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'Wars the Like of Which One Has Never Seen'

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Introduction

‘WARS THE LIKE OF WHICH ONE HAS NEVER SEEN’: READING NIETZSCHE AND POLITICS

Letzte Erwägung	Last consideration
Könnten wir der Kriege entrathen, um so besser. Ich wüßte einen nützlicheren Gebrauch von den zwölf Milliarden zu machen, welche jährlich der bewaffnete Friede Europa kostet; es giebt noch andre Mittel, die Physiologie zu Ehren zu bringen, als durch Lazarethe ... Kurz und gut, sehr gut sogar: nachdem der alte Gott abgeschafft ist, bin ich bereit, die Welt zu regieren...	If we can forego wars, so much the better. I know of a better use for the twelve billions that the armed peace in Europe costs each year; there are other means to bring physiology to honor than military hospitals ... Well and good, indeed very good: after the old God is done away with, I am ready to rule the world. (WKG VIII/3, p. 460)
Genug: die Zeit kommt, wo man über Politik umlernen wird.	Enough: the time is coming when we will transform all our views about politics. (WKG VIII/1, p. 85)

Why ‘Nietzsche and Politics’ now?

Sixty years ago, as the West was just starting to read or reread Nietzsche, perhaps no opinion was more widely accepted about him than the one Thomas Mann had advanced some 20 years before the outbreak of the Second World War when he had associated himself with Nietzsche as an ‘unpolitical’ man (Mann, 1983, pp. 101–2). Mann claimed to take the phrase from Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo*; unfortunately, he got it slightly wrong. Mann speaks of ‘*unpolitische*’ but, as has been pointed out (Bergman, 1984, p. 4), he slightly misquotes the passage. Nietzsche says ‘*antipolitische*’.¹ Even, however, if we remain with the ‘anti-’ versus ‘un-’, it is not completely clear what that means. It could mean that Nietzsche was simply opposed to politics; or it could mean that he was politically opposed to the state when it interfered with culture. Or it could mean that he thought that in the future the contemporary political state – the ‘coldest of cold idols’ he calls it – would take over everything else, that the politicization of the world in terms of the present state was the future. It is noteworthy on this score that

1 The passage can be found in *Ecce Homo*. ‘Why I am so wise’. 3 in Schlechta, Vol. 2 (1955, p. 1.073). All other citations from Nietzsche are listed by book title, internal subdivision from *Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [henceforth WKG], volume number and subdivision and page. Abbreviations of titles are given in the bibliography.

as he steps into insanity; his last letters are notably political – he is having Bismarck and the young emperor shot (along with all anti-Semites); he is moving to the executive mansion in Italy; he is ready ‘to rule the world’ (WKG VIII-3 p. 460. See Strong, 1988c).

‘Nietzsche and politics’: as such the matter is hard to resolve. It is made all the more complex as the passage in question above happens to occur in a section of *Ecce Homo* that Nietzsche drastically revised. The revisions were sent to the printer in December, 1888. Nietzsche crossed into madness in early January, 1889, and the book was not printed until after his death, in 1908. Nietzsche’s sister, however, did not include the changes Nietzsche had made and the reason is not hard to find: the new pages include a violent attack on both his mother and his sister (‘to believe one is related to such *canaille* is a blasphemy’ (Wise, 3 WKG VI-3, p. 266)²). The revised version was not published until 1969 after Mazzino Montinari, one of the two editors of the now definitive edition, had discovered them in some of Peter Gast’s essays. The new section 3, however, does not repeat the comment about being the ‘last anti-political German’ and the phrase appears nowhere else in the *Ecce Homo* text. Clearly, getting what was wrong with his mother and sister right (the change is precipitated, he says, by seven years of calumny) was more important than the ‘anti-political’ self-designation, possibly because he goes on to say that his mother and sister are ‘the deepest objection’ to his most basic and ‘abysmal’ thought – that of eternal return. Since eternal return stands (as I read it) as an understanding of the world which, if practised, – we would now call it a praxis – will engender what he calls a transfiguration in who or what we are. So the change here may have something to do with political concerns.³

Nietzsche may have come to question the depth of his ‘anti-political’ necessities – the matter is hard to resolve. As to the scholarly question of Nietzsche and politics, the matter is very different today than it was for Thomas Mann. A computer search of a research university library using the terms ‘Nietzsche’ and ‘politics’ turns up over 1,400 hits, most of them since the late 1970s. The sense that Nietzsche has *something* to do with politics has become widespread. This is in part consequent to a more complex reading of the texts. Here the publication of Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures in 1961 and their influence on a new, non-Marxist, generation of German and especially French scholars, as well as slightly later on Anglo-American ones, was decisive. Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida (among others) and their coterie of brilliant students were all instrumental in developing new ways of drawing attention to Nietzsche. (See Allison, 1977). Reception for these new modes was, however, made possible by a set of political and social changes.

The academic generations of the 1960s and after did not directly experience the Second World War. We (for I am of them) were thus the first for whom the authority of the battles earlier fought was sufficiently attenuated as not to govern the way we approached a problem. Bluntly, being *against* fascism and soon even against Stalinism no longer appeared to many a sufficient basis for one’s politics or intellectual life. In this context, Nietzsche became attractive for several reasons.

First, Nietzsche raised the question of the health of a society as a whole (see, for example, WKG V-1, pp. 176–8). Standards of judgement, including moral standards, were analysed by Nietzsche in terms of structures of domination and power, that is, in political terms. This

2 See my discussion in Strong (1982).

3 These arguments are at the core of Strong (1975, 1988, 2000).

was not a reason for rejecting them (although some read Nietzsche this way), but it was a reason to raise general questions about the possibility that society as a whole must be changed. The 1960s seem to make cultural revolution a real possibility: something was happening in America, in Europe, in China, and no one knew what it was. This realization allowed readers to grope towards a Nietzsche who had broader concerns than the single individual.

Secondly, and more problematically, attraction to Nietzsche came from an extension of his claim that moral and social structures were disguised structures of domination. We found (or thought we saw) in Nietzsche a reason to be deeply suspicious of morality as a justification for action. These suspicions were not the old suspicions that morality might be a kind of subjective personal judgement. It was rather that the categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ seemed to be available to almost anyone. Hitler had clearly thought of what he was doing as ‘good’. Thus a particular kind of moral relativism developed in the wake of the Second World War. The energy and apparent clarity of purpose that the Nazis brought to the justification of their enterprise called the very categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ – that is moral categories as a way of organizing human affairs – into radical doubt. The question ‘what if Hitler had won?’ inescapably seemed to suggest that moral categories were relative to success and success relative to power. If that were so, the only apparent answer to Hitler appeared to be power. The question became if power could be or was a moral category: at the very least it radically undercut the pragmatist argument for morality popular with thinkers such as John Dewey. It is important, though, to remember that if the war made possible a kind of moral relativism, too many people, especially the young, too quickly thought themselves entitled to conclude that what they wanted was good simply because they wanted it (‘if it feels good, do it’). Nietzsche, moreover, understood that not anyone for any reason can at any time think him- or herself excused from morality.

Still, for some, moral relativism went only so far as the facile claim of ‘I-me-mine and there is nothing anyone else can say about it’, and, to some degree, it must be said, Nietzsche is responsible for making it appear unrealistically easy and safe. For others, though, reading Nietzsche made it possible to imagine a life that was not based on structures of imperatives (explicit or unconscious), on structures, that is, like those Kant had shown to be a necessary component of what we call morality. Nietzsche points to a life ‘beyond good and evil’ (Strong, 2003, pp. 535–62). In the enthusiasm of liberation, of course, many did not fully appreciate how difficult it is *not* to live in terms that are those of morality. (A letter to Lou Salomé says that she must ‘be liberated from her liberation’.)

Third and finally, at some deep and almost always unspoken level, I think Nietzsche attracted the post-war generation because his texts allow us to think seriously about the possibility of human extinction (see the essay by George Kateb in Chapter 15 of this volume). The deepest fact – not the most immediate or the most prominent – of our life might be said to be that we can destroy all life on the planet. The significance of this fact is that there are no other terms by which to understand human life than those it makes available to itself. Nietzsche had realized as deeply as anyone that human life had no reference to anything other than itself. This is what the ‘death of god’ means – that from now on we will be able to ‘play dice with gods at gods’ tables, for the earth is a table for the gods’ – that humans are the only determiners of value (Z Seven Seals 3, WKG VI-3, p. 296).

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Why so many different readings?

These are the conditions which seem to me to underlie the post-1970 explosion of interest in ‘Nietzsche and Politics’. What we find is an enormous range. From his first readers to his most recent ones, Nietzsche has found supporters and detractors almost everywhere. Why so? I shall argue that this in great part has to do with the nature of Nietzsche’s texts. He seems to write, as David Allison has recently remarked, ‘for you’ (Allison, 2001, p. 3). The particular quality of the man’s work seems to lend itself to every appropriation – and thus also to every mis-appropriation. This is true in ethics, in epistemology, in aesthetics. Here our concern is with politics.

From the point of view of political allegiance, it is well known that those prominent in public life who claim to have learned from or been influenced by Nietzsche have covered the widest possible range, and this from the end of the nineteenth century. In Germany, Social Democrats such as Kurt Eisner, who was to be murdered in January 1919, just after his defeat for reelection as head of the Bavarian Republic, found Nietzsche to be a ‘diagnostician of genius’. Additionally, anarchists, progressives hostile to laws oppressing socialists, feminists, youthful populist romantics of the *Wandervogel* movement – all found common ground in Nietzsche. And this is only on what one might almost call ‘the left’ (Taylor, 1990). The great social scientist Max Weber wrote to a student that a modern scholar must, if he is honest, admit ‘he could not have accomplished crucial parts of his own work without the contributions of Marx and Nietzsche’ (Baumgarten, 1964, p. 554). The political ‘right’, for instance those who made up the *Georgekreis*, with its Hellenic-inspired voluntarist protest against materialism and naturalism, read deeply into Nietzsche and this sometimes became fertile ground for sympathies to Nazism (even if the poet Stefan George himself kept his distance until his death in late 1933). (See the essay by Kurt Fischer, Chapter 2.) Geneviève Bianquis (1954) has demonstrated that the range of those similarly affected in France was the same.⁴

Among important thinkers, the top of the listing of those whose thought would not have been the same includes Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger in Germany; in France Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault as well as existentialism and deconstructionism in general. Theologically he is important to both Christianity and Judaism: one finds his influence in, among others, Paul Tillich and Lev Shestov as well as in Thomas J.J. Altizer and Martin Buber (who translated the first part of *Zarathustra* into Polish). In psychology, Adler and Jung were deeply influenced, as was Sigmund Freud, who said of Nietzsche that he had ‘a more penetrating understanding of himself than any man who ever lived or was ever likely to live’.⁵ Nor was his influence limited to Europe. Early on he was of importance in Japan; Chinese intellectuals such as Lu Xun and Guo Moro, both later to become prominent in the Chinese Communist Party, were readers of Nietzsche.⁶ Politically, Maurice Barrès, T.E. Lawrence, as well as even less savoury characters such as the members of the *Cagoule* and the *Croix de Feu* come to mind. Novelists and literary figures include Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, André Malraux, André Gide, George Bernard Shaw, H.L. Mencken, Rainer Maria Rilke and William Butler Yeats, as well as John Gardner and

4 On Germany see Thomas (1983); Behler (1981/1982).

5 My list draws on one formulated by Bernd Magnus – it is the obvious one and by no means of any less importance for that.

6 Becker, (1983). Parkes, (1993) as well as several works by Cheung (1992, 2001).

John Banville among contemporaries. One could even include Milos Forman and Arnold Schwarzenegger.⁷

In the contemporary period, the range of readings has, if anything, expanded. My selections in Part II and III below are but a very thin slice from a very thick loaf. From various points of view and with many others (see the selections here), scholars claimed to find resources and/or inspiration for a ‘democratic’ vision in Nietzsche. William Connolly (1988, 2002) was one of the first, but others such as Mark Warren (1988), Keith Ansell-Pearson (1991a), Bonnie Honig (1993a), Daniel Conway (1997) and Lawrence Hatab (1995) soon followed and have, in different ways, found in Nietzsche the basis for a radical rethinking of the basic principles of democratic politics. They do not claim that he *is* a democrat (though Hatab says he should have been) but that his thought permits and in fact requires a rethinking of the bases of democratic politics. Others like James Conant (2000) and David Owen (1994, 1995) (and on occasion myself (Strong, 1988a, 1996)) find in Nietzsche a perfectionism that is germane to the thought of Emerson and Stanley Cavell.

This ‘left-Nietzscheanism’, as Alasdair MacIntyre dubbed it (MacIntyre, 1981),⁸ has not gone unopposed. Dom Dombowsky (2004), Thomas Pangle (1986 and below), Peter Berkowitz (1995), Frederick Appel (1999), Bruce Detwiler (1990) and many others, have constructed arguments around passages where Nietzsche defends slavery, where he appears as an elitist calling for a great man or great men, where he seems misogynist (Oliver and Pearsall, (eds) 1988)⁹ – this is Nietzsche the ‘aristocrat’. The selections chosen for this volume represent some of this diversity.

This diversity raises a number of important questions. Nietzsche has provided inspiration for almost anyone who cared to seek or claim it. It is perhaps the lot of any great thinker to be greater than all the possible interpretations made of him or her. In this sense, one might (almost) say that none of these interpretations is in itself *wrong*. But then none would be right and this, too, seems unsatisfactory. Surely Nietzsche meant *something* or was *trying* to mean something: how do we account for passages which appear simply incompatible one with the other? I should say before I proceed that, if what follows seems like a blanket critique, it is; but that does not obviate the fact that I have learned much from many commentators on Nietzsche both in agreement and disagreement. Some of my closest friends are Nietzsche scholars and I am proud to be theirs.

A number of explanations for the diversity of interpretations have been advanced. Some have suggested that Nietzsche is *internally inconsistent*, that he is simply confused or that he never understood that various parts of his teaching (say the will to power and the doctrine of eternal return) did not and could not go together. Thus Walter Kaufmann, in a hugely influential book in English-speaking countries (Kaufmann, 1975), found Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal return to be ‘of dubious value’, despite the fact that Nietzsche seems to say that it is the centrepiece of his teaching. Others, such as Karl Jaspers (1977) and in a different way Wolfgang Müller-Lauter (1999a), have allowed that Nietzsche does contain contradictions

7 One cannot resist recalling that *Conan the Barbarian* has as epigraph a truncated quote from Nietzsche (‘Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger’)

8 MacIntyre (1981) where the present author (1975) is labelled such.

9 Note, however, that these texts do not all read Nietzsche simply as a misogynist. See also Smith and Strong (forthcoming).

but that these contradictions are there purposefully. Thus they argue that he writes in such a way as to provide a negation to any assertion he might be understood as making.

Others see all this as the result of an *evolution* in his thought. A still somewhat standard reading of Nietzsche divides him into three periods: the youthful Wagner-intoxicated romantic phase; then a ‘positivist’ or ‘naturalist’ phase lasting at least through the first four books of *The Gay Science* though possibly reappearing in portions of *The Genealogy of Morals*. Finally there would be his ‘mature’ phase – the writings of the 1880s after *Gay Science* I–IV, and possibly even a final phase, that of his ‘collapse’, that would include some or all of the work of 1888.¹⁰ Those who adopt something like these divisions argue not so much that he is inconsistent but that, as he matures or encounters new ideas, he changes his mind and that this accounts for the wide range of those who find him important (for some he changes in 1874, for others in 1876, or perhaps in 1882, or perhaps in 1887 – it depends on what mind he is said to have, I suppose). Sometimes these shifts correspond to breaks with important friends, a first one with Wagner and a second with Lou-Salomé.

Still others have argued that it is not so much a matter of the various supposed doctrines being incompatible with each other, nor of his thought having evolved, as that he was *analytically confused* and offered unwittingly different versions of the same doctrines, some of them sound, others not.¹¹ A variant on this finds the confusions to derive from the attribution of an overvalued status given to the *Nachlass*, the extensive series of notebooks in which Nietzsche jotted down ideas and sketched out his writing. As it can be shown that much of the material in the notebooks consists not only of material that Nietzsche later explicitly rejected but also of preliminary and revised drafts of work later published, often in very different forms, hence material corrected by Nietzsche as he got a particular passage right, there is clearly something to this claim.¹²

What to make of all this? Most of the above readings, different though they are, refuse to see Nietzsche’s work as a whole. I think that they all pretty much fail to take seriously the impact and import of Allison’s claim that Nietzsche writes ‘for you’. Allison is referring to the fact that, when reading Nietzsche, I (or you or she) have the feeling that he is speaking directly to *me*. We have this sense, I argue, because Nietzsche does in fact write *purposely* such that anyone (almost anyone) may respond to him or rather to some part of his work.¹³ (Those readers who have taught Nietzsche have perhaps had the experience I have often had of finding a student entranced by some aspect of Nietzsche – and of being not a little worried about the student’s reaction). Nietzsche, one should remember, was a student and teacher of classical rhetoric to a depth that in our world has almost been lost: he knew it intimately and used it.

All of this raises a range of questions about the quality and nature of rhetoric in Nietzsche, about the role of style in philosophy, questions that have lurked on the periphery of Anglo-American mainstream philosophy for some time and only recently – most especially in work

10 The tripartite division is very widespread. Erich Podach (1961) adds the fourth division.

11 Alexander Nehamas in his early work (1985) is the most sophisticated exemplar of this approach. See my analysis in Strong (2000a, Chapter 10).

12 See Magnus (1986). The strongest case for the primacy of the *Nachlass* is made by Heidegger (1961).

13 See Strong (1988a, 1995). A politically complex version (a combination of Louis Althusser, Mao Zedong and Leo Strauss) of this has been given in Waite (1996).

on Plato, on Wittgenstein – and on Nietzsche – have begun to reassume the place that they had in ancient times.¹⁴ If I raise the question of style on my way to a consideration of what Nietzsche says about politics and the wars to come, it is because the rhetorical quality of what he says is prominent.

The philosophical and political import of ‘rhetoric’

No one can fail to recognize the rhetorical quality of Nietzsche’s writing. Some take it very seriously and find that style to be the source of political danger. In a recent book, Heinz Schlaffer has argued that Nietzsche’s style has had the effect of hyperbolizing contemporary political understandings. Thus, after Nietzsche, when one speaks of leadership in a political context, one thinks of a ‘super’-leader, one who is a leader of leaders. Nietzsche may have thought of such a person as a philosopher (as Heidegger was shortly to do), but when that possibility fades away, the ‘word is unbound’ and that idea of what a leader needs to be remains. And this can have, argues Schlaffer, deleterious political consequences (Schlaffer, 2007, esp. pp. 142ff.¹⁵

This is a serious argument and it raises the question of the responsibility of a writer for the unintended consequences that his writing permits (see the essay by Fischer, Chapter 2). It is not, however, the response of most of those who take note of Nietzsche’s rhetoric and style. Most of those who pay attention to his rhetoric (often referred to as his ‘rhetorical excesses’) generally avail themselves of it to excuse Nietzsche from one or another claim or to point out a philosophical ‘mistake’. The general form of such argument is that ‘behind’ the rhetoric there is an argument that one can reconstruct. This is an attempt to see what one can get ‘out’ of Nietzsche – a tacit reproach goes with such statements. What this has led to, however, is a multitude of readings that seek to excuse Nietzsche from some apparent implications of his writings on the grounds that ‘Nietzsche certainly did not believe X’ – it is rather as if one were trying to prevent his work from being taken as the platform of a particular party.

After the Second World War, Walter Kaufmann (1975) was the first great master of the apology based on rhetoric (although Richard Schacht (1985, 2000) has occasionally availed himself of this approach, as have others.) There were political-historical reasons for this stance. Not only had the First World War been tagged by Bertrand Russell as ‘Nietzsche’s War’, not only had a copy of Zarathustra been standard issue for each soldier in the Wehrmacht (see William Salter, Chapter 1, this volume),¹⁶ but the subsequent appropriation of Nietzsche by the Nazis required a rehabilitation for him to be granted admission to a philosophical host. Nietzsche could appear to be responsible and/or possibly supportive (in some senses of the term) of the military horrors of the century. To distance him from these events, Kaufmann generally proceeded by suggesting that when Nietzsche spoke of, for example, war, he really meant a war like the Franco-Prussian war. To Nietzsche’s apparently derogatory remarks about Jews,¹⁷ Kaufmann adduced counter anti-anti-Semitic quotations with the explicit or latent

14 See, for example, Garsten (2006) without, however, any consideration of Nietzsche.

15 Thanks to Babette Babich for calling this book to my attention.

16 The link is made also in Willoughby (1918), p. 257. See also Rie (1952).

17 On the general question of Nietzsche and the Jews, see Kofman (1994) [translation by Strong in *New Nietzsche Studies*, 2008], as well as the other essays in this issue; Golomb and Wistrich (2002);

assertion that the offending words were consequent to the spirit of the times or to Wagner's baleful influence. (Thus Kaufmann casts ridicule on everything in the *Birth of Tragedy* after Chapter 15, even asserting that Nietzsche should have stopped there).

This approach leads to much work that seeks to present what Nietzsche *would have said* had he been writing in a manner aimed at publishing in a contemporary philosophical journal. So we are given what would have/should have been Nietzsche's arguments, which are then subjected to the kind of critical analysis that philosophers are good at. I should say that I do not criticize this work in a blanket fashion. The material on Nietzsche in a book like Alasdair MacIntyre's (1984, 2007) strikes me as important as does that of Alexander Nehamas (1985). James Conant (2000), following a lead from Stanley Cavell, helps us read or reread some of Nietzsche's early work. David Owen's (2007) and Aaron Ridley's (1998) respective recent books on 'the genealogy of morals' provoke one in fruitful ways, whether or not one ultimately agrees with the conclusions.

However, relatively few commentators have centred their readings of Nietzsche around his rhetoric. Most of these work in a vein that one might call 'continental' and are often European.¹⁸ In any case, those who deny that Nietzsche's style and rhetoric are centrally important¹⁹ to his philosophical teaching are, I think, seriously wrong. In 'The Doctrine of Style', ten numbered notes or commandments presented to Lou Salomé in 1882, Nietzsche writes: 'The style must be appropriate with respect to a definite person in whom you wish to confide (*der du dich mitteilen willst*).' He calls this the 'law of the double relation'. He continues: 'A wealth of life betrays itself in a wealth of gestures. One must learn to perceive everything, the length and brevity of the sentences, the punctuation marks, the choice of words, the pauses, the sequence of the arguments – as gestures' (WKG VII-1, p. 34). What this means is that Nietzsche crafted *everything* that he published with great and purposive care. If one takes this claim seriously it means that *everything* in his published texts is there for a purpose, including that which appears as 'excessive'.

This is a strong claim – it is rather like saying that there is *nothing* about da Vinci's *La Gioconda* (the 'Mona Lisa') that is not essential to that painting.²⁰ It is like saying that *every* word in Robert Frost's 'Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening' is exactly necessary to the poem. Or it is like Schumann's response when asked, upon finishing a piece, as to its meaning. His response was to play it again, every note. Presumably not even Nietzsche was able to attain perfection in all of his writing; but it is significant that this is what he sought to do and this means that dismissing some aspect of it as 'overblown rhetoric' will most likely proceed from an unrecognized prejudice.

Yovel (1998).

¹⁸ Aside from those mentioned above, one might note Babette Babich, Angèle Kremer-Marietti, Gary Shapiro, Jacques Derrida, Sarah Kofman, Peter Sloterdijk and a host of others

¹⁹ For example Brian Leiter (but not just him). See, for instance, his contribution of 'Nietzsche' to the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* where he argues that Nietzsche's 'penchant for hyperbolic rhetoric and polemics often leads him' to 'overstate' his case.

²⁰ This is Freud's conclusion in his analysis of the Moses statue by Michelangelo and is the assumption that permits his analysis. See Strong (1984).

Rhetoric and the reader

In analysing Nietzsche's work, one must then proceed very carefully and slowly – one must *listen* to it – for such writing is always a temptation to conclude. As such it is also meant to be a temptation and to be experienced as such. Nothing in Nietzsche can be read properly without hearing the resonance that any section of a sentence sets up, both with the rest of the sentence and with the rest of the entry of which it is a part, and with those that are around it.²¹ Werner Dannhauser (1974, pp. 195, 197, 203–4), in an excellent book on Nietzsche's relation to Socrates, properly points to the importance of the aphorism in Nietzsche's thought. He writes: 'It is not easy to determine when he is being quoted out of context because it is not easy to see whether there is context or what it is.' Dannhauser continues by (properly, I think) indicating that the aphorism is a counter to the treatise as a form of philosophizing. Then he says that aphorisms 'broach problems rather than solve them' and indicates that aphorisms are 'generalizations [which] are to be taken as stimulating insights rather than as final truths'. He gives as an example: 'One aphorism declares "What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger"'.²²

The citation is from *Twilight of the Idols* (Epigrams 8). What Dannhauser gives is indeed a generalization, to which, he properly notes, one could find all sorts of counterexamples. To the degree that the sentence he cites is an aphorism, it is indeed a kind of stimulus, not a 'final truth'. However, for whatever reason, Dannhauser has not given us the aphorism that Nietzsche wrote. Nietzsche wrote rather: '*From the military school of life.* – What doesn't kill me makes me stronger.' The two parts of the aphorism resonate with each other (as do the italics) and forbid a simple conclusiveness about what Nietzsche 'means'. What does it mean to speak from 'the military school of life', – especially as the aphorism now becomes part of a military *training*, perhaps a training that is necessary to write a book like the *Twilight*, one which Nietzsche says is a 'declaration of war'? And 'war' is here, Nietzsche says, a way of wounding *oneself*, so that one can heal from being 'too inward, too deep' (TI-Foreword).

I leave these questions unanswered except to call attention to the fact that they make the whole matter of reading anything in Nietzsche much more complex than the conclusion that Nietzsche is a propagandist for *Conan the Barbarian*. However, a few things can be noted. First, whatever an aphorism is, it is *all* of its words. The sentence that Dannhauser gives (as Nietzsche's) is different than the sentences that Nietzsche gives. A sentence does not an aphorism make; *resonance between parts of a sentence (or the entry as a whole) does*. Secondly, Nietzsche's sentences *lend themselves to being wanted to be remembered*, as Dannhauser gives them – without the shaping tone that gives thickness to an otherwise bald assertion. *Therefore part of recovering the whole is remembering that one did not want to remember it*. Thus wanting to get it wrong is part of getting it right. As Babette Babich has written:

The reader who falls short of the aphorism's resonant or entire meaning, i.e. the reader who misses its musical significance, not only fails to 'get it', as we say, but this failure is ineluctable because it is a failure unawares, hence, and effectively, incorrigible. Any aphorism, every Nietzschean text, has at least two points, if not indeed many more, which excess permits most readers to come away with

²¹ The material in the next several paragraphs draws upon my 'Introduction' to Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* (1997). It has been revised and, I hope improved, following a conversation with Simon May. See also Babich in Acampora (2006).

at least a partial notion of the text ... Taking up the musical sense of the aphorism, one keeps both its subject matter and its development as part of a whole. Thus positions, statements at variance with one another are not simple *contradictions* but *contrapuntal* ... (Babich, 2002, p. 178).

The aphorism – his writing – must thus, in a third manner, be read musically, *concinuously*, that is, as a musical unification of dissonant themes.²² This has two elements to it. First is the resonance that occurs within and between sections, even within sentences themselves. Second, this is a text which draws upon the classical style, while subverting its elements in terms of the apparent relations of consonance and dissonance that it creates.

An argument for the importance of ‘musicality’ is made in Crépon’s essay (Chapter 16). As a more extended example of the (‘musical’) complexities of reading Nietzsche, let me take section five of ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’ of *Twilight*. Nietzsche begins:

Given that one has grasped the sacrilege of such a revolt against life, like the revolt that has become nearly sacrosanct in Christian morality, one thus has, fortunately, grasped something else as well: the uselessness, illusiveness, absurdity, and mendacity of such a revolt.

The operant subjectivity of the paragraph is not defined: it is ‘one’. This realization is available in principle to anyone, at least anyone in our historical position. The sentence is a kind of invitation: ‘Are you part of this “one”?, Might you see yourself that way?’ The whole entry is premised on a conditional, a conditional that already requires inverting one’s normal understanding of the idea of sacrilege. Here it is *sacrilege* to claim that God can in fact look into one’s heart. We know that God can look into one’s heart (the traditional musical tonic chord, one might say). To claim this, however, must appear as sacrilege, that is, as a profanation of God. The text appears first to offer a stance towards life, but it does so in precisely the terms (sacrilege) which it takes over from that which it claims to criticize. The first move in this paragraph requires, in other words, the use of religious language and categories in an irreligious manner. One might think that this constitutes a condemnation of religion by Nietzsche. However, the initial resolution appears now not to resolve the matter but to call up something else. Nietzsche continues:

A condemnation of life by one who is alive remains, in the end, just a symptom of a particular kind of life: this does not at all raise the question of whether the condemnation is justified or unjustified.

Any condemnation of life as such is a manifestation of something profoundly wrong. A condemnation of life requires that one tacitly assume a position outside life; thus, that is false to oneself, one that lies. So attacking God remains inside a framework which *lies*. It is to assume the stance of God in the name of denying God – hardly an advance. Again, grasping this is apparently available to anyone – as shown by the persistent use of ‘*man*’ (one) in the first part of the entry. Nietzsche continues:

22 The term and the argument for it can be found in Babich (1990), pp. 59–80. Her footnote 17 gives a good summary of various commentators who have read Nietzsche as musical. Note that such considerations mean that the material in Nietzsche’s notebooks, the so-called *Nachlass*, is by and large *not* a ‘Nietzschean’ text. It is the elements that become a composition, the composition itself. Babich makes the same point. All of this in great part confirms Bernd Magnus’ argument for ‘splitters’ over ‘lumpers’ (of the published work over the *Nachlass*) in Magnus *et al.* (1993).

One would have to occupy a position outside life, and on the other hand to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be allowed even to touch upon the problem of the value of life:

To even raise the question of the value of life means to have placed oneself in the position of being abstractly outside life. It means to adopt a stance promiscuously monarchical, aristocratic or democratic and in that also claim exemption from the judgement being made of and on the world. To understand in this way, however, would be to change who is the subject. Nietzsche again, following immediately from the colon that ends the previous citation:

... these are reasons enough to grasp that, for us, this problem is an inaccessible problem. When we speak of values, we speak under the inspiration, under the optics of life: life itself is forcing us to posit values, life itself is valuing by means of us, if [and/or 'when': wenn] we posit values ...

Note how the insistent 'one' yields here to a 'we'. A seductive new resolution is proposed: that of 'life'. Those who understand ('we') that 'life' is the answer will realize that there is nothing to do but to succumb to the realization that there is nothing to say, that the problem is 'inaccessible'. (In 'How the "Time Word" Became a Fable', the capsule history of Western philosophy Nietzsche has just given in the previous section, he associates this position with positivism). Again the reader is tempted to feel a part of the apparent fraternity of insight. With this move the subject-reader (if he or she has joined this 'we') finds itself particular, non-universal, implicitly an elite. It makes a difference who is asking – the passage leads the reader to accept this by implicitly offering the reader a resting space with the new 'we'.

It follows from this that even that anti-natural morality that takes God to be the antithesis and condemnation of life is only one of life's value judgments – a judgment made by which life? Which kind of life?

This is what 'morality as it has been understood up to now' is – a condemnation by the condemned, and this includes even the judgement that God is the antithesis to life. When the reader started this section – 'Morality as Anti-Nature' – there seemed to be an expectation that morality would be opposed to 'nature'. Now it appears that, as Nietzsche says in the next paragraph, that the problem comes when morality 'condemns on its own grounds', that is, when morality moralizes itself. Notice that an example of morality's self-moralization is the judgement that God is the antithesis to life. The question ('... which life? Which kind of life?') is raised therefore of the kind of life that makes such a judgement, that requires such a judgement. Who is it that says there is nothing to be said about 'life'? This question itself succumbs to a temptation to think that consonance has been achieved. Thus Nietzsche will immediately undermine the apparent finality of this 'we' by subtracting himself from it – but then who and what is left of the 'we'? We had associated ourselves with what we thought to be Nietzsche's position but now he tells us this was wrong.

– I already gave the answer: declining, weakened, tired, and condemned life.

The sudden intrusion from the 'I' announces that there is no help from Nietzsche here: what he has to say he has already said; the reader did not grasp it but thought that he or she did. The answer is what it has always been and has been here since before we started the paragraph.

It is as if we missed the tonic when it went by. In effect we have to start over: we are back at the beginning, knowing it, however, perhaps for a first time.²³ In wanting to agree with what I had thought Nietzsche to be saying I have shown myself to be declining, weak, tired: I have condemned my life.

Nietzsche's writing thus calls up (or can call up) a *critical relation* between what the reader wants and what the text makes available and requires of the reader. The effect is to call into question precisely the desire to give resolution and to bring consonance to experience. This is what Nietzsche in his preface to *Twilight* calls 'sounding out idols', idols which function here as 'eternal truths', that is, as truths which claim for themselves a permanent moral standing. To 'sound out an idol' with, as he says, a tuning fork, means rather to produce a *dissonance*, the contrast between the tone of the fork and the sound the idol makes when struck. Thus Nietzsche says that the human being is a dissonance.

Producing self-criticality: where is authority?

(Almost) all of Nietzsche can and should be read like this. One has to hear the text with ones eyes. In reading Nietzsche, and especially in reading Nietzsche about politics, this means the following. When one thinks that one understands Nietzsche (whether affirmatively or negatively) the first thing one should do is ask oneself 'why is it that I want to think that *this* is what Nietzsche means?' Typically, one will find, as with my analysis of the aphorism above, that one has left something out, and a conclusion about which one was confident finds itself undercut. This requires a self-examination as why it is that I was drawn to find my initial conclusion correct. Nietzsche's writing would thus generate a self-critical relationship of the reader to the conclusions that he or she wishes to draw. In this way it has a *therapeutic* aim – it requires or can require the reader to be (self-)critical. It also means that what Nietzsche writes does not spring from a position in which he has assumed the position of a final arbiter. He is not telling you what is the case but helping you to find it for yourself. Paradoxically, he achieves this most often by writing in such a way that you think that his is the voice of authority.²⁴ At his best, which is often, Nietzsche forces the reader to come to grips with his or her own unexamined needs and desires: to be self-critical and thus to become his or her own authority. He is trying to make it possible for *you* to cure *yourself*, to 'become what you are', in the phrase from Pindar's second *Pythian Ode* that serves as a touchstone for his enterprise.²⁵ He is not telling you what to do or what to be. The multiple understandings of Nietzsche are all (shall I say 'almost all?'), to some degree, understandings of those who have not adequately turned their understanding back on themselves.

I am not arguing that each of us has his or her 'own' Nietzsche. I am arguing that Nietzsche *purposely* writes in such a manner as to make most of those whose read him think that they have understood Nietzsche, only to find, on further careful or more careful reading or rereading – Nietzsche tells us he is a proponent of the *lento* in reading – that they have made

23 Cf. the opening lines of 'Peoples and Fatherlands' in *Beyond Good and Evil*: 'I hear it again for the first time – the overture to *Die Meistersinger* ...'

24 See the extended discussion in my 'Texts, Pretexts and the Subject: Perspectivism in Nietzsche' (Strong, 2000, Chapter 10, esp. p. 308). An earlier version appeared in Strong (1985).

25 See the analysis of this phrase in Babich (2006b).

something out of Nietzsche after their own image, an image or an idol that they must now call into question. In the section of *Ecce Homo* in which he explains why he writes such good books, he says:

Ultimately, nobody can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience one will have no ear. Now let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any frequent or even rare experience – that it is a first language for a new series of experiences ... This is in the end my average experience and, if you will, the originality of my experience. Whoever thought he had understood something of me, had made up something out of me, after his own image ...²⁶

From this we can see why both the ‘aristocratic’ and ‘democratic’ readings of Nietzsche are possible and why they are incomplete without each other. Aristocracies are about elites. There are, however, two ways of thinking about the question of an ‘elite’, a conception that Nietzsche clearly has. The first consists in holding the position that some individuals are, by the nature or their endowments, simply superior to the others. These are by their order or rank, entitled to whatever is theirs, perhaps to rule. At times, for instance in the early text *The Greek State* (appended to this volume), Nietzsche sounds as if he shares this position. The other way of thinking about an ‘elite’ consists in asking why is it that most humans are content to, as Thoreau put it, ‘live lives of quiet desperation’, that they are not more than they are or more of who they are. Here one would look at the way in which a sense of possibility and transformation has been slowly erased from human capacities. (This is the source of Nietzsche’s distress with the consequences of Socratic rationalism and Pauline Christianity.) This more ‘critical’ reading, to which I generally subscribe, also shows how ‘critical theorists’, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, could think to draw upon Nietzsche. (See Part IV of this volume.) The advantages and disadvantages of this reading are manifest in the relevant selections below. This reading does raise the question of the possibility of human excellence in an age that tends to make human mediocrity seem all there is or can be.

From this we have some sense of the question of different periods in Nietzsche’s writings. In his first work, he had been quite clear that human excellence was in principle available to all. At the end of *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, he will indicate that it is the glory of Wagner’s music to ‘enlighten the poor and lowly and melt the arrogance of the learned ... [N]ow that it has come about, it must transform the very notion of education and culture in the spirit of everyone who experiences it; it will seem to him that a curtain has been raised on a future in which there are no longer any great and good things except those which all hearts share in common. The abuse (*Schimpf*) which has hitherto clung to the word “common” will have then been removed from it’ (RWB 10, WKG IV, pp. 75–6).²⁷ The reception – or rather non-

26 *Ecce Homo*. ‘Why I Write such Good Books’. I WKG VI-3, p. 296: Zuletzt kann Niemand aus den Dingen, die Bücher eingerechnet, mehr heraushören, als er bereits weiss. Wofür man vom Erlebnisse her keinen Zugang hat, dafür hat man kein Ohr. Denken wir uns nun einen äussersten Fall, dass ein Buch von lauter Erlebnissen redet, die gänzlich ausserhalb der Möglichkeit einer häufigen oder auch nur seltneren Erfahrung liegen. — dass es die erste Sprache für eine neue Reihe von Erfahrungen ist ... Dies ist zuletzt meine durchschnittliche Erfahrung und, wenn man will, die Originalität meiner Erfahrung. Wer Etwas von mir verstanden zu haben glaubte, hat sich Etwas aus mir zurecht gemacht, nach seinem Bilde, ...

27 See Strong (1996). See also the Crépon essay (Chapter 16).

reception – of his first book, however, forces him to abandon his youthful enthusiastic hopes for a political regeneration of culture (Strong, 1996). He spends the rest of the 1870s in self-examination: what was it that led him to be wrong? And, I think, he spends much of the 1880s in an examination of the various human practices that make understanding him by others difficult to impossible. Thus *Zarathustra* can be read as in great part about various human social and political institutions; *Genealogy* is about morality; *Beyond Good and Evil* is about *Wissenschaft*; *Twilight* is about authority, etc. These are not rejections so much as they are *critiques*: they explore what has to be the case for humans to engage in these various practices and what the meaning, both present and future, of that engagement is.

Nietzsche has been read: left, right, centre and other

With this in mind, we can look at some of the political readings. Nietzsche did say that he was one thing and his writings another, but this cannot be taken to mean that we excuse what we find problematic in his writings because they are not (really) Nietzsche. (Here we could discuss the relation between Nietzsche the man and Nietzsche the author: again precisely the question of style). Here we have the question of how Nietzsche is appropriated for political thinking.

For some the issue is ‘misappropriation’. Walter Kaufmann (and others) argue that Nietzsche’s thought has been put to ends of which he never would have approved. In such a reading, one finds that Nietzsche is above all a nice man, *d’esprit un peu bohémien* – and certainly different from the readings that people have managed to make of him. The misappropriation theory excuses Nietzsche – importantly on no philosophical grounds – from the company that would keep him (see Strong, 1995).

Others are concerned to appropriate Nietzsche, to enlist him as a philosopher with whom they share important values. This is tolerant appropriation and its various forms shape most of the debates surrounding the general question of Nietzsche and politics. Importantly there is toleration on both the Left and the Right (to use some outdated terms²⁸) readings of Nietzsche. On the ‘Right’, Peter Berkowitz (1995), for instance, argues (a) that Nietzsche believes there can be, and advocates that there should be, a rank order among human beings; (b) that there are therefore standards governing human affairs and that it is the task of the philosopher to discover and comprehend them; (c) that Nietzsche holds that ‘flourishing or spirituality’ (what Berkowitz calls ‘the supreme form of human excellence’) requires a ‘suprapolitical’ life. Hence what Nietzsche says about history, art, morality and religion may best be understood as an ethics. Nietzsche’s other writings prepare the way for the highest human type, to be found, according to Berkowitz, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Berkowitz, as well as authors like those mentioned above, find in Nietzsche an argument for a kind of superior being, for an order of rank, arguments that they share and find convincing. In an interesting variant of this, Tamsin Shaw (2007, p. 152) argues that Nietzsche presents an important critique of some aspects of liberal political thought but that his ‘aristocratic’ biases prevent him from seeing the possibilities for liberal democracy. (‘He could not acknowledge that the development of reason, and therefore the greatest hope for truth, might require publicity.’)

²⁸ It is perhaps a sign of the thinness of our political life that we still use terms that originally designated relative seating positions in the French Assembly of the 1790s.

Against this reading, but still tolerant of Nietzsche, one can find a range of people from Leslie Thiele (1990a) to a book like that of Larry Hatab (1995) on ‘Nietzsche and democracy’, some of whom share the perfectionist reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator* mentioned above. What is democratic about perfectionism? In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche writes that only the person who ‘has attached his heart to some great man [what he calls here an exemplar] receives thereby the first blessings of culture’.²⁹ The purpose of culture is the production of what he calls ‘genius’. One should tread slowly here. Genius is a term that Nietzsche almost certainly here takes from Emerson, in whose style the *Considerations* are written. Emerson writes: ‘To believe in your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all – that is genius.’ (Emerson, 1979, p. 259). And already in ‘The American Scholar’ Emerson had noted that genius was ‘the sound estate of everyman’ (Emerson, 1983, p. 57). Genius, we find in Nietzsche, is used interchangeably with what he calls (still in *Schopenhauer as Educator*) ‘the furthering of the emergence of true human beings’ and he explicitly says that this is in principle possible for everyone (SE 6, WKG III-1, p. 383).³⁰ One’s own voice is the voice of genius: the problem is to find one’s own voice. The perfectionist reading can attach itself to the critical-theoretical reading. I am reminded of a fine phrase in Mark Twain’s notebooks: ‘All of us have music and truth inside but most have a hard time getting it out.’ The question that should follow from Twain’s note is ‘why not?’ (See here Crépon’s essay (Chapter 16) and my essay (Strong, Chapter 17).³¹)

These readings are not illegitimate: one can clearly learn from a thinker without having to accept everything he or she says. Neither of these forms of toleration is wrong, but neither do I find either of them completely satisfactory.

Nietzsche and the question of Nazism

I do not find these readings satisfactory because in the last 60 years one attempt at appropriation has not been tolerated at all – that essayed by the Nazis. The question that must be confronted here is why it is that we tend to allow a range of understandings of Nietzsche, referring them possibly to the interpretative space opened up by the exuberance of his style, but find that of the Nazis illegitimate. First it is important to recognize that some of the Nazis who appropriated Nietzsche were not idiots. Alfred Bäumler, a philosopher who joined the party in 1933 (and was promptly given a chair at Berlin), for instance, was not only the author of *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker* (1931) but of an important book on aesthetics, neither of which can be dismissed, as did Walter Kaufmann, as the work of a ‘hack’.³² And he was not the only one: there were smart Nazis and their relation to Nietzsche cannot be ignored. (See the essay by Kurt Fischer, Chapter 2 and Taureck (1989)).

29 SE 6, WKG III-1, p. 381: *empfangt damit die erste Weihe der Kultur* [trans modified from Hollingdale].

30 I give ‘emergence’ for *Entstehung* as opposed to Hollingdale’s ‘production’. Delicacy in translation is essential to this essay. A translation that gives ‘specimen’ for *Exemplar* and ‘production’ for *Entstehung* makes us think of the ‘production of specimens’ rather than the ‘emergence of exemplars’.

31 These issues also come up in, for instance, Redhead and Connolly (1997), pp. 183–93 and 194–202.

32 Bäumler (1923). See also Sluga (1993) and Halberstam (1999).

Secondly, what is one to make of the relation of Nietzsche to the thought and practice of National Socialism? There are two issues here: first, one might ask if Nazism is a singular aberration in the history of the West or if it is an inherently possible development of dynamics in the Western form of life (in the way that someone like Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe argues that it develops from humanism) (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990). If it is an aberration (say, due to a historically specific combination of the sense of betrayal after the First World War, of a revengeful peace, of the particularities of German anti-Semitism and of the development of technologies of propaganda), then it need not be part of future history and there is no need to do anything except to make sure that it does not happen again. Any relation Nietzsche might be said to have to it will be destined for the historical trash heap. This stance has been highly significant for political philosophy as much of the political philosophy written since the Second World War has been done with the more or less explicit aim of making sure that ‘it’ never happens again – to shut down, that is, *any* possibility of anything that looks like Nazism. Any association of Nietzsche with it would be historically contingent and not organic.

The second issue has to do with Nietzsche’s understanding of his own thought. On the one hand, he could have held that his work constitutes or engenders a break in the history of thought – that he was the actual start of something new. On the other hand, Nietzsche could see himself as identifying developments inherent in his time but not at present understood. (This would be his ‘untimeliness’.) His thought would not engender a break even if it might call for one: in this light he would expect, as he seems to say, the next two hundred years to continue the development of dynamics inherent in his time.

There is thus a matrix of possible readings.

	Nietzsche is a break	Nietzsche sees development
Nazism as aberration	Nazi use is an unforeseen misappropriation	Nazi’s use is a misappropriation as they are a dead end.
Nazism as development of elements of the West	Nietzsche is wrong if he sounds like them (Kaufmann etc.)	The Nazis can appropriate Nietzsche: they are part of the organic history and future of the West (though not all of it)

With this in mind we can turn to the immediate problem here: the political status of the question of the wars that Nietzsche predicts. What is clear is that it simply will not do to claim that he is limited by his experience and that, when he, in *The Greek State*, ‘chants a paean in favor of war’ (for which he begs our pardon), that ‘all’ he has in mind is the Franco-Prussian war. There are to be wars ‘the like of which has not been seen’. Furthermore, as early as the last aphorism in ‘A Glance at the State’ in the first volume of *Human, All-Too-Human*, Nietzsche raises the question of ‘great politics’.

What are ‘great politics’?

The first thing to notice is that Nietzsche does not seem to think that the concept of great politics need give particular difficulty. All, or almost all, of the uses of *grosse Politik* are in books that he has published. The fact that the term does not appear in the *Nachlass* means at least that he did not think it complex enough to spend time working it out. On this first level, *grosse Politik* simply means something like *modern* international politics.³³ It is the case that, in most of his discussions of it, Nietzsche refers to the fact that the populace will be involved in such wars. In a discussion between ‘two old “patriots”’ in *Beyond Good and Evil*, paragraph 241, Nietzsche has one of them (almost certainly the Frenchman Adolfe Thiers, who had served as prime minister in the 1830s and then as head of state after the Commune in 1871) ask if a statesman who requires his people to go in for ‘great politics’, even if and especially if their tastes lay elsewhere, could ever be called great. The aphorism ends ambiguously as it leads us to believe that the will of one people comes to dominate over another but only at the cost of a ‘spiritual flattening’. Likewise in the paragraph 482 of the first volume of *Human, All-Too-Human*, he is at pains to note the financial burden that the mobilization needed for great politics involves. Hence perhaps the thoughts behind my first epigraph.

The point here is that whatever the dynamics of ‘great politics’ are, they are already present in the world in which Nietzsche lives and works (Barth, 1945, p 212). Nietzsche is here centrally concerned with the transformation of politics that is resulting in his time (and will continue in the future), a transformation that comes from the mobilization of the populace in the pursuit of a country’s aims. The question is not then if they are something new but what becomes of them as the new century approaches?

As noted earlier, at the end of his life in sanity, Nietzsche sends a number of letters to friends old and new as well as to various political figures of the time. The tone of those letters is unusual. There is none of the ironic distance, none of the sense of complexity, none of the exuberance and laughter that had shaped his work since the writing of the last book of *Zarathustra*. These are letters of a man in a hurry, with a mission and, in their breathless quality, resemble nothing so much as his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. And they are all political in focus: his mission appears to be the development of a significant force of political opposition to the exiting European regimes. Thus he advises Overbeck late in December 1888 that he is ‘working up a memorandum for the courts of Europe with an anti-German league in view’ (NSB, viii, p. 551). He suggests that Peter Gast may write him in the Palazzio del Quirinale (NSB, viii, p. 567) – the seat of the Italian executive branch – and he announces to Strindberg that he is having the young German emperor shot.³⁴ In the preface to *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, written on Christmas Day 1888 in Turin, he chides the Italian prime minister

33 See, for example, Johannes Lepsius’ edited volumes entitled *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914* – a compendium of diplomatic correspondence for the period.

34 It is possible, as Babette Babich has urged on me, that this refers to the death by firing squad in Mexico of the young Emperor Maximilian in 1867, precisely the year that Nietzsche first joined the cavalry as a junior officer. It is inevitable that barracks talk would have focused on this event. It could also refer to events in ‘the year of three Kaisers’. William I had died in March 1888; he was succeeded by Frederick III, who died in June 1888 of cancer. Nietzsche might be referring to his successor, the youthful 29-year-old William II (who promptly undid much that Bismarck had sought to accomplish and would reign until 1918. It can be argued that his policies make the First World War close to inevitable).

for going too far in the Triple Alliance: ‘with the Reich an intelligent people can only enter into a *mésalliance* (NCW preface, WKG VI/3, p. 413).’ But for one line, the last words he ever wrote are to his friend and Basel colleague Jacob Burckhardt: ‘Wilhelm, Bismarck, and all anti-Semites shot’ (NSB viii, p. 579). The stance in all this material is that of political opposition to all that is dominant in Europe. He is, as we have noted, ‘ready to rule the world’ (WKG VIII/3, p. 460).

Shortly before these letters he had announced the coming of wars such as one had never yet seen. If the wars involve the mobilization of the populace, what will that result in? In several places Nietzsche refers to the transformation of politics into a *Geisterkrieg* – which might be translated as ‘ideological war’ but is better thought of as a war for the *Geist*: ‘The concept of politics has become completely subsumed in a *Geisterkrieg*: all configurations of power have dissolved into thin air – there will be wars the like of which there has never been on earth.’³⁵ A war for the *Geist* is a war about what counts to fight about, not about what there is to fight about. Nietzsche is here making a claim about the development of war in the century that was to come. What is the relation of ‘great politics’ to the *Geisterkrieg*? Great politics had brought all members of society into political conflict, inevitably political conflict with members of other societies. Nietzsche had certainly observed that the Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian war had not only mobilized the masses in movements like the Paris Commune but had cost France two of its provinces and had seen the imposition of reparations in the sum of five billion francs (a sum incidentally in the range that Nietzsche speaks of as the cost of great politics: see the first epigraph). Another way of expressing what *Geisterkrieg* means is to say that, whereas in the past wars were fought over the distribution of what there was, in the future (that is to say, in our times) wars will be fought to determine what there is to distribute.

So Nietzsche’s prediction is that this developing kind of international politics (perhaps the first truly international politics: we forget how different twentieth-century politics were from those of, say, the eighteenth) will give rise to unprecedented wars, in part because of the involvement of the populace at large. There is much truth to this apparent prediction. Arno Mayer, for instance, has carefully analysed the way in which the politics pursued by Wilson and Lenin were not only remarkably like each other in their conception of what politics was about but were also radically different from those pursued by Clemenceau, Lloyd George and most of the other leaders at Versailles (Mayer, 1964; Strong, 1986). Clemenceau and his friends wanted to make sure that war never got out of hand again, as the Great War clearly had. They wanted therefore to make sure that the waging of war remained in the hands and for the purposes of the elite. Wilson and Lenin sought to remake the very stuff of politics – in Wilson’s famous phrase, to ‘make the world safe for democracy’. (Note the ambiguity in that sentence.) The war had involved the population as a whole: it was ‘total’, as Raymond Aron was later to call it (Aron, 1985).³⁶ (Note that the century of total war is also the century of totalitarianism.) For them the purpose of war was to extend certain social relations, that is, to make concrete and universal dynamics inherent in social developments since, say, the French Revolution.

35 WKG VIII/3, p. 453: ‘Der Begriff Politik ist gänzlich in einen Geisterkrieg aufgegangen, alle Machtgebilde sind in die Luft gesprengt, — es wird Kriege geben, wie es noch keine auf Erden gab.’

36 See also my analysis in Strong (1972).

Nietzsche sees the same thing, but with much more anxiety. When he speaks of a *Geisterkrieg*, what he means is war, the general shape of which is determined by the particular dynamics of slave morality. Those dynamics revolved around the fact that slave morality required the continued presence of a foe, against whom one might define oneself. The logic of this war (like the logic of slave morality) is such that there can be no logical way of bringing it to an end nor a way of stopping it. (It is the political equivalent, one might say, of capitalist relations of exchange). Thus, at the very end of the last essay in *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes that humans would rather ‘will the void, than be void of will’. What he means by that is that slavishly moral human beings are unable to stop willing. Willing is the faculty by which the future is constructed in the light of the present (the will to power is thus best understood as a dynamic architectonic)³⁷ and that the nature of the present in slave morality is nihilism or nothingness. Thus the slavishly moral person wills to bring about *das Nichts* because that is all that there is for slave morality after 2,000 or more years of *Einverleibung* – of embodiment.

It is therefore not surprising that these wars will manifest the dynamics of slave morality, and specifically of the end (though not final or ending) stages of that morality. Nietzsche writes in 1882: ‘*Kriege über das Princip von Besser-Nichtsein-als-Sein* – wars over the principle of better not-being than being’ (WKG VII-1, p. 42). He means that eventually wars will be fought not to assert what one is, let alone to achieve it, but to avoid being anything in particular, precisely so as not to come to an end [Here one might ask oneself what has really ended with the ‘end’ of the Cold War?]. It is the characteristic of slave morality that it is caught in a definition the very denial of which constitutes its reaffirmation (something akin to what Hegel had named ‘bad infinity’ and Nietzsche calls a *circulus vitiosus*).

One may ask here now if Nietzsche sees this as a break with the past. In these letters and in other pronouncements, Nietzsche is often taken to be speaking prophetically – that is, commentators assume that he is announcing the arrival of something entirely new. Such interpretations, standard in the literature, draw considerable support from Nietzsche’s insistence, as early as 1886 in BGE but compulsively in the last months of his life, that he is ‘no man – I am dynamite’.³⁸ The question, however, is more complex than might first appear. There is a strong tendency to think that Nietzsche sees himself at the end of an epoch and is announcing an entirely new epoch. What is the dynamite that blows things up?

In a review of *Beyond Good and Evil* in the *Berner Bund* of 16 and 17 September 1886, Josef Widmann picked up on a word in the text of the book. Nietzsche had referred to a particular stance by a ‘philosopher’ as dynamite. Dynamite, the recent invention of Alfred Nobel, had been recently used in the construction of the St Gothard pass. Widmann had compared the book to the black warning flags that warned of the danger from the nearby use of dynamite. Widmann wrote: ‘An intellectual explosive, like a material explosive, can serve a very useful work: it is not necessary that it be misused to criminal ends. But one would do well, where such material is around, to make it clear that “Here there is dynamite”’.³⁹

37 I argue for this in Strong (2000, Chapter 8).

38 *Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I am a destiny’, 1WKG VI/3, p. 363; see the letter to Deussen, 26 November 1888; to Brandes, 9 December 1889.

39 ‘Der geistige Sprengstoff, wie der materielle, kann einem sehr nützlichen Werke dienen; es ist nicht nothwendig, daß er zu verbrecherischen Zwecken mißbraucht werde. Nur thut man gut, wo solcher Stoff lagert, es deutlich zu sagen “Hier liegt Dynamit”’.

Widmann had picked up on Nietzsche's own use of 'dynamite', but in using it he had obscured what Nietzsche had meant. In raising the question of dynamite in *Beyond Good and Evil* 208, Nietzsche attributes its qualities of dynamite to the philosopher who announces that he is *not* a sceptic. Scepticism, as he goes on to explain, is an antidote to saying and doing 'No' – that is negation. Scepticism is a *consequence* of the pursuit of objectivity in *Wissenschaft* (described in BGE 207). (Here is another opening to the discussion of Nietzsche's attitudes towards science; see Babich (1994) and Moore and Brobjer (2004)). It is a self-produced consolation that is used to justify and leads to the 'paralysis of the will'. Nietzsche ends this entry with the hope that the increasing threat of the Russian will might lead Europe to acquire a single will and end an overly long period of petty politics and *Kleinstaaterei*. Finally we get this: '[T]he very next century will bring with it the struggle for mastery over the whole earth – the *compulsion* to great politics.'

Note here that scepticism is part of the logical development of slave morality – it consists in the claim of the unverifiability in principle of any claim about the world – something which thus furthers slave morality's hostility to *being* anything. Dynamite consists in *interrupting* this development. The development, however, is already under way. Nietzsche is thus seeking not to effectuate a break but to stop a process, to stop it by opening a gap in that development.

What this means – to speak too briefly here – is that Nietzsche would have seen fascism as a possible outcome of Western slave morality (an outcome that includes and will generate *Geisterkriege* as well as absurdly acquiescent attitudes towards the authority of science). But it also means that any reading of Nietzsche that excludes *a priori* the reading(s) that the Nazis made of him is wrong. This in turn raises a very complex question of the degree to which one can hold someone responsible for what is made of their thought. Here the question of whether or not 'Nietzsche would have been a Nazi' is not of primary importance. (I think that it is obvious he would not have, just as figures like Oswald Spengler, Herman Rausching, Stefan George – I pick very conservative people who one might have thought potentially sympathetic – were not). If, however, what I have said above is true – that Nietzsche writes for each of us – then he also writes for a Nazi. If he wishes such an appeal – this is my reading – to be engaged by the dissonance of self-criticism, the political question becomes how long should – how long must – one allow for such a move to happen? (Here the essay by Kurt Fischer (Chapter 2) is directly relevant).

Does Nietzsche have a political 'theory' or 'philosophy'?

The above establishes that Nietzsche had political concerns and that, at least at the beginning and at the end of his writing, saw those concerns as importantly related to his general concerns. It is also the case that throughout all of his work there are scattered remarks on various political topics.⁴⁰ Furthermore, from his earliest work he conceived of his work as having politico-cultural elements. (See Crépon's essay (Chapter 16) and my essay (Strong, Chapter 17)).

But does this mean he has a political *theory*, in the way that Hobbes or Rousseau clearly do? A common argument,⁴¹ often advanced to protect him it would seem from unsightly conclusions, is that he has none. And, as noted, against this many have sought to find political

40 I have given an account and analysis of this in Chapter 7 of Strong (2000).

41 For example Brobjer (1998, pp. 300–19); Leiter (online text cited in fn.19).

resources in Nietzsche or have declared Nietzsche's thought to be political.⁴² It is, I think, reasonable to say that Nietzsche was concerned with politics; it is also clear that he laments the disappearance of a kind of vigorous agonistic politics such as that he associated with Ancient Greece and the Renaissance.⁴³ But it is also the case that he apparently does not have what one might call a 'political theory'. It is no accident that those who seek a political theory in Nietzsche in fact claim only to seek resources. The question, however, should be: given the fact that he has political concerns, *why* does he not have a political theory?

What has to be the case for one to have a political theory or philosophy? Hannah Arendt once remarked in a spirit of loss that this may not be the time to ask 'who governs?' Her reference was of course to the title of a famous book by Robert Dahl, a book that established for several generations of Anglo-American social scientists that there was nothing to fear and much to be gained from liberal politics. Whatever Nietzsche is, he is not a liberal democrat, even if some have found ways to take him as a 'preface' to such politics (Kariel, 1963).

This is not the place to engage in a long discussion of the preconditions that make political theory possible. Any discourse carries with it presuppositions and consequences. It is, for instance, hard for many contemporary intellectuals to speak seriously about religion. Some in philosophy (one thinks of the late Bernard Williams) have argued that to speak of 'morality' commits one to the structure of a discourse that carries undesirable consequences and that one should instead speak of 'ethics' with its highlighting of character rather than rules. One should be able to say the same thing about political philosophy and ask what are the preconditions that make political theory and politics possible *in our time*. There are lots of ways of organizing life (bureaucratically, economically, lovingly, sportingly, etc. ...) and the political is but one of them. Some have argued that it was particularly important and that in modern times it was being lost. These thinkers (one thinks of Carl Schmitt, Max Weber and Hannah Arendt, among others) have often sought to recover the political. Nietzsche, as the short piece *The Greek State* (below) makes clear, is among them. For much of his writing, Nietzsche seems clear that if by politics and the political we mean something like the agonism of Ancient Greece or the Renaissance (see *The Greek State* below), the preconditions for that agonism are no longer available. What could they be under conditions of modernity?

The fact of the matter is that at various points in his writing Nietzsche seems to have sought, albeit briefly, to remedy this situation. In *Human-All-Too-Human* (HAH ii, 'Mixed Opinions', 318 WKG IV-3, p. 143),⁴⁴ Nietzsche seems to indicate that, were laws to be given by a self-selected group of the 'honest and trustworthy men', one would have an acceptable 'lawgiving body'. The tone of the paragraph is to my ear slightly ironic (this solution is said to be 'easy, ridiculously easy') and it is in any case clear that Nietzsche holds out no hope that such a group could be found. The later part of this entry indicates that a 'better solution' (then the 'easy' one) would require that all come to honour '*Wissenschaft* and those who know [*Wissenden*]'. Later in the book he indicates that 'all political thinking, even in the case of the greatest statesmen, is random improvisation left to lucky chance [*auf gut Glück*

42 Nussbaum (1997) argues that he is political but not in a state-based fashion. See Hunt (1993, Chapter 3), Strong ([1975. 1988a] 2000) and Part II this volume.

43 See *The Greek State* (in this volume).

44 Shaw (2007, p. 284f.) is one of the few to discuss this passage.

improvisieren]' (HAH ii 'Wander', 277 WKG IV-3, p. 311).⁴⁵ Around the end of 1887 he drafts a 'preface' to a *Tractatus Politicus*' (WKG VIII-2, pp. 267–9).⁴⁶ His document is not, he says, to be for everyone. Its intent is to outline the politics (or would be had he continued) whereby virtue might be brought to rule (*Herrschaft*). 'Virtue' (*Tugend*) is here distinguished from morality (*Moral*). (He has thus apparently moved from his position in *Schopenhauer as Educator* where he opposes the *furor philosophicus* to the *furor politicus*) (SE 7, WKG III-1, p. 400). Such virtue can only be brought about by what he calls a 'pure Machiavellianism', something *übermenschlich* to such a degree that no one, not 'even Plato' has attained it. Here Nietzsche's worry has to do with the conjoining in modern times of the power of the state and the moral point of view. In an age when human values are no longer legitimated by their derivation from something higher than they are (call this the 'death of God'), then *any* course of action can *and will* be counted as 'good'. When this is joined with centralized power, the consequences can be terrible.

For the last twenty-four hundred years, Nietzsche says, humans have incarnated an error that they have made flesh in their lives (GS 11, WKG V-2, p. 56). They have persuaded themselves of the 'truth' of the self-destructive illusions of slave morality and have lived them out. To break out from the prison of the present is both difficult and dangerous. Nietzsche often speaks of the attractions that his doctrines will have and is afraid that people will seize on this as a justification for behaviour to which they are not entitled. 'You must have lived through every degree of scepticism and with desire [*Wollust*] bathed in ice-cold streams – otherwise you have no right to this thought. I must defend myself against the easy-to-believe and the enthusiasts (WKG V-2, p. 471).' His notes from this later period are filled both with his conviction that his doctrine should be spread throughout the world and with his fear that mankind will not be sufficiently prepared to be able to assimilate them. This is a worry about the consequences of the moral point of view when released from the constraints of a transcendental realm. As Stanley Cavell has remarked:

Someday, if there is a someday, we will have to learn the evil things of itself as good, that it could not have made such progress in the world unless people planned and performed it in all conscience. Nietzsche was not crazy when he blamed morality for the worst evils, though he may have become too crazy about the idea. This is why goodness, in trying to get born, will sometimes look like the destruction of morality (Cavell, 1969, p. 136).

He is thus cautious: the soil must be prepared. In the past there were successes. Indeed, 'success in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a higher type which, in relation to mankind as a whole, is a kind of overman. Such fortunate accidental major successes were always possible and will perhaps always be possible. And even entire families, tribes, peoples can occasionally represent such a bull's-eye (AC 4, WKG VI-3, p. 169).' The Greeks had been such a success. For the future, however, one cannot afford to rely on accident and this is the source of Nietzsche's concern

⁴⁵ '*Auf gut Glück*' is generally rendered 'random' but this misses the sense of hoping for a lucky chance.

⁴⁶ See also WKG VIII-2, pp. 156 and 187.

with 'breeding' and 'extirpation' – the 'higher type' must be 'bred, willed and attained'. And that is the purpose of the doctrine of eternal return (AC 3, WKG VI-3, p. 168).⁴⁷

The stakes are high: conditions must be created such that the doctrine can 'sink in slowly' (WKG V-2, p. 401), failing which there will be 'thirty years Gloria with drums and fifes and then thirty years of grave-digging' (WKG V-2, p. 512). In a note from 1885 he writes: 'Basic idea: the new values must at first be created – we shall not be spared that: The philosopher must be a lawgiver to us. New types. (As earlier the highest types – e.g. the Greeks – were bred: this type of 'accident' to be willed consciously) (WKG VII-3, p. 255).' We seem to be in a situation where nothing holds mankind back: there is a danger of total chaos in which any and all voices will speak with no way of selecting between them and thus in which no voice will be heard. Much as is the case for Zarathustra, Nietzsche's initial political problem is to develop an audience able to hear what he says.

To this extent he occasionally refers to the 'lords of the earth', whose role it seems to be to create the condition that will make meaningful discourse and life possible again on earth. The 'lords of the earth' have to discover 'a whole host of transitory and deceptive measures ... to this end slowly and cautiously to liberate ... a whole host of slandered instincts'. Such 'an educator is beyond good and evil but no one must know this' (WKG VII-3, p. 198). Hence his attempt at a 'tractatus politicus' above.

To bring about such a new, transfigured world will require a change in 'all that one knows about politics'. By this Nietzsche means that in the past politics was (as in Greece) an often fearful agon of equals inside an unquestioned arena. Men fought and competed for advantage and superiority. They did not, however, fight to define what would make a person superior. In previous politics, Nietzsche is saying, men fought (and operated) to gain more of what there was to get: it was presumed that they knew what they were fighting about. The breakdown of a common world – which Nietzsche sees as a central characteristic of modern times⁴⁸ – means that humans increasingly no longer have an idea as to what counts to be fought over. Hence the new idea of politics will be war *to say what will count*, to determine what the standards will be by which humans will measure themselves.⁴⁹ This is politics to *define* the world, not to gain control of a portion of it. Thus there was a correct core to the naïve belief during the Cold War that 'we are fighting the capitalists/communists to see who will run the world'.

This is not a 'political theory' but it points to the fact that Nietzsche thinks he *needs* one. The political theory of the future must be about what is of human worth. But to raise that question is to open up a field which has no given limits. The writings of the end of his life are writings, I think, in which Nietzsche comes to worry about the fields he had opened up. When, with one foot out of sanity, he says that he is 'ready to rule the world',⁵⁰ Nietzsche is not being megalomaniac: he is distressed.

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47 See also Strong (2000a, Chapter 9).

48 See the extended analysis in Strong (2000a, Chapter 9).

49 It is for this reason that Schmitt (1996) insists that politics must always remain that of 'friend' versus 'enemy' (hence and agon) and is worried that in modern times this is increasingly less the case.

50 See the first epigraph.