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THE IDEA OF NEW MIDDLE AGES IN THE LIGHT OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S NIHILISM

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism. This history can be related even now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.

— Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, Preface

The historical period of the Middle Ages was a time of enormous change in the heart of European culture, which we can call a *catastrophe* in the ambivalent sense of the end and dawn. The Middle Ages was the definitive end of the old Greek–Roman world and, at the same time, it was the definitive dawn of the Christian world preparing the new shape of Western Civilisation. The concept of *New Middle Ages* refers to the cultural change occurring inside the modern and postmodern world according to Oskar Spengler's idea of the end of Western Culture and the Nietzschean idea of nihilism. The deep philosophical description of the nihilistic change penetrated not only the postmodern culture inside the Western World but also the history of *being*. We can find this in the diagnosis of the future given by Martin Heidegger in his famous Spiegel-Interview. Speaking about the contempo-

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rary power of technology, Heidegger states: “Only God can save us (*nur ein Gott kann uns retten*).” Fifty years later, we can confirm this pessimistic prognosis: in the crisis of the globalised and technologised reality, we observe the end of the Christian world and the dawn of the unknown world predicted by the Nietzschean nihilistic vision programmed for “the history of the next two centuries.”

The announcement of the catastrophe of European culture, extracted from Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*, reveals nihilism as the fundamental change in the heart of the Old World resulting in a deep-reaching transfiguration of the cultural order as we know it.¹ “Eine Katastrophe”, the word Nietzsche has originally chosen, refers to Greek καταστροφή [*katastrophē*] and καταστρέφω [*katastréphō*]: used by a classical philologist, it is endowed with a non-accidental semantic ambivalence. The noun καταστροφή [*katastrophē*] may indicate the moment of annihilation of the existing order, or its reversal. The verb καταστρέφω [*katastréphō*], in its main meaning, points to the choice of a new direction, that is, to a transformation that leads to the emergence of a new reality.² The natural philosophical association of the Nietzschean καταστροφή καταστροφή [*katastrophē*] is the Platonic μεταβολή [*metabolē*] from the narrative on the reversed order of the world in *Politikos*.³ In the context described by Plato, μεταβολή [*metabolē*] refers to the transformation of the world that consists in the total alteration of the course of reality. The Platonic myth represents the Universe as a living and rational being led and moved by God himself. When the history of the Universe reaches its appropriate measure, God suddenly abandons it. Left to itself, the Universe comes to a halt and starts revolving backwards. Necessarily, humans and other living beings forced to find their place in the new order of reality are partly destroyed. The most important phenomenon that accompanies the cosmic transformation is the total reversal of the human ethos: instead of growing old, people become increasingly young, instead of being born from women, they emerge from the soil like plants, instead of cultivating the land, they have at their disposal all the plants that yield crops on their own accord.

The previous world was orderly because it was run and cared for by gods. The instant the divine helmsman lets the steering wheel from his grip, the

¹ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, trans. Reginald John Holingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 3.

² Henry G. LIDDELL and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 915.

³ PLATO, *Politikos*, 272d 7–8.

world is left to itself. The life of people becomes difficult, as from that moment on they are forced to look after themselves and other living creatures.⁴ The Platonic motive of gods abandoning the world returns in Friedrich Hölderlin's Romantic poetry and in its reception proposed by Martin Heidegger.⁵ This fact seems important for the understanding of the essence of historical nihilism, as it is Hölderlin and Heidegger who share a deep belief that a fundamental and irreversible transformation took place in our world. For Europe this transformation means *καταστροφή* [*katastrophḗ*]: on the one hand, it means the destruction of the safe social order: the order that is well known to the Western man and based on the presence of God; on the other, it also means a new responsibility for the world and for the development of new forms of life. This is exactly the meaning of the nihilistic *καταστροφή* [*katastrophḗ*] foretold by Friedrich Nietzsche: on the one hand, he announces the 'death of God' and points to the necessity of the transvaluation of all values; on the other, he predicts the emergence of a new man: *Übermensch*, and with him, the formation of a new human community governed by new values. The enormous tension between the lost world of the old values and the forthcoming dawn of the new reality reveals the contemporary nihilism as the phenomenon both of loss and of hope. The irretrievable loss of the past image of the world is accompanied by the hope for entering the world that revolves in an entirely different, and perhaps better direction.

1. THE PROBLEM

Describing the very moment of the catastrophe of culture and predicting its consequences, Nietzsche raises the question of its source. Two causes of nihilism, as it is interpreted by Nietzsche, will be discussed below: *ressentiment* as a motive for the transformation of the culture's ethoses described by Nietzsche as master morality and slave morality, and the division of the reality into the visible (sensible) part and the invisible (intelligible) one – the division that has become the model of cultural forms of the West, such as the Judeo-Christian religious tradition or moral and political behavioural patterns. However, the answer to the question of the source of nihilism must be

⁴ Plato, *Politikos*, 269e – 274e.

⁵ See Friedrich HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 405; Martin HEIDEGGER, *Hölderlins Hymnen »Germanien« und »Der Rhein«*. Gesamtausgabe Abteilung: Vorlesungen. Band 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), 93–113.

complemented with an argument coming from outside the context of Nietzsche's thought, looked at in the light of the process of 'logical enlightenment' present in the centre of European culture for a long time. The characteristic moment of this process is Sigmund Freud's reflection on consciousness and on the unconscious: the reflection that was oriented not only towards individual analysis, but also towards the analysis of culture. It seems that the equally characteristic stage of the process of 'logical enlightenment' is René Girard's anthropological theory focused on the word (logos) as the source of elucidation of the dark mechanism of collective violence that stands at the origin of human culture, and especially of religion. The mentioned process is that of becoming aware of European cultural identity through gaining an increasing autonomy from mythical and religious narratives. In contradistinction to Freud, Girard directs his attention to the historical event that resulted in a breakthrough in the course of our 'leaving the cave' of myth, and consequently, bringing the Western religious paradigm slowly to a halt. In Girard's anthropology the cultural order of myth and religion is based on a blind sacrificial mechanism that generates the phenomenon of culture in the Freudian sense of a mechanism of defence and control. In the logic of the mentioned anthropology, it was this mechanism that exerted a decisive influence on the formation of Judeo-Christian civilisation. Like the steering wheel of the Universe released from God's hand in the Platonic myth makes this world go on, for some time still, in the direction determined by the gods, the contemporary history of European culture, as a result of the erosion of religious and mythical mechanisms, revolves slower and slower, following its old paradigm, and soon it will probably stop only to begin moving according to a different pattern.

1.1 THE POSTMODERN SYMPTOMS

The actual change of old cultural models (morality, social sensitivity, politics, religion technology) and looking forward to new forms is characteristic of today's European *status quo*. The nihilistic harbingers of the catastrophe of European culture can be observed in the postmodern time especially in new technologies of communicating information that quickly transform the human manner of being in the world.⁶ The erosion of the European cultural paradigm is, according to Nietzsche, to take 200 years in the minds of the

⁶ Jean-François LYOTARD, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 3–4.

Europeans, which means that at the moment the postmodern West is experiencing the epicentre of the influence of nihilism. It is, however, a mere negative nihilism that consists in the transvaluation of the old ethos of Western man's life. Indeed, despite the dazzling development of positive sciences, it is difficult to detect any new, vital and creative principle of culture; an interesting example of this fact is provided by a journalistic testimony of Robert Krasowski. The former editor-in-chief of *Dziennik* points to a far-reaching decay of the order of political ethos in Poland and dispels the illusionary old values of the Polish 'Solidarity generation.' Politics today seems the domain of technical procedures, and because Europe is fully satisfied with its system of democratic control, neither outstanding virtues nor heroic sacrifices are demanded from politicians. One can obviously dispute Krasowski's participating observation, as in every social organism one can find exceptions from the tendency to despair about any deep meaning inherent in political behaviours. Its conclusion, however, is a simple statement of the fact that the trend described by Nietzsche is there. Krasowski writes:

As someone who for some years has been attempting to understand the Polish politics, I am becoming aware that what I had lived for in my everyday life made no sense at all. When I browse old newspapers, I see that *all* the published headlines were perfectly unimportant [...] I would like to undermine in my readers an irrational faith in politics, a childish need for a fairy-tale about the world that has its hosts, a history that has its directors. I am trying to show politicians as they are in order to strip their profession from fascination, respect and awe that they do not deserve [...] I do not claim that all they deal with is entirely unimportant, but as a matter of fact, their work is very ordinary. It resembles the job of an engine driver in a train from Warsaw to Krakow.⁷

The above observation reveals the phenomenon of the destruction of political space constituted by mutual references, which providing a common feeling of meaningfulness, forms a community into one ethnic or political organism. It is symptomatic of our time to increasingly distrust any great narrative (fable, myth, human genius, scientific revolution, divine revelation) that makes man see the clear meaning of his life and gives orientation to his actions. The above orientation refers to a rather narrow field of political culture, but the tendency to lose the sense of faith in a broad, meaning-lending story can be observed in many areas of culture, and especially in re-

⁷ Robert KRASOWSKI, "Polscy politycy stają się intelektualnymi warzywami [WYWIAD MIESIĄCA!]. Robert Krasowski w rozmowie z Łukaszem Pawłowskim i Tomaszem Sawczukiem," *Kultura Liberalna*, 2014, nr 7 (267), accessed February 25, 2021, <http://kulturaliberalna.pl/2014/02/18/polityka-religia/>. Translated into English by Piotr Pasterczyk.

ligion.⁸ The consequence of this loss is a slow dissolution of the Western *polis* as an orderly place where the basic distinctions that give orientation of private and public life are clear.⁹ An Italian politician and philosopher Mario Tronti confirms this intuition, observing the process of the eclipse of the West's cultural narratives in the context of emptiness that the intellectuals perceive with an increasing clarity: "There is our time, but the epoch is missing: that phase that emerges and stays forever. History has become small, daily news prevail: idle chatter, complaining, banality [...] Where are the great thought, the great literature, the great politics, the great art? I can no longer see any of them."¹⁰

1.2 THE PLACE OF NIHILISM IN EUROPEAN CULTURE

In the course of history the term 'nihilism' was primarily used to refer to a threat against an established order. One of the earliest meanings of this term is of theological character and it described an early mediaeval heresy of *nihilianism* that claimed that the human nature of Christ was merely accidental to His person. The key usage of the word 'nihilism' pertains to the philosophical context, e.g. it is used to describe an idealistic standpoint from the realist perspective, or to refer to critical and revolutionary social tendencies.¹¹ In the German language area, which is particularly important for an in-depth reflection on the essence of nihilism, the term was used for the first time probably in Jacobi's letters to Fichte as a pejorative description of the latter's philosophical position.¹² The strategy of describing a worldview

⁸ An exception from this nihilist rule is a technical narrative limited only to a very narrow space and time, described today as *public relations*. The society is ready to submit for a short time to such a limited narrative hidden in consumption-encouraging advertisements or in politicians' explanations of current issues. In contradistinction to the great narratives like myth and religion, the technical *public relations* cannot generate any institutional forms.

⁹ The Platonic term *polis* will be used here not so much to describe the specific organisation of the Greek city-state, but primarily to refer to the structure of meaning that Plato linked to this word. *Polis* is, in the first place, the social structure of justice where everyone "does his due," thus gaining a deep sense of coherence and meaningfulness of his existence.

¹⁰ Antonio GNOLI and Mario TRONTI, "Sono uno sconfitto, non un vinto. Abbiamo perso la guerra del '900", *La Repubblica* 28.09.2014: 52.

¹¹ Wolfgang MÜLLER-LAUTER and Wilhelm GOERDT, "Nihilismus," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 6, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Scheidegger and Spiess, 1984), col. 846-849.

¹² Friedrich H. JACOBI, *Werke*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1816), 44. The original philosophical usage of the word 'nihilism' can be also traced back to Turgenev who described with this term the supporters of social revolution. Heidegger points to the philosophical application of the

different than one's own as nihilism can be found also in art and literature, e.g. at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jean Paul described the Romantic poetry using the epithet "nihilistic".¹³ Those rather loosely related meanings of the word 'nihilism,' their common denominator being a dissent against an established order, are replaced by an intuition that positively describes man as a being separated from his natural ground. Heidegger drew attention to this insight, analysing Dostoyevsky's speech on Alexander Pushkin. Dostoyevsky identifies Pushkin as the discoverer of the sickness of Russian intelligentsia represented by the type of man who, by definition, is disconnected from his social ground and can be called "the negative type of the Russian man." The man of this type is characterised with an inability to find inner peace and lacks faith in his human homeland, described above as "a little homeland." The consequence of this negating attitude is his separation from his social ground as the primary cultural order that gives meaning to human existence, and the ensuing enormous suffering.¹⁴ An essential connotation of nihilism that is assumed here undoubtedly refers to Pushkin's anthropological discovery and to the closely related work of Dostoyevsky himself. This connotation appears in its pure form in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. Its essence lies not so much in the contestation of some philosophical, social or theological standpoint, but in the global confrontation with all those Western cultural orders and their philosophical roots. The catastrophic imprint on the word 'nihilism' was left by Nietzsche's announcement of all the ruling values (morality, religion, arts, politics) losing their meaning: the announcement that proved an accurate diagnosis recognized as such and adopted later by, among others, one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger.

2. NIHILISM AS A PHENOMENON

The simplest and clearest form of nihilism is the nihilism that reveals the catastrophe of the values constituting the identity of European culture and Western man. This kind of nihilism undermines the sense of European identity, since it points to the fact that its important structures of meaning were constructed on philosophical claims whose viability is coming to an end. Re-

concept of nihilism as a description of epistemological position reducing knowledge to sense perception. See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Günther Neske, 1998), 23.

¹³ JEAN PAUL. *Werke*, vol. 5: *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (München: Hanser, 1959-1963), 31-34.

¹⁴ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, 23-24.

ferring to the Platonic metaphysics as the actual source and object of Nietzsche's nihilistic criticism, we will present eight areas of culture in which the philosopher recognizes the end of the values regnant to-date.

2.1 NIHILISM IN THE FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

In his notes published in the twelfth volume of the critical edition of his collected works, as well as in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche defines nihilism referring to eight primary modes in which European culture is expressed:¹⁵ Judaeo-Christian faith in God, morality founded on a religious sanction, philosophy based on moral judgement, natural sciences, politics, national economy, history and art.¹⁶ The forms in which nihilism appears overlap to a great extent with the modes in which European culture in general manifests itself. Therefore God and his sudden absence diagnosed by Nietzsche in the cultural space of Modernity occupy the key position in this list. The enlightened Zarathustra, descending from the mountain down to the city to announce its inhabitants the tidings of the *Übermensch*, is astounded by the ignorance of the last people who are unaware that "God is dead."¹⁷ In *The Gay Science* Friedrich Nietzsche rhetorically testifies to this new cultural reality:

Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the market place crying incessantly, 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!' Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated? — Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! We have killed him — you and I! We are all his murderers.'¹⁸

¹⁵ It is rightly pointed out that *The Will to Power* is not a work Nietzsche composed as a whole, but a later compilation prepared by his sister Elisabeth Förster. In the text to follow *The Will to Power* will be cited along with *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA), because it is this compilation that, among others, was analyzed by Martin Heidegger in his lectures on Nietzsche presented in 1936–1940 in Freiburg im Breisgau. See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Günther Neske, 1998), 8.

¹⁶ NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, 7–8; IDEM, *Nachlass 1885-1887*, *Kritische Studienausgabe* in 15 Bänden [KSA], ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 12 (München: dtv, 1999), 125–127.

¹⁷ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: The Modern Library, 1917), 5.

¹⁸ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119–120.

This increasing sensation of God's absence in the social and psychological space is an intuition Nietzsche expressed in the last years of the nineteenth century. His insight refers to the basic areas of culture, since it is on the presence of God, like on a cornerstone, that the moral order rests with all its cultural consequences, such as philosophy, politics and economy. This order, which already in Plato's *Republic* was referred to God's authority that sanctioned punishment and reward after death as consequences of moral choices in life,¹⁹ was deepened and consolidated by the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the form of the value system we know, and of the ethoses we have built on it. The progressing decline in the awareness of God's authority undermines, according to Nietzsche, the meaningfulness and the previous theoretical clarity of any moral choice: "Skepticism regarding morality is what is decisive. The end of the moral interpretation of the world, which no longer has any sanction after it has tried to escape into some beyond, leads to nihilism."²⁰ [...] "We see that we cannot reach the sphere in which we have placed our values; but this does not by any means confer any value on that other sphere in which we live: on the contrary, we are *weary* because we have lost main stimulus."²¹ Καταστροφή [*katastrophé*] is the space from which nihilism emerges as the consequence of being suspended between what used to be the transcendent space of ideas and their earthly incarnation. The psychological effect of this process is weariness, the lack of stimuli and of the sense of meaning, while waiting for the values of the other sphere to awaken. This is the sphere of everyday life, and especially the pragmatic schemata of responses to the challenges of the social organization of Western man's life. Thus politics is the first victim of the fall of values founded on divine authority, such as truth and virtue. The ethos of Pericles and Themistocles is substituted with "the air of mediocrity, wretchedness, dishonesty [...] Redeeming class and human being are lacking — the justifiers."²² For Nietzsche, the fatal consequences of nihilism in politics and economy are nationalism and anarchism, as well as the dearth of practical power capable of liberating and justifying man in his most practical pursuits. He ironically compares the nihilistic principles of politics and economy to practical skills in play-acting accompanied by deplorable mediocrity and dishonesty, but lacking strategy and tactics to save the society from actual danger.²³

¹⁹ PLATO, *Politeia*, 614a – 621 b.

²⁰ NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, 7.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 11.

²² *Ibidem*, 8.

²³ NIETZSCHE, KSA 12, 127.

Nietzsche locates the want of the sense of meaning also in the space of natural sciences he criticizes for their causalism and mechanicism, as well as for the search for regularities—the search devoid of any authority — as the relic of a dead and gone glory of the thought that no longer asks who man is.²⁴ This question cannot be posed by scientists who no longer strive to reach into the essence of the constitution of what is human, but adopt modern procedures that follow from the nihilistic process. “... the words ‘factory’, ‘labour market’, ‘supply’, ‘making profitable’, and whatever auxiliary verbs egoism now employs, come unbidden to the lips when one wishes to describe the most recent generation of men of learning.”²⁵ Nietzsche encapsulates it succinctly in his notes, referring to Copernicus and interpreting his discovery of the Earth’s *status quo* as man’s withdrawing himself from the centre of all sense and meaning towards increasing indeterminacy.²⁶ For Nietzsche, the recent attempts to introduce a little transparency (in the form of Darwinism) into the history of reason are also nihilistic. These attempts spring from a sentimental dependence from the past and refer to a great narrative that, one way or the other, is a distant echo of the divine factor that lies at the foundation of natural history.²⁷

Nietzsche’s religious rhetoric is an occasion to ask what is hidden behind the phenomenon of the “death of God.” What is the genuine meaning of the parable of the madman spreading the news that God is dead? What does the increasing awareness of His absence in the space of modern and postmodern culture of the West refer to? Heidegger raised these questions directly in his essay of 1943 *Nietzsches Wort ‘Gott ist tot.’* A little earlier, drawing on the motive, recalled by Hölderlin, of the gods leaving our world he points above all to the difference between the interpretations of God’s absence in Hölderlin and in Nietzsche. While the German poet, in an imposing analogy to the above-cited myth from *Politikos*, speaks of the flight of the gods (entflozene Götter), Nietzsche speaks of the murder on God committed by man. Nietzsche’s God according to Heidegger is not the Judeo-Christian Yahweh; it seems that Nietzsche’s notion is, in contradistinction to that of Hölderlin’s, deeply marked with the Biblical tradition and therefore, instead of painting

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 130.

²⁵ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 7, trans. Reginald John Hollingdale Hollingdale, in Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 99.

²⁶ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne* (Ditzingen: Reclam Taschenbuch, 2018), 127.

²⁷ Ibidem.

the image of God's (the gods') departure set in the ancient-Greek scenery, he confronts us with the image of His death. The death of God is a representation of the end of what is supersensible, of norms, ideals and values.²⁸ This representation encodes the mechanism of bestowing meaning upon the sensible, in reference to the Platonic source of the division of the world into the sensible reality and the supersensible one.²⁹ Nihilism is for Heidegger nothing but a historical process as a result of which what has been encoded in the history of the West as supersensible, with the advent of Modernity loses its power over the sensible.³⁰ The death of the Christian representation of God is not, in this interpretation, a form of *Weltanschauung*-related atheism, but it points to the actual philosophical source of the division of the world that stands at the foundation of the culture of the West.³¹ "Platonism for the peo-

²⁸ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, 25.

²⁹ A question equally interesting as that of the essence of nihilism is, in the above context, also the problem of the essence of the so called Platonic theory of ideas, because — as it has been indicated in the first part of the article — the source of the division of the world into the supersensible and sensible parts, inherent in this theory, may be of merely metaphorical character. This refers to, among others, the Platonic metaphors of cognition included in Books VI and VII of *Politeia* and suggesting the division of the world into what is real and can be known by reason alone (idea), and what is mere appearance and can be grasped by the senses. Those notions are strengthened by a number of dialogues that address the difference between the intelligible and the sensible. The most important of those dialogues is undoubtedly *Phaedo* that introduces the above distinction into the space of the existential question of the immortality of the human soul. Although according to several interpreters, Plato is not the author of the theory of ideas, but it stems from later Neoplatonic compilations, for both Nietzsche and Heidegger it is just a simple fact that without Plato, his metaphors and terminology, neither Platonism nor Neoplatonism would have come into existence. Therefore, the ultimate adversary, especially in the case of Heidegger, remains Plato as the originator of metaphysics and all the space of values that became the foundation for the European and Christian ethos of thinking and living according to values.

³⁰ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, 25–26.

³¹ What is constitutive of the West and what actually marks the beginning of Europe in its cultural sense remains open to dispute. The world of Presocratics, and above all the world of Homer, Hesiod and the Greek tragedy, laid the foundations for Plato, Aristotle and Christianity. However, probably neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger would indentify the Western space of meaning with the Homeric vision of man as a bodily-spiritual unity. From this vantage point, the European space of meaning in the proper sense of the phrase comes into being when, as a result of the Peloponnesian Wars, what we know only as a legend handed down in the form of the Homeric narration is destroyed. From the perspective of nihilism, Europe in the cultural sense begins with the Platonic division into the sensible and the supersensible, and with the Christian adaptation of this division. A great advantage of this simplification is its synthetic character and clarity: the essence of European culture lies in the division into the sensible and the supersensible, and in the special part that the supersensible plays in the constitution of what we call our European *polis*, including the Western understanding of man, values, technology, religion, and politics. The essence of negative nihilism lies in an insight that this *polis* as a historical cultural formation is coming to its end.

ple” — as Nietzsche describes Christianity³²—is the consequence of the historical clash of the Greek and the Jewish representations of the world that resulted in the emergence of the hemisphere of Western civilization. The leading motive of Christianity is, for Nietzsche, not the theology of salvation, but the philosophy of the divided reality. This philosophy manifests itself, in the first place, in the Christian moral teaching that is dependent on the “real world” and rejects “this world.” The goodness of what is ideal and divine is connected, upon this view, with the depreciation of what is bodily and merely human. The supersensible is, for Plato and for the Christian morality, the decisive criterion of the emergence of values and valuable actions. Nihilism, in its deepest interpretational layer, indicates the impotence of the supersensible structure of meaning, which, in the history of Western culture, has been moulded as a precise machine to constitute the most important manifestations of culture. Thus not only does this impotence mean a disintegration of the European religious worldview, but it also means a disintegration of the present order of the European world. When the supersensible loses its validity, there remains only the earthly, yet devoid of any indications of what is good or evil, of what is valuable or valueless.

2.2 NIHILISM IN THE LIGHT OF THE RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

The key concept of nihilism, that of the “death of God” refers to the obliteration of the distinction, typical of European culture, between the temporal and the eternal. Already the primordial Greek myth clearly determined the heterogeneity of reality, pointing to the layers of heaven (οὐρανός [*ouranós*]) and earth (γαῖα [*gaía*]) emerging from the Chaos. The world seen with Hesiod’s eyes bore a clear distinction into three parallel ‘events,’ where heaven and earth as the dwelling of gods and men were the consequence of the Cosmos emerging from the Chaos (χάσκω, χάσμα [*cháskō, chásma*]) as the gate of absolute indeterminacy (τάρταρα [*tártara*]).³³ For the students of myth and religion, such as Mircea Eliade, the mythical division into heaven and earth is the general principle of the crystallization of culture inherent in every narrative that lends safety to human existence in the world, simultaneously opening human consciousness onto the space of goals that transcend temporality.³⁴ The inter-

³² Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.

³³ HESIOD, *Theogony*, 115–128.

³⁴ Defining the principle of the crystallization of culture as a meaning-giving narrative is one of the possible descriptions of the origin of culture. The aptness of this principle rests primarily

pretation of the world in the Homeric epics retains from Hesiod's description mainly heaven and earth, yet their distinction is not unambiguous. The Homeric worlds of gods and humans incessantly interpenetrate each other, while the division into the eternal and the temporal is different than the one Nietzsche referred to.³⁵ Erwin Rhode, Nietzsche's friend who in his philological and cultural studies investigated the Greek belief in the immortality of man, points to the religious origin of the concept of the immortal soul (*psyche*) in the Thracian cult of Dionysus. According to Rhode, however, this mysteries-related representation of the soul is not identical with the concept of *psyche* as an element of the constellation that the human being is as a compound of soul and body; *psyche* is a divine particle that from the beginning pertains not the human reality, but to the divine one.³⁶ The nihilistic obliteration of the division into the temporal and the eternal, and the transvaluation of the present European values refer, in the light of the Heideggerian interpretation of Nietzsche, not to the mythical and religious constellation of the world, but to the annulment of the philosophical distinction into the sensible world and the intelligible one.³⁷ This Platonic distinc-

on the understanding of the state — *polis* as referred to the human soul. The Platonic *Politeia* considers the relationship between the critical awareness of thought (*logos*) and the uncritical acceptance of a narrative (*mythos*). Both terms of this relationship describe the reality of man and his culture whose metaphorical expression is the Platonic myth of the cave that presents, on the one hand, the mythical and political narrative as slavery, and, on the other, the critical activity of reason as a process of liberation from it. This philosophical interpretation of culture has been complemented by Mircea Eliade in his cultural anthropological theory of myth and religion. See ELIADE, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959), where each mythical narrative becomes a space in which the most fundamental meanings shaping human existence are opened. The metaphor of such existence is undoubtedly Plato's cave; another one is, according to Eliade, the sense of security created in every human community by a religious description of the world as a source of the most primordial meanings that shape the human world.

³⁵ The classic example of the opposition of eternity and temporality in the Homeric epic is the description of the Odysseus' journey to Hades in *Odyssey*. Hades, the dwelling place of the souls of the dead, has nothing in common with the fullness of reality, which is testified to by Achilles who, in a conversation with Odysseus, confesses: „Let me hear no smooth talk of death from you, Odysseus, light of councils. Better, I say, to break sod as a farm hand for some poor country man, on iron rations, than lord it over all the exhausted dead.” HOMER, *Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), XI, 488–491. The world of the dead is not, according to its original Greek notion, the fullness of life, as it is suggested by the Platonic testimony given by Socrates preparing for death, but a pitiful existence that miserably reflects the life on earth.

³⁶ Erwin RHODE, *Psyche. Seelenkult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (Freiburg im Breisgau/Leipzig: Mohr, 1894), 295–296.

³⁷ M. Heidegger, „Nietzsches Wort »Gott ist tot«,“ in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 216.

tion, in the light of which the whole Judeo-Christian religious tradition was interpreted and introduced into history, is not mythical in the sense in which Hesiod's and Homer's descriptions are mythical, but it is logical, in the sense in which logical are the metaphors used by Plato to interpret and explain rationally. The metaphor of the line from Plato's *Republic* divides the reality into the objects of thought and the objects of the senses; in consequence the spiritual world is understood, in Plato's work, above all as an intelligible space, and not the beyond where the soul wanders after the death of the body. Moreover, according to Plato, the object of thought is what really is (being, idea), and thus the world of what only seems to be (senses, becoming) necessarily assumes the character of a mosaic of opinions in which philosophical theories mingle with a theological image of the reality based on the Biblical revelation.

The nihilistic removal of the difference between heaven and earth consists in the modern becoming aware of the metaphorical character of this distinction. The paradox of this modern awareness lies in the fact that most probably Plato himself did not believe in the real separation between the spiritual and the sensible, because this dichotomy functions in his dialogues exclusively as a metaphor (cf. the Sun, the line, the cave) used to explain the questions of knowledge,³⁸ and, consequently, also the question of man as an enigmatic being: neither animal nor god.³⁹

2.3 NIHILISM AS A FORM OF AWARENESS: PASSIVE AND ACTIVE NIHILISM

Nietzsche defines nihilism in terms of the awareness of the loss of cultural meanings previously considered as valid. In contradistinction to Heidegger's one, his definition is not so much metaphysical as psychological.⁴⁰ In his notes of autumn 1887 he draws an important distinction between two forms of nihilism understood as a psychological stance: the passive nihilism

³⁸ Plato, *Politeia*, 507d – 518d.

³⁹ Plato, *Phaidros*, 230 a.

⁴⁰ The above-proposed interpretation of Heidegger's thought plays only an auxiliary role in the interpretation of Nietzsche's nihilism. Heidegger was interested mainly in the metaphysical aspect of nihilism because it corresponded exactly with his historical claim on the end of metaphysics. For this reason he refers to Nietzsche as the last metaphysical thinker who, despite his prophetic naming of the historical process that develops over the last two thousand years of the Western culture, does not go beyond it. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche remains suspended in the metaphysical world he criticized, being its 'last breath.' See HEIDEGGER, "Nietzsches Wort »Gott ist tot«,“ 240.

and the active nihilism.⁴¹ Introducing into this distinction, Nietzsche defines the psychological state typical of the nihilistic stance as awareness of the absence of purpose and inability to answer the question 'why?'⁴² Both the awareness of the purposefulness of any every day activity and the clarity of an answer to every question why one should do something or abstain from doing it, are undoubtedly rooted in the earlier-mentioned structure of the ideal world as the reference for the sensible existence. Unlike Heidegger, Nietzsche refers in the first place to practical life that encompasses morality and religiously founded attitudes. Something must have happened in the Western culture to enable the awareness of the hypotheticality of the presupposition, grounded by Plato and creatively developed by Christianity, that the ideal world exists. According to Nietzsche, modernity is characterized by exactly this awareness: its first consequence is passive nihilism, i.e. the apathy rooted in the lack of clarity of goals and directions, whose image may be Buddhist passiveness and indifference to the processes taking place in the world. The values constructed by metaphysics and Christianity cease to work the very moment we cease to believe in them, i.e. without a believer, beliefs no longer provide motivation for any change in the world or any goal-oriented activity. However, Nietzsche's nihilism reaches further than a mere *Weltanschauung*-related attitude, as it does not regard a faith or belief, but the existential catastrophe (fall) touching the substance of the previous world that closes down the moment its fundamental values stop having any meaning. Such is the nature of passive nihilism which leads to the weakening of the vital strength of the spirit: "Nihilism als Niedergang und Rückgang der Macht des Geistes."⁴³ It is manifested by a marked exhaustion of spiritual strength so that man, deprived of the value and purpose of his actions, becomes incapable of any deed. Nietzsche grasps this kind of nihilism in the context of decomposition of culture and describes it as a pathological condition of the human spirit. Such a form of nihilism is characteristic of the transitional stage: from the painful awareness of the necessity to transvaluate all values to the moment the transvaluation actually becomes possible. This is the moment when active nihilism emerges: the form of nihilism that is an indication of the strength of the spirit. Active nihilism reaches its apogee as a violent, destructive force. Perhaps it is no longer nihilism in the same sense as the

⁴¹ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Nachlass 1885-1887*, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden [KSA], ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 12 (München: dtv), 350-355.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 350.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 351.

passive nihilism, because it does not result in a breakdown of values, but in the emergence of new structures of meaning. The symbol of the new values and new vision of an active nihilist is, in Nietzsche's work, Zarathustra descending the mountains and giving people the good news of the *Übermensch*. At this stage of the cultural and individual development, nihilism becomes a symbol of vital force: the greatest riches and the highest spiritual power of man.⁴⁴

2.4 *RESSENTIMENT AS A SOURCE OF THE PHENOMENON OF THE FADING SENSE OF MEANING*

Nietzsche's nihilistic claim is liable to be a subject-matter of numerous critical analyses mainly because it hits the very heart of the Western-European *Weltanschauung* as an amalgam, deposited over centuries, of the structures of meaning that constitute the European *polis*.⁴⁵ The worldview-related discussions of Nietzsche's ideas are usually critical: just as critical as the discussions around the thought of Martin Heidegger, the greatest promoter of the claim that the Western culture fundamental structures of meaning, generated by metaphysics, have come to an end.

The argument that accompanies this discussion and refers the nihilistic stance to the problem of worldview is unsatisfactory, as both Nietzsche and Heidegger protest against such a qualification of their reflection and indicate its philosophical profile.⁴⁶ What is then the true source of the passive nihilistic stance analyzed not through the prism of the cultural interest of the defence of a *Weltanschauung*, but in its cultural *statu nascendi*? According to

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 353.

⁴⁵ This criticism is expressed by creating the legend of both the person and the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche in the context of the misunderstanding caused by the suggestions of his ideological anti-Semitism, anti-Christianity, racism, and — above all — by the claim that his physical or mental illness was the principal source of his work. Thomas Mann in his very pertinent opinion on the correctness of the interpretation of Nietzsche's output does not address the topic of his personal life at all, but points to the fact that this author must not be read and listened to literally. Despite the external similarity between the ideology of national socialism and nihilism, concerning such concepts as: nation, earth, blood, the chthonic, etc., Nietzsche's thought was, according to Mann, the opposite of ideological faith characteristic of every totalitarian form of social organization. See Thomas MANN, "Meine Zeit," in *Reden Und Aufsätze*, Gesammelte Bände, vol. 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), 314–318.

⁴⁶ This is particularly conspicuous in the case of Martin Heidegger who, already in his early thought, indicated hermeneutic phenomenology as the space of thought contradictory to any *Weltanschauung*. See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, Gesamtausgabe Abteilung: Vorlesungen, Band 56/57 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987).

Nietzsche this true source is *ressentiment*, understood as an attitude that led to abandoning the original Greek ethos: this was the ethos that involved the distinction between master morality based on the difference between good and bad (*Gut und Schlecht*) and slave morality grounded in the difference between good and evil (*Gut und Böse*).

In this perspective, nihilism is the last stage of the development of slave morality, exposing it as anthropological fiction. As a result of the historical process of the transvaluation of fundamental life values, it is a phenomenon of slowly progressing elucidation of a particular human weakness expressed in the desire to evade the awareness of the necessity to take responsibility for the world. The expansion of this fiction is not a sudden event, but is presented by Nietzsche as a protracted cultural evolution, from the Socratic-Platonic division of the reality into 'two worlds,' to the turning point in the form of Judeo-Christian religiosity, to the modern nihilism as the end of the process.⁴⁷

In the immanent world of Nietzschean argument, human weakness is the source of nihilism. Nietzsche's diagnosis refers to the interpretation of culture connected mainly with a human being's personal experience of life. Nietzsche expressed it in a simple formula of "the will to power," referring to the source of vital energy from which springs all the conscious life of man, and which, in the first place, sharpens the contours of what we call culture, with all its formal expressions. The source of man's vital energy is situated beyond good and evil in the same way as the dark origin of the Cosmos in the Chaos and in the total wars waged by the first generations of gods, as described in Hesiod's *Theogony*, evade any possible judgment within the cosmic order we are familiar with. "War is the father of all things" —Nietzsche adopts this phrase by Heraclitus and refers it to the disquieting source of the true power that stands at the origin of societies and cultures, but also at the beginning of every individual human existence. The loss of connection with the source of vital energy results, in Nietzsche's view —just like in Freud's one —in a kind of trauma and suffering as a price to pay for the security of everyday life. Culture is the source of suffering, as Freud aptly describes it, when the source of happiness is the possibility of unrestrained fulfilment of libido drives. Nietzsche, like Freud, recognizes the relationship of human self-fulfilment to the dark and hidden energy of the will to power, but he is much more subtle in defining the essence of culture as

⁴⁷ Elżbieta POSŁUSZNA and Jacek POSŁUSZNY, "Resentiment i nihilizm w ujęciu Fryderyka Nietzschego," in *Nihilizm. Dzieje, recepcja, prognozy* (Warszawa: Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2001), 111.

the consequence of an encounter between two mutually balancing dynamisms: that of Dionysus (music, tragedy, the enormousness of inner experience) and that of Apollo (fine arts, architecture, clarity and logic). In its essence, nihilism is, for Nietzsche, a breakdown in the Dionysian-Apollonian equilibrium in favour of the latter. The same breakdown is expressed already in the downfall of Greek tragedy in favour comedy and Socratic-Platonic paradigm of thought and ideas.

Nihilism begins with the loss of the early Greek ethos of masculine rivalry that reflected the natural and unadulterated laws of the world being substituted by the Socratic and Platonic reference to ideas. It is *ressentiment*, the symptom of weakness of those who do not have sufficient power to fulfil their intentions, but keep pointing to ideal models to conceal their weakness and by inducing a sense of guilt to control the world, that, according to Nietzsche, stands at the foundation of the new intellectual valuation.⁴⁸ The *ressentiment* effectively destroys vital energy and closes individual human destiny in the cage of moral judgments. This direction in the development of European culture is embodied in Judeo-Christian religiosity or, as Nietzsche dubbed it, "Platonism for the people." The Platonic division of the world into the sphere of senses and the sphere of reason was culturally adopted and consummated in the vision of the world that deemed what happened on earth as much less important than what would happen in heaven. Automatically, anything born in the Dionysian darkness of the enormousness of power becomes suspicious and sometimes even forbidden in the new world. In the new ethos, aggressiveness, courage, the will to fight are replaced by humility, submissiveness and mercy. For Nietzsche, what really develops within *ressentiment* and the new European ethos based on intellect and on the belief that earthly 'here and now' is worthless, is not only moralism, but above all the disease of the human spirit expressed in an inability of a creative act, or even of any act at all.

3. THE QUESTION CONCERNING THE CREATION OF NEW VALUES

For Nietzsche, the current transvaluation of European values is a consequence of the historical transformations of the human spirit, announced by his mature work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Descending to earth from the

⁴⁸ Such resentment towards the weak was represented in Plato's *Republic* in the context of the nation's genesis in the sense of a social agreement. Cf. *Politeia*, 558e – 559e.

clouds, Zarathustra carries the message of the new man and the related with it new culture. This positive dimension of nihilism indicates the paradoxical relationship between Nietzsche and Plato.⁴⁹ Although Nietzsche considered Platonism to be the major source dividing reality into the temporal and eternal worlds, and Socratic intellectualism the main cause of slave morality, yet his postulate about the creation of new values deceptively reminds us of Plato's greatest pedagogical and philosophical project. Just as Plato's *Republic* did not eliminate Hesiod and Homer's myths in order to destroy the evil culture of their ancestors, but in order to make room for better myths and a better society, so Nietzsche unmasks the mythical nature of the difference between heaven and earth only to epitomize the nihilistic despair of losing meaning in our culture, but above all in order to build a "new earth and new heaven" (Rev 21:1). The expressive symbol of this new beginning for the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are the three transformations of the human spirit, resulting in a being (*Übermensch*), whose most distinctive feature is neither obedience to the existing cultural patterns, nor their brutal breaking, but the ability to create new values:

But tell me my brethren, what can a child do which even the lion cannot do? Why hath the preying lion still to become a child? Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yes.⁵⁰

The special characteristics of the man who has gone through all the stages of development and has become a new man are gentleness, patience, joy, affirmation of reality and the ability to create.⁵¹ The question is whether this image created by Zarathustra is actually a picture of something completely new in the history of Western culture. Given the degree of Nietzsche's education and his origin, it seems fair to suggest that the above image is the central idea taken from the Bible, which did not directly become the symbol of Christian religion, but is constantly present in the minds of Christian reformers such as Francis of Assisi and John Hus. Nietzsche does not see Christianity as a biblical movement, but as a religious system whose special features are such phenomena as ritualism, moralism, slave morality, false humility and the negation of life present as false asceticism. At the same time, his own vision of new values and a new man are not new in the sense

⁴⁹ Plato, the creator of the ideas of good in itself and the pure spirit, is for Nietzsche the example of the brightest error in dogmatic thinking. Cf. NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3–5.

⁵⁰ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: The Modern Libray, 1917), 25.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 23–25.

of a spiritual program, but remains in direct relation to the various writings of the New Testament. Such a vision is present in fact already in Nietzsche's criticism of Paul of Tarsus, who in his *Letter to the Galatians* speaks of the new creation of the Spirit and describes the ethos deceptively resembling Zarathustra's suggestion: "On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). *The Letter to the Galatians* describes the contrast between law and grace and presents the exact antithesis between the mentality of a slave and a free man, which is symbolized by a child, who is the classical symbol used by the Master of Nazareth to describe someone entering the Kingdom of God, meaning someone who represents the new values and can be called a new creation:

At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, «Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?» So he called a little child to him whom he set among them. Then he said, «In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.» (Mt 18:1–3)

The new values, which Nietzsche points out by referring *volens volens* to the biblical Christian tradition, in a sense are no longer so-called values as in the Platonic or Aristotelian idea of virtue. Nietzsche called into question Paul of Tarsus, who defines virtue not in the context of human effort and efficiency in doing good, as does Aristotle based on the scholastic tradition, but only on the basis of the gratuitousness of the grace of God along with man's trust (Rom 3:21–24). Nietzsche does the same in opposing legally or sacredly objectified virtue and seeing it as an expression of the new man's creativity. As Vattimo rightly states, for Nietzsche, values no longer exist in the objective (metaphysical) sense as facts, but only their interpretations exist.⁵² Nietzsche states the hermeneutic aphorism "there are no facts, only interpretations" in the context of natural nihilism, suggesting that even statements from the natural sciences are only interpretations.⁵³ This aphorism fits, however, when adopting a metaphysical thesis about the existence or non-existence of (new) values.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra shows the path to take in searching for them, not as objects in themselves, but rather as "a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yes." And that is why the death of God

⁵² Gianni VATTIMO, *Oltre l'interpretazione. Il significato dell'ermeneutica per la filosofia*, Economica Laterza (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 2002), 17.

⁵³ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden [KSA], ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 5 (München: dtv), 37.

and the destruction of all existing values as events shaping Modernity do not refer to his physical annihilation, but rather to turning away from God as a metaphysical principle in order to turn towards new structures in the sense of the emerging, for example, interpretation of the modern being-in-the-world (Heidegger). Among other things, Heidegger refers to this hermeneutic new beginning in his dialogue with Nietzsche during World War II, and later also continues the final phase of his ideas primarily contained in *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. From this philosophical discussion of nihilism emerges a clearer question not only about the philosophical and cultural implications of the collapse of the existing values that Heidegger repeated in many of his essays,⁵⁴ but also the question of the concrete results of such a catastrophe in the sense of a new beginning. A new beginning means that, which is to come, what now defines the future (*die Zukünftigen*), which in the last phase of Heidegger's thinking is correlated with the time the collapse of the old order and the emergence of the "last God" (*der letzte Gott*).⁵⁵ A similar correlation can already be seen in Heidegger's discussion of technology as a form of forgetting about being. Technology, which is the ultimate emanation of Western metaphysics, indeed belongs to the nihilistic disaster, but it is also a historical necessity and there is no turning back because it expresses the modern and postmodern truth of being.⁵⁶ Postmodern Westerners resemble the prisoners in Plato's cave, since they tend to be more and more immersed in a technological dream, deprived of contact with nature, focused on themselves, and their cave is filled with technological gadgets. Our needs are no longer natural, but are becoming increasingly driven by advertising and technology. Our world in many of its dimensions has become a dream.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Vattimo is convinced of the historical inevitability and the positivity of nihilism, which is why, in one of his works, he makes an open apology of nihilism.⁵⁸ In his case, he makes a positive evaluation of nihilism, among others, to the phenomenon of the "death of God" and the related demytholo-

⁵⁴ HEIDEGGER, "Nietzsches Wort »Gott ist tot«, 209–267.

⁵⁵ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 395.

⁵⁶ IDEM, "Die Frage nach der Technik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Stuttgart: Günther Neske, 1994), 37.

⁵⁷ Gianni VATTIMO, "Toward a Nonreligious Christianity," in John D. CAPUTO and Gianni VATTIMO, *After the Death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 40.

⁵⁸ Gianni VATTIMO, *La fine della modernità* (Milano: Garzanti, 1998), 27–38.

gization of Christianity, with which the Italian philosopher feels bound. Such a positive view of nihilism is not shared by Girard, for whom Nietzsche and Heidegger are rather opponents in this debate. The French anthropologist, however, like Vattimo, is convinced that the modern experience of atheism and depleting postmodern culture of the sacred should be positively accepted as the effect of words that disclose the mechanisms of myth and religion. It is impossible to deny the historical processes in which we are involved from modernity and positively not deal with something that is not an arbitrary result of conscious human decisions, but those which appear in their unconcealed reality. Does the blurring of all existing values and at the same time, when the new man expected by Nietzsche does not appear, should all this be interpreted not so much in the sense of positive nihilism as the dawn of the coming new world, but rather as a catastrophe of the only world as we know it in the first sense of the mentioned in the introduction Greek word *καταστροφή* [*karastrophé*]? Is the image mentioned by Plato of a world abandoned by the gods arriving at the end of its appropriate revolutions not a tragic image revealing the actual defeat of both man as well as the culture he has designed? This is exactly so in the Platonic description, which directly describes the death of most people who have experienced *καταστροφή* as a change in the direction the universe is moving in terms of the transvaluation of the most important human values.

We do not have and cannot have an influence on the historical process occurring within Western space in Modernity and Post-Modernity, but the fact of the annihilation of the highest principles on which we base all values causes that there can be no room for any new values based on any new humanism in the sense of making man the centre of the world, including any religion or new culture. Perhaps talking about a superman, a new culture and new values was a phantasm from the start, just as any attempt to build the kingdom of God on earth turned out to be a phantasm, just like building a new society on successive phantasmagorical visions of fascism, socialism or communism. Perhaps instead of the dawn of a new culture and a new human, the Western community sees nothing new and nothing creative. Perhaps instead the revelation of man, apart from moral choices, we will see only the increasing blurring of boundaries between good and evil, thus increasing helplessness in giving answers to the question: how should we live? Referring to Hölderlin and Heidegger in confronting the fact of the gods leaving our world, left us rephrase that question today as Heidegger did and ask: how should we live in such difficult times?

[...] and what are poets for in a destitute time?" asks Holderlin's elegy "Bread and Wine." We hardly understand the question today. How, then, shall we grasp the answer that Hölderlin gives? "[...] and what are poets for in a destitute time?" The word "time" here means the era to which we ourselves still belong. For Holderlin's historical experience, the appearance and sacrificial death of Christ mark the beginning of the end of the day of the gods. Night is falling. Ever since the "united three"—Herakles, Dionysos, and Christ—have left the world, the evening of the world's age has been declining toward its night. The world's night is spreading its darkness. The era is defined by the god's failure to arrive, by the "default of God."⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Martin HEIDEGGER, "Wozu Dichter," in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 269. Translated by Albert Hofstadter, in Martin HEIDEGGER, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 87.

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THE IDEA OF NEW MIDDLE AGES IN THE LIGHT OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S NIHILISM

S u m m a r y

The author of the article proposes the concept of the New Middle Ages and describes the modern and postmodern transformation taking place in Western culture, which is similar to the medieval period's transition from the Greek-Roman world to the Christian world. With the help of the New Middle Ages concept, the transition from the Christian world to a presently unknown world of new values corresponding to the paradigms of science and technology can be defined. Such a transition is expressed by Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of nihilism. It contains the postulate about a new man and a postulate about new values in response to the phenomenon of God's death in the modern and post-modern world. Nietzsche's nihilism is closely related to the fundamental changes taking place in Western culture. It not only includes negating the values that are the basis of the Christian world, but also the necessity to found new values based on the awareness of the absence of God who guarantees these Christian values. Nietzsche's nihilism is also a critical reference to those attitudes, ones that do not notice such change of values at all or denies it altogether.

Key words: Nietzsche; nihilism; Christianity; values; death of God; man.

IDEA NOWEGO ŚREDNIOWIECZA W ŚWIETLE NIHILIZMU FRIEDRICHA NIETZSCHEGO

Streszczenie

W artykule autor proponuje koncepcję nowego średniowiecza i opisuje nowoczesną i ponowoczesną przemianę zachodzącą w kulturze zachodniej, która przypomina przejście okresu średniowiecza ze świata grecko-rzymskiego do świata chrześcijańskiego. Za pomocą koncepcji nowego średniowiecza można zdefiniować przejście ze świata chrześcijańskiego do świata obecnie nieznanego, o nowych wartościach, odpowiadających paradygmatom nauki i techniki. Takie przejście wyraża idea nihilizmu Fryderyka Nietzschego. Zawiera się w nim postulat nowego człowieka i postulat nowych wartości w odpowiedzi na zjawisko śmierci Boga we współczesnym i ponowoczesnym świecie. Nihilizm Nietzschego jest ściśle powiązany z fundamentalnymi przemianami zachodzącymi w kulturze zachodniej. Obejmuje nie tylko zanegowanie wartości, które są podstawą świata

chrześcijańskiego, ale także konieczność znalezienia nowych wartości, opartych na świadomości braku Boga, który gwarantuje wartości chrześcijańskie. Nihilizm Nietzschego jest też krytycznym odniesieniem do tych postaw, które takiej zmiany wartości w ogóle nie dostrzegają lub całkiem jej zaprzeczają.

Przełożył Stanisław Sarek

Słowa kluczowe: Nietzsche; nihilizm; chrześcijaństwo; wartości; śmierć Boga; człowiek.