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Panel: Biopolitics and the Question of Animal Life

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Nietzsche, Biopolitics and the Question of Animal Life

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Introduction

In this paper I would like to approach what we call since Foucault “biopolitics” through the question of animal life and its significance for political life. Foucault himself did not relate biopolitics to animality, but in recent times authors like for example Agamben have done so. I believe that Nietzsche’s philosophy offers the most fruitful entry into the question of the relation between politics and animality. For Nietzsche rediscovers the centrality of animal life for the self-understanding of the human being. Additionally, his political thought has been marked, nearly from its first reception, by the claim that Nietzsche biologizes politics or politicizes biology. So I shall begin with a brief discussion of the most recent literature on Nietzsche and biopolitics, in order to then propose my own interpretation of how animality and politics relate in Nietzsche. I seek to show that Nietzsche, contrary to the Western tradition of political thought, which conceives of politics as a mechanism to protect human life against the animality of the human being, re-conceptualizes the relation between humanity and animality, so as to emancipate animal life from being the object of political domination. I argue that this

emancipation requires culture, or in other words, that the key to the question of how to overcome the political domination of animal life is found in Nietzsche's philosophy of culture.

Nietzsche's Biopolitics: For and Against Esposito's Reading of Nietzsche.

Roberto Esposito's most recent and important book on *Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2004), forthcoming in English this year, makes two significant contributions to the field of biopolitics: it provides, as far as I know, the first extensive theoretical discussion of the relation between Nietzsche's philosophy and biopolitics. Esposito identifies Nietzsche's political thought both as an example of bio-politics and as an internal critique of biopolitics.¹ He thereby shows, successfully, I believe, that Nietzsche's conception of the relation between life and politics, in its manifold sense, is best understood within the different discursive possibilities found in the paradigm of biopolitics. Second, it augments the study of biopolitics by showing that where Foucault only saw one

¹ The translation of Roberto Esposito, *Bios. Biopolitica e filosofia* (Turin: Biblioteca Einaudi, 2004) is forthcoming with Minnesota University Press. While Nietzsche scholars have widely accepted that Foucault's notions of sovereign power and of disciplinary power have their conceptual origin in Nietzsche's conception of master and slave morality developed in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the question of whether Nietzsche's thought has also influenced Foucault's notions of biopower and biopolitics still remains to be addressed. For other accounts on the relation between Nietzsche and biopolitics, see Friedrich Balke, "Die Figuren Des Verbrechers in Nietzsches Biopolitik," *Nietzsche-Studien* 32 (2003). Friedrich Balke, "Wölfe, Schafe, Ochsen. Nietzsche und die Liberale Politische Zoologie," (unpublished manuscript). On the relation between Nietzsche and Foucault, see Gary Shapiro, "Dogs, Domestication, and the Ego," in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docil and Brutal*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph Acampora (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 53-60. Martin Saar, *Genealogie Als Kritik* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2007). Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

biopolitics, there exist in fact two, a positive and a negative biopolitics. The question is what conception of animal life allows for a positive biopolitics.

Esposito argues that the fundamental concepts of modern political thought, the idea of equality, liberty and individual rights, are ideological constructs intended to legitimize political power as a function of the principle of self-protection of life: they are intermediary forms through which politics wants to secure life. According to Esposito, Nietzsche rejects the entire juridical framework of modern political thought because for him politics is not a means for the protection of life but, rather, “life is always already political” (Esposito, 2004: 82), or, in other words, “politics is the original modality in which what is living is or in which a being lives” (Esposito, 2004: 82). Life is immediately political because it is will to power. In turn, will to power expresses itself as an excess of life: life is always too much for itself, and this surplus reveals itself as death.²

Esposito sees Nietzsche as developing two incompatible responses to this “Dionysian” excess of life that is death. The first one is a reaction of “hyper immunity”: Nietzsche tries to distinguish a “stronger” life which has to protect itself from a “weaker” life, and protect the “higher” essentially by putting to death the life that is “lower”.³ Esposito thinks that Nietzsche’s “bad aristocratism,” which leads directly to the politics

² Esposito’s conception of life as excess that reveals itself as death has a strong affinity with Bataille’s notion of expenditure. According to Bataille, life is excessive in the sense that it gives, spends and wastes itself beyond calculation. Life, therefore, is always already death (Georges Bataille, “The Notion of Expenditure,” in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

³ On the notion of immunity in Esposito, see Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: Ursprung und Wege der Gemeinschaft* (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2004). Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: Schutz und Negation des Lebens* (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2004).

of death of the National Socialist totalitarian regime, finds its roots in such hyper-immunity.⁴ But in the Nietzschean text, Esposito also discerns a deconstruction of Nietzsche's own eugenic arguments centered on claims made by Nietzsche with respect to the impossibility of separating what is healthy from what is unhealthy, what is ascendant from what is decadent in the forms of life. From this viewpoint, there is health only in and through the experience of sickness, which leads to the conclusion that all forms of life, indiscriminately, have to be unleashed. This unleashing of life takes the form of an openness of life to otherness. Esposito hints that in Nietzsche there is another discourse on the relation of the human to the animal which is not negative and aristocratic in the "bad" sense, i.e., which does not see other human beings as bestial types that require taming and breeding and eventually selection and death, but rather that sees in the relation to animal life, in the "animalization of man" (Esposito, 2004: 112), the only chance to escape the thanatopolitics implicit in immunitary logics of self-preservation.⁵

Without denying the obvious importance and originality of Esposito's treatment of Nietzsche, his interpretation of Nietzsche is unsatisfying on two accounts: first, because it does not provide a theoretical account of the "animalization of man" and, second, because it leaves unaddressed the question of whether and how this "animalization" may

⁴ On the notion of thanatopolitics, see in comparison Agamben. For other readings of Nietzsche's political philosophy as an example of a "bad aristocratism" that is implicitly fascist, see Frederick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, Il Ribelle Aristocratico. Biografia Bilancio Critico* (Turino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), Bernhard H. F. Taureck, *Nietzsche und der Faschismus. Ein Politikum*. (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 2000).

⁵ On the animalization of the human being, see Christa D. Acampora and Ralph Acampora, ed., *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 157-242.

in fact escape the thanatopolitical consequences implicit in immunitary logics of self-preservation. The objective of my presentation is to pursue these two questions through an analysis of the role that animality plays in Nietzsche's political philosophy. I seek to show that Nietzsche provides a way to understand the relation between animality and humanity which can be given a new and productive interpretation by seeing it as developing a positive biopolitics.

That Esposito leaves the question of the role played by animality in Nietzsche unaddressed, is a direct consequence of his reading of Nietzsche, more specifically, it is a consequence of his assumption that life as will to power is always already political, that in Nietzsche politics is the original modality in which a being lives. But, this assumption conflicts with the idea found in Nietzsche that life, human, animal, and other, resists being grasped by political power and captured in a political form. Against Esposito, I hold that, if life is anything always already, then it is culture understood in the widest sense of the term as a radical openness to the other, a hospitality receiving life in all its forms.⁶ Nietzsche's notion of life as will to power corresponds to the notion of life as that which is always already involved in the becoming of culture.⁷ On my account, culture precedes politics rather than the other way round.

⁶ Culture is pure hospitality (WP 939), or in the words of Jacques Derrida, "hospitality is culture itself" (Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

⁷ On the relation between culture and becoming, see in comparison Alan D. Schrift, "Rethinking the Subject: Or How One Becomes-Other Than What One Is.," in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism, Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future.*, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Ansell-Pearson, "On the Miscarriage of Life and the Future of the Human: Thinking Beyond the Human Condition with Nietzsche." Ansell-Pearson 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

Throughout his work, Nietzsche underlines the priority of culture over politics. He holds that politics is nothing but an “inferior” means of culture. A note from the *Nachlass* nicely illustrates 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! (KSA 13, 19 [11]).⁸

Many commentators have interpreted the priority of culture over politics as functional to Nietzsche’s justification of a politics of domination and exploitation that has “higher culture” as its aim.⁹ The view that an authoritarian, hierarchical and exploitative politics is conducive to the becoming of “higher culture” presupposes that politics as a means of

inorganic” (ibid, p. 177).

⁸ In his early writings, Nietzsche already makes it explicit that the state is an “inferior” means of culture: “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” (*Philosophy in Hard Times*, 78). The role of the state and of politics in the forth bringing of a “nobler humanity” should not be confused with a direct involvement of politics in the matters of culture (Quentin P. Taylor, *The Republic of Genius: A Reconstruction of Nietzsche's Early Thought* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 1997), pp. 4-40. Instead, the state always remains exterior to the ennobling of human animal life. When it furthers the becoming of the human animal’s nobility, the state does so only indirectly and despite itself. Even a *Kulturstaat*, as Nietzsche imagines it in his early writings, does not make culture “superfluous”, in the sense of resolving problems of culture by means of politics. Ideally, the state should not at all be involved in the affairs of culture (SE 6).

⁹ See Daniel D. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1997). Conway argues that Nietzsche’s early political thought exemplifies a form of “political perfectionism” where the aim is, precisely, to justify domination and exploitation for the sake of the becoming of great individuals. See also, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971). Rawls famously treats Nietzsche as an example of political perfectionism that is irreconcilable with his “Theory of Justice.” On Cavell’s response to Rawls and the question of whether Nietzsche is a perfectionist, see also Vanessa Lemm, “Is Nietzsche a Perfectionist? Rawls, Cavell and the Politics of Culture in Nietzsche's Schopenhauer as Educator.,” *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 34 (2007), pp. 5-27.

culture can be identified with culture. In other words, it assumes that culture and politics both pursue the same aim of elevating the human animal type and both seek to attain this aim by the same means of domination and exploitation. But by falsely identifying culture and politics, this view misses not only the crucial difference between the projects of culture and civilization in Nietzsche, but also the point that Nietzsche's aristocratic conception of culture can only be understood as an attempt to overcome such a politics of domination.

I hold that the difference between the projects of culture and civilization in Nietzsche is more fundamental than the distinction between culture and politics. On my view, life is not always already political, but there are two different and distinct antagonistic ways in which life can be politicized. On the one hand, there is what could be called a politics of civilization, which in many ways reflects what Esposito calls negative biopolitics. On the other hand, there is what could be called a politics of culture, which in many ways reflects what Esposito names positive biopolitics. Whereas in Esposito's treatment of Nietzsche his negative and positive biopolitics are radically unrelated, designating two different ways of responding to the "Dionysian" excess of life which is death, I argue that they are involved with each other, that an ongoing antagonism holds them in tension for and against each other. An analysis of Nietzsche's antagonistic conception of culture and civilization is crucial for it shows not only how and on what grounds animal life has become the object of political domination, but also how animal life can be emancipated from being the object of political domination. Whereas the politics of civilization gives rise to forms of social organization that require the disciplining and domination of the animality of the human being, the politics of

culture provides a re-conceptualization of the relation between life and politics that emancipates life from being the object of political domination because it offers the animality of the human being a positive, creative role in the social and political organization of human animal life.

The opposition between culture and civilization is also reflected in Nietzsche's treatment of the promise in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In my interpretation, Nietzsche's notion of the "memory of the will" (GM II, 1) provides an example of how the mastering and control over animality, more precisely, over the forgetfulness of the animal, functions as a base for the stable and orderly functioning of society. The "memory of the will" reflects an economical approach to animality whose aim is the self-preservation of the group at the cost of the normalization of the individual. In contrast, the promise of the sovereign individual (GM II, 2-3) provides an example of how the liberation of animality can become the source of individual self-responsibility. The promise of the sovereign individual exemplifies a cultural approach to animality understood as the protection of the radical plurality and singularity of individuals. More generally speaking, one can say that the objective of the politics of civilization is to produce a normalized society through the practice of domination and exploitation. By contrast, the objective of Nietzsche's politics of culture is to cultivate an aristocratic society through the practice of an agonistic politics of responsibility.¹⁰ This politics is based on the idea of culture as a public struggle (*agon*) that generates the becoming of

¹⁰ On the idea of an "agonistic politics of responsibility" in Nietzsche, see also Vanessa Lemm, "Does Nietzsche's Aristocratic Conception of Culture Entail a Politics of Domination? Reconsidering the Notions of Order of Rank, Responsibility and Will to Power," (2008). Paper given at the 2007 International Friedrich Nietzsche Society Conference, Leiden (Holland) and forthcoming in an edited volume based on the conference (Herman Siemens, ed).

freedom as responsibility. Before I turn to the question of the sovereignty of animal life, let me first make a few remarks on the notions of culture and civilization in Nietzsche.

The Notions of Culture and Civilization

In the recent reception of Nietzsche's political thought, the relation between culture and civilization has not yet received the attention it deserves. One reason for this might be that commentators have interpreted the significance of the dualism between culture and civilization only within the context of its nationalistic use in the German academic and political debates of the 19th and early 20th century which discussed Germany's self-understanding as a *Kultur*nation. As a result of this debate, the notion of *Kultur* became discredited in the early 20th century because of its appropriation by conservative and reactionary thinkers. The other reason is that the notions of culture and civilization have often been collapsed onto each other.¹¹ In fact, Nietzsche himself is continuously mixing

¹¹ See Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche, le corps et la culture* (Paris: PUF, 1986). Patrick Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation* (Paris: PUF, 1995). While Wotling identifies culture with civilization, Blondel identifies civilization with culture, thereby missing the antagonistic relation that is constitutive for both terms. I agree with Wotling that Nietzsche rethinks the opposition between the German notions of *Kultur* and *Zivilization*. In this opposition *Kultur* denotes the intellectual and spiritual realm of the life of a society and *Zivilization* denotes its material and practical conditions. However, I disagree with Wotling, according to whom the novelty of Nietzsche's discourse is that it overcomes a dichotomy between a theoretical (cultural) and a practical (civilizational) understanding of the life of a society in favor of a genealogical investigation of the relation between the will to power of a particular society and the kinds of cultural types it produces. From the perspective of genealogy, Wotling argues that civilization turns out to be just a certain kind of culture: "la *Civilisation* devient ainsi un cas spécifique de *Cultur*" (Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p. 28). Wotling investigates the Nietzschean problem of culture ("*le problème de la culture*") as a problem of civilization ("*le problème de la civilisation*") because he holds that the French term "*civilisation*," which designates the entire condition of human existence, renders more accurately the Nietzschean notion of culture, than the French term "*culture*" which designates, primarily the realm of theoretical knowledge (*ibid*, p. 28). Wotling translates the German *Kultur* into the French *Civilisation*, and thereby fails, in my view, to give an account of their inherent antagonism. Wotling's *Nietzsche et le problème de la*

up the terms, which makes it difficult to determine whether in using the term *Kultur* he is referring to culture or to civilization. As a consequence, interpreters have often reduced, as mentioned above, the antagonism between culture and civilization to one between culture and politics. In so doing, however, one misses the point that the relation between life and politics under the rule of culture is different and antagonistic to the relation between life and politics under the rule of civilization.

On my reading, the crucial difference between culture and civilization in Nietzsche is that while culture understands itself as a politics of cultivation which considers the

civilisation is interesting, however, because it provides a critique of Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche, le corps et la culture* (Paris: PUF, 1986), which investigates the problem of culture in Nietzsche as a problem of “*culture*.” According to Blondel’s reading of Nietzsche, there is a tragic gap within nature that separates human culture from nature. He claims that “a culture is properly the way in which the problem of the *gap* is tackled by such and such a society or age or civilization” (Blondel, *Nietzsche, le corps et la culture*, p. 49). In my view, culture in Nietzsche is not at a tragic distance from nature and the animal, but stands for a radical exposure of the human animal to the otherness of nature and the animal. Culture in Nietzsche does not designate a given way of life and/or thought, but an openness which allows for the overcoming of a certain way of life and thought (civilization). Sarah Kofman’s *Nietzsche et la scène philosophique* does not distinguish explicitly between culture and civilization, but identifies two different notions of culture in Nietzsche, one which corresponds to what I refer to as civilization and the other to what I refer to as culture (Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche et la scène philosophique* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1979), pp. 289-318. She does not, however, discuss the relation between these two conceptions of culture as an antagonistic one. A distinction between culture and civilization in Nietzsche’s early work is also missing in Taylor, *The Republic of Genius: A Reconstruction of Nietzsche’s Early Thought*. Taylor answers the question of “What is *Kultur* for Nietzsche?” by saying that “in the broadest sense, *Kultur* for Nietzsche is similar to, if less inclusive than, ‘civilization’” (Taylor, *The Republic of Genius: A Reconstruction of Nietzsche’s Early Thought*, p. 66). The reason for this might be related to the fact that Taylor “aims at a ‘reconstruction’ of Nietzsche’s early thought, with an emphasis on his positive doctrines and value theory” (Taylor, *The Republic of Genius: A Reconstruction of Nietzsche’s Early Thought*, p. 16). Taylor recognizes that “Nietzsche’s *constructive* philosophy emerges out of a radical *critique* of modern civilization” (ibid.), but since his focus is on the former at the expense of the latter, he fails to distinguish the antagonism of culture and civilization as constituting Nietzsche’s “positive” conception of culture. For a reading of Nietzsche’s political thought that is sensitive to the distinction between culture and civilization, see Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*.

human being as part of a continuum of animal life (UM, especially HL and SE), civilization understands itself as a politics of moral improvement which requires the separation of human from animal life (TI “Morality as Anti-Nature”; TI “Improvers”). Its objective is to impose another, supposedly morally better, nature upon human animal life. The project of civilization is in this sense representative of the Western traditions of humanism and enlightenment which assume that civilization is the means through which humanity has emancipated itself from animality (ibid., GM II: 1-2, see also A 4 and 14). Instead, Nietzsche proposes to investigate culture not as a rational and moral phenomenon, but as a phenomenon of life.¹² From the perspective of life, it seems that what makes culture interesting is that it is taken up by animality and not, as these traditions assume, that culture is the measure through which humanity has separated or emancipated itself from animality. An investigation of culture as a phenomenon of life gives rise to a new conception of human life and culture, one which is not directed against animality, but rather one which see in the animality of the human being a source for the becoming of culture.

Nietzsche assigns two main functions to this new conception of culture: first, the task of culture is to show that the processes of civilization, i.e. the rationalization and moralization of the human being, proceed though inherently violent techniques of domination and exploitation directed against its animality (TI “Morality as Anti-Nature”, “Improvers” and GM II, 1-3). In this function culture stands for the critique of

¹² On the relation between life and philosophy, life and culture see, in particular, GS “Preface.”

civilization.¹³ The second task of culture is not a critical, but a distinctly positive one: its function is to overcome civilization by undoing the separation between animality and humanity (HL 1, GM II, 2), or, in Esposito's terms, by animalizing the human being. The challenge here is to bring forth forms of life and thought which are not separated from but embodied by animality. In this function culture stands not only for the resistance to but also the liberation from the oppressiveness of civilization.

What distinguishes the cultural practice of cultivation from the civilizational practices of breeding and taming is a desire to embrace life in all its forms: "give me life and I will create a culture out of it for you" is the claim Nietzsche puts into the mouth of youth (HL 10). The practice of cultivation is a practice of hospitality: it means to receive life and to give life in turn. Culture as cultivation reflects an excessive giving and overflowing of life towards the pluralization of non-totalizable, inherently singular forms of life. The continuous multiplication and transfiguration of human animal life constitute what Nietzsche takes to be the supreme aim of culture.

The different approach to animality found in culture as opposed to in civilization is thematized in a note from Spring-Summer of 1888 where Nietzsche writes:

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

¹³ In its opposition to civilization, Nietzsche's conception of culture remains faithful to the definition of culture given by J. Burckhardt: "Nous appelons culture la somme des activités de l'esprit qui ont lieu spontanément et ne prétendent pas à une valeur universelle ni à un caractère obligatoire. La culture modifie continuellement et désagrège les deux organismes statiques de la vie, sauf lorsque ceux-ci l'ont assujettie entièrement et l'ont obligé à ne servir que leurs seuls desseins. Normalement, elle est la critique des deux autres facteurs, une montre qui indique l'heure à laquelle, dans un Etat ou dans une religion, la forme et la substance ne se recouvrent plus exactement" as cited by Marc Crépon, *Nietzsche: L'art et la politique de l'avenir* (2003), p. 132.

intolerance of the spiritual and most bold natures. What civilization wants is something different from what culture wants: maybe the opposite (*etwas Umgekehrtes*) (KSA 13, 16 [10]).

That Nietzsche identifies the rule of civilization not only as violence directed against animality, a “willed and forced animal taming,” but also as an intolerance shown towards “the spiritual and most bold natures,” is revelatory of the affinity he sees between the freedom of the animal and the freedom of the spirit.

From this viewpoint, one could say that whereas Esposito sees in thanatopolitics the necessary result of an understanding of politics from within the perspective of the continuum of animal and human life, I contend that the thanatopolitical consequences of the politics of civilization are due to an extreme form of self-protection on the part of social and political forms with regard to the uncontrollable plurality and singularity of life forms that result from the affirmation of the continuum of animal and human life. On my account, Nietzsche’s biopolitics signal a shift to a new mode of politicizing life that has both a positive and a negative declension: negative politicization depends on the reduction of the human being to another living species in conflict with other animal species. Such a negative biopolitics is exemplified by totalitarian biopolitics.¹⁴ Positive biopolitics, by contrast, calls forth a different kind of politicization found in Nietzsche’s thought in which the return of the animal is oriented to the pluralization of humanity and to its irreducibility to the species, just as animals are irreducible to species also.

¹⁴ On the relation between totalitarianism and biopolitics, see Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996). Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1973). Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1998). Esposito, *Bios. Biopolitica E Filosofia*. Simona Forti, *Il Totalitarismo* (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2001). Miguel Vatter, “Nativity and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt,” *Revista de Ciencia Politica* 26, no. 2 (2006).

The Sovereignty of Animal Life

Before I address the relation between life and politics in Nietzsche, I will need to make a few preliminary remarks on his notions of memory and forgetfulness. According to Nietzsche, life is historical through and through because life is always already taken up by processes of remembering and forgetting. Culture and civilization fabricate two different and antagonistic forms of memory and forgetfulness and it is essentially in their making and unmaking of memory and forgetfulness that one can see how each of them accesses life, forms and transforms it, politicizes and depoliticizes it.

In *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche distinguishes within the human life form between animal forgetfulness, on the one side, and human memory, on the other. He argues, first, that animal forgetfulness is prior and primordial to human memory and, second, that the possibility of future life depends on a return of and to animal forgetfulness.¹⁵ Nietzsche sees human life threatened by a form of memory which understands itself as the radical opposite of animal forgetfulness; as a memory which erases and forgets the animality of the human being. According to Nietzsche, this kind of memory is reflected in the making of the history of western civilization, a history which, as mentioned above, sees in human “progress” the result of the emancipation from animality. Against the memory of civilization, or I should say the forgetfulness of civilization, Nietzsche calls for the necessity of a different kind of memory, a cultural memory that functions, in the terms of Foucault, as a counter-memory

¹⁵ For a reading of HL centered on the notion of animal forgetfulness, see Vanessa Lemm, "Animality, Historicity and Creativity: A Reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*," *Nietzsche-Studien* 36 (2007), pp. 1-32.

against civilization.¹⁶ 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 future life, a force which knows how to redirect the past towards the future.

Nietzsche's conception of the relation between forgetfulness and memory, animality and humanity, culture and civilization in *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life* stands in direct continuity with the views he puts forth in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The novelty of the genealogy is that it shows how the different antagonistic relations between animal forgetfulness and human memory in culture and civilization affect the relation between life and politics.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* this antagonism takes the form of a conflict between "the memory of the will" as an artifact of civilization, and the "promise of the sovereign individual" as an artifact of culture. For Nietzsche, culture and civilization and their different ways of politicizing life enhance the becoming of human life only if the antagonism that holds them in tension is kept alive. Nietzsche insists that what is crucial for the elevation of the animal 'human being' is the presence of an antagonism. "Chief point of view: establish distances but create no antithesis" (WP 891). Nietzsche sees this antagonism threatened by, first, extreme hatred of the mediocre and, second, extreme hatred of the exception (WP 894, 893). The threat posed by those who hate exceptions is particularly acute in modern mass societies, and thus Nietzsche's concern for the future leads him to return once again to the untimely question of the value and significance of an aristocratic way of life and mode of evaluation. An aristocratic mode of life and evaluation is only meaningful, according to Nietzsche, insofar as it favors the becoming

¹⁶ I borrow the term counter-memory from Foucault, Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, La Généalogie, L'histoire," in *Hommage À Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: PUF, 1971).

of culture understood as a counter-force to the leveling and normalizing tendencies found in modern mass societies. I suggest that Nietzsche's conception of the promise of the sovereign individual reflects such an aristocratic mode of life and evaluation that might contain an answer to the question of how to prevent the antagonism between culture and civilization from degenerating into a thanatopolitics. The promise of the sovereign individual reflects a bond between human beings that does not go counter to their animality. Rather it sees in their animality, their animal forgetfulness, a force necessary to the foundation of forms of social and political life that are free from domination. From this perspective, it turns out that what has become sovereign in the promise of the sovereign individual is the human being's animality, or what Nietzsche also refers to as its "dominant instinct" (GM II, 2) of responsibility.

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