Guest Editors' Introduction

What Does Nietzsche Mean for Contemporary Politics and Political Thought?

Herman Siemens and Gary Shapiro

Over the last twenty years or so Nietzsche's significance for political thought has become the single most hotly contested area of Nietzsche research, especially in the English-speaking world: Is Nietzsche a political thinker at all—or an antipolitical philosopher of values and culture? Is he an aristocratic political thinker who damns democracy as an expression of modern nihilism—or can his thought, especially his thought on the Greek *agon*, be appropriated for contemporary democratic theory? These and other ongoing controversies attest to the profoundly ambivalent and controversial nature of Nietzsche's legacy for political thought. In this issue, we add the question of Nietzsche's actuality: What does Nietzsche mean for contemporary politics and political thought?

Two significant events dedicated to Nietzsche and politics were organized in 2007: the Sixteenth International Conference of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society was held at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands in March, followed shortly thereafter by a small conference at the University of Richmond. Four articles focused on Nietzsche and contemporary politics and drawn from these events appear in this special issue. Additional essays will soon appear in a volume titled *Nietzsche, Power, and Politics*.[1]

One reason for the explosion of literature on Nietzsche and the political in recent years is the perception that he offers a wealth of resources for rethinking key political concepts, theories, and events in a rapidly changing world. This was not always so. In the wake of World War II, Nietzsche was largely considered to be a critic of modernity with nothing constructive to offer political thought, capitulating instead to a blind, irrational voluntarism. But the great polarizations of the twentieth century, its world wars and Cold War, have now given way to a present that is wrestling with terrorist threats, preemptive strikes on the part of a single hyperpower, issues of globalization, environmental crises, and multiculturalism. If the questions of the last century were posed between two poles, the questions of the present revolve around only one: *What is it to become "one" (world, market, Europe, democracy, hyperpower . . .)?* In this context, Nietzsche

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seems to put his finger on the pulse, when he provokes us to ask: What shall be the "*Sinn* [meaning, direction] of the earth?" or when he states: "*Europe wants to become one*." But what *is* it to become one?

It is around these two questions that Gary Shapiro's essay in this issue turns. Shapiro explores Nietzsche's question of the *Sinn der Erde* from a geophilosophical perspective, as a question about the "direction of the earth" that poses a powerful challenge to globalization theories. Geophilosophy, as developed by Deleuze and Guattari, names a reorientation of philosophy toward spatial or "territorial" coordinates, against the primacy accorded to history by philosophy and modernity's sense of historical time. Read from this angle, Shapiro argues, Nietzsche's thought undermines ideologically driven metanarratives of globalization, such as Eduard von Hartmann's *Weltprozess* story, repeatedly ridiculed by Nietzsche, but also the more topical "end of history" story popularized by Fukuyama. Yet Nietzsche does not leave us empty-handed. His geophilosophical impulse leads him to elaborate "alternative notions of time and futurity" as he rearticulates the European present in terms of mobility, difference, and multiplicity, declaring that "this is the century of the multitude [*Menge*]!" (*BGE* 256).

In taking contemporary politics and political thought as its starting point, Shapiro's essay opens up some of the more obscure and difficult areas of Nietzsche's corpus to interpretation, especially the much-neglected chapter titled "Peoples and Fatherlands" in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Read through geophilosophical spectacles, this chapter locates philosophy in a dynamic tension between deterritorialization (as in philosophy's universalistic claims) and reterritorialization (as in the unavoidable, if largely unconscious reinscription of thought within spatial coordinates). The book's discussions of the nation-state, empire, soil addiction (*Schollenkleberei*), the Jews, and German, French, and English thought and, most importantly, the supranational "good Europeans" can all be understood as reterritorializing genealogical analyses that resolve artificial "unities" (the nation-state, Europe, the German) into variations and movements within a social, artistic, and technological transformation whose popular names will be "European Union" or "globalization." Nietzsche's deconstruction of "peoples and fatherlands" poses the question of the multitude as *the* political issue of the century (and more). Yet Nietzsche does not stop here. As Shapiro reminds us, he goes on to make the emphatic but puzzling assertion: "*Europe wants to become one*." In place of yet another metanarrative, Shapiro discerns two lines to the future in Nietzsche's thought, whose relation remains unclear and which are the subject of Nietzsche's "perilous perhaps" (*BGE* 2). The first is a democratizing and *homogenizing* movement, leading to the obedient, adaptable worker, close to Zarathustra's last man and Hartmann's globalized bourgeoisie. We can speak here of "one"-ness as an endless repetition of the same: the fully functionalized human being. The second line points to the possibility of a *differentiated* oneness, where Nietzsche describes Europe as the

breeding ground for new forms of spiritual *hybridity*, exceptional combinations born of the inner diversity and potential fertility of Europe: what he calls the "good European."

Nietzsche's analysis of this desire or will to "become-one" issues an important challenge to Europe: How do you create a new union or unity that is more than the homogenized repetition of fully functionalized workers/consumers in a single market, one that draws on the fertility of its mobile, inner diversity so as to resist the essentialist delusions of a grand synthesis that defines itself against an enemy from the East? In short, How do you create new political topographies of oneness that allow for genuine multiplicity? It is not clear, however, whether Nietzsche leaves us with resources for addressing this challenge. At issue in the statement "*Europe wants to become one*" is not just a problem of *one*ness but also a problem of *wanting*, of the *will* to search for a new, dynamic, and pluralized order. It is not by chance that the hybrid types inscribed in the movement of the "good European" are also identified by Nietzsche as "Tantaluses of the will" (*BGE* 256); this needs to be read against the background of nihilism, understood as a crisis of the will, the depletion of our voluntaristic resources. Yet Nietzsche gives us only a list of such hybrid individuals exemplifying the spirit of experimentation freed from nationalistic madness. If peoples and fatherlands are more flexible assemblages than patriotic piety suggests, and if nomadism, cosmopolitanism, and hybridity produce a multitude, can the multitude have a will (as Hardt and Negri suggest)—or is it simply the material in which new tyrants grow (a development assessed in Strong's essay)? Must the *Menge*, whose century this is, be understood as a relatively undifferentiated mass (a term that Nietzsche avoids here), or can it be construed as a differentiated multiplicity? These are questions posed but not resolved by Nietzsche's text.

The problem of the will comes back to haunt the next article in this issue. In "Nietzsche and the Neoconservatives: Fukuyama's Reply to the Last Man," Haroon Sheikh looks to open a discussion on right-wing appropriations of Nietzsche by staging a confrontation between Nietzsche on one side and Fukuyama and his mentor, Strauss, on the other. Both Fukuyama and Strauss, Sheikh argues, take Nietzsche's last man very seriously, as a narrative about the decline of *thymos*, that is, the seat of pride in Plato's soul, that which makes men seek recognition, prestige, and honor from others. The case for Fukuyama rests on the claim that he offers a third way between the equally unappealing responses to this narrative given by Nietzsche and Strauss. If Nietzsche responds to the eclipse of *thymos* by advancing "one"-ness in the form of world dominion or *grosse Politik*, Strauss's refusal of the project of *grosse Politik* leads only to a *skepsis* regarding the possibility for human flourishing in modernity. Fukuyama's third way is to offer an alternative answer to the question "What is it to become 'one'?" by taking issue with the nihilistic narrative of the last man.

Against Nietzsche, he points to three sites where *thymos* persists in the modern world: the rise of liberal democracy, understood as the result of a "struggle for recognition" or *isothymia*; tamed versions of *megalothymia* as exemplified by capitalist entrepreneurs, ambitious politicians, and sportsmen; and the persistence of certain traditional institutions, understood as premodern sources of *thymos*. Correcting the last man narrative in this way allows Fukuyama to advance a global vision of liberal democracy and capitalism as the "one" to end all history.

Does Fukuyama offer a genuine alternative on the questions of the "one" and the "direction of the earth"—or does the "end of history" thesis fall under Nietzsche's geophilosophical critique of modernist, Eurocentric metanarratives issuing in technocratic utopias? There are certainly reasons for reading the end of history as a triumphalist metanarrative that advances the hegemony of the last man—in spite of Fukuyama. A good deal depends on what we make of the resources he locates and mobilizes against the narrative of the last man. Do they represent an alternative, a real source of resistance, or just an endless repetition of the fully functionalized worker/consumer? Fukuyama's exemplars of *megalothymia* seem to be not only "tame," as Sheikh concedes, but radically impoverished in comparison with Nietzsche's "higher men" or "good Europeans," whose signature features are hybridity, (inner and outer) multiplicity, and mobility. More importantly, Fukuyama's identification of liberal democracy as a site of *isothymia* looks like wishful thinking when set against Nietzsche's strongest formulations of contemporary nihilism. In an important *Nachlass* note Nietzsche argues that under modern economic-technological conditions of exploitation, human life suffers an overall loss of value, worth, or quality: "der Mensch wird geringer" (*KSA* 12:10[17]). The loss of commanding and sense-giving powers that accompanies the democratic processes of "contraction" and "leveling" signifies a value reduction (*Werth-Verringerung*) of the human type, that is, *a loss of intrinsic human value or worth*. Clearly, this thesis undermines the conditions for *isothymia*, understood as mutual recognition of intrinsic worth. If nihilism signifies this loss of intrinsic human value or worth for Nietzsche, its sources lie in a problem of the will—the loss of commanding and sense-giving powers. The *thymiotic* accounts of the last man and the correctives proposed by Fukuyama seem to overlook this problem completely. As Sheikh remarks in closing, the question of nihilism is the battleground for the endgame between Fukuyama and Nietzsche.

Tracy Strong's article articulates the deep structure of Nietzsche's political thought by exploring the connections of tyranny, tragedy, and philosophy. If philosophy is itself a tyrannizing force by imposing its meanings on the world and blinding itself to the limits of this imposition, then tragedy can balance this tendency by disclosing the impossibility of the tyrannical project, whether

political or philosophical. Strong shows how Nietzsche's diagnosis of modernity is about a world in which tragedy is no longer part of the public sphere (itself a replacement for the *agon* of tyranny, tragedy, and philosophy). If tragedy is a way of fending off tyranny, Socratic rationalism, which constitutes tragedy's death and rules in its aftermath, opens the door once more to the pursuit of a total explanation, in other words, to the search for the tyrant. Thus, the modern world sets itself up for a succession of tyrannical projects. Confirmation of Strong's assessment of George W. Bush as a tyrant can be found in current U.S. policy of preemptive war as a new realization of the tyrannical fixation of meaning. The view that war is justified as the elimination of threats that might materialize in the future, of virtual or possible threats, presupposes a strange sense of the future as already visible. The future that preemption fears or anticipates may be brought into existence by the act of preemption itself in Iraq; preemptive war creates its own evidence by assembling terrorists enabled by a "war on terrorism." Here we might be reminded of the ironic relation that the Greeks saw between tyrants and oracles (consider the stories of Herodotus as a commentary on the uses of "intelligence"). Thinking they knew the future, tyrants and despots launched disastrous wars and occupations in which they were both protagonist and victim. As Strong emphasizes in an allegorical reading of John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and in his remarks on the current Bush presidency, the project of overcoming tyranny requires a renewed sense of community tempered by tragic wisdom.

In "The Innocence of Victimhood Versus the 'Innocence of Becoming': Nietzsche, 9/11, and the 'Falling Man,'" Joanne Faulkner takes up the question of agency that Strong invites when he closes his essay by saying, "[t]hat murder is not possible does not mean that we must be helpless." Faulkner argues that the hegemonic first-person post–9/11 narrative in the United States revolves around the concept of a victimized innocence, a self-image that is then used to support projects of revenge (however arbitrary and costly in life and treasure) and accepts the authority of a state of exception wherein real liberties are sacrificed for promised security. Why, she asks, were images of those who fell or jumped from the Twin Towers quickly suppressed in the media? Because, she answers, they could be read as exhibiting a moment of decision and the possibility of agency even in the most desperate and limited circumstances. The jumpers complicate the image of innocence and victimhood. Faulkner interprets the dominant U.S. narrative in terms of Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment*; if we are innocent victims, then we gladly seek revenge by ceding our powers to a higher authority. Nietzsche's alternative concept of the *Unschuld des Werdens* suggests the possibility of acting outside the cycle of debt and guilt. Here innocence—*Unschuld*—is understood as freedom from that kind of moral thinking; accepting the innocence of becoming is "integral to the skillful exercise of agency" and

to making "a choice to take part in the inevitability of the moment." Faulkner shows how Nietzsche's thought on agency can contribute to the critical analysis of the rhetoric of good and evil, the suspension of constitutional liberties, and the abrogation of international agreements that characterize the "global war on terror."

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NOTE

1. Herman W. Siemens and Vasti Roodt, eds., *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

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