university tradition as well, which made of Nietzsche a "philosopher-poet," a life-philosopher without conceptual rigor whom one could denounce "from the height of German chairs of philosophy." But in either case one praises or condemns that "philosophy of life" which Heidegger from *Being and Time* onward had combatted as an absurdity.

This critique of psycho-biologism underlies also his critique of Nietzsche's "alleged biologism" ["Nietzsches angeblicher Biologismus," *N*, I, pp. 517-27]. It answers the question of the name of Nietzsche, the question "What is that we call Nietzsche?" There, once again, in response to the question, "Who is Nietzsche?", right at the opening of the third chapter, "The Will to Power as Knowledge," in the first subsection (again the first words), which has the title "Nietzsche as Thinker of the Fulfillment of Metaphysics":

Who Nietzsche *is* and above all who he *will be* we know as soon as we are in a position to think that thought which he stamped into the world-framework of *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche is that thinker who went the way that the train of thought led him — to the will to power. Who Nietzsche is we never find out through a historical account of his life history, and also not through a presentation of the content of his writings. Who Nietzsche is we do not will to know and also are not meant to know if and so long as we have in mind only the personality, the historical figure, the psychological object and its productions. But wait (*N*, I, p. 473)

At this point, Heidegger brings forward an objection he will soon reject. Before going into this, however, I should like to offer a cautionary remark against oversimplifying the question I am directing to Heidegger's procedure. Doubtless there is an effort by Heidegger to reduce the name of Nietzsche or the "Who is Nietzsche" question to the unity of Western

metaphysics, even to the uniqueness of a limit situation on the crest of that metaphysics. Nevertheless, the question “Who is X?” was a rare question when applied to a thinker; it is so still if one does not understand it in a biographically trivial way — as the man and the work, the man behind the work, the life of Descartes or Hegel associated with a kind of doxography. But to ask in another sense “Who is Nietzsche?” — to make his name the title of a book on his thought — that is something not so conventional.

Here is the objection Heidegger raises in a *pro forma* way just after he has rejected psychobiography: “But just a minute! Has not Nietzsche himself as a last act completed a work for publication entitled *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is?* Does not *Ecce Homo* speak as Nietzsche’s last will and testament, to the effect that one must deal with this man, and let it be said of him what the excerpts of that writing suggest: ‘Why I am so wise? Why I am so intelligent? Why I write such good books? Why I am a destiny?’ Does this not point to an apex in unrestrained self-presentation and measureless self-mirroring?” Heidegger answers: *Ecce Homo* is not an autobiography, and if anything culminates in it, it would be the final moment of the West, in the history of the era of modernity. Without a doubt things get knotted together right in this place. One can admit, easily enough, that *Ecce Homo* is not Nietzsche’s autobiographical history. But when Heidegger simply lets stand the conventional concept of autobiography instead of reshaping it, and only opposes to it the destiny of the West whose “carrier” Nietzsche would be, then one has to ask: Does Heidegger himself escape a fairly traditional opposition between biographical factuality — psycho-biographical, historical — and an essential thinking on the order of a historical decision? One can also ask what interest is served by this Heideggerian discourse being carried out along these lines.

By means of this strategy, Heidegger intends to rescue Nietzsche from his own singular fate. This fate has remained ambiguous. It has provoked odd uses of his thinking, uses which turned against what Heidegger calls Nietzsche’s “innermost will.” Thus it is a matter of gaining access to this innermost will and to oppose it to the duplicity of the empirical figure of Nietzsche as well as to the ambiguity of its subsequent effects — its immediate after-effects, for Heidegger believed that the future will work to restore that innermost will. After saying this in order to rescue Nietzsche from ambiguity, Heidegger directs this whole interpretation of Nietzsche’s essential and singular thinking to the following argument: this thinking has not really gone beyond the end of metaphysics; it is still itself a great metaphysics and even if it points to such an overcoming, it is just barely,

just enough to remain on the sharpest crest of the boundary. Or, in other words, to remain in complete ambiguity.

This, then, is essential ambiguity! Not just Nietzsche's, as Heidegger sees it, but also Heidegger's own ambivalence with regard to Nietzsche. It remains constant. In saving Nietzsche, Heidegger loses him too; he wants at the same time to save him and let go of him. At the very moment of affirming the uniqueness of Nietzsche's thinking, he does everything he can to show that it repeats the mightiest (and therefore the most general) schema of metaphysics. When he is pretending to rescue Nietzsche from this or that distortion — that of the Nazis, for example — he does so with categories which can themselves serve to distort — namely, with that opposition between essential and inessential thinkers, authentic thinkers and inauthentic ones, and with the definition of the essential thinker as someone selected, chosen, marked out or, I would even say, "signed" (*gezeichnet*). Signed — by what? By whom? By nobody — by the history of the truth of Being. Nietzsche was sufficiently chosen for that, and yet he was condemned by this same destiny to bring metaphysics to its completion, and without reaching a decision which he alone had prepared, even without recognizing the scope of that decision: "between the hegemony of *beings* and the lordship of *Being*" ("Zwischen der Vormacht des Seienden und der Herrschaft des Seins"). For all these points I refer you to the first pages of the chapter, "The Will to Power as Knowledge," whose first section carries the heading, "Nietzsche as Thinker of the Fulfillment of Metaphysics" (*N*, I, p. 473ff.).

It was doubtless necessary to set up this interpretation-schema of Nietzsche's *biographiein* in order to penetrate to his "alleged biologism." There too it is a matter of rescuing — in a most ambiguous way — the uniqueness of a thinking from the ambiguity of a life and work. The marking out of the boundaries of the biographical and of the proper name opens up the general space in whose interior the interpretation of the biological occurs.

Before the first words I quoted moments ago from the Preface there is an *exergue*.⁷ It is taken from the *Gay Science* and its first word is "life." "Life" stands at the extreme outset of Heidegger's book — even before its beginning, before any decision between biography and biology. Here, strangely enough, Heidegger is not satisfied with breaking off the passage before its end. He also skips over a few words and replaces them with ellipses: "Life . . . more mysterious since the day the great liberator came over me — the thought that life should be an experiment of knowers." Among the words he skips over are the words "true" and "desirable," both

of which pertain to life. Here is the fragment from Nietzsche in its — if one may speak this way — integral character.

In media vita! No! [These four words — the title, in short — and above all, these two exclamation points, are omitted by Heidegger — this time without ellipses. JD] Life has not disappointed me! On the contrary, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year — ever since the day when the great liberator came over me: the idea that life might be an experiment of knowers — and not a duty, not a calamity, not trickery! And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others; for example, a bed to rest on, or the way to such a bed, or a diversion, or a form of leisure — for me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. “*Life as a means to knowledge*” — with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too! And who knows how to laugh anyway and live well if he does not first know a good deal about war and victory? (*Gay Science*, § 324)

These are fundamentally secretive assertions, very difficult to interpret, just like the title *In media vita!* That makes life out to be a medium — as much in the sense of a mean between two extremes as in the sense of an elementary milieu in which the experiment of knowledge finds its place. In situating itself within life, this experiment uses life as a means, steers it from the inside, and — with this power to steer the living — comes to be beyond and outside of life, on the side of its end and its death, and so on. One can see why Heidegger took this passage as an *exergue*. He appears to be making a biological reading of Nietzsche more difficult in advance, whether one understands this reading in the sense of a subordination under the model of biology or as a celebration of life as the ultimate aim — even to the determination of life as the Being of beings, or being as a whole.

This choice of an *exergue* is sufficient evidence that the question about life and the “alleged biologism” stand at the active center of Heidegger’s *Nietzsche*. And yet the paradoxical character of this passage (*In media vita!*) could also thwart Heidegger’s hermeneutical strategy. Life does have a beyond, but it does not allow itself to be made into something secondary. As itself and in itself it unfolds the movement of truth or knowledge. It is in itself as its own beyond. Not to mention the stresses and the joys, the laughter and the war, the question marks and exclamation points — those things which Heidegger, considering how he effaces or conceals them, obviously does not want to hear spoken of here. . . .

I would like to point out a second thing about this exergue — or rather, once again, a first thing, something completely first — pre-first. I said “life” was the first word of the citation. Strictly speaking, it is the first word in the quotation from Nietzsche. Before this quotation Heidegger adds a short sentence which — strangely enough — presents the exergue itself: “Nietzsche himself names the experience that determines his thinking: ‘. . .’”. Hence, it is Nietzsche himself who *names* what determines his thinking, the patient experience of his thinking. And, if the name of the thinker designates the matter of his thinking, as Heidegger wants to show immediately afterwards, then the exergue as a whole means: Nietzsche names himself, he names himself from that out of which one must be able to name him. He will give himself a name from out of the experience of his thinking, and from it he receives his name. And so the thinking, so named, must rightly be understood from within this autonomous circle. But is it correct to say, as Heidegger so positively claims, that this thinking is one? — that Nietzsche then has only one name? Does he name himself only once? For Heidegger, his naming takes place only once, even if the place of this event retains the appearance of a borderline, from which one can get a look at both sides at once, at the summit of Western metaphysics, which is gathered together under this name.

But who ever has said that a person bears a single name? Certainly not Nietzsche. And likewise, who has said or decided that there is something like a Western metaphysics, something which would be capable of being gathered up under this name and this name only? What is it — the oneness of a name, the assembled unity of Western metaphysics? Is it anything more or less than the desire (a word effaced in Heidegger’s Nietzsche citation) for a proper name, for a single, unique name and a thinkable genealogy? Next to Kierkegaard, was not Nietzsche one of the few great thinkers who multiplied his names and played with signatures, identities, and masks? Who named himself more than once, with several names? And what if that would be the heart of the matter, the *causa*, the *Streitfall* [point of dispute] of his thinking?

As we have just now seen, Heidegger wants to save Nietzsche at any cost, to save him from ambiguity by a gesture which is itself ambivalent. And what if it would be this rescue, which must be called into question in the name or names of Nietzsche?

When reading Heidegger’s lectures on Nietzsche it is possibly less a matter of suspecting the content of an interpretation than of an assumption or axiomatic structure. Perhaps the axiomatic structure of metaphysics, inasmuch as *metaphysics itself* desires, or dreams, or imagines its

own unity. A strange circle — an axiomatic structure which consequently demands an interpretation, one, gathered up, around a thinking unifying a unique text and, ultimately, the unique name for Being, for the experience of Being. With the value of the *name* this unity and this oneness mutually guard themselves against the dangers of dissemination. Here, perhaps — to take the words from Heidegger's preface — lies the *Streitfall* or the *Auseinandersetzung* between the Nietzsches and Martin Heidegger, between the Nietzsches and so-called [*ladite*] Western metaphysics. Since Aristotle, and at least up until Bergson, "it" (metaphysics) has constantly repeated and assumed that to think and to say must mean to think and say something that would be a *one*, one *matter*. And that not thinking-saying some one matter or principle is not thinking-saying at all, but a loss of the *logos*. Here is perhaps what the Nietzsches have put in question: the *legein* of this *logos*, the *gathering* of this logic.

This plurality starts to look like the family names of wanderers and tigh trope walkers. It leads one away to the feast. Nietzsche and Heidegger speak of this feast with added emphasis. I leave it to you to consider this difference:

The error will be recognized only when a confrontation with Nietzsche is at the same time conjoined to a confrontation in the realm of the grounding question of philosophy. At the outset, however, we ought to introduce some words of Nietzsche's that stem from the time of his work on "will to power": "for many, abstract thinking is toil; for me, on good days, it is feast and frenzy" (XIV, § 24).

Abstract thinking a feast? The highest form of human existence? Indeed. But at the same time we must observe how Nietzsche views the essence of the feast, in such a way that he can think of it only on the basis of his fundamental conception of all being, will to power. "The feast implies: pride, exuberance, frivolity; mockery of all earnestness and respectability; a divine affirmation of oneself, out of animal plenitude and perfection — all obvious states to which the Christian may not honestly say Yes. "The feast is *paganism par excellence*" (*Will to Power*, § 916). For that reason, we might add, the feast of thinking never takes place in Christianity. That is to say, there is no Christian philosophy. There is no true philosophy that could be determined anywhere else than from within itself. For the same reason there is no pagan philosophy, inasmuch as anything "pagan" is always still something Christian — the counter-Christian. The Greek poets and thinkers can hardly be designated as "pagan." Feasts require long and painstaking preparation. This semester we want to prepare ourselves for the feast, even if we do not make it as far as the celebration,

even if we only catch a glimpse of the preliminary festivities at the feast of thinking — experiencing what meditative thought is and what it means to be at home in genuine questioning. (*N*, I, pp. 14–15; Eng. I, pp. 5–6)

What happens in the course of the feast to the *legein* of this *logos*, which demands of the thinking-saying of the essential thinker that it be a thinking-saying of the one and the unique? The Nietzsches' feast risks tearing it into pieces or of dispersing it in its masks. Certainly it would protect it from any kind of biologism, but because the "logism" in it would lose its hold from the start. And another style of autobiography would come into being, bursting open (in every sense of the expression *faire sauter*) the unity of the name and the signature, disturbing both biologism and its critique, so far as it operates, in Heidegger, in the name of "essential thinking."

These are the preliminary remarks that I wanted to suggest for a future reading of Heidegger's *Nietzsche* — for this ambiguous life-saving act, in the course of which one stretches out the net for the tightrope walker, the one who runs the greatest risk overhead on the narrow rope, only insofar as one has made sure that he — unmasked and protected by the unity of his name, which in turn will be sealed by the unity of metaphysics — will not be taking any risks. In other words: he was dead before he landed in the net.

Certainly none of that will have taken place in *Zarathustra* — nor in Basel, Venice, or Nice — but in Freiburg im Breisgau, between 1936 and 1940, during the preparation for a feast, preparation for a "being at home in genuine questioning" (*N*, I, p. 15; Eng. I, p. 6).

II

Since I have been speaking for far too long (and I hope you will excuse me), I will be even more schematic in linking up a second question to the one we have just discussed. All this will be barely even preliminary, and, as I indicated at the beginning, will have to do with the concept of totality. One knows that the reference to the "totality of beings" in Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche, as well as in Western metaphysics itself, plays a structuring role. In order to speed things up, I am first of all going to mention two quotations. Heidegger takes the first one from the notes for *The Will to Power*: "Our whole world is the *ashes* of countless *living* creatures: and even if the animate seems so miniscule in comparison to the whole, it is nonetheless the case that *everything* has already been transposed into life

and so departs from it.” After this quotation Heidegger continues: “Apparently opposed to this is a thought expressed in *The Gay Science*, number 109: ‘Let us guard against saying that death is the opposite of life; the living creature is simply a kind of dead creature, and a very rare kind.’”

The first thought points to a paradox in totality as a value. It shows itself disrespectfully in the face of the assurance of all that one generally thinks under the category of totality. But let us not forget that Heidegger defines metaphysics as the thinking of beings as a whole so that the question of the Being of beings is excluded; and on the basis of this definition he often makes Nietzsche out to be the last metaphysician. Without getting tangled up in the complexity of this whole question, one can already surmise just by reading this one passage that Nietzsche by no means trusts any thought of totality. He who says, “Even if the animate seems so miniscule in comparison to the whole, it is nonetheless the case that *everything* has already been transposed into life and so departs from it,” expresses a thought about life and death which by no means subordinates itself to an unequivocal meaning of totality, of the relation between a whole and a non-whole. The idea of the eternal recurrence, obviously pervading this statement, is not a thought about totality. But Heidegger presents it *as* a thought about totality. It is one of the most insistent and most decisive themes of his reading. For instance, he writes at the end of the entire interpretation, which began with the two quotations that I recited:

For one thing, we have circumscribed the field in which the thought of return belongs and which the thought as such concerns: we have surveyed this field of being as a whole and determined it as the interlacing unity of the animate and the lifeless. For another, we have shown how in its foundations being as a whole — as the unity of animate and inanimate — is structured and articulated: it is constituted by the character of force and the finitude of the whole (at one with infinity) that is implied in the character of force — which is to say, the immeasurability of the “phenomenal effects.” (*N*, I, p. 355; Eng. II, pp. 96–97)

We must remember that Heidegger takes the will to power to be the principle of the knowledge of the eternal recurrence of the same. It is the *Verfassung* [composition] of beings (their *quid*, their *quidditas*, their *essentia*); the eternal recurrence is the modality (the *quomodo*, *die Weise* [the manner of being]) of beings as a whole (*N*, I, p. 425). In order to analyze Nietzsche’s metaphysical *Grundstellung* [fundamental position], Heidegger must

examine the accepted answer to the question about beings as a whole. The answer, he finds, is a two-fold one: the totality of beings is will to power and it is eternal recurrence. Whether or not these two answers are compatible, complementary, or combinable is basically less determinable from their content than their mutual relation. In point of fact, they are responses to two questions which throughout metaphysics form a pair (Being as *quidditas* or *essentia*; Being as manner of existing). As Heidegger sees it, because we did not know to identify this “metaphysical” pair of questions, we have erred up to now before the enigma of this twofold answer. But you can very well see that in each of these two questions the question of beings as a totality remains implied. This question about beings as a whole is one that Nietzsche, as the metaphysician he is (according to Heidegger), would stubbornly seek to answer.

And now my question: If in the first of the two statements Heidegger cites (“ . . . even if the animate seems so miniscule in comparison to the whole, it is nonetheless the case that *everything* has already been transposed into life and so departs from it”) the thought of the eternal recurrence does not coincide either with the thought of totality or any opposition of whole and part, is it perhaps hasty to make Nietzsche out to be a metaphysician, albeit the last one? — At least if a metaphysician is, as Heidegger sees it, a thinker who adheres to the thought of beings as a whole. It just may possibly be that Nietzsche is not at all a thinker of beings, if indeed an essential connection exists between beings as such and totality.

Is it not also worth noting that it is life-death which deprives the value of totality of any privileged status? Is it not to be thought — following a very Nietzschean gesture, for we could well have other indications — that the living (the-living-the-dead) is not an existent being, does not fall within an ontological determination? Nietzsche had one day proposed to think the word “being” starting from life and not the other way around.

A second preliminary remark: Heidegger has put these two quotations together on the ground of their apparent contradiction. He notes that they appear to “stand opposed” (*entgegenstehen*) to one another. Even if what we have here is an hypothesis or a feigned objection, it seems to me that its very principle is thwarted in Nietzsche’s sentence. There, opposition or contradiction no longer constitutes a law dictating prohibitions to thought. And that without dialectic. Life and death (life-death), from which we think everything else — are not the whole. Neither are they opposites: “Let us guard against saying that death is the opposite of life; the living creature is simply a kind of dead creature, and a very rare kind.” In one blow Nietzsche thwarts all that governs the thought or even the anticipation of

totality, namely the relationship of genus and species. Here we are dealing with a unique inclusion — without any possible totalization — of the “whole” in the “part.” With a metonymizing free from limits or positive devices. Let us defend ourselves against all our defenses — Nietzsche seems to be saying, at the beginning of a long aphorism (*Gay Science*, § 109), which, one more time, Heidegger does not quote in its entirety. — Yet another metonymical violence that engages his interpretation, it seems to me. But I do not want to impose upon your time; somewhere else, some other time, perhaps I will come back to these matters. Here I simply wanted to take the risk of sketching out two questions.

ECOLE DES HAUTES ETUDES
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This essay was presented at the Goethe Institute in Paris on April 25, 1981, at a colloquium organized by Philippe Forget which brought together Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida. Papers from the colloquium, including among others the presentation by Gadamer, Derrida's reply, and Derrida's own contribution, here translated into English for the first time, have appeared in German as Text und Interpretation, edited by Philippe Forget (Munich: W. Fink, 1984). The translators wish to thank Philippe Forget for his generous assistance in this project.

1. Derrida elsewhere develops this theme further, and in relation to Nietzsche. See his “Nietzsches Otobiographie oder Politik des Eigennamens: Die Lehre Nietzsches,” *Fugen: Deutsch-Französisches Jahrbuch für Text-Analytik* (1980). JD. [For the English version of this article, see note 7 below.]
2. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. Pierre Klossowski (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
3. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), p. 9; English edition, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1: *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. xv. Where Derrida provides a French translation, we have worked from the French rather than using Krell's translation. Where the German is presented untranslated, we have sometimes used the Krell translation and sometimes supplied our own.
4. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, I, 22; Eng. I, 14. Hereafter the abbreviation *N* will refer to the original two-volume German edition. The English translation, when given, will follow a semicolon.
5. The point Derrida is making relies on the French sounds. A translation would be: “He wants Nice, he venices, he wants Nietzsche” — all of which sound close enough to each other in French to invite the play on words.
6. This is the interpretation proposed by Derrida in the essay cited in footnote 1 above. JD.

7. Fr. "exergue." See the significant reference in Derrida's "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), pp. 11-12: "Between the Preface [of *Ecce Homo*] signed F. N., which comes after the title, and the first chapter . . . there is a single page. It is an outwork, an *hors d'oeuvre*, an exergue or a flysheet whose topos . . . strangely dislocates . . . the time of life's *récit*. . . ."