

Über, a Problematic Term within the Continental Philosophy

Über, un término problemático dentro de la filosofía continental

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the semantic complexity and translational challenges of the German word *über* in the way it was used by some leading philosophers of the Continental tradition. Focusing on Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, and subsequently on the essay featuring the debate between Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger, *Über die Linie/Zur Seinsfrage*, it examines how different European translations have shaped the understanding of the term. By carefully considering the interplay between language, culture, and philosophical thought, the article seeks to provide a hermeneutic analysis of its meaning. Such investigation is tasked with elucidating the epistemological significance of the word, often connected with the challenging philosophical aim of providing an overcoming of the nihilistic existential crisis. The present study thus seeks to compare both the diverse translations and the differing interpretations of *über*, and to demonstrate how these align coherently within the broader discourse on nihilism. Although the word has always held significant philosophical relevance, it has seldom been analyzed in terms of its rendition across different European languages. Such an analysis, however, can be valuable for reflecting on the reception and interpretation of the term within various national philosophical traditions.

KEYWORDS:

ÜBER, NIHILISM, PHILOSOPHY, TRANSLATION, HERMENEUTICS,
LANGUAGE, SUBJECT

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga la complejidad semántica y los desafíos de traducción de la palabra alemana *über* tal como fue utilizada por algunos de los principales filósofos de la tradición continental. Centrándose en el concepto nietzscheano del *Übermensch* y, posteriormente, en el ensayo que presenta el debate entre Ernst Jünger y Martin Heidegger, *Über die Linie/Zur Seinsfrage*, examina cómo diferentes traducciones europeas han moldeado la comprensión del término. Al considerar cuidadosamente la interacción entre lenguaje, cultura y pensamiento filosófico, el artículo busca ofrecer un análisis hermenéutico de su significado. Esta investigación tiene la tarea de aclarar la importancia epistemológica de la palabra, a menudo vinculada con el desafiante objetivo filosófico de superar la crisis existencial nihilista. El presente estudio, por tanto, pretende comparar tanto las diversas traducciones como las diferentes interpretaciones de *über*, y demostrar cómo estas se alinean coherentemente dentro del discurso más amplio sobre el nihilismo. Aunque la palabra siempre ha tenido una gran relevancia filosófica, rara vez ha sido analizada en términos de su traducción a diferentes idiomas europeos. Sin embargo, dicho análisis puede resultar valioso para reflexionar sobre la recepción e interpretación del término dentro de diversas tradiciones filosóficas nacionales.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

ÜBER, NIHILISMO, FILOSOFÍA, TRADUCCIÓN, HERMENÉUTICA, LENGUAJE, SUJETO

I. ABOUT *ÜBER* AND ITS MEANING

SINCE THE SECOND HALF OF the 18th century, German philosophy has exerted a profound influence on Western thought. The German formulations of Idealism, Materialism, and Nihilism serve as significant examples of this impact. In particular, the field of hermeneutics has been decisively shaped by German intellectual contributions, to the extent that it has become one of the major philosophical currents of the twentieth century. This tradition can be said to begin with Friedrich Nietzsche, whose reception and development laid the foundation for a genuine philosophy of existence, culminating in the work of Martin Heidegger, its most prominent figure. Within this tradition, the language in which, and through which, philosophical questions are articulated, assumes critical importance. It is precisely in this orientation towards language that the hermeneutic approach diverges from the analytical tradition, exemplified by the Vienna School. From a hermeneutic perspective, language is not merely a tool for thought; rather, it constitutes the very condition of possibility for thought. Language “is” thought in its formation and development. It encompasses not only the rational domain but the entirety of human experience. Language forms part of our perceptual and interpretative framework through which we engage with reality and process the events in which we participate. This perspective, which radicalises an idea originally proposed by Wilhelm von Humboldt in his seminal *Einleitung zum Kawi-Werk* (1836)¹,

1 HUMBOLDT, W. v. (2011), *Über die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel Java*, trans. by Buschmann, J. K. E., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

is particularly pronounced in Heidegger's philosophy and in the tradition it inspired. Here, language is conceived as a "circle" from which human beings cannot escape, except by entering the circle, or system, of another language. The focus on the constitutive, rather than merely instrumental, function of language, which has been a hallmark of German thought since the nineteenth century, inevitably brings the problem of translation to the fore. Both the comprehension and (potential) transmission of philosophical concepts necessitate engagement with multiple languages and cultures. It is widely recognised that understanding and translation are never mere transfers of content from one linguistic form to another. However, in the case of the thinkers considered in this article, this general difficulty is intensified by their deliberate use of the particular features and subtleties of the German language to express novel philosophical ideas.

To cite a single illustrative example, a literal translation can often obscure the meaning of a term, particularly when dealing with abstract concepts shaped by the historical and cultural specificity of their original context. Such concepts frequently resist full and consistent transposition into a language other than that in which they were first articulated. A concept, after all, is a discursive element with a precise linguistic identity; once translated, it must necessarily be reintegrated into an entirely different system of signification². In many cases, translation may require the use of a periphrasis or a substitute term that fails to convey the full range of meanings embedded in the original lexeme. As a result, the outcome of translation may remain ambiguous or even give rise to genuine misunderstanding, particularly when the conceptual complexity of a philosophical term cannot be adequately rendered in another language. A well-known instance of this translation challenge is the German word *über*, which gained philosophical prominence in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German discourse on nihilism. Most notably, the term features in Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, introduced in his seminal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Decades later, *über* resurfaces as a focal point in the debate on post-nihilist existentialism between the writer, soldier, and thinker Ernst Jünger and the philosopher Martin Heidegger. The latter, indeed, marked Heidegger's sixtieth birthday with an essay tellingly titled *Über die Linie* ["Across the Line"], in which this term once again assumes a central philosophical role³. The German

2 The term signification is a semiotic concept, which indicates the arbitrary relationship between a signifier and a signified: every and each historical language is therefore a peculiar system of signification, depending on arbitrary values, as argued by linguist and semiotic scholar Ferdinand de Saussure, in his famous university courses on general linguistics, whose contributions were collected by his students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in the work *Cours de linguistique générale* (1st ed. 1916, 2nd and definitive edition 1922), available in English through editions such as DE SAUSSURE, F. (2011), *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Baskin, W., New York: Columbia University Press

3 JÜNGER, E. (1950), *Über die Linie*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann

philosopher responded with another essay, dedicated to Jünger on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, originally titled *Über die Linie* as well, but, starting from the second edition, *Zur Seinsfrage* [“On the Question of Being”]⁴. This text has often been published alongside Jünger’s essay, forming a single volume that, in many cases, assumes the shared title *Über die Linie*, a pattern that becomes evident when analysing the various translations of these essays.

To briefly consider the translations of the term *über* in these two contexts, reference may be made to some of the principal languages used across the European continent: English, Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. The most commonly encountered translations include the following:

In the English context, the German word *über* is frequently translated using lemmas such as “over”, “on” and “beyond”, depending on the specific usage⁵. In the case of *Übermensch*, however, the most widely recognised translation is “Superman”⁶: the Latin-derived term “super” was thus employed, mirroring other languages, to render a word, *über*, that is not typically associated with it. Nevertheless, alternative expressions such as “Overman” are also attested⁷, and on occasion, “Beyond-man” has been proposed⁸. In any case, with regard to *Über die Linie*, the translation appears to have become standardised as *Across the Line*⁹.

In Italian, *über* is commonly translated as *riguardo a*, *sopra* and *oltre*¹⁰. Nevertheless, when translating *Übermensch*, the term *Superuomo*¹¹, featuring the Latin-derived *super*, has generally been employed. This rendering has prompted considerable scholarly debate, and, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, alternative for-

4 HEIDEGGER, M. (1967), *Zur Seinsfrage*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann. Although rare, pdf examples of the original edition bearing the first title can be found on the net, as in this one: https://www.bard.edu/library/pdfs/archives/Heidegger-Uber_Die_Lenin.pdf

5 AGBARIA, E. (2003), *Cambridge Klett Comprehensive German Dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

6 Like in NIETZSCHE, F. (1961), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Hollingdale, R. J., London: Penguin Classics

7 In online-scientific articles like this one, from the Stanford University: <https://ccrma.stanford.edu/~pj97/Nietzsche.htm> and in editions like NIETZSCHE, F. (1995), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Kaufmann, W., New York: Random house

8 Like in STACK, G. J. (1990), Emerson and Nietzsche’s “Beyond-Man”, *Revista de Filosofía de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, 25 (56): 87 <https://smjegupr.net/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/07-Emerson-and-Nietzsches-Beyond-Man-by-George-J.-Stack-.pdf>

9 The relevant fact is that the essay has not been published individually in English, but still appears in the collection of the Correspondence between Jünger and Heidegger, JÜNGER, E., HEIDEGGER, M. (2010), *Correspondance 1949-1975*, trans. by Hervier, J., Paris: Bourgois

10 (2022) *Dizionario Tedesco Langenscheidt*, Milano: Vallardi

11 As it happens in the edition NIETZSCHE, F. (2017), *Così parlò Zarathustra*, trans. by Mati, S., Milano: Universale Economica Feltrinelli

mulations such as *Oltreuomo* or even *Sovrauomo* have been proposed in an attempt to capture more accurately the philosophical connotations of the original term. Conversely, in the case of *Über die Linie*, the Italian translation is largely consistent and has been rendered as *Oltre la linea* [“Beyond the Line”]¹², typically without reference to the title of Heidegger’s contribution.

In Spanish, *über* is generally translated as *màs allà* or *sobre*¹³. The term *Übermensch* has most frequently been rendered as *Superhombre*¹⁴, although *Sobrehombre*¹⁵ is also occasionally employed, mirroring similar variation found in English and Italian. The translation of *Über die Linie* has appeared as *Sobre la línea / Hacia la pregunta del ser*¹⁶, the former meaning, literally, “On the Line”, and the latter preserving the title of Heidegger’s essay, “On the Question of Being”.

In French, the term *über* is typically rendered as *au-dessus de* or *sur*¹⁷, resulting in the translation of *Übermensch* as *Sur-homme*¹⁸. The prefix *sur*, in this context, retains a semantic proximity to the Latin *super*. *Über die Linie* has been translated as *Passage de la ligne* [“Crossing the Line”]¹⁹, although this designation appears to have been employed solely in reference to Jünger’s essay²⁰.

12 As it happens in the edition of JÜNGER, E., & HEIDEGGER, M. (2020), *Oltre la linea*, trans. by Volpi, F., Milano: Adelphi

13 (2023) *Langenscheidt Universal-Wörterbuch Spanisch: Spanisch - Deutsch / Deutsch - Spanisch*, Berlin: Langenscheidt

14 As it happens in the edition NIETZSCHE, F. (2021), *Así habló Zaratustra: Un libro para todos y para nadie*, trans. by Sánchez Pascual, A., Madrid: Alianza editorial

15 Although this expression seems to be used at most by authors commenting on Nietzsche, as LIZCANO PELLÓN, M. (2010), *Tiempos del sobrehombre*, México: Sepha

16 JÜNGER, E., HEIDEGGER, M. (1994), *Sobre la línea/Hacia la pregunta del ser*, trans. by Molinuevo, J. L., Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós

17 (2016), *Praktisches Wörterbuch Französisch: Französisch-Deutsch / Deutsch-Französisch*. Berlin: Langenscheidt

18 As it happens in the edition NIETZSCHE, F. (2000), *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra: Un livre pour tous et pour personne*, trans. by Goldschmidt, A., Paris: Livre de Poche, and as philosopher and scholar Gilles Deleuze referred to the term in the course of his reflection on Nietzsche, like in the text DELEUZE, G. (1965), *Nietzsche: sa vie, son œuvre, avec une exposé de sa philosophie*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France

19 As it happens in the edition JÜNGER, E., HEIDEGGER, M. (2000), *Passage de la ligne*, trans. by Plard, H., Paris: Bourgois

20 In fact, Heidegger’s response does not seem to have been published individually in French, nor merged with Jünger’s work. However, Heidegger’s text was translated into French and published in the collection JÜNGER, E., HEIDEGGER, M. (2010), *Correspondance 1949-1975*, trans. by Hervier, J., Paris: Bourgois

In Portuguese, *über* is commonly translated as *sobre*, *mais de* or *por*²¹. The most prevalent rendering of *Übermensch* is *Além-homem*, though alternatives such as *Super-homem* and *Sobre-homem* are also attested²². The translation of Jünger's and Heidegger's text follows the pattern observed in Spanish, often appearing as *Sobre a linha*²³ ["On the Line"], while Heidegger's response has typically been translated literally as *Sobre o problema do ser*²⁴ ["On the Question of Being"].

In summary, the translations examined herein do not exhibit a uniform approach to the rendering of the German term *über*, particularly in the context of philosophical discourse. As such, it becomes apparent that, in attempting to translate this term within specific philosophical frameworks, one may be compelled to adopt lexical choices that diverge from the more conventional or literal equivalents.

II. 2. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND THE ÜBERMENSCH

An analysis of the translations of the term *über* in *Übermensch* reveals that four of the languages considered incorporate a semantic dimension linked to the Latin *super* and its associated field of meaning. This connection clearly evokes an idea of empowerment, a transition from one state to a qualitatively superior one. Given that *mensch* means "human being", *Übermensch* would therefore be rendered as "Super-human" (or "Superman"). Among these languages, French is the only one not to adopt a direct derivative of *super*, instead opting for *Sur-homme*. However, the prefix *sur* is conceptually very close to the Latin *super*, thereby preserving the connotation of the "Superman". Italian and Portuguese introduce alternative translations: *Oltreuomo* and *Além-homem*, respectively, where *oltre* and *além* typically mean "beyond". These renderings suggest a nuance distinct from the traditional "Superman" interpretation. Rather than implying mere enhancement or superiority, they underscore the notion of transcending, or moving beyond, something. As will be discussed further, this often pertains to overcoming past human values and thus transforming the existential condition of the human being. In this sense, the Italian and Portuguese terms imply not so much a "Superman" as a "Beyond-man". In Italian, the term *Oltreuomo* was

21 EPPLE, B. (2012), *Langenscheidt Universal-Wörterbuch Portugiesisch: Portugiesisch–Deutsch / Deutsch–Portugiesisch*. Berlin: Langenscheidt

22 As it happens in the edition NIETZSCHE, F. (1998), *Assim falou Zarathustra*, trans. by De Souza, P., Lisboa: P. C.

23 It seems that the text itself has never been published individually in Portuguese, but still appears to be available through a translation by WERLE, M. A. (2021), "Sobre a linha", *Aoristo - International Journal of Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Metaphysics*, Toledo, Paraná, Brasil: Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná (UNIOESTE), ISSN-e 2526-592X, Vol. 4, 1-2

24 And published individually as HEIDEGGER, M. (1969), *Sobre o problema do ser*, trans. by Stein, E., Sao Paulo: Duas cidades

notably proposed by the philosopher Gianni Vattimo in his 1974 work *Il soggetto e la Maschera* (1974)²⁵, and it was generally well received by critics. The word *Oltreuomo* had already existed in Italian philosophical discourse, although not in reference to Nietzsche's thought. It had previously been employed by the Catholic philosopher Teodorico Moretti-Costanzi in his work *La filosofia pura*²⁶, where it carried a religious meaning. Vattimo's use of the term clearly diverges from this earlier usage. Nevertheless, his adoption of *Oltreuomo* has not been free from critique, most notably from philosopher Domenico Losurdo, whose interpretation of Nietzsche differs significantly from more traditional readings, thus placing emphasis on the political and social dimensions of Nietzsche's philosophy. According to Losurdo, Nietzsche's vision is fundamentally aristocratic; despite its opposition to the metaphysical aspects of Platonism, it nonetheless draws on the Platonic idea of a "spiritual aristocracy" with evident hierarchical and anti-democratic implications, as exemplified in *The Republic*. From this perspective, and in alignment with the interpretation of German philosopher Alfred Baeumler²⁷, Losurdo contends that *Sovrauomo* ["Overman"] would be the most accurate Italian rendering²⁸. *Superuomo* would also be acceptable, provided the prefix *super* is not understood merely as a qualitative enhancement of the human, but rather as a form of supra-elevation, as in the biblical verse *Militia est vita hominis super terram* from the book of Job²⁹, which suggests life on earth is a kind of struggle or higher calling. The term *Sovrauomo* thus parallels the English "Overman", which appears in some translations of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, while *Oltreuomo* corresponds closely to the English "Beyond-man", a term similarly used by English-speaking scholars examining Nietzsche's thought³⁰. In Portuguese, all three variants have been explored: *Super-homem* ["Superman"], *Sobre-homem* ["Overman"], and *Além-homem* ["Above-man"]. On this topic, the scholar Victor Gonçalves has produced a noteworthy study under the auspices of the Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, in which he analyses various Portuguese translations of Nietzsche's works³¹. His research further underscores the ongoing

25 VATTIMO, G. (1974), *Il soggetto e la maschera*, Milano: Bompiani

26 MORETTI-COSTANZI, T. (1959), *La filosofia pura*, Bologna: Edizioni Alfa

27 BAEUMLER, A. (1931), *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker*, Leipzig: Verlag von Philipp Reclam

28 LOSURDO, D. (2021), *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel*, trans. by Benton, G., Chicago: Haymarket Books

29 It's the case of the translation of S. Girolamus, called Vulgata, realized in IVth century, Job, 7.1, available in editions like (1990) *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, Philadelphia: Amer Bible Society

30 See reference at note 4

31 GONÇALVES, V. V. (2020), "Nietzsche: Sobre a tradução de Der Übermensch", *Philosophica*, 28 (55–56), 179–190

complexity of the issue: the translation of *Übermensch* remains highly contingent upon the interpreter's philosophical reading of Nietzsche's ideas.

To summarise, there are at least three principal renderings of the term *über*: "super", "above", and "beyond". But to what extent do these translations truly capture the nuanced dimensions of Nietzschean thought? To reflect meaningfully on this question, it would be particularly valuable to consider the etymological origins of the word *über*, and subsequently to examine the specific meaning Nietzsche intended to convey with his notion of a new kind of humanity.

The expression *Übermensch* was not, in Nietzsche's time, a neologism; however, its earlier meanings appear to differ significantly from the interpretation Nietzsche would later assign to it. A comparable term can already be found in ancient Greek culture, a culture with which Nietzsche was intimately familiar. The term *ὑπεράνθρωπος* [*hyperanthrōpos*] appears, for instance, in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the 1st century BCE, as noted by Friedrich Kluge in his *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*³², and later in the 2nd century CE by Lucian, as observed by the scholar Babette Babich³³. In the German language, however, the earliest attestations of *Übermensch* emerge much later. One of the first known uses is found in 1527, when the Dominican Hermann Rab employed the term pejoratively in a letter criticising Lutherans, an instance cited once again by Kluge. This is possibly the earliest documented appearance of the word, though it is by no means the only one. Other writers also employed it subsequently, including the theologian Heinrich Müller in his *Geistliche Erquickungsstunden* (1664)³⁴. In these early uses, however, the concept of *Übermensch* bears little resemblance to Nietzsche's later formulation. Even Göthe used the term in his magnum opus *Faust*³⁵ and in his poem *Zueignung* (1787)³⁶, though again with meanings quite distinct from Nietzsche's and, in contrast to the earlier theological uses, with a distinctly ironic inflection. It is highly probable that Nietzsche was aware, either directly or indirectly, of some of these earlier occurrences. Nevertheless, certain scholars argue that Nietzsche's conceptualisation of the *Übermensch* was shaped not so much by these earlier usages as by broader currents in European literature related to the

32 KLUGE F., GÖTZE, A. (1954), "Etymologisches Wörterbuch Der Deutschen Sprache", *Revue Belge De Philologie Et De Histoire* 32, no. 2: 573–77, p. 817

33 BABICH, B. (2011), "Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Parodic Style: On Lucian's Hyperanthropos and Nietzsche's *Übermensch*". *Diogenes*, 58(4), 58–74, p. 56

34 GUTMANN, J., KAUFMANN, W., A. (1951), "Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist." *The Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 21, 644. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2021481>, p. 359

35 *Welch erbärmlich Grauen fasst Übermenschen dich!* ("What tremendous horror the übermenschen arouse in you") GÖTHER, J. W. (1965), *Faust: der Tragödie. Erster Teil*, Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, p. 490 (translated by me)

36 GÖTHER, J. W. (1787), *Schriften*, vol. 1, Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen

idea of the “Superhuman”. One particularly notable influence may have been Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, inspired by Thomas Carlyle’s writings on heroism (which was criticized, however, by Nietzsche himself in his autobiographic essay *Ecce homo*³⁷), developed the notion of a “Plus-man”, an individual set apart from and superior to the masses, in his essay *Power*³⁸. Such ideas arguably laid the groundwork for Nietzsche’s reimagining of what the *Übermensch* could represent, that is, not simply a superior human, but a radically new type of being who transcends conventional values.

However significant the aforementioned influences may be, they remain only potential sources of inspiration for the German philosopher, who, for his part, developed a conception of the *Übermensch* that extends far beyond a simplistic notion of superhumanism. Nietzsche’s vision encompasses multiple dimensions of human existence, from morality to desire, and is closely linked to key concepts within his philosophical framework, namely nihilism, the “eternal return”, the “death of God” and the “will to power”. His philosophical inquiry begins with an exploration of classical Greek culture³⁹, particularly tragedy, which he saw as expressing two fundamental existential tendencies inherent both in that culture and in humanity itself: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The former represents light, form and order; the latter, shadow, chaos and creation. Ancient culture had the capacity to synthesise these two forces in a powerful equilibrium, but this balance was soon lost within tragedy itself. As a result, the Dionysian aspect was gradually marginalised and ultimately demonised, especially with the advent of the Christian tradition. This, in Nietzsche’s view, constitutes a religion of sorrow, a theological formalisation of the “sacred no” to life, founded upon the metaphysical obsession with absolutes that began with Plato. Such a framework, he argues, sought the complete subjugation of human desire through the promise of transcendence and immutable moral truths:

No religion has so far contained, either directly or indirectly, either as dogma or allegory, a truth. For each was born of fear and need and has crept into existence based on errors of reason.⁴⁰

37 NIETZSCHE, F. (2004), *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One is*, trans. by Hollingdale, R. J., London: Penguin UK, (chapter 2)

38 ZAVATTA, B. (2019), *Individuality and Beyond: Nietzsche Reads Emerson*, trans. by Reynolds A., Oxford: Oxford University Press

39 NIETZSCHE, F. (1993), *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. by Whiteside, S., London: Penguin Classics

40 NIETZSCHE, F. (1996), *Human, All Too Human*, trans. by Hollingdale, R. J., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 32

One of the aspects of Christianity that Nietzsche most sharply criticises is its moral framework, particularly its dualistic division of the world into a component, both material and metaphysical, deemed “good”, and another regarded as “evil”, the embodiment of error and inherent wickedness. This critique is especially prominent in his works *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. According to Nietzsche, the great deception of this moral system lies in its identification of the so-called “evil” with the Dionysian instinct in humanity, the instinct most closely tied to desire, vitality and creativity. This aspect of human nature, he argues, has been demonised through the concept of “sin”:

“Sin” – for that is the name for the priestly reinterpretation of the animal “bad conscience” (cruelty turned back on itself) – has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul up till now: with sin, we have the most dangerous and disastrous trick of religious interpretation.⁴¹

Through sin, man denies himself and fails to attain that existential completeness towards which his instinct aspires, thereby betraying his own will to power, that eternal desire to improve and surpass himself that characterises the human being and perpetually recurs in his existence. This, then, would constitute a genuine tendency towards *nihil* [nothingness], that is, the nullification of the self, and represents the fundamental characteristic of Western culture, assuming the form of nihilism:

Nihilism: the end is missing; the answer to “why?” is missing. What does nihilism mean? - That supreme values lose all value.⁴²

It is precisely in deference to the conceptual separation of “good” and “evil” that the German philosopher chooses the character of Zarathustra to communicate his ideas, the historical prophet of the ancient Mazdean cult, used in his text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in an evidently fictitious manner. Characteristic of the Mazdean religion was that it was among the earliest pre-Christian cults to conceive of the distinction between “good” and “evil”, as would later be asserted dogmatically in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim worlds. The “Nietzschean” Zarathustra, however, is the protagonist of an “awakening”, insofar as it is the reunion of the ego with its own authentic being. Indeed, he makes two proclamations to humanity: one concerning the “Death of God”, the other regarding the advent of the *Übermensch*, as a direct consequence of the first. That would constitute a truly new humanity, born of the consciousness

41 NIETZSCHE, F. (2017), *On the Genealogy of the Morals*, trans. by Diethe, C., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 104

42 NIETZSCHE, F. (1914), *The Will to Power*, trans. by Levy, O., Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, frg. 0.2, 2-3, 11

of God's death and the liberating power of it. The *Übermensch* is not, however, a state that characterises all of humanity; it is rather the development of certain human beings, who have been able to rise above despondency and the pain of nihilism, by embracing their *amor fati* [love of fate]. These individuals would transcend good and evil, thus surpassing all morality and religion, and would represent a true existential overcoming of "old humanity":

I teach you the overman. Man is something to be surpassed. What have you done to surpass him? All beings thus far have created something beyond themselves: and you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and even return to the beast rather than surpass man?⁴³

The *Übermensch*, therefore, can be understood as a human being who transcends self-imposed limitations, unencumbered by the fear of realising their own potential. In conclusion, all three interpretations of *über* ("super", "over", "beyond") appear to be valid, though it is plausible that the word possesses nuances that defy singular translation. To elucidate this, it is pertinent to revisit the concept of the "will to power", previously mentioned, which is crucial to the genesis of the *Übermensch*. For this reason, it cannot be ignored that a systematic definition of the expression is not entirely feasible, given that the author himself has not provided one. Nonetheless, it may be considered the fundamental driving force of life, or the impulse that compels the human being both to affirm their existence and to overcome their limitations, thereby surpassing their current state:

The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The overman shall be the meaning of the earth!⁴⁴

As previously noted, the existential tragedy inherent in the fundamental falsehoods of Western thought resides in its repression of the will to power, thereby evincing its nihilistic identity. Consequently, for humanity, the attainment of the *Übermensch* signifies an authentic transvaluation of values, a resignification of past ethics entailing the nullification of prior meaning and a preference for a novel morality, originating from the creative force of the ego, which elevates the individual above the collective. Indeed, it is precisely this elevation that ultimately precipitates the definitive transcendence of humanity's prior existential state, in favour of a new condition, one that is superior, more powerful, and thus beyond its historical precedent.

43 NIETZSCHE, F. (1995), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Common, T., New York: Random house, p. 13

44 *Ibidem*

III. JÜNGER, HEIDEGGER, THE *ÜBER* AND THE “LINE”

The question of the *über* is far from resolved by Nietzsche’s philosophy. Indeed, by introducing the theme of nihilism and its overcoming, Nietzsche initiated a complex philosophical debate. The German philosopher, who died in 1900, served as both an exemplar and a source of inspiration for diverse schools of thought. Simultaneously, however, he was also subject to both doubt and critique, as much by his detractors as by those who recognised a certain merit in his thinking. Even those who accepted the critique of metaphysics and its “oppressive” essence in relation to the human being questioned the validity of the overcoming “proposed” by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, particularly concerning the problematic advancement of modernity and, consequently, technology. It was precisely this, indeed, that would become the theme of the work, entitled *Über die Linie*⁴⁵, that Ernst Jünger dedicated to Martin Heidegger on his 60th birthday. By adopting that highly problematic and revolutionary term that Nietzsche had used to define “his” new humanity, namely *über*, Jünger also introduces a new concept, that of the “Line” [*Linie*], understood as the human existential horizon in relation to the advent of the nihilist epoch. The crux of the writer’s argument concerns the possibility of realising that overcoming that Nietzsche envisioned, and whether this can occur in the contemporary and technical era. The dedication of this text to Heidegger is not accidental, given that the celebrated German philosopher was both a significant Nietzsche scholar, having devoted himself to the theme of nihilism for many years, and a favoured interlocutor of Jünger. Indeed, he shared various political and social ideas with Jünger, and both, albeit with their differences, fit into the strand of thought known as the “Conservative Revolution”⁴⁶. More than a mere political movement, this was a cultural current originating within the Weimar Republic, hostile to both liberalism and socialism, and also to that radical nationalism that would later precipitate the birth of the Third Reich. Despite this, Heidegger’s response to the suggestions raised by Jünger, entitled *Zur Seinsfrage*⁴⁷, and often incorporated into Jünger’s *Über die Linie*, is decisively critical. This is not accidental, as the philosopher’s thesis, in his prolific study of Nietzsche, is that the latter failed to achieve the overcoming of which he speaks. This would derive from his “oblivion” of being, which led him to attempt to transcend metaphysics, albeit in metaphysical terms, thus failing in his aim. While attempting to acknowledge the merits of Jünger’s hypothesis (if only out of courtesy), Heidegger maintains that he has also fallen into the same error, and that it is precisely in

45 JÜNGER, E. (1950), *Über die Linie*, Frankfurt am Main: Klosterman

46 MEHRING, R. (2018), *Martin Heidegger Und Die Konservative Revolution*, Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber

47 HEIDEGGER, M. (1967), *Zur Seinsfrage*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann

this regard that it would be necessary to reflect on the term *über*, and its value in relation to the concept of the “Line”. Rather than a crossing over, it would, in Heidegger’s view, be necessary to adopt a “focus”, that is, a closer analysis of that “Line”, understood by him perhaps as being itself: this is the reason for the title he gave to his essay, which means literally “On the question of being”. Furthermore, the philosopher proposes a different interpretation of Jünger’s title, which should not be understood as “Beyond/Across the Line” but rather as “On the Line”. The debate between the two thinkers, thus, is a partially true dialogue, in the Gadamerian sense⁴⁸, as both sides open up to the possibility of reaching a shared understanding on the subject (even though Heidegger is highly critical of some of the other’s views), and each point opened by Jünger is followed by a precise and analytical response from the philosopher from Messkirch. In spite of this, the two positions still maintain a strong conceptual autonomy, and as such it is evident how much of an ideal “merging of horizons” is lacking, since the two conceptions of nihilism remain substantially distinct and separate, and neither thinker ends up changing his or her views in light of the other’s perspectives. This should be a fundamental condition, for the Italian philosophers Gianni Vattimo⁴⁹ and Santiago Zabala⁵⁰, for the

48 The main reference work of the author about this theme is *Truth and Method*, available in English through editions like GADAMER, H. G. (2004), *Truth and Method*, trans. by Weinsheimer, J., Mar, D. G., London: Continuum Books

49 This hypothesis is particularly supported in his work *Not Being God*: VATTIMO, G. (2009), *Not Being God, A Collaborative Autobiography*, trans. by McCuaig, W., New York: Columbia University Press. According to Vattimo, Gadamerian dialogue offers a real path to overcome traditional metaphysics, which is based on the claim of an objective and universal truth. If truth, in fact, is always interpretation, and is constituted in dialogue, then there is no ultimate truth or solid foundation from which to start. This suggestion ties in with both his idea of “weak thinking” and that of “hermeneutic communism”, whose goal is still a provisional understanding in the search for a truth that is, however, never entirely stable

50 Zabala, in his essay ZABALA, S. (2009), *The Remains of Being*, New York: Columbia University Press, argues that the soul of hermeneutics resides in the possibility that, in a dialogue, the other party in question may be right, and with this, dialogue is necessarily configured as a tool for mutual understanding, which, however, is always an interpretative process that emerges from the confrontation itself (thus it cannot be objective). Meaning, therefore, emerges from dialogue, which is necessary in order to understand the complexity and uncertainty inherent in experience. However, the methodological pivot of interpersonal dialogue must always be a “Principle of Charity”, which allows for the recognition of a common vocabulary between the interlocutors. According to Zabala, the dialogue “is a more specialized kind of conversation dedicated to finding the truth about something, as in the Platonic dialogues; in these dialogues, the interlocutors controlled the subject matter and the dialogue’s outcome. To conduct a conversation instead means to allow oneself to be led by the subject matter, since what happens in a conversation is really without a goal.”, ZABALA, S. (2009), *The Remains of Being*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 80

realisation of a true “conversation”, where truth should be the result of a free exchange, that brings to a new truth, which emerges from the interaction, and potentially through conflict and differing perspectives. A “conversation” would thus differ from a dialogue, which suggests a starting point where there’s an assumed shared understanding or pursuit of truth, and neither of the parts shift their stance after their deliberation. This could therefore lead us to believe that, following the ideas of the two Italian philosophers, the interaction between Jünger and Heidegger is a dialogue, but not a conversation. Heidegger, in particular, despite the declared openness of his intentions, essentially ends up reaffirming and clarifying his own ideas, which are far removed from those of the German writer and military man. In this sense, taking up the ideas of the Italian philosopher Santiago Zabala and his mentor Gianni Vattimo, the one between Heidegger and Jünger could perhaps more justifiably be regarded as a “conversation”, being a genuine exchange of opinions, but with no substantial movement from their positions on the part of the two interlocutors.

When examining the translation of the term *über* in the title of this essay, Italian appears to be the only language that retains the sense of *über* as “surpassing”, remaining closer to Jünger’s intended meaning by rendering the title as *Oltre la linea*, which may be interpreted as “Over the Line”. The French and English translations, by contrast, tend to reflect the notion of “crossing the line”, suggesting an immanent moment, a transitional passage, rather than a full act of overcoming. In Spanish and Portuguese, however, both the dimensions of overcoming and of transit seem to be attenuated, in favour of a more static or enduring interpretation of the concept of the “line”. This shift may be seen as more consistent with Heidegger’s philosophical intention, even though these translations often preserve his original title. It is also significant that, as discussed in Section I.I, Heidegger’s essay has experienced a partially adverse editorial fate. On some occasions, it has been published in conjunction with Jünger’s text under the shared title *Über die Linie*, while in other instances it has not been published at all, or only as part of collected correspondence between the two thinkers, rather than as a standalone work.

The difficulty inherent in translating the same term across two distinct philosophical contexts underscores the complexity and semantic richness of the expression *über*. This observation provides an initial sense of the multifaceted nature of the term and highlights the extent to which its rendering in another language demands more than a purely linguistic operation. Rather, it calls for a genuine conceptual analysis, attentive to the intentions and philosophical frameworks of the original authors. Within the broader discourse on nihilism and post-nihilist thought, *über* assumes a crucial discursive function. For Nietzsche, as for Jünger and Heidegger, the subject is compelled to confront an unprecedented existential challenge, namely, the need to rediscover its own

being beyond inherited meanings, particularly those derived from metaphysical tradition, which have constrained both its creative potential and its access to authentic existence. In this regard, the interpretative frameworks developed by thinkers including Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gianni Vattimo, may serve as essential reference points. Their analyses shed critical light on the enduring effects of nihilism within modern philosophy and on the evolving problematic of subjectivity in the contemporary era.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The investigation into the term *über*, as deployed by Nietzsche, and later debated by Jünger and Heidegger, reveals a remarkable confluence of linguistic richness, philosophical depth, and interpretative complexity. Far from being a static lexical item, *über* emerges as a living conceptual locus—a swirling site of tension where questions of human transcendence, ethical transformation, and ontological inquiry intertwine. The data collected in this paper seem to show that plurality of translations—ranging from “super” to “beyond” and “over”—do not merely provide semantic alternatives but generate distinct philosophical horizons, coloring the ways in which thinkers and readers alike engage with the profound questions at the heart of continental philosophy. The multiplicity of translations foregrounds the hermeneutic nature of philosophical language: translation is, in itself, an act of interpretation that inevitably reshapes the target concept according to particular linguistic and cultural frameworks. Such an understanding underscores the impossibility of a singular, definitive rendering—and instead invites an appreciation of the interpretative openness and tension that characterize philosophical discourse. This plurality becomes emblematic of the ongoing vitality of Nietzschean and post-nihilist thought, which resists closure and demands continual reinterpretation and dialogue. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Jünger’s emphasis on overcoming and Heidegger’s call for reflective focus on the “Line,” illuminates how *über* functions as a concept that mediates not only linguistic translation but also philosophical contestation within the modern epoch. The diverse translational and interpretative outcomes signify different ontological priorities and existential attitudes—ranging from the enthusiasm for transcendence to the cautious inquiry into the nature of being—thus demonstrating the profound impact that a single term can exert on the trajectory of philosophical thought.

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