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WHERE IS THE ANTI-NIETZSCHE?

OPPROSED TO EVERYONE, Nietzsche has met with remarkably little opposition. In fact, his reputation has suffered only one apparent reverse—his enthusiastic adoption by the Nazis. But, save in Germany, Nietzsche's association with the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust has served chiefly to stimulate further curiosity. Of course, the monster has had to be tamed, and Nietzsche's thought has been cleverly reconstructed so as perpetually to evade the evils perpetrated in his name. Even those philosophies for which he consistently reserved his most biting contempt—socialism, feminism and Christianity—have sought to appropriate their tormentor. Almost everybody now claims Nietzsche as one of their own; he has become what he most wanted to be—irresistible.

This situation gives added significance to a number of recent publications in which the authors reverse the standard practice and straightforwardly report what Nietzsche wrote in order to distance themselves from it. Ishay Landa's article, in which he persuasively argues against the idea that Nietzsche was anything other than dismissive of workers' rights, is one example.¹ But it is only the latest in a small flurry of books and articles that take a more critical view of Nietzsche's thought. The anti-Nietzschean turn began in France, where Luc Ferry and Alain Renant's collection, *Pourquoi nous ne sommes pas nietzschéens* (1991), responded to the Nietzsche/Marx/Freud syntheses of the preceding decades with the demand that 'We have to stop *interpreting* Nietzsche and start taking him at his word.'² The contributors emphasized Nietzsche's opposition to truth and rational argument, the disturbing consequences of his inegalitarianism and immoralism, and his influence on reac-

tionary thought. Ferry and Renant were seeking to renew a traditional humanism, but anti-Nietzscheanism can take very different forms. Geoff Waite's cornucopian *Nietzsche's Corps/e* (1996) links the end of Communism and the triumph of Nietzscheanism, and approaches Nietzsche and his body of interpreters from an Althusserian perspective from which Nietzsche emerges as 'the revolutionary programmer of late pseudo-leftist, fascoid-liberal culture and technoculture'.³ Claiming that, in that it is now 'blasphemy only to blaspheme *Nietzsche*—formerly the great blasphemer—and *his* community', Waite proceeds to uncover Nietzsche's 'esoteric' teachings which aim 'to re/produce a viable form of willing human slavery appropriate to post/modern conditions, and with it a small number of (male) geniuses equal only among themselves.'⁴ Integral to this teaching is what Waite calls the "hermeneutic" or "rhetoric of euthanasia": *the process of weeding out*'. Those who cannot withstand the thought of Eternal Recurrence are, Nietzsche claims, unfit for life: 'Whosoever will be destroyed with the sentence "there is no salvation" ought to die. I want *wars*, in which the vital and courageous *drive out* the others.'⁵

Although Fredrick Appel's succinctly argued *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (1999) could hardly be more different from *Nietzsche's Corps/e* in style, the argument is similar. Appel complains that as 'efforts to draft Nietzsche's thought into the service of radical democracy have multiplied . . . his patently inegalitarian political project [has been] ignored or summarily dismissed.' Far from being a protean thinker whose thought is so multifaceted as to resist any single political interpretation, Nietzsche is committed to 'an uncompromising repudiation of both the ethic of benevolence and the notion of the equality of persons in the name of a radically aristocratic commitment to human excellence.'⁶ Unlike Waite, who suggests that Nietzsche to some degree concealed his politi-

¹ Ishay Landa, 'Nietzsche, the Chinese Worker's Friend', *NLR* I/236, July–August 1999, pp. 3–23.

² Alain Boyer, 'Hierarchy and Truth', in L. Ferry and A. Renaut, eds, *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, Chicago 1997, p. 2.

³ Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or, The Spectacular Technology of Everyday Life*, Durham, NC 1996, p. xi.

⁴ *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, p. 67 and p. 232.

⁵ F. Nietzsche quoted in *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, pp. 315–6.

⁶ Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, Ithaca 1999, p. 2.

cal agenda, Appel argues that it pervades every aspect of Nietzsche's later thought. Nietzsche's elitism is not only fundamental to his entire worldview, it is so profound that it leads naturally to the conclusion that 'the great majority of men have no right to existence'.⁷

Appel draws attention to Nietzsche's political programme not in order to exclude Nietzsche from the political debate but 'to invite democracy's friends to face the depth of his challenge head-on with a reasoned and effective defence of democratic ideals'.⁸ Appel himself gives no indication of what the appropriate defence might be. For Waite, who takes up Bataille's suggestion that 'Nietzsche's position is the only one outside of communism', the answer is clear: the only anti-Nietzschean position is a 'communist' one, vaguely defined as an assortment of social practices leading to total liberation.⁹ However, Waite does not say how or why such a position should be considered preferable. Nietzsche's arguments were explicitly formulated against the practices of social levelling and liberation found within Christianity, liberalism, socialism and feminism. Pointing out that Nietzsche's thought is incompatible with such projects is, as Appel rightly emphasizes, only the beginning.

But from where should Nietzsche be opposed? Most of his recent critics seek to reaffirm political and philosophical positions that Nietzsche himself repudiated. For them, reestablishing that Nietzsche was an amoral, irrationalist, anti-egalitarian who had no respect for basic human rights suffices as a means of disposing of his arguments. Yet if opposition comes only from within the pre-existing traditions, it will do little to dislodge Nietzsche from the position that he chose for himself—the philosopher of the future who writes 'for a species of man that does not yet exist'.¹⁰ The self-styled Anti-Christ who placed himself on the last day of Christianity, and at the end of the secular European culture that it had fostered, would not be displeased if his 'revaluation of all values' were to be indefinitely rejected by those who continued to adhere to the values he despised. He would live forever as their eschatological nem-

⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (hereafter WP), tr., W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York 1967, 872 (unless otherwise indicated, references to Nietzsche's works are to section numbers not page numbers).

⁸ *Contra Democracy*, p. 167.

⁹ *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, p. 70.

¹⁰ WP, 958.

esis, the limit-philosopher of a modernity that never ends, waiting to be born posthumously on the day after tomorrow. What seems to be missing is any critique of Nietzsche that takes the same retrospective position that Nietzsche adopted with regard to Christianity. Postmodernity has spawned plenty of post-Nietzscheans anxious to appropriate Nietzsche for their own agendas, but there appear to be no post-Nietzschean anti-Nietzscheans, no critics whose response is designed not to prevent us from getting to Nietzsche, but to enable us to get over him.

Reading Nietzsche

The chief impediment to the development of any form of anti-Nietzscheanism is, as Waite points out, that ‘most readers basically *trust* him’.¹¹ One reason for this is that Nietzsche gives readers strong incentives to do so. ‘This book belongs to the very few’, he announces in the foreword to *The Anti-Christ*. It belongs only to those who are ‘honest in intellectual matters to the point of harshness’; who have ‘Strength which prefers questions for which no one today is sufficiently daring; courage for the *forbidden*’:

These alone are my readers, my rightful readers, my predestined readers: what do the *rest* matter?—The rest are merely mankind.—One must be superior to mankind in force, in *loftiness* of soul—in contempt . . .¹²

Through the act of reading, Nietzsche flatteringly offers identification with the masters to anyone, but not to everyone. Identification with the masters means imaginative liberation from all the social, moral and economic constraints within which individuals are usually confined; identification with ‘the rest’ involves reading one’s way through many pages of abuse directed at people like oneself. Unsurprisingly, people of all political persuasions and social positions have more readily discovered themselves to belong to the former category. For who, in the privacy of a reading, can fail to find within themselves some of those qualities of honesty and courage and loftiness of soul that Nietzsche describes?

¹¹ *Nietzsche’s Corps/e*, p. 24.

¹² F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1968, Foreword.

As Wyndham Lewis observed, there is an element of fairground trickery in this strategy: ‘Nietzsche, got up to represent a Polish nobleman, with a berserker wildness in his eye, advertised the secrets of the world, and sold little vials containing blue ink, which he represented as drops of authentic blue blood, to the delighted populace. They went away, swallowed his prescriptions, and felt very noble almost at once.’¹³ Put like this, it sounds as though Nietzsche’s readers are simply credulous. But there is more to it. Take Stanley Rosen’s account of the same phenomenon in Nietzsche-reception: ‘An appeal to the highest, most gifted human individuals to create a radically new society of artist-warriors was expressed with rhetorical power and a unique mixture of frankness and ambiguity in such a way as to allow the mediocre, the foolish, and the mad to regard themselves as the divine prototypes of the highest men of the future.’¹⁴ How many of those who read this statement regard themselves as these ‘divine prototypes’? Very few I suspect. For in uncovering Nietzsche’s rhetorical strategy Rosen reuses it. The juxtaposition of ‘the highest, most gifted human individuals’ to whom Nietzsche addressed himself, and ‘the mediocre, the foolish, and the mad’ who claimed what was not rightfully theirs, encourages readers to distance themselves from the former category and identify with the ‘gifted human individuals’ who, it is implied, passed up the opportunity that Nietzsche offered. Like Lewis, Rosen invites his readers to consider the possibility that Nietzsche is only for the little people, and that being a mere Superman may well be beneath them.

Nietzsche’s strategy is one from which it is difficult for readers wholly to disentangle themselves. And in *Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game*, Daniel Conway argues that it is just this strategy that is central to Nietzsche’s post-Zarathustra philosophy. Isolated, and seemingly ignored, the late Nietzsche desperately needs readers, for otherwise his grandiose claims about the epochal significance of his own philosophy cannot possibly be justified. But insofar as his readers passively accept his critique of earlier philosophy, they will hardly be the ‘monsters of courage and curiosity’ needed to transmit his philosophy to the future. However, if Nietzsche’s readers actually embody those adventurous qualities he idealizes, they

¹³ Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, Santa Rosa, CA 1989, p. 113.

¹⁴ Stanley Rosen, *The Ancients and the Moderns*, New Haven 1989, p. 190.

will quickly detect 'his own complicity in the decadence of modernity'.¹⁵ Paradoxically, therefore, Nietzscheanism is best preserved through readings which expose Nietzsche's decadence and so make him the first martyr to his own strategy. Indeed, Conway's own practice of 'reading Nietzsche against Nietzsche' is, as he acknowledges, one example, and so, according to his own argument, ironically serves to perpetuate a Nietzscheanism without Nietzsche: 'the apostasy of his children is never complete. They may turn on him, denounce him, even profane his teachings, but they do so only by implementing the insights and strategies he has bequeathed to them.'¹⁶ As a result, one aspect of Nietzsche's programme, his suspicion, is forever enacted against another, his critique of decadence, for the suspicion that unmasks the decadence even of the 'master of suspicion' is itself a symptom of decadence waiting to be unmasked by future generations themselves schooled in suspicion by their own decadence.

Although Conway illustrates ways in which both Nietzsche and his 'signature doctrines' are potentially the victims of his own strategy, he does little to show how the reader can avoid participating in it. In fact, Conway appears to be deploying a more sophisticated version of the Nietzschean response used by Lewis and Rosen. Rather than simply inviting the reader to think of themselves as being superior to the foolish mediocrities who would be Supermen, Conway encourages the reader to join him in the higher task of unmasking the Supermen, and Nietzsche himself. But is there no way to reject Nietzsche without at the same time demonstrating one's masterly superiority to the herd of slavish Nietzscheans from whom one is distinguishing oneself? Can the reader resist, or at least fail to follow, Nietzsche's injunction: 'one must be superior . . .'?

Reading for victory

The act of reading always engages the emotions of readers, and to a large degree the success of any text (or act of reading) depends upon a reader's sympathetic involvement. A significant part of that involvement comes from the reader's identification with individuals or types

¹⁵ Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols*, Cambridge 1997, p. 152.

¹⁶ *Dangerous Game*, p. 256.

within the story. People routinely identify with the heroes of narratives, and with almost any character who is presented in an attractive light. This involves ‘adopting the goals of a protagonist’ to the extent that the success or failure of those goals occasions an emotional response in the reader similar to that which might be expected of the protagonist, irrespective of whether the protagonist is actually described as experiencing those emotions.¹⁷ Hence, a story with a happy ending is one in which the reader feels happy because of the hero’s success, and a sad story is one in which the protagonist is unsuccessful.

Within this process, readers sometimes identify with the goals of characters who may be in many or all external respects (age, race, gender, class etc.) dissimilar to themselves. But the goals with which they identify—escaping death, finding a mate, achieving personal fulfilment—are almost always ones shared by the reader in that they reflect rational self-interest. The effect of identifying with the goals of protagonists on the basis of self-interest is that the act of reading becomes an attempt to succeed in the same objectives that the reader pursues in everyday life. Indeed, success in the act of reading may actually serve to compensate the reader for their relative inability to realize those same objectives in their own lives. Hence perhaps the apparent paradox generated by Nietzsche’s popularity amongst disadvantaged groups he went out of his way to denigrate. They, too, are reading for victory, struggling to wrest success from the text by making themselves the heroes of Nietzsche’s narrative.

Reading for victory is the way Nietzsche himself thought people ought to read. As he noted in *Human, All Too Human*:

Whoever wants really to get to *know* something new (be it a person, an event, or a book) does well to take up this new thing with all possible love, to avert his eye quickly from, even to forget, everything about it that he finds

¹⁷ See Keith Oatley, ‘A taxonomy of the emotions in literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative’, *Poetics*, 23, 1994, pp. 53–74; D. W. Allbritton and R. J. Gerrig found that readers have positive preferences for the outcomes of narratives, and that having negative preferences (e.g. hoping that the protagonist misses a flight) is so unusual that when readers are manipulated into preferring a negative outcome (e.g. by being told that the plane will crash) they are less able to remember the actual outcome; see their ‘Participatory Responses in Text Understanding’, *Journal of Memory and Language*, 30, 1991, pp. 603–26.

inimical, objectionable, or false. So, for example, we give the author of a book the greatest possible head start, and, as if in a race, virtually yearn with pounding heart for him to reach his goal.¹⁸

When he wrote this, Nietzsche considered that reading for victory was only a device and that reason might eventually catch up. But in his later writings, this possibility is dismissed. Knowledge ‘works as a tool of power’ and so ‘increases with every increase of power’.¹⁹ The reader’s yearning for victory is now not a means to knowledge but an example of what knowledge is. Getting to know something is no more than the act of interpreting it to one’s own advantage: ‘The will to power *interprets* . . . In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something.’²⁰

In this context, reading for victory without regard to the objections and consequences of that reading is more than reading the way we usually read: it is also our first intoxicating taste of the will to power. Not only does reading for victory exemplify the will to power, but in reading Nietzsche our exercise of the will to power is actually rewarded with the experience of power. It is possible to see this happen even in a single sentence. Take Nietzsche’s boast in *Ecce Homo*, ‘I am not a man I am dynamite.’²¹ Reading these words, who has not felt the sudden thrill of something explosive within themselves; or, at the very least, emboldened by Nietzsche’s daring, allowed themselves to feel a little more expansive than usual? This, after all, is the way we usually read. Even though Nietzsche is attributing the explosive power to himself, not to us, we instantly appropriate it for ourselves.

Here perhaps is the root of Nietzsche’s extraordinary bond with his readers. Reading Nietzsche successfully means reading for victory, reading so that we identify ourselves with the goals of the author. In so unscrupulously seeking for ourselves the rewards of the text we become exemplars of the uninhibited will to power. No wonder Nietzsche can so confidently identify his readers with the Supermen. It is not just flattery. If Nietzsche’s readers have mastered his text, they have demonstrated just those qualities of ruthlessness and ambition that qualify

¹⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, tr. M. Faber, Harmondsworth 1984, 621.

¹⁹ WP, 480. ²⁰ WP, 643.

²¹ F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1979, p. 126.

them to be ‘masters of the earth’. But they have done more than earn a status in Nietzsche’s fictional world. In arriving at an understanding of Nietzsche’s cardinal doctrine they have already proved it to themselves. Nietzsche persuades by appealing to experience—not to our experience of the world, but our experience as readers, in particular our experience as readers of his text.

Reading like a loser

There is an alternative to reading for victory: reading like a loser. Robert Burton described it and its consequences in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*:

Yea, but this meditation is that marres all, and mistaken makes many men farre worse, misconceaving all they reade or heare, to their owne overthrow, the more they search and reade Scriptures, or divine Treatises, the more they pussle themselves, as a bird in a net, the more they are intangled and precipitated into this preposterous gulfe. *Many are called, but few are chosen, Mat. 20.16 and 22.14.* With such like places of Scripture misinterpreted strike them with horror, they doubt presently whether they be of this number or no, gods eternall decree of predestination, absolute reprobation, & such fatall tables they forme to their owne ruine, and impinge upon this rocke of despaire.²²

Reading to one’s own overthrow, to convict oneself from the text is an unusual strategy. It differs equally from the rejection of a text as mistaken or immoral and from the assimilation of a text as compatible with one’s own being. Reading like a loser means assimilating a text in such a way that it is incompatible with one’s self.

The interpretative challenge presented by the doctrine of predestination is in important respects similar to the one Nietzsche offers his readers. The underlying presupposition of both is that many are called, and few are chosen. One might suppose that the majority of those faced with the doctrine would deduce that they are more likely to be amongst the many than the few. But, just as almost all of Nietzsche’s readers identify themselves as being amongst the few who are honest, strong and courageous, so generations of Christians have discovered themselves to be amongst the few who are ‘called’. The alternative, although seemingly logical, was

²² Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Oxford 1989, vol. 3, p. 434.

so rare as to be considered pathological. People were not expected to survive in this state. As Burton noted: ‘Never was any living creature in such torment . . . in such miserable estate, in such distresse of minde, no hope, no faith, past cure, reprobate, continually tempted to make away with themselves.’²³

Reading like losers, we respond very differently to the claims Nietzsche makes on behalf of himself and his readers. Rather than reading for victory with Nietzsche, or even reading for victory against Nietzsche by identifying with the slave morality, we read for victory against ourselves, making ourselves the victims of the text. Doing so does not involve treating the text with scepticism or suspicion. In order to read like a loser you have to accept the argument, but turn its consequences against yourself. So, rather than thinking of ourselves as dynamite, or questioning Nietzsche’s extravagant claim, we will immediately think (as we might if someone said this to us in real life) that there may be an explosion; that we might get hurt; that we are too close to someone who could harm us. Reading like losers will make us feel powerless and vulnerable.

The net result, of course, is that reading Nietzsche will become far less pleasurable. When we read that “Those who are from the outset victims, downtrodden, broken—they are the ones, the weakest are the ones who most undermine life”²⁴ we will think primarily of ourselves. Rather than being an exhilarating vision of the limitless possibilities of human emancipation, Nietzsche’s texts will continually remind us of our own weakness and mediocrity, and our irremediable exclusion from the life of joy and careless laughter that is possible only for those who are healthier and more powerful. In consequence, we will never experience the mysterious alchemy of Nietzsche’s texts in which the reader reaps the benefits of Nietzsche’s doctrine in the act of apprehending it.

How then will we feel about Nietzsche? We might answer the way Nietzsche suggests no one has ever answered: “I don’t like him.”—Why?—“I am not equal to him.”²⁵ In any case, we will not be able to look

²³ *Anatomy*, p. 422.

²⁴ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. D. Smith, Oxford 1996, 3.14.

²⁵ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. W. Kaufmann, New York 1966, 185.

him in the face as he asks us to do.²⁶ His gaze is too piercing, his presence too powerful. We must lower our eyes and turn away.

The philistine

Reading Nietzsche like losers is likely to prove more difficult than we might suppose. It involves more than distancing ourselves from his more extravagant claims; it means that we will find it impossible to identify with any of his positive values. This may prove painful, for some of Nietzsche's values are widely endorsed within contemporary culture, and accepting our inability to share them may count as an intellectual and social failing. This is perhaps most obviously true when it comes to art, the one thing to which Nietzsche consistently ascribed a positive value.

It was in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche first articulated the view that life was meaningless and unbearable, and that 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*.'²⁷ Although he subsequently distanced himself from this early work, Nietzsche never gave up the idea that art was the one redemptive value in the world, or that 'we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art.'²⁸ In his later writings, the role of art comes to be identified with the will to power. As Nietzsche wrote in a draft for the new preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.

Art as the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antinihilist *par excellence*.²⁹

Whereas other putative sources of value, such as religion and morality and philosophical truth, placed themselves in opposition to life, art was not something that stood over and against life, it was the affirmation of life, and so also life's affirmation of itself.

²⁶ *Anti-Christ*, 1.

²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. W. Kaufmann, New York 1967, 5; see also *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufmann, New York 1974, 107.

²⁸ *Birth of Tragedy*, 5. ²⁹ WP, 853.

Nietzsche's later vision of art as the value that supersedes all others has two related elements: the role of the aesthetic as a source of value, and the artist as a creator and embodiment of that value. But if we are reading like losers, we are not going to be able to identify with either of these things. We will think of ourselves as philistines who are unable to appreciate what is supposedly the aesthetic dimension of experience; as people who have no taste or discrimination, no capacity to appreciate what are meant to be the finer things of life. This does not just involve distancing ourselves from the rarified discourse of traditional aesthetics; it means not being able to see the point of avant-gardist repudiations of tradition either.

According to Nietzsche, 'the effect of works of art is to *excite the state that creates art*'. Being an aesthete is therefore indistinguishable from being an artist, for 'All art . . . speaks only to artists.'³⁰ Reading like losers places us outside this equation: unable to appreciate, we are also unable to create. We cannot think of ourselves as original or creative people, or as makers of things that add to the beauty or aesthetic variety of the world. When we read Nietzsche's descriptions of the 'inartistic state' that subsists 'among those who become impoverished, withdraw, grow pale, under whose eyes life suffers',³¹ we should not hurry to exclude ourselves. In Nietzsche's opinion, '*the aesthetic state . . . appears only in natures capable of that bestowing and overflowing fullness of bodily vigor . . . [But] The sober, the weary, the exhausted, the dried-up (e.g. scholars) can receive absolutely nothing from art, because they do not possess the primary artistic force.*'³² 'Yes,' the loser responds, 'that sounds like me.'

It may not appear to be a very attractive option, for Nietzsche deliberately makes it as unappealing as possible, but acknowledging a lack of 'the primary artistic force' must be the starting point for any anti-Nietzscheanism. Anyone who does not do so retains an important stake in Nietzsche's vision of the future. Receptivity to the aesthetic is the ticket to privilege in Nietzsche's world; the only people liable to suffer from his revaluation of values are those who lack it. Nietzsche may claim that only a select minority are likely to qualify, but in a culture where self-identified philistines are conspicuous by their absence, it is not surprising to discover that Nietzsche's readers have consistently

³⁰ WP, 809 and 821.

³¹ WP, 812.

³² WP, 801.

found themselves to be included rather than excluded from his vision of the future.

The subhuman

To find the Anti-Nietzsche it is necessary not only to locate oneself outside contemporary culture, but outside the human species altogether. Nietzsche's model for the future of intra-specific relations is based on that of inter-specific relations in the natural world. The underlying analogy is that Superman is to man, as man is to animal. Zarathustra pictures man as 'a rope stretched between animal and Superman—a rope over an abyss.'³³ The philosopher of the future must walk the tightrope. Unlike those who would rather return to the animal state, the Supermen will establish the same distance between themselves and other humans, as humans have established between themselves and animals:

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves, and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide and return to the animals rather than overcome man?

What is the ape to men? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.³⁴

Indeed, Nietzsche repeatedly refers to Supermen as being a different species: 'I write for a species of man that does not yet exist: for the "masters of the earth".'³⁵ He was not speaking metaphorically, either. He hoped that the new species might be created through selective breeding, and noted the practical possibility of 'international racial unions whose task will be to rear the master race, the future "masters of the earth".'³⁶

According to Nietzsche, it follows from this that, relative to the Supermen, ordinary mortals will have no rights whatsoever. The Supermen have duties only to their equals, 'towards the others one acts as one thinks best.'³⁷ The argument here is also based on inter-specific analogies. Nietzsche conceives the difference between man and Superman not only in terms of that between animal and man, but on

³³ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1969, p. 43.

³⁴ *Zarathustra*, p. 41.

³⁵ WP, 958.

³⁶ WP, 960.

³⁷ WP, 943.

the model of herd animal and predatory animal. He first introduced the idea in *The Genealogy of Morals*, in a discussion of lambs and birds of prey. Noting that it is hardly strange that lambs bear ill will towards large birds of prey, he argues this is ‘in itself no reason to blame large birds of prey for making off with little lambs.’ According to Nietzsche, to do so would be

To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a will to overcome, overthrow, dominate, a thirst for enemies and resistance and triumph, makes as little sense as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength.

The argument hinges on the idea of carnivorousness as an expression of the amorality that is a natural and inescapable feature of interspecific relations. Nietzsche imagines his birds of prey saying ‘We bear them no ill will at all, these good lambs—indeed, we love them; there is nothing tastier than a tender lamb.’³⁸ However it may appear to the lambs, for the carnivore eating them it is not a question of ethics, just a matter of taste. Nietzsche therefore argues that were a comparable divide to exist between two human species, the Supermen and the herd animals who sustain them, relations between the species would also be entirely governed by the tastes of the superior species. Nietzsche does not say whether the Supermen will feast upon their human subordinates, but it is inconceivable that he should have any objection to the practice, save perhaps gastronomic.

Why do not Nietzsche’s readers experience the visceral fear of the Superman that Nietzsche attributes to the lambs? The answer is surely that the reader immediately identifies with the human rather than the animal, and with the carnivore rather than the herbivore. Nietzsche’s argument relies on the assumption that the patterns of interspecific relations are unquestioned and that it will be easier for the reader to imagine eating other species than it is to imagine being eaten by them. The raptors’ response to the lamb is therefore also that of carnivorous readers, who also love lamb as much as they love lambs. Reading like losers, however, we may see things rather differently. We will not just identify with man rather than Superman, but also with the animal rather than man, and with the herd animal rather than the predator. The pattern of

³⁸ *Genealogy*, I. 13.

interspecific behaviour that Nietzsche describes will immediately strike us as terrifying—an all-out war against the defenceless explicable only in terms of the hatred of the predator for the prey.

Once again, the difficulty of reading like losers is extreme. First, rather than dismissing Nietzsche's suggestion that intrahuman diversity could ever produce distinct species of men and Supermen, we have to accept the idea that interspecific analogues are relevant. Second, we have to relocate ourselves within those analogues in the position of the subhuman rather than the human, as ape to man, herbivore to carnivore. This means divesting ourselves of all our assumptions about species superiority and imagining our experience of the human species to be that of a subhuman species. Consistently thinking about the human from the perspective of the subhuman is difficult, but in reading like a loser we have to give up the idea of becoming more than man and think only of becoming something less.

Nietzsche himself identified becoming subhuman with the egalitarian projects of democracy and socialism:

The *over-all degeneration of man* down to what today appears to the socialist dolts and flatheads as their 'man of the future'—as their ideal—this degeneration and diminution of man into the perfect herd animal (or, as they say, to the man of the 'free society'), this animalization of man into the dwarf animal of equal rights and claims, is *possible*, there is no doubt of it.

The prospect strikes Nietzsche with horror: 'Anyone who has once thought through this possibility to the end knows one kind of nausea that other men don't know.'³⁹ Even those who consider Nietzsche to have offered an absurd caricature of the socialist project would probably agree that the subhumanization of man was a repulsive goal. But if we are reading like losers we may think differently. Just as the superhumanization of man will fill us with terror, the dehumanization of man into a herd animal will strike us as offering a welcome respite from a cruel predator, and opening up new possibilities for subhuman sociality. And although the subhuman, like the philistine, may not seem like the most promising basis for a thoroughgoing anti-Nietzscheanism, it is more than just a hypothetical counter-Nietzschean position generated

³⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 203.

by a perverse strategy of reading: the subhuman and the philistine are not two forms of the Anti-Nietzsche but one.

Negative ecology of value

Nietzsche's project is the revaluation of all values. There are two stages: the first nihilistic, the second ecological. Nietzsche acknowledged himself to be 'a thorough-going nihilist', and although he says he accepted this only in the late 1880s, the idea obviously appealed, for he then proclaimed himself to be 'the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself.'⁴⁰ What Nietzsche means is that he has accepted, more completely than anyone before him, the 'absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes.'⁴¹ All the values of religion and morality which were supposed to make life worth living are unsustainable; scepticism has undermined the lot. The truthfulness enjoined by religion and morality has shown the values of religion and morality (including the value of truth itself) to be fictitious. In this way, the highest values of the past have devalued themselves. Nihilism is not something that has worked against religion and morality, it has worked through them. The advent of nihilism, the realization that everything that was thought to be of value is valueless, therefore represents both the triumph of Christian values and their annihilation. As Heidegger observed, 'for Nietzsche, nihilism is not in any way simply a phenomenon of decay; rather nihilism is, as the fundamental event of Western history, simultaneously and above all the intrinsic law of that history.'⁴²

Although Nietzsche does not repudiate nihilism, he anticipates that in the future it will take another form. He argues that 'the universe seems to have lost value, seems "meaningless"—but that is only a *transitional stage*.'⁴³ What lies beyond it is 'a movement that in some future will take the place of this perfect nihilism—but presupposes it, logically and psychologically'.⁴⁴ The movement is the one that Nietzsche describes as the revaluation of all values. The presupposition of this is that 'we

⁴⁰ WP, Prologue, 2.

⁴¹ WP, 3.

⁴² M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, New York 1977, p. 67.

⁴³ WP, 7.

⁴⁴ WP, Prologue, 2.

require, sometime, *new values*', but not values of the old kind that measure the value of the world in terms of things outside it, for they 'refer to a purely fictitious world'.⁴⁵ Nietzsche's revaluation of values demands more than this, 'an overturning of the nature and manner of valuing'.⁴⁶

Nietzsche does not use the word, but the form of this revaluation of valuing is perhaps most accurately described as ecological, not because Nietzsche exhibited any particular concern for the natural environment, but on account of the unprecedented conjunction of two ideas: the recognition of the interdependence of values, and the evaluation of value in biological terms. As a pioneer in the study of the history of values, Nietzsche sought 'knowledge of their growth, development, displacement'.⁴⁷ Values did not co-exist in an unchanging timeless harmony. Within history some values had displaced others because not all values can simultaneously be equally valuable. Some values negate and devalue others: Christianity had involved 'a revaluation of all the values of antiquity', for the ancient values, 'pride . . . the deification of passion, of revenge, of cunning, of anger, of voluptuousness, of adventure, of knowledge', could not prosper in the new moral climate.⁴⁸ And the same could happen again: 'Moral values have hitherto been the highest values: would anybody call this in question?—If we remove these values from this position, we alter all values: the principle of their order of rank hitherto is thus overthrown.'⁴⁹ In consequence, the revaluation of values involves not the invention of new values, but reinventing the relationships between the old ones: 'The future task of the philosopher: this task being understood as the solution of the *problem of value*, [is] the determination of the *hierarchy of values*.'⁵⁰

If it was as a genealogist of values that Nietzsche discovered their precarious ecology, it was as a nihilist that he sought to exploit it. Nietzsche recognized that, just as asserting one value negated another, so the denial of value placed a positive valuation upon the negation itself. The one irreducible value was therefore the value of valuation. But since, for a nihilist, values are valueless in themselves, the value of valuation is not merely the last value but the only one. As Nietzsche states, nihilism

⁴⁵ WP, 12B.

⁴⁷ *Genealogy*, Preface, 6.

⁴⁹ WP, 1006.

⁴⁶ *Concerning Tautology*, p. 70.

⁴⁸ WP, 221.

⁵⁰ *Genealogy*, I.17.

‘places the value of things precisely in the lack of any reality corresponding to these values and in their being merely a symptom of strength on the part of the value-positers.’⁵¹ The effect of this argument is heavily reductive, for if the only value is valuation, then all that is of value is the capacity to establish values, a capacity that Nietzsche equates with life itself: ‘When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values.’⁵² However, life itself is contested, and so ‘There is nothing to life that has value except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power.’⁵³

As a historian, Nietzsche noted that ‘Values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values’,⁵⁴ but, according to his own reductive argument, changes in value are not merely related to changes in power, they are themselves those changes in power, for the only value is ‘the highest quantum of power that a man is able to incorporate.’⁵⁵ So, because value resides in valuation, and valuation exists only where there is the power to establish values, the ecology of value within the realm of ideas becomes a literal biological ecology of living organisms. As Nietzsche puts it:

The standpoint of ‘value’ is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming.⁵⁶

In short, value is ultimately ecological, in that what is of value is the conditions that allow valuation. And since, according to Nietzsche, ‘it is the intrinsic right of *masters* to create values’,⁵⁷ it follows that “Value” is essentially the standpoint for the increase or decrease of these dominating centres.⁵⁸ The future task of the philosopher is therefore that of establishing not so much a hierarchy of value, or even a hierarchy of value-positers, as that of creating an ecology in which valuation is possible. Not being familiar with the twentieth-century concept of the ecologist, Nietzsche imagines a new type of physician whose concern is with the health of society as a whole:

⁵¹ WP, 13.

⁵² F. Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1968, V.5 (p. 45).

⁵³ WP, 55.

⁵⁴ WP, 14.

⁵⁵ WP, 714.

⁵⁶ WP, 715.

⁵⁷ BGE, 261.

⁵⁸ WP, 715.

I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of that word—one who has to pursue the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of humanity—to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life.⁵⁹

What this global ecologist of value would do is create conditions that foster the production of value-positors. And since the ‘higher type is possible only through the subjugation of the lower’,⁶⁰ this means breeding a master species capable of enslaving the rest of the world:

a new, tremendous aristocracy, based on the severest self-legislation, in which the will of philosophical men of power and artist-tyrants will be made to endure for millennia—a higher kind of man who . . . employ democratic Europe as their most pliant and supple instrument for getting hold of the destinies of the earth, so as to work as artists upon ‘man’ himself.⁶¹

In this ecology, the philistine and the subhuman are the same thing. Nietzsche equates receptivity to the aesthetic with being an artist, being an artist with the capacity for valuation, and the capacity for valuation with the exercise of power. Just as his artist-tyrants display their artistry through their tyranny and exercise their tyranny in their artistry, so philistinism is the mark of the subhuman, and subhumanization the fate of the philistine. Because they fail to participate in art, the ‘*affirmation, blessing, deification*, of existence’,⁶² philistines lack will to power, and are enslaved. And because subhumans lack the power to create value, they can never appreciate it either. Within the ecology of value a certain number of subhuman-philistines are always necessary in order to act as slaves to the supermen-aesthetes, but since an ecology of value is one that fosters the production of supermen-aesthetes rather than subhuman-philistines it follows that any increase in the latter, beyond the minimum needed to serve the needs of their masters, will have a negative effect on that ecology. Nietzsche’s vision of the future naturally includes provision for the extermination of these vermin, for their proliferation will do more than have a negative effect on his ecology of value; since the ecology of value is the last remaining value in the history of nihilism, its negation is the ultimate negation of value itself.

⁵⁹ *Gay Science*, 35.

⁶⁰ WP, 660.

⁶¹ WP, 960.

⁶² WP, 821.

It is worth considering the implications of this a little further. For a thorough-going nihilist the last value must be derived from the negation of value. Since valuation is unavoidable, it would seem to follow that valuation is that last value. And this is why Nietzsche thinks that the ecology of value will be the ultimate conclusion of his nihilism. But this is not so. Although value might ultimately be ecological, it does not follow that its ecology is valuable. Rather than a positive ecology of value, which creates the possibility for conditions of valuation, there might be a negative ecology. The nihilistic impulse might turn against this last redoubt of value, arguing that the last value must be the negation of the conditions of valuation, an ecology which minimizes the possibilities for the positing of value and so reduces the quantum of value still further. On this view, the last value would not be an ecology of value but a negative ecology of value. The full significance of the philistine and the subhuman now becomes clearer. Reading Nietzsche as a philistine-subhuman is not just a matter of finding a perspective from which Nietzsche's ideas appear alien and threatening, it actually constitutes a countermove to Nietzsche's strategy. Reading for victory exemplifies the will to power and promotes an ecology of value by increasing the numbers of those who are value-positors; reading like a loser has a direct negative impact on that ecology since it decreases the proportion of value-positors. Taking up the role of the philistine-subhuman therefore continues the nihilistic dynamic that Nietzsche thought he had ended, not by perpetuating the *ressentiment* of slave-morality—reading like a loser is not an affirmation of the values through which losers become winners—but by having a direct, negative impact on the ecology of value.

Total society

It might appear that a negative ecology of value could feature on only the most perverse of dystopian agendas. But that would be a hasty judgement. The negative ecology of value, which Nietzsche called 'the kingdom of heaven of the poor in spirit', had in his view already begun:

The French Revolution as the continuation of Christianity. Rousseau is the seducer: he again unfetters woman who is henceforth represented in an ever more interesting manner—as suffering. Then the slaves and Mrs. Beecher-Stowe. Then the poor and the workers. Then the vice addicts and the sick . . . We are well on the way: the kingdom of heaven of the poor in spirit has begun.⁶³

The way in which this process served to negate value is spelt out most clearly with regard to slavery: “Abolition of slavery”—supposedly a tribute to “human dignity”, in fact a destruction of a fundamentally different type (—the undermining of its values and happiness—).⁶⁴ Rather than accepting the rhetoric of liberation on its own terms, and seeing it as an extension of the ecology of value which attributes positive qualities to those who are liberated, Nietzsche sees it only as a negation of the values reposed within the masters. Thus, the liberation of women serves only to negate the special value of masculinity; the emancipation of slaves the value of whiteness, the liberation of the workers the value of capital, the liberation of the sick the seemingly unarguable value of health itself.

Those who seek to oppose Nietzsche typically reject his analysis of these changes and maintain that the long process of human emancipation has not only been motivated by the desire to promote values but has also contributed to their ecology. But, as has often been noted, this argument is difficult to sustain at a historical or sociological level. Whatever the intentions of those who have promoted these social reforms, their effect has not been to strengthen value, but rather to dilute it by widening its scope. Durkheim, writing shortly after Nietzsche, was perhaps the first to note the pattern. Laws against murder are now more inclusive than in former times, but

If all the individuals who . . . make up society are today protected to an equal extent, this greater mildness in morality is due, not to the emergence of a penal rule that is really new, but to the extension of the scope of an ancient rule. From the beginning there was a prohibition on attempts to take the life of any member of the group, but children and slaves were excluded from this category. Now that we no longer make such distinctions actions have become punishable that once were not criminal. But this is merely because there are more persons in society, and not because collective sentiments have increased in number. These have not grown, but the object to which they relate has done so.⁶⁵

Indeed, as he argued in *The Division of Labour in Society*, the *conscience collective*, the set of values shared by a social group, is progressively weakened by increases in the size and complexity of the unit. Taken to its

⁶³ WP, 94.

⁶⁴ WP, 315.

⁶⁵ E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, tr. W. D. Halls, London 1984, p. 117.

limits, the dynamic that Durkheim describes involves the totalization of society to its maximal inclusiveness and complexity, and the corresponding elimination of shared values. Already, he suggests, morality 'is in the throes of an appalling crisis'.⁶⁶ If the totalization of society and the weakening of *la conscience collective* is not balanced by the development of organic solidarity through the division of labour, the change will result only in *anomie*.

Although they emphasize different aspects of the process, it is clear that Durkheim and Nietzsche are addressing the same issue. Both describe the origins of morality in the customs of communities bound together by what Durkheim called 'mechanical solidarity'. But what is, for Durkheim, the expansion of the group and the weakening of *la conscience collective*, is, for Nietzsche, the slave revolt in morals and the beginnings of European nihilism:

Refraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation and placing one's will on a par with someone else—this may become . . . good manners among individuals if the appropriate conditions are present (namely, if these men are actually similar in strength and value standards and belong together in *one* body). But as soon as this principle is extended, and possibly even accepted as the *fundamental principle of society*, it immediately proves to be what it really is—a will to the *denial* of life, a principle of disintegration and decay.⁶⁷

Durkheim is nervously optimistic about the totalization of society. Observing that 'there is tending to form, above European peoples, in a spontaneous fashion, a European society', he argued that even if 'the formation of one single human society is forever ruled out—and this has, however, not yet been demonstrated—at least the formation of larger societies will draw us continually closer to that goal.'⁶⁸ In contrast, Nietzsche's response is to demand a return to mechanical solidarity, not of course for everyone, but for the few strong men who can create value. Only if society is detotalized and redivided into the community of the strong and the undifferentiated mass of the weak can the conditions for value creation be sustained:

⁶⁶ *Division of Labour*, p. 339.

⁶⁷ BGE, 259.

⁶⁸ *Division of Labour*, p. 337.

As a good man, one belongs to the 'good', a community that has a communal feeling, because all the individuals are entwined together by their feeling for requital. As a bad man, one belongs to the 'bad', to a mass of abject, powerless men who have no communal feeling.⁶⁹

In this context, our reading of Nietzsche assumes additional importance. Identifying positively with any narrative (written or otherwise) means making its goals one's own. And although we may not be trying to make common cause with other readers, reading for victory has a strong centripetal dynamic: the greater our success, the more closely our goals converge with those of others who are doing the same thing. Reading Nietzsche for victory is the route to his new mechanical solidarity. In contrast, reading like losers is centrifugal. Since we are not in any sense opposed to the text, we have no common cause even with those who are reading for victory against it, we just become part of that 'mass of abject, powerless men who have no communal feeling'. Reading like a loser, in its consistent exclusion of the reader from shared value, is a willingness to exchange an exclusive communality for an inclusive and indiscriminate sociality.

Becoming part of a mass with no communal feeling may negate the ecology of value, but such a mass is not necessarily a negative ecology. Like Nietzsche, Durkheim thought of society in biological terms. His model of organic solidarity is an oak tree which can sustain 'up to two hundred species of insects that have no contacts with one another save those of good neighbourliness.'⁷⁰ Just as an environment can sustain a higher population the greater the diversity of the species within it, so society can accommodate more people if they have less in common and more diversified social roles. But whereas Durkheim's ecology is acknowledged to be part of a negative ecology of value, Nietzsche's ecology is a positive ecology of value designed to sustain species whose will to power is value positing:

society must *not* exist for society's sake but only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of *being*—comparable to those sun-seeking vines of Java . . . that so long and so often enclasp an oak tree with their tendrils

⁶⁹ *All Too Human*, 45; see also, *Genealogy*, I.II.

⁷⁰ *Division of Labour*, p. 209.

until eventually, high above it but supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and display their happiness.⁷¹

It is Nietzsche's commitment to an ecology of value that makes him an anti-social thinker. The boundaries of society must be constricted in order to sustain the flower of value. For the anti-Nietzschean, however, the argument will go the other way. The boundaries of society must be extended in order to decrease the possibility of value, for the negative ecology of value is total society.

A possibility

Nietzsche's image of the vine climbing the oak neatly encapsulated his idea that the Supermen must exercise their will to power as parasites upon society. Translating the idea into historical terms supplied Nietzsche with an extraordinary vision: 'I see in my mind's eye a *possibility* of a quite unearthly fascination and splendour . . . a spectacle at once so meaningful and so strangely paradoxical it would have given all the gods of Olympus an opportunity for an immortal roar of laughter—*Cesare Borgia as Pope*.'⁷² Like the vine that strangles the tree as it reaches toward the sunlight, Cesare Borgia would have abolished Christianity by becoming its head.

The totalization of society does not require such fantasies, but it may involve changes for which many are unprepared. For example, one recent appeal for the ongoing totalization of society is 'The Declaration on Great Apes', which proclaims that

The notion of 'us' as opposed to 'the other', which like a more and more abstract silhouette, assumed in the course of centuries the contours of the boundaries of the tribe, of the nation, of the race, of the human species, and which for a time the species barrier had congealed and stiffened, has again become something alive, ready for further change.

The Declaration looks forward to 'the moment when the dispersed members of the chimpanzee, gorilla and orang-utan species can be liberated and lead their different lives as equals in their own special territories in our countries.'⁷³ However, neither the signatories of the Declaration, nor

⁷¹ *Good and Evil*, 258.

⁷² *Anti-Christ*, 61.

⁷³ P. Cavalieri and P. Singer, eds, *The Great Ape Project*, London 1993, p. 5 and p. 6.

subsequent advocates of simian sovereignty have specified where these simian homelands should be located. It has been suggested that some heavily indebted equatorial nation might be induced to cede part of its territory in return for relief from its creditors.⁷⁴ But within a negative ecology of value there may be other, more appropriate solutions.

Even if not undertaken with this intention, extending the boundaries of society to include members of other species is liable to devalue specifically human values, notably those of culture. Not only does it run counter to the Nietzschean argument that (super)humans, as the sole value-creating species, should live in a world that maximizes their capacity to flourish at the expense of other non-value generating species, but by including within society so many unregenerate philistines, it undermines the capacity for human culture to function as a shared value within the expanded society. In such a philistine ecology, some redundant piece of the West's cultural heritage might prove to be a suitable location for an autonomous simian group. Perhaps the Louvre, and its collections, could be put at the disposal of apes freed from zoos and research laboratories: the long galleries could be used for sleeping and recreation, the Jardin des Tuileries for foraging. Who but a Nietzschean could object?

⁷⁴ See R. E. Goodin, C. Pateman and R. Pateman, 'Simian Sovereignty', *Political Theory*, 25, 1997, pp. 821–49.