

Introduction

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Nietzsche and fascism? Is it not almost a contradiction in terms? What can Nietzsche have in common with this murderous ideology? The central ideal of Nietzsche's philosophy was the individual and his freedom to shape his own character and destiny. The German philosopher was frequently described as the "radical aristocrat" of the spirit because he abhorred mass culture and strove to cultivate a special kind of human being, the *Übermensch*, endowed with exceptional spiritual and mental qualities. What can such a thinker have in common with National Socialism's manipulation of the masses for chauvinistic goals that swallowed up the personalities, concerns, and life of the individual?

In 1934, Adolf Hitler paid a much publicized visit to the Nietzsche archives at Weimar. He had gone at the insistent request of its director, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (sister of the long-deceased German philosopher), and he was accompanied by his personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann. The main purpose of the visit, it seems, was to enable Hoffmann to take a picture of Hitler contemplating the bust of Nietzsche, which stood in the reception room. Perhaps appropriately, only half of the philosopher's head was shown in the picture, which duly appeared in the German press with a caption that read, "The Führer before the bust of the German philosopher whose ideas have fertilized two great popular movements: the National Socialism of Germany and the Fascist movement of Italy."

Although Benito Mussolini was certainly familiar with Nietzsche's writings and was a long-time admirer of the philosopher, Hitler's own connection with Nietzsche remains uncertain. As a soldier during the First World War, he had carried the works of Schopenhauer and not those of Nietzsche in his backpack. There is no reference to Nietzsche in *Mein Kampf* (though there is to Schopenhauer), and in *Hitler's Table Talk*, he refers only indirectly to Nietzsche, saying: "In our part of the world, the Jews would have immediately eliminated Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kant. If the Bolsheviks had dominion over us for two hundred years, what works of our past would be handed on to posterity? Our great men would fall into oblivion, or else they'd be presented to future generations as criminals and bandits."¹

Thus the picture of Hitler gazing at Nietzsche's bust had more to do with a carefully orchestrated cult, one aspect of which was to connect National Socialism with the philosopher's legacy, at least by association. On October 1944, celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Nietzsche, Alfred Rosenberg, the leading Nazi party ideologist, delivered an official speech in Weimar, seeking to reinforce this impression: "In a truly historical sense, the National Socialist movement eclipses the rest of the world, much as Nietzsche, the individual, eclipsed the powers of his times."² Of course, Nietzsche was not the only German philosopher invoked as a spiritual guide and forerunner of the Nazi revolution, but his "Nazification" in the course of the Third Reich is a historical fact that cannot be denied, though it is more open to interpretation than is sometimes assumed.

The intriguing question that lies at the heart of this original collection of essays is how Nietzsche came to acquire the deadly "honor" of being considered the philosopher of the Third Reich and whether such claims have any justification. What was it in Nietzsche that attracted such a Nazi appropriation in the first place? To what extent is it legitimate to view Nietzsche as a protofascist thinker? Does it make any sense to hold him in some way responsible for the horrors of Auschwitz? These issues are not as clear-cut as they may seem, and though they have attracted much polemical heat, they have not received any truly systematic treatment. In this volume, we have attempted to fill that gap in as concise and comprehensive a way as possible by turning to a variety of distinguished historians, Nietzsche scholars, philosophers, and historians of ideas. It was clear from the outset that we could not expect, nor indeed did we strive for, unanimous conclusions on the thorny, complex, and emotionally charged question of Nietzsche and fascism. A whole range of views is presented here that attempts to do justice in different ways to the ambiguity and richness of Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche encouraged his readers to shift their intellectual

viewpoints and be willing to experience even radically incompatible perspectives. Thus by dealing with the subject matter of this collection from two different perspectives—that of philosophers and of historians—we hope that a Nietzschean spirit of intellectual tolerance will be reflected in this volume.

Nietzsche's life and thought will never be reducible to a single constituency or political ideology, as this volume makes plain. The ambiguities and contradictions in his work as well as his elusive, aphoristic style lend themselves to a wide range of meanings and a multiplicity of interpretations. Nevertheless, while acknowledging this diversity, the editors cannot in good conscience be exempted from the challenge of offering some guidelines regarding the central issues raised by a book about Nietzsche and fascism, even if the title (as seems appropriate in this case) ends with a question mark.

Nietzsche was clearly an elitist who believed in the right to rule of a "good and healthy aristocracy," one that would, if necessary, be ready to sacrifice untold numbers of human beings. He sometimes wrote as if nations primarily existed for the sake of producing a few "great men," who could not be expected to show consideration for "normal humanity." Not surprisingly, in the light of the cruel century that has just ended, one is bound to regard such statements with grave misgivings. From Mussolini and Hitler to Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and Saddam Hussein, the last eighty years have been riddled with so-called political geniuses imagining that they were "beyond good and evil" and free of any moral constraints. One has to ask if there is not something in Nietzsche's philosophy with its uninhibited cultivation of a heroic individualism and the will to power, which may have tended to favor the fascist ethos. Mussolini, for example, raised the Nietzschean formulation "live dangerously" (*vivi pericolosamente*) to the status of a fascist slogan. His reading of Nietzsche was one factor in converting him from Marxism to a philosophy of sacrifice and warlike deeds in defense of the fatherland. In this mutation, Mussolini was preceded by Gabriele d'Annunzio, whose passage from aestheticism to the political activism of a new, more virile and warlike age, was (as Mario Sznajder points out in his essay) greatly influenced by Nietzsche. Equally, there were other representatives of the First World War generation, like the radical German nationalist writer, Ernst Jünger, who would find in Nietzsche's writings a legitimization of the warrior ethos (as David Ohana makes clear).

There have also been Marxist critics like George Lukács, who saw in Nietzsche's philosophy nothing more than an ideological apologia for the rapacious plunder of German capitalist imperialism and a particularly destructive form of irrationalism. Lukács insisted both on the

reactionary coherence of Nietzsche's "system" and on the "barren chaos" of his arbitrary language, singling him out as one of the most dangerous "intellectual class-enemies" of socialism. Lukács's own miserable record as an apologist (for the crimes of Stalinism), gave his one-sided reading of Nietzsche (which equated hostility to egalitarian socialism with fascist imperialism) transparently propagandist coloring, yet it is an interpretation that had considerable influence in its day.

Many commentators have raised the question as to whether the vulgar exploitation of Nietzsche by fascists, militarists, and Nazis could indeed be altogether arbitrary. While almost any philosophy can be propagandistically abused (as Hans Sluga has shown, Kant was a particular favorite among academic philosophers of the Third Reich!), Nietzsche's pathos, his imaginative excesses as well as his image as a prophet-seer and creator of myths, seems especially conducive to such abuse by fascists. The radical manner in which Nietzsche thrust himself against the boundaries of conventional (Judeo-Christian) morality and dramatically proclaimed that God (meaning the bourgeois Christian faith of the nineteenth century) was dead, undoubtedly appealed to something in Nazism that wished to transgress and transcend all existing taboos. The totalitarianism of the twentieth century (of both the Right and Left) presupposed a breakdown of all authority and moral norms, of which Nietzsche was indeed a clear-sighted prophet, precisely because he had diagnosed nihilism as the central problem of his society — that of *fin de siècle* Europe. For him there was no way back to the old moral certainties about "good" and "evil," no way to regain firm ground under one's feet. Humanity, long before 1914, had (spiritually speaking) already burned its bridges. Nietzsche was convinced that there was no escape from the "nihilism" of the age, except to go forward into a more "perfect nihilism," to use the term of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter in this volume. Nietzsche believed that only by honestly facing the stark truth that there is no truth, no goal, no value or meaning in itself, could one pave the way for a real intellectual liberation and a reevaluation of all values. Nietzsche was more a herald and prophet of the crisis of values out of which Nazism emerged, rather than a godfather of the century's fascist movements *per se*.

Much of the confusion identifying Nietzsche with National Socialism can be traced back to the disastrous role of his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (married to a prominent German anti-Semite) who took control of his manuscripts in the 1890s, when he was mentally and physically incapacitated. Already in the 1920s she promoted her brother as the philosopher of fascism, sending her warmest good wishes to Benito Mussolini as "the inspired reawakener of aristocratic values in Nietzsche's sense"; similarly, she invited Hitler several times to the archive in

Weimar, even giving him the symbolic gift of Nietzsche's walking stick in 1934. Nazi propaganda encouraged such (mis)appropriation, for example, by publishing popular and inexpensive anthologies and short collections of Nietzsche's sayings, which were then misused in their truncated form to promote militarism, toughness, and Germanic values. Alfred Bäumler, a professor of philosophy in Berlin after 1933, on seeing German youth march under the swastika banner could even write, "[A]nd when we call 'Heil Hitler!' to this youth then we are greeting at the same time Friedrich Nietzsche with that call." Needless to say, Bäumler played a key role in the increasingly shameless appropriation of Nietzsche as a philosopher of the so-called Nordic race, a kind of intellectual Siegfried—anti-Roman, anti-Christian (which was true), and thoroughly in tune with the spirit of 1914. Aware that Nietzsche had no theory of *volk* or race, Bäumler nonetheless concocted a spurious link between the philosopher's individual struggle for integrity and Nazi collectivism. With the same sleight of hand, he could explain away Nietzsche's break with Wagner merely as a product of envy and dismiss his tirades against the Germans as expressing no more than his disapproval of certain non-Germanic elements in their character.

No less convoluted were the efforts of the Nazi commentator Heinrich Härtle in his 1937 book *Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus*, where he presented the philosopher "as a great ally in the present spiritual warfare." Härtle realized that Nietzsche's advocacy of European unity, his elitism and individualism, his critique of the state, his approval of race-mixing, and his anti-anti-Semitism were incompatible with Nazi ideology. By relativizing these shortcomings as minor issues (in the case of the Jews, he simply quoted those instances—comparatively few in number—where Nietzsche seemed to be attacking them) and as reflections of a different political environment in the nineteenth century, Härtle could present Nietzsche as a precursor of Hitler.

Sadly, such crude distortions were echoed in Allied war propaganda and in newspaper headlines in Britain and the United States, which (continuing the traditions of the First World War) sometimes depicted the "insane philosopher" as the source of a ruthless German barbarism and as Hitler's favorite author. Phrases torn out of their context such as the "superman," (or "Overman"), the "blond beast," "master morality," or the "will to power" were all too easily turned into slogans (even by distinguished philosophers like Sir Karl Popper³) to demonstrate Nietzsche's imagined identification with German militarism and imperialism, though nothing had been further from his mind.

Before 1939 not everyone shared this increasingly broad consensus, which saw Nietzsche as the spiritual godfather of fascism and Nazism. Opponents of Nazism like the German philosophers Karl Jaspers and

Karl Löwith sought to invalidate the official Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche in the 1930s. Together with a number of French intellectuals, they contributed to a special issue of *Acéphale* published in January 1937 and entitled “*Réparation à Nietzsche*.” The most prominent of the French antifascist Nietzscheans was the left-wing existentialist thinker Georges Bataille, who sought to rescue Nietzsche by demonstrating the German philosopher’s abhorrence of pan-Germanism, racism and the rabid anti-Semitism of Hitler’s followers. In the United States, the most eminent postwar advocate of a “liberal” Nietzsche was Walter Kaufmann, an American scholar in Princeton who provided many of the most authoritative translations into English of Nietzsche’s writings. His *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950) became a standard work in the critical rehabilitation of Nietzsche in the postwar English-speaking world, seeking to dissociate him from any connection with Social Darwinism and the intellectual origins of National Socialism.

One of Kaufmann’s virtues was to document the scale of Nietzsche’s contempt for the racist anti-Semites of his generation, such as the schoolteacher Bernhard Förster (his sister’s husband), Theodor Fritsch, Paul de Lagarde, and Eugen Dühring. If Nazism conceived of Jewry as an inferior race of “subhumans” marked for annihilation, then Nietzsche’s own writings show, as both Yirmiyahu Yovel and Robert Wistrich have argued, that the Jews represented for him a kind of spiritual crystallization of what he understood by the *Übermensch* (Overman) of the future.

At first sight, this sharp rejection of anti-Semitism might seem a good enough reason to answer negatively and decisively the question concerning Nietzsche’s responsibility for Nazism. Certainly, a thinker who held a high opinion of Jewish qualities, looked to them as a spearhead for his own free-thinking Dionysian “revaluation of all values,” and sought their full integration into European society could hardly be blamed for the Nazi Holocaust. On the other hand, in his sweeping rejection of Judeo-Christian values (as they were mirrored in German Protestantism) Nietzsche constantly referred to their origin in the sublime “vengefulness” of Israel and its alleged exploitation of so-called movements of “decadence” (like early Christianity, liberalism, and socialism) to ensure its own self-preservation and survival (Menahem Brinker). Even though Nietzsche’s prime target was clearly Christianity — which he also blamed for the suffering of the Jews — the source of the infection ultimately lay in that fateful transvaluation of values initiated by priestly Judaism two millennia ago. It was a selective reading of this Nietzschean indictment of Judeo-Christianity that led the late Jacob Talmon, an Israeli historian, some forty years ago to see in Nietz-

sche a major intellectual signpost on the road to Auschwitz. Moreover, even when describing the “Judaization” of the world in terms that mixed admiration with disapprobation, Nietzsche seemed inadvertently to be feeding the myth of Jewish power, so beloved of Christian and racist anti-Semites. Though his intentions were profoundly hostile to anti-Semitism, this provocative technique was undoubtedly a dangerous game to play. While it would be senseless to hold Nietzsche responsible for such distortions, one can find troubling echoes of a vulgarized and debased Nietzscheanism in the later diatribes of Hitler, Himmler, Bormann, and Rosenberg against Judeo-Christianity.

The case of Nietzsche is a good illustration of the pitfalls in an overly schematic approach to intellectual history that takes particular strands in a thinker’s oeuvre and seeks to fit them into more general constructs like fascism or National Socialism. On the basis of Nietzsche’s declared hostility to Christianity, liberal democracy, and socialism, it is possible to see him as a precursor of the fascist synthesis. Some aspects of his admiration for ancient Greek culture and for “Romanitas” were used by both fascists and Nazis, who thoroughly distorted his philosophical intent. Though he took the ancient Greeks as cultural models, he did not subscribe to their self-conception as a “breed of masters,” which prompted them to brand non-Greeks as “barbarians,” fit only to be slaves. Indeed, all forms of xenophobia were profoundly alien to Nietzsche’s outlook, none more so than the hot-headed nationalistic rivalries so typical of the European nation-state system into which he was born. This explains his revulsion from the German nationalism that had come into vogue in the 1880s following the unification of Germany and the success of Bismarckian power politics. In fact, Nietzsche was in many respects the least patriotic and least German of his philosophical contemporaries in the Second Reich.

This was one of the major reasons for his abandonment of Wagner and the Bayreuth Festival, which had degenerated into a chauvinist celebration of “German Art,” “German virtues,” and a so-called “Germanic essence,” deeply contaminated by “the humbug of races” and anti-Semitism. The fact that the Wagnerites gave a romantic Christian veneer to their cult of “Germanism” further provoked his antagonism. Nietzsche reserved a special animus for the ways in which the Christian churches in Germany had allowed themselves to be swept along by the national intoxication after 1870. Above all he denounced the corruption of the German “spirit” by the new practitioners of power politics. Hence it was one of the worst Nazi distortions of Nietzsche’s philosophy to claim that his notion of “the will to power” was consonant with what was being advocated in the Third Reich.

Far from relating to nationalist obsessions, Nietzsche had asserted a

life-affirming outlook that sought to empower the individual to overcome his or her limitations by questioning all our assumptions concerning truth, logic, beliefs, culture, values, and history. As Jacob Golomb has shown, what Nietzsche prized above all was spiritual power (*Macht*) not the brute political force (*Kraft*) that he denounced with all the sarcasm at his command. This spiritual power of the sovereign, emancipated individual who is “master of a free will” involved a long and difficult process of sublimation, which would eventually culminate in self-mastery. It was a vision fundamentally antithetical to the totalitarian collectivism of both the Right and the Left.

Nietzsche’s indictment of the Christian and nationalist Right as well as of the official *Machtpolitik* and its consequences for German culture, was unequivocal. The break with Wagner is especially illuminating because the Wagnerian ideology and the cult that developed in Bayreuth was a much more real precursor of *völkisch* and Hitlerian ideas. Once Nietzsche had thrown off the romantic nationalism of his early days, his devastating critique of Wagner—prophetic in many ways of what was to come—revealed his remarkably penetrating insight into its dangerous illusions. National Socialism could plausibly derive inspiration from Wagner but it could only use Nietzsche by fundamentally twisting his philosophy.

Nietzsche was undeniably mobilized by the Nazis as several historical essays in the present collection demonstrate. So what exactly was the role of Nietzsche and his writings in this process? Is Martin Jay right to claim in his *Fin-de-Siècle Socialism* (1988) that “while it may be questionable to saddle Marx with responsibility for the Gulag archipelago or blame Nietzsche for Auschwitz, it is nevertheless true that their writings could be misread as justifications for these horrors in a way that . . . John Stuart Mill or Alexis de Toqueville could not” (33). Even Jacques Derrida, despite insisting that “Nietzsche’s utterances are not the same as those of the Nazi ideologists and not only because the latter grossly caricature the former to the point of apishness,” cannot refrain from wondering, in reference to Nietzsche’s case, “how and why what is so naively called a falsification was possible (one can’t falsify anything).”⁴

Some of the essays in the present collection try to answer this intriguing question. The enigma becomes even more perplexing in an argument in which a distinguished scholar absolves Nietzsche from any responsibility for the atrocities performed by the Nazis, yet holds him accountable for their misinterpretations. His claim is that Nietzsche had anticipated being misinterpreted as a fascist without doing enough to prevent these misinterpretations. Such a view is presented in Berel Lang’s essay. Yet, in his 1990 book, Lang asserts that “to reconstruct in

the imagination the events leading up to the Nazi genocide against the Jews without the name or presence of Nietzsche is to be compelled to change almost nothing else in that pattern.”⁵ So who is right? Lang ten years ago or the essay we have included? Can we, indeed ever reach a definite and sound judgment concerning Nietzsche’s accountability, responsibility, or even culpability for Nazi misappropriations of his writings?

The essays below strive to provide us with some answers. But other, even more crucial questions hover over this issue. Was Nietzsche not trying to convince an entire culture and society to cultivate a new kind of man and mode of life (as the Nazis were also trying to do)? Has not the fact that he had no normative ethics, nor normative politics, facilitated his criminal misappropriation? Should we not consider his attempt to overthrow the values of the Enlightenment and eradicate the foundations of Christian morality an extremely dangerous maneuver, especially when he could clearly hear the loud strains of Wagnerian music and the nationalism of Bayreuth, which for many philosophers and historians already seems like a prefiguration of Nazism (see Yovel’s essay in this volume)? Brinker and others in this book think that Nietzsche did have some responsibility for Nazi crimes—an argument that has also been made by Steven Aschheim in his study of the Nietzschean legacy in Germany. Many others, including both editors of this volume, think differently.

To tackle this question as soberly and objectively as possible requires going beyond a common defense of Nietzsche in the postwar scholarship. Walter Kaufmann and others were trying to sever Nietzsche altogether from Nazi ideology by stressing the fact that he was fundamentally an apolitical thinker who rejected pan-Germanism and anti-Semitism. But it does not necessarily follow that since Nietzsche detested German and other nationalistic attitudes, his teaching was essentially a nonpolitical one. Tempting as it may be to cleanse his thought from the taint of any political ideology, especially that of fascism, it is in fact a misguided strategy. For it is precisely by emphasizing the political import and content of Nietzsche’s philosophy that one can put into a sharper relief his “antifascist” orientation.

The argument that presented Nietzsche as a staunch opponent of the nation-state was especially prevalent among his advocates during the first twenty years after the second World War. They wished to rehabilitate his reputation by denying any trace of resemblance between his writings and those who did almost everything to make them sound compatible with *Mein Kampf*. As a result, these apologists performed a sweeping depoliticization of Nietzsche’s thought.⁶ One of the most influential of these commentators was the previously mentioned Walter

Kaufmann. Against the generalizing accusations of Crane Brinton (1940, 1941) and others, that Nietzsche was the godfather of Nazism, Kaufmann presented the leitmotif of Nietzsche's life and thought as that of "the antipolitical individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern world."⁷

It is noteworthy that much contemporary research—which has been less vulnerable to the atmosphere of suspicion that loomed over Nietzsche by the end of the Second World War—tended instead to emphasize the significance of politics in his philosophy. Such scholars sensibly conceded that even if one cannot find in Nietzsche's antisystematic writings any definite political thought, his radical discussions of morality and concept of the "modern man" had a far reaching political significance. It was within a definite cultural and political context that Nietzsche sought to attain his ideal of a unique and authentic individual cultivating Dionysian values.⁸

Nietzsche did, however, reject the view that one can justify or rationally derive a political order from certain universalistic principles. It is also true that during his life Nietzsche did not publish anything comparable to Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus*, which was specifically dedicated to political issues. Of course, there were always political implications in writings like his *Genealogy of Morals*, which critically examined the moral values prevalent in modern society. Moreover, there was an early unpublished composition by Nietzsche (from 1872) that analyses the "Greek state," and we also have many long passages from his published works that squarely deal with politics.⁹ We should not forget also that the last sentence Nietzsche had a chance to write before his final collapse did have a pronounced political connotation: "*Wilhelm, Bismarck und alle Antisemiten abgeschafft*" ("Wilhelm, Bismarck and all anti-Semites abolished").

It is worthwhile in this context to examine more closely Nietzsche's so-called confession that he was the "last antipolitical German". The German equivalent to this term is *antipolitisch* which is different from *unpolitisch*—referring to somebody who is utterly indifferent to politics. Indeed Nietzsche, in his *Twilight of the Idols*, in a section entitled "What the Germans Lack," distinguished between both of these attitudes to politics by contrasting the Bismarckian modern *Reich* that embodies a strong political power (*Grossmacht*) to a society that is essentially *antipolitisch*. The latter is a social framework that objects to using political force (*Kraft*) to promote its culture (and Nietzsche in this context gives as an example France, which he calls the "*Culturmacht*"). None of this made Nietzsche into an antipolitical person, let alone an anarchist. On the contrary, as a great advocate of human creativity, he could see the need for statehood and a civil society in whose framework

creativity might take place and flourish. Nietzsche distinguished sharply between the more sublime spiritual and mental powers of individuals (or entire peoples) who generate and produce sublime cultures, and the physical or political force that found expression in overpowering *Kraft* or *Gewalt*. Possibly because Hegel, whom Nietzsche criticized in his writings, regarded the Prussian state of the nineteenth century as the highest rational manifestation of the Universal *Geist*, Nietzsche felt particularly driven to attack this idea of statehood that had attracted his contemporaries. In any case, it is noteworthy that Nietzsche wished his publisher to remove the passage from his *Ecce Homo* where he supposedly declared himself to be a nonpolitical thinker.

In this passage, Nietzsche actually tries to distance himself not from politics as such (a move that would indeed have made him a nonpolitical thinker) but from the nationalist German politics which at that time raised its ugly head to the ominous tunes of “*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles*.” With this militaristic slogan, Nietzsche observes, came “the end of German philosophy.” Thus his statement that he was the “last *antipolitical* German” could itself be seen as a political statement that strove to overcome nationalism and racism—the “anticultural sickness par excellence.” At any rate, in that passage which, as mentioned above, was not intended for publication, Nietzsche states that due to him being “the last *antipolitical* German” he is “perhaps more German than present-day Germans, mere citizens of the German Reich, could possibly be.” Nietzsche thereby admits to belonging to the German nation but clearly distances himself (at least in his main compositions during the middle period of his career) from the German Reich of Bismarck. One could almost say that Nietzsche was an antipolitical thinker for political reasons and a political thinker for philosophical reasons, among them his attempt to foster the existential ideal of personal authenticity. In other words, Nietzsche had adopted an antipolitical attitude for reasons that had to do with the future of human culture, an issue which he called “*grosse Politik*.” For Nietzsche, politics becomes “grand” when it sustains and assists in cultivating human greatness and cultural grandeur. This “great politics” is fundamentally a politics of culture. And if we broadly define politics as an organized and orchestrated mobilization of human resources for the sake of a group or nation, Nietzsche, was indeed deeply engrossed with a politics that would embark on the cultural engineering of the entire society. We ought also to recall that Nietzsche saw in the genuine philosopher the creator of values for future society. Like Plato, Nietzsche envisaged the philosopher as a legislator. Hence Nietzsche is no less political than he is “immoral”—in a very moral and political sense.

Nietzsche abhorred the state only insofar as it became a goal in itself

and ceased to function as a means for the advancement and education of autonomous and creative human beings. His preferred and most admired models to achieve the latter ideal were the Greek *polis*, the *virtu* of ancient Rome, and the worldly individualism of the Italian Renaissance—cultural patterns that had never made national supremacy the cornerstone of their ideal or regarded the ethnic attributes of their citizens as a mark of creativity or superiority. But there was nothing in his writings to suggest that Nietzsche objected in principle to “the political organization” of statehood as long as it did not become a Leviathan repressing genuine culture and persons.

Nietzsche did not reject the state where it was conducive to authentic life aspirations—a vital element in his philosophy. But once this legitimate (and “natural”) creation changed its nature and became a manifestation of extreme nationalism that hindered free and spontaneous creativity, Nietzsche vehemently opposed it and wished to curb its destructive effects. Perhaps under the influence of Hobbes, Nietzsche would call this kind of state “the coldest of all cold monsters.”¹⁰ However, where it encouraged individuals to shape and form their cultural identity in an authentic way, Nietzsche regarded the state as a “blessed means.”

An illuminating case in point is Nietzsche’s attitude toward the aspirations of the Jewish people to establish an independent state for themselves.

For Nietzsche, the history of the Jewish people was a great enigma. He was mesmerized by the example of the Jews in the Diaspora and their ability to establish an effective spiritual-cultural kingdom in Europe without any state or territorial basis. Despite their lack of such support and other adverse and taxing conditions, they had manifested a “plentitude of power *without equal* to which only the nobility had access” (GS, 136). Nietzsche’s reference to the Jews as the most “powerful race,” in spite of their obvious political and physical weakness, clearly showed that there was nothing physical in the sense of brute force (*Kraft*) in the Nietzschean concept of power (*Macht*). One might even assert that Nietzsche’s vision of a “new Europe” devoid of national boundaries and united not by a common economic interest and financial policy but by the wish to foster a Dionysian, genuinely creative culture was partially inspired by the example of European Jewry. Moreover, Nietzsche stressed the fact that even in the most adverse circumstances, the Jewish people “have never ceased to believe in their calling to the highest things” (D, 205). This abundance of spiritual power could best function creatively without national institutions. Hence Nietzsche bestowed on them a vital role in the extraterritorial and su-

pranational Europe of the future when their plentiful power will flow “into great spiritual men and works . . . into an eternal blessing for Europe” (ibid.).

Echoing the Old Testament prophecy about Israel’s magnificent future and its spectacular salvation, Nietzsche claimed that the Jews would once again become the “founders and creators of values.” The creation of values is the most significant task in Nietzsche’s philosophy, which always returns to the “transfiguration of values” and the nature of Western culture, in which the Jews are destined to play the major role as well as to serve as catalysts. Nietzsche’s hope of mobilizing European Jewry to assist him in this transfiguration of values is the background for his emotional exclamation: “What a blessing a Jew is among Germans!” Nietzsche speculated in this context about the possible intermarriage of Jews with Germans or with the best “European nobility” for the sake of enriching a renewed European culture. Nietzsche, in this regard, obviously underestimated the strong and persistent reluctance of many Jews to fully assimilate into their Gentile environment. His views on intermarriage may seem especially perplexing in light of his admiration for Jewish “purity of race,” uniqueness, and pride.

Nietzsche’s cosmopolitan notion of “Jewish calling” might also seem to contradict the national aspirations of the emerging Zionist political movement. But a closer look suggests otherwise. There exists a record of Nietzsche’s conversations in the winter of 1883–34 in Nice with Joseph Paneth—an Austrian Jewish intellectual who was also a good friend of Freud. We know that Nietzsche and Paneth discussed the possibility of the revival of Jewish people in Palestine and their “regeneration” there.¹¹ Nietzsche was apparently not at all happy about the prospect that the Jews might estrange themselves from their Jewish tradition and history to become completely assimilated within the European nations, since such “free spirits (*freie Geister*) detached from anything are dangerous and destructive” (Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, 486). He added that one should not ignore the “impact of nationality” and, according to Paneth, he was “quite disappointed that I did not wish to hear anything about the restoration of a Palestinian state” (ibid.). It is certainly possible to imagine Nietzsche supporting the idea of a return of the Jews to the land of Israel and statehood, which, especially in the times of the ancient Hebrews—as he had strongly argued—provided the earthly sources for their spiritual power and legacy. This hypothesis is in a sense implied by Nietzsche’s statement that “in the hands of the Jewish priests the great age in the history of Israel became an age of decay; the Exile” (A, 26). Logically, one way out of this state of “decadence” would be the reestablishment of a Jewish state that revived the secular kingdom of the ancient Hebrews in Zion.

Such a development could also serve Nietzsche's project of European cultural rejuvenation since it would be quite possible to enlist the "new Israel" and its revival for the sake of "new Europe." Hence Nietzsche did not see any tension or contradiction between his plan for enlisting Jews for the sake of his new Europe and the Zionist program. He had heard about and was quite aware of the Zionist sentiments awakening among the European Jewry in the last years of his lucidity, and had never given any sign of disapproval or indignation as he did so loudly and eloquently against many other nationalist trends and movements of his time, including the cult of Wagner in Bayreuth. On the contrary, he enthusiastically embraced the future prospects (without excluding the national option) of the Jewish people.¹²

But what of Nietzsche's famous immoralism and rejection of traditional Judeo-Christian values? What of his *Lebensphilosophie* and thoughts about regeneration that at times seemed to envisage the "breeding" of a new elite that would eliminate all the decadent elements within European culture? Did the Nazis not draw some inspiration from his shattering of all moral taboos, his radical, experimental style of thinking, and his apocalyptic visions of the future? Certainly, there were National Socialists who tried to integrate Nietzsche into the strait-jacket of their ideology and exploited his dangerous notion of degeneration. But without its biological racism and anti-Semitism, the Nazi worldview had no real cohesion and Nietzsche was as fierce a critic of these aberrations as one can imagine. Moreover, his so-called immoralism, with its questioning of all dogmas and established values, was hardly the basis on which fascist, Nazi, or other totalitarian regimes consolidated their support. On the contrary, such regimes, however radical their intentions, were careful to appeal to conventional morality and nationalist feelings in order to broaden their following, just as they often paid lip service to democratic values in order better to destroy them. Nietzsche's skeptical outlook, with its love of ambivalence, ambiguity, and paradox, was far removed from such manipulations, which he could only have despised and abhorred. Certainly, Nietzsche was a disturbing thinker whose ideas will always remain open to a diversity of interpretations. He was no admirer of modernity or of the liberal vision of progress, nor was he a "humanist" in the conventional sense of that term. His work lacked a concrete social anchor and his solution to the problem of nihilism led to a cul-de-sac. But to hold Nietzsche responsible, even indirectly, for Auschwitz, is surely to turn things on their head.¹³ No other thinker of his time saw as deeply into the pathologies of fin de siècle German and European culture, or grasped so acutely from within, the sickness at the heart of anti-Semitism in the Christian West. It would be more just to see in Nietzsche a tragic prophet of the spiritual

vacuum that gave birth to the totalitarian abysses of the twentieth century. As such he remains profoundly relevant to our own time.

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Notes

1. *Hitler's Table Talk*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2nd ed., 1973), 89.

2. Quoted in the *Marbacher Kataloge: 'Das 20. Jahrhundert. Von Nietzsche bis zur Gruppe 47'*, ed. B. Zeller (Deutsche Schillergesellschaft Marbach a. N., 1980), 20 (our translation). Compare to A. Rosenberg, *Friedrich Nietzsche. Ansprache bei einer Gedenkstunde anlässlich des 100. Geburtstages Nietzsches am 15. Oktober 1944, in Weimar* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1944).

3. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945), 1:230.

4. Jacques Derrida, "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronell, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken, 1985), 30, 24.

5. Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 198.

6. For biographical details see Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1–9.

7. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 412, 418. This characterization of Nietzsche as an "antipolitical" thinker who is solely interested in cultivating the individual life does not prevent Kaufmann from dwelling at length on the bitter (mainly political) struggles in which Nietzsche was deeply involved with his ex-mentor Wagner and against German imperialism and anti-Semitism. These struggles placed Nietzsche well within the political framework of his times. However, one should not see here any contradiction on Kaufmann's part since Nietzsche's antipolitical attitude stemmed organically from his political and cultural interests and drives.

8. See, among many others, the following works: Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Peter Pütz, "The Problem of Force in Nietzsche and His Critics," in *Nietzsche: Literature and Values*, eds. V. Dürr, R. Grimm, and K. Harms (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 14–28; Tracy B. Strong, "Nietzsche's Political Aesthetics," in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, eds. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 153–174; Geoffrey Waite, *Nietzsche's Corpsle: Aesthetics, Politics, or the Spectacular*

Technoculture of Everyday Life (Durham: Duke University Press 1996); and Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Berkowitz writes, “It is tempting to conclude that Nietzsche does not practice or contribute to political philosophy. . . . Yet Nietzsche moves within the domain of moral and political philosophy . . . [since] the question of human perfection lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s inquiries” (1–2). See also Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), where Nietzsche is portrayed as an “ironic liberal” and serves Rorty as a heuristic means to promote his postmodern liberalism.

9. Nietzsche, “Der griechische Staat,” *KSA*, vol. 1 (1988), 764–77. And see also part 8 of the first volume of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (*KSA*) entitled “Ein Blick auf den Staat” (“A Glance at the State” in Hollingdale’s translation).

10. *Z*, 160.

11. The letters of Paneth were first published in a biography of Nietzsche by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsche*, (Leipzig, 1904), 2:474–475, 479–493. See also Richard Frank Krummel, “Joseph Paneth über seine Begegnung mit Nietzsche in der Zarathustra-Zeit,” *Nietzsche Studien* 17 (1988): 478–95.

12. For elaboration of these points see Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche in Zion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

13. See Robert S. Wistrich, *Hitler and the Holocaust* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001).