

The Biological Threshold of Modern Politics: Nietzsche, Foucault and the Question of Animal Life

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Introduction

While it has been widely accepted that Foucault's notions of sovereign and disciplinary power have their conceptual origin in Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, the relation between Foucault's notion of biopolitics and Nietzsche's political thought has only recently entered the scholarly debate¹. In this essay I approach Foucault's notion of biopolitics through Nietzsche's treatment of the question of animal life². Nietzsche rediscovers the centrality of animal life to the self-understanding of the human being, its culture and its politics. This essay examines how this recovery of animality in Nietzsche's philosophy contributes to an understanding of what Foucault calls the 'biological threshold of modernity' (Foucault 1990 142).

I begin by introducing Foucault's notion of biopolitics in order to then present the contemporary discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy from the perspective of biopolitics. I suggest that Nietzsche provides a way to understand the relationship between animality and humanity which can be given a new and productive interpretation by seeing it as developing an affirmative biopolitics³. Continuing my argument, I propose that an affirmative biopolitics sees in the continuity between human and animal life a source of resistance to the project of dominating and controlling life-processes. Whereas the project of dominating and controlling life-processes is based on the division of life into opposing

forms of species life, the affirmative biopolitics I lay out subverts such a division and replaces it with the idea of cultivating a plurality of singular forms of animal life. On my hypothesis, Nietzsche's vision of a future 'great politics' provides an example of how cultivation and care for animal life has the potential to overcome the biopolitical domination of life.

Biopolitics: a New Paradigm of Political Power.

Foucault distinguishes among three different senses of the term biopolitics⁴. In *The History of Sexuality*, he uses the term 'biopolitics' primarily to define a turning point in the history of Western political thought which manifests itself as a radical transformation of the traditional concept of sovereign power beginning in the seventeenth century. In his lectures on *One Must Defend Society*, he uses the term biopolitics to speak of technologies and discourses that play a central role in the emergence of modern racism. Lastly, in his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* and on *Security, Territory, Population*, he uses the term to describe the kind of political rationality at stake in the liberal mode of governmentality. These different uses of the term biopolitics overlap insofar as they all describe the historical discontinuity through which, as Foucault says,

for the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention (Foucault 1990 142).

The Foucaultian idea that biological existence is 'reflected' in political existence should not be confused with the view that biopolitics means understanding the state as an organism or with the view that biopolitics simply designates the entrance of issues

concerning biological life into the sphere of political discussion and decision-making⁵. Both views presuppose an external and hierarchical relationship between life and politics⁶.

In contrast, Foucault holds that biopolitics constitutes a transformation in the nature of political power itself: 'For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question' (Foucault 1990 143). This definition of biopolitics is crucial in several respects. First, Foucault clearly adopts the view that 'modern man is an animal'. Second, the politics of this animal concerns not only its 'way of life' or what the Greeks call *bios*, but also its biological life, or *zoe*⁷. While, for Aristotle, the political existence of the human being both presupposes and transcends its animality, Foucault claims that, at least for modern men, the essential concern of political life lies in the status of their animality, of their biological existence: 'Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world' (Foucault 1990 142). An extreme example of a modern biopolitics which questions the human being's existence as a living being was employed in Nazi ideologies of race and ethnic distinctions which denoted supposedly superior and inferior species of men⁸. A less extreme example of such a biopolitics is visible in how we now speak of a 'higher' or 'lower' quality of life, suggesting that health care, the environment and the amount of 'human capital' accumulated determine the quality of our biological life⁹.

Foucault's notion of biopolitics depends on understanding the animality of the human being in terms of 'the life of the body and the life of the species' (Foucault 1990

146). For reasons of space, I am not able to discuss the understanding of animal life in terms of ‘the life of the body’. Instead, I focus my argument on the idea of ‘the life of the species’. The transformation of the human being’s animal life into species life is the leitmotif of Foucault’s genealogy of modern political science from out of its emergence in the classical and Christian theme of ‘pastoral power’ (Foucault 2004 119-193; Foucault 2000 298-327). Pastoral power is a salvation-oriented form of power that conceives political subjects as members of a species analogous to a herd of sheep (Foucault 2004 145)¹⁰. It is a political power that is primarily concerned with the biological life of the individual insofar as ‘salvation essentially is subsistence’, ‘secured nourishment’ and ‘good pastures’ (Foucault 2004 130). Foucault defines pastoral power as ‘an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, handling, manipulating human beings, an art of pursuing them, pushing them step by step, an art which takes charge of the human being collectively and individually throughout their lives and at every single step of their existence’ (Foucault 2004 168 and 184-ff). At the same time as pastoral power treats human beings as part of a species, it also creates modes of ‘individualization’, or what Foucault calls modes of ‘assujettissement’ (Foucault 2004 187). In the pastoral discourse, ‘the relation between the sheep and the one who leads them is a relation of total dependence’ because it is ‘a relation of submission of one individual to another individual’ (Foucault 2004 178). This individualization is acquired through two central procedures, or ‘power techniques’. The first way to acquire individualization is ‘through a network of servitudes which imply the general servitude of all to all and at the same time the exclusion of the I [...], the exclusion of egoism as the

central, nuclear form of the individual' (Foucault 2004 187). The underlying idea is that one becomes an individual essentially by dedicating oneself to the general well-being of all which, here, means giving up one's self for the sake of others¹¹.

The second technology of individualization which comes from considering the human being as a species is carried out 'through the production of an inner truth which is secret and hidden' (Foucault 2004 187). This inner truth belongs to each and every individual. The shepherd or pastor is charged with identifying each individual through the discursive practice of confession, which simultaneously assures integral obedience¹². To sum up, one could say that in pastoral politics, the human being's 'existence as a living being' is at stake in two ways. First, the human being's biological existence is totalized into the life of a species-- every single human being as a living being is subsumed under the totality of the species. Second, the human being's 'existence as a living being' is particularized into separate, isolated, individual subjects¹³.

When pastoral power turns into modern biopolitics, rule over the life of the flock gets interpreted in terms of 'regulating populations' (Foucault 1990 146; Foucault 2004 132), where population is understood as 'all the individuals belonging to the same species, living side by side' (Foucault 2000 323)¹⁴. In contrast to pastoral politics, modern biopower over populations goes hand in hand with the rise of comprehensive measures, statistical assessments and interventions aimed at the entire social body (Foucault 1990 146). The life of the species qua population becomes an independent, objectifiable, measurable entity— a collective reality which subjects its members to normalizing processes. Analogously, the individualization of the human being's existence

as a living animal is now delivered over to the power/knowledge discourses of the new human and natural sciences, above all as these develop in the deployment of sexuality: 'it is through sex [...] that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility' (Foucault 1990 155). In this way the technique of confession, which originates in pastoral power, is taken up in the form of the 'secret' of sex as one's own truth which 'attaches each of us to the injunction to know it, to reveal' it (Foucault 1990 157).

In modernity, the system of servitudes which characterizes pastoral politics becomes the biopolitical concern for the 'protection' of the health of the population. But to protect something entails the right to use force, including the right to put to death. Hence the paradox that Foucault finds himself confronted with is: how can a power over life that seeks to preserve and reproduce species life acquire the right to put this life to death? Foucault's hypothesis is that this occurs through the development of modern, state-centered racism. Racism, first of all, entails a 'separation' within the 'biological continuum of the human species' (Foucault 1997 227): races are a biologicistic way to divide the species into sub-groups. This division is instrumental to conceiving of the distinction between self and other, friend and enemy, no longer in military terms but in biological ones: 'the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or of the degenerate or the abnormal) is what is going to make life in general healthier; more healthy and more pure' (Foucault 1997 228). The state's power to kill is legitimized as a means of protecting society from the 'biological danger' that races represent (Foucault

1997 229). It is essentially through racism that biopolitics becomes thanatopolitics, or a politics of death¹⁵.

The systems of pastoral servitude and the biopolitical regulation of life lead to resistance, to what Foucault calls 'contre-conduites'. They free the individual from being led by others and motivate the 'search for ways to conduct one's own life' (Foucault 2004 198). The resistance to biopower does not transcend the horizon of 'a living species in a living world' (Foucault 1990 142). Rather, 'life as a political object was in a sense taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it' (Foucault 1990 145). Resistance counteracts the processes of individualization, the constitution of the subject in and through its transformation into a species, by cultivating or caring for the self by redefining the status of the human being's animality. Foucault's critique of biopolitics as a politics of the domination of the human being's animal life seeks to create the possibility for a different relationship with the self, one that separates it from the 'herd' without isolating it neither from others nor from its own animal life. The formula for this other relationship with the self passes through culture, through a cultivation of nature, which does not dominate nature or animal life but, to the contrary, emphasizes its creative potential: 'We should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity' (Foucault 1994 262). The important point here is that Foucault understands the biological life of the self as a function of creativity, rather than understanding creativity as a particular quality of the self. In contraposition to a

Sartrean existentialist ethics of authenticity, Foucault seeks to develop an ethics of freedom that takes the form of an ‘aesthetics of existence’ (Foucault 1994 255)¹⁶.

Nietzsche from the Perspective of Biopolitics

The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito’s *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* provides, as far as I am aware, the first extensive discussion of Nietzsche’s philosophy within the Foucaultian context of biopolitics. Esposito identifies in Nietzsche’s political thought both a negative and an affirmative biopolitics: a ‘politics over life [*biopotere*]’ and a ‘politics of life [*biopotenza*]’ (Esposito 2004 25-39). According to his reading, Nietzsche’s notion of ‘great politics’ reflects a negative biopolitics of taming and breeding [*Zucht und Züchtung*] which selects ‘higher’ or ‘stronger’ forms of life over ‘lower’ or ‘weaker’ forms. These ‘higher’ life forms are then essentially protected by putting the ‘lower’ life forms to death in ways that bear analogy to the biopolitical discourse of racism identified by Foucault¹⁷. Esposito, like other interpreters, thinks in Nietzsche there is a ‘bad aristocratism’ which is a direct precursor to what Foucault calls thanatopolitics, or the politics of death exercised by totalitarian regimes¹⁸.

Esposito, however, is careful to show that Nietzsche’s discourse deconstructs its own racial pronouncements by testifying to the impossibility of separating what is healthy from what is unhealthy, what is ascendant from what is decadent in forms of life. Following Nietzsche’s definition of ‘great health’ understood as ‘a health that one doesn’t only have, but also acquires continually and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up!’ (GS 382), Esposito acknowledges that health in

Nietzsche exists only in and through the experience of sickness. This insight leads Esposito to hypothesize an ‘affirmative biopolitics’ in Nietzsche in which there would be no hierarchy between forms of life. Rather, all forms of life would be affirmed indiscriminately. This affirmation of a multiplicity of different living forms arises from humanity’s (*bios*) openness to animality (*zoe*), or from what Esposito refers to as the ‘animalization of man’ (Esposito 2004 112)¹⁹. Esposito hints that this ‘animalization of man’ in Nietzsche represents the only chance to escape the political domination of life. Yet, Esposito’s interpretation of Nietzsche neither provides a theoretical discussion of what is entailed in such an ‘animalization of man’ nor addresses the question of whether and how this ‘animalization’ may in fact overcome negative biopolitics.

In my view, Esposito leaves the question of the positive role played by animality in Nietzsche’s ‘affirmative biopolitics’ undeveloped because he assumes that ‘politics is the original modality in which what is living is or in which a being lives’ (Esposito 2004 82). This reading of Nietzsche takes his notion of life as will to power to mean that life is always already political. I contest this reading on the grounds that it conflicts with the idea found throughout Nietzsche (and also Foucault) that animal life resists being grasped by political power and captured in a political form. In the words of Foucault, ‘it is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them’ (Foucault 1990 143). Instead, if life as will to power is anything always already, then, for Nietzsche, it is culture, not politics, with culture being understood in the widest sense of the term as an openness to otherness that lies at the basis of creativity: ‘Give me life and I will create a culture out of it for you’ is

Nietzsche's motto for culture (HL 10). The practice of cultivation is a practice of hospitality: receiving life and giving life in return. In the words of Jacques Derrida: 'hospitality is culture itself' (Derrida 2001 16). 'Will to power is essentially creative and giving'²⁰, meaning that life is from the beginning involved in the becoming of culture. The decisive point I want to make against Esposito's reading of Nietzsche, as well as against that of other interpreters, is that culture precedes politics rather than the other way around and this has significant consequences for how we think about biopolitics.

Before I turn to this discussion, let me recapitulate the argument so far. Foucault suggests that the only way to resist negative biopolitics is through care for the self, through a cultivation of the human being's existence as a living animal which rests on an understanding of the self as a function of creativity. Foucault, however, does not explain how creativity is related to animal life. Conversely, Esposito appeals to Nietzsche's 'animalization of man' as the only way to overcome negative biopolitics, but does not provide a theory of culture which shows how animality is related to creativity. I suggest that Nietzsche's conception of culture provides us with the missing link between animality and creativity because it offers an account of how animality engenders culture, of how animal life can become the source of creativity. Nietzsche's conception of culture further increases our understanding of the contemporary debate concerning the relationship between biopolitics and animal life because it articulates the relationship among animal life, culture and politics. The last part of this article is dedicated to these two aspects of Nietzsche's conception of culture. I will begin with the relationship among

culture, politics and animality and then discuss the relationship between animality and creativity.

Culture, Politics and the Animality of the Human Being

Examples from Nietzsche's early and late work show that, throughout his career, he privileges culture over politics. In the early 1870's Nietzsche writes:

It is not the state's task that the greatest possible number of people lives well and ethically within it; numbers do not matter. Instead, the task of the state is to make it generally possible for one to live well and beautifully therein. Its task is to furnish the basis of a *culture*. In short, a nobler humanity is the goal of the state. Its goal lies outside of itself. The state is a means (PB 78)²¹.

The political task of furnishing a basis for culture should not be confused with a direct involvement of politics in the matters of culture or in the production of a 'nobler humanity'. Nietzsche rejects the idea of a *Kulturstaat* precisely because he believes that the problems of culture cannot be resolved through politics (FEI 3, SE 6). Rather, he contends that the state should not get involved in the affairs of culture at all (SE 6). A passage from the late *Nachlass* confirms this idea: 'The state takes it upon itself to debate, and even decide on the questions of culture: as if the state were not itself a means, a very inferior means of culture! ... "A German Reich" - how many "German Reichs" do we have to count for one Goethe!' (19[11] 13.546f.). In continuity with his earlier views on culture and politics, Nietzsche recalls that the aims of culture and politics are distinct and that, at best, politics is an inferior means of culture.

In the reception of Nietzsche's political thought, one can distinguish two main lines of interpretation concerning culture and its relation to politics. According to the first line, Nietzsche figures as a precursor to totalitarian and authoritarian ideologies where

privileging culture over politics exemplifies a form of ‘political perfectionism’ where the aim is to justify domination and exploitation for the sake of the becoming of great individuals²². The second line of interpretation holds that Nietzsche’s privileging of culture over politics attests to the non-political character of his philosophy. From this perspective, Nietzsche figures as a moral perfectionist who can be assimilated into liberal democracy²³. In the first interpretation, however, culture and politics are identified with each other on the assumption that culture and politics both pursue the same aim of elevating the human species and that both seek to attain this aim by the same means of domination and exploitation. But by falsely identifying culture and politics, this view misses the crucial point of Nietzsche’s conception of culture which consists of a resistance to and eventual overcoming of such a politics of domination:

Culture and the State – one should not deceive oneself over this- are antagonists: the “cultural state [*Cultur-Staat*]” is merely a modern idea. The one lives off the other, the one strives at the expense of the other. All great cultural epochs are epochs of political decline: that which is great in the cultural sense has been unpolitical [*unpolitisch*], even *anti-political* [*antipolitisch*] (TI “Germans” 4)²⁴.

Culture is antithetical to politics insofar as it counteracts the progressive moralization and normalization of the human being which Nietzsche identifies as the objective of political rule and which, as discussed above, Foucault identifies as the objective of pastoral and modern biopower. This is also the reason why culture in this ‘anti-political’ sense needs to be distinguished from the civilizational project of breeding and taming which Esposito (and Balke) associate with the idea of ‘great politics’. I will return to this point in a moment.

The second interpretation, which figures Nietzsche as a moral perfectionist, has a tendency to reduce culture to individual self-culture.²⁵ It emphasizes the ‘unpolitical

[*unpolitisch*]’ aspects of culture over its ‘anti-political [*antipolitisch*]’ aspects and therefore does not sufficiently take into account the political significance of culture as a counter-culture, that is, as a struggle against and an overcoming of the various forms of (moral, political, economical) domination over life. Culture is not ‘unpolitical [*unpolitisch*]’ because it reflects a retreat to the private or, perhaps, to the ethical sphere²⁶. Rather, culture is ‘unpolitical [*unpolitisch*]’ because the cultivation of a plurality of different forms of life cannot be institutionalized: culture and the state are antagonists.

The difference between the political significance of culture and the politics of the state is evident in Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘great’ and ‘petty’ politics (BGE 208). Whereas the politics of the state are deemed ‘petty’ politics, the political tasks of culture are ‘great’. The notion of ‘great politics’ in Nietzsche reflects an ironic appropriation of a Bismarckian formula put to a very anti-Bismarckian, even anti-German use (EH “Books” CW: 2). He dismisses what Bismarck considers ‘great politics’ as merely ‘petty’ politics and instead endorses the ‘great politics’ he associates with the ‘good Europeans’ who are too diverse and too racially mixed’ and therefore refuse to ‘participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and obscenity that parades in Germany today’ (GS 377; see also 25[6] 13.639f.). Nietzsche identifies the highest task of ‘great politics’ as ‘the higher cultivation of humanity’ (EH “Books” BT). In a note from the *Nachlass*, he defines this project of culture as follows:

Great politics makes physiology into the ruler [*Herrin*] over all questions, - it wants to cultivate humanity as a whole, it measures the rank of races, people and individuals according to their future -

[--), their promise [*Bürgschaft*] of life, the life they carry within themselves, - it remorselessly puts an end to everything which is degenerate and parasitic (25[1] 13.638).

The association between the ‘higher cultivation of humanity’ and ‘the remorseless destruction of all degenerate and parasitic elements’ (EH “Books” BT) has led many interpreters, including Esposito, to suggest that Nietzsche’s notion of ‘great politics’ betrays the features of a racist biopolitical domination over life. But this interpretation overlooks the fact that, for Nietzsche, ‘degeneration’ is linked to the figure of the ‘ascetic priest’ or, in Foucault’s terms, a figure of pastoral power: ‘Let us here leave the possibility open that it is not human kind which is degenerating but only that parasitic species of man the priest, who with the aid of morality has lied himself up to being the determiner of human kind’s value’ (EH “Destiny” 7). The cultural project of ‘great politics’ must therefore be understood as an attempt to overcome the domination over life exemplified by the figure of the ascetic priest and its correlate form of pastoral power.

The affirmative aspect of Nietzsche’s notion of ‘great (bio)politics’ can be further appreciated through an analysis of what he refers to as the antagonism between culture and civilization (16[73] 13.509). In my view, this antagonism is more fundamental than the difference between culture and politics. This is first, because it expresses the priority of culture over politics and, second, because it allows one to distinguish between two different kinds of politics in Nietzsche - a politics of culture and a politics of civilization – which reflect two distinct ways in which life can be politicized. Whereas the politics of civilization reflects what Foucault calls biopolitics, or what I have been referring to as negative biopolitics, the politics of culture reflects what Foucault defines as the new

forms of resistance against biopolitics, or what I call positive or affirmative ('great') biopolitics.

The notion of an antagonism between culture and civilization is of particular interest to the question of biopolitics because it is through this antagonism that Nietzsche addresses the relationship among animality, culture and politics. The different approach to animality found in culture as opposed to civilization is thematized in a note from Spring-Summer of 1888:

The highpoints of culture and civilization lie far apart: one should not be misled by the abyssal antagonism between culture and civilization. The great moments of culture have always been, morally speaking, times of corruption; and conversely the epochs of willed and forced animal taming ("civilization") of the human being have been times of intolerance of the spiritual and most bold natures. What civilization wants is something different from what culture wants: maybe the opposite [*etwas Umgekehrtes*] (16[10] 13. 485f.).

By civilization, Nietzsche means the emergence of forms of social and political organization based on the disciplining and taming of the human being's animality. Civilization constitutes an economical approach to animality whose aim is the self-preservation of the group at the cost of the normalization of the individual²⁷. By culture, Nietzsche means the critique of civilization which liberates animal life from being the object of political domination and exploitation. Whereas the objective of a politics of civilization is to produce a normalized society through the violent means of animal taming, the objective of a politics of culture is to cultivate forms of sociability through the practice of individual self-responsibility or, in Foucault's terms, through practices of freedom based on the care of the self (Foucault 1994 223-252).

It is important to note that the cultural liberation of animal life is not based on the idea that there exists a human nature which has been alienated, repressed or denied

through historical, economical and social processes and therefore needs to be liberated in order to reconcile the human being with its lost animal nature²⁸. Rather, by cultural liberation, Nietzsche means liberation from the idea of civilization that the human being is endowed with a ‘nature’ in the first place. When Nietzsche prescribes ‘a return to nature’ as a ‘*cure* from “culture”’ (i.e. from civilization), he means a ‘cure’ from the belief that the human being always already has a fixed and stable nature, for example, a moral or a rational nature (WP 684; cf. 14[133] 13.317).

The essential difference between culture and civilization is that while culture understands itself as a politics of cultivation that considers the human being to be part of a continuum of animal life (HL 1; A 14), civilization understands itself as a politics of moral improvement that requires the separation of human from animal life (TI “Morality”, “Improvers”). The objective of civilization is to impose a ‘second’ nature on the human being which is, morally speaking, ‘superior’ to its ‘first’ animal nature. The project of civilization represents the humanist and enlightenment belief that humanity will be free only once it emancipates itself from animality through a disciplining process directed against, for example, the forgetfulness of the animal as in the ‘memory of the will’ (GM II 1)²⁹. But, since this process depends on dividing and imposing a hierarchy on the continuum of life, it also betrays its affinity with racism which, according to Foucault, relies on such a division and hierarchy.

Nietzsche, contrary to the presuppositions of modern racism, proposes to consider culture as part of the continuum of life, as constituted out of animal life. From the perspective of culture, the life of the human beings is inseparable from the life of the

animals and of the whole organic and inorganic world³⁰. Nietzsche famously claims to have even discovered himself to continuously repeat a variation of the poetic, logical, aesthetic, and affective becomings of the entire history of life (GS 54) which leads him to reject the view that human life constitutes an autonomous island within the totality of life. To the contrary, any form of life which is separated from other forms of life cannot maintain itself because it is cut off from the antagonism with other forms of life which generates its life³¹.

From the perspective of continuity, Nietzsche assigns two tasks to culture. The first is to show that the processes of civilization (i.e. the rationalization, moralization, and humanization of the human being) proceed through inherently violent techniques of ‘extirpating’ the human being’s animality (TI “Morality”, “Improvers” and GM II 1-3). In this capacity, culture stands for the critique of civilization. The second task of culture is not a critical, but a distinctly affirmative one: to overcome civilization by bringing forth forms of life and thought which are not separated from, but embodied by animality. Culture seeks to cultivate a second nature that is a more ‘natural naturalness’ (HL 10). Here, culture stands for ‘the longing for a stronger nature, for a healthier and simpler humanity’ (SE 3). In this second capacity, culture wishes to stimulate the pluralization of different, inherently singular forms of life. However, the question remains: how can culture bring forth such a ‘second nature’ without relying on the civilizational techniques of taming and breeding? And how does this cultivation lay the ground for forms of sociability that are based on individual self-responsibility or, in Foucault’s terms, on an ethos of freedom (Foucault 1994 223-252)?

Nietzsche's answer to the first question depends upon the link he establishes between animality and forgetfulness. In *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, he introduces forgetfulness as the primary feature of the human being's animality³². He argues, first, that animal forgetfulness is prior to and more primordial than human memory and, second that the possibility of future life depends on a return of and to animal forgetfulness:

We shall thus have to account the capacity [*Fähigkeit*] to feel to a certain degree unhistorically as being more vital and more fundamental [*wichtigere und ursprünglichere*], in as much as it constitutes the foundation upon which alone anything sound, healthy and great, anything truly human can grow. The unhistorical is like an atmosphere within which alone life can germinate [*erzeugt*] and with the destruction of which it must vanish again (HL 1).

Nietzsche believes human life is threatened by a form of memory which understands itself as the radical opposite of animal forgetfulness; a memory which erases and forgets the human being's animality. This kind of memory is constitutive of the history of western civilization which sees human 'progress' as the result of emancipation from animality (A 4). Contrary to a memory of civilization, Nietzsche calls for a cultural memory that works, in the terms of Foucault, as a counter-memory (Foucault 1971 145-172). This counter-memory does not understand itself as the opposite of animal forgetfulness. Rather, it recognizes in the forgetfulness of the animal a carrier of higher, more virtuous, more generous forms of life to come.

In Nietzsche's conception of culture, animal forgetfulness constitutes the link between animality and creativity. Nietzsche praises animal forgetfulness so highly because it enhances the human being's creativity and increases its vitality. Forgetfulness is not only 'essential to actions of any kind' (HL 1), but also indispensable to the

philosopher: ‘many a man fails to become a thinker only because his memory is too good’ (AOM 122). Forgetfulness defines the creativity of the genius of culture who ‘uses himself up, who does not spare himself’ for the sake of culture (TI “Skirmishes” 44). It is also the source of virtue exemplified by the tragic hero whose ‘strength lies in forgetting himself’ (SE 4), in perishing in ‘the pursuit of his dearest values and highest aims’ (HL 9). Forgetfulness, moreover, belongs to the sovereign individual who enjoys the privilege of making promises but who ‘fully appreciates the countervailing force, forgetfulness’ (GM II 1)³³. Finally, it belongs to the giver of gifts who Zarathustra loves, ‘whose soul is overfull so that it forgets itself’ (Z: 3 “Prologue”). Nietzsche compares the overflowing of the self in the act of gift-giving to the natural movement of a river which overflows its banks. Both movements are ‘involuntary [*unfreiwillig*]’ and ‘inevitable’ (TI “Skirmishes” 44; Z: 1 “Prologue”): they cannot be traced back to an intentional subject, a conscious decision, or a willful act. Instead, what is active in gift-giving is the forgetfulness of the animal, the animality of the human being.

What distinguishes this plurality of figures in Nietzsche - the historical agent, the philosopher, the genius of culture, the tragic hero, the giver of gifts, the sovereign individual, to name just a few – is that they are composed of singular individuals in whom animality, ‘their existence as a living being’, has become creative and productive. Nietzsche values these singular individuals so highly because they exemplify ways of life that resist the transformation of the human being into a herd animal, an obedient and docile, tamed and over-bred example of the so-called ‘human’ species. They are effectively counteracting the processes of individualization and totalization Foucault

associates with biopower. But, more importantly, Nietzsche associates this new freedom (of the animal) with a new responsibility: the continuous and radical critique of social and political forms of life that are based on ‘cruelty to animals’ (SE 6).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to return to the question of the relationship between animal life and species life. Both Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault point out that totalitarian ideologies have as their final aim ‘the fabrication of mankind’ and, to that end, ‘eliminate individuals for the sake of the species, sacrifice the parts for the sake of the whole’ (Arendt 1973 465). Analogously, Foucault says that: ‘If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers [...] it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population’ (Foucault 1990 137). The emergence of totalitarian biopolitics in the 20th century challenges contemporary political philosophy to conceive of the relationship between political life and animal life beyond the ‘biological threshold’ of species life. What is needed is a new awareness of the artificial character of the very idea of species life. Arendt sought to move beyond this idea by showing how political acts create a discontinuity or break with what she called the ‘cycle of life’ and bring about a radical novelty while simultaneously manifesting the singularity of the actor. I have showed how Nietzsche’s philosophy opens up another possibility for moving beyond species life by emphasizing the continuity, rather than discontinuity, between political and animal life. In Nietzsche, the affirmation of the continuum of animal and human life questions the

possibility of a division among species. In this sense, Nietzsche's recovery of the animality of human beings is far more conducive to undermining than to underpinning the foundations of totalitarian ideology. Furthermore, the affirmation of animality in Nietzsche is oriented towards the pluralization of humanity. From this perspective, it seems that the uncontrollable plurality and singularity of life forms that Arendt sought to counteract totalitarian politics and provide the foundation of a new humanism may result more from the affirmation, rather than the forgetting of our dependence on animality.

¹ See Esposito 2004c 79-115 (available also in English as Esposito 2008 and Balke 2003b 705-722 (available also in German as Balke 2003a 171-205).

² In the contemporary debate on the question of animal life one can distinguish two different understandings of what this question entails. In the Anglo-American tradition, the question of animal life revolves primarily around the ethical status of nonhuman animals, the question of whether the interests of animals deserve equal consideration with the similar interests of humans, and whether, therefore, animals have rights (see, for example, Singer 2004 xi). By contrast, in the tradition of European Continental philosophy, the question of the animal concerns the status of the animality of the human being; the question of whether the continuity between human and animal life calls for a reconsideration of our 'humanist' understanding of life, culture and politics. My approach to the question of animal life falls within the second tradition. For an analysis of the question of animal life in this second sense, see also Atterton/Calarco 2004 xv-xxv and Wolfe 2003.

³ I borrow the term 'affirmative biopolitics' from Roberto Esposito who uses it to distinguish a 'politics of life [*biopotenza*]' from a 'politics over life [*biopotere*]'. (Esposito 2004c 25-39). One of the merits of Esposito's work is to have challenged both Foucault's and Agamben's conception of biopolitics, precisely by distinguishing a way in which biopolitics can be conceived not only as a negative politics of domination over life, but also as a politics of affirmation of a multiplicity of different living forms. I appreciate Esposito's original contribution to the field of biopolitics, but disagree, as I will discuss below, with how he applies the term 'affirmative biopolitics' to Nietzsche's political thought. For a discussion of the term 'affirmative biopolitics' in Esposito, see Campbell 2006 2-22.

⁴ On the three different uses of biopolitics in Foucault, see Lemke 2007 49-67.

⁵ For an example of this view see Gerhardt 2004.

⁶ See in comparison Lemke 2007 19-34 and 35-46.

⁷ On the importance of the distinction between *bios* and *zoe* for an understanding of biopolitics, see Agamben 1998 1-12. The distinction between *bios* and *zoe* as introduced by Agamben has been called into question by Dubreuil 2006 83-98.

⁸ For a discussion of the relation between biopolitics, racism and totalitarianism, see Forti 2006 9-32.

⁹ For a recent discussion of the relation between biopolitics and capitalism in neoliberal ideology, see Cooper 2008.

¹⁰ 'We thus reach this definition: the politician is the Shepard of man, the pastor of a herd of living beings which constitute a population in a city' (Foucault 2004 145).

¹¹ Interestingly, Foucault notes that the rise of pastoral power coincides with the disappearance of the classical care of the self: ‘From the moment that the culture of the self was taken up by Christianity, it was, in a way, put to work for the exercise of a pastoral power to the extent that the *epimeleia heautou* became, essentially, *epimeleia tōn allōn* – the care of others – which was the pastor’s job. But insofar as individual salvation is channeled – to a certain extent, at least- through a pastoral institution that has the care of souls as its object, the classical care of the self disappeared, that is, was integrated and lost a large part of its autonomy’ (Foucault 2000 278; see in comparison also Foucault 2004 183). But Foucault also notes that, for example, during the Renaissance, the reemergence of the care of the self took the form of a resistance against pastoral power and coincided with the reemergence of the idea that from one’s own life one can make a work of art (Foucault 1994 278). On the various movements and practices of resistance against pastoral power, see in comparison Foucault 2004 208-ff.

¹² Foucault defines Christian pastoral power as ‘the organization of a link between total obedience, knowledge of oneself, and confession to someone else’ (Foucault 2000 310). He argues that in Christianity the guidance of the individuals’ conscience has as its sole function to make the individual dependent on the one who guides it, i.e. the pastor, rather than, as was the case in Antiquity, to help further the individual’s mastery over itself: ‘the examination of conscience in the classical age was an instrument of mastery, here, on the contrary, it is an instrument of dependency’ (Foucault 2004 186).

¹³ According to Foucault, when pastoral power becomes modern biopolitics, its ‘inevitable effects are both individualization and totalization’: the political rationality of the modern biopolitical state is both ‘individualizing and totalitarian’ (Foucault 1994 325).

¹⁴ Foucault insists that the population falls under the category of ‘the human race’ [espèce humaine], a notion that was new at the time and is to be distinguished from ‘mankind’ [le genre humain] (Foucault 1994 70).

¹⁵ ‘Roughly speaking, I believe that, in the economy of biopower, racism has the function of death according to the principle of the death of the others. It is the biological reinforcement of oneself as a member of a race or a population, as an element in a unitary and living plurality’ (Foucault 1994 230). See also: ‘Since the population is nothing more than what the state takes care of for its own sake, of course, the state is entitled to slaughter it, if necessary. So the reverse of biopolitics is thanatopolitics’ (Foucault 2000 416).

¹⁶ Foucault acknowledges that his notion of an ‘aesthetic of existence’ is inspired by the Nietzschean project of giving style to one’s life (GS 290) (Foucault 1994 262). For both Nietzsche and Foucault, the realization of an ‘aesthetics of existence’ depends on overcoming the prejudice against life as found in modern society. For example, Nietzsche regrets that the individual experiences its singularity (genius) as a ‘chain of toil and burden’ rather than as a source of creativity and argues that this is in great part due to the conformism and the normalizing pressure which define modern society (SE 6). Foucault voices a similar concern when he says that ‘what strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?’ (Foucault 1994 26; see also Foucault 1994 260).

¹⁷ In addition to Foucault’s biopolitical conception of racism Esposito provides an interesting analysis of racism as an (auto)-immunitary reaction. But this is not the place to elaborate on Esposito’s notion of immunity. For a further discussion of this notion, see Esposito 2004a and, by the same author 2004b. See also *Diacritics, a Review of Contemporary Criticism*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2006) dedicated to the political thought of Esposito.

¹⁸ Friedrich Balke’s recent discussion of Nietzsche’s philosophy of crime further supports Esposito’s view that Nietzsche is undoubtedly the philosopher who informs and is informed by the biopolitical paradigm insofar as he no longer grafts the good life (*bios*) onto mere physical existence (*zoe*), but conceptualizes the content of the good life as the result of processes that continuously intervene into mere physical existence and give it form (Balke 2003b 705). Similarly to Esposito, Balke sees Nietzsche’s notion of ‘great politics’ as providing an example of what Foucault calls pastoral politics. According to Balke, Nietzsche’s ‘great politics’ completely changes the role of the political Shepard insofar as he is no longer considered the first servant of the herd, but the inaugurator of what Nietzsche himself referred to as ‘the experiment of a

fundamental, artificial, and conscious breeding of the opposite type' of the "herd animal"[*wäre es nicht an der Zeit je mehr der Typus "Herdenthier" jetzt in Europa entwickelt wird, mit einer grundsätzlichen künstlichen und bewussten Züchtung des entgegengesetzten Typus und seiner Tugenden den Versuch zumachen*] (Balke 2003b 719; WP 954; cf. 2[13] 12.71). For Balke, 'great politics' 'is essentially [a] politics of selection [*Auslese*] and extinguishing: a selection of positively evaluated abnormalities over those that are negatively evaluated' (Balke 2003b 709). For recent readings of Nietzsche's political philosophy as an example of a 'bad aristocratism' that is implicitly racist, see Dombowsky 2004; Losurdo 2002 as well as Taureck 2000.

¹⁹ On the animalization of the human being in Nietzsche, see in comparison Acampora/Acampora 2004 157-242.

²⁰ See Deleuze 1962 97 and 95-99. See also in comparison Ansell-Pearson who argues that 'the human is from the beginning of its formation and deformation implicated in an overhuman becoming, and that this is a becoming that is dependent upon nonhuman forces of life, both organic and inorganic' (Ansell-Pearson 2000 177).

²¹ *PB=Gedanken zu der Betrachtung: Die Philosophie in Bedrängnis*, 1873, Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Thoughts on the Meditation: Philosophy in Hard Times', in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale, New Jersey, Humanities Press International 1979, p. 120-121.

²² This thesis is found in Conway 1997.

²³ This thesis is found in Cavell 1990.

²⁴ See in comparison: 'All great times of culture were politically impoverished times' (19[11] 13.547), and also 'the greatest moments of culture have always been, morally speaking, times of corruption' (16[10] 13.485).

²⁵ For a further discussion of moral perfectionist interpretations of Nietzsche see Lemm 2007 5-27.

²⁶ Similarly to Nietzsche's notion of culture, Foucault's notion of care of the self should not be confused with a form of individualism. Foucault is careful to point out that, first, the care of the self 'does not mean simply being interested in oneself, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination' (Foucault 1994 269); and, second, that only a person who takes proper care of him or herself is, by the same token, able to conduct him or herself properly in relation to others and for others (Foucault 1994 287-ff). Foucault insists that, in the Greeks, the precept of the 'care of the self' 'was one of the main principles of the cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life' (Foucault 1994 226). From this point of view, I suggest that the ethics of care of self lays the basis for a politics of care (culture) of self.

²⁷ Nietzsche does not reject civilization, 'the transformation of the human being into a machine' per se, for he believes that it will lead to an 'inevitable counter-movement', to the rise of culture which disrupts civilization's economy of self-preservation in favor of an economy of 'expenditure', of giving beyond calculation (WP 866; cf. 10[17] 12.462f.). See in comparison, Bataille 1985 116-129.

²⁸ On this point, see in comparison Foucault 1994 282.

²⁹ For a discussion of the relation between animal forgetfulness and the 'memory of the will', see Lemm 2006 161-174.

³⁰ In a note from the *Nachlass*, Nietzsche writes 'Human beings do not exist, for there was no first 'human being': thus infer the animals' (12[1].95 10.391). Analogously, he also questions the idea of organic life as having a beginning. As he puts it, 'I do not see why the organic should be thought as something which has an origin' (34[50] 11.436) and 'continual transition forbids us to speak of "individuals", etc; the "number" of beings is itself in flux' (WP 520; cf. 36[23] 11.561). Given the continuous transition between all forms of life, Nietzsche even rejects the division between the inorganic and the organic world as prejudice: 'The will to power also rules the inorganic world or rather there is no inorganic world. The "effect of distance" cannot be abolished: *something attracts [heranziehen] something else, something else feels attracted [gezogen]*' (34[247] 11.504). See also in comparison GS 109 and 9[144].97 12. 417f.

³¹ See in comparison Stiegler who argues that in Nietzsche life is an openness to what advenes because the enhancement of its proper internal power is inherently dependent upon the encounter of another power,

even if this encounter brings with it the risk of death and suffering (Stiegler 2001 73). According to Nietzsche, this insight also applies to the production of human culture. In *Homer's Contest*, Nietzsche claims that once the Greeks had destroyed their opponents' independence, once they 'made their superior strength felt,' they destroyed the fruitful antagonism which was responsible for the greatness of Greek culture.

³² For a discussion of *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life* centered on the notion of animal forgetfulness, see Lemm 2007 169-200.

³³ On the active forgetting of the sovereign individual, see also Schrift 2001 59.

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