Nietzsche's Elitism

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the place of Nietzsche's elitism in his thought, arguing that his concepts of physiology, self-overcoming, and revaluation compel us to acknowledge his elitism's centrality to his thinking. Domenico Losurdo's relatively recent Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel *shows us, I claim, that an evasion of Nietzsche's elitism is an evasion of the core of his thought. I illustrate how this creates problems for the egalitarian political appropriations of Nietzsche that have been so prevalent over the last half-century or more. Losurdo's work does not successfully reveal to us the conceptual locus out of which Nietzsche's elitism emanates, so I demonstrate how Nietzsche's "physiology" implies a hierarchy of human bodies, where this hierarchy is determined not by race (as his Nazi readers believed) but by a given embodied human being's capacity for "revaluation" in the form of "self-overcoming." Whereas Nietzsche sees revaluation as tremendously difficult, it is problematically made to appear as open to all by his egalitarian readers. In conclusion, I argue that Nietzsche's conviction that revaluation is difficult, and that it is the domain of the few, is a valuable message in the age of social media.*

1. Introduction

Nobody would deny that Nietzsche is an elitist. Looking back into history and surveying the present, he has more admiration and sympathy for historical aristocracies than for the people they oppressed. Looking into the future, he calls for a social organization in which the masses of lesser beings are sacrificed for the sake of a few great individuals. In his own time, there is nothing worse, for him, than the democratization of taste in the arts, unless it is perhaps the democratization of knowledge via the press and universal education.[1]

But his elitism goes quite a bit deeper than mere allegiance to the causes or the interests of the elites. That sort of elitism characterizes the thought of many of history's great philosophers, including philosophers whom Nietzsche admired, such as Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's elitism is far more radical in that the praxis of philosophy itself is fundamentally elitist–elitism becomes, for the right kind of philosopher, a procedural task. Nietzsche writes books "for all and none," to refer to the subtitle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: books which address the destiny of humanity as a whole, but which will only be understood by very few, and which *ought* to be understood only by very few. Nietzsche thinks it would be dangerous, perhaps for the masses themselves but certainly for the elites who rule

1 All Nietzsche citations come from the second edition of the Colli-Montinari *Kritische Studienausgabe*, whose pagination is still current, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, 15 vols., 2nd ed., eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: De Gruyter, 1999). Footnotes will cite the volume number and the page number. Citations of extant notes will also list the year and Colli-Montinari-designated note number. All Nietzsche translations are my own. Forms of the word *Zeitung*, newspaper, appear literally hundreds of times in the Nietzsche corpus, and newspapers are usually brought up in order to be attacked. *Dawn* calls them "socialist pied pipers" (KSA 3:184). *Beyond Good and Evil* counts "the obligation of every man to read his newspaper at breakfast" as a core element of "parliamentary nonsense" (*parlamentarischer Blödsinn*) (KSA 5:139–40). Regarding education, although disdain for "the masses" is more obvious late than early in Nietzsche's career, already 1872's "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions" asks, "Why does the state need that excess of educational institutions, of teachers? Why this extensive education of the people and enlightenment of the people [*Volksbildung und Volksaufklärung*]?" (KSA 1:710).

over them, for those masses to read and understand his thought, and he wants to prevent this.[2] The very act of doing philosophy, then, becomes an act of elitist esotericism.[3]

So far, we have only said things that every serious reader of Nietzsche already knows. Yet it is also well-known that the academy's embrace of Nietzsche in the second half of the twentieth century, following Walter Kaufmann's rehabilitation of Nietzsche after the stain of Nazism and down through the postmodern era, puts the philosopher to decidedly egalitarian uses.[4] In what follows I would like to open the question of the general viability, or, conversely, the limitations, of such implementations of Nietzsche. Certainly, even the greatest thinkers can be used against their will and against their intentions, so to speak, by later generations, and it is not really up for debate whether this has been done very productively over and over again in the history of philosophy. But it seems to me that the situation is very different if, on the one hand, and as Nietzsche's left-leaning admirers of the last half-century tend to believe, Nietzsche's elitism does not lie close to the core of his central ideas, or is the result of some self-misunderstanding, or if, on the other hand, and, as I contend, Nietzsche's elitism in fact lies quite close to the center of his thought. If the truth turns out to be the latter, then a second question arises: How far from the core of an earlier thinker's thought can an appropriation stray while nevertheless remaining a productive encounter?

2 The great anti-Christian philosopher on more than one occasion expresses the thought, for instance, that only the rulers should be exposed to his critique of religion and that the "immature masses" (*unmündige Menge*) should be protected from it (*Human, All Too Human,* KSA 2:302).

3 The very mention of the word "esotericism" in the context of philosophy brings to mind Leo Strauss–yet Strauss interestingly appears to deny any esoteric quality to Nietzsche's writing: "Nietzsche says if you have a dangerous truth in your hand, then open your hand. Nietzsche had no notion of the noble lie." Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," ed. Richard L. Velkley (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 75.

4 Kaufmann's own conclusion regarding Nietzsche and politics is more or less summed up by his claim that Nietzsche is "basically 'anti-political.'" Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), 352.

2. Domenico Losurdo's "Aristocratic Rebel"

Wherever that limit lies, we can say with certainty that for Domenico Losurdo, author of *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel*, Nietzsche studies strayed beyond it quite some time ago. Losurdo's vast (over a thousand pages!) book was originally published in Italian in 2002, but, owing presumably to the tremendous challenge of translating such a work (challenges that would not have been limited solely to its length, but would also have to do with the necessity of tracking down sometimes-obscure German and French sources, and translating those as well), it appeared in English only in 2019, one year after Losurdo's death. Losurdo was an Italian Marxist communist. He seeks to read Nietzsche charitably, and, indeed, paints a picture of a great thinker, but he rejects the notion that the charitable reading of Nietzsche can possibly mean making him into a "liberatory" force from any left-wing perspective. Rather, "his powerful demystifying potential can only be understood from the angle of the reactionary radicalism of his political program . . . As in the history of the West as a whole, so too in the thought of this great philosopher, greatness and horror are two sides of the same coin."[5]

Losurdo argues that the guiding thread, in the thought of this writer whose thought undergoes such dramatic revolutions, is an opposition to the egalitarian political movements of democracy and socialism. This is the enduring and orienting constant in the early, middle, and late Nietzsche. I find this claim convincing on its own terms, although I will later question whether those terms really get to the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical project. But, for now, I would like to summarize the development of Nietzsche's thought as narrated by Losurdo, both because I find the developmental story he tells to be convincing enough that anyone interested in Nietzsche should find it worth considering and because it can have the effect of refreshing our sense of this author after decades of the kind of egalitarian appropriations referred to above and discussed in more depth below.

5 Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel*, trans. Gregor Benton (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2021), 999.

For Losurdo, as for many readers of Nietzsche, there are three stages to the philosopher's development. These stages correspond to three differently structured elitisms, three differently arranged human hierarchies, all of which correspond to or at least resonate with different brands of right-of-center thought in Nietzsche's time. In the first stage, which lasts until 1878's *Human, All Too Human* and excludes that work, Nietzsche's thought is patriotically animated by the dream of a "German revival of tragic Hellenism."[6] At this point, the elite party in Nietzsche's thought is the German *Volk*. His thought is fundamentally Romantic and opposed to France, the Jews, modernity, the Romans, the Enlightenment, and reason—all six of these parties or concepts carrying parallel spiritual force, acting as a diabolical unity, and all reflected in the figure of Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy*.[7] In the present, France, at least until 1870's Battle of Sedan, bears the most pressing threat of democratic, socialist revolution. The second stage, called by Losurdo as by others the "Enlightenment" period, is initiated by a turn toward reason catalyzed by Nietzsche's disillusionment with what turns out to be the inauthenticity of the *völkisch* nostalgia of the Second Reich, which shows itself to be more concerned with strengthening a state than with strengthening an ethnic culture. Losurdo's Nietzsche here abandons his ethnic chauvinism, but "the condemnation of intra-European national chauvinism went hand in hand with the recognition of Europe's planetary mission and of the colonial wars."[8] Nietzsche's resistance to the bellicosity of the Reich translates into a valorization of the "good European," who is "homeless"—like the Jews, who, still associated with reason but honored and not denigrated for that, have now come to hold a privileged place in Nietzsche's hierarchical view of humanity.[9] Christianity, on the

6 Losurdo, *Nietzsche, The Aristocratic Rebel,* 326.

7 See especially chap. 3, "Socrates and 'Present-Day Judaism'" (ibid., 108–36), and chap. 4, "The Founding of the Second Reich, and Conflicting Myths of Origin" (137–63).

8 Ibid., 323. In this context, Losurdo cites *Dawn* 206, in which Nietzsche calls on European workers to stop complaining about conditions at home and instead to go abroad, "becoming masters" over those they find there and creating a "swarming train of colonists" overseas (KSA 3: 184–85).

9 As far as I am aware, the first usage of "good European" arrives in HH 475 (KSA 2:475). The good European's "homelessness" is discussed later, in GS 377 (KSA 3:628–31).

other hand, because it is associated with the victory of faith over reason and with egalitarian inclinations, becomes a mark against the irrational German peasantry who accepts it so thoroughly. Finally, we have the "immoralist" period, the turn toward which begins with *The Gay Science* (although Losurdo seems to think this transition is more gradual than the one between the first two stages), in which "the language of religion and the Enlightenment merged," and in which the elites whom Nietzsche champions are now the solitary individuals capable of overcoming morality, of affirming the "innocence of Becoming," and of living "beyond good and evil."

Losurdo traces Nietzsche's relationship with the political factions of his day as he follows this development in his thought. In moving between his three stages, Losurdo's Nietzsche goes from being a "national liberal" to being a "conservative liberal," to finally being (in Nietzsche's own words) "by no means liberal."[10] Along the way, he delineates the affinities between Nietzsche's own quasi-political rhetorics of elitism and those of contemporary German voices, affinities that are strong enough that they admittedly have the occasionally disappointing effect of making Nietzsche sound less original than he might have sounded before we read Losurdo's book. What is unique about Nietzsche's elitist voice, and what counts for Losurdo as Nietzsche's primary innovation among the other European conservative voices whom Losurdo brings to the fore, is his conviction that the egalitarian energy of modernity shows itself for the first time not with the Enlightenment or the French Revolution but with Socrates and Christianity, such that "modernity" turns out to be a paradoxically ancient, atavistic disease, perennially reemerging in Western culture in order to demolish its hierarchies, endanger its strongest individuals, and destroy its highest cultural achievements. "Wilamowitz," Losurdo concludes, "was right when he accused the author of *The Birth of Tragedy* of wanting to deny 'the development of the millennia'"—and, we can surmise, he would still have been right to lodge such a charge against Nietzsche even sixteen years later, at the end of his productive life.[11] The

10 Losurdo, *Nietzsche, The Aristocratic Rebel*, 336–37. Losurdo is here citing Book V of *The Gay Science* (KSA 3:629).

11 Losurdo, *Nietzsche, The Aristocratic Rebel*, 462.

fundamentally "modern" notion of the basic equality of human beings is always the great threat, the constant throughout these evolutions in Nietzsche's thought.

That Nietzsche understood himself as an antiegalitarian philosopher will come as a surprise to absolutely no one, including the authors discussed below, who put Nietzsche to egalitarian uses. What I wish to emphasize in introducing Losurdo's intellectual biography is that, for Losurdo, such an intellectual biography could not even be coherently produced if it did not present Nietzsche as a fundamentally reactionary figure. The notion that his commitment to inequality is so central to his thinking raises the question whether egalitarian appropriations of Nietzsche's philosophy in fact make use of fragmented elements of his thought that, when put into the context that gave them sense in the first place, point necessarily toward conclusions these readers do not themselves want to draw. This is the question I raise and answer in the remainder of this essay.

3. The Critical Nietzsche

In order to explore that question, it is necessary to lay out the logic by which the Nietzsche readers in the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond arrive at the egalitarian, "liberatory" Nietzsche. This Nietzsche derives in important ways from the Nietzsche given to us by French deconstruction and related poststructuralist thinkers. The general pattern, which we will trace across three different politicized themes—the status of woman, gender conformism, and postcolonialism—goes like this: invoking perspectivism and the dynamism of Dionysianism over the rigidity of the paradigm of Being, Nietzsche destabilizes, de-essentializes, and denaturalizes antinomies. In Nietzsche's own thought, this is expressed as the attempt to overcome dualism and the hierarchy of good and evil—but the same approach, labeled Nietzschean, can be used to dismantle other hierarchies, such as (in the order in which I will address them below) (1) man over woman, (2) gender-conforming man or woman to non-gender-conforming person, and (3) colonizer over colonized. Although the reader has likely been exposed to some such invocations of

Nietzsche, I would like to distill these three egalitarian implementations of Nietzsche successively here, so that their shared formal structure can emerge.

We can begin with the Nietzsche who is allied to feminism. The most important Nietzsche text regarding the relationship between man and woman is probably *Beyond Good and Evil*, which begins by inviting us to "suppose that truth is a woman" and then, in 231–39, offers what appears on a superficial level to be fairly standard sexism, remarkable only in its duration.[12] Everything changes, for the feminist reader of Nietzsche, when we notice that Nietzsche puts the phrase "*Weib an sich*," woman in herself, in potentially skeptical quotation marks, associating the phrase with Kant's *Ding an sich*, in which the Nietzsche of 1886 certainly does not believe.[13] This calling into question of the category of woman serves to undermine everything that follows regarding "woman," and this effect is doubled by the fact that, before delivering the sexist "truths" contained in these nine passages, Nietzsche declares them to be only "*my* truths."[14] The earliest feminist interpretation of this passage of which I am aware, one whose lead has been followed many times,[15] comes from Jacques Derrida, who says, "There is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of woman in itself. That much, at least, Nietzsche has said."[16] Of the "truths" Nietzsche offers, Derrida says, "they are not *truth* since they are multiple, multicolored, contradictory. There is therefore no one truth in itself but additionally, even for me, of me, truth is plural . . . There is therefore no truth in itself of sexual difference in itself, of woman or of man."[17] The oppressive hierarchy is thus destabilized as the hierarchized terms that

12 KSA 5:11 and KSA 5:170–78.

13 BGE 231, KSA 5:170.

14 Ibid. Emphasis in original.

15 I discuss further iterations of Derrida's basic approach in my "Nietzsche's Misogyny and a Feminine Philosophy of the Future," in *Nietzsche on Women and the Eternal Feminine: A Critique of Truth and Values*, ed. Michael McNeal (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 87–102.

16 Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 101.

17 Jacques Derrida, "The Question of Style" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 187.

compose it—man and woman—are allegedly exploded. We can imagine the intended effect visually: The hierarchical structure's constitutive parts fail to hold, and the structure that had towered vertically comes crashing down to the ground, where all its constituent parts lie in equality.

Sticking with the topic of gender, but moving on to a different hierarchical relationship, Judith Butler, most famously in *Gender Trouble*, invokes Nietzsche in challenging the valorization of gender-conforming men and women over non-gender-conforming people. Butler leans on the famous passage *Genealogy of Morals* I.13 regarding the lamb and the bird of prey, in which Nietzsche declares of human actions and of the substrate "subject" that would undergird them, "there is no such substrate – there is no 'being' behind the doing, effecting, and becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added on to the deed – the deed is everything [*das Thun ist Alles*]."[18] Applying this thought about the subject to the notion of the *gendered* subject, Butler asserts, "In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary [to Nietzsche's claim that there is 'no such substrate']: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[19] Here it is the notion of a gendered man or woman that is de-reified, denaturalized: Once again, as a constituent part of the hierarchy is pulled from the edifice, the coherence of the overall structure is said to collapse.

Finally, we can turn to postcolonial appropriations of Nietzsche. In her "Continental Philosophy and Postcolonial Subjects," Ofelia Schutte orients herself toward the "critical history" of the second *Untimely Meditation*.[20] She proposes to "retake Nietzsche's perspectival project of a critical history of the world," in which one interrogates the past to free oneself of its burdens and delusions.[21] This would involve acknowledging that, as Nietzsche himself says, "our" prejudices regarding history "may only be

18 GM I:13, KSA 5:279.

19 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 34.

20 "On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life," 3, KSA 1:269–270.

21 Ofelia Schutte, "Continental Philosophy and Postcolonial Subjects," *Philosophy Today* 44, supplement (2000), 16.

Western prejudices."[22] Of course, the adjective "Western" does not imply, as we might think it would, that Nietzsche himself will pursue the topic of specifically Western delusions regarding history; but the postcolonialist who has read Nietzsche can do this, destabilizing "our" reified historical antinomies—that is, those of the Western colonialists, such as Edward Said's "European" and "Oriental."[23] Despite the fact, Schutte says, that Nietzsche "believed it was the prerogative of high cultures to rule the destiny of peoples," the destabilizing force of his critique "breaks the taboos of the mind and the ever-present dogmatisms of the prevailing culture."[24] Here again, via an insistence upon a perspectivism that remembers the situatedness of every perspective (we are reminded of Nietzsche's truths on women being only "*my* truths"), the antinomies that make up a hierarchy from the standpoint of just one perspective are de-essentialized. Once again, the hierarchy, this time that which places the colonist above the colonized, collapses once its constituent elements are called into question.

We can sum up the movement of the critical egalitarian approach to Nietzsche as follows: The assertion of perspectivism, which sees perspectives as situationally and historically contingent, calls into question the timeless validity of whatever a given socially dominant perspective has hegemonically and self-interestedly asserted as a natural hierarchy by first denaturalizing its constituent elements. To give this approach its due, this assertion of perspectivism goes hand-in-hand with the affirmation of a dynamic world of "deeds," and not "doers," of living beings capable of self-overcoming, not narrowly confined to natural types. On the practical or ethical level, it speaks to the possibility of self-transformation (we might say "self-overcoming"), and of revaluation: We can improve ourselves by challenging and overcoming the ambient social values that have forced us into certain oppressive roles and identities. This much *is* truly Nietzschean.

22 "On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life," 1, KSA 1:256. Cited by Schutte in "Continental Philosophy and Postcolonial Subjects," 13.

23 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994).

24 Ofelia Schutte, "Nietzsche's Cultural Politics: A Critique," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37, supplement (1999), 66 and 69–70.

Before I turn to the limitations of this general approach, we should be careful not to caricature it as some sort of wild collective delusion about who Nietzsche is. Derrida recognizes Nietzsche's misogyny in seeking to unlock feminist potential in the notion that "truth is a woman." Butler acknowledges explicitly that Nietzsche would not "condone" *Gender Trouble*'s use of his thought in order to deconstruct the notion of gender. Schutte confirms that Nietzsche believes in the lordship of some peoples over other peoples. None of them are willingly blind to the fact that Nietzsche is an elitist. Their claim, in each case, is that there is a robust formal element in Nietzsche's thought that can and ought to lead in an egalitarian direction that Nietzsche himself turns away from.

4. Finitude, Strength, and the Danger of Self-Overcoming

My counterclaim is simply that the formal element on which these thinkers rely is not as robust as they think it is. In each of the cases named above, the hierarchy-deconstruction pursued is in regard to a directly or implicitly *bodily* hierarchy: male bodies over female bodies, conventionally gendered bodies over gender-resistant bodies, implicitly white colonizing bodies over implicitly nonwhite colonized bodies. This in itself is not at all something to complain about: Nietzsche always thinks of the human being as an embodied being. The body is a self: As opposed to the child, who takes himself to be body and soul, Zarathustra's "adult, the knowing one, says, 'body am I, pure and simple, and nothing besides - and the soul is merely a word for something about the body.'"[25] Nietzsche would undoubtedly agree with Zarathustra on this. But the question is whether the body is being thought about in a Nietzschean way in the approaches to Nietzsche delineated above, and it is my sense that it is not. To take seriously Nietzsche's physiology is to confront his hyperelitism head-on, which the above critical approaches to Nietzsche fail to do. I will seek to show directly how these thinkers fail to do this in the final main section

25 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:39.

of this essay, once I have provided a fuller picture of what Nietzsche's physiological elitism consists of in my own view.

With the return to the topic of elitism, Domenico Losurdo again comes to mind. It is Losurdo who tells us at such length and with such a preponderance of evidence that there is no Nietzsche who is not politically and spiritually elitist to the core. This would imply that Nietzsche's egalitarian appropriators are cherry-picking from his thought in such a way as to leave out that "core," sidestepping the most profound kernel of his thought, making Nietzsche a politically expedient, but far more superficial, puppet. And there is no doubt that Losurdo—who, again, is himself a Marxist—believes this about much of the half-century of Nietzsche criticism that precedes him.[26]

But what is "the core" of Nietzsche's thought? I do not think it is given to us by Losurdo's indispensable book. Opposition to socialism and democracy does not amount to a core *philosophical* conviction; nor does a defense of the aristocracy or a generalized elitism. There are large swaths of Losurdo's long book that are frustratingly thin on what we might call the central Nietzschean lexicon, or at least the elements of it that do not directly touch on politics: words like self-overcoming, eternal return, will to power, revaluation, psychology, and physiology, for instance.[27] Losurdo has identified a deep commitment to elitism in Nietzsche's thought, but what ties this elitism together, in a deep, philosophical way, beyond an opposition to "Socratic" modernity?

The answer to that question is physiology. Nietzsche sees a social universe of higher and lower bodies. He advances an elitist physiology.

26 See, for instance, his "Appendix 2: Nietzsche's Spectacles and Umbrella: An Answer to My Critics," especially the sections "The Conflict of the Faculties: Philosophers and Historians" (Losurdo, *Nietzsche, The Aristocratic Rebel*, 1007–8) and "The Suppressions of the 'New Right' and of the Postmodern Left" (ibid., 1009–10).

27 In this way, his work resembles another Marxist's heavily politicized reading of Nietzsche—that of Georg Lukács in his 1952 *The Destruction of Reason*. To be sure, Losurdo's engagement is far more serious than that of Lukács, who concludes that "the 'positive' part of the Nietzschean myths is no more than a mobilization of all the decadent and barbaric instincts in men corrupted by capitalism." Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1981), 394.

For obvious historical reasons, following this thread is uncomfortable. The Nazis made Nietzsche a spokesman of German racial supremacy.[28] This was resisted by Martin Heidegger, who rejected Nietzsche's "alleged biologism" as advanced by his Nazi colleagues[29]—and then turned out, as we learned rather recently with the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, to be the worst kind of Nazi himself.[30] The revelations of the *Black Notebooks* make the fact that Heidegger gives us a *different* picture of a Nietzschean elitism of bodies—one that is stripped of references to biology and race—scarcely comforting. In the aftermath of World War II, when the world knew that Heidegger had belonged to the National Socialist Party, talk of the body largely dropped out of discussions of Nietzsche, perhaps as the price of his resuscitation, in both the Anglophone and Francophone spheres of Nietzsche reception. It is my sense that the many ensuing decades of what we might call the "disembodiment" of Nietzsche's thought is what made egalitarian readings such as those of Derrida, Butler, and Schutte, discussed above, possible—but at the expense of a sober view of Nietzsche's thought. What I mean by this should become clear in what follows.

How does Nietzsche understand the body? The body is a multiplicity of wills to power, which is to say, of drives: "The most general picture of our constitution [*unseres Wesens*] is a *socialization of drives* [*Vergesellschaftung von Trieben*], with constant rivalry and individual alliances amongst themselves."[31] While the words suggestive of agon grab our attention

28 For a thorough discussion of Nazism's appropriations of Nietzsche, see Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), especially chap. 8.

29 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, ed. Brigitte Schillbach (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), 465–74.

30 Indeed, David Farrell Krell convincingly makes the case that Heidegger, in ostensibly resisting the "biologism" read into Nietzsche by Nazi readers such as Alfred Bäumler, in fact inherits and tacitly accepts the framing of many questions of Nietzsche interpretation as developed by those Nazi readers. Krell claims that the "assertion that the concept of will to power is the systematic 'creative center' of Nietzsche's thought" came to Heidegger from Bäumler. David Farrell Krell, "Analysis," in *Nietzsche Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger, ed. trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991), 270.

31 *Nachlass* 1884 7[94], KSA 10:274.

before the conciliatory ones do, "socialization" and "alliance" are as integral to the constitution, and to its survival, as competition, as is evidenced by the appearance of rhetoric tending in both directions again here: "With the guiding thread of the body, we recognize the human as a multiplicity of living beings, which, partly struggling against one another, partly integrating and subordinating each other, unintentionally affirm the whole in the affirmation of their individual beings."[32] We should be wary of taking the preoccupation with the body as an oddly local fixation on one element of the human being: As we heard Zarathustra insist, the body is everything, such that even the mind is body, implying that psychology will be subsumed under physiology. The capaciousness of the concept of physiology, the concept of the body, is indicated in *Beyond Good and Evil* by the sweeping scope of the will to power, which, as the "basic organic function," is the body's basic mode of being. [33] The will to power is the "essence" of the "world,"[34] such that "Life itself is *essentially* appropriation [*Aneignung*], injury, overpowering of the alien and the weaker, oppression, harshness, imposition of one's own form, *incorporation*."[35] When we read that this "basic organic function" that is the will to power is the "primordial fact of all history," we realize that bodies are, in a certain sense, all that Nietzsche sees when he looks out at the human race.[36] As Leo Strauss succinctly says of Nietzsche's thought, "Thyself is body,"[37] or "self is body,"[38] or "man is radically bodily, his virtue is radically passion."[39] We are, that is to say, "socializations of drives," of will to power. At this point it becomes indisputable to say, as Roberto Esposito does (since we are concerned here with Nietzsche's politics and his political interpreters), that, for Nietzsche,

32 *Nachlass* 1884 27[27], KSA 11:282.
33 BGE, KSA 5:208.
34 BGE, KSA 5:107.
35 BGE, KSA 5:207. Emphasis mine.
36 BGE, KSA 5:208.
37 Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra,"* 49.
38 Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra,"* 45.
39 Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra,"* 43.

> no politics exists other than that *of* bodies, conducted *on* bodies, *through* bodies. In this sense, one can rightly say that physiology, which Nietzsche never detaches from psychology, is the very same material of politics. It is its pulsating body. But . . . the body is [also] constituted according to the principle of politics–struggle as the first and final dimension of existence. Struggle outside oneself, toward other bodies, but also within as the unstoppable conflict among its organic components.[40]

Importantly, as Esposito's last two sentences imply, the body is always already threatened with dissolution both from outward stimuli and from its internal multiplicity, from the chaos without and the war within. *Coherence* is thus a basic task of the body, of the body that "the person" is wholly, and periods of decadent modernity are always depicted as periods of physiological dissolution. In Socrates's Athens in *Twilight of the Idols*, "everywhere the instincts were in anarchy."[41] Today in Europe, the "race of masters" is "succumbing physiologically" to a "modern anarchism" of the "intellectual and social instincts," claims the *Genealogy*.[42] The "style of [modern] decadence," concludes *The Case of Wagner*, is "anarchy of the atoms, disaggregation of the will."[43] The precariousness of the body's basic ability to hold together as a coherent hierarchy of drives leads to a sense of the embodied self as fundamentally finite. If there is a defense for the disembodiment of Nietzsche in "the New Nietzsche" in Continental studies after the 1960s and simultaneously in the Anglophone sphere after Kaufmann, it is that Nazi readers, wanting to read the possibility of a biologically determined demigod into Nietzsche, refused to see this physiological finitude for what it was, such that the sense of the Nietzschean body established in their scholarship was very far from the reality of the Nietzsche text in important respects. It should also be said,

40 Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 84.

41 *Twilight of the Idols*, KSA 6:71.

42 GM, KSA 5:264.

43 *The Case of Wagner*, KSA 6:27.

however, that what Anglophone readers misleadingly still refer to as "the French Nietzsche," which is to say the relatively disembodied Nietzsche inspired by deconstruction, has in fact been surpassed for quite some time by French voices who have worked to display the Nietzsche of the finite flesh. Already in the 1980s, for instance, Eric Blondel gave us a Nietzsche of Freudian finitude, whose physiology stands in parallel with Freudian psychology.[44] In the early 2000s, Didier Franck produced a Nietzsche of Heideggerian finitude, where the Nietzschean body could be said to align roughly with Heidegger's Dasein.[45] Shortly thereafter, Barbara Stiegler gave us a Nietzsche of unmistakably Kantian finitude—a flesh subject to "critique" by Dionysus, the god of Becoming.[46] For all three of these French readers, the fundamentally limited body-as-will-to-power is the nexus point of Nietzsche's thought.

The fact that coherence is a basic task of the body, of life, and is not a given, makes the coherence-risking attempt at self-overcoming, at the transvaluation of values via the transformation of the embodied self as drive structure, a tremendously dangerous activity. "One must still have chaos within to give birth to a dancing star,"[47] but there is nothing more

44 Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche and Freud, or: How to Be within Philosophy While Criticizing It from Without," in *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, eds. Jacob Golomb, Weaver Santaniello, and Ronald Lehrer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 171–80; and Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, trans. Sean Hand (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991). Blondel says that Nietzsche "insist[s] . . . on the theory of drives and psychology of the 'body' and 'instincts' (or on physiology)" ("Nietzsche and Freud" 176) and seeks to illuminate the body by cutting through the "rhetorical illusions of morality and metaphysics," which are constructed in the realm of consciousness and seek to suppress true knowledge of the drives. In this way, "physiology" and "psychology" overlap in Nietzsche, as the attempt to illuminate the body involves sounding out the "illusions" that shroud it, so that we can see through them to their physiological foundation (*Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, 136).

45 Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, trans. Bettina Bergo and Philippe Farah (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012).

46 Barbara Stiegler, "On the Future of Our Incorporations: Nietzsche, Media, Events," trans. Helen Elam *Discourse* 31, no. 1/2 (2009): 124–39; Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair: Dionysos, Ariane, le Christ* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2005).

47 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:19.

threatening than chaos. Modernity, the time of the nihilistic chaos of values, exposes bodies to greater chaos than ever before. This forces a hierarchizing split in humanity, between those who are strong enough for self-overcoming, for revaluation, for the renovation of the self as a hierarchy of drives and the chaos to which it exposes them, and those who are not so strong. One natural response of the weak is simply to shut down, to seek to close off one's dangerous exposure to chaos:

> "Modernity" under the allegory of nourishment and digestion.
>
> The sensibility unspeakably more excitable . . . the abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever before–the *cosmopolitanism* of cuisines, of literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even landscapes, etc.
>
> [T]he *tempo* of this influx as a *prestissimo*; the impressions wipe each other out [*wischen sich aus*]; *one protects oneself instinctively from taking anything in* [emphasis added], from accepting it *deeply*, from "*digesting*" anything
>
> – *Weakening* of the power of digestion is the result of this. A kind of *adaptation* to this inundation of impressions emerges: the human being unlearns how to *act*; he *now only reacts* to stimuli coming from outside. *He expends his power* partly in *adaptation*, partly in *defense*, partly in *riposte* [*Entgegnung*].[48]

We can read the last man as the herd animal who does exactly this, living a strategically anesthetized life in which he protects himself "from taking anything in." Stiegler calls modernity "the reign of what Nietzsche calls 'the last man,' that is, a human flesh for whom and through whom nothing happens."[49] But the herd had already chosen anesthesia in other less extreme forms, such as Christianity and socialism, as well.

It is always the case, on the other hand, that the small minority called to the transfiguration of the self as drives consists of elite bodies. These bodies can afford "chaos within" and the encounter with "Dionysus."

48 *Nachlass* 1887 10[18], KSA 12:464.
49 Barbara Stiegler, "On the Future of Our Incorporations," 133.

While the weak body self-anesthetizes, the strong one knows it is capable of the pain of the loss of the self that is implicit in the transformation or overcoming of the self, since "what determines . . . the place in the hierarchy is the profundity with which one can withstand suffering . . . Deep suffering makes one noble, it sets one apart."[50] The necessity of pain and hardship to creative self-fashioning is nowhere clearer than in *Zarathustra*'s "Three Metamorphoses," in which one must do battle with the values of millennia in order to achieve it.[51] For the truly strong, accepting such a battle makes sense, since "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger."[52] Some, on the other hand, may count themselves among those strong enough for self-overcoming, but only mistakenly. This seems to be the case with the idealistic youth climbing a mountain in Book I of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, who says, "I transform myself too quickly: my Today contradicts my Yesterday. I often leap over steps as I climb – which no step forgives me."[53]

If the human being can indeed say, "body am I, pure and simple," then it is only the body that values, and the revaluation of values must mean the self-overcoming of the body. This means the wagering of the self, the wagering of the hierarchy of drives that is the rubric of coherence as which we are currently constituted, and the supreme danger implied in this wagering is reflected in the omnipresence of the verb *Wagen*, to dare, in the Nietzsche text. "What does nihilism mean?–*That the highest values devalue themselves*. The goal is lacking; the answer to the 'Why?' is lacking."[54] This reality is expressed spatially in the most memorable way by the madman of GS 125, who announces the death of God, proclaiming that humanity itself has "wipe[d] away the entire horizon," and asking, "What did we do, when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? In what direction are we taking ourselves? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging perpetually? And backwards, sideways,

50 BGE, KSA 5:225.
51 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:29–31.
52 *Twilight of the Idols*, KSA 6:60.
53 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:52.
54 *Nachlass* 1887 9[35], KSA 12:350. This is also aphorism 2 of *The Will to Power*.

forwards, toward all sides?"[55] Yet the townspeople do not feel these cosmic convulsions and do not undertake the monumental task of forcing the earth onto a new fixed path. As a result, in the present, they remain comfortable. According to the Nietzschean logic we have been following, that is the right choice for ordinary people—not the exalted choice, but the lowly choice that is appropriate for the lowly. On the other hand, the intrepid, swashbuckling sailors of the immediately preceding section, GS 124, are clearly higher beings. They daringly put themselves in harm's way, sailing into the "horizon of the infinite," presaging the disorientation of the madman (and presaging, also, the madman's claim that such disorientation is manmade) by saying they "have destroyed the land behind us" such that "there is no 'land' anymore!"[56] The disorientation that must accompany the attempt at revaluation in the wake of the enervation of values in nihilism is not a state that just anyone should sail directly into, as indicated by the divergent cases of the Nietzschean sailors of GS 124 and the townspeople of GS 125. The self-imperilment implicit in self-overcoming and revaluation ought only to be attempted by the elite—by elite bodies.

5. Re-embodying Nietzsche: The Deafening World of the Last Man and the Egalitarian Nietzsche

What is the importance, to us, of recognizing the difficulty of the Nietzschean projects of self-overcoming and revaluation? What would be the downside of believing that the transfiguration of the self is easier than it really is?

Earlier, I referred to Barbara Stiegler's reconstruction of a vision of a dystopian postmodernity under "the reign of what Nietzsche calls 'the last man,' that is, a human flesh for whom and through whom nothing happens." Now it is time to fill out the rest of that dystopian landscape—or "soundscape," rather, as we will hear in a moment. The

55 GS 125, KSA 3:481.
56 GS 124, KSA 3:480.

future world Nietzsche fears is one, Stiegler shows us, in which the air is always filled with noise, in which everyone is always convinced that great things are happening, because loud things are happening.[57] In reality, however, nothing is happening. She cites Nietzsche as saying that we hear the resounding "hammering of the telegraph," as well as that of "the printing press, the machine, the railroad"—but "we do not understand it."[58] In this misbegotten age, only music that, like that of Wagner, "excites the flesh with an avalanche of more or less intense 'shocks'," can be considered great.[59] This, Stiegler concludes, is the last man's world governed by the "aesthetics of shock, which held that it was better to affirm the absolute flux [of Becoming] by destroying all the tools of incorporation [of Becoming] created by the flesh. This process is what Nietzsche calls the loosening of the arc, of the arc of incorporation."[60] This world of Wagnerian "shocks" constantly simulates cataclysm without undergoing fundamental change. The creation of this world allows the last man not only to hide from the responsibility and the danger involved in real "events," but also to believe that no greater events could be happening than those pseudo-events noisily taking place in the

57 By contrast, a voice "without voice" tells Zarathustra that "The most silent words [*die stillsten Worte*] are the ones which bring the storm. Thoughts which come on doves' feet guide the world" (KSA 4:188–89).

58 Cited by Stiegler in "On the Future of Our Incorporations," 125. The reference to the "hammering of the telegraph" comes from *Nachlass* 1877 22[76], KSA 8:392. The reference to the "printing press, the machine, railroad" comes in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* 278, KSA 2:674.

59 Stiegler, "On the Future of Our Incorporations," 136.

60 Stiegler, "On the Future of Our Incorporations,"136. Stiegler's language of explosive noise and "loosening" echoes the language of another scholar who speaks of the fate of the body in modern decadence through the figure of Wagner. David Wellbery sees "noise and disgregation" in Wagner and the era he represents: "In fact, *the true object of the essay is not Wagner the individual, but a species of organic agitation, a syndrome or type of sickness* . . . The sickness in question, of course, is decadence, a disease characterized by a poison-like spreading, an inner contagion. What spreads in decadence is *a certain disorganization, analogous, I think, to what information theorists call noise.* Decadence designates the disgregation of meaning structures." David Wellbery, "Nietzsche–Art–Postmodernism: A Reply to Jürgen Habermas" in *Nietzsche in Italy*, ed. Thomas Harrison (Saratoga, NY: Ambri Libri, 1988), 91, emphases mine.

present. To import the language of self-overcoming and revaluation—which is, to say, of great events, from Nietzsche's point of view—we can conclude that the last man not only evades the responsibility and danger of self-overcoming and revaluation, but also rests convinced that he is performing them every day. A smug self-deception in which one believes that one is creating culturally ensures that cultural creation will not in fact take place.[61]

The problem with the picture of the Nietzschean challenge to established values given by the critical egalitarian Nietzsche, such as the Nietzsche given to us above by Derrida, Butler, and Schutte, is that it makes self-overcoming and revaluation look like a mere *choice*, a mere *vocalization* that one can *choose* to make if one gives voice to the correct critical words. This happens because of the neglect of Nietzsche's physiology, which has been brought back to us by the relatively recent French readers I cite above, but which is largely absent on the readings of what the Anglophone world still anachronistically understands as "the French Nietzsche," either pejoratively, as in the case of many scholars working in analytically oriented philosophy departments, or positively, as in the case of many Anglophone humanities thinkers like Butler and Schutte whose work does not lie entirely within the domain of philosophy.

We can focus on Butler's employment of Nietzsche in *Gender Trouble* to illustrate how this picture that neglects physiology, and thus makes self-overcoming too easy, implies a violation of the core of Nietzsche's

61 We can see a somewhat parallel dynamic at work in Heidegger's indictment of the age of machination in the *Black Notebooks*, in which sheer size becomes the measure of mattering, so that Nietzsche's decibel magnitude is replaced with spatial magnitude. "The more gigantic [*je riesiger*] the human being becomes, the smaller his essence must become, until he, no longer seeing himself, confuses himself with his machinations, and thus 'survives' [überlebt] his own end." Then, later, "Contemporary humans are convinced that dashing along in machination [*Machenschaft*] (machination which is intrinsically and necessarily *incapable* of setting goals) would be strength and power and the mastery of 'life' . . . [They] *idolize [vergötzen] the antidivine [das Widergöttliche].*" Martin Heidegger, Überlegungen II-IV (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938), in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 94, ed. Peter Trawn (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2014), 282 and 341.

thinking regarding the human being.[62] For Butler, the notion that there is no doer behind the deed serves to justify the conclusion that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility."[63] It is clear, on a reading of *Gender Trouble* as a whole, that the phrase "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person'" names, for Butler, deleterious delusions: The task of the book might be said to be the "liberatory" "subversion" of the deluded belief that such coherence and such continuity exist (for anyone who has not read the book, the scare quotes around each noun in this phrase convey how dubious Butler thinks each of the concepts is).[64] The subversion of such coherence will pave the way for a world in which the stiflingly coherent gender norms that have constricted us up until now will have been genealogized, deconstructed, and disempowered. Yet we have shown that physiological coherence—as the coherence of the drives—is a basic task of the body, for Nietzsche, and that the loosening of this coherence is what Nietzsche names cultural decadence. In fact, the passage Butler

62 There is a fair deal of direct evidence that Butler is heavily influenced by French readings of Nietzsche of the generation that is now sometimes referred to with the phrase "the New Nietzsche." The most sustained evidence comes at the end of the book that comes out of the Yale dissertation project, *Subjects of Desire*, which traces twentieth-century French readings of Hegel, only in the end to narrate Nietzsche's usurpation of Hegel in the latter half of the century as French philosophy's German philosopher of choice (Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* [New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999], 205–238). Also, Butler is explicit in leaning on Michael Haar's reading of Nietzsche in presenting a Nietzsche who rejects the "doer" behind the "deed" in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 28). Haar contributed to the English-language volume *The New Nietzsche*, which was first published in 1977 and also included articles by Sarah Kofman, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze (Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," in *The New Nietzsche*, 5–36).

63 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

64 It is worth noting that the all-important, and always valorized, Butlerian word "subversion" (or "subversive") is quite frequently the word that appears in Losurdo's book to name everything Nietzsche *resists* politically, e.g., Nietzsche's "originality lies in his effort to locate themes present in the culture of the time as part of his view of the *longue durée* of the cycle of subversion" (Losurdo, *Nietzsche, The Aristocratic Rebel*, 920).

cites, the famous *Genealogy* I:13, is ultimately *all about* Nietzsche's claim that one cannot spontaneously choose to revolutionize one's current, coherent drive structure, one's physiology, which can be the only basis, for Nietzsche, for anything like an identity: Birds of prey cannot freely choose to be lambs, because "to demand of strength that it does not express itself as strength . . . is exactly as nonsensical as demanding of weakness that it express itself as strength. A quantum of force is also a quantum of drive… and only due to the deception of language . . . which understands and misunderstands all action as determined through an actor, can it appear otherwise."[65] To overcome eaglehood and to achieve lambhood, as happens when at last the city of Rome bows down to a Jew in GM I:16,[66] or to overcome lambhood and achieve eaglehood, which the same section intimates as a Nietzschean goal, is in fact the result of millennia of development, millennia of *Zucht und Züchtung*. Nietzsche admires nothing more than true self-overcoming, but he also paints it, in the context of his philosophy as a whole, as a veritable miracle. This is literalized in the mythology set forth in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: One must die, *untergehen*, in order to come back as a higher being. For Butler in *Gender Trouble*, on the other hand, the "subversion" of the (gendered) self as which one has been living until now very frequently appears as a mere choice, a merely intellectual, conscious, spontaneous decision to reject the reified notions of perduring subjecthood that have always oppressed inhabitants of the Western world. In Butler's invocation of Nietzsche, then, the miracle of Nietzschean self-overcoming is reduced to the mere decision to choose a different identity. Butler's own self-criticism in the 1999 preface concedes, "*Gender Trouble* sometimes reads as if gender is simply a self-invention."[67] This can only happen once the thoroughly bodily category of gender has been disembodied, from a Nietzschean point of view regarding what it means to be embodied—once the subversion of embodied cultural norms is no longer understood through the lens of the incredibly difficult task of reworking the hierarchy

65 GM I:13, KSA 5:279.
66 GM I:16, KSA 5:287.
67 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxvi.

of drives that composes the self as body, but is instead understood only as a simple choice of self.[68] The result is that, invoking Nietzsche at two critical junctures, both at the introduction of the program of *Gender Trouble* at its outset and the conclusion's summary of what the book has accomplished,[69] Butler removes the danger and the tremendous difficulty of the self-overcoming of the body, democratizing self-overcoming by ignoring the physiological context in which the "doer" behind the "deed" is denied, making it something anyone and everyone can accomplish at any time.

Invoking the logic of Stiegler's essay regarding the cacophony of modern pseudoevents, we can say the following: Butler's democratization of Nietzschean self-overcoming in their depiction of self-chosen "subversion" is an invitation to the dystopian modernity that believes that great events are always happening, when, in fact, the age of true happening has already passed. When everybody believes that genuine subversion is a merely discursive event, a Tweet perhaps, an act of simple explicit renunciation of old values and vocal confirmation of new values, rather than the hard work of self-training toward the embodiment of a new drive hierarchy that would sing in tune with a new set of values, then a world has been built in which everyone falsely believes in every moment that they are a creator, a cultural innovator, a subversive leader. Such a world will appear superficially as a constant stream of cultural explosions when, in fact, nothing is happening. Nietzsche's last man, Stiegler's 2009

68 Indeed, something like this complaint has been leveled against Butler completely apart from her appropriation of Nietzsche. Feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood asserts against Butler that "the question of reform of [a patriarchal] tradition cannot start simply from an advocacy of women's emancipation from male control, but necessitates a *much deeper engagement with the architecture of the self* that undergirds a particular mode of living" (emphasis mine). It is not the case that Mahmood's "architecture of the self" is identical to Nietzsche's, but this "architecture" certainly does include the hard-wired, learned inclinations and desires of the body. In an essay currently being drafted, I argue that Mahmood's rejoinder against Butler amounts to the quasi-Nietzschean accusation that Butler has forgotten the body of drives. Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 217.

69 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 28 and 195.

depiction of him presciently suggests, lives permanently on Twitter or on TikTok, fecklessly exploding without changing the chemical content of the atmosphere at all. Reengineering the very "architecture of the self"[70] in the way required for true self-overcoming is something only very few can do, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, and, while the "printing press, the machine, the railroad, the telegraph" hammer away deafeningly, the few who are capable of self-overcoming quietly turn inwards in order to accomplish it: While *Zarathustra*'s "fire hound," representative of social reformers and political revolutionaries,[71] believes that the loudest (political) events are always the most important ones, Zarathustra responds, "The greatest events – those are not our loudest, but rather our most silent [*stillsten*] hours."[72]

But only the greatest are capable of the great, silent event of self-overcoming, and the greatness of the great is always embodied. In short, one cannot seriously confront Nietzsche's physiology without confronting the fact that he is centrally and always a thinker of human excellence. Excellence implies hierarchy and is, in the first instance, an antiegalitarian concept. When appropriations of Nietzsche—especially those that turn themselves toward the question of how we live our bodies, as do those of Derrida, Butler, and Schutte—avoid these elements of Nietzsche's thought, it is worth questioning whether the texts of Nietzsche are actually contributing in any serious way to the ultimate conclusions reached—and whether what is being done with the Nietzsche texts really deserves to be called *reading*. Derrida and Butler, especially, take very seriously Nietzsche's self-designation as a prophet of new values. Yet it is difficult to imagine how either of them could account, within the logic of their respective readings of Nietzsche, for the following lines, so important to him that they appear twice, identically, in two of his most important works, in Book III of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and as the final words of *Twilight of the Idols*:

70 I borrow the term from Saba Mahmood; see note 68 above.

71 I glean this interpretation of the fire hound figure from T. K. Seung in his *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 87–88.

72 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:169.

> For creators are hard. And it must seem blessedness to you to impress your hand onto millennia as onto wax
>
> –blessedness, to write upon the will of millennia as upon bronze– harder than bronze, nobler than bronze. Only the noblest is entirely hard.
>
> This new tablet, oh my brothers, I place over you: *become hard!* –[73]

When one associates creative transvaluation, as Derrida does, with laughter, play, forgetfulness, and feasting, but *without* reference to becoming hard, going under, or "the noblest," it comes to seem like something anyone could do, just as it does in Butler.[74]

6. Conclusions

Nietzsche's elitism matters because the birth of new values will only come about via creators capable of rebirthing themselves as new human beings. But he views this as incredibly difficult, as evidenced by the entire logic of the finite flesh as hierarchy of drives. The democratization of revaluation renders flaccid the notion of a *value* in Nietzsche. How is it that an entire civilization can find itself in a state like that of nihilism, the state of the collapse of values? Certainly, we cannot conceive of this happening if the "printing" of values, if you will, appears to us simply as spontaneously willed "self-invention," to use Butler's phrase, that is accomplished as soon as it is decided upon. Only in a world in which the creation of new values is "hard," as hard as the creator himself, and is not something everyone can do, can such a historical view even begin to make sense. Otherwise, nihilism would never have lasted a day before new values were created to fill the void.

It is my sense that Nietzsche's elitism, his exhortation to "the noblest" to "become hard," has something valuable to say to our world today, when the creative fashioning of a "self" in the form of a social media account has

73 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:268; *Twilight of the Idols*, KSA 6:161. Emphasis in original.

74 See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30, no. 1 (1969): 57.

never seemed more democratically available, and the pretense to playing a part in the directing of a culture's values is as easy as a Twitter diatribe. This is a loud world, full of constant explosions that do not change the placement of a single atom. The power to initiate these explosions has been radically democratized, but this does not mean that real cultural influence has been. Nietzsche has never been more "untimely" than in this loud age, as he calls on the few who are able to do so to do the nearly impossible work of becoming the sort of creators who would produce the "greatest events," which are "not our loudest, but rather our most silent hours." A great irony lies in the fact that such a jeremiad against an age of deafening shocks (and against its leader in his time, Wagner, a composer of deafening shocks) would be delivered by a man whom we could quite reasonably call the loudest philosopher of all time. That, however, is a topic we will not explore here.

I would like to close by reflecting on some thoughts regarding the value of Nietzsche, as offered by Ofelia Schutte, whose postcolonial interpretation of the philosopher I briefly discussed above. Schutte argues that reading the elitist, antiprogressive Nietzsche is good for progressives because it leads toward an open mind and away from dogmatism. "His critique of democratic and egalitarian ideals is good," she says,

> not because we (democrats) believe in his cultural politics of the superior being dictating the cultural norms everyone else must follow, or because we think European culture should rule over the rest of the world's cultures. It is good only because it breaks the taboos of the mind and the ever-present dogmatisms of the prevailing culture, some of which he himself was not able to unravel, though he sets the path for others to do so. Nietzsche's radical questioning of accepted truths permits us to think creatively and to risk new interpretations of democracy, feminist theory, socialist theory, or whatever our progressive political goals may be.[75]

75 Schutte, "Nietzsche's Cultural Politics," 69–70.

In a superficial way, I agree: Nietzsche does "break the taboos of the mind"—and even breaks what had, at various earlier stages in his career, been the taboos of his own mind. Indeed, he shows us how to be open-minded. But how open-minded can a reading be if it sets out, as Schutte clearly marks herself as setting out, from the beginning not to be persuaded by the inegalitarian elements of a thinker whose opposition to egalitarianism is central to everything he ever says? What is being "risked" in the reading of an antidemocratic, antifeminist, antisocialist, antiprogressive author, if the intention from the outset is to reformulate the "political goals," which remain in place throughout the reading, of democracy, feminism, socialism, and progressivism? What does it mean to read, and is it something we are still capable of?

What if the "ever-present dogmatisms" of a given individual's time and place, of their intellectual milieu, are inflexibly egalitarian? In the context of today's university, and in the context of today's Nietzsche studies, allowing Nietzsche to be truly "subversive," to invoke Butler's watchword, would mean allowing him to stand forth as a great elitist thinker whose greatness and elitism cannot be separated. It would mean *reading* Nietzsche. But that involves risk, an act of *sich Wagen*, of which only an elite few might be capable.