

Heidegger's Question – Who is Ernst Jünger's Worker?

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Ernst Jünger's 'The Worker – Dominion and Form'
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Abstract

My title today recalls, and quite deliberately, Martin Heidegger's extraordinary summary essay on his confrontation with Friedrich Nietzsche, presented in Bremen in 1953 and published the following year, entitled *Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?*¹ It was the second of Heidegger's published essays on Nietzsche, the first, written in 1943 but only appearing in 1950 as *Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'*.²

Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche is well-known, although perhaps not always as well understood. It is impossible to understand Heidegger's reading of Jünger apart from his reading of Nietzsche. If there is any truth at all in the claim sometimes made, that Jünger was an influence on Heidegger, it is because Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche allowed him to understand what – or rather who – had first laid out the forms in which Jünger's insights were able to take their subsequent shape. Often quoted is Heidegger's suggestion, apparently made to Gadamer that “Nietzsche nearly did me in”.³ Heidegger read Nietzsche not, as is sometimes thought, only from the 1930s onwards, but from very early on.⁴ He was close to the Nietzsche-Archive at Weimar, and well aware (in ways, it seems, that did not interest Jünger) of the both positive and questionable ways in which Nietzsche's *Nachlaß* had been edited.

More important than this, and in ways little understood to this day, is the extent to which Heidegger read Hegel right from the very beginning, and the connections he made between Nietzsche and Hegel. The thinker, however, who shaped Heidegger's mature thought in ways parallel to the ways in which Nietzsche's thoughts gave shape to Jünger's, is Friedrich Hölderlin, whose work he had known since 1908.⁵ If that is a topic for another day, it lies decisively present and constantly informs all we consider today. Never could Heidegger have interpreted Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return as he did, unless he had first understood how an understanding of eternal return was already at work for Hölderlin, and in ways in which

¹ Martin Heidegger, 'Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra (1953)' in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (GA7), edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (2000 [1954]), pp. 99–124.

² Martin Heidegger, 'Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist tot" (1943)' in *Holzwege* (GA5), edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (2003 [1950]), pp. 209–267.

³ "Nietzsche hat mich kaputt gemacht!"

⁴ Heidegger reports being familiar with the *Wille zur Macht* from 1910 (and so presumably with the 1906 first edition) and the 1911 edition enlarged to nearly twice its size. From the Foreword to the first (1972) edition of Heidegger's *Frühe Schriften*. Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften* (GA1) edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1978), p. 56. "Was die erregenden Jahre zwischen 1910 und 1914 brachten, läßt sich gebührend nicht sagen, sondern nur durch eine Weniges auswählende Aufzählung andeuten: Die zweite um das Doppelte vermehrte Ausgabe von Nietzsches ‚Willen zur Macht‘."

⁵ From a *Reclam* edition he kept all his life.

Nietzsche too had been aware of from the very beginning, but realised in his own work in an entirely different way.

It was Jünger's experience of total war that enabled him to concretise Nietzsche's insight in the actual moment for which the thinking that Nietzsche described had been the preparation. The cold, hard, *iron* necessities of the battlefield enabled Jünger to take Nietzsche's demand "workers need to learn to feel like soldiers",⁶ and show how this had become possible only because soldiers had already become workers, and war had become a form of work.

"What Ernst Jünger thinks in the thought of dominion and form of the worker and sees in the light of this thought, is the universal dominion of the will to power within planetarily conceived history." Heidegger's verdict on Jünger's *The Worker* was written in 1945, and so is also a verdict on the conflagration that, in German, at least, had finally ended in that year. They appeared, however, only in 1983, when Hermann Heidegger posthumously published his father's *The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts (1945)*, an evaluation of Martin Heidegger's time as rector of the University of Freiburg under the Nazi regime between April 1933 until April 1934 when he resigned from the position. Heidegger refers in this text to *The Worker*, and the discussions he and colleagues held on it shortly after its appearance in 1932, and again in 1939/40. Heidegger speaks of the strangeness of the thoughts contained in this book, and calls them "strange and estranging", until they were "borne out by 'the facts'." What are "the facts" of this history? The "facts" are what the conclusion of the war revealed to be the case: a war that, as far as Heidegger was concerned, only made manifest a devastation already at work long before, and very far from over. Heidegger concludes "in this reality today stands everything, whether understood as communism, or fascism or world democracy".⁷

How does Heidegger understand the word "everything" (*Alles*) in this sentence? Up until this very day Heidegger scholarship is dogged – I would even say confounded – by two persistent refusals: either, first, to accept Heidegger's credentials as a commentator on such things as "communism, or fascism or world democracy", or second, to translate Heidegger's most central terms in ways that reveal what he himself understood by them. But more of that

⁶ Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht*, §763, (GOA16), p. 196 (=KSA12, *Nachlaß 1885–1887*, p. 350). "Arbeiter sollten wie Soldaten empfinden lernen."

⁷ Martin Heidegger, 'Das Rektorat 1933/34: Tatsachen und Gedanken (1945)' in GA16, pp. 372–394, 375. "Fremd waren und noch befremdeten, bis sie durch 'die Tatsachen' bestätigt wurden. Was Ernst Jünger in den Gedanken von Herrschaft und Gestalt des Arbeiters denkt und im Lichte dieses Gedankens sieht, ist die universale Herrschaft des Willens zur Macht innerhalb der planetarisch gesehenen Geschichte. In dieser Wirklichkeit steht heute Alles, mag es Kommunismus heißen oder Faschismus oder Weltdemokratie." Ernst Jünger, 'Der Arbeiter (1932)' in Ernst Jünger, *Sämtliche Werke* (=SW), vol. 8, pp. 9–317.

at the end. On that first: how *can* we accept commentary on social, or political, or moral, themes from an avowed, if rather special kind, of anti-Semite? And, surely, the way to “save” Heidegger’s thinking for posterity is to show how, even if it cannot possibly be relevant for the “social and political”, it can be relevant for teaching us a little philosophy, and a little thinking, and that should be as much as we should hope for. How can we trust the political understanding of a one-time Nazi and anti-Semite?

Do we now live in an age that understands this “all” differently from, or beyond, the universal dominion of the will to power, planetarily conceived? Have even one of our current obsessions: with rescuing the planet; with overcoming inequality and injustice; with technology, its global promise, and its planetary curses; with our common humanity, its “rights” and its confinements in gendered, racial, sexual, national, historical and colonial, intersectional, borders; or the continued threat of terror, nuclear conflagration, and final extinction; moved even an inch beyond this universal dominion, and if so, how, and when did this peace among us first break out? Do we not continue to live in the devastation of which the years 1945–6 were only a milestone?

How are we to read *The Worker*? What kind of book is it? Heidegger grouped it, along with Jünger’s *Total Mobilisation* and *On Pain* under the heading of Jünger’s metaphysical texts. Metaphysical in what way? Vincent Blok, in his recent *Ernst Jünger’s Philosophy of Technology*,⁸ attempts to derive from Jünger a systematic thinking that will explain both Jünger and our present situation to ourselves. This anxious project is doomed almost from the outset: Jünger was not a trained philosopher, and try as we might, we cannot squeeze his irregularly shaped observations and at times febrile intuitions into systematic or even rationalisable shape. It is impossible to speak of “Jünger’s Platonism” as an active dialogue, only by means of his very secondary and derivative acquisition of the metaphysics within which he stands and his parroting of Nietzsche. When Jünger speaks of form, he does so with an at times startling clumsiness: “Of utmost concern, however, is that the form is not subject to the elements of fire and earth, and consequently man as form belongs to eternity”.⁹ Whose understanding of “form” and the elements is at work here? Aristotle’s? Or Nietzsche’s? Or is this Jünger himself an innovator of a new and decisive school of thinking?

⁸ Vincent Blok, *Ernst Jünger’s Philosophy of Technology: Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁹ See, for instance the discussion of form in §8 of *The Worker*, pp. 18–21, 20. *Der Arbeiter* (SW8), p. 40. “Von höchstem Belange aber ist die Tatsache, daß die Gestalt den Elementen des Feuers und der Erde nicht unterworfen ist und daß daher der Mensch als Gestalt der Ewigkeit angehört.”

What drew Heidegger to *The Worker* was not, therefore, Jünger's own power to shape the history either of metaphysics, or of being itself. Jünger is not in this sense a "thinker" of, and within, what Heidegger often calls the "history of being". For Heidegger he was of greater and more immediate importance. Heidegger did not – and nor should we – understand the history of thinking itself to be comprised of a chain of conversations merely between "great thinkers". Heidegger understood the history of thinking phenomenologically, which means, he understands the work of the thinker to be – at the foremost – to bring to adequate description, to bring to the word and to language itself, whatever is, the *all*, *das Alle*, that I have already named. Thus Descartes is not the founder of the "concept" of "the subject", but rather only because human life is already being thought from out of the subjectivity of the subject (what Heidegger at times calls a change in the very being, the essence, of humanity), a thinking into which Descartes entered with the driest, coldest, most penetrating rigour, is it possible for Descartes to think, and so write, as he does. Descartes brings to thought and the word what is *necessary* to be said: what has, in being, *arrived*.

Why, then, does this book *The Worker*, at times written in a high literary style, at times sublime in its capacity to craft a description of the habits and behaviour of the time, but at times rambling, repetitive, obscure, sour and even pompous, with its at times infuriating sequences of mixed, bombastic, and unintelligible metaphors, assume so much importance both at the moment it was published, and for a thinker like Heidegger, and now? It was, after all, a sensation in its hour, and it has never been out of print. Heidegger was drawn to an engagement with Jünger because he believed *The Worker* to confirm and further elaborate the history of being itself, that history he was trying to describe. The atmosphere of the book is peculiar: descriptive, not programmatic; neither utopian nor dystopian; yet elaborating the utopian hopes and dystopian fears of the age – for all of which it was both praised and criticised at the time. This descriptiveness is not, however, so much a survey or an assessment as the announcing and letting-appear of a horizon, namely, the horizon of the highest stretch toward which we are reaching "now". This horizon has about it the sense of a pressing totality. This is the very "all" that Heidegger brings to our attention.

In 1950 Jünger's contributed to a *Festschrift* for Heidegger's sixtieth birthday in an essay published as *Beyond the Line*. In it, Jünger names this horizon as nihilism itself, in which we sense "the grand destiny, the founding power whose influence none can avoid". This encompassing horizon affects the order of everything, every aspect of life, it transforms every *thing* in the manner of its appearing, such that "even in morals one recognises this

provisionality, which in *The Worker* we indicated as their workshop-character”.¹⁰ Heidegger was drawn to Jünger, to studying *The Worker* both on his own and with students and in groups because he was concerned with the very “all” that Jünger, and that we ourselves, continually face in the present – both of his own day and our own.

The historian of ideas Walter Struve, in one of the few lengthy treatments of *The Worker* in English, examines its genesis and context in some detail. Struve, who died almost exactly a year ago, does not write approvingly of Jünger, even if he writes with forensic care and a penetrating eye. He draws attention to the transition from the much shorter 1930 essay *Total Mobilisation* to *The Worker* two years later: while both cover similar ground, the clarity and accessibility of *Total Mobilisation* gives way in *The Worker* to “sustained abstractions” and “enigmatic form”. Struve says “in reading the *Arbeiter* one often feels that he is in the midst of a dream – or a nightmare. Every image, every scene seems precise, but on reflection becomes obscure. What appears at first tangible dissolves as one approaches it. The reader thinks he has grasped Jünger’s ideas until he begins to question their meaning”. He adds, in words we as translators should perhaps have heeded, had we not found them until it was too late “it is probably significant that there is neither an English translation of the *Arbeiter* nor an extended treatment in English of its political content.”¹¹ Struve presents the milieu out of which *The Worker* sprang: the way the book, in its savage treatment of the figure of the bourgeois and its exaltation of the economic plan, hovers between the programmes of Lenin and Mussolini, the curiosity of the almost monastic life it describes as the worker’s ideal, and how its rejection of Marx and Marxism (rather than something like the “National Bolshevism” of Niekisch) are to be understood.

Struve understood that Jünger saw what Marx could not: that anyone, from Emperor to house-cleaner would become a worker – or rather, that to remain a visible part of the planetary world to come, the only way an Emperor might remain on the throne, or a cleaner keep hand on the mop, is because both are *recognisably* become workers, ordered to each other and to the work-world as a whole through the way in which hierarchy is always subordinate to, and in consequence of, the worker-role: “every member of the new order, whatever his position in the hierarchy, would be a worker”.¹² The question of ownership and private property is, for Jünger

¹⁰ Ernst Jünger, ‘Über die Linie: Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag (1950)’ in *Essays I* (SW9), pp. 237–280, 244. “Man muß jedoch den Nihilismus als großes Schicksal ahnen, als Grundmacht, deren Einfluß sich niemand entziehen kann. [. . .] Auch in Moralischen ist jenes Provisorium zu erkennen, das wir im ‘Arbeiter’ als den Werkstättencharakter bezeichneten.” See *Der Arbeiter* (SW8), p. 190 / *The Worker*, p. 115.

¹¹ ‘Ernst Jünger: Warriors, Workers and Elite’ in Walter Struve, *Elites Against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany 1890–1933* (Princeton NJ: Princeton, 1973), pp. 377–414: p. 381.

¹² Walter Struve, ‘Ernst Jünger: Warriors, Workers and Elite’, p. 387.

(in distinction to Marx and Engels) irrelevant. Struve cites *The Worker*: “the matter is not whether the fact of property is moral or immoral, but only whether it can be brought under the work-plan”.¹³

His criticism of Jünger springs from Struve’s impeccable commitment to the “world democracy” that we have already heard Heidegger name, and that both Heidegger and Jünger elsewhere, and before 1945, had referred to as “Americanism”. Struve is repulsed by Jünger’s acceptance of the necessity, and so willingness, to manipulate the masses and his disdain for democratic transparency (he fails, perhaps, to foresee how the masses might embrace this manipulation): Struve cites with horror *The Worker*’s claim that “the more life can be led in a cynical, Spartan, Prussian, or Bolshevik way, the better it will be”,¹⁴ and quotes Jünger’s claim elsewhere that “I hate democracy as I do the plague”.¹⁵ We find in *The Worker* that “liberal democracy” will give way to “work democracy” which is more closely related to the absolute state.¹⁶ That is to say, democracy, inasmuch as *it* is to survive, will itself become a function of, and subordinate to, the work-world.

Struve’s desire to alert us to Jünger’s anti-democratic sensibilities, and his distaste for them, not unakin to that felt by many (if not most, perhaps nearly all) commentators on Heidegger, is driven by explicit concerns. Struve writes in the *Preface* to his book containing the essay on Jünger: “when I began working on German elitism almost fifteen years ago, I thought I was examining doctrines that had developed mainly in Germany and were not characteristic of most industrial societies . . . Elitism of a variety familiar to me from this study of Germany is now on the rise in the West. After a century of almost uncontested celebration, the doctrines of democracy appear to be losing their supremacy in the United States . . . Today the advance of such elitism is likely to go hand in hand with reaction.”¹⁷ Struve’s *Introduction* is equally trenchant, beginning as it does with references to Lenin and the Jacobins.

Both Struve and Blok, and indeed, many others, can often be found to be searching for a key, or code, which, if we but uncovered it, might unlock the strangeness of *The Worker*. To attempt to uncover Jünger as a cryptic philosopher, or to uncover in Jünger a cryptic key to his

¹³ Ernst Jünger, *The Worker*, p. 176. Struve’s translations differs in minor respects to ours. *Der Arbeiter* (SW8), p. 292. “In der Arbeitswelt handelt es sich jedoch nicht darum, ob die Tatsache des Eigentums sittlich oder unsittlich ist, sondern lediglich darum, ob sie im Arbeitsplan unterzubringen ist.”

¹⁴ Ernst Jünger, *The Worker*, p.130. (*Der Arbeiter*, p. 214 f.) “Je zynischer, spartanischer, preußischer oder bolschewistischer im übrigen das Leben geführt werden kann, desto besser wird es sein.”

¹⁵ Ernst Jünger, *Das Wäldchen 125: Eine Chronik aus den Grabenkämpfen 1918* (Berlin 1925), p. 73.

¹⁶ Ernst Jünger, *The Worker*, p. 165. *Der Arbeiter* (SW8), p. 274. “Unter diesem Gesichtswinkel ist die Arbeitsdemokratie dem absoluten Staate enger verwandt als der liberalen Demokratie, der sie zu entspringen scheint.”

¹⁷ Walter Struve, ‘Preface’, *Elites against Democracy*, p. ix.

thought, is to look in the wrong place. Rather, to interpret Jünger as appearing within, and bringing to the fore, what thinking itself makes manifest, as Heidegger did, is a far more powerful way both to understand Jünger's *The Worker* (and other some of his other texts), and to provide us with an access to what Jünger continues to make manifest even now, some eighty years after *The Worker* first appeared.

Struve brings before us something that is constantly and permanently gestured towards in every political statement made in Western life – in and beyond the United States – and was as familiar to Jünger and Heidegger (both of whom also read Lenin) as it is to figures as diverse (and with as much in common) as Bernie Sanders and Steve Bannon. Heidegger in 1945 named this *all* “communism, or fascism or world democracy”; in 1930 Jünger had described this as what was appearing “in Fascism, in Bolshevism, in Americanism, in Zionism, in the movements of coloured peoples”, which is that “advance is made into a progress that one would formerly would have held to be unthinkable”.¹⁸ This is the *all* of the most immediate present. Jünger's formulation discloses the constant actualisation of the unthinkable as *and within* the real: it is an entirely metaphysical formulation. We recognise its Nietzschean lineage. It is not less Hegelian for being so Nietzschean. What else could Hegel possibly have meant when he claimed that the rational is the real and the real the rational? Hegel establishes with absolute clarity the same metaphysical ground for this statement as Heidegger understood to ground the entirety of Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming by explaining this insight as bound in the most iron way to the necessity and demand of the present itself, to look beyond which is entirely misleading and vain. Hegel tells us: “This is the manner in which recognition arrives, in the appearance of the temporal and transient, as that substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present”.¹⁹

In the whole history of metaphysics, there has never been a clearer or more universal statement of the relation of the way the world appears within the present, or the way in which its meaning is referred to the whole of time (as eternity). From around about 1930 onwards, Heidegger began to interpret Hegel's thought as the *Vollendung*, the fulfillment and completion of what he calls metaphysics: a thinking that begins with Plato and Aristotle and comes to its

¹⁸ Jünger, E., *Die Totale Mobilmachung* in Jünger, E. (ed.), *Krieg und Krieger*, Berlin, Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1930, pp. 9–30, p. 27. “Im Faschismus, im Bolschewismus, im Amerikanismus, im Zionismus, in den Bewegungen der farbigen Völker setzt der Fortschritt zu Vorstößen an, die man bisher für undenkbar gehalten hätte.”

¹⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, ‘Vorrede’ in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1955 [1821]), p. 14–15. “*Was vernünftig ist, das ist Wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig.*” (Hegel's emphases) “Darauf kommt es dann an, in dem Scheine des Zeitlichen und Vorübergehenden die Substanz, die immanent, und das Ewige, das gegenwärtig ist.”

completion in Hegel. To this completion he had added, certainly by the end of the 1930s, the name of Nietzsche, together with a full and comprehensive explanation of how Nietzsche's and Hegel's thought represent and carry through the consummation he names. To these, as adjunct figures of the consummation, Heidegger included the name of Karl Marx, and in repeated passages in his private notes, Ernst Jünger.

The most formal definition of work hitherto is to be found in Karl Marx's *Parisian Manuscripts*. Here Marx says that Hegel "grasps work as the *essence*, as the self-preserving essence, of man".²⁰ Jünger intensifies this definition inasmuch as he announces, not a metaphysical essence as a principle, but a living-essence (*Lebewesen*): the worker. Jünger's *Worker*, Heidegger says repeatedly, represented the consummation (*Vollendung*) of subjectivity.²¹

We began with the question: "who is Ernst Jünger's worker?". Jünger himself never asks this question. Like Nietzsche before him, Jünger announces – but what exactly? Jünger asks no *question* in relation to the worker. Jünger tells us "an increasingly clear will to power begins to announce itself . . . there is only *one* form in which it is possible to will at all": he adds "we know which form it is, whose silhouette begins to appear in this way".²² It is in the voice of announcement that the will to power as such appears. Is the announcement in the voice of the worker? Or rather, the worker is *that one* who is announced. By whom? Should we not better ask: in what way is Jünger's worker related to Nietzsche's Zarathustra? In the first place, Heidegger tells us (citing Nietzsche), Zarathustra is the teacher of eternal return. However, Jünger never once makes any reference to eternal return. Or rather, no reference to eternal return as Nietzsche puts it forward. Why is this so? We might be tempted to claim that what the eternal return is quite absent from Jünger's thinking, but in fact entirely the opposite is true.

How are we to understand Nietzsche's thought of thoughts, the doctrine of eternal recurrence or return? In Jünger's *Festschrift* he spoke principally of nihilism as grand destiny, as a 'line' or limit that constitutes everything within the line, that line within which, he says "the 'highest values devalue themselves' " (quoting Nietzsche) – and then asks about the

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte (1844)* in MEW40, p. 574. "[Hegel] erfaßt die *Arbeit* als das *Wesen*, als das sich bewährende Wesen des Menschen." (Marx's emphases)

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Z Ernst Jünger (GA90)*, edited by Peter Trawny (2004), pp. 6, 40, 52, 78, 80, 96, 99 f., 101 f., 213, 253, 258 f., 140.

²² Ernst Jünger, *The Worker*, p. 39. *Der Arbeiter* (SW8): p. 70. "Ein immer klarerer Machtwille sich anzumelden beginnt . . . es nur eine Form gibt, in der überhaupt gewollt werden kann"; p. 101. "Wir wissen, welche Gestalt es ist, deren Umriß sich auf diese Weise abzuzeichnen beginnt."

possibility of crossing this line.²³ The implication was that Heidegger, the man and the thinker, is one whose thought is capable of crossing the line. Heidegger's reply, initially entitled *On 'The Line'* was almost immediately renamed *On The Question of Being*. Heidegger referred to Jünger's citation of Nietzsche, but it is worth pursuing that reference – or at least, pursuing what it says. It begins “Nihilism as a normal state of affairs . . . there is no answer to the ‘why?’.”²⁴

Too often we expect the path of thinking to be marked by arguments, by the machinery and props of rational distinctions and calculations, an apparatus of explanation, freighted with complexity. The philosophical understanding of being has ordinarily been like this, at least since the Middle Ages, but writers like Gilson have continued that tradition almost up to the present day. Heidegger had shown, already in 1927, that what twists itself free of the technical machinery of philosophy is merely the *question* itself. To open the question, in the face of the assertoric declaration, the doctrine and its *announcement*, prepares the way, not for the *Vollendung* of metaphysics, its perfection and fulfillment, but its *Überwindung*. We translate this as overcoming, but it can just as easily be translated as surmounting – not as a conquest, but as a vaulting-(lightly)-over: what Heidegger often referred to merely as a leap.

Before we can take a step further forward, we must take one sideways. What is all this talk of metaphysics? Put most simply, what does metaphysics attempt to tell us? It tells us what being itself is. What is this being of which it speaks? Nothing other than what we began with, much earlier, the question which we left, at least to a certain extent, hanging: what is meant by the “all”? This *all* is what presents itself whenever we are faced with everything most decisive. It announces itself and presses itself most insistently upon us. We met this *all* already, as much in Jünger as Struve and the others we have been discussing. This *all* appears as something that is constantly recurring and returning in all our thoughts. It often stands before us: it is the singular possibility that we should have any thoughts at all.

Might we then say that this *all* is in some sense “being”? Nietzsche certainly thought so. In Nietzsche's own words (in a passage from *Also sprach Zarathustra*), “everything passes away, everything returns: eternally rolls the wheel of being”, and again he calls this “the ring of being”.²⁵ Nietzsche's thought of thoughts, the eternal recurrence, is a thought of being.

²³ Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie* (SW9), p. 258 f. “die ‘obersten Werte sich entwerten’.” Jünger is citing Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* (GOA15), p. 145, no. 2 (=KSA12, *Nachlaß 1885–1887*, p. 350.)

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* (GOA15), p. 145, no. 2 (=KSA12, *Nachlaß 1885–1887*, p. 350.) “Der Nihilismus ein normaler Zustand. Nihilismus: es fehlt das Ziel; es fehlt die Antwort auf das ‘Warum?’.”

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, KSA4, p. 272–3. “Alles geht, alles kommt zurück; ewig rollt das Rad des Seins . . . der Ring des Seins.”

Heidegger tells, citing a fragment from Nietzsche's notebooks, that when Nietzsche speaks of *das Sein* he means *das Seiende im Ganzen*, "being as a whole".²⁶ Why is this distinction important? How are we to understand "being as a whole" or even "being"? Heidegger says "Nietzsche does not speak of being as a whole. We employ this phrase primarily to name all that is not simply nothing: nature (living and lifeless), history . . . God, the gods, and demigods. Being (*seiend*) we name also what becomes, emerges and passes away".²⁷

Heidegger argues that it is through the doctrine of the eternal recurrence that being as a whole comes in to view all over again, as the underlying ground of Western thinking. It does so, however, in an entirely new and decisive way. In this sense, it itself returns, both all over again and utterly anew. At the point where Zarathustra speaks of the ring of being he adds "in each moment being begins".²⁸ If the ring indicates the eternity of recurrence, how is it grasped? Heidegger answers "this ring and its eternity are only grasped out of the *moment*".²⁹ The moment discloses the whole of being – or rather the moment and the whole of being are *each time* and *for all time* the same: what is present, what is "presently" present. *Das Seiende* means whatever is, or has been, or will be, capable of being present. Even what passes away is present *as* what passes away. More importantly for Nietzsche, everything that *is*, must be *as* becoming.

For Nietzsche the moment is decisive, as what allows the eternal return to come into view. The thought of eternal return of the same the most *nihilistic* of thoughts because in the eternal return the valuelessness of everything becomes visible. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's thought of eternal return was decisive not only because it allowed the whole of present being to become visible, but because it disclosed its *manner* of visibility, its "how": in present nihilism.

This "how" is only graspable, however, on the basis of the one grasping – on the basis of that one who thinks about the world and appears within it – the human being, "man". This is what Heidegger's understanding of the ring of recurrence means, that ring which, constituting the limit and limitations of the whole, *becomes* within it. How do we relate to the eternal return? As ones who (have to) become. Why? Because inasmuch as everything is becoming it is at the same passing away: it loses its value. It is this that led Nietzsche to

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (GA44), p. 97. "[das] Sein (gemeint: das Seiende im Ganzen)."

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (GA44), p. 24 f. "Nietzsche spricht nicht vom Seienden im Ganzen. Wir ge brauchen diesen Namen, um zunächst all das zu benennen, was nicht schlechthin nichts ist: die Natur, die leblose und die lebendige, die Geschichte und ihre Hervorbringungen und Gestalter und Träger, den Gott, die Götter und Halbgötter. Seiend nennen wir auch das Werdende, Entstehende und Vergehende."

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, KSA4, p. 273. "In jedem Nu beginnt das Sein."

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (GA44), p. 71. "Dieser Ring und seine Ewigkeit sind nur aus dem *Augenblick* zu fassen." (Heidegger's emphasis)

understand the unfolding world as a nihilism. It is not that the same values repeat themselves over and over, but rather that everything that is, becomes valueless. The eternal return brings us before the whole of present being, as what has been, and is, and will be, but with the overwhelming threat of the valuelessness of all present being.

The whole of being therefore summons forth *that one* capable of becoming. Becoming what? Or rather, becoming *as such*? This is the essential connection for Nietzsche of eternal recurrence with the will to power: we do not *choose* to exercise the will to power, rather we are driven in to it by the eternal return to the valuelessness, the weightlessness, of the totality of being. Heidegger argues that in this the ring of being – time – the circle – plays a role, requiring that “man be grasped through the world and world through man himself”.³⁰ *That one* most capable for becoming, Heidegger says, is the one who drives to its highest and most complete possibility, not only the will to power as such (what Heidegger later comes to call the will to will), but is the highest and most complete expression, the *Vollendung*, or consummation, of the subjectivity of the subject. Jünger took up Nietzsche’s term for such a being: not, strictly speaking, the worker, but, even more fundamentally, the *typus*. The *typus* is *that one* who can “stamp becoming with the character of being [as] the highest will to power”: that *one* who can make new values.³¹

Heidegger locates this completion in a person: in a sense, the person of Jünger, but more is meant. Heidegger says “Ernst Jünger’s *Worker* arises from metaphysics rightly understood, that is, shaped from the basic position of the metaphysics of Nietzsche, which means an imperial, and so purified of all ‘bourgeois’ conceptions, communism”. Heidegger adds “in the form of the worker the subjectivity of humanity attains its consummation” as an unconditioned and planetary form.³²

If Nietzsche understands being as both “appearance” and becoming as the permanentising of presence, an *effect* of the will to power as its highest expression, does Heidegger understand being differently? We can answer this question only through an aside. Early on in his considerations of Jünger, Heidegger lays out what he considers to be Jünger’s “blindness and essential limit” in consequence of Nietzsche’s metaphysics. Nietzsche’s most

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (GA44), p. 110. “Den Menschen von der Welt her und die Welt aus dem Menschen zu begreifen”

³¹ Nietzsche, *Will zur Macht* (GOA15), p. 101 (=KSA12, *Nachlaß 1885–1887*, p. 312). “Dem Werden den Charakter des Seins aufzuprägen – das ist der höchste Wille zur Macht.”

³² Martin Heidegger, *Zu Ernst Jünger* (GA90), p. 40. “In der Gestalt des Arbeiters erreicht die Subjektivität des Menschentums ihre Vollendung ins Unbedingte und die Ausbreitung in das Planetarische. Ernst Jüngers ‘Der Arbeiter’ ist die aus der Grundstellung der Metaphysik Nietzsches geschaffene Metaphysik des recht verstandenen, d. h. von allen ‘bürgerlichen’ Vorstellungen gereinigten imperialen ‘Kommunismus’.”

fundamental distinction had been between being and becoming: being, if there is such a thing, is secured through becoming. Becoming is secured *as* the effect of the will to power. Jünger had developed from this the understanding of the worker as that one who, as the expression of the highest will to power, secures being through the worker's becoming.

In *Being and Time* and beyond it, Heidegger draws a distinction not between being and becoming, but between being as the "all", what is presently present (*das Seiende*) and being itself, *das Sein*. Nietzsche also uses the term *das Sein*, but Heidegger is adamant, for reasons we can only touch on, that what Nietzsche means by *das Sein* is *das Seiende*, present being. In considering Jünger's blindness, therefore, Heidegger says "Jünger therefore, cannot 'see' and determine the proper realm of decision between being itself (*das Sein*) and present being (*das Seiende*) (the difference)".³³ Elsewhere Heidegger calls this the "ontological difference".³⁴ If you have encountered this difference before, you will almost certainly have done so as the difference between being and beings, but this is a quite derivative and misleading translation. What is at issue is different ways in which a kind of *all* shows up, and the manner of the appearing of the *all*. Here the distinction is between that kind of *all* enforced and produced through the highest will to power in the being of the worker and – well what exactly?

A clue, but only a clue – given the time available to us – comes in Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return. These were published in an edited form in 1961. The original transcripts were made available much later. For the most part they differ only occasionally, and most often only in minor detail. In one key place, Heidegger is concerned with this "difference", between being and present being. Heidegger is concerned with how Nietzsche grasps the meaning of eternity itself – yet another *all* – as time. In the original transcript, Heidegger had emphasised again that what Nietzsche means by "being" is present being, *das Seiende*: this is in contrast to what Nietzsche understood as the whole of time, time in its totality as eternity. What Nietzsche understands as eternity, *we* are to understand by: *Sein*. Being.

The questions 'who?' and 'why?', before anything else, *ask*. It is this asking, this interrogating and questioning being into its very ground, its ground as disclosedness, that enables Heidegger to withdraw from the driven description of *The Worker* as the highest form

³³ Martin Heidegger, *Zur Ernst Jünger* (GA90), p. 13. "Jünger kann deshalb nicht 'sehen' und ausmachen den eigentlichen Entscheidungsbereich der zwischen Sein und Seiendem (die Unterscheidung)."

³⁴ See especially the discussion throughout the lectures published as Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (GA24) edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1989 [1975]), p. 22 and *passim*. Initially Heidegger presents this in the following way: "Wir bezeichnen sie als die *ontologische Differenz*, d. h. als die Scheidung zwischen Sin und Seiendem." (Heidegger's emphasis)

of the will to power. Heidegger argued that Nietzsche presented Zarathustra as a teacher not only of the doctrine of eternal recurrence, but also as one other of those things that go to make up Nietzsche's conception of the whole of present being, *das Seiende im Ganzen*. Heidegger presents the Nietzsche who has Zarathustra say "*I teach you the overman*".³⁵ Who does Heidegger say Jünger's worker is? In protocols of a seminar of the 7th June 1944, Werner Creutzfeldt reports that Heidegger claimed "immediately and without reinterpretation [. . .] Ernst Jünger in his poetry is rooted in Nietzsche. His worker in the book of the same name is the overman."³⁶ Is it, then, the *overman* who we must put into question?

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra? (1943)* (GA7), p. 103. Citing Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (KSA4), p. 14. "*Ich (nämlich Zarathustra) lehre euch den Übermenschen.*" (Heidegger's emphases)

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Seminare 1937 und 1944* (GA87), edited by Peter von Ruckteschell (2004), p. 283 f. "Unmittelbar und ohne Umdeutung, wie Spengler sie vorgenommen hat, fußt *Ernst Jünger* in seinen Dichtungen auf Nietzsche. Sein 'Arbeiter' in dem gleichnamigen Buch ist der Übermensch."