

# VATTIMO AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF NIHILISTIC ONTOLOGY

## *Vattimo y las posibilidades de ontología nihilista*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Gianni Vattimo's "nihilistic ontology" is immediately distinguished by its resolute anti-metaphysics. Thus, instead of what Vattimo construes as the definitive tropes of metaphysics, i.e., temporal permanence, necessity, foundationalism, etc., the possibility of nihilistic ontology must maintain a critical exigency regarding these tropes. According to this imperative, Vattimo seeks to equate nihilistic ontology with a hermeneutic ontology. This text examines this equation, attempting to separate the continuity between nihilism and hermeneutics, according to the latter's commitment to a variation of anthropocentrism evinced in concepts such as the effectivity of the particular content of a history, which in turn belies a nihilism that has posited history and man as contingent. Rather, what is at stake in a nihilistic ontology, consistent with Vattimo's reading, is a radically minimal ontology dedicated to the contingency of Being itself, thus excising the privileged ontological status of man that characterizes the hermeneutic ontology, a privileging analogous to the very metaphysical foundationalism that nihilism is to obviate.

*Key words:* G. Vattimo, nihilism, hermeneutics.

### **RESUMEN**

La "ontología nihilista" de Gianni Vattimo se distingue inmediatamente por su antimetafísica acérrima. Así, en lugar de los que Vattimo considera los tropos definitivos de la metafísica, i. e. la permanencia temporal, la necesidad, el fundacionalismo, etc., la posibilidad de la ontología nihilista debe mantener una exigencia crítica respecto de estos tropos. De acuerdo con este imperativo, Vattimo busca equiparar la ontología nihilista con una ontología hermenéutica. Este texto examina esta equiparación e intenta separar la continuidad entre nihilismo y hermenéutica, de acuerdo con el compromiso de la segunda con una variación del antropocentrismo evidenciado en conceptos tales como la efectividad del contenido particular de una historia que, a su vez, contradice el nihilismo que ha propuesto a la historia y al hombre como contingentes. En lugar de ello, lo que está en juego en la ontología nihilista, siguiendo la lectura de Vattimo, es una ontología mínima radical dedicada a la contingencia del Ser mismo, que remueve el estatus ontológico privilegiado

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*Artículo recibido: 17 de enero de 2009; aceptado: 14 abril de 2009*

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del hombre, característico de la ontología hermenéutica; un privilegiado análogo a la misma metafísica fundacionalista que el nihilismo ha de evitar.

*Palabras clave:* G. Vattimo, nihilismo, hermenéutica.

## Introduction

Insofar as Gianni Vattimo's project has maintained hermeneutics as a resolute conceptual reference, this gesture may be construed as a derivation of the more fecund philosophical decision made for nihilism. It is this anterior decision that is immediately incisive in Vattimo's exposition: the petitioning for a thought according to nihilism, the proper name itself, in deference to the inimical corollaries this may engender vis-à-vis the *eikos* of philosophical tradition. That the commitment to nihilism requires the specificity of a hermeneutics suggests the latter may be abstracted as a symptom of nihilism; this symptom pertains particularly to the licit possibilities, however provisional, for a philosophy obligated to think with nihilism.

Vattimo reads nihilism with a gravity, in the nihilistic imperative that certain philosophical discourses, to be collated under the nomination "metaphysics", are rendered untenable, whilst concomitantly proposing a "hermeneutic ontology" (as hermeneutics itself is recapitulated as a "nihilistic ontology" (*cf.* Vattimo 1997a)) that is to operate in place of the now archaic metaphysics. Such an archaism is ascribed according to a formulation that will resemble the familiar *doxa* of any so-called postmodernism: metaphysics may be abstracted as a particular invariant, despite its very mobilization of (non)particular invariants; metaphysics will allude to putative certainty and necessity, to "the ultimate foundation in the face of which there can only be silence or admiration" (Vattimo 1993 40). Regardless of the general orientation of the philosophical discourses that intend to obviate metaphysical foundationalism, nihilism may thus be said to attest to a degree of theoretical rigour, as it effectuates the elision of ontologies unable to posit the acute corollaries precipitated by what for Vattimo is, certainly, an event. Nihilism is, as Vattimo will describe it, the "sole opportunity" (*cf.* Vattimo 1991) for thought –it will indicate a certain genetic that forces thought according to a precise content which consists of the absence of any such variant of metaphysical foundationalism. In the spirit of both the acuity and the irregularity of such a genetic, Vattimo's contention is that the precipitate of this event is most rigorously mobilized by the hermeneutic current, as the latter is recapitulated as bearing a series of concepts analogous to the imperatives of a nihilistic ontology. It is this thesis which is to be treated

by the following intervention: according to Vattimo's account of nihilism and the demands it places on philosophical thought, does the proposed nihilistic ontology necessarily delimit the possibilities of this thought along the lines of a hermeneutic ontology? That is to say, does taking nihilism as the closure of metaphysics, thus rendering the latter's conceptual apparatus exhausted, entail a movement towards the pertinence that Vattimo ascribes to the Heideggerian ontology and its variations? Does Vattimo's hermeneutic ontology effectively actuate nihilism's theoretical possibilities, whilst remaining consistent with what he construes as the (in)variant postulates of a radically nihilistic ontology? It is this transition from nihilism to hermeneutics -which for Vattimo is precisely not a point of transition, and therein evinces the notion of hermeneutics as nihilistic symptom- that is to be interrogated in terms of a reading that suggests hermeneutics' intercalation of an anthropic principle into nihilistic ontology that resembles the dogmatic metaphysical necessity nihilism attempts to preclude, thus belying the terms of the initial decision.

### 1

Vattimo will seize on two concepts to orient his nihilistic ontology: contingency and exigency. The former will describe his conception of *Being*; the latter will describe thought's relation to *Being*, viz., an ontology conceived as response to this contingency. It is these two concepts that, for Vattimo, affirm the continuity of hermeneutics to nihilism in the form of a certain symptomatology.

A logic of the employment of these two concepts may be located in Vattimo's *The End of Modernity*, in the adduction that the status of nihilism is incomplete, whilst the genetic it intimates is to be conceived as heteroclitite. Nihilism as concept, or movement, is described as nascent, in a hypothesis that will recall Heidegger's moments of hesitation towards a comprehensive account of nihilism (cf. Heidegger 1977), with a conjunction that nevertheless affirms the latter's significance vis-à-vis philosophy. Vattimo will caution that "nihilism is still developing and it is impossible to draw any definitive conclusions about it" (1991 19). Accordingly, following this description of nihilism's incompleteness, Vattimo offers the following denotation: "Nihilism signifies here what it means for Nietzsche in the note found at the beginning of the first edition of *The Will to Power*; the situation in which 'man rolls from the centre toward X'" (1991 19). What Vattimo omits in his citation of Nietzsche clarifies the intent of the original remark, as the prefatory "Since Copernicus" coincides nihilism with the acute historical displacement from a centre (that for Vattimo is resolutely metaphysical in its notion of an invariant), the latter evincing the incompleteness

of nihilism in two senses: that this displacement is ongoing and that the  $x$  is unknown. The dual structure of the concession of this incompleteness is pertinent in its indication of Vattimo's imperative of what is ontologically licit for thought. There is an inscription of an exigency at stake in the reading of nihilism determined by the very construal of the incompleteness as indicative of a hiatus— insofar as nihilism is regarded as incomplete, nihilism itself is only to be posited in terms of the particularity of a history, viz., the immanence of Vattimo's nihilistic thought to the displacement from metaphysics described in Nietzsche's Copernicanism. Thus, whilst the displacement is continuous, implying that its significance is to be posited as incomplete, the genetic of nihilism forces a thinking that is delimited according to a critical exigency to metaphysics, as nihilism is precisely to be read against these invariants of metaphysics. Hence, the various syntagms found throughout Vattimo's writings, such as "weak thought" and "ontology of actuality", may be recapitulated as the movement of thought against metaphysical particulars, against putative invariants now to be thought as variants: the genetic at stake here is one that departs from and retroactively critiques the "topological" certainty that Nietzsche's Copernicanism has elided, i.e., the actuality of the immediate effectivity of the Copernican uranology itself.

Vattimo's notion of exigency thinks the cursory status of nihilism according to metaphysics as historical, for metaphysics is possessive of a history, despite its postulation of invariants, as nihilism effectuates metaphysics' historical status through the positing of the finitude of the latter's putative ground evinced in the Copernican uranology. It is this dissolution of metaphysics on the grounds of the affirmation of its historical particularity that is to anticipate hermeneutics' implicit continuity to nihilism. Vattimo's thesis that postmodern thought is indicative of a "hermeneutic koine" denotes a contemporary philosophical ubiquity of hermeneutics, one that Vattimo equates to the shift nominated by nihilism. Such koine "describes an overall climate, a general sensibility, or simply a kind of presupposition that everyone feels more or less obliged to take into account" (Vattimo 1997a 1). The notion that hermeneutics in Vattimo's account has become the putative inclination of contemporary philosophical thought *pace* metaphysics nevertheless possesses a marked detrimental effect: if a hermeneutic symptom may be read as traversing a disparate series of philosophical texts, this indicates that hermeneutics is precluded from any theoretical rigour it may have possessed: "Hermeneutics defined so broadly [...] ends up as something innocuous, worthless even" (*Ibid*). The continuity of hermeneutics to nihilism therefore would not merely coincide with the latter's perceived ubiquity against some anterior metaphysics, as

this would belie the alterity of a nihilistic ontology. Rather, to radicalize hermeneutics against the nugatory consequences of the koine, Vattimo will suggest that hermeneutics must return to the acute theoretical shift proposed by nihilism, i.e., the absence of foundationalism, of which hermeneutics is symptomatic. Hermeneutics is not inhibited because of the incompleteness of nihilism; the latter remains incomplete only insofar as it is abstracted as the immanence of thought to the decision for metaphysics' insufficiency.

It is thus for Vattimo the Nietzschean syntagm of "everything is an interpretation, yet this too is an interpretation" which is to be regarded as the definitive statement of hermeneutic ontology's continuity with nihilism. The latter part of the syntagm radicalizes hermeneutics against the obscurity threatened by the vulgarization of the koine, whilst concomitantly delimiting the terms of the movement away from metaphysics: the hermeneutic symptom that Vattimo reads across contemporary philosophy, is itself an interpretation:

If hermeneutics is not accepted as a comfortable metatheory of the universality of interpretative phenomena, as a sort of view from nowhere of the perennial conflict, or play, of interpretations, the (only, I believe) alternative is to think the philosophy of interpretation as the final stage in a series of events (theories, vast social and cultural transformations, technologies and scientific 'discoveries'), as the conclusion of a history we feel unable to tell (interpret) except in the terms of nihilism that we find for the first time in Nietzsche. (Vattimo 1997a 8)

As the proposed hermeneutic symptomatology to nihilism is realized according to the precise content of this exigency qua anti-metaphysics, this entails a hermeneuticization of the hermeneutic thesis itself. The ubiquity that is the koine cannot re-inscribe itself as centre; it cannot repeat the tropes of metaphysics. The conversion of the ubiquity of interpretation into a type of faktum would only suspend hermeneutics' nihilistic actuality, demarcating a regress into the archaic form of metaphysics that nihilism as event has rendered theoretically insufficient. Rather, insofar as nihilism denotes a collapsing of various metaphysical discourses of necessity and centres, substituted by the recapitulation of these discourses as interpretations, the Nietzschean fragment preserves hermeneutics' distance from metaphysics through the stressing of hermeneutics' general theory of interpretation as an interpretation immanent to its historical actuality. Moreover, to avoid the construal of the hermeneutic thesis as merely a form of theoretical underdeterminism in its *prima facie* delineation of an entirely innoxious thesis according to the apparent internal derision of its own ontological claims, the recovery of hermeneutics' theoretical rigour resides in its utilization of metaphysical (in) variants as its immanent

historical material, in opposition to the hermeneutic ontology itself denoting some trans or a-historical invariant.

Hence this (what may be termed) “weak thesis” of a certain Pyrrhonian type (in its proposal of a theory of interpretation that is itself an interpretation) coincides with a “strong thesis” that stipulates a temporalization of all ontologies. Exigencies are actuated by the concession of the Pyrrhonian nature of the hermeneutic ontology, thus temporalizing the latter on what may provisionally be termed a “particular level” (i.e., the hermeneutic koine as a particular exigency to nihilism’s Copernican displacement), whilst also postulating a temporalization on a “universal level”, viz., metaphysics, hermeneutics, any of these various ontological discourses are particularities. In these terms, the problematic at stake in the possibility of a nihilistic ontology is one of the proper account of temporality: against a-historical necessary universals, Vattimo’s *nihilistic temporality invokes the possibility of ontology according to particular, finite and contingent exigencies*.

The weak and strong theses codification via the problem of temporality prefigures Vattimo’s ontological decision for Heidegger. In these terms, it is thus lucid that for Vattimo nihilism is primarily “a geschichtlich problem in the sense of the connection made by Heidegger between Geschichte and Gecihck” (1991 19). The utilization of Heideggerian historicity and facticity to subvert metaphysics’ approach to ontology collapses any ontology’s possibility into the genetic of finite historical thrownness, in line with Vattimo’s strong thesis. Thus, particulars are transient; they will occur and cease, therein delimiting the remit of nihilistic ontology: “a fundamental weakening of being, in which being is not, but happens” (Vattimo 1993 73). Vattimo’s reliance on Heidegger’s ontology actuates Being against metaphysics, in order to fully recapitulate the conceptual shift at stake in nihilistic ontology: according to the ontological priority attributed to the *contingency of the particularity of what happens* as opposed to the *necessity that is the universal of what is*, Vattimo will posit an isomorphy of Being and Event. Nevertheless, while noting that Heidegger did not explicitly offer such a formulation, Vattimo’s isomorphy bears a type analogous to Heidegger’s account of Being and Ereignis:

Being is not to be understood as an objective datum that precedes the application of “conceptual schemes” [...] we can speak of Being only at the level of the events in which the ever-varying modes that structure the world of human historical experience are instituted. Being is not an object, it is the aperture within which alone man and the world, subject and object, can enter into relation [...] Being should be thought of as an event. (Vattimo 2007 6)

Vattimo, following Heidegger, excises the ontic metaphysical inclination towards presence, through the delineation of this presence as the corollary of an anterior ontogenesis. Ontogenesis as aperture suggests the latter's double denotation as both opening and gap: it disrupts the putative consistency of metaphysical types of ontology through the interruption of the invariant givenness of the object, whilst serving as an opening that will make licit the possibility of givenness as such. The objectivity of any datum presupposes some metaphysical necessity and permanence in its occlusion of "happening" itself; in contrast, nihilism thinks this objectivity as an instance of contingency in the very non-necessary possibility of its happening. That is, ontogenesis' aperturic status denotes this contingency, in that "what happens" cannot be thought in terms of a reference to a given objectivity, as this would prioritize the latter over the anteriority of ontogenesis, thus inverting the ascribed corollary: insofar as the sequence at stake in nihilistic ontology is ontogenesis' anteriority to the ascribing of ontological objectivities, the former must be thought as a contingency in the particularity and non-objectivity of "what happens". It is this commitment to the contingency of ontogenesis that will delineate the acuity of nihilistic ontology's exigency, with the proviso that the commitment to this ontogenesis entails, as the strong thesis denotes: ontology itself is an instance of ontogenesis. This does not imply that any ontology is merely enclosed in the remit of its own ontogenesis. Being as Event does not occur within a void; nor does it occur as Vattimo notes, among "objects" that precede ontogenesis; events occur among events. This plurality of events evinced in the notion of "evental level" recalls Vattimo's allusion to nihilism as problem of Heideggerian historicity: a particular ontogenesis emerges as immanent to a heterogeneous series of particular ontogeneses, thus engendering the differentiation (the every varying modes) of a history. The particularity of Being as Event entails an ontology dedicated to the *singularity* of being in its "happening", nevertheless to the degree that these events occur amongst events, the positing of ontogenesis is necessarily co-determined by the context of its appearance among other events, which in themselves are contingent; in other words, nihilism is a Heideggerian type of historical problem as *the reduction to Being as Event is a reduction towards the ligation of the finite particularity of ontogenesis to other such isomorphic ontogeneses*.

This emphasis on ontogenesis in Vattimo's nihilistic ontology become more acute when thought in contrast to a metaphysics that is structural and eternal (a thought in contrast which is *de jure* necessary, according to Vattimo's imperative for nihilism's critical exigency), the

latter description as derived from his readings of both Heidegger and Nietzsche:

Now, what Heidegger calls “metaphysics” is precisely the idea that being is order objectively given once and for all, that also Nietzsche reproaches to Socrates, seeing in him the beginner of modern decadence, guilty of having killed the great tragic spirit of the ancients. If being is a stable structure given once and for all, there is no possible openness in history nor any freedom. (Vattimo 1997b 1)

The permanence of Being initiates the obfuscation of the problem of temporalization in terms of a teleology that bars the appearance of these singularities, here abstracted as history and freedom, eliding Being as event’s contingency, particularity and heterogeneity. Ontogenesis is vitiated of its differentiating status as event, according to the putatively posited eternality of structure that has *pre hoc* occluded eventual possibility. Temporal permanence will obscure the contingency of the event, through a suspension of the latter via a teleology that vitiates the possibility of a being extrinsic to its remit, therefore ascribing the event as object according to an overdetermination that is inherent to an account of temporality qua pure presence. In contrast, the commitment to Being as Event will engender the «narrative» status of metaphysics, insofar as metaphysics’ theoretical inclination is realized as entirely thetic: its illusory infinite temporality is punctured by the nihilistic Being as Event, as the «good hermeneutician» in consistency with nihilism is implored to occlude structural stability, allowing for the possibility of radical contingencies and their finitude ligated to particular historical situations as given through the necessary relationality posited between events.

The terms of nihilistic ontology may thus be recapitulated as follows:

a. The weak or Pyrrhonian thesis of hermeneutic ontology, whilst postulating an *eikos* of interpretation in “post-metaphysics” that indexes the insufficiencies of metaphysics, concomitantly evinces the strong thesis of temporality. Nihilism introduces a particular conception of time, which will posit ontologies themselves as events, i.e., contingent, particular and finite; as such, any ontology is described as an event, yet nevertheless determined by its particularity in that it is immanent to other events. Thus, the ontology of ontogenesis is an instance of ontogenesis itself.

b. The strong thesis proposes a radically *minimal ontology*. What Vattimo terms “weak ontology” evinces this minimal ontology, in that Vattimo will seek to index ontogenesis –ontological thought is obligated to what appears, what occurs, rather than what is. Thus, thought’s



genetic is posited as a beginning from this minimal appearance of being, as opposed to metaphysics' maximal ontology, i.e., thinking through the pre-given eternal structures and the putative notion of ontic permanence. Being as Event will rather denote the bare minimum of the contingent and particular singularity ligated, according to the strong thesis, to other isomorphic types, engendering the exigency between events and thus, the notion of a history: viz., *the minimal point of this ontology is the thinking of the appearance of an event as ligated to the purely evental context of its appearance.*

## 2

To further develop the above premises, Vattimo's reading of nihilistic ontology and metaphysics' respective treatment of *truth* is apposite on two tiers. First, it recapitulates again the critical exigency of the tenets of the nihilistic ontology posited against the tenets of metaphysics; second, an account of truth is deemed necessary for hermeneutics to not merely be abstracted as a non-rigorous ontology of relativism, thus repeating the innocuousness of the hermeneutic koine. Vattimo does not discard truth for the sake of actuating nihilism's heterogeneity to metaphysics, but rather shifts the account of truth into one complicit with his minimal ontology. The concern here is not an evaluation of Vattimo's account of truth, but rather the utilization of the latter to recapitulate nihilistic ontology, as truth essentially is to function as a conceptual analogue for the minimal ontology conceived as Being as Event.

In consistency with nihilism's critical exigency against metaphysics, Vattimo will describe truth via the latter's vitiating: "for hermeneutics [...] truth is not primarily the conformity of statement to thing, but the opening with which every conformity or deformity can come about. The opening is not a stable, transcendental structure of reason, but a legacy, the finite-historical thrownness" (1997a 16). The critique of metaphysical truth as conformity between what may be termed the classical philosophical distinction between *logos* (here for Vattimo "statement") and *physis* ("thing") recapitulates the motifs of an eternal structurality indicative of metaphysics: the possibility of conformity presupposes the dyadic eternal objectivity of *logos* and *physis*. Thus, the correspondence approach to truth, summarized as "the incontrovertible givenness of the thing, fostered by a suitable strategy of approach" (Vattimo 1997a 75), is problematic insofar as the thing is posited as eternal, as is the strategic discourse used to address it; the metaphysical notion of "thing", putatively postulated as eternal-structural presumes the latter quality. Moreover, insofar as conformity is what is at stake in metaphysics, this conformity presupposes the

possibility of a strategy that would necessarily be qualitatively identical to the structural eternality of the thing; the possibility of their eternal convertibility will engender truth.

Metaphysical truth therefore operates through the putative positing of the invariant status of its object, ligated to the possibility of an invariant of its statement. Insofar as nihilism's exigency is described as effacing putative metaphysical positions, in the case of truth this will suggest the obviation of the eternal-structural duality at the heart of metaphysics' account of the latter, through a finite historical thrownness that is explicitly demonstrative of an anti-metaphysical conception of temporality. The utilization of the Heideggerian syntagm of finite historical thrownness thus functions as a conceptual analogue for the bare minimum of the ligation of Being and Event: the contingent singularity of thrownness eventuates within a "historical situation", denoting the exigency that co-determines the singularity. The minimal ontology will elide metaphysics' eternal structurality through the nihilistic decision in favour of the latter's finite temporalization (evinced in the aforementioned strong thesis); as such, the Heideggerian influenced positing of the anteriority of ontogenesis in terms of "opening" recapitulates metaphysics itself (its statement and its putative "access" to the eternality of the thing) as an instance of the former. To the degree that finite historical thrownness delineates the conditions of possibility for metaphysical discourse, metaphysics qua discourse itself is determined in the last instance by this bare minimum of Being as Event.

Accordingly, Vattimo's account bears the familiar resemblance to the certain transcendental tradition of the identification of more originary conditions; in this case, the appropriation of the Heideggerian emphasis on the minimum of ontogenesis as opposed to the putative constancy of the ontic is used to usurp metaphysics –the conditional sequencing coincides truth with ontogenesis, as Vattimo is concerned with "the first condition of every particular truth" (Vattimo 1997a 82). However, the conditionality for truth at stake in the series of conceptual analogues that determine the minimal ontology again here differs, as Vattimo notes in the utilization of the metaphor of dwelling to describe this first condition:

[T]he truth of the opening can, it seems, only be thought on the basis of the metaphor of dwelling [...] It is "dwelling" that is the first condition of my saying the truth. But I cannot describe it as a universal a structural and stable condition for historical experience (and lately that of the history of science as well) evinces the irreducibility of heterogeneous paradigms and cultural universes, and moreover in order to describe the opening as a stable structure, I would need a criterion of conformity, which would then be the more original opening. (Vattimo 1997a 82)

Despite the opening's appearance of condition, it is not to be construed as a stable structure, alluding to the classical type employed by metaphysics. Whilst the condition of the opening is invariant, the latter must be thought in terms of the ontogenesis posited qua Being as Event, which, in contrast to dogmatic metaphysical necessity, is construed as contingent, particular and finite. Thus Vattimo, whilst employing conditionality to displace metaphysics, will stress *the contingency of the minimal ontology's conditions*; insofar as the exigency of his ontology is to Being as Event, the irreducibility of this condition cannot be ascribed as universal constant. Finite openings are co-constituted by their relation to other events, to the thrownness into history that delimits the conditionality according to which the singularity must be thought; nevertheless, this conditionality, rather than a universal, is in each case "particular"; it is the relation of events to events, of dwellings to dwellings, of openings to openings, which describes the ontogenesis as always contingent, and thus particularizes exigencies of thought. That is, to the degree that the exigency postulated in the strong thesis temporalizes all conditions, the latter necessarily implies an alterity; Vattimo thus is to particularize conditionality, rendering these conditions heterogeneous. Hence, whereas Vattimo concedes that finite historical thrownness may to a certain degree be viewed as a variation of a Kantian a priori conditions (Vattimo 1997a), it is Heidegger's analytic of Dasein that effaces this prima facie resemblance, according to the particularity of each instance of Being as Event, i.e., the particularity of an instance of finite historical thrownness. The conditions are posited as a minimum according to ontogenesis; moreover, this ontogenesis is radically variant, according to the contingency of the precise contents of this bare minimum of Being qua condition (finitude, history, language, the irreducibility of ontogeneses' appearance within "heterogeneous paradigms and cultural universes"), therefore suggesting the heterogeneity of any particular ontology assaying to describe this ontogenesis, alongside the heterogeneity of this ontogenesis itself.

With the clear tropes that are to distinguish metaphysics and nihilism, the index of Vattimo's acuity in his account may be clearly interrogated: is Vattimo's minimal ontology sufficiently heterogeneous and contingent to satisfy the commitment to nihilism? In a more direct polemical engagement with Vattimo's exposition, the question may be posed as follows: insofar as the minimal ontology begins from a ligation of the ontogenesis that is radically contingent to the context of other events, to a history that determines thought's exigency, does this not intimate a necessary structure according to the intercalation of the latter? This is the crux of the entire re-conception of nihilism against metaphysics, and why truth is exemplary of the

problem: if the historical particularity within which the ontogenesis appears is construed as conditioning ontogenesis via the relation that is its exigency to extrinsic modalities, this would re-inscribe a metaphysical motif into the account of the nihilistic ontology, through the intercalation of a type, however weak, of structure, indicated by *the necessity which the contingent ontogenesis is co-determined by*. That is, from the perspective of the ontogenesis and ontology itself, which become inseparable in Vattimo's account, does the stipulation of exigency to the particularities of a history not infer an ineluctable necessity? (In this case, particularities are specific in their reference to e.g., a particular linguistic-historical context evinced in finite historical thrownness, e.g., the immanence of thought to a historical actuality, viz., nihilism to the displacement from metaphysics.)

Insofar as the logic of Vattimo's recusal consists in the notion that the structure itself is a particular, this gesture inheres to a shift of "necessity" and "structure" to the particular, thus occluding, in Vattimo's view, a metaphysical motif, as these particularities do not make any pretense to the universal, even though necessity and structure remain extant. The "not stable a-structurality" of these conditions persists insofar as they vary according to particularities; any two particularities, since they are posited as heterogeneous and irreducible, would be deemed radically disparate enough to preclude the motif of invariant structure across particulars. Thus, the particularity of an ontogenesis or an ontology within, e.g. ancient Scythia, or within e.g., the Napoleonic wars are deemed as heterogeneous enough to preclude a universality of this bare minimum of ontogenesis and the ligation to its context. Being qua Event thinks the continuity of history, denoted in Vattimo's usage of the term "legacy", and the discontinuity that is the contingent ontogenesis as ligated, therein obviating the structural consistency of Kantian conditionality through minimizing metaphysics' maximal stable structurality, whilst thinking the latter as a *particular* condition and thus, as the bare minimum of a *particular* genetic. In other words, to subvert metaphysical trappings, Vattimo's account incurs a division on the level of form and content; It is the acute *content* of a particular that evinces an alterity to another particular, i.e., the specific "information" that constitutes the thrownness (an event) into a history (the other events, the other instances of "what has happened"), its initial conditionality. However, the forms of these particulars are in themselves entirely isomorphic: finite historical thrownness is a syntagm that abstracts all particulars of Being as Event. That the content of Being as Event varies, differentiating the precise content of the "conditions", is sufficient for Vattimo to preclude the conflation of his minimal ontology with Kantian conditions, since their particularity renders any condition heterogeneous, nevertheless the form of the ontogenesis traverses any

particular, i.e., Vattimo's strong thesis as the very positing of an isomorphy of form vis-a-vis particulars heterogeneous in their content.

Yet, insofar as the strong thesis of temporalization demarcates a necessary relation for ontogenesis, the alternative antithesis becomes acute, as what remains open here is the question of why *the particular history that co-determines the singularity of ontogenesis/ontology itself is not posited as contingent, thus excising its determinate, structural status*. Vattimo's decision is that ontogenesis is inseparable from its ligation to the history of its appearance: it can not be excised from this history, insofar as events appear in relation to events, and thus the possibility of "what happens" and the ontology of the latter are irreducibly linked. Since Vattimo rejects Being as Event occurring within a void, or Being as Event occurring amidst already existing objects, Being as Event must occur in relation to other events. However, the corollary of this decision is that it belies the very radical contingency that Vattimo describes is at stake in the transition from dogmatic metaphysics to nihilism. The minimal ontology's proposal of a necessary relation between a particular ontogenesis and what constitutes its dwelling, i.e., the content of its history, introduces nihilistic thought as inseparable from the particularity of its history, despite the contingency of the latter itself: this history is simultaneously posited as contingent and necessary. Thus, although a particular ontogenesis is not a *necessary* effect of the evental level, i.e., it is contingent, as is the evental level itself, the particularity of what happens is thought according to a necessity ascribed to the contingent evental level. Using Vattimo's own imperative against metaphysics, the regression here into the latter is intimated insofar as this *historicity* is thought in terms of a homology of contingency and necessity. Thus, an appearance within Ancient Scythia is radically contingent; however, the precise content of Ancient Scythia, just as its various normativities, denote a structure for this ontogenesis itself in the latter's barred separation from its context, and any ontology itself therefore is rendered inseparable from what amounts to the pure doxa of this context. This hidden necessity at stake in the prioritization of the temporal and thought's necessary exigency to a historical particular, despite the latter's posited contingency, denotes an ambiguity in the commitment towards a nihilistic ontology, an ambiguity specifically engendered through Vattimo's intercalation of motifs consistent with and derived from Heideggerian ontology into the incompleteness of nihilism. That is, whilst Vattimo posits the contingency of historicity, *the latter's content is re-inscribed as a faktum that denotes the exigency of thought's possibilities*, thus betraying the decision for nihilism through a decision for Heidegger.

The problematic of historicity's dual necessity and contingency is, in essence, an avoidable conflation. As Alain Badiou has noted, the concession of the contingency of historicity suggests philosophy's unbinding from its own historicity. As Ray Brassier acutely recapitulates Badiou's position:

It is precisely by acknowledging the aleatory contingency of its historicity [...] that philosophy frees itself from the myth of its uncircumventable historical destination, whether the latter be construed in terms of an ineluctable progress according to 'the History of Spirit', or that of an irrecusable decline according to the "history of Metaphysics". (Brassier 2004 51-52)

Whilst Badiou's remark is intended for temporalities qua teleologies, resembling Vattimo's denotation of metaphysics that his nihilistic ontology assays to critique, the contingency of history is wholly germane to the transcendental-finite tradition that Vattimo appropriates vis-à-vis the demands of a nihilism. That is, whereas Vattimo rejects teleologies, teleology is replaced by the notion of the exigency of philosophy as a response to the specific historical particularity of nihilism contra historicity as teleology, thus intercalating a fundamental limiting remit that has already been posited as contingent: finite-historical thrownness as denotative of nihilism's minimal ontology will confuse, in a lack of theoretical ascesis, the apparent contingency of the singularity of ontogenesis with other necessary ontogeneses. In contrast, if this nihilistic ontology follows through in its positing of its own historicity as contingent, what is elided is the necessary exigency to its own history, a history that, in the specific case of metaphysics, nihilistic thought has already posited as contingent. Vattimo's positing of the denouement of metaphysics becomes a theoretically radical position, insofar as he concomitantly separates the possibility of ontological thought from the particular content of its exigency, i.e., the equivocation of Being as Event and the historical as a particular and necessary content, viz., the historical context into which one is thrown. The positing of the contingency of this appearance in its most radical sense demands an excision of the historical from this minimal ontology, as history is to be posited as contingent in both its form and content, as opposed to the particularities of the latter determining ontogenesis and collapsing ontology into the necessity of a content: viz., nihilism without dogmatic metaphysical contamination would suspend the effectivity of history's content, realizing this history itself, in affinity with Nietzsche's syntagm, as merely a "history of corruptions".

## Conclusion

If the decision to radicalize nihilism on the grounds of temporality construed as history, despite the latter's contingency, may be said to intercalate an undesired metaphysical structure into Vattimo's nihilism, the terms of this gesture's belying of nihilistic ontology become more acute when thought as symptomatic of a certain humanism. This symptom can be read in Vattimo's commentary on Nietzsche's Copernicanism, which forces centres and necessities *for man* to be obviated by a heteroclitite movement of displacement and a commitment of thought to this displacement itself. Vattimo will not efface the figure of man; he will instead attempt to provide a certain (a)topology of its displacement.

*Prima facie*, this humanism in Vattimo is undesired. *The End of Modernity* will discuss nihilism and the "dedivinization of man"; it will delimit a postmodern condition as the metaphysical displacement of man. Thus, Nietzsche's Copernicanism does not address the "human subject alone at the psychological or sociological level" (Vattimo 1991 20), but rather, as man's displacement is linked to the question of Being (Vattimo 1991 20), at an ontological level. Nevertheless, insofar as the ontological status of man ascribed by nihilism is that of a contingent ontogenesis ligated to an account of temporality qua historicity, this will be analogous to the intercalation of a certain anthropic principle, as man will exercise a simultaneous underdetermination and overdetermination within nihilistic ontology: in the case of the former, all ontologies are human interpretations, therefore there is no hermeneutic distinction between ontologies; in the case of the latter, the overdetermination lies in the conceptual analogues of history, language, culture, and finitude which condition any possible ontology. This duality of underdetermination and overdetermination thus seeks to displace the necessity of the discourse of and for man, whilst at the same time hypostatizing "man" and its conceptual analogues as the unsurpassable Real of thought: man is consecrated as the necessary being of ontology, as for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, according to the one that posits the question in the first instance. As a consequence, this decision surprisingly recasts ontology as a metaphysical type codified by a permanence assigned to man: the latter's ontological status is posited as contingent, however *any ontology itself is rendered particular according to the presence of man as the universal ground of ontology*.

Nevertheless, if man is not posited as the beginning of ontology *in the first instance* but rather this contingency is used to ontologize man *in the last instance*, the dedivinization of man within a nihilistic ontology becomes plausible. This distinction of in the first instance and in the last instance suggests that the latter will recast the apparent genetic of ontology as beginning from man, according to the extrapolation

of this beginning in terms of the contingency of this beginning itself: viz., if the nihilistic ontology concedes the contingency of history, and thus occludes its determining status, the concomitant gesture is thus the separation of thought from what may be termed these very normativities of the anthropic. What remains open in Vattimo's account, and what is arguably most compelling in this account, is the possibility of the minimal ontology without reliance on the normativities of the anthropic, whether historical, cultural, etc.,. Insofar as Vattimo mobilizes the concepts of contingency and exigency, what becomes incisive is the possible assays of a nihilistic ontology that is finally elided of a privileged, utterly metaphysical status ascribed to man:

a. Vattimo's minimal ontology, as vitiated of man, forces the notion of thinking of "what happens" without reference to anthropic temporality, i.e., history, and the topological certainty of this reference, which has already been rendered theoretically insufficient by Nietzsche's Copernicanism. Ontogenesis is thus a-historical, yet it is nevertheless "what happens". Being as event would therefore be conceived as a contingency, however a radicalized contingency in that there is no conception of time to ground the appearance of this contingency in terms of an anthropic remit (i.e., the ligation of ontogenesis and the particular history). Rather what is delineated here is a heterogeneous series of Events, heterogeneous in the sense that once anthropic temporality is excised from the ligation of ontogenesis, ontogenesis is not anthropomorphized: the positing of this contingency is thus not merely the contingency of history, of anthropic temporality, but rather is indicative of the collapsing of the ontological separation of man and non-man, through ontogenesis taken in its strongest sense, viz., precluding it from being re-formulated as merely an anthropogenesis.

b. What remains for the exigency that determines an ontology is precisely the exigency to this contingency. The exigency that forces thought without time, man or any variation of metaphysical necessity would be an exigency to a contingency that is the actuality constituting the bare minimum of the minimal ontology. The genetic here is not the precise content of metaphysics, i.e., various foundations, but rather, the contingency of these foundations, thus suffusing the latter with contingency itself, as opposed to a determination by the precise content of a particular. Vattimo's attempt to make thought immanent to its actuality (viz., ontology as ontogenesis itself), posits an immanence of thought to the precise content of metaphysics; to elide the humanistic motifs that over and under determine ontology, the immanence of ontological thought is needed to be posited vis-à-vis the contingency which renders metaphysics itself as a particular.



Once the anthropic series of conceptual analogues are precluded, the condition of nihilism, which forces thought, is the condition of contingency: viz., insofar as nihilism does not denote a sociological or psychological commentary of man, what is required is the reciprocal de-anthropologization of nihilism. It is according to this excision of man that nihilistic ontology is ascribed its most radical possibility: what is nascent is an aperture for an entirely heteroclitic account of Being and Being as Event, its relationality, non-relationality, the formation or non-formation of the context of an eventual level, etc.; an account effectuated by the minimum that is ontology's immanence to contingency, the exigency to the contingency of Being itself.

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