

## BETWEEN THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING AND THE WEIGHT OF BECOMING

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**ABSTRACT.** One of the few direct solutions that Nietzsche gives for the overcoming of nihilism is the facing of the thought of eternal recurrence. Being the heaviest of all thoughts, it may seem that through Heidegger's filter it will become a sort of metaphysical concept, but his analysis may at least help us see it as an axis around which thought can pivot, at least for a moment. Kundera sees the contradiction between lightness and weight as the most problematic of all, as it is difficult to see the burden as something positive when emancipation seems to always be an attempt to achieve total freedom, a search for lightness. We argue that "the heavy thought" makes us confront fatalism and affirm freedom, while lightness makes freedom by becoming impossible. The eternal recurrence is the idea that offers motivation to intervene in the chain of determinations and to influence them decisively.

**Keywords:** eternal recurrence, lightness, weight, freedom, being, becoming.

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## Introduction

The article's title makes reference to Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, a postmodern literary work that combines fiction with philosophical essay parts concerning two opposites, lightness and weight. Closely tied with the main character's own psychological drama, the question on which concept should represent the positive half of this pair seems to find an answer when looked at in relation with Nietzsche's eternal return. We will try to understand, starting from here, not only the particularities of this duality, but also what the tension between the two concepts can further reveal about being and becoming.

At first glance, it is easy to accept Parmenides' view that lightness is the positive concept, and this common belief survives until today. Lightness is closely tied with freedom while weight is often associated with carrying a burden, something that we must get rid of in order to be free. However, if we look at this common belief from an existentialist point of view, it is easy to see its limits in describing the experience of freedom. "I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free."<sup>2</sup> The burden of freedom can be an experience just as valid, especially when we talk about anxiety, that can be described as the sensation the human subject has when confronted with the radicality of his own freedom.

Even though Kundera only refers to Parmenides' study of opposites, we cannot omit the pre-Socratic philosopher's peculiar ontological views. Being is seen as unable to change, while becoming is impossible. Contrary to this, Heraclitus develops a philosophy of becoming, comparing existence to a river that flows, seeing substance not as static, but constantly changing.<sup>3</sup> If we

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<sup>2</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, New York, 1978, p. 439

<sup>3</sup> Curd, Patricia, "Presocratic Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/presocratics/>>

are to avoid Parmenides's strange conclusions about the nature of existence, we must break apart the opposites that he puts forward, including lightness and weight. Kundera brings Nietzsche into discussion as a philosopher that dismantles the general belief about weight, as he introduces the concept of the eternal return, discussed in *The Gay Science*, where the philosopher calls it "the greatest weight."<sup>4</sup>

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence--even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself.<sup>5</sup>

This may seem strange, as it is not clear why the infinite repetition of life exactly in the same manner would put a burden on one's shoulders. At first, this may seem as a nihilist thought, a cycle of repetition with no change whatsoever would constitute a proof for fatalism, with the human subject unable to modify any of the iterations of his own life, it having already happened in the same way before. Even if we look past this preliminary nihilistic interpretation, the thought is being planted into conscience by a demon, so by giving this example, Nietzsche acknowledges the fact that, at least at first glance, the eternal return is something meant to frighten us. Only by thinking about the eternal return along with the maxim "*Amor fati*", that is meant to turn the negative into positive, can we make a crucial step in our own attempt to invert the duality of lightness and weight, and along with this, to rethink dualism as a whole.

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<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974, p. 273

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974, p. 273

Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all, and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.<sup>6</sup>

The passage from a naïve *yes*, the kind that is present in shallow expressions like: “*Live the moment*” or “*You only live once*”, to the true affirmation of life that Nietzsche proposes can be made only after we interiorize the thought of eternal return. What do the aforementioned maxims really mean, with their heavy use in advertising or self-help literature, if not the fact that life should be taken lightly and every moment enjoyed as it could be the last one. What the eternal return proposes is exactly the opposite, every action we do should be regarded as the most important, as we are condemned to live with its consequences over and over. The weight applied to the Moment is something of relevance for Heidegger in his interpretation of Nietzschean thought, as it helps us notice the relation between the Moment as the fundamental unit of time and eternity. The Moment has a specific weight because it equals eternity, if we look at it from the perspective of the eternal return, and we should not understand this only in a metaphorical sense. What Nietzsche and Heidegger argue for is a thought that should help us interpret our place in existence in a better way.

### **Atlas and Sisyphus, myths of a burden**

To further explore the concept of weight and its existential implications, we can bring forth two reinterpretations of mythical representations in modern literature and philosophy, the revolt of Atlas from Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* and the absurdist Sisyphus from Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Rand’s novel, while being embraced by many right-wing libertarians as the purest

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<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974, p. 223

expression of individualist capitalism, it is heavily criticized by others on the left as being a gross exaggeration of collectivist politics and an ideological work. This radical freedom translates from Rand's philosophy of objectivism to an adversity towards any sort of regulation from the state regarding the market. She is known to be, in addition to a declared egoist and individualist, an enemy of any form of socialism, understood only as a collectivist form of organization that is always deemed to become totalitarian.

[S]ocialism is the doctrine that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that his life and his work do not belong to him, but belong to society, that the only justification of his existence is his service to society, and that society may dispose of him in any way it pleases for the sake of whatever it deems to be its own tribal, collective good.<sup>7</sup>

While her political thought leads to a form of anarcho-capitalism, in which entrepreneurship can finally flourish, *Atlas Shrugged* is set in a dystopia at the opposite side of the spectrum, a world in which individual initiative on the market is set back by an abusive bureaucratic state that is on the verge of economic collapse. Dagny Taggart is the main character, a feminine symbol of entrepreneurial struggle, while John Galt is the mysterious driving force of the story, the leader of the strike of the martyred elites. These great minds in conflict with the dysfunctional collectivist state are represented by the main metaphor of the novel, that of Atlas, whose suffering is a symbol for the condition of the entrepreneur under a collectivist regime. We see the visceral image of this Titan burdened by the weight that only he can carry, the element of novelty being the suggestion that in this case, he should shrug<sup>8</sup>, in this way becoming the symbol of the strikers.

The burden is that of the state, that in an altruist society must be supplied economically by everyone in contributions in the form of taxes, while the wealth is then redistributed more evenly, and for a capitalist, this

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<sup>7</sup> Rand, Ayn, *For the New Intellectual*, Penguin Books, New York, 1961, p. 36

<sup>8</sup> Rand, Ayn, *Atlas Shrugged*, Signet, New York, 1957, p. 422

goes against his own interest. There are authors who try to minimize the political implications and propose a more in-depth analysis of Rand novel as a metaphor for the human condition under state regulations.

All too often, Rand's criticism of altruism-collectivism in *Atlas Shrugged* is interpreted too one-sidedly in politico-economic terms, as if her main point is to show society's dependence on its best minds materially and financially. But Rand wanted to dig deeper than this.<sup>9</sup>

As profound as the novel intends to be, we can easily see through this attempt of critique by appeal to a dystopian imaginary and discover the underlying ideological content. The collectivist tendencies of modern society are limited, and if anything, they are the only ones that separate us from total domination by corporate interests. The maximum amount of freedom on the market leads to the dominating power of a few actors, who form an oligopoly that holds everyone else in a weaker position. This form of stateless capitalism is nothing but a replacement of state power with monopoly or oligopoly power, and we can even identify manifestations of this ideology in our current form of global capitalism.

We may be tempted to regard Rand's philosophy as identical to Nietzsche's, both opting for a surpassing of the Christian ideas of generosity and mercy, seeing them as negative concepts that hinder human development. We can clearly distinguish between the two because even though they both want to reject Christianity, Rand only seeks to replace it with another ideology, while Nietzsche is more concerned about rejecting any form of ideology altogether.

To further differentiate between the two, we can propose a more nuanced interpretation and ask why Nietzsche chooses a "heavy thought" in the form of the eternal return, even though the absence of a unique moral

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<sup>9</sup> Minsaas, Kirsti, *Ayn Rand's Recasting of Ancient Myths in Atlas Shrugged*, in *Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged: A Philosophical and Literary Companion*. Edited by Edward W. Younkins, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Hampshire, 2007, p. 132

system and of a God should lighten us. Rand sees the lifting of the burden off Atlas's shoulders as the ultimate step in the gaining of freedom, while Nietzsche seems to be adopting a new weight. We can argue, following Nietzsche's steps, that Christianity as a cultural form that leads civilization to passive nihilism can disburden people just as well, by shifting focus from this life to life after death, a place where all suffering will be redeemed. Meanwhile, we remain just as weak in our current lives, Christianity offering us other ways to cope with earthly struggle, such as lamentation and resentment, or we can accept God's death while not truly confronting this fact, fixated on the same despises for life, not choosing to reevaluate all values.

Of course, it may seem that Rand's characters, being intentionally idealized, can represent some sort of model for the Nietzschean *Übermenschen*. The people of the mind seem to embody the aristocratic morality, opposing the resentful slave morality, but the concept of eternal recurrence can help us turn away from this parallel between Nietzsche and Rand, and introduce the second mythical figure, that we would argue is a bit more resemblant to authentic Nietzschean thought. The eternal return is compatible to a greater degree with the labor of Sisyphus in Camus's philosophy, the work done in *The Myth of Sisyphus* being continued in *The Rebel* and developing into a philosophy that from the idea of man's revolt, recovers humanism and leads us closer to the Other, unlike Rand's philosophy that seems to stray us away from any type of alterity.

All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols.<sup>10</sup>

Camus's Sisyphus accepts the burden that he was given, and his revolt happens inside his working condition, when he embraces absurdity and learns to find happiness through it. The allusion to Nietzsche is also clear

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<sup>10</sup> Camus, Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated by Justin O'Brien, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 110

here, Sisyphus accepts the burden of a godless world, he does not simply reject God, but continue his struggle, despite his non-existence. This is what is meant when Camus says that Sisyphus “silences all idols”, the twilight of the Idols is already here and a new morality must be born. The figure of Sisyphus embodies man after this twilight, he takes it upon himself to forge a new meaning.

We must not interpret this metaphor of labor as an acceptance of servitude, but as a look into the deeper meaning of existence similar to Nietzsche’s eternal return and his maxim, „*Amor fati*.” From this point of view, Camus’ absurdism is more nuanced, as he tries in *The Rebel* to place the individual within a collective, rejecting solipsism and violence towards oneself or others. He accepts the fact individuality and community will remain in tension, but rejects both far left and far right extremist ideologies, analyzing many views of philosophers both from the anarchist left, such as Mikhail Bakunin, and from the egoist right, such as Max Stirner. These tendencies, nowadays repeated in the clash between Antifa and the alt-right or neo-Nazi movements, have the same characteristics, especially because they are fueled by a form of destructive nihilism.

For Camus, resentment is a form of passive nihilism, manifested by calling for something you do not possess, while the authentic revolt is active, you turn to something that you are or you possess. Unlike Rand, for whom revolt is the fact of abandoning the burden of the whole society in order to free yourself, Camus thinks that revolt is based on the solidarity between people, view expressed in the slogan: “I rebel—therefore we exist.”<sup>11</sup> For Stirner, as he further shows, to consider yourself in the service of humanity is the same as serving God<sup>12</sup>, view that is shared by Rand and Nietzsche. What helps us salvage Nietzsche’s philosophy in a greater measure than the egoist anarchism of Stirner and Rand is the fact that he did not place ultimate trust on the ideas of individual property or the free market.

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<sup>11</sup> Camus, Albert, *The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, p. 22

<sup>12</sup> Camus, Albert, *The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, p. 64



### Dionysus-Christ, the God of Paradox

However, it is more interesting to see how Camus himself treats Nietzsche in his analysis of the history of revolt. For Nietzsche, what's interesting is that the figure of Christ is left standing, "only the God of morality is rejected"<sup>13</sup>, and we can back this argument by what Nietzsche himself writes in *The Antichrist*: "at bottom there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross."<sup>14</sup> Camus believes that Nietzsche only tries to shift focus from *faith* to *deeds*, and in this regard the Nietzschean critique of Christianity recovers the Jesus more authentically than Christianity itself. While the gospels say that Jesus died on the cross, Nietzsche emphasizes the actual life of Christ, and there are few things more in tune with his own life affirming philosophy than this. He goes on to say that "the life lived by him who died on the cross, is Christian"<sup>15</sup>. The ideology of Christianity, however, is based on the Gospels and on the description of the death of Christ, thus life on earth becoming salvageable only by the belief in an afterlife.

Nietzsche also proclaims himself the last disciple of the God Dionysus<sup>16</sup>, not in a religious sense, but more in a symbolic sense. It is possible that Nietzsche chooses the image of Dionysus only to avoid that of Christ, so as to escape any association with religion. However, there are similarities between Dionysus and Christ, both being examples of a *Dying-and-rising deity*. The eternal return offers us the thought that what we live now will repeat over and over, a continuous revival that gives life its weight. Of course, in Christianity, the emphasis was on the divine realm as a utopian space that contrasts the imperfection of life, but what Nietzsche wants to highlight is life as a means

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<sup>13</sup> Camus, Albert, *The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, p. 68

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is & The Antichrist. A Curse on Christianity*, Translated by Thomas Wayne, Algora Publishing, New York, 2004, p. 139

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is & The Antichrist. A Curse on Christianity*, Translated by Thomas Wayne, Algora Publishing, New York, 2004, p. 139

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil: prelude to a philosophy of the future*, translated by Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books, New York, 1966, p. 235

in itself, not as a means to accede to the afterlife, and although it is difficult, we can draw the same conclusions from the life of Christ. A “Nietzschean Christianity”, if we can put forward such a concept at least for the sake of the argument, would reconcile the Dionysian myth with the Christian one and would take into account the affirmation of life rather than the empty promise of the kingdom of the Lord after death. Duality and paradox, among others, are signified by Dionysus<sup>17</sup>, and he is adopted by Nietzsche precisely for this reason, to reveal the tragedy of life and to make live the opposites, the concepts that contain in themselves their opposite.

The God whose Nietzsche announces the death of is only the moral God, the father with whom people strike a deal for the forgiveness of sins. This means that we cannot place Nietzsche in the camp of atheists who do not believe in God only out of scientism, but neither can we consider him a half-Christian, as Heidegger warns us.

We dare not turn the word and concept atheism into a term of thrust and counterthrust in Christianity’s duel, as though whatever did not conform to the Christian God were ipso facto “at bottom” atheism. The Christian God can all the less be for Nietzsche the standard of godlessness if God himself, in the designated sense, is “dead.”<sup>18</sup>

Observing the way in which the concepts contain their opposite, starting from the Dionysian figure, which is itself a synthesis between the preliminary conceptions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, we can see how the *lightness/weight* dualism can also be rethought. Heidegger stresses the importance of the eternal return being “the heaviest thought”, and he tries to present this concept as being central to Nietzsche’s view on existence. This interpretation can be criticized, as it shows Nietzschean thought bordering the metaphysical realm, with Heidegger trying to bring this concept together

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<sup>17</sup> Otto, Walter F., *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, Translated by Robert B. Palmer, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1965, p. 91

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Translated from the German by David Farrell Krell, Harper & Row, New York, 1984, p. 66

with *amor fati* and giving them an utmost importance in the understanding of something more profound about the nature of temporality, existence and the Dasein. However, his inquiry about the fact whether this particular thought can be seen as a central point in Nietzsche's philosophy should not be so hastily overlooked, even if it comes with the challenges of regarding Nietzschean thought as having a central point or as being a "philosophy", in the sense of a philosophical system, thing which he opposed and struggled to avoid in his writing. Heidegger suspects that Nietzsche uses the word *existence* not in a classic sense of describing something about the nature of reality, but more to describe a way of thinking about one's experience. He compares this view on existence to the Dasein, and we can see how this implies that the eternal return is not something that can be attributed to some external mechanisms, but to the human subject and its way of relating to the world.

The *Übermensch* is to be understood as something beyond man, not as something essentially different, it is simply the man that has overcome some of his limitations and can look retrospectively at his previous condition. The *Übermensch* is the condition of possibility for the current study of the human, and it is the only way the human condition can become visible, by allowing ourselves, even as a prospect, to gain distance from our current state. This, of course, means that the issue of temporality is closely tied with the way the human existence can be analyzed, and Heidegger does not hesitate to lead the discussion in this area. He focuses on the *Moment* as the point of maximum pressure, the thought of the eternal return applying its weight onto existence through this point.

That is what is peculiar to, and hardest to bear in, the doctrine of eternal return-to wit, that eternity is in the Moment, that the Moment is not the fleeting "now," not an instant of time whizzing by a spectator, but the collision of future and past. Here the Moment comes to itself. It determines how everything recurs.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Translated from the German by David Farrell Krell, Harper & Row, New York, 1984, p. 57

Becoming is not to be treated as a way to escape this life; it is not something exterior to it, but a way to calibrate with life in a deeper sense, to accede to eternity via the Moment. A temporary nihilistic attitude can be of help here, especially when we want to create new values and need to abandon the old ones. It is not that a certain set of values is more suitable than another, what's to grasp here is that values need to be in a constant process of reconsideration so as to avoid fixating on one single moral system. Becoming a nihilist is an important step, as it turns our attention away from traditional metaphysical explanations and gives us the freedom to participate in becoming, giving life's force the opportunity to manifest.

"I no longer believe in anything" suggests the very opposite of doubt and paralysis in the face of decision and action. It means the following: "I will not have life come to a standstill at one possibility, one configuration; I will allow and grant life its inalienable right to become, and I shall do this by prefiguring and projecting new and higher possibilities for it, creatively conducting life out beyond itself."<sup>20</sup>

Even though Nietzsche values life, understood as the current existence, he does not concern himself with being as Heidegger does in his philosophy. He sees becoming as the most suitable way to think about ourselves, matching this with his view of a chaotic reality that cannot be explained by a single metaphysical system. This is why we cannot place the concept of eternal return at the center of Nietzschean thought, as it cannot be understood as a traditional philosophy that has basic principles and final conclusions. Instead, Nietzsche tried to capture the flux of existence, the dynamic nature of reality, and adopts becoming not only for descriptive purposes, but also as a possibility for us to better adjust in a changing environment. If we see our existence as becoming, we will be prepared to face uncertainty, but to do this, we must be willing to abandon a state of being and search for another, we must repeatedly destroy and create.

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<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Translated from the German by David Farrell Krell, Harper & Row, New York, 1984, p. 126

### Lightness and weight, the inversion of values

Becoming individualizes the subject, but here it happens only under the burden of the hardest thought. Stirner's solipsism and selfishness, or Rand's anarcho-capitalism denies weight, gives individuality maximum importance but fails to place the human subject into a context, where intersubjectivity can become possible. Kundera describes in the novel the tension between hard and light with a reference to Beethoven and his expression used in the last movement of his last quartet. "Unlike Parmenides, Beethoven apparently viewed weight as something positive."<sup>21</sup> An almost Kantian imperative, the so called "*Es muss sein!*"<sup>22</sup> represents "the weighty resolution is at one with the voice of Fate (Es muss sein!); necessity, weight, and value are three concepts inextricably bound: only necessity is heavy, and only what is heavy has value."<sup>23</sup> What's important here is that Tomáš, one of the main characters, from being a libertine type of man, a good example of an individualist, becomes aware of the unbearable lightness when he falls in love, in relation to another person. This makes him choose the weight of settling with his loved one as he abandons his individual being that made him feel without purpose.

Although it is intuitive to associate freedom with lightness, this view would resemble more closely the rejection of responsibility and adoption of a libertine conduct. Camus says that "claim to total freedom and the cold-blooded dehumanization of the intellect appears in Sade."<sup>24</sup> The total freedom of the intellect that, as we have shown, leaves the subject lacking of any sign of humanity and leads to solipsism. The dehumanized subject of Sade, we can claim, has to detach from humanity as a whole to become truly free, in the same way that Stirner proposed. If we regard authentic freedom

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<sup>21</sup> Kundera Milan, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by Michael Henry Heim, Harper & Row, New York, 1984, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> Ger. *It must be*.

<sup>23</sup> Kundera Milan, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by Michael Henry Heim, Harper & Row, New York, 1984, p. p. 13

<sup>24</sup> Camus, *The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, p. 46

as a prerequisite for the human experience, and not as a kind of solipsism, we can better understand what freedom actually means.

Obviously, the thought of eternal recurrence of the same guides us back to the question of the relationship between freedom and necessity.<sup>25</sup>

Freedom can only be exercised through making choices, or else, it is nothing but an essentialist attribute of the intellect that has no real power to make changes in the phenomenal world. The hard choice that Kundera describes, evoking Beethoven, when made, destroys the other possibilities that potentially existed for the individual. Freedom is the way we choose one way or the other, the way we intervene in the string of causality that lies in front of us.

We can still accept the idea of determinism, but we also have to allow the subject to choose a path of necessity. This is only possible if we consider ourselves subjects of becoming, which cannot be submitted to a hard deterministic system that proposes the existence of static beings ready to be frozen in time and analyzed. We would be much more submissive to determinism if we were of what we could call “metaphysical libertines.” If we gave in to the will of fate and assumed no responsibility, determinism would dominate us. We would be living beings in the present, but we could not truly become something, because any choice we would make could be easily replaced by another one, thus nullifying it. Most importantly, we could not be consistent in any action or pursuit, any project would be deemed to fail.

“*Be yourself*” is probably the most individualistic and narcissistic maxim of the contemporary era. Besides the problematic assumption of a (good) being that lies within each of us and could give us value, if only we were to actualize it, it eclipses the much more important teaching of Socrates, “*Know yourself*.” We are asked to be ourselves, without being taught how to

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<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Translated from the German by David Farrell Krell, Harper & Row, New York, 1984, p. 135

know ourselves first, if such a thing is actually possible. As we know from psychoanalysis, the positing of the existence of an unconscious makes self-discovery all the more difficult. The maxim also goes against the existentialism of Sartre, who proves in *Existentialism is a humanism* that we do not have a being to relate to, and that there is not even a human nature to talk about.

Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it. Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after life exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism.<sup>26</sup>

If we are to follow Nietzsche, “*Be yourself*” needs to be replaced with “*Become Who You Are.*” To choose the determinations means to become, to see the human being as a project. We turn from human *beings* to human *becomings*, among all the *becomings* in the world. Perhaps the most liberating maxim is “*amor fati*”, the love of fate, not to be understood as a love of fatalism but as a revaluation of our own self-forged destiny. Nietzsche describes this attitude towards existence as a Dionysian one, and makes a connection between all the concepts reminded here in a fragment from *The Will to Power*:

Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this-to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection-it wants the eternal circulation: -the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence-my formula for this is *amor fati*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, translated by Carol Macomber, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2007, p. 22

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1968, p. 536

Negativity, understood here as the annulment of all possibilities in order to pick one choice at a time, is what frees us from the anguish of the ever-present choices and puts us on the path of becoming through the hard choice that Kundera describes in his novel. We must also acknowledge the fact that, in the view developed here, once a choice is made, it no longer belongs to us, as we are not a static being that is able to own something. Instead, the choice is now fixed in the string of the many causalities that we are able to visualize only retrospectively. In this sense, the human being is a thing of the past, that only the *Übermensch*, that is the human *becoming*, can perceive. The human *becoming* is that entity that has surpassed being and can gain distance from the thing that it wants to name and interact with.

## Conclusion

Starting from the duality of lightness and weight that reveals the challenges of dealing with positive and negative concepts, and ending with the problem of *being* and *becoming*, we have managed to find connections with many more areas of discussion in Nietzsche's thought. Even though we must be constantly aware of the profound anti-systematical message that he intended to send, from the content to the form, we cannot help but notice the many ties between his proposed concepts and how they can all form a sort of map that we can use to navigate his work. This does not mean that the reader has to follow a specific route towards truth, but we can use the hermeneutical methods towards Nietzsche's works that Heidegger or Camus practiced in order to better understand their thinking respectively. The story about Sisyphus takes a whole other meaning and becomes even more complex if we take into account the eternal return, and Heidegger's conception of time takes an interesting turn when faced with the same concept.



It is also difficult to grasp just by focusing on Nietzsche just how revealing his ideas are, one of the reasons being that he does not concentrate his effort to explain concepts, precisely to avoid becoming too systematic. His style of writing is much more poetic, and the interpretations on his thoughts on the eternal return or *amor fati* are in themselves part of the concepts. The adoption of the figure of Dionysus is yet another emblematic feature of his philosophy that inspires Camus and Rand to employ similar mythical images in their work to explain certain attitudes that we should adopt, that cannot be expressed in traditional or academic ways of writing and argumentation. The similarity between Dionysus and Christ that we have noticed matched with Nietzsche's own concerns about how Christianity handles its own mythology is a very significant insight on how any message can become ideological.

The final reflections on *being* and *becoming* have proved useful in the attempt to overcome not only the traditional manner in which essence and existence have been perceived, but also to avoid a way of thinking that tends to regard beings as static, and refuses to adapt to the dynamic nature of the world as *becoming*. This is as much a philosophical tool as it is a way of altering our perception about ourselves, to regard the human as *becoming* instead of being. Such a change would free us from the confines of our own thinking by abandoning the unbearable lightness of being, overcoming our condition of metaphysical libertines and choosing weight instead. This should help us evolve organically, while also allowing ourselves to make real decisions by choosing the burden of the world, condemning ourselves to become free.

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